
Chamber music with lots of heart

REVIEW/CONCERT

THE TROUT

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Music

Faculty

Lee Foundation Theatre

Thursday

Chang Tou Liang

Chamber music is most pleasurable for musicians and listeners alike. Originating from works written for royal court musicians, this evolved into *hausmusik* (house music) played by members of 19th-century middle-class households for their own entertainment.

A collegial spirit exists in chamber music performance, hopefully allied by excellent techniques and refined tastes.

There were strong doses of all that in this concert featuring faculty members of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Music Faculty.

It opened with 20th-century Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski's *Trio D'Anches* for woodwinds, written during the dark years of World War II.

It was far from being a sombre work, as oboist Joost Flach, clarine-

tist Tang Xiao Ping and bassoonist Aw Yong Tian gave a lively reading of it. There were dissonances aplenty and a spicy brand of humour ran through its 10 minutes. The fast outer movements were tautly delivered with pin-point cues and accents, contrasted with a slow and doleful central movement, housing a canon where the oboe carried its tune. A dance-like finale with a witty end completed a fine reading.

Further contrasts came in the four-movement *Horn Trio* by Johannes Brahms, a well-known but not often performed work here. Its paucity is due to a lack of willing French horn players and a strenuously acrobatic piano part. Thankfully, hornist Marc-Antoine Robillard was a natural. Shaping the instrument's singing lines and having accurate intonation are often taken for granted.

Pianist Nicholas Ong's role was jumping through musical hoops, especially in the fast second and fourth movements, accomplished with confidence. Violinist Foo Say Ming completed the trio, who galloped through the "hunting-call" finale with a fearless panache. Anything slower would have been lead-footed, so their natural impulses were to go for broke. This was

well received by a noisy audience with far too many fidgety kids.

Foo was joined in the second half by violist Janice Tsai, cellist Lin Juan, bassist Wang Xu and pianist Lena Ching for Franz Schubert's popular *Piano Quintet In A Major*, nicknamed the *Trout Quintet*. The performance was by no means note-perfect, but it had that pre-requisite of chamber music: lots of heart.

A smart and brisk pace rightly dictated the first movement, helmed by Ching's incisive playing. There were lots of moments to heave a breath and savour the scents and Ching was always alert to her partner's notes and nuances.

The alternating fast and slow movements were contrasted to good effect; the second movement's congenial indolence found a foil in the punchy rhythms of the third and fifth movements. The work's heart was the fourth movement, based on Schubert's lied *Die Forelle* (The Trout, hence the concert's title), which unfolded beautifully with each variation. Here, the heart throbbed and the warmth of camaraderie filled the hall with a glowing presence. That, simply, was the true essence of chamber music.