

Hum of history

Review Concert

VOYAGE TO NANYANG

Singapore Chinese Orchestra
Singapore Conference Hall/Last Saturday

Chang Tou Liang

Outreach concerts and events for young people are now an essential part of the concert calendar for musical groups.

The Singapore Chinese Orchestra's concerts for students have gone through a variety of themes, the latest being an exploration of the Chinese diaspora to South-east Asia. Also titled Tunes Of Old Streets, this was a concert, comedic skits, history and national education lesson all rolled into one.

SCO resident conductor Quek Ling Kiong played the role of the coolie Ah De, or Ah Teck in Hokkien, who emigrated from Fujian to Singapore, settling in the melting pot that was Chinatown. He was partnered by veteran stage personality Chen Zhao Jin, who played the engaging storyteller in Mandarin, one unafraid of indulging in jokes and the odd colloquialism.

Music from Law Wai Lun's Admiral Of The Seven Seas and Phang Kok Jun's Sounds Of The Bamboo Grove accompanied the adventure, which flowed seamlessly to the legend of Sang Nila Utama founding Singapore, the Lion City. By this time, the Chinese music had also morphed to something more distinctly Malayan, also by Law, to represent Nanyang or the Southern Seas. Chen's rendition of Dayung Sampan also had the audience in stitches.

Excerpts from Gu Guan Ren's A Glimpse Of Singapore, a suite of picture-postcard pieces, saw Ah De in his occupation as a rickshaw puller, delivering his fare to a Chinatown teahouse. The tete-a-tete between conductor and gaohu player Zhang Bin was an informal one, with the latter demonstrating his prowess on Lu Wen Cheng's popular Ping Hu Qiu Yue (Autumn Moon Over A Placid Lake).

Chen also presided over an audience quiz in which children had to differentiate between the musical styles of Chinese, Malay and Indian music, matching them with places of worship and streets in Kreta Ayer. How the district Niu Che Shui (or Gu Chia Chui to dialect speakers) got its name, from bullock carts that transported water to its residents, was also explained in an entertaining manner.

The concert closed with a sing-along to Phoon Yew Tien's Singapore Folksongs Medley in the four official languages: English (Singapore), Chinese (Xiao Bai Chuan or Little White Boat), Malay (Lenggang Kang-kong) and Tamil (Muneru Valliba).