

# Festive start to spring

Review Concert

## RHAPSODIES OF SPRING 2014

Singapore Chinese Orchestra  
Singapore Conference Hall/Last Friday

### Chang Tou Liang

Chinese New Year is a dual celebration of the turn of the lunar calendar and the heralding of spring. Thus the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's annual New Year Concerts conducted by its music director Yeh Tsung share a similar festive spirit as the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's Christmas Concerts, with the added flavour of a television variety show.

Li Huan Zhi's Spring Festival Overture rowdily opened the concert and, before anyone could applaud, went directly into Huang Hai Huai's Horse Racing. The familiar melody served to greet the Chinese Year of the Horse, its stampeding hoof beats and chorus of synchronised neighing providing marked contrasts with the gentle trot and amble of Leroy Anderson's Horse And Buggy.

Then the show belonged to the disc jockeys of Capital 95.8, the popular Chinese-language radio station. They acted out a skit, The Swordsman Saga, which brought legendary heroes and villains of wuxia or Chinese sword-fighting escapades into the mix.

By some quirk of magic, the denizens of folklore arrived in modern-day Singapore and went on air with comical consequences. The accompanying music was arranged by Tan Kah Yong, with a segment quoting Prokofiev's Montagues And Capulets from the ballet Romeo And Juliet.

The second half was distinguished by three soloists. Han Lei demonstrated his versatility on the guanzi, the short reed instrument which revelled in folk-like slides in Hebei melody Grazing The Burro and a saxophone's revelry in the infectious rhythm of Kong Hong Wei's Summer Palace.

Vocalist Fan Qiong oozed sensuality in the Mongolian folksong Swan Goose and Huang Yi Jun's Misty Rain. In the latter, she was joined by violinist Qian Zhou, whose lyrical obbligato part was equally alluring. There was a folksy lilt in Tang Ni's The Story Of Small Town and dazzling coloratura in the waltz-song Hai Yan (Swallow) by Chen Ge Xin, probably China's answer to Johann Strauss' Voices Of Spring.

Unlike last month's mass participation Messiah, this audience is not one for singing, so there was a clap-along instead for Sim Boon Yew's Spring Festival Suite II, which contains the four most popular Chinese New Year anthems of all. The DJs provided a makeshift unison choir, their contribution made all the more apparent when soloist Fan finally joined the fray.

With the arrival of a costumed God of Wealth, a Chinese Santa Claus of sorts, their communal message was Make Prosperous.

There could not be a more propitious Chinese greeting than that.