

Ulasan/*Reviews*

Mengarkibkan Konsert-Konsert yang telah Dikendalikan oleh Pusat Seni Sempena Sambutan Ulang Tahun USM yang Ke-25

Jabatan Muzik Pusat Seni yang baru ditubuhkan telah menganjurkan satu siri konsert bagi memperingati dan meraikan ulang tahun USM yang ke-25 pada tahun 1994. Penyanyi lirik spinto, Siti Chairani Proehoeman dan pianis, Naomi Taura telah mempersembahkan satu resital di Dewan Kuliah A pada tengah hari, 26 Februari manakala Nederlands Gitaarduo telah mengadakan konsert mereka di Muzium dan Galeri USM pada malam 7 April. Konsert gitar itu merupakan anjuran bersama antara Pusat Seni dengan Kedutaan Belanda.

Satu bengkel komposisi muzik dan persembahan oleh Sarah Hopkins telah berlangsung selama lima hari dari 13–17 Ogos di Bilik 1.1, Pusat Seni dan Panggung Sasaran, USM. Persembahan tersebut adalah merupakan gandingan di antara Pusat Seni dengan Pesuruhjaya Tinggi Australia.

Perayaan ulang tahun ditutup dengan persembahan tiga buah konsert yang berlangsung dalam jangka masa lebih kurang empat minggu. Pianis, Sia Poh Eng; penyanyi soprano, Siti Chairani Proehoeman; penyanyi tenor, Eddy Chin; dan penyanyi mezzo soprano, Mari Sakae telah menyampaikan satu persembahan muzik vokal pada 16 September di Auditorium Dewan Budaya. Pianis, Bichuan Li dan flutis undangan, Linda Masen pula membuat persembahan mereka pada 29 September. Siri konsert tersebut berakhir dengan persembahan Konsert Abad ke-20 yang pertama dan disertai oleh pensyarah dan pelajar Pusat Seni.

Siri konsert tersebut bertujuan untuk meneroka pelbagai gaya persembahan. Nota program yang mengandungi keterangan lengkap serta pengenalan lisan diberikan untuk memastikan para penonton yang tidak mempunyai pendidikan muzik secara formal dapat mengikuti dan menghayati muzik

yang dipersembahkan. Pendekatan secara spontan dan serta-merta yang diamalkan oleh Sarah Hopkins dan ahlinya, yang terdiri daripada pelajar muzik dan seni kreatif Pusat Seni bertujuan untuk merapatkan jurang di antara penonton dengan pemuzik. Pengedaran pelbagai stail muzikal disampaikan oleh pemuzik melalui karya dari zaman praktis lazim dan dihamburkan dengan karya abad ke-20 yang biasa atau tidak biasa kedengaran. Berusaha bersama Bichuan Li, Jabatan Muzik merasakan betapa perlunya untuk mewujudkan keghairahan pada karya Clara Gottschalk, Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn dan Faustina Hodges yang telah disalahanggapkan sebagai karya yang bukan bertaraf tinggi. Tanggapan jabatan bahawa penonton akan menjauhi muzik baru yang tidak lazim diperdengarkan telah dibuktikan sebaliknya. Pada akhirnya, Konsert Abad ke-20 turut berkembang menjadi satu siri konsert tahunan (enam tahun berturut-turut) dan mempamerkan karya yang dipengaruhi oleh pelbagai estetika yang menggabungkan pengaruh muzikal Timur dan Barat.

Berikut adalah tinjauan penulis ini tentang persembahan konsert yang diterbitkan dalam akhbar *The New Straits Times (NST)*. Pelajar yang ingin memperolehi maklumat yang selanjutnya tentang karya yang dipersembahkan boleh merujuk pada rakaman persembahan tersebut yang disimpan di Perpustakaan Hamzah Sendut USM. Berikut ialah nombor rujukan konsert yang telah dirakamkan: Resital vokal dan piano oleh Siti Chairani dan Naomi Taura: MT18.R433, Nederlands Gitaarduo: MT18.N371, Resital piano dan flut oleh Bichuan Li: MT18.R434 dan Konsert Muzik Abad Ke-20: M1045.K82.

Splendour in Their Music Making (*NST*, March 9th, 1994)

Over the past eight years since her return to this region after spending more than 20 years in Europe and the United States, Siti Chairani Proehoeman has been establishing herself as a serious singer. She has always had a mission and that is to disseminate vocal music to the widest possible audience.

Chairani, who gives many concerts per year here, is also now gaining recognition abroad. Late last year she was in Bangkok and Jakarta, and some time this year she will be in Pusan. As with her other performances, her recent appearance with pianist Naomi Taura at the USM Dewan Kuliah A on February 26 was a revelatory afternoon of intelligent and lovely music making.

Naomi Taura comes from a family of musicians. Her mother, a vocal professor at the Senzoku Gakuen University, was her piano teacher, and her aunt, a violinist, is an associate professor at the Nagoya University of Fine Arts. Both her uncle and grandfather play the violin too. There was therefore, plenty of music in the house. A graduate of the Tokyo University of Music and Fine Arts, Taura subsequently taught piano at the Japan Women's University.

Sitting calmly at the piano, Taura is the focus of relaxed attention. There is something sincere about her playing that touches the heart and she obviously understands the music well.

The opening of Franck's *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue* was at once a reminder of the composer's predilection for his religion. I like the dynamic restraint in the first two movements, the gradual increase in dynamics in the fugue and the emotional outburst in the jubilant climax.

In line with the university's intention to establish a reputation for high standards not only in the performing area and ethnomusicology, but also in composition, Taura presented two works by composers from her native land. An exponent of new music herself, Taura managed to convey the overall structural sense in such a way as to bring out the musical logic of each of the pieces.

The Three Characters On Tooryanse by Hirohisa Shono, based on a children's gamesong, was originally composed for piano students. Concerned with the song in three different patterns, the music has parts in which the composer's sense of organisation is evident.

Junji Mitsubishi's music, inspired by an old esoteric poem *Tasogare-doki* by Kitahara, which incidentally gave its name to this composition, is among other things, a convincing demonstration of the composer's evocative and colouristic talents. The style is musing, and at times improvisatory and pointillistic, and has short melodies meandering through a hazy landscape of tonal colors.

The repertory chosen by Chairani during the second half is typical of her programming and her vocal range. We were given Fiordiligi's *Come Scoglio* from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Imogene's *Oh! S'io Potessi* from Bellini's *Il Pirata* and Leila's *Me voilà seule dans la nuit* from Bizet's *Les*

pêcheurs des perles. Chairani's voice has the thrust and the agility that is needed to bring out the drama of these arias. She evinced quite a lot of steel in her crescendos and vibratos, but there were also sufficient legatos, especially in the central melody of Beethoven's extended scena and recitative *Ah! Perfido*.

However, I am bound to say that continuous bravura and tonal splendour were actually something of an endurance test not only for both singer and pianist but also for the audience. And so when the time came for *Wo die schonen Trompeten blasen* from Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, I could not resist noticing the sensitive way Taura simulated the sounds of the distant horns and trumpets, and the beautiful way Chairani brought out the *piano-pianissimo* variations in the dialogue between the dead soldier and the grievous lover.

The accessibility of the three Indonesian art songs made them the most popular. Sung with energetic directness and free from the heart-on-sleeve emotionalism, the pieces have an attractive appeal with a piano accompaniment to match.

Chairani's and Taura's performance is the first a series of concerts that Pusat Seni is organizing to commemorate the 25th anniversary of USM. The second of the series will feature The Nederlands Gitaarduo on April 7 at USM's Museum and Gallery. Juun Voorhoeve and Erik Otte, the winners of the *Concours International de Guitare en Duo* in France will perform in a concert of mostly 20th century works.

Gifted Duo in Guitar (*NST*, April 22nd, 1994)

On April 7th, at the USM's Museum and Gallery, a large crowd listened with all the polite attention it could give to the Nederlands Gitaarduo. The recital, organised by Pusat Seni and the Royal *Netherlands Embassy*, was as much about communication as it was about music.

Erik Otte and Juun Voorhoeve are both persuasive and gifted performers. They have plenty to say not only about the guitar and its repertory but also about their artistic relationship. Their informal introductions that evening found the audience immediately engaged.

I asked Voorhoeve how she and Otte got together. "We first met at the *Concours International de Guitare en Duo* in France 11 years ago. Although we had been playing with other guitarists it was never the right musical partnership. We were in fact looking everywhere for a partner."

They discovered among other things that they had studied under the same professor at the *Rotterdam Conservatory*. Since then, their career has taken them over much of Europe, to engagements in Japan and this time to Southeast Asia.

Otte's arrangements which formed the backbone of the programme are impressive. The *Three Piano Preludes* by Gershwin is a good example. Each work flowed naturally under the fingers of the guitarists. At times they struck my ears as effective as the original music.

What does Otte consider the guideline to writing an arrangement? "The guitar has a range of only three-and-half octaves and therefore you have to make changes where changes are needed." Added Voorhoeve, "Also, my right hand is capable of playing fast, Erik's left is strong. He tries to exploit these aspects in his arrangements."

Otte's own composition *Two Romantic Preludes* has much beautiful writing. By his own admission, he had imagined himself to be a composer of the Romantic era, thus confining himself to the conventions of the period.

The Dutch composer, Jurriaan Andriessen had written an original work for two guitars entitled *Six Impressions* for the Nederlands Gitaarduo. Prepared two days prior to their departure for this region, the duo performed a transcription of his *Three Dances* instead. Andriessen is very much a composer who works within the traditional notions of formal structures and musical developments.

There were three sets of variations. Franck's *Prelude, Fugue and Variations* were performed with the tonal refinement. Giuliani's *Variazioni Concertanti* received sufficient contrast between the solo and ripieno sections. The *Variations on a Dutch Clog-Dance* by Komter were joyful and homespun in every sense.

The Nederlands Gitaarduo went to charm the audience with the *Granada* in which Albeniz reminisced the beauty of the Alhambra, and the *Castilla* in which he injected humour into the seguirilla. Both artist then allowed their music making to build up in the two tangos by Piazzolla – *Lo que vendra* and *Night Club 1960* contain a mélange of sensual melody, strong rhythmic accompaniment and percussive effects.

Voorhoeve highly recommends students to learn flamenco music. "In classical music the fingers move in towards the knuckles but in flamenco the fingers move away so that they hit the strings on their way out. This way you can develop good guitar technique."

Otte and Voorhoeve responded to the audience gratitude by presenting three encores. At the conclusion of the third, Otte's arrangement of the Indonesia *Nina Bobo*, the Nederlands Gitaarduo gently took their final bow.

Visual and Aural Feast with 'Holistic' Artiste (*NST*, September 2nd, 1994)

The Australian High Commission in cooperation with Pusat Seni of USM recently hosted a five-day music composition workshop by Sarah Hopkins. The workshop culminated in two performances: one on August 17th, in Penang, at USM's Panggung Sasaran; and the other on August 19th, in Kuala Lumpur, at Kompleks Budaya Negara's Experimental Theatre. Both performances featured the university's music and creative arts students.

Hopkins refers to her music as holistic. She explained that 12 years ago she was involved in a near-fatal accident. Since then she has been drawn to compose music which embraces the positive aspects of living. She is especially interested in using music as a tool for healing.

Much of Hopkins' rehearsal technique is therefore geared towards encouraging students to acknowledge their 'total being'. Her projects enable practically anyone to make music regardless of his or her musical background. Her participants work with choirchimes and whirlies.

What is a whirly? "Simply stated, it is a length of tubing like those used by vacuum pool cleaners," Hopkins said when introducing the instrument during her performance. But unlike the whirly toy that was popular in the United States during the seventies, Hopkins experimented with hoses of varying lengths and thicknesses to produce tuned whirlies.

Deep Whirly Heart Song, for instance, is for the deep C instrument, while *Fly* is for whirlies tuned to the C and F harmonic series. By twirling the instruments above her in different patterns and with different tempos, notes of the harmonic series are spilled forth and intermingle, producing sounds pure and haunting.

There is a sense of improvisation and rhythmic freedom in all her works. Hopkins, who lives by the sea, is very much in tune with the rhythms of nature. She is quick to point out that the Australian landscape has much bearing on her music-making. The welcoming piece, *Greetings*, was composed in 1983 whilst she was visiting Alice Springs. *Songs of the Wind* was inspired six years later by winds rushing through the trees.

Harmonic overtones form the basis of her compositions. Hopkins in fact uses them extensively in her singing and cello playing. Overtone singing, we were told, has its roots in both secular and sacred Tibetan and Mongolian traditions.

Rising above the open string cello drones of her *Cello Chi* and the solo version of her *Reclaiming the Spirit*, her vocalisations evoked an other-worldly experience. The pieces are also imbued with aboriginal *didjeridu* bowing and cello *glissandos* that range from natural harmonics and harmonic “bird calls” to combinations of both.

Now for those in the audience who think that the music is somewhat unconvincing, rest assured that Hopkins had a serious education in classical music before venturing into other musical realms. Hopkins received the Diploma of Arts in Cello Performance from the Victorian College of the Arts Music School in Melbourne before obtaining the graduate diploma in Contemporary Cello Techniques and Experimental Compositions.

Hopkins’s readily identifiable style permeates her ensemble works. *Transformations* found the artist and students clad in colorful attire. All were fully involved, as each rang their pre-designated choirchimes, first anticlockwise to their neighbours, then in the opposite direction, and later in random order before finally ending on a six-note cadence that spanned two octaves.

Spiral Bells for 12 choirchimes and *Gaia Whirlies Ensemble* work on the same call-and-response principle. Structured improvisations were clearly evident in *Eclipse*. Inspired by the 1986 lunar eclipse, Hopkins had the choirchimes echo sporadically the notes spun out by the whirlies.

As excitement built up with the notes of the G dominant seventh chord mixed in four different types of combination, the high F punctuated the sequence, signalling the beginning of the cosmic effect. Thereafter the choirchimes joyously celebrated by ringing out the descending G major scale. All in all, this was a visual as well as an aural experience.

One could see from the impressively large crowd at both performances that new music is making its mark on the Malaysian audience. For this the Australian High Commission has to be congratulated.

In another development, Pusat Seni and Dewan Budaya will continue with its year-long 25th anniversary celebration of USM with vocal music by a group of predominantly local singers. Much has been written about Siti Chairani Proehoeman, Eddy Chin and Sia Poh Eng, the concert will also introduce two newcomers; Mohd. Fadzil Abdul Rahman, an ITM music lecturer, and Mari Sakae, a Japanese songwriter in an evening of French chansons, German lieder and Italian arias. There will also be local as well as popular numbers.

The carefully selected programme is aimed at attracting young audience who might otherwise stay away from concerts of a classical nature. The performance is scheduled for September 16th and will be held in what will be USM's major contribution to Penang—the newly built Dewan Budaya Concert Hall.

Celebrating the Century's Music (*NST*, October 21st, 1994)

One of the fortunate things about the USM Music Department is the way in which the staff share a common philosophy on the types of music that should be taught. Along with the accessible music of our local as well as Western cultures, the department tries to promote music for which very few people feel an affinity for.

In fact, all visiting artist are persuaded to include new and less familiar works in their programmes. It was therefore fitting that the department ended its celebration of USM's 25th anniversary with a concert dedicated to 20th century music. The student concert was held jointly with Dewan Budaya on October 7th at the newly-built Dewan Budaya Concert Hall.

Amidst the more familiar cornerstone of 20th century music, three unfamiliar works deserve mention. Vivian Adelberg Rudow's *Rebecca's Song* was written in memory of Rebecca Blackwell who died of cancer when she was 18 months old. The piano piece found favor with the audience. Akin Euba's *Six Yoruba Folksong* is traditional as far as the vocal line is concerned. The rhythmic and harmonic sense of the piano accompaniment, however, is clearly his own. The style, too, is tonal but while Rudow's work exploits the piano's resources, Euba's, by virtue of its folk-influenced structure, is confined to a narrower range.

Paul Zdunek based his *Anthem for Doomed Youth* on Wilfrid Owen's poem of the same title. Scored for a mixed chorus and prepared piano, Zdunek revealed some aspects of 20th century compositional inventiveness. The work allows the performers to inject an improvisatory quality in the musical happening.

A week earlier on September 29th, pianist Bichuan Li had devoted the first half of her programme to works by Chinese composers. According to Li, Western music is performed extensively in China while Chinese music has still not found favor. The works she chose to perform are among their respective composers' strongest.

Duo Ye earned composer Chen Yi first prize in the Chinese National Composition Competition. The piece was made memorable by Li's rendition of its melody, moving along seemingly static sections comprising short ostinato patterns.

The other five works make modest demand, both technical and emotional, on the player. Li nevertheless played them with minute and loving attention to details. Her way with Li Yinghai's transcription of *Flute and Drum at Eventide* was fascinating for what I consider her perceptive grounding in Chinese programmatic music.

Too often, finding fault with a performer who does not adhere to the intentions of the original score is easy to do. But in this case, I tended to agree with Li's interpretation when she simulated the drum by extending the repeated "Bb" notes at the opening of the piece, and when she made the music move effortlessly by clipping off some sections of the transcription.

Equally imaginative was her performance of Yin Chengzong's *Cheerful Nuisance*. Based on Yi tribe folksong, Yin's arrangement consisted of many repeated sections which modulated around closely-related keys. In her own way, Li used the repetitions for some slight exploration.

There was also some light and airy playing in the two works that subscribe to fairly Western musical styles. *Ginseng Dance* and *Seaweed Dance* are selections from the *Mermaid Suite* by Russian-trained Wu Zuqiang and Du Mingxin. The music hints at mannerism that could have been acquired from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*.

With over 100 compositions to his name, He Luting counts as one of the leading figures in Chinese music. He's *The Shepherd and His Flute* provided an ideal example at Li's fingerwork. Framed on the outer sides by the same two-part contrapuntal section of pentatonic materials, the music has a contrasting homophonic structure of diatonic elements.

I discovered many intriguing facts about Li. She had started piano studies at four, but after the communist confiscated her instrument, she not only had to practise in the houses of her more privileged friends but also to confine her practice to the technical regime of scales and exercises. Other sorts of practices had to be done inside her head.

After the political thaw, she managed to enter the highly competitive Shanghai Teacher's University where she practised a minimum of 10 hours a day, a great deal of it by candle light. Today, after obtaining her Masters in Piano Performance from the University Hawaii, Li is a faculty member at the university and an honorary associate professor of her previous Alma Mater.

Works by women composers are another cause that Li has been furthering. After the intermission, she accompanied Linda Madsen's commendable flute playing on Anna Amalie's *Sonata for Flute and Piano*.

Clara Schumann's *Marzuka Op. 6, No. 5*, Clara Gottschalk's *Staccato Polka*, Faustina Hodges' *Lake Shore Dream*, and Fanny Mendelssohn's *Melodie Op. 4, No. 2* and *Il Saltarello Romano Op. 6, No. 4* might sound to some like salon pieces, but their underlying beauty lends them a charm that truly wins the heart.

Li's performance raised these miniatures beyond the status of the salon. There were no unnecessary frills, rather Li was interested in showcasing the composers' compositional character and cohesiveness. Lily Boulanger's *D'un Vieux Jardin*, particularly stood out for its bold invention and daring-sounding chromaticism.

European songs were also heard in a recital of vocal music held on September 16th. The musical end of the singers was as memorable as could have been expected. Both Siti Chairani Proehoeman and Eddy Chin sang with attention to detail and deftly moved from style to style, and language to language with ease and flexibility.

Eddy Chin's journey in Schubert's *Erlkonig* was full of contrast and change of moods. To be honest, Sia Poh Eng's accompaniment of the piano rhythms was slightly on the slow side. It was only at the part where the Erlking sings that she was able to give sympathetic support to the singer.

On Mozart's *Non Piu Andrai*, Chin was strongly involved and in control of his tonal projection. Here, Sia exhibited a satisfying relationship with the voice. The approach of the singers on Andrew Lloyd Webber's *All I Ask Of You* was curious, but convincing. Eddy was overtly responding to the words while Siti Chairani was direct in emotional expression. Still, they caught the character of the piece economically and had the audience enchanted.

Mari Sakae's plaintive tones were appropriate for Schumann's lieder and Faure's melodies. She aptly captured the spirit of the pieces and admirably highlighted the play between words and key changes. Incidentally, Mari is one of the numerous Japanese musicians now residing in Kuala Lumpur.

Guitar buffs might be interested to know that the Hill Wiltschinsky Duo, comprising Robin Hill and Peter Wiltschinsky, will be performing at the same venue on October 23rd. Based in London, they have been playing together for 20 years and have gained a reputation as one of the finest classical guitar duos. Apart from their varied repertoire which ranges from Elizabethan lute duets to present-day music, Hill and Wiltschinsky will perform their own works.

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Photo 1 USM students singing Zdunek's *Anthem for Doomed Youth*



Photo 2 Hopkins conducting USM students playing whirlies and choir chimes



Photo 3 Voorhoeve and Otte