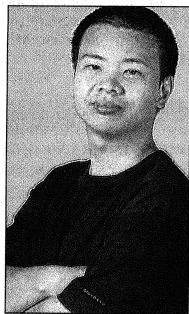


5 Best



CLASSICAL

► Chang Tou Liang

1 VIOLIN & PIANO RECITAL

Chua Lik Wuk & Lim Yan
May 11, Esplanade Recital Studio

Local violin virtuoso Chua Lik Wuk (above left) returned after five years of self-imposed silence to give a compelling recital of Brahms, Saint-Saens, Stravinsky and Messiaen on a 1711 Stradivarius. Eliciting perfect chemistry with excellent pianist Lim Yan (right), it was as if he had never left the scene. Was this the comeback of the decade?

2 WAGNER DIE WALKURE, ACT 1

May 12, Esplanade Concert Hall
Soloists with Singapore Symphony Orchestra/Shui Lan

The first-ever concert performance of a "bleeding chunk" from Wagner's Ring Cycle in Singapore was a runaway hit. Solid performances from Gitta-Maria Sjoberg, Richard Decker and Martin Snell were backed by a full-strength SSO that proved to be much more than a pit orchestra. Who needs to go to Bayreuth after all?

3 JAMES MACMILLAN'S SEVEN LAST WORDS

Singapore Symphony Chorus & Orchestra/Lim Yau, May 26, Esplanade Concert Hall

Modern music need not be forbidding, as shown by the South-east Asian premiere of this iconic 1993 choral masterpiece. The combined choruses coped with its myriad dissonances and complexities, rising to the occasion with sincerity and humanity. The Scottish-themed concert was also a master stroke of astute programming.

4 CHAMBER MUSIC IN SINGAPORE

Chan Yoong Han, Violin et al
Feb 6, Victoria Concert Hall &
Sept 19, Esplanade Recital Studio

A new movement of chamber music excellence has emerged, spearheaded by the ubiquitous violinist Chan Yoong Han. Witness sympathetic performances by local composer Tan Chan Boon's three String Quartets and Take Five, the ambitious project to perform the complete piano quintet repertoire with pianist Lim Yan. The quintets of Edward Elgar and Cesar Franck were only the beginning.

5 FESTIVAL FANTASIA

Soloists with Singapore Festival Orchestra / Chan Tze Law
June 23, Esplanade Concert Hall

An auspicious debut for Singapore's third professional orchestra in the Singapore Arts Festival 2007, graced by two of the country's brightest young musicians. Loh Jun Hong shone in Glazunov's Violin Concerto while Abigail Sin breathed fire into Shchedrin's First Piano Concerto. The future certainly looks bright.

3 Worst

1 LANG LANG PIANO RECITAL

Oct 30, Esplanade Concert Hall

The Chinese piano idol is still maturing but blotted his copybook by despoiling some sublime Mozart, Chopin and Schumann with the most vulgar and outrageously over-the-top readings of two virtuosic Rachmaninov Preludes. It was a "Look ma, no hands!" moment that would have embarrassed his teacher, the great Gary Graffman.

2 NATIONAL PIANO & VIOLIN COMPETITION 2007

Quarter-final Round, Dec 5-9, AGF Auditorium, Alliance Francaise

What possessed some young people grossly lacking in talent to parade their obvious lack of musicality – and insight – in front of an expectant audience? One transgressor so massacred Badarszewska's A Maiden's Prayer that it was everybody's prayer for the piece to end. Another did not complete a single movement of Bach's Italian Concerto and skulked off the stage. Shades of Singapore Idol, anyone?

3 THE PRIMA DONNA WHO WENT HOME

(Names withheld to protect the guilty)

A prize-winning and rising young Asian conductor had been engaged amid much publicity to conduct a concert with a local musical organisation. After arriving and checking in, he objected to his allocated lodgings and demanded an upgrade. When that was not forthcoming, he responded by not turning up at the first rehearsal, having caught a return flight home. An 11th-hour replacement conductor – a Singaporean – stepped in and saved the day.

So much for foreign talent.