

Spot where the orchestra is

Sacred music festival features orchestra piece performed by musicians in various parts of hall

Lisabel Ting

In John Tavener's *Flood Of Beauty*, the musicians and choristers involved will not just be performing on the Esplanade Concert Hall's stage.

Instead, they will be divided into four groups – one for each cardinal point – and scattered around the hall. While one group will remain on stage, others will be tucked away in the upper circles, or nestled right at the top of the hall.

The result of this surround-sound setting is music which breathes and moves, which swirls around the hall and cascades down from the upper levels.

Conductor Jason Lai says: "If you go to a concert, you will normally hear music from the front. In this instance, you will be surrounded by sound and it's literally very multi-layered."

He will be conducting the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra and says that the performers will be interacting mostly in canon, imitating one another, but at points, they will be playing and singing as one.

While he will be on the main stage, he will be assisted by two other conductors in charge of the groups on the upper levels, and they will be watching a live feed of him on screen.

The music from the orchestra will be coupled with a hundred verses sung in Sanskrit. Choral director Jennifer Tham will lead the Conservatory Chamber Singers, ONE Chamber Choir, Singapore Youth Choir Ensemble Singers and The Vocal Consort.

She says of the verses: "The harmonic rhythm tends to be quick – in some places, we have to jump from one key to another in a heartbeat – while the melodies are long and arching, with a lot of activity beneath the surface."

Flood Of Beauty is one of the highlights of the Esplanade's annual A Tapestry Of Sacred Music festival, which brings together sacred music from all around the world. This year's festival will feature acts from places such as Japan, Damascus and France, among others.

Programmer Tan Xianghui says: "For us, it's important to strike a balance in terms of representation, making sure that our audiences get to experience performances from different cultures, eras and faiths, all within a secular setting."

"In our festival, we also create opportunities for local religious communities to share their music, which we might not be privy to unless we are a part of those communities."

Another highlight of the festival is a performance by the Soweto Gospel Choir



The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra rehearsing *Flood Of Beauty* for this year's A Tapestry Of Sacred Music. PHOTO: ESPLANADE

from South Africa.

Since they were formed in 2002, they have won Grammy Awards, performed at the Oscars and supported the Red Hot Chili Peppers at concerts in Germany.

The first thing that one notices about the choir is their eye-catching, vibrantly coloured outfits.

Choir director Beverly Bryer says that "the outfits represent South Africa's Rainbow Nation", a term coined by Nobel Peace Prize recipient Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

"They show the many colours and culture of our country, with several African designs melded together. They also represent the brightness and energy of the choir itself," she says.

She adds that the choir sings all genres of music, including African gospel and traditional songs, as well as contemporary international classics.

"African harmonies are added to international songs that are well-loved to make them sound a little different, although still recognisable," she says.

"They also sing a bit of classical, reggae and jazz, so are influenced by all types of music."

Alongside the ticketed shows, there



Book it

A TAPESTRY OF SACRED MUSIC

Where: Various venues around the Esplanade
When: Till next Monday
Info: Go to www.tapestryofsacredmusic.com/2015

The Soweto Gospel Choir from South Africa performs in vibrantly coloured outfits. PHOTO: TONY RUDOV

are also more than 40 free programmes, such as talks, workshops and performances such as Pipes In Harmony, a pipe organ performance by Japanese

conductor and organist Masato Suzuki . Mr Tan says: "Ultimately, we want our audiences to appreciate the sacred art forms for their beauty and hopefully

realise that despite how the music may sound different, we can find a shared humanity in the diverse expressions." lting@sph.com.sg