

# Sparks fly in fast romp

## REVIEW/CONCERT

WALTON'S CELLO CONCERTO  
Singapore Symphony Orchestra  
Esplanade Concert Hall/Last Friday

### Chang Tou Liang

Chinese-Australian cellist Qin Li-Wei has become a permanent fixture in Singapore's musical scene, thanks to his position as head of cello studies at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory where he trains young cellists to fill the world's orchestras. As

a soloist, his appearances in concertos and chamber music continue to excite audiences and this evening was no different.

In William Walton's bittersweet Cello Concerto (1957), composed for the great Gregor Piatigorsky, Qin brought to bear his years of experience to give a totally compelling reading with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) conducted by Jason Lai. In the first movement's hushed and subdued atmosphere, the tone he coaxed from his 1780 Joseph Guaragnini

was warm and transcendent, yet keeping on a cloak of melancholy and unease.

He let it rip in the scherzo-like central movement with biting wit and an edgy sense of irony. Sparks flew in this fleet-fingered romp, which included double-stop pizzicatos and all manner of slaloming runs. The finale provided impassioned soliloquys in two cadenzas, moments of true catharsis before a return to the opening's lament and a final descent into depths of silence.

Qin, whom the audience warmed to, generously offered three encores by David Popper (*Etude*), Giovanni Sollima (*Alone*) and Prokofiev (*March For Children*),

which displayed different vistas of his virtuosity.

From this most eloquent voice, could one hope for local premieres of Britten's Cello Symphony or Frank Bridge's Oration?

The second half focused on orchestral fireworks and showcased SSO associate conductor Lai as an interpreter of real maturity. His was not of the geriatric protract-edness-as-profundity kind, but one of nuanced dynamism and fluidity. Britten's *Sinfonia Da Requiem*, originally written for the Japanese empire but subsequently rejected for its Christian slant, uncannily foretold the carnage of war following its 1941 premiere.

The wailing horrors of the Lacri-

mosa were steadily built up to a shattering climax, followed by the shrill and strident sprint of death in the *Dies Irae*. Lai maintained a tight rein and, when push came to shove, the orchestra upped its pace to match and it became a thrilling meeting of like minds.

The *Requiem Aeternam* closed with a conciliatory balm to the earlier violence, with paired flutes singing like doves of peace, before a final climax of rising hope.

Equally exciting but of a completely different complexion was Richard Strauss' *Tod Und Verklarung* (*Death And Transfiguration*), a tone poem about rising hope for the seemingly hopeless. Here, a man's struggle with painful

death throes was portrayed with chilling restlessness yet sympathy, which Lai and his charges brought out with a show of instrumental prowess.

Solos from Rachel Walker (oboe), Jin Ta (flute) and concertmaster Igor Yuzefovich (violin) stood out, and a magical moment was reached with the brass chorale's chant of the work's big tune, accompanied by singing strings.

That was just one of many instances when both conductor and musicians served the big picture of a masterpiece, which went on to close with the most reassuring C major chord ever conceived.

The fear of death was never to be the same again.