

# Pianist Albert Tiu steals the show

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## REVIEW/CONCERT

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PRELUDE TO THE AFTERNOON OF THE FAUN, STRAUSS' DON JUAN & ALBERT'S TCHAIKOVSKY

Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra  
Esplanade Concert Hall  
Tuesday

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### Chang Tou Liang

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The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra's final concert of the academic year resembled a graduation prom.

Most of the female players wore colourful evening gowns, adding a dose of glamour to a programme filled with glitzy orchestral showpieces. These are works which professional musicians are expected to play in orchestras and the young players did a fine job under the helm of French guest conductor Olivier Ochanine.

Needing little time to warm up, the orchestra launched into the passionate music of Richard Strauss' tone poem *Don Juan*.

The romantic sweep and swash-buckling was made even more special by the solo playing. The plaintive oboe in the work's dreamiest episodes was excellent, matched by solo clarinet in repartee. And the famous passage for French horns was truly a moment to wait for and savour. There were heroes and heroines aplenty.

The orchestra's versatility showed when it switched gears for Debussy's *Prelude To The Afternoon Of The Faun* with its languid and haunting opening. Long sinuous lines on solo flute set the mood, taking the audience into a realm of sensuousness. The sensitive and evocative playing was accompanied by projected visu-

als created by media students Mervin Wong and Emilia Teo.

Great music and spirited playing do not need added visual dimensions and the moving pictures of dispersing smoke, seeping water and close-up shots of plants and flowers were just innocuous appendages. Other than an unintentionally comical cartoon of a faun, this seemed like an experiment in synaesthesia, an affliction where sounds induce coloured visual hallucinations.

The longest work of the evening was Tchaikovsky's rarely performed *Second Piano Concerto In G Major*, with Albert Tiu as soloist. It is a taxing piece, but Tiu mastered its crunching chords, stampeding octaves and tricky fingering with fearless aplomb – even though occasional over-enthusiastic orchestral playing masked some passages.

The ballet-like quality of the music shone through and even the long and treacherously rhythmic piano cadenza at the end left him unfazed.

The slow movement, played in its original unedited version, was essentially a mini-concerto for piano trio. Concertmaster Askar Salimdjánov and principal cellist Jamshid Saydikarimov, both from Uzbekistan, conducted an exquisite *pas de deux* in an extended introduction before being sidelined by the piano in the concerto's finest melody.

Resolution invariably occurs with Tchaikovsky and a loving *menage a trois* of the soloists ensued.

The infectious gaiety of the rollicking finale brought the loudest cheers and two encores. Still with Tchaikovsky, Tiu emoted with Mikhail Pletnev's transcription of the *Andante* from *Sleeping Beauty*, followed by his own arrangement of a fugal tango by Astor Piazzolla for the marvelously balanced threesome. It rocked.