

Choral music programmes offer a joyful noise for Easter weekend

CONCERTS

THE KOZLOVSKY REQUIEM

Singapore Symphony Orchestra
Esplanade Concert Hall
Last Friday

A GALA FOR CREATION

Yong Siew Toh Conservatory
Conservatory Concert Hall
Last Saturday

Chang Tou Liang

There is not a better time for Christian religious music than on Easter weekend, evident by performances of two choral masterpieces, one neglected and the other celebrated.

Polish composer Joseph Kozlovsky's Requiem In E Flat Minor was written in 1798 for his nation's last monarch, King Stanislaw II, who had died in Russian exile.

This performance, the Asian premiere, is a revival of the original edition which had been sequestered in St Petersburg archives for more than two centuries.

A labour of love of Singapore Symphony Orchestra's (SSO) head of artistic planning Hans Sorensen, the performing edition by music director Hans Graf may be judged a stunning success.

The Latin setting of the mass of the dead will be familiar to lovers of choral music, with Kozlovsky's being reminiscent of the classical style in Mozart's famous Requiem of 1791, but with several notable differences.

Particularly striking were the solo arias, which took on operatic dimensions, such as Confutatis, with bass Christoph Seidl sounding imposing and imperious; or the unusually dramatic and theatrical Benedictus, beautifully delivered by soprano Olga Peretyatko.

There was also a ringing bel canto quality in tenor Boris Stepanov's solos, with mezzo-soprano Olesya Petrova completing a well-balanced quartet.

Credit also went to the 80 voices from the Singapore Symphony Chorus and Youth Choir, who contributed volume and weight in the



A diversity of nationalities performed at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's concert last Saturday. PHOTO: YONG SIEW TOH CONSERVATORY

doom-laden Dies Irae, and offered excellent diction, consonance and an enviable cohesion throughout. Their almost unaccompanied Sanctus was a breath of fresh air in its lightness.

The 53-minute Requiem was preceded by Mozart's Symphony No. 25 In G Minor, which shared a common Sturm and Drang (storm and stress) quality of being both gripping and moving. It is hoped that the SSO and Graf's exploration of this "lost" masterpiece will win them many new friends.

Also receiving its first performance in 1798 was Joseph Haydn's famous oratorio *Die Schöpfung*, better known by Anglophones as *The Creation*.

Marking the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's 20th anniversary, the performance by vocal students and members of its orchestral institute conducted by Jason Lai could not have been more appropriate.

The symbolism was there for all to see. Before the conservatory, higher music education in Singapore might be alluded to in its overture, the harmonically unstable *Representation Of Chaos*.

This was Haydn's most radical piece of orchestration, six minutes of music trying to find its own key, later arriving in the glorious "licht!" (light!) in the bright key of

C major. Even the lighting in the auditorium responded accordingly in a creative attempt at a *son et lumière* show.

More importantly, it was the singing that impressed most.

The trio of soloists representing angels Raphael, Uriel and Gabriel – baritone Daegyun Jeong, tenor Zachary Singson Dominguez and soprano Tan See Huey – was uniformly excellent.

The duets of Adam and Eve in Part 3, sung by chorus members tenor Jason Suryaatmaja and soprano Kira Lim, were just as sympathetic.

From their names alone, one would be struck by the diversity of nationalities within the conservatory's student population and alumni. Their sung German was also idiomatic, the audience's understanding further aided by projected English transliterations.

This celebration would not be complete without crediting the 35-strong choir, which included within its ranks the conservatory's head of vocal studies Alan Bennett.

And what a joyous noise it made in choruses like *Der Himmel Erzählen* (The Heavens Are Telling) and *Singt Dem Herren, Alle Stimmen!* (Sing The Lord, All Voices!).

A Lenten weekend could not have been better spent than this.