



The Kam-Harwood-Lim Trio is made up of (from left) London-based Singaporean violinist Kam Ning, Britain-trained Singaporean pianist Lim Yan and British cellist Richard Harwood. PHOTO: YONG SIEW TOH CONSERVATORY

From death to sunshine in a night

The Kam-Harwood-Lim Trio's performance took audiences into darkness and back into the light

CONCERT

KAM-HARWOOD-LIM TRIO
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory
Concert Hall
Last Friday

Chang Tou Liang

Lovers of chamber music have never had it so good.

In recent months, they have been treated to excellent concerts by the T'ang and Concordia quartets, More Than Music duo and Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's piano quintet.

Now, meet the piano trio formed by London-based Singaporean

violinist Kam Ning, British cellist Richard Harwood and Britain-trained Singaporean pianist Lim Yan in a programme that traced the history of the piano trio medium.

Joseph Haydn was the "father of the piano trio", having composed as many as 45 of them.

Of these, only one is performed with any frequency, his Piano Trio In G Major (Hob.XV:25) published in 1795.

It would be hard to find a more congenial work to open the concert with, one oozing salon charm from every pore.

As with such early trios, the keyboardist was the acknowledged leader, with string players providing the accompaniment.

While Kam's violin had some pretty melodies to mull over, spare a thought for Harwood's cello, whose role was to play the perfect sidekick to his partners.

Even in the Rondo all'Ongarese, popularly known as the Gypsy Rondo, it was Lim's piano which dominated, overseeing the abrupt shifts in tempos and modes which

made for an enjoyable ride.

All this was turned on its head in Dmitri Shostakovich's Piano Trio No.2 In E Minor (Op.67), where Harwood was obliged to open with harmonics, effecting tinnitis in excruciating high registers.

This wartime work, which premiered in 1944, made for uneasy listening because of its grim countenance. Grating dissonances, bare octaves and insistently hammering rhythms were par for the course, the aural equivalent of treading barefoot on broken glass.

The piano was now an instrument of percussion, content with issuing beats over which strings ran riot, culminating in the second movement's demented fast waltz.

The slow third movement was typical Shostakovich, a passacaglia with long-held piano chords establishing a funereal and plodding pace for short variations to unfold.

This led into the finale's infamous "dance of death", centred on a Jewish tune which once heard, would be an earworm for the ages.

A vision of the Holocaust, with

Jews led to their graves by a village band, was the chilling and abiding memory evoked by this music.

The trio gave a take-no-prisoners performance, and audience members held their breath for a few moments after its subdued close before erupting in loud applause. They had been compelled to understand what the music meant.

With the first half closing on a dark and sobering note, the second half was lit by the sunshine of Felix Mendelssohn's Piano Trio No. 1 In D Minor (Op.49), likely the most performed piano trio in Singapore.

Its sheer likeability has to do with the Biedermeier years of 1839, where a cult of beauty was prized over mundane reality.

The Kam-Harwood-Lim trio made every movement a veritable song without words, besides letting rip with the early Romantic era's trademark prestidigitation, and the chamber concert with marked contrasts closed on a cheerful and optimistic note.

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