

Yong Siew Toh Conservatory students tackle Debussy's Preludes with care

PRIMARYLY PIANO: DEBUSSY
PRELUDES

Yong Siew Toh Conservatory
Piano Studio, YST Conservatory
Orchestral Hall
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The two books of Preludes by French composer Claude Debussy (1862-1918) are landmarks of 20th-century piano repertoire. These 24 pieces, 12 in each book, represented a departure from cultivated tonal formalities of the age by embracing nebulous forms and ambiguous harmonies of the future.

Debussy first wrote the pieces, and later added descriptive titles in French. These cemented his reputation as the musical "impressionist", a sobriquet he disliked.

It is rare to hear all the Preludes in a single sitting, previously undertaken here by visiting French pianists Philippe Cassard (2003) and Monique Duphil (2006). This evening's well-attended recital was offered by 23 students from Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's piano

studio, students of Albert Tiu, Ning An and Lim Yan.

Book I (1909-1910), the more popular and often performed, opened with *Danseuses De Delphes* (Dancers Of Delphi), *Voiles* (Veils) and *Le Vent Dans La Plaine* (Wind In The Plain), three works which encapsulated Debussy's delicately crafted sound world. Deft pedalling, sensitive balancing of treble and bass voices, and feathery lightness were keenly observed by Kuo Lyu-Cen, Chen Bo-Yu and Venus Chai.

Debussy's most fancy titles, such as *Les Sons Et Les Parfums Tourment Dans L'Air Du Soir* (Sounds And Scents Mingle In The Evening Air) and Book II's *Les Fees Sont D'Exquises Danseuses* (The Fairies Are Exquisite Dancers) and *La Terrasse Des Audiences Du Clair De Lune* (Terrace For Moonlight Audiences) were also his most impressionistic in feel and texture. These received imaginatively evocative readings from Soh Wei Qi, Wang Chien-Jou and Cheryn Pandora.

For contrasts in colour and mood, it was hard to beat the sequence leading from *Les Collines D'Anacapri* (The Hills Of Anacapri), *Des Pas Sur La Neige*

(Footsteps In The Snow), *Ce Qu'a Vu Le Vent D'Ouest* (What The West Wind Saw), *La Fille Aux Cheveux De Lin* (Girl With Flaxen Hair) through to *La Cathedrale Engloutie* (Engulfed Cathedral). Within a matter of minutes, one experienced jollity, desolation, violence, innocence and monumentality through the capable hands of Edenia Maureen, Fong Jean Ying, Liang Ray-Heng, Xian Ruofei and Darrell Lim.

Rhythmic patterns defined *La Serenade Interrompue* (Interrupted Serenade) and Book II's *La Puerta Del Vino* (The Wine Gate) and *Les Tierces Alternees* (Alternating Thirds), the first two influenced by Spanish music. The Hispanic spirit came alive through Lee Ann and Vernis Chua, while Goh Kai Cheng gave the smoothest possible account of the tricky etude-like latter number.

The art of syncopation and jazz informed Book I's *La Danse De Puck* (Puck's Dance) and *Minstrels* as well as Book II's *General Lavine - Eccentric and Hommage w S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.*, portrayals of comedic or ethnic-African characters. Panyakorn Lertnimitphan, Ashley Chua, Toby



Cheryn Pandora was one of 23 students playing Debussy at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's concert. PHOTO: CHANG TOU LIANG

Tan and Papat Lertchanvit were alert and sympathetic to their rhythmic thrust without resorting to caricature.

Book II (1912-1913) had the more complex pieces, with Debussy using three staves instead of two in scoring. The most impressionist were *Brouillards* (Mists) and *Feuilles Mortes* (Dead Leaves), which saw Lin Sin-Yue and Maw Li Awng Mi bring out an array of colours and shades.

For sheer simplicity, *Bruyeres* (Heaths) and *Canope* (Canopic Jar)

were spare in keyboard writing yet loaded with poetry. Chakrit Khanonvej and Lin Shih-En had the honour of unlocking their secrets.

Cheryl Pandora (Cheryn's elder sister) was the lucky pianist assigned to play two preludes, including splashy *Ondine*, guardian of the watery realm and the most spectacular piece of all, the closing *Feux D'Artifice* (Fireworks), which literally swept across the entire keyboard. This kaleidoscopic two-hour-long piano excursion had it all.