

Brimming with talent and conviction

REVIEW / CONCERT

A MUSICAL FANTASY – SONG ZILIANG

PIANO RECITAL

School of the Arts Concert Hall

Last Friday

Mervin Beng

Pianist Song Ziliang works full-time as a general music teacher in a secondary school, but the programme he presented for his recital was as substantial as that of a performance by a concert pianist.

The recent graduate of the Royal College of Music and Moscow Conservatory also spared no effort to connect with the audience, drawing them in with engaging chats and including piano arrangements of film, pop and anime music in the programme.

The concert began with Italian pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni's transcription of the Chaconne from J.S. Bach's Partita No. 2 For Solo Violin.

The Chaconne is widely regarded as one of the greatest pieces ever written for solo violin and Busoni's transcription aptly captures the essence and imposing architecture of the work.

The mild-mannered Song delivered the piece strongly, giving it scale, structure and some of the best piano tone this reviewer has heard at the School of the Arts Concert Hall.

Busoni's piano part is every bit a technical minefield as Bach's original is for violin. Although there were a few missed notes and greater contrast in the voicing of parts would have helped, his performance as a whole was technically sound and did full justice to the majesty of the Chaconne.

The Fantasie In C Major, Op. 17 by Schumann is a work that is so challenging that Franz Liszt was reputed to be one of the few pianists of the time able to perform it.

Song was well up to scratch and the naturalness of his interpretation made the 30-minute piece feel considerably shorter.

The passionate first movement could have done with greater gravitas, but the tenderness and intensity he showed in the final slow movement was wonderful.

As if the Bach-Busoni and Schumann Fantasie were not enough, he performed the Sonata No. 5 by Scriabin, which is considered one of the most demanding of works in the piano repertoire.

The rigour of his four years of musical education at the Moscow Conservatory came into play and he performed with ease, brimming with pathos and conviction. This was a most impressive performance.

He prefaced the Scriabin with the world premiere of Syafiqah 'Adha Sallehin's commission *Mahligai*, an expression of love and marital bliss.

The short work with slow-fast-slow sections features a melody with unmistakably Malay influence, embellished with "grenek" – traditional Malay musical ornamentation – which did not sound far removed from baroque ornamentation.

The Malay folk melodies and rhythms Syafiqah used combined comfortably with Western harmonisation, although the final outcome was more a mash-up than a fusion.

In Song's speech to the audience, he waxed lyrically about his desire to bring classical music to new audiences, especially the young.

His earnest, homely tone and self-effacing humour won many admirers and the younger members of the audience were particularly entranced with his selection of anime and Chinese pop arrangements.

If all school music teachers had a fraction of his musical abilities and passion in sharing their love of music, Singapore's musical future will be a bright one.