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## Concert review: T'ang Quartet and Chloe Chua shine in strings shows



(From left) T'ang Quartet's Ng Yu-Ying (first violin), Ang Chek Meng (second violin), Wang Zihao (cello) and Han Oh (viola) in Humble Beginnings. PHOTO: T'ANG QUARTET

[Chang Tou Liang](#)

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### Humble Beginnings

**T'ang Quartet**

**Victoria Concert Hall, April 22**

**The Four Seasons With Chloe Chua**

**Singapore Symphony Orchestra**

**Esplanade Concert Hall, April 23**

Thirty years ago, four men in their twenties burst onto the local musical scene. Raising eyebrows and turning heads with their in-your-face attitude and style, they were admired and adored by the chic hipster demographic for their edgy and passionate performances.

Formed by violinists Ng Yu-Ying and Ang Chek Meng, violist Lionel Tan and cellist Leslie Tan, the T'ang Quartet was Singapore's first full-time professional chamber group. Chamber music, often considered staid and all-too-serious, would never be the same again.

Today, the Tan brothers have retired from quartet-playing, replaced by younger colleagues violist Han Oh and cellist Wang Zihao.

The quartet's new incarnation made its debut with contrasting string quartets by Joseph Haydn and Alexander Borodin to no less fanfare.

For Haydn's Quartet in D minor (Op.76 No.2), nicknamed "Fifths" because of the descending interval that opens its first movement, the foursome were a model of decorum and discipline.

Their tightly-knit ensemble work raised genuine tension in the fast outer movements, but never at the expense of clarity or warmth.

In Borodin's familiar Second String Quartet (well-known because the Broadway musical Kismet borrowed its melodies), there was more room to luxuriate.

By playing its third movement's radiant Notturmo straight and without gilding the edges, the quartet amply brought out its sheer beauty.

Judging by the cheers and long line for autographs, some things for the rebooted T'ang Quartet have not changed.

Also over the weekend, a young violin prodigy commanded the stage like a seasoned veteran.

Chloe Chua, who aged 11 in 2018 made headlines by sharing first prize in the prestigious Yehudi Menuhin Violin Competition (Junior division), returned to the stage with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO).

At the competition in 2018, Chua had enchanted international audiences with a highly assured yet sensitive performance of Winter from Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Now 15, she has recorded a CD of all the Seasons with the SSO, and this concert was its live showcase.

For the winsome Chua, it is no longer a matter of playing right notes, but one of making music with a spontaneity that comes as naturally as breathing.

In tutti sections, she blended as one with the orchestra, then emerged with a solo voice that could only be described as sheer poetry.



Young violinist Chloe Chua in The Four Seasons with Singapore Symphony Orchestra. PHOTO: NATHANIEL LIM

Whether imitating bird songs, torrential rain storms, hunting horns or falling snow, she was fully absorbed with every measure and turn of phrase. Who could fault the audience for applauding after each season and every fast movement?

The ante was upped in Pietro Locatelli's Violin Concerto in D major (Op.3 No.12), also known as the Harmonic Labyrinth. Longer than any of the Seasons, its outer movements culminate in capriccios, the most fiendishly difficult of solo passages. She took these in her stride, fearlessly letting rip and then some.

Should a history of string-playing in Singapore be written in some distant future, surely T'ang Quartet and Chloe Chua would count among its highest lights.

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