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NEWS RELEASE

The Finale of T'ang Quartet's 30th Anniversary 2022/2023 Season

An extraordinary musical collaboration that marks the milestones of two music icons – the T'ang Quartet and the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music – in one show

Give and Take (Back and Forth)
March 3, 2023 • 7:30pm
Conservatory Concert Hall
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music
Tickets at $10 on yst/eventbrite.com

Ng Yu-Ying
1st violin

Ang Chek Meng
2nd violin

Jamshid Saydikarimov
Cello (guest)

Dandan Wang
Viola (guest)

Programme

Chen Zhangyi
Twin Cinema for String Nonet

Maurice Ravel
String Quartet in F

Chen Zhangyi
Give and Take (Back and Forth)
for T'ang Quartet

Conservatory Concert Hall at
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music

Feb 6 2023: The T'ang Quartet is taking the 30th anniversary finale concert home on March 3 at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YST), where they have been Quartet-In-Residence since 2003. The upcoming show will draw a close to the quartet's successful Anniversary Season that begun last year, with the ensemble helming three concerts between April and October.

Titled, *Give and Take (Back & Forth)*, the gig is of much significance as it is also part of YST's 20th Anniversary 2022/2023 Season programme, thus celebrating two Singapore music icons in one show. Tickets ($10) are on sale now on yst/eventbrite.com .

As the last major concert of T'ang Quartet's Anniversary Season, the ensemble is pulling all the stops to wow the audience. The programme comprises three sterling works from two outstanding composers – French composer, pianist and conductor Maurice Revel, and Singaporean composer Chen Zhangyi. Chen (b.1984) is an assistant professor at YST where he teaches analysis and composition. He is also an accomplished conductor, violinist and violist.

Collaborative Expression

The programme underscores the collaborative effort between T'ang Quartet and Chen. On March 3, Chen will debut a string quartet work, *Give and Take (Back and Forth)*, specially for T'ang Quartet, as a centrepiece of the programme, alongside another work of his, *Twin Cinema for String Nonet*, which was previously commissioned by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) – written for the Stradivari Quartet and SSO musicians.

The music of Chen has been described as "music from a voice of the future" by BBC Radio 3 and "a breath of fresh air on our musical landscape" by The Straits Times. Nature is an important source of inspiration in his instrumental and orchestral works, which also include *Vanda, Rain Tree* and *Of An Ethereal Symphony*.

Chen Zhangyi

Ng Yu-Ying, T'ang Quartet's founding member, says: "We have known Zhangyi for a long time and have always admired his talent as a musician and composer. This is a significant and meaningful collaboration for all of us."

Chen adds: "I am very honoured to be able to create a work for the T'ang Quartet on this momentous occasion, where their milestone of three decades coincides with the two decades of YST Conservatory's. Being an alumnus and a faculty member of YST, it is indeed a good time to reflect upon the past and look forward to the future, and to borrow the YST's current theme of *Looking Back, Moving Forward*."

On the premise of his titular work, he says: "As with any relationship (or marriage), playing together in a string quartet requires the tight-knit rapport to play in perfect harmony and synchrony, moving and breathing as one musical body. Naturally, the delicate balance of four personalities involves some sort of '*Give and Take*'."

Chen's *Twin Cinema for String Nonet* will also see the T'ang Quartet with guests Jamshid Saydikarimov (cello) and Dandan Wang (viola) performing alongside young talents from YST – Guennadi Mouzyka (double bass); Edgar Javier Lucena Rodriguez (violin); Hoi Khai-Weing (violin); Lee Wei-Fan (viola); and Sim Yein (cello).

Commissioned by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), Twin Cinema was written for the Stradivari Quartet and SSO musicians. The concept of the work is based on the Singaporean poetic form of Twin Cinema, where two separate columns of poetry may be read separately, or across, as a single poem.

Chen has taken inspiration from Dr Sara Florian's poem *The Lost Seasons*. A poem that weaves together the Twin Cinema form with the pantun, while depicting two concurrent coming-of-age stories: a Venetian countryside boy contrasted with a Singaporean kampung boy. Florian conjures the passage of time, effects of the changing climate, and the counterpoint between the rustic and the urban, navigating between the East and the West.

Musically, Chen has taken a slightly cinematic and eclectic approach, exploring and maintaining two strands of narratives between the two quartets. The pair of quartets are placed in a 'stereo' antiphony, and their musical strands coexist in sometimes complementary, and at times surreal juxtapositions of moods and characters in this imaginary duet of 'cinematic' scores. Throughout, the contrabass acts as the central pillar that support the narratives on both sides.

**Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)
String Quartet in F**

I. Allegro moderato – très doux
II. Assez vif – très rythmé
III. Très lent
IV. Vif et agité

Ravel's String Quartet in F is modelled after a piece written a decade earlier by Debussy: first movement in sonata form, barbed interjections between plucked and bowed strings in the Scherzo, a moving and lyrical elegy following this before ending with a rhythmically quirky finale. The movements are connected by repetitive head motifs in the style of Cesar Franck – ironically something which the two younger composers had been known to consciously avoid.

Quartet writing had become the epitome of abstract composition since the time of Mozart, and both Debussy and Ravel appeared to desire their works to be seen within that convention, not just through the use of traditional forms but also in their titling. Ravel's statement of an overarching tonality – Quartet in F – is as misleading as Debussy's assigning of an opus number (10) to his work without such an index in his previous nine.

Debussy is believed to have listened to Ravel's Quartet before it premiered in 1904 and given his approval of the work. However, the similarities between the two works triggered the supporters of either composer, leading to an unfortunate rift between the two.

"It's probably best...", said Ravel reflected, "for us to be on frigid terms for illogical reasons."

While time never healed the rift between the two French composers, it has muted the similarities to reveal contrasts underneath. Ravel's scoring for the strings is obviously more transparent even though it had an orchestral range of colour. The Basque character which Ravel got from his mother, always so evident as a badge of identity in his music, reveals itself in the Scherzo's guitar-like strumming.

Ravel himself would later admit to flaws in his quartet's form, but one should probably be sceptical of this as one might think of Brahms' self-deprecating assessment of his own work. After all, all three men placed Mozart closest to God, with Ravel's piece closer to Mozartian harmony of expression than the quartets of either Debussy or Fauré – particularly in the first and third movements, where the audience is drawn in by a reserved, confident and mysterious attraction.

Source: *Hi-Fi News*

Interviews on T'ang Quartet & Chen Zhangyi collaboration

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Celebrating the milestones of two icons in one show

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T'ANG QUARTET

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GIVE AND TAKE (BACK AND FORTH)
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Featuring:
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