

Musical Siamese twins first among equals

> concert

FIDDLERS' FEUD

Jin Li & Chan Yoong Han, Violins
Young Musicians' Society Auditorium/Monday

Chang Tou Liang

THE sound of two violins can sometimes be a surefire recipe for a squeak-fest. However, when two master fiddlers meet, expect the unexpected.

The outgoing, photogenic Chan Yoong Han and introverted, shy-to-a-fault Jin Li, both first violinists of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, proved to be a surprisingly well-matched pair.

In a demanding programme of two-violin music that lasted over two hours, the odd couple gave a convincing impression of musical Siamese twins. Despite almost breathing as one for the most part, there was also a generous sense of give and take. Jin's more robust and earthy tone was well complemented by Chan's sweeter and limpid sound.

In two Jean-Marie Leclair sonatas, the intricate Baroque counterpoint benefited from very tight ensemble, one so seamless that even a microtome would be hard-pressed to separate.

The eponymous "fiddlers' feud" came to bear in the eight Etude-Caprices of Henryk Wieniawski. With the pair alternating parts, one could easily appreciate how these virtuosi operate.

When one reached out for pyrotechnics, the other provided neat accompaniment or played a counter-melody. Then it was a delightful reversal of roles. Even a momentary collapse following an awkward page-turn in the familiar Tempo di Salterella could not dampen the high spirits in full flow.

Local composer Zechariah Goh need not feel overawed in this company. His fiendishly difficult new composition Valour, receiving its world premiere, showed that both violinists had the right amount of what the title called for. Beside it, even Prokofiev's tricky Sonata In C Major might seem like a walk in the park.

The recital was not short of bonbons either. Joined by fellow SSO violinist Cindy Lee, who proved highly capable on the piano, the pair ripped through the nostalgic schmaltz of Moszkowski's Suite and Sarasate's Navarra. Milking the applause, Chan emerged with his viola and together with Jin, finished Halvorsen's Passacaglia on a high.

"Outplay, out-sing and out-charm" could be a motto of this musical showdown, but unlike television's Survivor, both fiddlers emerge as first among equals.