

Singapore International Piano Festival 2007

Introducing Young Virtuoso Albert Lin

Albert Lin has been selected to perform at this year's Young Virtuoso Recital at the Singapore International Piano Festival. His recital programme on Saturday 30 June (4pm) is very adventurous - the music of Bach, Beethoven and Liszt alongside Singaporean composers Joyce Koh and Zechariah Goh Toh Chai, and Swedish avant-gardist PerMagnus Lindborg and Russian jazz legend Nikolai Kapustin. In a rare interview, he speaks candidly with *BraviSSimO!*



You grew up always wanting to be a concert pianist. When did that realisation come about and what was your family's response to that?

I have been surrounded by music my whole life. My mother wanted to be a pianist herself, and was an interpreter for the great pedagogue Robert Schulz in Taiwan! Both my siblings had piano classes but they both hated it! I would tag along on their lessons, and played on my own at home. The realisation of wanting to become a pianist came about after I attended my first concert, by violinist Cho-Liang Lin in the 1980s. I recall being overwhelmed by the joy and emotions he produced and conveyed, and just felt out of the world at that point. It was nothing really serious, however; I had also wanted to be a soccer or tennis player!

It was only when I studied with Ong Lip Tat that I decided to seriously pursue performing as a career, and my parents, like most, objected even through the course of my studies in the USA. They eventually saw that this is the path I wanted to take in my life, and that this was how I could best contribute to society.

Could you tell us something about your piano teachers in Singapore and the USA? How did they influence your repertoire and interpretation of piano music?

I've been very fortunate to have had some really amazing teachers. Ong Lip Tat was very strict and did not accept any shoddy work. Under his tutelage, I understood

music as a language, and not just a bunch of nice sounds. Marian Hahn at Peabody Conservatory was trained in the Taubmann Technique, which emphasised on the alignment of the body and playing with minimal effort. I spent a great deal of time changing the way I played, and even had to play only scales for months at a time! She had a keen ear and was very sensitive to the quality of sound from a piano. She taught me to be always conscious of the sound I wanted. Arthur Greene at Michigan was a big fan of Russian music, especially Scriabin. I learnt most of the Rachmaninov concertos with him, but to his disappointment, none of Scriabin's works. For him, music had to be spiritual, and larger than life! Ong Lip Tat brought me an intellectual approach, Marian Hahn a technical and aural one, and Arthur Greene the spiritual and emotional.

Contemporary music and works of Singaporean composers feature prominently in your recital programmes. Was this a conscious decision? And how did you arrive at this decision?

A few years ago, I realised that I wasn't attending as many concerts as I used to. I had become bored stiff listening to the same pieces all the time! "Familiar Favorites" is always the easiest way to sell tickets, but there's only so many times I want to listen to a Beethoven sonata, or Chopin Ballade, much less to play it. There are many wonderful works written within the past 30 years, and they deserve a bigger audience.

As an artist, it is very important to contribute to the progression of my art. Composers

aren't writing 30 sonatas or 10 concertos anymore, because there aren't enough people playing them so there isn't a demand. It would be a tragedy if musicians still perform the same music 200 years from now! There's much new music written by Singaporean composers being performed by orchestra, wind and chamber ensembles, and choir, but not so for solo instruments like the piano. To me, being an artist is akin to being an ambassador for the arts, and I cannot be a good ambassador if I don't represent music from my peers.

You gave the world premiere of Goh Toh Chai's *Rasa Sayang Variations and Miniatures*. What do these works mean to you?

I gave the world premiere of Goh's *Ripples 2* too! These are some finely written works, and I really hope they'll be performed more often. Having known Toh Chai since my teens, it is immensely satisfying to perform his music as they are just like he is as a person, a little mad! It is always a proud moment for me to premiere a work, and to have a work associated with me whenever people hear it!

After the Piano Festival, what does the immediate future hold for Albert Lin?

Back to learning new music! I have a whole bunch of works by composer John Sharpley that I would love to perform, and will be inviting all young composers to send me their music. ■

Albert Lin meets the Changs

On 28 May, Young Virtuoso Recitalist Albert Lin gave a mini-recital at the home of Mr & Mrs Chang Ming Wen. He played the music of Bach, Beethoven, Liszt and Kapustin to an admiring audience comprising family members and descendents of the late Mr & Mrs Chang Kuo Chi. The Chang family is proud to support the Young Virtuoso Recital with their generous donations.



Albert performs for the Chang family