

CLARENCE LEE Graduate Diploma Piano Recital



CLARENCE LEE Piano Recital Graduate Diploma Recital Series Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Concert Hall Wednesday (3 April 2013)

It is an unmitigated pleasure to see and hear some of Singapore's brightest musical talents perform on stage. Their Graduate Diploma Recitals at the Conservatory are open to the public, which is the voyeuristic equivalent of witnessing someone take his or her final examination. Sink or swim, fly or flop, there seems to be a guilty pleasure in being part of the process. After all, it is the trade of a musical performer to be paraded in full view of the public, and sometimes being judged.

No fears for young Clarence Lee, who was in 2011 awarded 2nd Prize in the Artist Category of the National Piano Competition. He plays like a seasoned performer and is buoyed by the applause of a warm audience. Beginning with Chopin's *Nocturne* in C sharp minor (Op. Posth), he wove a seamless legato and a fine cantabile line. The clarity of projection continued into Mozart's *Sonata* in D major (K.576), distinguished by its trumpet-like hunting motif. The performance was crisp, very well-articulated and full of

vitality in the outer movements. The slow middle movement revelled in the shifts of major and minor key, bringing out its true pathos.



There was a hint of caution in the opening of Scriabin's *Fantasy* in B minor (Op.28). This apparent lack of mystique however dissipated with the emergence of the big melody, reaching its ecstatic climax of thundering chords which was very well handled. Lee is a true master of sonorities. He also gave the Singapore premiere of Japanese composer Shin-ichiro Ikebe's *Sway Green Treetops*, the set piece of the 2012 Hamamatsu International Piano Competition. Filled with the usual atonal and virtuosic clichés, relieved by occasional Takemitsu-like harmonies, it is not a piece I would like to hear again, even if played as convincingly here.

Lee left his best for the last, the second book of Albeniz's *Iberia*. Strange as it may appear, he was totally comfortable with its rhythmically exacting and intricate idiom. The gypsy-dance of *Rondeña* literally leapt out from the black and white of the score (he did play the entire recital from memory) into the realm of Technicolor, while the sultry romanticism of *Almeria* oozed from his pores from start to finish. In the delightful *Triana*, he traipsed the fine high-wire between hitting the notes accurately and savouring the spirit of the dance. Never once did the melodic line falter nor its rhythmic thrust diminish in this wonderful account. Interestingly, *Triana* is one of the set-pieces of the Hong Kong International Piano Competition. Clarence Lee will certainly be ready to take on its challenges come October 2014.



Review by Chang Tou Liang, 4 April 2013