

Reviews

Stephen Hough in recital
City Hall Concert Hall
Reviewed: May 28

This memorable recital by British pianist Stephen Hough was inventive in concept and impeccable in execution.

He caught the essence of Mendelssohn's *Variations Sérieuses* perfectly, limiting self-indulgence to dabs of tasteful *rubato*. He drew on a different tonal palette for the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata in C minor, Op 111, which was played tautly and with little exploration of its more pliant side. If that forfeited textural variety, it at least heightened the contrast with the following variations in which Beethoven's gentle rhythmic development gradually gained in cohesion.

Two short pieces by Saint-Saens (*Valse Nonchalante*) and Chabrier (*Feuillet d'Album*) separated the more familiar waltzes. Throughout the whole set there was no predicting what Hough would do next with his discreet phrasing and colourful characterisation.

Lines in Weber's *Invitation to the Dance* seemed to be shaped on a whim while the two Chopin waltzes (*Op 64 No 2* and *Valse Brillante in A flat major*) were given such delicate makeovers that they dispensed with all need for flamboyance, while the virtuosity in Liszt's *Valse Oubliée No 1* and *Mephisto Waltz No 1* was delivered with a restrained physicality.

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Sam Olliver

Tribute to the 21st Century Romantic
Feminine
Guangdong National Orchestra
City Hall Concert Hall
Reviewed: May 31

This concert featured works by modern Chinese women composers representing the Chinese Woman Composers' Association, but the music was neither feminine nor romantic.

Femininity in composition is very difficult to define and recent attempts to do so by encyclopedias

and dictionaries have failed. We would be better served having a compendium of effective and ineffective composers of both sexes.

There were examples of both in the eight original works and one arrangement played by the Guangdong National Orchestra, comprising Chinese traditional instruments with the western cello, double bass and percussion.

Poor scoring was often a problem, with the strings inaudible against shrill wind sounds and ear-splitting percussion.

However, the best was saved until last. *Ciel demande II* (Tao Yu), *Zishu Women* (Zhu Jie) and *Mountain of Eight Spirits* (Alice Ho) integrated the percussion with subtlety, were more adventurous both rhythmically and harmonically, and used thinner scoring to achieve clarity. Less is more was never better demonstrated.

Qi Keng's tender *gao* solo in *Zishu Women* was a highlight of the evening.

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Sam Olliver

Of Mountains and Seas
New Asia Amphitheatre
Chinese University of Hong Kong
Reviewed: May 31

This Gao Xingjian play is based on myths compiled by the Chinese gazetteer *Shan Hai Jing* at least 2,000 years ago. It focuses on the mythical character Archer Yi (played by Andy Ng Wai-shek).

Directed by Hardy Tsoi, the three-hour performance is a solid piece of storytelling, complemented by the open air ambience of the venue, fantastic puppetry and excellent live music and sound from percussionist John Lee Yiu-shing and vocalist Chan Wai-kwong.

Gao insists the tales should be read as they are, but one can draw parallels between Archer Yi's life and Gao's, both having been forced into exile after angering the authorities.

The third act was under-rehearsed and Tsoi could have cut some scenes without compromising the play's integrity.

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Kevin Kwong