An evening of joyful Bach music

REVIEW/CONCERT

MASAKI SUZUKI & JS BACH
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra/Conservatory Concert Hall/
Last Saturday

Chang Teo Liang

The baroque music revolution in Singapore is well and truly under way. Recent concerts by Red Dot Baroque and recitals have established a definite trend. Another all-Bach concert, with the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra conducted by seasoned baroque specialist Masaki Suzuki, founder of Bach Collegium Japan, was the icing on a well-baked cake.

Instrumental concerts, choral music, a motet and a cantata were on this well-conceived programme. Opening was Keyboard Concerto in D Minor (BWV.1052). Bach’s longest, with young harpsichordist Mervyn Lee helmimg the demanding solo. He was a confident reading: weaving between being an ensemble member and exerting himself in solo passages.

The string accompaniment led by guest concertmaster Iryo Terakado, numbering only 12 players, ensured a light and transparent texture throughout. Thus Lee’s ornate figurations in the slow movement and the finale’s virtuoso flourishes came through very well.

The other concerto work was the Concerto in C Minor For Violin And Oboe (BWV.1060a), where Terakado and guest oboist Masanori San’nomiya, both permanent members of the Bach Collegium Japan and highly experienced soloists, held sway. The interplay between both players, intricate and intimate, was exquisite.

Both choral works performed were sacred in inspiration and content. The religious message in the motet Jesu, Meine Freude (Jesus, My Joy, BWV.227) was unmistakable. The 16-member chorus from the conservatory, with four singers a part including tenor Alan Bennett (head of voice studies), sung like they meant every word.

Chorales were delivered with conviction, while the fugue Ihr Aber Seid Nacht Hervorchilicht (But Ye Are Not In The Flesh) delighted in its buoyant counterpoint.

In the brief trio Das Gesetz Des Gelobts (For The Spirit Of The Law) and So Aber Christus In Euch Ist (And Of Christ He Is In You), the soloists were somewhat exposed, but did the best to hold their own. In the cantata Mit Fried Und Freude Ich Fahr Dahin (With Peace And Joy I Depart, BWV.120), the feeling of accomplishment was even greater. The obligated parts from oboist San’nomiya and guest flautist Lifilio Mada were delightful, while a trio of young vocalists had the opportunity to shine.

Alto Lu Pei-Yun radiated true gravitas in the ari Ich Will Auch Mein Gebrochene Augen (Even With Broken Eyes), a prayer of submission, while baritone Lim Jing Jie reaffirmed that one need not fear death in O Wunder, Du Eiser Herz (How Wondrous That A Heart), in the duet Ein Ungeschmückt Licht (An Unfading Light), Lim and tenor Jung Woo were well matched in their utterance that “He who believes shall be blessed”.

The Dith (Choral Er Ist Das Heil (He Is The Salvation) came all too soon, but Suzuki and his charges totally justified the cantata’s exhortation, sending an appreciative audience home in peace and joy.