

## An evening of joyful Bach music

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### REVIEW/CONCERT

MASAAKI SUZUKI & J.S. BACH

Yong Siew Toh

Conservatory Orchestra/

Conservatory Concert Hall/

Last Saturday

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### Chang Tou Liang

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The baroque music revolution in Singapore is well and truly under way. Recent concerts by Red Dot Baroque and re:Sound have established a definite trend.

Another all-Bach concert with the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra conducted by renowned baroque specialist Masaaki Suzuki, founder of Bach Collegium Japan, was the icing on a well-baked cake.

Instrumental concertos, 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 helming the demanding solo. His was a confident reading, weaving between being an ensemble member and exerting himself in solo passages.

The string accompaniment led by guest concertmaster Ryo 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 virtuosic flourishes came through very well.

The other concertante work was the Concerto In C Minor For Violin And Oboe (BWV.1060a), where Terakado and guest oboist Masamitsu 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 excellent.

Both choral works performed were sacred in inspiration and content. The religious message in the motet *Jesu, Meine Freud* (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 Nicht Fleischlich* (But Ye Are Not In The Flesh) delighted in its busy counterpoint.

In the brief trios *Denn Das Gesetz Des Geistes* (For The Spirit Of The Law) and *So Aber Christus In Euch Ist* (And Of Christ Be 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.125), the feeling of accomplishment was even greater. The obbligato parts from oboist San'nomiya and guest flautist Liliko Maeda were a delight, while a trio of young vocalists had the opportunity to shine.

Alto Lu Pei-Yun radiated true gravitas in the aria *Ich Will Auch Mit Gebrochnen Augen* (Even With Broken Eyes), a prayer of submission, while baritone Lim Jing Jie reaffirmed that one need not fear death in *O Wunder, Dass Ein Herz* (How Wondrous That A Heart). In the duet *Ein Unbegreiflich Licht* (An Unfathomable Light), Lim and tenor Jong Woo were well matched in their utterance that "He who believes shall be blessed".

The final chorus *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.