

FOREVER YOUNG

LYNNETTE SEAH and LIM SHUE CHURN

talk about their 20 years with the SSO

When the Singapore Symphony Orchestra gave its first concert in 1979, the 21 year old Singaporean violinist LYNNETTE SEAH MEI TSING (LS) assumed the role of its first concertmaster. Also playing with the first violins was 13 year old LIM SHUE CHURN (SC), an SSO trainee at the time. In 1989, both musicians were among eight who were awarded gold medals for ten years of service. Now the few have become fewer; only two of the original cohort remain but they are as youthful and active as ever.

Lynnette Seah will open the 20th anniversary celebrations with a performance of the Sibelius Violin Concerto on 15 & 16 January 1999.



Lynnette Seah (left) and Lim Shue Churn (right).

Q: *Congratulations on your long service with the SSO! To what do you attribute this success?*

LS: Hard work and more hard work. Besides playing in concerts, I keep myself busy learning new concertos and works, doing chamber music and ensuring that I am always in good condition musically. In 1986, I took six months off to study in Germany, preparing for the Carl Flesch International Violin Competition in London. Also during that period, I saw my two sons Maurice and André grow up. They are now fourteen and thirteen years old. So it does not feel like twenty years!

SC: The love of music keeps me going. I am inspired by working with many different conductors, in particular Maestro Okko Kamu, whom I feel is a great musician and has an excellent baton-technique that speaks louder than words. I also like the working hours which allow me more time for practice at home, sports like badminton and tending to my pet parrots.

Q: *What are your memories of SSO's first ever concert?*

SC: There was a great sense of occasion and anticipation, and I felt the audience to be very warm and receptive, and perhaps less critical. Being a greenhorn, I was totally innocent about musical matters and thus felt very little stress during the performance. Nowadays I tend to be more self-conscious. Ignorance is bliss, they say. And I don't remember being invited to more receptions and post-concert parties ever!

LS: Just one week before the big day, Maestro Choo Hoey told me that I would be SSO's concertmaster. It was a total

surprise for me as I was relatively junior then. I later served in that position for one and a half years until Pavel Prantl arrived from Czechoslovakia.

Q: *Besides tuning up the orchestra before each concert, what does a concertmaster do?*

LS: As a concertmaster, I served as the leader of the entire string section and made decisions on the bowing, thus ensuring that the strings play as one. I also acted as the spokesperson for the whole orchestra on all sorts of administrative matters, being the liaison person between orchestra members and the management.

Q: *Lynnette, many people remember you as the child prodigy who performed in the very popular Talentime during the Sixties. Who was your biggest musical influence?*

LS: My mother was a concert pianist who was quite well-known at the time. She got me started on the piano when I was four and a half and later the violin at six – and she would make me practise for hours daily. She even did my art and sewing homework so that I could spend more time on the violin! I remember those “works” of hers being displayed in school for others to admire!

Q: *Shue Churn, you also come from a family of musicians. Was that why you became one yourself?*

SC: My late father who was also my first violin teacher felt that I could go all the way. As my grades in music were far better

than my other studies and I happened to be more musically inclined than the other children of my age, it seemed like the obvious thing to do. I was only nine years old then. Along those lines, one of my brothers became a rock musician!

Q: *You have a keen interest in the music of Singaporean composers, and that is evident in your recitals. Do you see a future for Singaporean classical music?*

SC: I recently recorded on DAT works for violin and piano by my father Lim Tiap Guan, Lee Yuk Chuan, Poon Yew Tien, Kam Kee Yong, Lee Kee Hoi, Er Yenn Chwen and others, but do not have the means of getting it transferred on CD. Most local composers similarly face an uphill task in getting their works performed and published. After all, how often do you see their names featured in orchestral concerts?

Q: *What would be the single most memorable event in your twenty years with the orchestra?*

LS: This has to be our concert at the Salle Pleyel in Paris during the tour of 1994. Touring brings out the best of the orchestra despite the tight schedules and long bus journeys. On that evening, we played with a vibrancy and camaraderie as never before and all of us gave 150 percent of ourselves. We showed that we could be as good as the best European orchestras. It was indeed a proud moment for Singapore music.

Q: *If given a chance to relive your last twenty years, would you choose the life of an orchestral violinist or that of a concert violinist?*

SC: I would have liked to become a professional chamber musician, playing in a full-time string quartet or chamber ensemble. Unfortunately, this species of musician does not exist in Singapore, not just yet!

LS: You have to be a loner to become a soloist. I need to be around for my boys, to give them lots of love and time. Playing in an orchestra is a fantastic experience – you would not otherwise have the chance of playing music like Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, my favourite, as a solo violinist. I still get to do solos regularly and it is a great honour being asked to open the season. I played the Sibelius with the SSO years ago, and having hopefully matured and grown with it, I will have something new to say with this most romantic of works.

Interview by Chang Tou Liang

1983

- Lim Yau appointed assistant conductor
- First open-air concert at the Istana

1984

- Performs Orff's Carmina Burana & Beethoven's 9th Symphony at Arts Festival
- Zubin Mehta conducts a rehearsal

1985

- Tour to Norway, Sweden & Denmark
- Okko Kamu guest conducts for the first time
- “Asian Evergreens” sells 10,000 copies

1986

- Performs Tsao Chieh's “Singapore” Symphonic Suite

1987

- Klais Organ installed

1988

- Tour to Spain, Italy, Czechoslovakia & Hungary
- Performs Handel's Messiah at the National Stadium with a chorus of a thousand members

1989

- Shostakovitch on
- British