

# Ravishing, beautiful strings suffused concert with colour

## MUSIC

SINGAPORE  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

*Lim Yau, conductor*

Last Friday  
Victoria Concert Hall

By **LIONEL CHOI**

IT IS a real shame that one of the most polished musical performances so far this season should have been seen and heard by so few.

Former associate conductor Lim Yau returned to lead the Singapore Symphony Orchestra for the first time since his resignation two years ago in a concert programme comprising two Romantic favourites by Mendelssohn and some obscure but thoroughly delightful French Impressionist fare.

Roussel's ballet, *Le Festin De L'Araignee*, overshadowed by Stravinsky's sensational *Rite Of Spring*, which was produced some eight weeks later, is a charming, thoroughly atmospheric score with some exuberantly excited moments so harmonically pungent yet wanting in the sort of luscious colour one will find in a Debussy or Ravel score.

If Lim's interpretation of the orchestral suite did not quite mask the music's weaknesses (and not that it should), it was certainly alert and rhythmically vital, with all of Roussel's delicate invention presented with captivating lightness of touch and truly Gallic lucidity.

And it was amazing how much good an orchestra in cracking form could do in furthering a conductor's vision: The SSO strings, in particular, were ravishingly beautiful here.

The splendidly-tight, disciplined ensemble work was to pervade throughout the two Mendelssohn pieces as well, though in the famous E minor Violin Concerto, Op 64, there was some impatient, chugging support in the opening pages.

But otherwise, Lim was

accompanying with the utmost naturalness, at times even spontaneously subtle and sensitive to his soloist's occasional whims.

Lim Shue Churn, a long-time member of the SSO's first violins, and favouring brisk tempos in all three movements, made a refreshingly straightforward, unmannered soloist, with fewer lapses into sentimentality, less elastic rubato and less schmaltzy vibrato.

Hers was a surprisingly Classical reading of this concerto, not just on a consciously intimate scale but simple and fresh in style of phrasing, and particularly clean and gleefully sparkling in the finale.

Some might crave for more urgency and sweep, but beyond the odd passing untidiness and signs of haste, the performance remained compelling, and it was far better this than decorous emptiness.

Swift speeds were also favoured in the Italian Symphony, Op 90, though even at its fastest, the music hardly seemed hard-pressed to the point of sounding hectic.

There was some wheezing breathlessness in the string passages of the third movement, which could have relaxed somewhat for a little more imagination or distinction in the phrasing.

But elsewhere, one was almost inclined to search for superlatives.

If the first movement was about Italian sunshine, then Lim Yau let one bask in all its radiant, cheery glory, screened from all potentially scorching effects.

The Pilgrim's march of the second movement, though quick, had grace and finesse, never a dull plod.

Finally, the concluding Saltarello bit hard and fast but not viciously, with great whoops of joy springing forth from the burnished virtuosity of every SSO player, rounding off an invigorating concert with a sense of brilliance, colour and suffusing warmth.