



ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

SOULFUL:
Take Five's
 (standing
 from left) Lim
 Shue Churn
 and Foo Say
 Ming,
 (sitting) Lim
 Yan, Chan
 Wei Shing
 and Chan
 Yoong Han.

Classical quintet gets a high five

> concert

TAKE FIVE

With Lim Yan on piano and string players from the Singapore Symphony Orchestra

Esplanade Recital Studio

Wednesday

Chang Tou Liang

TAKE Five may be the title of the jazz classic by the Dave Brubeck Quartet, but the outstanding debut concert of the piano quintet formed by SSO musicians and pianist Lim Yan could not have been more serious.

The tandem of piano quintets by Edward Elgar and Cesar Franck was well matched because both had dug deep within their souls to yield their most poignant and emotionally fraught music.

Elgar's masterpiece in A minor dates after the carnage of World War I, when all pretence of civility was replaced with moodiness and frayed nerves. Freudian references to Beethoven's Fate motif and fragments of Elgarian nobility – now in its decaying vestiges – get mixed up in this 35-minute study of concentrated angst.

Purportedly a Singapore premiere, the quintet performed with a sturdy assurance, with violinists Foo Say Ming and Lim Shue Churn blending well in the top lines. Violist for the evening was Chan Yoong Han, whose burnished tone also impressed, while his cellist uncle Chan Wei Shing provided solid support.

Pride of place, however, goes to the Manchester-trained Lim Yan, whose gritty piano part – in an anti-virtuoso role – weaved their parts together in a taut bind.

Those expecting Gallic refinement in the second half would labour in vain as Franck's 40-minute F minor quintet upped the ante till the psyche teetered on the brink of sanity.

There were moments of respite, but the nostalgia provided by Franck is of a fragile variety; a drib of melody here, a drab of tune there, and all calculated to induce *deja vu*, regret and quiet anguish.

The quintet provided short flashes of sentimentality, but focused on the more harrowing agenda of the music, culminating in the mighty finale, which swayed between menace and suffocating despair.

Little wonder that composer Saint-Saens, to whom the work was dedicated, was so unnerved after its first performance that he was outrightly hostile. These qualities were conveyed with unequivocal directness and remarkable coherence, leading to a chorus of well-deserved "bravos" from the small audience.

This is music-making that may be summed up in one word: Intense.