

Going for the jugular

review classical

TAKE 5 PIANO QUINTET SERIES – CONCERT IV

Esplanade Recital Studio, Last Sunday

chang tou liang

Local audiences have come a long way,

especially when a chamber concert with Shostakovich as its most conservative item garnered a sold-out house made up mostly of people under the age of 30.

Not surprising, since the piano quintet Take 5 have, in four concerts, established themselves as a name second only to the T'ang Quartet. No small feat.

The first commissioned piece was by Joyce Koh, long considered the hardcore avant-gardist among local composers.

The title *What'll We Do?* comes from the nihilistic play *Waiting For Godot*, the music is a reflection on its pacing of dia-

logue and thought processes. In a dense 16 minutes, she made little concession for the audience yet did not talk down to them.

A verbal preamble by the composer was helpful in defining the themes but it was the performance that resonated deeply. While the musical language was unapologetically atonal, the execution left no doubt about the players' convictions.

Violinist Foo Say Ming and violist Chan Yoong Han (representing Vladimir) paired off against violinist Lim Shue Churn and cellist Chan Wei Shing (Estragon) as fellow protagonists in their

shared fears. Lim Yan's piano (*Godot?*), both assertive and conciliatory, was the glue that held their parts together.

In the final movement *Let's Stop Talking For A Minute*, a brief but treacherous *moto perpetuo* for the piano's benefit closed the work to much applause.

The audience was obviously gripped by a musical drama that never let off its pressure on the jugular.

Like the play, this work would prove more respected than adored. Timing was crucial – anything longer might have proved unsustainable while any shortfall

would have made much less sense. In this respect, Koh is an expert of suspense.

Alongside this, Shostakovich's *Piano Quintet*, usually described as thorny, seemed a breeze. The substantial *Prelude* and *Fugue* revealed mastery of ensemble and contrapuntal playing. Even if there were intonation problems, they were slight in the face of the onslaught of angst and vitriol that coloured this masterpiece.

Take 5 encored the madcap *Scherzo* and why not? Its off-the-cuff jibes and hidden messages aptly summed up the evening's enthralling fare.