

# Taking on two rare gems

review theatre

TAKE 5

Take 5 Piano Quintet  
Esplanade Recital Studio/Last Sunday

marc rochester

Delving into the darker recesses of the piano quintet repertory for their seventh

concert in this occasional series, Take 5 unearthed two rare gems which, in musical language and handling of the genre, could hardly have been more different.

Amy Beach's Quintet of 1907 is very much a work for virtuoso piano with a supporting string quartet.

Lim Yan was hugely impressive as the virtuoso pianist, confidently pushing out Beach's extravagant and lavishly exhibitionist writing – strongly redolent of her younger contemporary, Rachmaninov – yet yielding gracefully whenever the string quartet put in an appearance.

In the first two movements, firmly adopting the language of Cesar Franck,

the lush, richly expressive writing was wonderfully conveyed. The third was a little more awkward at the beginning, but a ravishing viola solo, sensitively expressed by Chan Yoong Han, brought the emotional content back into the comfort zone and it ended in a mood of complete self-assurance and deep contentment.

It was a supreme joy to hear this fine work, possibly washed up onto Singapore shores for the first time, presented in a performance of such compelling and genuine artistry.

Written for the same city, New York, and dating from just 15 years after Beach's Quintet, Ernest Bloch's First seemed a world and an age apart. Those

15 years had seen the horrors of World War I come and go, and a growing hostility towards Jews which compelled Bloch to leave his native Europe. He had something far less comforting to say. He said it by putting the focus firmly on the string players, tautly led by Foo Say Ming, who ensured that ensemble and balance were impeccable.

While Lim Yan tirelessly propelled the music along, the string players rose masterfully to the challenge of Bloch's often unconventional writing, with cellist Chan Wei Shing transforming this technically demanding writing into particularly powerful emotional utterances.

From the impassioned octaves of the

opening, through the searingly anguished central movement to the undercurrent of menace in the finale, these players racked up the tension. Second violinist Lim Shue Churn's intensity as the music passed over some pretty harrowing ground is not the least arresting aspect of what was an electrifying performance.

The question on many lips as the audience left the concert was why we do not hear this magnificent music more often.

The answer is simple. Only musicians with a rare gift for communication and a deeply ingrained sense of musical sensitivity could possibly hope to bring it off so effectively in concert. It was a privilege to witness five such musicians at work.