

Keeping score

by CH Koh



Tears For Souvenirs

CHONG KEE YONG BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO DEWAN FILHARMONIK WITH A BRAND NEW ORCHESTRAL WORK IN MAY

IF LAST YEAR'S highlight at Dewan Filharmonik was the premiere of Adeline Wong's thrilling cello concerto *Snapshots*, then this year the glitzy concert hall will ring once again with the exciting sounds of Malaysian music with Chong Kee Yong's new work for orchestra, *Tearless Moon*.

Chong has been busy abroad since his *The Starry Night's Ripples* swept the prize at the MPO International Composers Award (MPOICA), having secured a scholarship to study with composer Peter Eotvos. In the process, he premiered his *Mourning the Murder of an Old Banyan Tree* and earned a composer-in-residence term at the German Herrenhaus Edenkoben Foundation later this year.

After penning *Starry Night*, he scored another artistic triumph with his *Monodrama* for oboe, ensemble and electronics with its rhythmic vitality and undercurrent of Beijing Opera, and was one of the winners in the Nieuw Ensemble's Young Chinese Composers Competition in Holland with his *Metamorphosis VI* for Sheng, Gu Zheng, Pipa and 10 western instruments. In March this year, Chong won yet another prize as he took second place at the II Lepo Sumera International Competition in Tallinn, Estonia, where his *Timeless Metamorphosis* was premiered by the Estonia National Orchestra.

This May, Chong will continue to explore sonic possibilities combined with his own brand of lyricism, this time in the form of Irish folk. His MPO commission, *Tearless Moon*, will feature an unusual orchestral arrangement that has two 'echo' groups of winds and brass respectively, behind the audience to provide a quadrasonic effect.

The work is dedicated to pioneering conductor, Kevin Field, in memory of his late wife Geraldine MacDonnell who passed away during the 2004 MPOICA, says Chong. 'I remember most of all her smile and kindness,' he recalls. 'Through my conversations with Kevin, I found out that Geraldine loved singing, and that she sang a lot of Irish folk songs.' This inspired him to incorporate melodies that he asked Field to recollect from his time with Geraldine. In the process, a song that Field composed with Geraldine's Gaelic lyrics turned out to be the seed for his new opus.

'*Tearless Moon* is a work of love, sadness, and nostalgia,' says Chong. 'Since the olden days, the moon has often symbolised nostalgia. I have specifically used a different orchestral set-up for this work, and the feeling of space and spatial relationship is the main theme here.'

Knowing Chong, expect nothing but the most intriguing music. The strings will be separated into two groups on stage right and left, flanking the woodwinds and percussion in the centre and back, while unusual instruments such as the recorder will also be assigned to the musicians, not leaving out the conductor, who also plays Japanese gong on a timpani.

A sprinkle of percussion and gusts of air from the brass set off a flurry of oscillating fifths on the strings. It all promises to be an exciting experience that will take place at Dewan Filharmonik on May 20, 2006, so make a date for this very special premiere. ■