

Timeless premiere

Chong Kee Yong's star is rising so fast in the classical music world that it's downright difficult to catch up with him. **JASON CHEAH** catches up with him to find out what the man's latest work, which will have its world premiere here, has to offer local fans.

WHOD be a freelance classical music composer? It isn't the easiest of careers to choose, but Chong Kee Yong seems to be thriving. It's a choice that has brought the 35-year-old from Johor international awards galore and has kept him travelling around the world.

The lad from Kluang has, in just the last two months, been in Estonia, Germany and Belgium for a competition, a world premiere of another one of his recent compositions and meetings for future projects.

With his composition *Timeless Metamorphosis*, Chong won second prize at the Il Lep Sumera International Young Composers competition in Tallinn, Estonia. He was also in Heidelberg, Germany, in April for the premiere of a work that he was commissioned to write when he won the 2005 Heidelberg Fruehling Composition Commission competition.

One of the most satisfying things when receiving commissions and winning competitions for Chong is the chance to listen to highly skilled musicians perform his work.

"The musicians were brilliant (in both countries). In Heidelberg, I found out that one of them is actually a friend of mine. It's such a small world," Chong says.

For now, he's back in Malaysia, preparing himself to listen to the premiere of another work, *Tearless Moon*, on May 20 at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas.

"This is a commission



Chong Kee Yong is doing Malaysia proud by winning awards around the world for his compositions.

from the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) after winning the MPO International Composers Award in 2004," Chong says.

But the work has turned out to be more than just a commission as he has dedicated it to MPO associate conductor Kevin Field.

"It is inspired by our friendship and is also a memorial piece for his (late) wife Geraldine MacDonnell who sadly

passed away during the time I was participating in the competition," Chong explains.

It took the most part of 2005 to think about but now Chong can explain that the work is based on one of Field's own song compositions with lyrics written in Gaelic by MacDonnell.

"I finally received the song composition from Field last August," he continues.

"I tried to integrate some of this song's

elements and the typical Irish folk music interval of an open fifth in this piece."

Chong promises an extremely interesting live concert experience this Saturday with this piece.

"I have specifically used a different orchestral set-up for this work," he says.

In brief, the musicians will be positioned in front as well as on the flanks of the audience, behind and above.

After Saturday's premiere, Chong will be preparing for more trips to Europe.

"I will be travelling with my family (his wife and a four year old daughter) to stay in Edenboken for five months from August," Chong says.

That trip is provided for by a scholarship he received to become *artiste-in-resident* in the Herrenhaus Edenboken Foundation in Germany.

"I have to do a portrait concert where I get to select an ensemble of musicians to perform four or five of my compositions. I know my wife (who is training to be a concert pianist) will be one of soloists.

Another grant he received offered a project in Berlin where four candidates were chosen to compose for the Ensemble of New Music of Berlin. The piece has to be completed by November.

He'll be a busy man the rest of this year as he also has a piece to complete for four hands piano with a large ensemble.

Dutch pianists Jan (who is his wife's professor) and Inge Michels will perform with the Prometheus ensemble (in the Netherlands).

All these deadlines certainly keep Chong on his toes with his compositions. He reckons he has now written almost 60, and there will certainly be more to come. All the more for us to enjoy, then!

■ *'Tearless Moon'* will be performed by the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Kevin Field at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas on May 20 at 8.30pm. The night will also feature compositions by Daugherty, Gruber and Schwertsik.

Tickets are priced at RM35 and are available from the box office. Call 03-2051 7007, fax 03-2051 7077 or e-mail dfp_boxoffice@petronas.com.my.