

6 S'pore composers to open Festival Puente in Chile

Their original classical music compositions will premiere at the Chilean port city of Valparaiso in November

Shawn Hoo

Six original Singapore classical music compositions will premiere at the opening concert of Festival Puente, which is on at the Chilean port city of Valparaiso from Nov 11 to 16.

The showcase of six Singapore composers' works came about after the president of the Composers Society of Singapore, Dr Hoh Chung Shih, met the festival's international coordinator at the Asian Composers League Festival & Conference in New Zealand in 2022.

Dr Hoh, 54, whose work will be showcased, says: "To the Chileans, I think this will be quite a refreshing and exciting experience – how

such a hotbed of multiculturalism is presented in music, sound and performance. For many of them, this would be the first time they learn anything about Singapore."

The other five composers are Dr Joyce Beetuan Koh, Dr John Sharpley, Dr Robert Casteels, Alicia De Silva and Chua Jon Lin.

It is the first time anyone from the Singapore contingent has set foot on the South American country, and Dr Hoh adds: "The audience will be curious about us as much as we're curious about them."

To mark the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Singapore's non-resident ambassador to the Republic of Chile, Ms Chong Siak Ching – formerly chief executive of the

National Gallery Singapore – will be in attendance.

The festival, organised by Orchestra Marga Marga since 2019, aims to be a site of cultural and music exchange. Its full name, Puente, Encuentro Interoceanico de las Culturas, roughly translates to Bridge, Inter-oceanic Meeting of Cultures.

When asked how these six compositions collectively represent the Singapore composition scene, Chua says: "I don't think we are going explicitly with a cultural agenda, so to speak."

While not all the works explicitly deal with Asian music traditions, Chua – who describes herself as "truly bilingual" in Chinese and Western classical music traditions – says the Asian influence is pal-

able for the night's repertoire.

"A lot of Asian elements in terms of thought and principles underlie these works."

The 38-year-old is an adjunct lecturer in composition at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Singapore (Nafa). Her piece, Qin Yun, is inspired by traditional Chinese guqin music.

Along with De Silva's Imagined Shadows, which is inspired by Javanese wayang kulit performances, these two works explicitly deal with Asian music traditions.

The title of Dr Hoh's Longa Brevis is inspired by the Greek philosopher Hippocrates' aphoristic "Life is short (brevis), and craft long (longa)".

But the guqin player and re-

searcher uses a distinctly Chinese metaphor to describe his approach to music as a social and interactive activity.

"It's like playing mahjong. Everybody knows what the rules are, we are all distributed different pieces and we can play the game, which is the performance itself," he says.

Dr Koh's work is titled Une Ligne Ephemere, French for An Ephemeral Line. The 56-year-old associate dean of the School of Interdisciplinary Arts at Nafa says: "I'd like to think that what I bring to the orchestra is me. I have been very interested in sound and timbre, and I have also been very interested in architecture, how things are piled together and formed."

Dr Sharpley's Cloud Of Unknowing is inspired by a 14th-century

Christian mystic text, while in Dr Casteels' SIETE?... por SIETE!, the number seven is omnipresent in its structure and music.

With the Chilean Orchestra Marga Marga performing the works of six different composers across generations, Dr Hoh says: "We are presenting a time capture of what is happening now in Singapore and bringing them over in sounds and in ideas."

Travelling to a faraway country for a cultural exchange reminds Dr Koh of the spirit of world exhibitions, where each nation exhibits her own cultural goods.

She adds: "What can you bring from a country? Your goodies can be music from living composers."

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Dr Joyce Beetuan Koh's work is titled Une Ligne Ephemere, French for An Ephemeral Line. PHOTO: VIOLETA APOSTOLOVA



(Above) Dr John Sharpley's Cloud Of Unknowing takes inspiration from a 14th-century Christian mystic text. PHOTO: COMPOSERS SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE

(Left) Dr Hoh Chung Shih will be presenting the work, Longa Brevis. PHOTO: ANDREW BI



(Left) Adjunct lecturer in composition Chua Jon Lin's Qin Yun is inspired by traditional Chinese guqin music. PHOTO: GABRIEL XAVIER CHARLES



(Above) Alicia De Silva's Imagined Shadows is inspired by Javanese wayang kulit performances. PHOTO: SONIC DIRECTIONS



(Right) The number seven is omnipresent in the structure and music of SIETE?... por SIETE! by Dr Robert Casteels. PHOTO: RUSSEL WONG