

Virtuoso prowess on flute and piano

Review **Concert**

ON THE FLIPSIDE: AN ANTIPODAL CONCERT

Roberto Alvarez, Flute
with Shane Thio, Piano
Esplanade Recital Studio/Tuesday

Chang Tou Liang

When Singapore Symphony Orchestra flautist Roberto Alvarez was young, he wondered where he would be if he dug a hole in his native Spain and burrowed across to the far side of the earth. Answer: He would have arrived near the islands of New Zealand.

That is the premise of this "antipodal concert", one that brought together flute works from Spain and New Zealand.

Two Spanish works bookended two Kiwi pieces, every performance being a Singapore premiere. All four compositions were tonal, with varying degrees of dissonance and lyricism, but fraught with severe technical demands for both flautist and pianist.

The concert opened with Elisanda Fabregas' Flute Sonata, four movements of rhythmically tricky and aurally piquant musical textures.

Its exoticism was an offshoot of the sound worlds of Debussy and Messiaen, dreamy and impressionistic in the slow movement, but picked up pace in the fleet-footed scherzo, an exercise in staccato playing that extended without a break into the finale.

Both Alvarez and pianist Shane Thio were pushed to wits' end to overcome the complexities, but acquitted themselves marvellously.

Gareth Farr's Nga Whetu E Whitu (The Seven Stars) refers to the constellation of stars Matariki, known to the West as the Pleiades, and used by sailors for navigation. Over the piano's insistent syncopated rhythm floated the flute's still and calm voice, and from this a haunting chant-like theme emerged as if commanded by spirits. This was contrasted with a vigorous, almost savage dance to close the work on a febrile high.

The irregular heartbeat that opened Anthony Ritchie's Flute Sonata was unnerving with its aggressive and menacing demeanour, and flutter-tonguing from the flute provided a quivering effect that added to its mystery. The slow movement was reminiscent of Bartok's "night music" with its fleeting motifs



SSO flautist Roberto Alvarez performed works from his native Spain as well as New Zealand. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROBERTO ALVAREZ

and flickering half-lights, while the finale revelled in an exuberant dance of ostinatos with a tinge of the Oriental.

The final work, Salvador Brotons' Flute Sonata, flirted with atonality, but never embraced it fully. There was a strange lushness in its slow first part that almost veered into sentimentality, but was resisted and kept at arm's length through its course. A solo cadenza then led to a mercurial finale, which afforded a brief moment of reflection before its spiky and volatile conclusion.

The encore was the world premiere of Waltz Of Fortune by Gonzalo Casielles, a delightful bonbon based on five notes derived from the number on a winning lottery ticket.

This concert, a show of seemingly limitless virtuoso prowess, was attended by just 32 people. By their show of appreciation, it would seem they had hit a musical jackpot.