

CLASSICAL MUSIC

The Intimacy of CreativityConcert Hall, Hong Kong Academy
for Performing Arts

★★★★☆

Ken Smith

The composer Bright Sheng came to Hong Kong's University of Science and Technology with an intriguing proposal: if playwrights can have extended rehearsals where scenes in their head are shaped on the stage with help from actors, why shouldn't music benefit from a similar process?

So, as part of UST's inaugural programme, entitled *The Intimacy of Creativity*, an international gathering of young composers received a week of daily feedback from musicians in residence, the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Yehudi Wyner and Sheng himself, all in front of UST students and interested observers. The results were put to the test at a sold-out concert at Hong Kong's Academy for Performing Arts on Sunday.

Though my own spot-check of rehearsals barely detected structural changes in the pieces, the music's dramatic character evolved sharply as performers grew more familiar with each composer's personality.

Clarinetist Richard Stoltzman and pianist Mary Wu found in Pedro Faria Gomes's *Nachtmusik* an allusive tonality where silence was as much of an entity as the sound. Wu, along with violinist Min-Young Kim and cellist Raman Ramakrishnan (both of the Daedalus Quartet) navigated so many influences in Ted Goldman's *Scrudge*, from Brahms to Indian raga to alt-rock, that silence was barely an option. In Ming-Hsiu Yen's *Lego City*, these four musicians scaled a modular verticality shaped by pulsating rhythms, but only after negotiating Yen's placement of their instruments in an uncomfortably high register.

The senior composers also served as pianists, Sheng in his *Four Movements for Piano Trio* (with Ramakrishnan and Kim) and Wyner in his *Trio 2009* (with Ramakrishnan and Stoltzman). Wyner, Ramakrishnan and Kim also returned with Daedalus violinist Jessica Thompson for Mozart's First Piano Quartet – either a model for the young composers or ear candy for Sunday's audiences after a demanding programme. Probably both.

I'm not sure which surprised me more: that the city's most innovative musical experience would come from outside the arts establishment or that a daily audience of science students would have the musical literacy to follow the minutiae of rehearsals without glazing over. Either way, this season has another showcase concert this Sunday, and I'm already looking forward to next year.