

Diverse, if disjointed, creative sounds

The Intimacy of Creativity - World Premiere Concert 1
City Hall Theatre
May 1

The abstrusely titled show is about people making beautiful music together in a strictly non-metaphorical sense.

Six aspiring composers arrived in Hong Kong 10 days ago with new works, which is where the creative process usually stops and the search for a chance to perform begins.

Veteran composer Bright Sheng, the symposium's artistic director, thinks differently: the instrumentalists with the responsibility for turning the dots into sounds should have an input. Here, they included members of Camerata Pacifica, an ensemble of American musicians, local cellist Trey Lee and mainland-born pianist Zhang Haochen.

Tuesday's concert was the first of two world premiere concerts showcasing the results of that buffing up. *Control Room* by Matt Van Brink was

a safe choice to open the show. Written for flute, cello and piano, its neat ideas and structure were easily assimilated: fragmentary statements, long lyrical lines, reflective interludes and passionate outbursts had their exchanges without outstaying their welcome.

Fellow American Matthew Tommasini's *mountains...seas...building...trees...* for cello and marimba enjoyed a similar clarity of material and architectural simplicity in its evocation of Hong Kong's landscape. The image I got was that of a kite (cello)



Artistic directors Adrian Spence and Bright Sheng. Photo: K. Y. Cheng

circling above city life (marimba) before dipping, soaring and fading away.

Briton Emma-Ruth Richards presented her *Piano Trio No 1* for violin, cello and piano. The insistent middle movement achieved a convincing climax; the outer two barely escaped the gravity of rhythmic blandness.

A new work by established American composer Joan Tower took us to the interval: *Catching the Wave* for piano and cello, however, made only episodic ripples.

The second half comprised Beethoven's ebullient *Piano Trio No 4* (1797), Bright Sheng's dynamic *A Night at the Chinese Opera* for violin and piano (2006), and Canto-pop singer-songwriter Jonathan Wong's arrangement of his own *Contented* (2010), the latter serving as ear candy and a reminder of what high school students now routinely produce for the local diploma exam in music, while enjoying considerably less limelight for their arranging talents.

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