

Glowing reviews for SSO Proms debut

British newspapers give performance four out of five stars; PM Lee praises orchestra on social media

Lisabel Ting

The Singapore Symphony Orchestra has received glowing reviews for its BBC Proms debut on Tuesday at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Two British newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, gave the performance four out of five stars, and Singaporeans on social media have also responded warmly.

The 98-member orchestra was led by music director Shui Lan and it performed Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2, the overture from Glinka's *Ruslan And Ludmila*, and Zhou Long's *Postures For Piano And Orchestra*.

Renowned Swiss pianist Andreas Haefliger performed in the latter.

The orchestra's encore was William Walton's *A History Of The English Speaking Peoples*.

The *Guardian*'s Tim Ashley called the orchestra's rendition of *Postures* "a sensational tour de force from Haefliger, and a fine display of orchestral bravado for the SSO and Shui".

He adds that "Shui's credentials as a Rachmaninov interpreter are impeccable and his no-frills performance was intense without sentimentality, noble but never bombastic".

Meanwhile, *The Telegraph*'s Hugo Shirley praised the orchestra's "lean, disciplined strings; crisp, well-balanced brass; mellow woodwind".

He said that Shui's interpretation of the Rachmaninov symphony was "refreshingly airy and spruce, playing to his orchestra's strengths in a reading that, despite its flexibility, kept the rhythms taut and the textures remarkably clean".

Life! freelance classical music reviewer Mervin Beng also gave the orchestra the thumbs-up. In his review published yesterday, he wrote: "For a relatively young Asian orchestra to take on Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, an intensely emotional and demanding work, takes gumption, but orchestra and conductor were up to the challenge."

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong posted a congratulatory note to the orchestra on his Facebook page on Wednesday.

He wrote: "Well done Singapore Symphony Orchestra! SSO's debut last night at the 120th BBC



The Singapore Symphony Orchestra, led by Shui Lan, at the BBC Proms at Royal Albert Hall in London. PHOTO: BBC

Proms, at the Royal Albert Hall in London, went very well. The orchestra put on a brilliant performance, wowed the audience and won critical praise."

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong attended the performance in London, along with other Singaporeans including National Arts Council CEO Kathy Lai and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Foo Chi Hsia.

Mr Wong posted pictures of the concert on his Facebook page, one of which showed the Singapore flag flying high, unfurled by Singaporean audience members at the Royal Albert Hall.

He wrote: "Even though SSO conductor Shui Lan was not feeling well, he persevered to the end, and led the orchestra to a superb performance. The SSO

received a very positive reception, and there were even people in the audience flying the Singapore flag!"

"After the concert, someone told me that this was the best orchestral performance so far at the Proms this year. Well done SSO!"

On social media, support for the orchestra's BBC Proms performance was also strong. Facebook user Ying Heng Heng, 35, a Singaporean paediatric occupational therapist based in London, attended the concert with a group of friends and posted pictures of it on her wall.

She told Life!: "I felt so proud to be able to share something from our little red dot with my visiting Singaporean cousin and three British friends. It was

simply an amazing and proud night for me."

Facebook user Kwok Leong Ronnie Chan posted: "This is indeed a great achievement for Singapore and heartiest congratulations to SSO for coming a long way to reach this world standard of fine music."

The Proms is a prestigious annual eight-week classical music season that has been organised by the British Broadcasting Corporation since 1927 and is one of the biggest classical events in the world. This year's season runs from July 18 to Sept 13.

✉ ltting@sph.com.sg

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