MEDIA MONITORS



Sydney Morning Herald
Monday 9/2/2009
Page: 16
Section: Arts & Entertainment
Region: Sydney Circulation: 209,508
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 139.25 sq.cms.
Published: MTWTFS-

Brief: TSUKI-COMP

Gardens the perfect setting for earthly delights

■ CLASSICAL

CHINESE CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Chinese Gardens, Darling Harbour, February 5
Reviewed by Peter McCallum

THE willows cooled their tips in the artificial lake, two ducks smugly took the best seats on a rock in front of the floating stage, and the audience, dotted around the pavilions of the Chinese Gardens, looked on enviously as a dragon-shaped lizard ended its postcard pose on a rock by diving into the water.

If it had been a film, one might say the picturesque was overdone, but authenticity was restored by the high quality of the musicianship of the members of the Shanghai Chinese Music Ensemble. Fang Yu played a slowly mesmerising meditation on the guqin, an ancient plucked koto-like instrument, followed by a hauntingly sweet duet on the bowed erhu (Ying Liu) and yangqin (Jin Feng), a cimbalom-style struck zither.

The sound world is glittering, sweet and treble heavy, with scarcely a hint of bass, the only dark colour coming from the impressive premonitory sheng, a multi-piped mouth organ. Its loud-grained sound was kept in careful check by the masterly concentration of Wang Zheng-Ting, who drew remarkable shades from an instrument whose natural domain is roughness and raucousness.

Ospreys Sporting With Water, Lulu Liu's solo on the pipa (a delicate four-stringed lute), returned to the world of light, inspiring the ducks to fly off to nearby Darling Harbour to try their luck.

After interval came a mellifluous arrangement of *Butterfly Lovers* by John Huie, the Australian composer who directed the event, which combined characteristic Chinese melodic ornamentation with French impressionist sensibilities.

The highlight was the extraordinary clear and expressive vocal style of the Suzhou Opera Troupe in a delightfully piquant and brightly-coloured duet. Playing a white piano poised perilously on the barge-stage, its tuning a little worse for the evening sun, Michael Kieran Harvey concluded with Debussy's *Poisson d'or*, and a reminder of the Lang-Lang aspect of Chinese culture and its fascination with Western virtuosity in Liszt's first *Mephisto* Waltz.