

Hearing The Lion Roar... Surprising Singapore 2 1/2



Elaborate costumed head, symbolizing good luck and prosperity, in the traditional Lion Dance (K. Rainville Photo)

by Jethelo E. Cabilete

Saturday, October 1, was a night of exotic wonders and sights, as the Singapore Students Association hosted Surprising Singapore 2/12. This event, marking the first of many multicultural events that will be held over the year, was immersed in an atmosphere that was relaxed and friendly; indicative of the hospitality and character of the Singaporean people. The decor was simple, yet striking, composed of hanging lanterns, banners, posters of Singapore and even a small booth where one could purchase souvenirs. Video equipment placed at strategic places presented information on the culture, history and background of this tiny island nation. The same video equipment provided extended visual presentations of the culture show to those who were seated at far ends of the room.

The evening began with greetings from the Master of Ceremonies, followed by the queue at the food centres. The delicacies of Singapore that night, were white rice (a staple of most far eastern countries), chicken curry, vegetarian bee hoon (a noodle dish), egg sambal (spicy hard-boiled eggs), wan-tons and pineapple cake. The meal was certainly excellent, and music played throughout the dinner; although it would have better fit the theme, if traditional Singapore music was heard instead of the top forties.

The culture show expressed the multicultural panoply that Singapore is composed of. The audience was greeted by four representatives of the Singapore Students Association, in the four main languages of the island: Mandarin, Malay, English and Indic. Following this was the traditional Lion Dance, symbolizing good luck and prosperity, which also symbolizes this country's rise from near poverty and ruin.

"Located South of Malaysia, this small island boasts a population of about three million people, several times the population of New Brunswick. In 1965, Singapore achieved

independence from Malaysia, when both countries were united during its British protectorate era. Initially, fear of not surviving was common, however, the diversity of cultures, its small size, the people and location at a major trade route, has helped make Singapore a commercial and economic power," guest speaker, Dr. Chok Hiew, commented during the event.

The speech by SSA president, Jessica Gomez, was accompanied by the theme song, We Are Singapore, sung by the entire Society. This song emphasized the pride and unity of the various cultures in their country. A Malay Dance, the Joget Sipinang Muda, was performed next; the dance usually done during weddings, was exquisite. The children's Baton dance, which traditionally welcomed honoured guests to festivals, was highly energetic and harmonic. Certainly, they were accomplished dancers, with a charm and grace all their own.

The Dia Bolo spinning is a traditional folk sport in Singapore, and the presentation that night was startling. This sport requires skill and co-

ordination, with the instrument humming constantly as the three spinners displayed seventeen techniques. An Indian dance, the Kulichaa Kuthalum, contained heavy drum beats and energetic dancing. This dance was well executed, and in addition, seemed to tell a story with its evocative movements. The Lantern Dance, performed by the young women of the Society, displayed an exotic grace and beauty in the fluid motions and gorgeous costumes.

The final highlights of this enjoyable evening were the Fashion Show and Chan Mali Chan, a popular folk song. The Fashion Show exhibited the various cultural costumes of Singapore. Many of the island's clothing are of thin materials, such as cotton or silk, with simple or ornate designs in often striking colours. The dance and folk song that capped the event, was a blend of the traditional and modern; the performers certainly enjoyed themselves along with the audience. A dance was provided at the end of the night for those who wished to continue the celebrations.

The Penderecki String Quartet: A Musical Mosaic

by Jethelo E. Cabilete

The first of the classical music series of the Atlantic Debut Atlantique began on a beautiful Sunday Afternoon, with the Penderecki String Quartet performance at Memorial Hall. This quartet is considered to be one of the finest international string ensembles, with its origins in Poland in 1981. For most of the ensemble members, this is their first introduction to Fredericton, although cellist, Paul Pulford, is no stranger to the New Brunswick scene. Pulford was a member of the New Brunswick String Quartet, and along with ensemble members: Piotr Buczek and Jerzy Kaplanek on violin, and Dov Scheindlin on viola, gave a splendid performance Sunday.

Pulford provided background on each piece that the quartet played, going in depth at times into the history of the music. The first section entitled Quartet in F Major, by Maurice Ravel, is perhaps one of the best loved string pieces. Ravel's compositions range from the soaring melodies of Modéré, Très doux to the aggressive and spritely Vif et agité. At times, his melodies alternate between subtle poignancies and frenetic activity, providing a wonderful panoply of music. Bela Bartok's Quartet no. 3 is a 20th Century equivalent of Beethoven's style, a condensed impressionistic folk version containing Hungarian themes. Alternating rhythms of slow and fast paces seemed to create a chaotic blend of diverse sounds that occurred together in a haphazard manner.

After a brief intermission, the quartet introduced us to John Oswald's pre-Lieu, an altered Beethoven piece modified with several additions and deletions. Oswald's forte in music, extends to the electro-acoustic, blending music with tape recorders, computer digitizers and other equipment. Sixteen bars of the original Beethoven piece were played, to be compared with pre-Lieu. The piece is certainly beautiful and moving, however, there didn't seem to be much of a difference between the original and the altered version; perhaps further listening, or study of the composition would help.

As You Pass A Reflective Surface, a composition in miniature in the style of Norman Feldman, was a creation of Linda C. Smith, who studied under Feldman. This piece resonated with miniature crescendos and descants that vibrated with plenty of emotion. The final piece was a classic Beethoven in a light-hearted and cheerful style, very different from his usual dark and dramatic compositions. Quartet in C Major, Opus 59, No. 3, began with an interesting smooth, methodic melody which abruptly became a passionate, and high-spirited section. This was a superb ending to an amazing performance.

As an encore finale, the musicians performed Randolph Peters' Tango, from the film "Smoked Lizard Lips." The film, according to Pulford, is a comedy, and this is reflected in the musical composition. The piece is light-hearted and comical, especially the wailing epilogue that seems to be a tongue-in-cheek display of ribaldry and humour. The members of the quartet certainly deserve all of the audience's applause, with their excellent playing styles and skill in their respective instruments. They displayed remarkably fluid communication among themselves; each instrument blending, beginning or ending in a non-stop array of melodies. No grandstanding or overpowering of one instrument over another occurred. Instead, the members performed as a true ensemble, merging their talents into a cohesive harmony. It was a good ending to a beautiful day.

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