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Esplanade opening festival continues

October 18 2002

The opening festival for Singapore's new state-of-the-art multi-purpose performing venue, Esplanades – Theatres on the Bay – is well underway as the S\$600m (over £200m) complex celebrates the culmination of 30 years' planning with a three-week jamboree of European and Asian music, theatre and art featuring 1300 artists from 22 countries.

Inaugurated on October 11 in the presence of the Singaporean president and 1600 invited guests from around the world, the Esplanade – which concert-goers have already nicknamed 'the Durians' because of the resemblance of its two ribbed domed buildings to a local fruit – aims to bridge the local, regional and international arts scene in an ambitious programme of work that will place high-profile artists alongside Singaporean talent.



The Esplanade complex
(Photo: Lee)

Esplanade chief executive, Benson Puah, has defined the role of the venue's four performance spaces as offering a platform 'for a resurgent arts culture in which we can dare to dream and take risks'.

Built on six hectares of prime waterfront land where Singapore's civic and business districts meet, the Esplanade has two major new music venues, both designed by the world-renowned acoustician, Russell Johnson of the New York-based Artec Consultants Inc.

Johnson has described the 1600-seat Concert Hall – with a 200-seat choir gallery, and which boasts a 4740-pipe, 61-stop organ designed and built by Johannes Klais Orgelbau – as being so acoustically flexible that it is 'a thousand rooms within one room'. Already the space has played host to concerts by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic (both with Sarah Chang as soloist), whose principal conductor Kurt Masur acclaimed the hall as 'a major achievement, one that will do much to attract international talent to Singapore – every good orchestra will want to come here – while providing local musicians with a world-class venue to be proud of. The future of classical music,' he declared, 'is more in Asia than anywhere else'.

The Esplanade's 2000-seat theatre-cum-opera house has been designed to accommodate everything from Broadway staples to grand opera and is complemented by a 220-seat 'black-box' theatre space and a 250-seat recital studio. The complex also houses a library, restaurants and shops as well as two outdoor performance spaces.

Musical highlights still to come in the opening festival include visits from Lorin Maazel and the New York Philharmonic with soloist Lang Lang, a recital by soprano Jessye Norman, a new 'symphonic epic fantasy' by Chinese composer Liu Yuen entitled *Marco Polo and Princess Blue*, and the National Ballet of China's acclaimed production of Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern*.

Michael Quinn, Gramophone Deputy Editor

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Singapore Symphony Orchestra moves into new home

January 10 2003

The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay becomes the new home of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) today, when the orchestra opens its 24th season with a world première of a new work by Grawemeyer Award-winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis.

A commission by DaimlerChrysler, Kernis's toy piano concerto was specially written for Singapore-born pianist Margaret Leng Tan, who will première the work. Tan, who is based in New York, has been a contemporary music advocate (some have dubbed her 'the high priestess of the avant-garde') with an almost cult following worldwide.



The Esplanade, the SSO's new home (Photo: Lee)

Conductor Lan Shui, music director of the SSO, will lead the orchestra in a programme which will also mark the bicentenary of Hector Berlioz's birth, with the popular favourite *Symphonie Fantastique*.

The SSO has a wide range of programmes that suit many levels of audiences. Apart from a Young People's Concert series and Classics On Campus, which are primarily educational outreach programmes, the SSO also institutes Casual Concerts, introducing classical music with lively conversation and Q&A sessions, allowing interaction with performers and engagement of a new, young adult, audience.

The orchestra has also toured Europe and Asia regularly in the past decade. In addition, SSO has also released many critically acclaimed recordings under the BIS label for the worldwide audience. Unusual, rarely recorded repertory by composers such as Russian Alexander Tcherepnin and Armenian Richard Yardumian were explored in multiple recordings of symphonies and concertos. SSO Music Director Lan Shui is also dedicated to music by living composers. Following a successful release of MacArthur Fellow Bright Sheng's *China Dreams*, the most recent SSO recording features soloist Evelyn Glennie, in works for percussion and orchestra by Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Alan Hovhaness, and Thea Musgrave.

Joanna C. Lee, Gramophone Online Far East correspondent



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Singapore Esplanade opens box office

August 6 2002

Singapore's premiere cultural centre, the state of the art Esplanade complex, has opened its 'ticketing' doors to the public, although the physical complex is still in the last phase of construction.

The line up of the Esplanade's Opening Festival is impressive indeed, featuring more than 1300 artists from 22 countries, 70 productions, and 600 free performances for the local population and overseas visitors. Musical performances will take place in the Esplanade's Concert Hall (seating capacity: 1,600), with dance and theatrical performances in the Grand Theatre (seating capacity: 2000).



The Singapore Dance Theatre opens the Esplanade to the public on October 12 with a newly commissioned work (with Indonesian choreographer Boi Sakti). However, most of the music programmes in the Opening Festival come from abroad, including such international luminaries as the London Philharmonic under Kurt Masur (October 14-15) and the New York Philharmonic under Lorin Maazel (October 28-29). Jessye Norman, who also participated in the opening of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre in 1989, will give a recital on November 1.

Apart from classical music, there is also a strong jazz component in the festival, with groups from Europe and America respectively: the WDR Big Band Cologne with Peter Erskine (October 16) and Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (November 2-3). Singapore's own popular music will also be featured (October 18), as well as the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (with a world premiere work, Marco Polo and Princess Blue), in keeping with highlighting the mixture of East, West, local and international. World music diva Cesaria Evora will also perform (October 19), giving the festival a true multicultural identity.

A 63-stop Klais pipe organ is installed in the Concert Hall, and in order to show off this impressive instrument and the hall's acoustics, American organist Dennis James will perform along a silent film, F. W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926) (October 31).

Joanna C. Lee, Gramophone Online Far East correspondent



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Singapore's Esplanade in final stages of construction

April 12 2002

The Esplanade, Singapore's new waterfront cultural complex, is nearing completion after 14 years of planning and development.

Founded with the motto 'to entertain, engage, educate and inspire,' the project will be officially opened on October 12. It houses a state-of-the-art 1,800 seat concert hall and a 2,000 seat theatre (designed by Russell Johnson, founder of architectural firm Artec, famous for acoustic design), recital, rehearsal and theatre studios, art galleries, restaurants and shops.



The Esplanade

Programme details of the opening festival (October 12 -November 3) will be announced in the coming month, although many participating overseas groups have already announced their tours. In the meantime, 38 trial concerts will be held between July and September for invited audience and professional artists, to monitor acoustics, technical processes and facilities, and front-of-house operations.

The annual programming of the Esplanade will aim to reach a broad range of local audiences, including low-cost or free indoor and outdoor events spanning classical, jazz, world music, dance and spoken theatre.

The Singapore Symphony Orchestra, whose home will remain at the Victoria Concert Hall, will also perform between 30 and 40 concerts per season in the Esplanade.

Esplanade chief executive officer Benson Puaah told *Gramophone Online* he hopes that in the coming twenty years the Esplanade will have affected 'the way Singapore society re-imagines itself.'

He believes that it could become 'the neuro-centre of Singapore's artistic community,' leading the Pacific region, especially in contemporary Asian art forms.

Joanna C. Lee, Gramophone Online Far East correspondent

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Maazel's first NYPO tour announced

January 15 2002

Details have been announced of Lorin Maazel's first tour with the New York Philharmonic as their music director-designate. Between October 16 and 31, 2002, the orchestra will perform in Beijing, Hong Kong, Macau, Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Mumbai (Bombay).

Maazel is already well-known to the Chinese. He first visited China in the late 1980s with the Pittsburgh Symphony and again with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra a decade later. His televised New Year's Eve concerts in Vienna having garnered him a large following worldwide (including broadcasts on government-controlled Chinese television), Maazel recalls finding himself a national celebrity during his second appearance in the country after ending one of his broadcasts by saying 'Happy New Year' in Mandarin.



Lorin Maazel, who will take the NYPO to Asia (photo: BMG)

Joining the Philharmonic on tour will be the rising 19-year-old Chinese pianist Lang Lang, performing Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto. Lang Lang himself is no stranger to China, having performed Mendelssohn's First Piano Concerto with Wolfgang Sawallisch and the Philadelphia Orchestra on their Asian tour (including Beijing and Shanghai) last season.

The New York Philharmonic's tour in Asia will include festival appearances and be sponsored by Citigroup. The Philharmonic musicians will appear at the Fifth Beijing Music Festival, where recent programmes have included international names such as Philip Glass, Julian Lloyd Webber, Tan Dun, Krzysztof Penderecki, Maxim Vengerov, Vladimir Ashkenazy, and orchestras such as the Czech and St Petersburg Philharmonics. The New York Philharmonic will also travel to Macau (now a Special Administrative Region of China) to perform in the city's 16th International Music Festival. Another highlight will be an appearance at the Esplanade (Theatres on the Bay) in Singapore, which celebrates its opening on 12 October, 2002.

The New York Philharmonic has toured extensively in Asia in the past few decades. The first of which took place in 1961 in Japan. In June 2002, the orchestra's outgoing music director, Kurt Masur, will lead a tour of Japan, Taiwan and Korea.

Joanna C. Lee, Gramophone Online Far East correspondent



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