

MONDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER, 2010

**DEATH AND THE MAIDEN**  
**SSO Chamber Series**  
**Victoria Concert Hall**  
**Sunday (5 September 2010)**

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Six weeks after its official Closing Gala, a definitive final concert was held at the Victoria Concert Hall. How appropriate it was for musicians of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, its long-time resident, to do the honours.

It was a most unusual, if incongruous programme, to unite Baroque master Georg Telemann, Classical icon Franz Schubert and 20th century American innovator George Crumb. Yet it worked strangely well, an indirect nod at the diverse acts that have graced the venue through the decades.

The four short movements of Telemann's *Trio Sonata* in D minor served as a delightful appetizer and warm-up for three musicians who gave the Singapore premiere of Crumb's *Vox Balaenae* (*Voice of the Whale*). Avant-garde for its era, the 1971 work carrying an eco-conscious message was an evocative and tuneful surprise.



Flautist Roberto Alvarez gave a *tour de force* of musical mastery and breath control. His part demanded otherworldly timbres that combined singing and whistling in addition to the traditional blowing and flutter-tonguing. If one sought electronic or extraneous augmentations, there was none to be found other than simple amplification.

Aiding and abetting were cellist Ng Pei Sian's expert manipulation of harmonics and slithering glissandos, and Shane Thio playing the insides and keys of his prepared piano. Through its 20 minutes, the humpback whale's song was re-created by instrumental simulation and celebrated. Even if some of the composer's directions, including musicians wearing masks and bathing the stage in blue, were not observed, the overall effect was still magical and haunting.