



(L-R) Ang Chek Meng (violin), Ng Yu-Ying (violin), Lionel Tan (viola), and Leslie Tan (cello)

THIS IS SINGAPORE

Blazing a Trail with T'ang Quartet

By Li Yen
Epoch Times Staff

Since 1992, T'ang Quartet has been embarking on critically acclaimed adventures with a purpose – to bring music appreciation to a larger audience.

Also known as Singapore's first professional string quartet, the name 'T'ang' is formed by incorporating the last names of each quartet's members – Ang Chek Meng (2nd violin), Ng Yu-Ying (1st violin), and brothers Leslie Tan (cello) and Lionel Tan (viola). In addition, 'T'ang' denotes Tang Dynasty – a symbol of China's golden age of cultural expression, as well as a representation of their Asian roots.

Trained in London and Moscow, the quartet's performances feature a creative blend of East and West, attracting both contemporary and traditional audiences.

Aspiring to make classical music popular in Singapore, the quartet has been presenting music in stylish and innovative ways to

delight local and foreign audiences for over two decades.

"We try to communicate the music like telling a story to the audience. We think this is the most important part of a performance," shares Lionel.

In today's society, where humanity's value is often reduced to the monetary, the quartet feels that the arts will enrich our existence and reconnect us to the intrinsic value of life with imagination and joy.

"It's wonderful that we work hard to provide for our families, but time spent visiting art galleries or attending concerts can bring lots of joy too!" exclaims Chek Meng.

Leslie asserts, "Don't be so focused on material things like money, and don't be afraid of having an opinion. And speak up!"

And T'ang Quartet's philosophy in one sentence?

"Passion, honesty, commitment and grit to get to your goal," says Lionel.

Yu-Ying adds, "Perseverance... but always with passion!"

Interview with T'ang Quartet

When did your love for music start?

Leslie: I grew up in a household that loved music. Mom played the piano, Dad could play the fife, the bugle. He also taught himself the violin and piano. I started on an ancient foot-pedalled organ – you had to pedal to get the bellows to produce air to make tones! Then I graduated to the piano when I was 10. Cello was just serendipity. The school was giving cheap lessons and I took up the offer. That was when I was 12. Never looked back since!

Lionel: I don't know exactly, but music was around me quite a lot. My dad listened to trumpet music, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, whilst my mum tinkled her favourite Für Elise on the piano. I suspect she could only play one piece.

Chek Meng: I started learning the violin because I was always fighting my two elder sisters for the chance to play on the piano we shared at home. I loved banging away and making loud noises. Hated early vio-

lin lessons because my teacher was terribly strict! I enjoyed performing, though, as it would take me to a different "world". Practice was tougher because music requires hours of concentration and repetitions and it was not fun for a seven-year-old! But as I became more accomplished instrumentally, I realised that making music was something magical. Now I cannot imagine living life without music.

Yu-Ying: I guess since as young as five years old, that's when I started learning music. Although I probably didn't know much about "love" yet... I dreaded practising of course, but I never wanted to quit because whenever I had a chance to perform, I would thoroughly enjoy it!

What is the importance of music in your life?

Yu-Ying: Music has surrounded me all my life. I grew up not only having strong influence from classical music, but also embraced pop music to Cantopop! I also tried breakdancing during my secondary