

The 160th Anniversary Concert

This morning I would like to pay tribute to the cast and crew of the 160th Anniversary Concert. As I said at the second assembly last Friday, the concert was undoubtedly the best school performance I have attended in all my years at schools on three continents. It was truly a memorable event and one that was thoroughly enjoyed by the audiences at the matinee and evening performances.

Over 700 students, alumni and teachers were involved in bringing the concert to the stage. This included the actors, dancers and musicians but also the considerable backstage crew and the large contingent working the front-of-house. Coordinating such a large production was no easy feat and our sincere appreciation must go to Miss Eileen Yu and Mr. Keith Wong on their tireless efforts over many long months.

The anniversary concert was held at a new venue to the College, the Jockey Club Auditorium at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. On previous occasions we had used the HK Cultural Centre but this venue proved impossible to book this year. However, the PolyU venue was a more than adequate substitute if not a little small in terms of stage area and audience seating capacity. The small stage required modifications to the items we wished to include in the programme. However, the smaller seating capacity enabled us to offer an afternoon matinee in addition to an evening performance. This new format proved to be highly successful as many parents with younger children preferred to experience the show at an earlier time.

By having two performances on the same day the organisers were able to prepare two different programmes. The afternoon matinee, for example, provided an opportunity for the Primary School Folk Group, the Chinese Instrumental Ensemble and the College Choir to display their talents. These groups did not perform in the evening show giving an opening for other items. This year St. Paul's College alumni featured prominently in the evening programme with items by the Alumni Choir and the Alumni Orchestra.

My first impression on arriving at the venue was the warmth of the welcome by the teachers and students at the reception desk. The obligatory flower was pinned to the lapel of my suit, the photographers were everywhere and an air of excitement filled the foyer. This positive atmosphere continued as guests made their way downstairs to have more

photographs taken below the stylish Anniversary Concert banner and in front of the large signature board. The venue was larger than many had expected and particularly comfortable. It was also well designed so that everybody had a good view of the stage particularly important when so many young children attended the afternoon performance.

The Combined Choirs of the College and Primary School opened both performances with *If You Love Me* by Tallis and the College Hymn. Set in darkness and each holding a candle the choir members sang the Tallis exquisitely as a 'round' with the repeated lines and music adding a special dimension to the overall effect. To most in the audience the special arrangement of the College Hymn was a new experience. Our alumnus, Felix Yeung, first released his new setting at Southwark Cathedral last July. It is a beautiful arrangement and one that I am sure will be used on special occasions for many years to come.

The Primary School Folk Group was delightful in their rendition of *O Sussana* complete with a dance routine. The Chinese Instrumental Ensemble, conducted by Mr. Wai, displayed yet again why it is one of the most popular musical groups at the College. Their interpretation of *The Melody of the Purple Bamboo* brought out the beauty of each instrument and highlighted again the technical ability of this special ensemble. The School Choir, under the direction of Mrs. Sandy Ng, sang one the many versions of *The Lord is My Shepherd* in its repertoire followed by a *Golden Hits A Cappella*. Singing at their customary best the latter item was highlighted by an onstage appearance of Miss Eileen Yu in a simple yet effective dance routine that was greatly appreciated by the audience.

The talents of Filbert Lam (percussion) and Alvin Chan (violin) were showcased in their renditions of two pieces; *Czardas* and *Super Mario Brothers Theme Song* (Nintendo). The wonderful technical ability of Alvin on the violin is well known to us all. Yet what always impresses me about Alvin's playing is his total control of the instrument and his seemingly effortless style. Filbert is not only a technically outstanding percussionist he also gives the impression that he has 'consumed' the instrument he is playing and that it has become part of this body. Filbert should be called Mr. Rhythm for the way that he uses body movement to interpret the music and to showcase the versatility of the instrument he is playing.

It was a pleasure to hear the String Orchestra at both performances. Appropriately attired and taking up an all-standing position on stage the String Orchestra played the *Concerto for Four Violins in B Minor* by

Vivaldi. What I always enjoy about this piece is the competition between the four violins as well as their connectivity with the rest of the players. Achieving the perfect relationship between all the strings during a performance is not easy and on this occasion was handled masterfully by the conductor, Mr. Matthew Leung.

The highlight of the first half of both performances was unquestionably the Primary School musical. Entitled *The Wildest Dream* the boys turned on a dazzling display of song, dance, acting and simple good-humour. When their item came to a close it left the audience wanting for more. Their performance demonstrated the great depth of talent we have in the SPC Primary School and the sheer enjoyment that comes from being on stage.

The Primary School Musical was equally matched after the intermission by the College musical, *Godspell*. Written in 1971 and based on St. Matthew's Gospel, *Godspell* is timeless in the story it tells and in the message it conveys. The songs have lasted well over the past forty years and the cast, ably assisted by a group of St. Stephen's Girls College students, were up to the task. All actors performed exceptionally well although I do need to highlight the part played by Roger Lo as Jesus Christ. The success of *Godspell* rests on a strong performance from the lead actor and Roger accomplished this task with consummate ease. His was a faultless performance and left the audience with many lasting memories that surely included his duet with Alex Yau that required perfection in word delivery and movement on stage.

Singing or playing on stage is extremely demanding. The pressure during rehearsals can be unbearable as lines are forgotten and dance steps seemingly impossible to master. Yet invariably all is well on the night when the curtain goes up and the audience disappears behind a bank of blinding white lights. This is the time that actors and musicians come into their own and deliver what is required for the pleasure of all who are watching.

The success of *Godspell* owed much to the Artistic, Set and Stage Directors, the Choreographer, the five alumni who formed the Live Band, and of course our own Mr. Fu. I have not seen Mr. Fu as animated as when he took to the stage to conduct the musical. His dynamic performance, full of energy and colour, was a major factor in the success of this musical item.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to the alumni. The Alumni Choir, conducted by Mr. Alberto Choi, reminded us of the strong tradition of singing in our College. Featuring alumni from the early 1960s through to more recent times the quality of their performance was plain to hear. The same was true of the Alumni Orchestra under the baton of Mr. Joe Chan. Joined by our College Orchestra, the Alumni Orchestra delivered two pieces that were executed at nothing short of a professional standard. When you notice that an orchestra has eight cellos in its ranks, and more violins than can be counted, then you know you are in for a treat.

All good things must come to an end. The cake cutting ceremony was a fitting conclusion to a wonderful concert and the atmosphere in the theatre during the singing of the College Song was nothing short of electric. On behalf of the College community I extend once again our appreciation to all who had a part to play or who simply attended one of the performances, in making the 160th Anniversary Concert such a memorable occasion.

J.R. Kennard