

From D1

## Child prodigy who won many awards

Martha Argerich was born on June 5, 1941 in Buenos Aires and began studying the piano at age five with Italian musician Vincenzo Scaramuzza.

When she was 13, her parents moved to Vienna so she could study with Austrian pianist Friedrich Gulda. Their move was orchestrated by Argentina's then-president Juan Peron, whose wife Eva inspired the long-running musical, *Evita*.

At the age of 16, Argerich won the first prize at the Geneva International Music Competition for young artists, as well as the Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition, but it was her win at the International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition at age 24 that put her on the world map.

Oddly for a major soloist, she prefers appearing on stage with other musicians and gave up on solo recitals in the early 1980s. Her long-time onstage collaborators include pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim, who was a child prodigy with her in Argentina, Israeli cellist Mischa Maisky and Latvian violinist Gidon Kremer.

Her first commercial recording was released by Deutsche Grammophon in the 1960s and her take on Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 with conductor

Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra won the CD Compact Award in 1997.

She has three Grammy Awards to her name, including the 2005 prize for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance (with orchestra) for her recording of Beethoven: Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3 with Abbado and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. It was her second win in this category after her 1999 award-winning take on Prokofiev: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 3/Bartok: Piano Concerto No. 3 with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, led by her former husband Charles Dutoit.

Her third Grammy win was in 2004 for Best Chamber Music Performance with Prokofiev (Arr. Pletnev): *Cinderella - Suite For Two Pianos/Ravel: Ma Mere L'Oye*.

Argerich has three daughters, one each with former husbands - all musicians - Robert Chen, Dutoit and Stephen Kovacevich. She has homes in Switzerland and Paris and helms two noted music festivals, the Lugano Festival in Switzerland and Argerich's Meeting Point in Beppu, Japan. Last week's performance at the Singapore International Piano Festival was her debut in an Asian country outside of Japan.



Argentinian pianist Martha Argerich playing in Singapore for the first time at this year's Singapore International Piano Festival. PHOTO: JACK YAM

# Singapore International Piano Festival ends on high note

Akshita Nanda

The Singapore International Piano Festival ended its 25th edition on a high note last Friday, having presented storied pianist Martha Argerich in her Singapore debut and filled 96 per cent of the seats at the nine events programmed.

The annual event organised by the Singapore Symphony Group - which also runs the Singapore Symphony Orchestra - ran from June 7 to 15 and featured six concert pianists, including Argerich.

There were also two masterclasses, each conducted by Vietnam's Dang Thai Son and American pianist Jeremy Denk, and a lecture-recital featuring Argerich's long-time collaborator, Argentinian pianist Dario Alejandro Ntaca.

Performers this year included Hungary-born Denes Varjon and South Korean pianist Seong Jin Cho, who won the International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition in 2015. The 24-year-old was mobbed by young fans at a post-concert signing session.

Organisers say Cho was one of the festival's main draws this year alongside Argerich.

Outgoing festival director Lionel Choi said he had been trying to programme Cho and Argerich for several years and was pleased to have presented them in his ninth and final year at the helm. From next year, the programme will be curated by Singaporean concert pianist Lim Yan.

Choi, who remains on the board of the Singapore Symphony Group, has during his tenure presented well-known pianists such as



This year's Singapore International Piano Festival included a masterclass by Vietnam's Dang Thai Son (left), as well as performances by Hungary-born Denes Varjon (centre) and South Korea's Seong Jin Cho (right). PHOTOS: JACK YAM

Britain-born Stephen Hough and Germany's Lars Vogt, as well as rising stars such as China's Yuja Wang and British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor.

This year, more than 5,800 tickets were sold and 68 per cent of festivalgoers were younger than 45.

This was a pleasant surprise for many performers, who are used to greying audiences in Europe and the United States. "The audience was amazing. It's incredible," Argerich told *The Straits Times*.

"It fills us with hope," Ntaca added.

Choi said: "I am immensely proud of the extraordinary following we

have worked hard to build these nine years, both among international touring artists and music agencies, and local and regional audiences, culminating in this year's supersized edition to celebrate our milestone quarter centennial. There is also no better time for me to hand the artistic reins over to a successor."

He added: "I believe Lim Yan possesses clarity of artistic vision through his immense pianistic abilities. He is devoted to educating the next generation of musicians and music lovers."

"I have full confidence that he will continue to raise the profile of

the festival and that audiences can expect this annual immersive pianistic experience to be even more inspired and engaging under his stewardship."

As a young piano student, the festival was a highlight of the concert calendar for Lim.

Lim said: "It is therefore an immense honour and privilege for me to be offered the opportunity to helm the festival in the coming years."

"I am aware that these are big shoes to fill and will endeavour to do my best in order to continue, maintain and build upon the success of the festival."