October 5, 2010
Mahler’s 10th Symphony on DVD and Blu-ray marks SINGAPORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA’s first UK concert since 1991

To mark its first UK concert since 1991 – at London’s Royal Festival Hall on October 11th – the SINGAPORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, under its Music Director LAN SHU, is releasing a video recording, in both DVD and Blu-ray formats, of Mahler’s 10th Symphony. The score is performed in the relatively rarely heard reproduction by the American violinist Carpenter. Completing the programme is the short suite Wu xing (Five Elements) by Qigang Chen, born and originally trained in China, but now resident in France, where he spent four years studying with Olivier Messiaen.

It is nearly 20 years since the Singapore Symphony Orchestra last performed in the UK, now as a seasoned ensemble. On Monday it makes its first appearance at the Royal Festival Hall under its Music Director, Chinese-American conductor Lan Shui.

The Singapore Symphony Orchestra, which celebrates its 32nd birthday in 2011, celebrates the centenary of Mahler’s death with this new international video release, its first since a DVD of Mahler’s Symphony No 1 celebrated its 20th anniversary. This disc is believed to be the only available video version of the Carpenter recreation (made in 1949 and revisied in 1966), which Lan Shui has chosen in preference to Deryck Cooke’s – since he considers it more authentic. Carpenter closely followed Mahler’s sketches for the 10th Symphony and draw on the composer’s orchestration in his earlier symphonies and song cycles, creating a score rich in detail, texture and intensity and providing valuable insights into Mahler’s evolution as a symphonist.

The orchestra’s particular prowess in music of the late 19th and early 20th centuries has already been confirmed on a CD released in 2007 on the BIS label, masterfully conducted by Lan Shui, it comprises Debussy’s La Mer, coupled with mid-twine works by Osvaldo Golijov and the contemporary Chinese composer Zhou Long. The BBC Music Magazine described the performances as “revealing... unequivocally world-class”, while the American Record Guide proclaimed that “this is the most astounding, effective, and beautifully recorded of La Mer I have ever heard.”

The surround sound on the new DVD/Blu-Ray disc does full justice to the Espilonode’s exceptional acoustics, and the aural immediacy is matched by the images, captured with state-of-the-art high definition video cameras.

The new video recording was made in the orchestra’s home, the concert hall in the spectacular Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay complex on the waterfront of Singapore’s Marina Bay. Opened in 2002, it houses an audience of over 1,600 and boasts superb, adjustable acoustics, the work of Artec Consultants – who also made a major contribution to the success of Birmingham’s Symphony Hall. The surround sound on the new DVD/Blu-Ray disc does full justice to the Esplanode’s exceptional acoustics, and the aural immediacy is matched by the images, captured with state-of-the-art high definition video cameras. The full impact of Mahler’s symphony – and the orchestra’s distinctive personality – will be best appreciated in the Blu-ray version. Offering full HD visuals and uncompromised DTS HD Master Audio sound, it demonstrates just why Blu-ray technology is now setting the standard.

The combination of music by Mahler – the culmination of the Austro-German symphonic tradition – and the Franco-Chinese Qigang Chen reflects Singapore’s nature as a melting pot. Though rooted in Chinese culture, the nation state is highly cosmopolitan, and the orchestra, its prime cultural ambassador, comprises players from Singapore itself and from around the world. The ensemble has been described as “a mini-United Nations of music makers”, while Lan Shui, who received his initial training in his native China, moved to the USA in the early 1990s and now, as Chief Conductor of the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra, maintains an active presence in Europe.