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■ David Quah

Penang-born David Quah teaches opera in Hongkong. He got his start singing in school and church, before leaving for Hongkong to study singing. He later pursued a degree in performing arts in Australia, and then attended London's Guildhall conservatory to study opera.

Nowadays, he teaches at the Hongkong Academy of Performing Arts. He has staged solo performances in Penang but this is the first time he will be singing in Kuala Lumpur.

He previously worked with Lyric Opera in Singapore in the early 90s. But this was the first time he will be working with Lyric Opera Malaysia.

Quah explains, "In this

production, my character (Camille de Rossillon) is a decent chap. I am head over heels in love with Valencienne, who is married to the Baron. My aim is to get her. I fall at that and it means I get to finish early," Quah jokes.

This is the third time he has played Camille. He has two duets in the show and one of them is the melodic *Red As the Rose in May Time*.

Wooing the widow

S. Indra Sathiabalan talks to three local cast members of *The Merry Widow*

Last year, Lyric Opera Malaysia successfully staged Puccini's *Tosca*. Because of the excellent response to the opera, Lyric Opera Malaysia is now staging Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.

The Merry Widow should go down well with the local audience who will be entertained by the tangled plot, comedy and sing-a-long type songs.

Set in the early part of the 20th Century, *The Merry Widow* revolves around Anna Glawari, a poor farm girl who was once spurned by Danilo, a royal prince. But Anna's social standing improves when she

marries a wealthy man. When her husband dies, every bachelor in the land pursues her.

But the leaders of her financially troubled homeland, Pontevedro, desperately need Anna (and her money) and so, they hope to persuade her to marry a local.

Within this intrigue is the temptation of adultery Baron Zeta, the Pontevedrian embassy official and mastermind of the plot to keep Anna a resident, has to contend with marital problems. His wife Valencienne is too busy enjoying the company of poet, Camille de Rosillon.

Though British and American actors play the main cast in the play, we have locals taking on pivotal roles as well. *theSun* spoke to David Quah, 35, who plays Camille de Rosillon; Peter Ong, 28, who plays Raoul de St Brioche; and Janet Lee, who plays Sylviane.

Catch *The Merry Widow* at Istana Budaya on Aug 20, 21 and 22. For tickets call Access ticketing services at 03-7491 9999.



■ Janet Lee

JANET LEE, 27, who plays Sylviane, sang in the OperaFest Choir in 1997 and was in the chorus of *Tosca*. She took up vocal training from Cha Seng Tiang, who plays Vicomte Cascada in *The Merry Widow*.

She started off her stage career with the play *Oliver Twist* staged by OperaFest in 1997. Her first speaking role was as Mrs Fong in *Flower Drum Song* the following

year.

Lee believes that one way to promote opera better is to introduce it in a small scale, for instance in colleges or cafes.

"Sylviane sings with the chorus most of the time. She is a flirtatious wife and she is having a secret affair with her husband's rival," explains Lee about her character in the play.

Singing is something Lee does in her free time, a perfect balance to her job as an executive.

LLER OF A RIDE"

- Joel Siegel, Good Morning America

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■ Peter Ong

PETER ONG sang with OperaFest in 1988. He left for Britain to study law at Bristol University and while there, sang with the University's choir. "I used to do musicals because I am trained as a dancer," said Ong, who choreographed the dances for *The Merry Widow*.

He also performed in musicals at the Edinburgh Festival, playing a range of roles including the Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret* and one of the Sharks in *West Side Story*.

After returning home, Ong took a two-year break from performing arts and worked in an advertising agency before resigning last year.

Fortune smiled on him when he met up with Leow Siak Fah, the director of Lyric Opera Malaysia, who offered him a role in *Tosca*.

This was followed by the Penang Art Council's production of *Turandot*, for which he took on the role of Pong.

He has other opera projects coming up, and even plans to join the Sydney Conservatory next year.

As for the character he plays in the *The Merry Widow*, Raoul de St Briche, Ong said: "I play a money-grabbing gigolo-type Frenchman. I am out to seduce or kidnap any woman with millions in her bank account. In this case, she happens to be the heroine of the opera."

Ong sings three numbers in this production of *The Merry Widow*.

