



Delightful performance: (from left) Wang DiXia, Janet Lee, Kho Mei Leng and Peter Ong in *The Magic Flute: Selected Excerpts in Concert*.

Brave new world

A concert version of a popular opera was staged by the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre recently.

INFORMATIVE opera for the masses, stripped bare to a concert equivalent. And instead of spoken dialogue that accompanies some operas composed by classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a narrator was used.

In addition, the duration of the music was shortened for ease of listening. Indeed, perhaps in our local scene, this is the way to educate fledgling listeners to the world of opera.

The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre's concert version of Mozart's famed (and last) opera, *The Magic Flute*, certainly strived to bridge the gap between young and old, enthusiasts and opera virgins, as well as promote talented young singers and musicians, when it was staged over four days from March 22 to 25.

The masses would have been interested indeed, what with added animation aspects and a narrator to boot.

Long-standing opera enthusiasts would already have been used to seeing or listening to full two-and-a-half-hour versions of *The Magic Flute* or any other popular opera that had been staged over the past 10 years in KL and Penang.

Nevertheless, between them and those new to the genre, there still seems to be a glaring gap that needs to be filled.

Concert versions of operas are nothing new, of course. This version with eight soloists is simpler and more down-to-earth.

Shortening it by a full hour was also good for an opera novice, and the fact that the set of performances was sung in English (again, nothing new, even if the original language for

The Magic Flute: Selected Excerpts in Concert

**Directed by Datuk Faridah Merican,
narrator/artistic director Joe Hasham
Music director Chong Kok Ting
Accompanied by the KLPac
Sinfonietta conducted by Brian Tan**

The Magic Flute was Italian) further added to its appeal.

At its most basic, the plotline is still as convoluted as any – the prince in search of love, the princess under the influence of her mother the queen, the humorous sidekick, and other various characters pepper the story.

Our young or less established singers, from Peter Ong to Irma Lailatul Munira; from Tan Sim Sim, James Long and John Tan to Kho Mei Ling and Janet Lee, with special guest Wang DiXia to add more mature support, all gave their best. And even if some of them were perhaps just a little overwhelmed by the music, still this was a good platform to promote their talents.

Never mind the imperfections; here we should mention the accompanying KLPac Sinfonietta, which was good enough by its own fledgling standards (only the second public performance so far). Also, the brass section could do well to keep in tune and the strings should be more "one".

The addition of animations to support and help the even younger generation was an interesting concept, while the narration, provided by artistic director Joe Hasham, made it a night of humour and relaxed fun.

Looking at the show as a whole, this could well be that missing link for the future of opera in this country.