



Ensemble: One of the ensemble pieces in a scene from 'Butterfly Lovers'.



Contemporary: All the costumes, as well as the make-up, are very contemporary with Oriental influences.

Tale of ill-fated lovers returns

Dama's interpretation has added many contemporary elements into the show

By **DEBBIE CHAN**

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Photos courtesy of
DAMA ORCHESTRA

THE age-old Chinese folk tale *Butterfly Lovers*, staged by Dama Orchestra, returns to awe more musical and theatre lovers.

After the smashing reviews and positive feedback on last year's staging at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, the troupe was invited to perform the musical in Perth.

"A representative from Australia saw the show and was very excited, so they asked us to re-stage it in Perth, which we will be doing in June. So we thought we would do a pre-Perth show since many have requested for a second run," said the orchestra's artistic director, Pun Kai Loon.

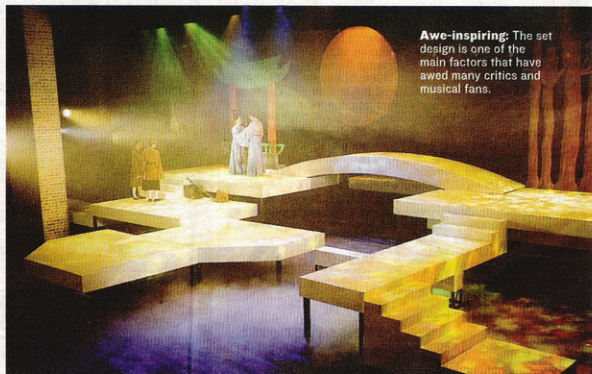
While many have the precon-

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PUN KAI LOON

ceived notion that the musical would be similar to a Chinese opera, Pun explained that the orchestra's interpretation has injected many contemporary elements into the show.

"It is definitely not the 'Tok Tok Chiang' (in reference to Chinese opera) type of show. Ours is a musical with a live backing band. It is a folksy story with modern musical elements, modern costumes with



Awe-inspiring: The set design is one of the main factors that have awed many critics and musical fans.

oriental touches, and a Western stage support system," Pun said.

Pun calls this the music drama interpretation, as it is something fresh that has not been done to *Butterfly Lovers* before. Interestingly, the show that is scripted in Mandarin has an English narrator and English subtitles for the non-Chinese-speaking audience.

"The story itself is nothing new to the audience. A lot of people have seen different stagings of the story so we thought that by adopting this method, it would present a fresh perspective to the audience."

The musical arrangement of the show is very much Western and the orchestra also introduced new songs to the repertoire.

"We try to combine all these modern and Western elements but in essence, the show still has the Oriental pervasiveness in it," Pun commented.

The orchestra has also kept very realistic dramatisation in the musi-

cal with minimal gestures that are appropriate and not over-the-top like conventional Chinese operas.

"There is a mix of theatre actors from the English and the Chinese scene, so we had all these people speaking different accented Mandarin, which was a problem at first. We brought in a dialect coach to sharpen everyone's Mandarin to the international standard pronunciation."

Since February, Pun has been working intensively daily on different scenes every day and every aspect of the production is a new challenge for the orchestra.

"The main challenge was to integrate the music with the speeches because everything needed to fall in place when it comes to the speech, the music and the singing, and that required a very tight co-operation from all the players in the team," Pun explained.

Unlike other productions, this one required a lot of consultation be-

tween the directors, the cast, as well as the technical crews.

"The scene changes in the production are very critical because if that failed to function, part of the interesting staging of this musical would be lost," Pun said, adding that many industry players had commended them on the set designs for the previous staging which were very refreshing.

"So at the end of the day, because of all the joint effort put in, everyone has a fair bit of ownership in the final creation, rather than it being just the director's or the producer's," Pun quipped.

Butterfly Lovers will be staged at the Genting International Showroom from April 13 to 15 and 20 to 22. Shows on all dates are at 8pm except for those on April 15 and 22, which are at 3pm. Tickets are priced at RM120, RM150 and RM180. For reservations, call 03-2718 1118 or visit www.genting.com.my/en/live_ent/2007/butterfly/default.htm.

Interesting: The lead character Chuk Ying Toi, seen here with an interesting set design that combines modern and traditional elements.

