

Dazzling Dama

Dama Asia celebrates its 22nd anniversary with a superb showcase of highlights from well-loved productions.

By EVELYN LEN
entertainment@thestar.com.my

THE singers' voices were simply divine – whether it was the mainstay trio of Tan Soo Suan, Chang Fang Chyi and Tria Aziz, or any of the other personalities in Dama's stable of talents. Playing their respective instruments, the musicians, too, were enthralling.

Dama Asia Productions (previously known as Dama Orchestra and Dama Music Theatre) staged *Yours Musically – The Dama Favourites* to a full house at Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KL.Pac) last Sunday in celebration of their 22nd anniversary.

It was a showcase of highlights from some of their critically acclaimed and sold-out productions over the years: *I Have A Date With Spring – The Musical*, *Larger Than Life* (songs from Broadway and West End), *Spring Kisses Lover's Tears* (Chinese golden oldies), *A Musical Sojourn*, *Fragrance Of The Night*, *Memories*, *The Legends*, *Butterfly Lovers – The Musical*, *Glitz And Glamour*, *The Moon Speaks For My Heart* (in memory of legendary songbird Teresa Teng), *Empress Wu – The Musical*, and *In Perfect Harmony* (a musical journey of the history of Malaysia as well as Star Media Group, previously known as Star Publications, that celebrated their 40th anniversary in 2011).

Through her compelling narration, Sabera Shaik took the audience on Dama's creative journey, from their inception in 1994 to the present day, the ups and downs they experienced, the sweet success they tasted at home and abroad (*I Have A Date With Spring*, staged in Perth, Australia, and *Spring Kisses Lover's Tears* in Shanghai, China) and the devastating losses suffered (during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, and in the 2003 flash floods in KL which destroyed their premises below Dataran Merdeka and consignments of CDs, recordings and scripts).

Dama Orchestra began as a quintet playing Chinese classical music. Over the years, they have included Western musical instruments, singing and musicals.

The songs for *Yours Musically* were performed in Mandarin, Cantonese, English, Malay, Hindi and Japanese. Even though I could not understand some of the songs, I was enraptured by the emotions conveyed so beautifully by the singers, especially in the songs from *Empress Wu – The Musical* (featuring Llow Jun Yi as Emperor Gaozong and



Yours Musically – The Dama Favourites is truly entertaining from start to finish. — Studio DL



The full Company gives a rousing performance of Michael Jackson's *Beat It* and *Black Or White*. — LOW MEI LING

Rachel Tan as the empress).

Cell Block Tango (from *Chicago* starring Jojo Wong and Ensemble) was saucy while *Can't Take My Eyes Off You* (from *Jersey Boys*, performed by Joshua Gui and Ensemble) was fun and catchy. *Do You Hear The People Sing* (from *Les Miserables*) was such a rousing number that it gave me goosebumps and made me feel like getting up on my feet and marching to the drumbeat.

What followed was something mellow, soothing and exquisite: *An Evening Of Chinese Chamber Music*, with Chua Bee Lin, Khor Seng Chew, See Keh Fong, Sara Heng and Gan Boon We performing *A Beautiful Evening*.

Some of the people broke into smiles and giggles when Tan (singing the Hindi song

Main Shayar To Nahin) coquettishly made her way to the audience and interacted with some of them.

It was also in the Mandarin number *Candy Song* that she again went round with her little basket of sweets, giving out the treats to several lucky ones and playfully refusing others. And, oh, how she warbled in *My Nightingale* – it was truly delightful!

The costumes, especially the period costumes, were elaborate and gorgeous. And the musical sets, though minimal, were effective and creative.

Its new name – Dama Asia Productions – reflects the change of artistic direction. In addition to the much-loved musicals, in the future there will be plays, operas, education



Tan mesmerises with her rendition of *I Have A Date With Spring*. — LOW MEI LING



Gui captivates the audience with his take on *Can't Take My Eyes Off You*. — Studio DL

and training. They also plan to spread their wings further afield as well as collaborate with overseas performing arts companies.

The two-hour musical showcase aptly concluded with a selection of songs that speak of our multi-racial composition and desire for a country that is "strong, harmonious and safe for everyone", as the narration went: *Balik Kampung*, *Chow Kit Road*, *Half A Catty Eight Taels*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* as well as Michael Jackson's *Beat It* and *Black Or White*.

Yours Musically – The Dama Favourites will be staged at KL.Pac on Oct 16, at 3pm and 8.30pm. Tickets are priced from RM85 to RM285. For bookings, call 03-4047 9000 or TicketPro at 03-7880 7999 and www.ticketpro.com.my.