

Opera for one and all

How can ornate opera classics endear themselves more easily to the common man? KLPac may just have the answers in its latest production. **SHARIFAH ARFAH** explains.



Lee (right) and Long during a practice session.

FRANCY watching an acclaimed opera but a shortened, simplified version, and in English to boot? The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPac) presents Mozart's *The Magic Flute - Selected Excerpts in Concert*.

It is hoped that that version of a classical opera will come across more easily and be educational and entertaining at the same time.

Eight vocalists, backed by a 45-piece orchestra, will perform in the two-hour show (with a 20-minute intermission).

The opera will be narrated by Joe Hasham, who is also the show's artistic director.

Two of the main vocalists, Janet Lee and James Long, could be called "unclassical" classical singers.

Lee, whose operatic appearances include *Tosca*, *Jurandor*, *At The Opera* and *Butterfly Lovers The Musical*, says it is a big privilege to perform in an opera like *The Magic Flute*. Lee will play the role of Papagena (soprano).

The Magic Flute is one of the most popular of operas, and it is nice to be a part of it and share it with the public," Lee said.

"She started singing in children's choirs in 1996. Awarded the Trinity College of London's Outstanding Achiever Award, she also earned a distinction in the Trinity College of London's Performer's Certificate exams.

Lee worked in the corporate sector but

quit in 2004 to pursue singing full-time. "I feel more relaxed now. I occasionally sing pop standards too.

"Even though private gigs are few and far between, it's a wonderful life for those who love music," she said.

Long, who will play the role of Papageno (baritone), has also had considerable exposure in classical vocal techniques.

A graduate of the Malaysian Art Institute (MAI), he was in the school choir and started his voice training with a tenor then.

"I initially didn't set out to be a classical singer. But looking back, I realise that what we really want at that time may not be good for us. Besides, I find music enjoyable," he said.

Both Lee and Long feel that operatic performances have come a long way, and public perceptions of such performances are changing. "If something is made exclusive but accessible, it will have a market, said Lee.

Long feels that classical music and vocal performances have gone beyond the limited settings of the past. "In the old days, classical music and operas were private initiatives, such as the Chinese opera.

"Now with institutions like the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO), the niche is growing," he said.

■ *Mozart's The Magic Flute - Selected Excerpts in Concert* will run at Pentas 1 of KLPac from Thursday till Sunday. Time: 8.30pm and 3pm (Saturday and Sunday only). Tickets: RM50, RM40 and RM30 (students, senior citizens and the disabled).

Purchase 10 or more tickets and KLPac will arrange your group to have a special pre-theatre Opera Appreciation Talk by Ilanika van den Bercken, a Dutch opera producer/director and a cellist with internationally-

renowned cello octet Conjunto Iberico. The 30-minute talk will provide valuable insights into the fundamentals of opera. The talk will start at 7.30pm (evening shows) and 2pm (matinees).

Seats are limited, so make your reservations now when you purchase your tickets. Call 03-4047-9000 (KLPac box office) / 03-2094-9400 (The Actors Studio, Bangsar). For enquiries on the talk, call 03-4047-9019/6 (Alexandra/ Yue May).