



The cast of KLPac's production of *The Magic Flute* (from left): Peter Ong, Janet Lee, Chong Kok Ting (music director), John Tan and Irma Lailatul Munira. Seated are Kho Mei Ling and James Long.

# Opera for the masses

**KLPac's version of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* aims to reach a wider audience when it begins its run tomorrow.**

By **JASON CHEAH**  
jasonc@thestar.com.my

**G**IVEN the rather patchy opera scene in this country, the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre's (KLPac) presentation of *The Magic Flute* seeks to reach the masses. First of all, it is starting with a familiar opera – a comic opera, actually – not one with a tragic ending, such as *Tosca* or *Carmen*.

*Die Zauberflöte*, better known as *The Magic Flute*, is an opera in two acts composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to a German libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder. The work is in the form of a *Singspiel* (song-play in German), which has spoken dialogue interspersed with ballads and arias.

However, the KLPac version of *The Magic Flute* will only feature selected excerpts. This format is likely to sustain the attention of a younger audience better than a full-length opera, which can run over two-and-a-half hours.

KLPac's abbreviated version will also be accompanied by narration

by artistic director, Joe Hasham.

Directed by Datuk Faridah Merican, the production will feature young but very talented classical singers whose powerful voices will be complemented by a 40-piece orchestra, the fledgling KLPac Sinfonietta.

The KLPac version of *The Magic Flute* aims to reach a wider audience by presenting the opera in a more accessible and innovative manner – it will use visual animation to help the audience follow the storyline.

"We want to present an opera to a younger audience and to families. So we've incorporated some animation instead of having dancers, as originally planned," Faridah said during an interview recently.

"However, the animation is not going to draw attention away from the soloists, narration, and orchestra."

In trying to expose the younger generation to opera, the production's music director, Chong Kok

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# Contemporary spin on opera

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Ting, decided on a different approach.

"I asked Faridah if we could 'dig out' all the young singers in Malaysia to have them sing in this opera," Chong said.

The cast includes younger and newer singers such as Peter Ong (as Tamino), Irma Lailatul Munira (as Pamina), Tan Sin Sim (as Queen of the Night), James Long (as Papageno), Janet Lee (as Papagena / Second Lady), John Tan (as Sarastro), Kho Mei Ling (as First Lady) and Wang DiXia (as Third Lady).

Chong assured that despite its abbreviated form, the KLPac version would retain the storyline of the original and all the major solos, arias and duets would be included. However, he said he had taken the liberty of making some cuts in the orchestral arrangements.

Tenor Peter Ong added: "It is sung in English (as well) so it is very accessible."

Ong, who has appeared in many opera productions over the past few years, said: "It is a nice change to sing with people my age. It is particularly exciting to work with young singers in Malaysia and to share this experi-



KLPac's *The Magic Flute* will be narrated by artistic director Joe Hasham and directed by Datuk Faridah Merican.

ence with them."

For soprano Irma Lailatul Munira, this will be the first time she is involved with an opera-themed production, although she has sung in three concerts.

"I have been singing since I was five but only started singing Western classical when I was 19 and began my studies at UiTM," the final-year student said.

All in all, the KLPac production, which updates an 18th century opera with contemporary features, is set to offer its audience an unusual introduction to *The Magic Flute*.

■ KLPac's presentation of *The Magic Flute* begins its run tomorrow at Pentas 1 and ends on Sunday. Shows are at 8.30pm nightly from tomorrow to Saturday with 3pm matinee shows on Saturday and Sunday. Tickets are priced at RM50, RM40 and RM30 (students, senior citizens and the disabled).

Contact KLPac (☎ 03-4047 9000/ [tickets@klpac.com](mailto:tickets@klpac.com)) or The Actors Studio at Bangsar Shopping Complex (☎ 03-2094 9400/ [tickets@theactorsstudio.com.my](mailto:tickets@theactorsstudio.com.my)).