

Performance

Spring Romance

Two years after their last production, Dama Orchestra is back with the musical 'I Have A Date With Spring', a blend of drama, songs and the Chinese music they do so well. **Rosheen Fatima** speaks to the team behind the production to learn more

Remakes are inevitable in performing arts, from theatre to film and back again, productions are changed and adapted as different art forms all the time. In Malaysia however, we usually adapt classic pieces from the West. Not this time though.

This month sees the staging of Dama Orchestra's 'I Have A Date With Spring', a tale of four young female nightclub singers and the highs and lows of their friendship over the years. Taking place from the '60s to the '80s, the musical was adapted from the original Hong Kong stage play format as well as the film.

Part of Dama's 15th Anniversary Celebrations, 'I Have A Date With Spring' was chosen for its focus on the ups and downs the characters go through during their friendship. 'In many ways, it reminds us of Dama itself. Our trials and tribulations. There were times when we were financially in the pit, and there

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we also times when we have notched success with our productions,' explains producer Khor Seng Chew who is also Dama Orchestra's founder and music director. 'In many ways, it is rather apt for us to stage a production that celebrates friendship, especially on an occasion like an anniversary celebration,' says Dama Orchestra's artistic director and the production's director, Pun Kai Loon. 'And along our way, we have renewed old friendships as well as found new kindred spirits to join in our musical endeavours.



A rather morbid reflection to see looking back at you

So, it's really a celebration of enduring friendship, far and near.'

Having started out as a music group in 1994 performing instrumental Chinese music, Dama Orchestra has since expanded their repertoire to include stage productions, from their first 'Spring Kisses Lovers Tears' in 1997, which was performed over 80 times including at The Majesty Theatre in Shanghai to their last 'Butterfly Lovers - The Musical' a decade later in 2007, which was brought over to His Majesty's Theatre in Perth, Australia.

Originally written as a play by Hong Kong playwright Raymond To Kwok Wai, the various adaptations of 'I Have A Date With Spring' include an award-winning book, an award-winning film and staged productions in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore. 'This production cannot fail. It would be terribly embarrassing if we do not do justice to the show,' laughs Kai Loon.

With Dama's resident soprano, the three-time National Grand Champion in Classical Singing Tan Soo Suan taking on the role of Butterfly Yiu after a two-year absence from the stage, the production

seems off to a very promising start. Steve Yap, local television personality and model will be playing her love interest Karl, and the rest of the cast includes experienced theatre practitioners Nell Ng as Yuen Pik, Janet Lee as Lulu, Fang Chi as Nancy and Ling Tan as Po Yi. 'Getting talents who can act, sing and dance is difficult as that is a rare species in Malaysia. That said, we managed to pull together a cast we are proud of,' beams Seng Chew.



All smooth and freshly waxed

The team is supported further by Dama Orchestra's concert master Gan Boon Wee, music composers Loo Fung Chiat and Loo Fung Ying, stage manager Melissa Teoh, dialect coach Lee Jin Wen and choreographer Wong Kit Yaw.

Originally written in Cantonese, the dialects used in the story's dialogue changed according to the different adaptations. However, Dama Orchestra's adaptation will be sticking to Cantonese. 'Cantonese is widely spoken in Kuala Lumpur and we chose to stick with the original Cantonese script as there are lots of subtle differences in nuances between the Cantonese and Mandarin dialects,' explains Kai Loon. 'We believe the onstage and emotional delivery of the actors' performances would be more effectively executed if they were underpinned by the employment of the Cantonese dialect.'

A story which everyone can relate to, the musical tells of friendship, career, love, heartache, heartbreak, happy times and the good old days; and promises a production with strength in every angle. With a strong script, cast, crew and music, this is definitely a production not to miss.

And they will not be resting on their laurels when the production comes to an end; the team is already planning their future productions. 'We

have numerous exciting projects swirling in our heads. Of immediate relevance is the musical staging of 'Emperor Wu - The First Female Emperor'. It will be an original piece of musical work and it will be in English,' explains Seng Chew. 'We also hope to move forward by working with foreign performers, be it on stage or at the production level. And we will be on the look out for opportunities to stage our shows abroad.' 'Big dreams, no doubt. But with 15 years behind them and an abundance of passion driving them, there is little doubt they will achieve these dreams.

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