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Designer labels going for a song

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A VERSACE T-shirt could easily cost RM400. What more a whole suit. And here was the Malaysian AIDS Foundation's executive director, Indra Nadchatram, calmly telling me - a sucker for any good sale - that all items during this second Fashion Aid event would retail between RM50 and RM400.

"Yes, everything is going between these prices," she said. "The Versace, Escada and Armani suits, shirts and blouses, the Donna Karan, Dior and Chanel blazers, the Ungaro gowns..."

Even before she could finish I was already rummaging through the huge pile of clothes that had been plonked on a table, waiting to be sorted out and tagged at the foundation's headquarters in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur.

Not that I would be able to buy anything there and then, but good labels going cheap never fail to excite me at any time. I was dying to see what Fashion Aid '97, organised to raise funds for the foundation, had to offer on Saturday and Sunday at the Atrium of Kuala Lumpur's Lot 10 shopping centre.

All these items, mostly used ones, had been contributed by renowned personalities (both local and foreign), socialites, VIPs and the public. Besides the clothes, there are home furnishings including tablecloths, bedsheets, curtains, crystalware, vases, carpets, tea sets, toys, baby accessories like prams, books and souvenir items.

As I admired and wondered how much a simple but nonetheless striking Thierry Mugler cotton tee, with shoe lace design to pull the look together, would cost, Indra excused herself to take a call.

Back a minute later, Indra told me that it was Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, the event's organising committee chairman, on the line to remind her, yet again, to make sure that all prices be kept "very, very affordable!"

Also on sale to the public would be autographed paraphernalia by the stars including a signed glove by Formula One racing champion Michael Schumacher; a signed denim shirt by Enrique Iglesias, singer and son of the all-time Romeo of singers, Julio; and more signed apparel by Taiwanese singers such as Emil Chau, and top Hong Kong stars.

On the local front, we have singers like Sheila Majid donating her pretty silver pair of strappy, ribboned Jimmy Choo stilettos. Elaine Kang has given a lovely light yellow kimono top. Rap group KRU has handed over 16 items used by the three siblings during the filming of their video clips.

Actor Hans Isaac has contributed his prized leather jacket purchased in London; singer Fauziah Latiff, her polka dot Red Dior jacket; and pop-soul group Innuendo, several T-shirts.

Another article to look out for is Paula Malai Ali's off-white, form-fitting lace dress which I was immediately attracted to the moment I saw it. Also to die for is a slinky black Donna Karan stretch dress, donated by someone who wishes to remain anonymous, and a white Versus shirt.

I also came across a canary yellow and black sequin jacket by American designer Bill Blass, a rather crinkled but hopefully iron-able grey DKNY pantsuit, a pair of black Charles Jourdan shoes and a MCM handbag.

But these were just a fraction of the things the organising committee has collected. Much more was being stored at Isetan, co-organisers of the event.

"We started collecting the items from the stars in April this year and almost everyone we know and have approached have been so supportive," said Indra. "As for the public's response, it has been incredible.

"In the Klang Valley, our three collection booths are at Isetan, our office here, and the Malaysia Tatler office." There is also a collection point at the Jenni Homemade Cakes outlet in Penang.

"We have stored most of our things at Isetan and as co-organisers, they will also be helping us with the price tags, the sorting out and sale of the items." So overwhelming has the reception been that Indra has no doubts about achieving their target of collecting RM250,000 by the end of the two-day affair.

Of course the charity drive would also be getting a helping hand from some of the country's top figures, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"Items donated by Dr Mahathir and Anwar would be auctioned together with a signed hardcover copy of South African President Nelson Mandela's autobiography, A Long Walk To Freedom, and other memorabilia by notable personalities."

My curiosity piqued by all the talk of a cornucopia at Isetan, I soon found myself on the fourth floor of Lot 10, again going through racks and racks of clothes and boxes of beautiful, sparkling accessories.

Here, I came across a Versace suit which I figure would easily cost RM4,000. The ash coloured suit still looked new and personally, I'd be eyeing it on Oct 4.

I had it photographed on a mannequin over a smart, beaded but understated Byblos shirt. What also caught my attention were a Mondri cropped jacket with gold button details and embroidered collar; a Montana sweater, also with simple gold beads detail; a chic black Anne Klein blazer; and of course the new Gucci bags with their distinct bamboo handles donated by the house.

"The donations are still coming in and we're most thankful for the public's support," said Indra. "But we would also like to invite as many people as possible to attend this event. The people can come even if they do not intend to buy anything.

"We'll be having lots of quizzes and games with the stars, lucky draws that would entitle winners to return overseas trips, exhibitions to create AIDS awareness and fashion shows featuring creations by top local designers. It's really going to be so much fun."

Besides using the money collected to support AIDS sufferers, the fund would also help in numerous other AIDS campaigns, hospice programmes, education programmes for schoolchildren and a host of other things to battle AIDS in the country. Funds will be used to furnish the AIDS council resource centre as well.

Fashion Aid is also organised by Malaysian Tatler, Regatta de Blond and The Star.

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