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Opera's exciting couple

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IN the last four years Malaysian audiences have been quite spoiled with the best from the operas of Puccini and Verdi, thanks to the YTL Corporation. This year's Concert of Celebration proved to be even more exciting with Roberto Alagna (tenor), and Angela Gheorghiu (soprano), together with flautist, Andrea Griminelli, accompanied by the Philharmonic Orchestra of Torino under the baton of Carlo Felice Cillario.

Alagna and Gheorghiu are really opera world's "most exciting couple". Every operatic aria they sang together was pure joy to listen to.

The timbre of their voices blended together beautifully, their understanding of the emotion and drama of the music coupled with their love for each other as husband and wife showed especially in the duets.

The emotion they felt was almost electric, the beauty of their voices encompassing and fulfilling especially the sweetness and lyrical quality of the soprano.

Their sense of drama was compelling as they brought to life each operatic aria. The orchestral accompaniment in the background enhanced the drama was skilfully controlled by Cillario, especially in the give-and-take of the beat, so necessary when accompanying singers.

It was a well-balanced programme of music. The evening started with the famous Prelude from the opera Carmen by Bizet, followed by the duet, Parigi o cara from Verdi's La Traviata.

Then came the tenor solo La donna e mobile from Verdi's Rigoletto, and L'air des bijoux from Gounod's Faust for soprano.

A flute transcription written in a special arrangement by the orchestra of the local composition, Lagenda by Marzuki and Hassan was specially dedicated in a touching tribute to Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who, together with his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah, were the guests of honour that night.

The second half of the concert opened with the quiet Adagio in G minor by Albinoni, soothingly played with great depth of feeling by the orchestra followed by the soprano solo, Ebben ne sodro, from La Wally by Catalani, then M'appari from Martha by Flotow for tenor.

Griminelli enthralled the listener with his brilliant virtuosity on the flute; the notes of the Rondo Russo from the Concerto in E minor by Mercadante spilled out in shimmering quicksilver before the duet for tenor and soprano, Vogliatemi bene from Puccini's Madame Butterfly concluded the evening programme.

Alagna and Gheorghiu gave three encores, the third being a love duet from La Boheme in which the last phrases are sung with the couple entwined in each other's arms, facing the orchestra as they exited the stage.

A standing ovation brought the house down.

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