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Rousing show by Kazakh troupe

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THE Presidential Guard of the Republic of Kazakhstan had a field day last Saturday at Stadium Merdeka as it patriotically marched onto the pitch and broke into song.

The troupe, which comprises more than 160 "band members", is here for performances in Kedah, Pahang, Malacca and Kuala Lumpur, at the invitation of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir had seen them perform when he visited Kazakhstan in July last year. Impressed with their skill, discipline and grit, he extended an invitation to them to perform in Malaysia.

The programme, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, in collaboration with Malacca, Pahang, Kedah and Angkatan Tentera Malaysia, is held with the aim of fostering closer ties between Malaysia and Kazakhstan and to expose Malaysians to Kazakh music, language and culture.

Present at the function last Saturday were Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik and his wife, Datin Faridah Mohammad, Kazakhstan ambassador Jumabaev Amang, and Presidential Guard commander General Tokpakbaev.

Though the stadium was not packed to capacity, with most of the audience confined to the grandstand, that did not deter the Kazakhs from putting up a highly-spirited performance. The spectators were mostly Malaysians, with a sprinkling of foreigners.

More than 30 items were presented, ranging from songs and dances to music and a march around the stadium.

The troupe, also known as the Big Band, started the ball rolling with a patriotic number, displaying well-synchronised moves. That was followed by songs and dances all night long.

The tunes and melodies conveyed an impression of what the Kazakhs are all about; almost all the songs were upbeat and happy.

A beautiful haunting song to mark their freedom (they celebrated their fifth independence this year, titled Elim Menin (My People) was the next item, followed by a rousing ensemble work called Sherniyaz. The latter, which sounded very "Beverly Hillbillies-ish" featured a lot of nimble guitar work.

An instrumental performance on the kobyz (a type of violin) by Raushan Orazbaeva was next.

But perhaps the most uplifting item was the soprano singing by the excellent Ardak Balazhanova.

There was just her, in a green top and a striking yellow long skirt, and a gambus-like instrument for company. Her powerful, crystal clear vocals filled the whole stadium.

The audience, reticent up to this point, gave a warm and appreciative round of applause to Balazhanova. And maintaining that high spirit, the Big Band came next with another arousing number in Adai.

There was a traditional touch with the folk-song, Zhelkildek, stirringly rendered by Aigul Kosanova, backed by a string quartet.

The Presidential Guard then took on a slightly different path, "transporting" the audience to the '50s with a bluesy song called The Body and Soul, performed by Sail Tutubaev, who continued with the cabaret number Fly Me To The Moon.

The next few tunes were definite crowd-pleasers - Getaran Jiwa and some

joget numbers. The audience were truly entertained.

The troupe performed at the Wisma MCA, Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday and will be at the Kubu Stadium, Jalan Hang Tuah, Malacca, today at 4.30pm. Admission is free.

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