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APA's `arresting' performance

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THE Malaysian performance arts community was recently all abuzz with activity in response to the interesting developments on the political front.

To make its voice heard, a group of performance artistes came together to form Artis Pro Activ (APA).

With a credo that reads "A non-politically aligned group of people from the arts community united in the belief that questions must always be asked", APA staged a, well, arresting performance at the Actors Studio called You Have Ten Minutes.

You Have Ten Minutes was part of APA's ongoing Festival of the Arts and, as its title suggests, a handful of performing artistes were each given a 10-minute slot to put up a show which was basically their commentary on living in Malaysia under the current situation.

As with all such performances, high on the show's agenda was the need to make a strong political commentary and as with everything done with such an agenda, there were moments of brilliant flashes and then there were others which lacked intelligence and bordered on artistic masturbation.

The highlight of the evening must surely be the hilarious skit titled Nooz (or Are You Getting Enough?) staged by Jo Kukathas and Amir Muhammad.

In it, "newsreader" Kukathas announces that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has decided to appoint a new Deputy Prime Minister: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

This news, she goes on to say, is lauded by the nation's Cabinet members, most notably, by the Finance and Home Ministers.

Congratulations too came pouring in from the corporate sector and from a prominent social activist, deadpanned Kukathas to the crowd's obvious amusement.

Other performers who raked in high performance marks during the night included Diong Chae Lian, who staged a one-woman performance, mimicking an inspirational corporate trainer, a figure almost all working adults who have attended training seminars of the morale-boosting kind are familiar with.

Her mock message for advancement in life is simple: Don't Get Involved (DGI).

Relaying how she first heard the phrase as a little girl when her father advised her not to get involved in the case of her classmate who cheated during an exam, Diong earnestly assures the audience that the path to success will be a short and quick one if everyone is taught the DGI concept early in life.

It is important, she says, as the audience was highly tickled, to pretend to be oblivious to what's happening all around us.

To get her point across, she used a whiteboard and marker pen to note down important points for the easy consumption of the audience, making her performance a memorable one that evening.

Two performers that night who also really made strong statements about power play were Lee Swee Keong and Loi Chin Yu. In their two silent and at times mime-like segments, they effectively nuanced the power struggle between two individuals through the show of might and the power of intimidation.

On his part, Vernon Adrian Emuang performed a directly didactic piece called The Shrimp Warrior (or Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf) where he

played a patronisingly paternal figure.

It was a watchable piece, with him lecturing his young son on what is acceptable behaviour and how experienced and powerful he was.

Then, in what can be considered as the most important message of the evening, in the 10 minutes allotted to him, Zahim Albakri basically told the audience of the importance of being self-equipped with knowledge - know your rights!

Sitting on stage, Zahim read out passages from the Federal Constitution and the Penal Code and although all the goobledgook in the book seemed pretty intimidating, the underlying message behind his readings overwhelmed whatever semantic intimidation that were held out by the two publications.

The idea was clear: We must educate ourselves as this is the only way the sanctity of an individual's rights can be safeguarded.

As for the evening's disappointments, amongst them was the ineffectual dance performance, titled 1974 by Aida Redza (choreographed by Marion D'Cruz) although it must be said that Aida was simply stunning to watch in her powerful self-choreographed segment titled Berkumandangnya Qasibah later that night.

Next would be Adlin vs Adlin by Adlin Aman Ramlie. He lacked the charge required to leave an impression on the audience and reminded one of the numerous young people who partake of a show of emotions and dissatisfaction without really understanding the deeper and damaging implications of harsh words and irrational outbursts.

Each of the night's performances carried dual titles - the title proper and the alternative title which is of a more questioning nature, clearly suggesting that Malaysians should also be of a more critical mindset.

The final word here is that the festival is most timely, making a pertinent point to the right audience. Nothing less.

Note: Those curious about Artis Pro Activ can find more on the group and its activities at the following websites:

<http://members.xoom.com/APAkhaba> or

<http://www.egroups.com/list/artisproactiv>.

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