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`Negaraku' deserves better treatment

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ARRIVING promptly at 7.45pm as requested in the invitation card, I was ushered up 3 1/2 flights of stairs to the Seruling Suite, at the Petronas Philharmonic Hall. But it's okay. I had 1 1/2 hours to catch my breath.

The show did not start until 9.15pm and I settled into my not-so-state-of-the-art chair to enjoy an evening of Ravel and Rachmaninoff.

After the interval, I was pleasantly surprised to hear Malay music being played. I was told this was the Malaysian overture.

But pride and pleasure turned to horror when after the rendition of "Ikan Kekek", the country's national anthem "Negaraku" was played.

I couldn't believe my ears at first. Looking around I found similar confused and horrified faces, I looked towards the Royal Box, where the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali were seated.

He was also confused. Obviously he was not told about this "honour". Twice, before the score ended, I saw him get up and sit down again. Me? I did what some so-called "cultured" people would term "uncivilised" behaviour - I got up and left, but not without giving a resounding "boo", which I am sure could be heard all the way to the Royal Box.

By the way, is it really a Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra? I did not see a single local face. I wonder what the organisers were doing when the whole repertoire was given to them?

Did they see that "Negaraku" was to be included in the Malaysian repertoire? I was told it was mentioned in the programme. The people responsible for this serious "faux pas" should be taken to task.

Petronas or whoever is paying princely sums to foreigners, who assume the name of the "Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra", please wake up!

Ask Malaysians who Bach and Puccini are, 90 per cent probably would say Bach is a cough mixture and Puccini a bad word.

But does that make Malaysians "uncultured"? There are patriotic and simple people who are proud to be just good citizens who neither have the time nor the money to indulge in classical music but who nonetheless take enormous pride in being Malaysians, and who have the highest respect for our flag and our national anthem.

To hear as I left, Malaysians and amongst them Cabinet ministers and VIPs applaud such an insult makes me feel sad.