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NEWS FOCUS

GIVING THE AIDS CAUSE THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

By: D Sundara Raja

KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 8 (BERNAMA) -- They have won a string of awards in the music industry but in their quest for success cousins Rizal Kamaruzzaman and Azlan Abu Hassan have not forgotten to give something back to society.

The Asian Song Festival second runners-up and winners of the AIM Best Album Award, have donated an album, Spirit of Life, to raise funds for the Malaysian Aids Foundation (MAF).

About 40 percent from the sales of the compact discs and cassettes will be channelled towards the foundation's programmes on HIV/AIDS education, prevention and care.

The Spirit of Life bilingual album consists of four songs and three instrumentals in tribute to Malaysians living with HIV and AIDS.

The title song, Spirit of Life, is performed by Ning Baizura. The other songs are I Will Be There by Sam of Innuendo, Pengorbanan by sisters Liza and Azlina Aziz and Selamanya by Innuendo.

Spirit of Life will be launched on August 8 at Suria KLCC by MAF chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

The Spirit of Life has also been chosen as the theme song of the Fifth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) which will be held here from Oct 23 to 27, said Encik Asri Ghafar, the ICAAP cultural and events sub-committee chairman and MAF trustee.

He told a press briefing that the ballad was produced by Rizal and Azlan as a tribute to people infected by the disease.

Rizal hoped that the Spirit of Life would open the eyes of Malaysians to give a helping hand to the sufferers without taking into account their race, religion and age.

He said the melody for the song was written about 10 years ago by Azlan for a school song contest but when they decided to do something for the MAF they revived and re-wrote the song to suit the subject of HIV/AIDS.

Rizal, who wrote the lyrics in memory of a friend who had suffered from HIV, got his college, HELP Institute, to help organise the fund raising initiative.

The 20-year-old aerospace engineering student and Azlan, a 28-year-old bank officer then recorded the song at Wizardworks Productions, a studio run by Azlan's brother.

Rizal, who will leave next week for the United States to complete his degree programme, said they have experience recording at the studio for famous artistes like Ziana Zain and Camelia.

Asri said the foundation was happy that the young artistes and gifted songwriters were stepping forward to support the HIV/AIDS cause.

He hoped more young people will follow their example and contribute their talents and time for the HIV/AIDS cause.

"As of April, this year about 30,000 people have been tested HIV positive and we need all the support to overcome this problem," he added.

Asri said: "Beyond the melody, the voice and lyrics, we find Spirit of Life is most appropriate and in tune with the 5th ICAAP's mission and intention."

He said more than 3,000 delegates were expected to attend the congress which will be one of the last major international AIDS congress to be held in this millennium.

He said the congress will reassess and evaluate what has been carried

out in the past in order to formulate better prevention, treatment, care and support programmes for people living with HIV/AIDS in the region.

The Malaysian Aids Council, the MAF's parent body, will host the biennial congress with the Health Ministry's support.

Themed "The Next Millennium: Taking Stock and Moving Forward," the congress is co-sponsored by the AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific (ASAP), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Asia/Pacific Council of AIDS Service Organisations (APCASO) and the Asia-Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN).

Spirit of Life Lyrics

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Feel the sorrow in your heart
But the will is shining bright
Though it'll never be the same
Forever till the end of time

We will stand together here
With our hands held just for hope
You and I we will give
For all the light of life

Chorus

We can hear your fallen cry
Till the angels touch your heart
Since the whole wide world
*(Standing together, Spirit of Life)
They're giving their love to you

I can never let you go
I will never let you cry
For all the love and might
Life can never stay with us

You will never give your life
With a struggle yet to go
And we'll know you will leave
All the courage of your life

*only last chorus

-- Bernama