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Francis, YTL group deserve an encore

TAN Sri Francis Yeoh and YTL have come a long way from the time I first met the infectious MD of the group at the bow of a boat on a cruise along the Yangtse Kiang during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's visit to China in 1985.

The group has grown and expanded, including making the celebrated acquisition of Wessex Water, which is headquartered in Bath.

Last Thursday, the group threw a party with The Three Tenors in Bath - Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti - in conjunction with the opening of the Thermae Bath Spa.

It was a splendid and resplendent occasion, with numerous guests from Malaysia but, more importantly, over 12,500 people of Bath.

Seven thousand tickets were given away free, with 5,000 invited guests. It was a celebration and an event unique in the history of the ancient Roman city.

The YTL group is said to have spent STG3 million (RM18.45 million) for the occasion, but this is small change for the return in goodwill and abiding memory of a warm, magical summer's evening at the historical Royal Crescent, described by the Councillor of the Bath and North East Somerset Council, as "the crowning glory of the World heritage Site".

From Francis's speech before the concert started, I wouldn't be surprised if the masses were a little bemused by his passionate Christian faith from a country characterised as Muslim.

It was splendid advertisement for Malaysia as a successful and tolerant country and people of various races, cultures and faiths - most of all faith in God and the Good.

The three tenors were in good voice, each coming to the end of his illustrious career in a different way, combining power with nostalgia, fun with memories of things past. Many I spoke to thought Domingo was excellent, although I felt Carreras - with the least large frame - was excellent and recognised Pavarotti's immense contribution in bringing opera to the people.

Francis and the YTL group have done more than its bit in that regard, not just in Bath, of course, but also in Malaysia. Bravo and encore!