

MPO not making the right kind of music
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I refer to the Malaysiakini report
MCPX
CM: Use petrodollars to build second bridge.

I believe the CM of Penang Lim Guan Eng has made a timely and pertinent request. How ironic that Petronas does not have money to build bridges to benefit Malaysians but has hundreds of millions to splash on foreign musicians.

Much as we like to encourage appreciation of Western music in Malaysia, why is it Petronas sees it fit to finance the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra which is a misnomer because 95% of its 105 musicians are foreign and mainly European? Each musician is paid between RM16,000 - RM28,000 per month.

They are given a two month paid holiday per year and working conditions which are second to none in the world. They have not only one but three European conductors! The Chief Conductor is paid RM130,000 per month and the Associate Conductor gets paid RM50,000 per month.

The total monthly budget for this orchestra is RM3.5 million. The Malaysian Conductor Ooi Chean See resigned because it was widely known she was being undermined and not allowed to develop in her career. During her time with the orchestra, her concert schedule decreased gradually to the point she was doing only a couple 'Children's Concerts' per year.

The orchestra has been in existence for 10 years now and the total amount spent on this orchestra has been a staggering RM500 million.

Petronas does not appear to have real desire to train or give opportunities to local musicians. They promised to set up an Academy of Music to train local musicians with the tutors drawn from the orchestra but this sadly has not materialised even after 10 years.

Since its inception, the Malaysian Philharmonic orchestra has not increased its Malaysian participation which still stands at a shameful 4%. They have cosmetic programmes like 'outreach' to supposedly encourage the love of Western classical music among local Malaysians but these are essentially self-serving publicity stunts.

Even the newly-formed 'Malaysian Philharmonic Youth Orchestra' is a publicity stunt with no serious commitment to develop Malaysian talent. It is poorly organised and its musicians meet about twice a year only! Artistic decisions were left to an international music agency which then billed Petronas.

The current CEO Juniwati Hussin is a chemist by training and is an improvement because she does actually attend the concerts and is not averse to learning to appreciate Western classical music. But the overall artistic planning and direction is controlled by Europeans who have a vested interest in telling Petronas that there is no talent in Malaysia and the ignorant management of Petronas are happy to maintain the status quo.

It would appear that they prefer foreign participation in this 'Malaysian Orchestra' than to have Malaysians. What a pathetic mindset!

I hope issues like this will be brought up in parliament. Why can't Petronas train local musicians, provide scholarships for locals to study abroad if need be, and then employ them in the orchestra? In a matter of a few years we can have an orchestra consisting of Malaysians true to the name 'Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra' and good enough to rival the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

There is an abundance of talent in Malaysia. The sad fact is, Malaysian talent is usually recognised overseas and not in Malaysia.

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