

'Tanah Akhirku' Borne Out of Campus Unity

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By Soon Li Wei

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- Every time Lim Mei Fen hears the patriotic song *Warisan* by the late Datuk Sudirman Arshad, she cannot help but tear up.

The 31-year-old has spent an inordinate amount of time delving into the meaning behind the lyrics of the song. This was because for the last four years, she has made it part of her 'homework' to learn the song as well as a few other Malay songs in an effort to improve her mastery of the Malay language.

"I didn't use to be fluent in Bahasa Malaysia. When I was given the role of Puteri Hang Li Po in the theatre performance "Takhta 3 Ratu' four years ago, I could only read the script without fully understanding it.

"So I worked at improving my Bahasa Malaysia by speaking and listening to Malay songs. When I finally comprehended the meaning behind *Warisan*, I could not help but be moved to tears. It made me grateful to be born Malaysian," she told Bernama.

As a final year student at the National Academy of Arts Culture and Heritage (Aswara)'s Faculty of Theatre, Lim found living among the multiracial campus community has taught her a lot about the meaning of unity.

"When I was first accepted into Aswara three years ago, I was the only Chinese student around. Despite being from a different racial and religious background, I found myself treated with respect and understanding from my classmates.

"I decided to document my experience as an Aswara student and the harmonious atmosphere on campus in the form of a theatre production named *Tanah Akhirku*. The

production was even staged at Istana Budaya in conjunction with the *Merdeka* month," said Lim, who hails from Pulau Tikus, Penang.

TANAH AKHIRKU

Tanah Akhirku tells the story of Ying Feng, a girl from mainland China who fled to Malaya with her mother and sibling to escape the civil war.

After living in Malaya for some time, Ying Feng fell in love with the country as well as a Malay man.

Lim, who is the show's producer and lead actress, said the show featured dialogues in multiple languages and was performed at Istana Budaya from Aug 28 to Sept 2, recently.

The performance features a cast of popular actors such as Aeril Zafrel, Erma Fatima, Izzue Islam, Angeline Tan and Nina Nadira.

The story was originally from a script written for her final year assessment in February. The Istana Budaya version, however, featured changes to the storyline as well as the introduction of new characters.

In addition to holding the honour of having her show staged in Istana Budaya, Lim was also fortunate enough to have the prime minister's wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali to agree to become a patron for her show, and to later attend the show with the Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Lim said the biggest challenge to getting *Tanah Akhirku* on stage was coming up with the funds for it.

“We had to raise RM500,000 for the production and we were having trouble getting funding since February.

“We finally resolved the problem during the Gala Night show on Aug 28, so we are grateful for all the help and support that everyone has given,” she said.

Lim, who obtained her degree in theatre arts from the Jakarta Institute for the Arts, said that *Tanah Akhirku* was an entirely new challenge for her despite her experience in acting as well as directing theatre and drama productions.

“It was my first time directing a multiple language show and it was quite a daunting experience. However, the cast and production team helped a lot.

“I can be rather strict when it comes to directing, but this is to ensure that we are giving the best to the audience,” she said.

She admitted to having difficulties sleeping in the days leading up to the first show and subsequently falling ill because of it.

“I was doing a number of things at the same time: looking for sponsorships, seeking publicity, ensuring the production is going well, memorising my script and trying to get a proper feel of my character.

“I refused to give up despite falling ill a few times. I did it all voluntarily and for the love of my country. *Tanah Akhirku* is everything to me, so I made sure that it went well and hope that the audience was moved by it.”

Translated by Sakina Mohamed

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