

Headline **Crossing borders with music**
Date **22 Jun 2011**
MediaTitle **Daily Express (KK)**
Section **Nation**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily (EM)**
Circ / Read **30,557 / 97,836**

Language **English**
Page No **9**
Article Size **301 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **1,551**
PRValue **4,653**



Crossing borders with music

KUALA LUMPUR: There is great truth in the phrase, 'music unites'.

Music has long been seen as one of the best means to unite people.

People from the music industry say music and lyrics are inextricably woven together, and together they can overcome boundaries of race and creed.

Three young people who understand this well, set out to learn traditional musical instruments of other races, in a bid to learn about each others' cultures.

At a time when playing modern musical instruments is in vogue, these three chose to buck the trend. Ell Zain Hyder Zainuddin Ottok chose to learn the erhu, a traditional Chinese musical instrument. Lee Lam Mei learned the gamelan, while Bareth Ravindran chose the caklempong.

The first time Ell Zain Hyder heard the melodic sound of the erhu was at a wet-market in Ipoh. She was mesmerized, and vowed to learn the instrument.

The 25-year-old, who prefers to be called Endang, said her parents supported her interest in the instrument, and promptly registered her for classes at Simpson Enterprise.

"It emits such unique, melodious sounds, especially when playing ballads. The erhu adds a special edge to the genre," Endang told Bernama in an interview recently.

The Istana Budaya musician has been playing the erhu since she was 15. It took her less than two years to get to grade five.

The ease with which she learnt the instrument can be attributed to her skills with another stringed instrument, the violin, which she began learning to play at eight years of age.

"The violin and erhu are similar. The violin originates from the West, while erhu is from China. But the finger movements for both instruments are the same, and music is played by drawing the bow across the strings," Endang said.

"Because the Chinese are very keen on numbers, erhu notations for its music scores are in numbers. The notation for violins, meanwhile, is in notes," she explained.

Interestingly, the erhu is also known as the 'Chinese violin'.

However, the erhu only has two strings, compared with the violin's four.

Endang admitted that, because she was one of the few Malays who are skilled at playing the instrument, many doors opened for her.

Her talent with the instrument has provided her with numerous opportunities to perform overseas. Endang, a graduate from the London College of Music, with a diploma in music performance, has played in China, Paris, Indonesia and Belgium.

She has also performed at the World Rainforest Music Festival in Sarawak, alongside other notable international music artists.

Even if some in the music industry believe she has a long way to go before she masters the instrument, her talent is fetching her further recognition.

When asked how many other Malays out

Headline **Crossing borders with music**
Date **22 Jun 2011**
MediaTitle **Daily Express (KK)**
Section **Nation**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily (EM)**
Circ / Read **30,557 / 97,836**

Language **English**
Page No **9**
Article Size **301 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **1,551**
PRValue **4,653**

there can play the erhu, Endang said, "I'm not sure. As far as I know, the only other Malay who can play the erhu is a man from Indonesia."

Twenty-one-year old Lee first heard the gamelan at a school event, when she was 17. She fell in love with it, immediately.

The accounting undergraduate from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) confessed she did not know, then, that the harmonious blend of music was from a set of instruments called the gamelan.

"It was the most joyous-sounding music I had ever heard. I was so enthralled that I just stood there watching the performance. I forgot to ask anyone there was that music was called," she said.

Lee then tried to find out the name of the instrument by describing it to her sister. She was disappointed when her sister, too, failed to recognize the set of instruments.

It wasn't until a year later, when she chanced upon her sister's photographs of co-curricular activities at Universiti Malaysia Sabah, that she learnt that the set of instruments was called gamelan.

"I never forgot the sound of it, even though I had heard it just once," said Lee, who now plays the 'bonang' in UUM's gamelan group.

She became so passionate about the instrument, that she was determined to choose it as her co-curricular activity when she was accepted into UUM in 2009.

She had no knowledge or experience with musical instruments, but this didn't prove a

hindrance to her.

Bareth was initially uninterested in the Negeri Sembilan traditional instrument, caklempong, but its rhythm eventually captivated him.

It all started when the form-five student at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bukit Baru, Melaka, discovered the instrument was unique and fun to learn.

"I started playing the caklempong when I was in form three. The beat is faster and different than gamelan. Among my performances, were those at the Gala Muzika and the Muzikama Night, both in Melaka," said Bareth who plays the 'getereh' for his school's caklempong team.

Refuting the idea that traditional music can only be played by the community that inherits it, Lee said music can play the role of a vital bond in realizing the 1Malaysia vision.

He said the harmony in a melody arises from the chemistry between musicians of multiple races.

Endang echoes Lee's sentiments.

"When I was learning the erhu, I was the only Malay student, but I experienced no discrimination. In fact, my Chinese teacher liked that those from other races were interested in learning the instrument," she said.

Bareth, meanwhile, believes those who allow racial barriers to get in the way of learning traditional music are shallow and narrow-minded.

"We may be different, but we are still Malaysians," he said. - Bernama



Music for all: Lee Lam Mei (front) says traditional music is not exclusive to any race.