



'Still Here' tells the story of three women whose lives are changed forever by a mysterious man.



'3 Dumb Smugglers' is about tourists forced to smuggle wildlife into Thailand.



'One Too Many' features a lonely but harmless ghost.



The university students participating in 'Valiant Verses' at their end of the show. NSTP PIX BY AZIAH AZMEE

Shy students deliver 'valiant' tales filled with Malaysian humour

THE spotlight does more than just illuminate a performer; it serves as a powerful catalyst for personal transformation. Beyond the lines of a script and the heavy velvet curtains, the performing arts — theatre in particular — function as a rigorous laboratory for building the very traits required in the modern world: unflinching confidence and boundless creativity.

The stage is often the first place where individuals learn to find their voice, literally and figuratively. By stepping into the shoes of another, performers are forced to navigate complex emotions and solve problems in real-time, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical, high-stakes communication.

This synergy of art and personal development was recently on full display during 'Valiant Verses', an annual theatre showcase that saw several student-led productions brought to

life at Universiti Putra Malaysia in Serdang, Selangor. Far from being a mere hobby, the showcase served as a testament to how theatrical training prepares individuals for the professional world, regardless of their eventual career paths.

A MIRROR TO REALITY

The showcase featured six original productions, each born from a need to reflect on social observations and personal reflections. Developed by student production houses like Pixel Playhouse, Room 108 and Cosmic Arc, the plays ranged from the haunting and mysterious to the hilariously local.

"The priority is for students to gain confidence, creative literacy and pedagogical insight," explained Khayma Balakrishnan, a theatre practitioner and educator who oversaw the project. She noted that the process is designed



around experiential learning, integrating theory and practice into a seamless whole.

By working in small, structured groups, participants are forced to manage interpersonal dynamics that mirror real-world environments. "Originality is a core requirement, and students are encouraged to draw from lived experiences," Khayma said. "This opened structure encourages creativity, critical thinking and risk-taking."

For many participants, the stage is a daunting space that eventually becomes a sanctuary of self-assurance. The transition from a "shy student" to a commanding performer is a cornerstone of the theatrical experience.

Emmanuel Ngalih, 22, who was involved in the play 'One Too Many' — a tale of ghost catchers and haunted houses — noted the diversity of sto-

ries told, from wildlife smuggling in '3 Dumb Smugglers' to the mysterious food stalls of 'Warong Wan Rogayah'. Behind these narratives was a massive effort in teamwork and resilience.

Participant Amirul Aiman highlighted the logistical hurdles that sharpened his professional edge, noting that his role involved interacting with sponsors and lecturers to promote the showcase.

"The biggest challenge we faced was balancing coursework with the demands of making the showcase a success," he said, echoing the sentiment of many who found that theatre teaches time management as much as it teaches acting.

The journey from the rehearsal room to the stage was bolstered by industry support, with the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPAC) providing guidance, workshops and mentorship. This collaboration allowed the participants to observe professional standards through programmes like

Short and Sweet Theatre.

"The collaboration with KLPAC bridges academic learning with industry practice," Khayma added, hinting that some of these original works may even find their way to a professional stage in the future.

Ultimately, the value of such showcases lies in the long-term growth of the participants. As lecturer and former student Amirul Syafiq recalled, the process involves a full semester of "working hard to come up with props" and building a world from scratch.

Fellow educator Alyssa Batrisyia Zainal Abidin noted that while the themes explored — ranging from forbidden love to criminal fronts — were often serious, they remained rooted in the Malaysian identity.

"The plays were loaded with Malaysian humour," she said, proving that when creativity is nurtured, it results in stories that are not only educational, but deeply resonant with the community. dchua@nst.com.my