



STEEPED IN MUSIC: The Loo sisters Fung Ying (right) and Fung Chiat—PIC ZURANEZA ZULKIFLI

THE older generation may be more familiar with the classic folk melody from the Shaw Bros film *Love Eternal*, but for Dama Orchestra composers Loo Fung Chiat, 38, and Loo Fung Ying, 36, a more modern touch was considered essential for contemporary audiences.

And so, the two sisters took the main theme from the 1963 film and arranged around it for *Butterfly Lovers*, Dama Orchestra's musical theatre adaptation of the story, which ran from Oct 5 until Oct 20 at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLpac).

"For the modern audience, the old theme is a bit simple and outdated. So we transformed it and added symphonic-style elements, while retaining the original tempo and rhythm," said Fung Chiat.

"Other pieces we did for the performance, such as wedding songs, overtures and the 'thunder' score, were original compositions."

Butterfly Lovers was the first musical production by Dama Orchestra, among many other concert performances ranging from shidaiqu (Chinese Oldies) folk songs to popular numbers.

An Eastern *Romeo & Juliet*, the epic tells the forbidden love story between Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai during the Jin Dynasty (265-420 A.D.).

In what is considered one of the finest works of ancient Chinese folk literature, the star-crossed lovers face the barricades of social and hierarchical prejudices, to be finally united

as husband and wife.

To make the transformation possible, the music was arranged and composed from popular huangmei folk songs, which, together with the costumes and stage design, have given the performance a modern flavour.

"The producers decided to do this project back in 2006, as part of the Dama Orchestra's 20th anniversary," said Fung Ying.

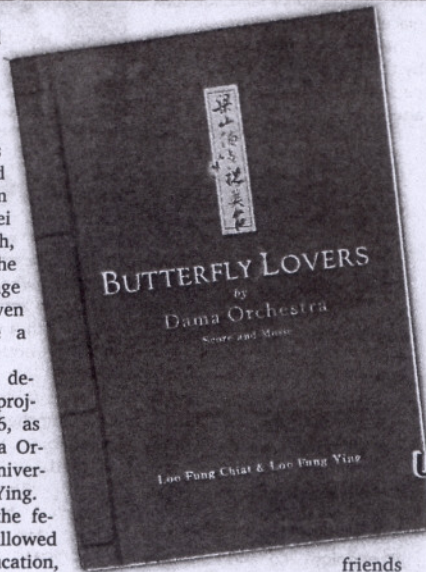
"In the story, the female lead is not allowed to have an education, but she still wants to. So she disguises herself as male, to trick her father into studying medicine. Later on, she be-

friends the male lead and falls in love."

However, her father has other plans for her back home, in the form of an arranged marriage with a wealthier young man.

"When the male lead finds out, he becomes depressed, falls ill and eventually dies. During the wedding day, she insists on visiting his grave."

Having been with Dama Orchestra since 2001, the sisters started out doing musical arrangements and transcriptions for Chinese Golden Oldies productions, as well as World Music.



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FUNG CHIAT

Sister act

University lecturers get hands-on with music

Fung Chiat was awarded her PhD in Performance Practice from the University of Sheffield, England. She received her Masters in Music from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, University of Wales; her Bachelors in Music from Universiti Putra Malaysia and her FTCL from Trinity College of Music, all in piano performance.

She is currently a senior lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia, has over 15 years experience in piano teaching and also has a keen interest in the clarinet.

Fung Ying is senior lecturer and currently the Deputy Director at the University of Malaysia's Cultural Centre.

A recipient of several awards — including the first prize in the prestigious Jacobson Piano Competition and the Grindea

Award for Best Pianist — she has enjoyed extensive performing and teaching experiences in the United Kingdom and Australia.

Their compositions and arrangements were featured in various award-winning productions for Dama Orchestra, with over 20 productions to date, four albums and three sold-out musicals: *Empress Wu the Musical* (2012), Raymond Toh's *I Have a Date with Spring* (2009) and, of course, *Butterfly Lovers*.

A CD recording of the production, recorded live at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth, Western Australia, was also released in 2009.

These talented sisters are also behind the arrangement and most of the compositions for Dama Orchestra's works next year including *The Legends* in June.