

ENTERTAINMENT

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By ANEESA ALPHONSUS

Original gem of a rock opera

IF THERE is anything unsavoury that needs to be said about *Natra - A Showcase*, it might well be regarding the publicity or lack thereof. The recent highlights from the rock opera crafted by Zulkifli Ahmad at Instant Cafe's Theatre Upstairs in Kuala Lumpur deserved a whole lot more attention than it received. The show ran from July 30 through Aug 3.

There is, of course, much more to *Natra* than entertainment value, and the fortunate few who witnessed it would undoubtedly agree.

The tale of Dutch girl Maria Hertogh or *Natra* isn't uncommon to Malaysians.

The tale of *Natra* takes place in 1942 in Tjimahi, Indonesia where Maria is handed over by her mother to Amina, a Malayan businesswoman. Raising Maria (later *Natra*) as her own, Amina decides to take the girl to Singapore to meet with the Dutch General Counsellor in order to settle matters regarding *Natra's* upbringing in Malaya.

In somewhat chaotic and depressing events which ensue, it is decided that *Natra* should be sent back to Holland to be with her natural parents. Placed in a convent thereafter, the girl pines for her loves lost and lives a lone-



ABOVE: The stellar cast of 'Natra', a musical which breathed life into the tale of Maria Hertogh.
LEFT: Spirited and inspired ... a sterling performance by Yasmin Amon.

ly and desolate life in Bergen Op Zoom, Holland.

The hour-long performance helmed by Lipraxedes Jumawan (musical director/arranger) was masterfully set to the happenings of a tumultuous era in song and

expression. A compelling chronology of happenings surrounding the young and eventful life of *Natra*, the musical was made all the better with the talents of skilful musicians.

As the term "rock opera" is rel-

atively new here, it would be difficult and unfair to associate or even compare it with other productions. *Natra* was truly an original gem that has paved the way for other such performances in the near future.

Comprising 17 awe-inspiring songs, the programme arrangement for the evening was kept crisp and tight throughout. Commendable indeed were the brilliant Yasmin Amon and Theresa Brossamer who sang the parts of Maria Hertogh/*Natra* and Amina respectively.

Strong, clear vocals reverberated through the medium-sized acoustic-friendly walls of the Theatre Upstairs especially when Brossamer rendered the hypnotic *Home Near The Waves*.

Special kudos has to go out to Yasmin who was the perfect *Natra* with her goose-pimple renditions of *We Can Share* and the tear-jerking *Can You Hear Me?* It will be a boon indeed if she makes a comeback as *Natra* when it is restaged in its entirety.

The tune in *Natra* blended perfectly with the masterfully-composed lyrics. The voices of cast members gelled perfectly with each other, evident more so in the catchy *Singapore Night*.

The performance was proof that you don't need expensive props and specially designed costumes to make a show happen.

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