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Angelic voices enchant audience

By LOOI SUE-CHERN

THEY were groomed for the world stage – but a small platform in a Penang church did not stop Malaysia's Operafest Children's Choir from performing their best.

Led by artistic director and choir conductor Kam Sun-Yoke, the choir dazzled the crowd with their angelic singing during the Light of the World charity concert at the FGA Centre in Penang recently.



The children were indeed bearing light as they walked into the dark hall holding candles, promising the audience a show to remember.

The choir started with Naplan's *Al Shlosha*, a Hebrew number, and proceeded to beautiful pieces like Beethoven's *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee*, Adam's *The Holy City*, Handel's *Love Ye the Lord* and Schubert's *Ave Maria*.

Carols were also sung, like *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*, *Away in a Manger*, *We Three Kings* and *What Child Is This?*.

The choir then led the crowd in singing *Ama-zing Grace* at the end of their performance but the show went on as the crowd was reluctant to let the choir retire for the night. Kam coaxed FGA Pastor Joseph Savarimuthu into leading the choir and the audience in singing *Silent Night* and *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*.

Even with the crowd singing, the powerful and melodious vocals of the 20-member choir still filled the hall. It was easy to understand how the children were able to display such outstanding vocals with Kam at the helm of the choir.

Kam, a renowned soprano, performed a brilliant solo of Mendelssohn's *Hear My Prayer (O for the Wings of a Dove)* and Handel's *Rejoice Greatly* earlier.

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The choir, founded by Kam in 1986, shot to international fame in 1991 when it won second place in the Llangollen International Music Eisteddfod in Wales and finished third in the Koor-festival of Arnheim in the Netherlands, also known as the 'Choir Olympics'.

The choir has sung in the Netherlands, England, Wales, Spain, Argentina, the United States, Greece, India, Singapore, Australia and South Africa.

Despite being a 'Malaysia Boleh' success story, the choir, Kam said, has remained relatively un-known to many Malaysians.

"When we performed in Argentina, the press there were shocked that our choir receives very little support back home," said the 63-year-old performer who has sung at the Barcelona Music Festival, the Tripartite Music Festival of Kiev, Ukraine, and alongside the award-winning Macedonian Youth Mandolin Orchestra.

The Penang-born soprano added: "I want to give children today something that I cherished very much in my childhood.

"Many of my singers have little knowledge of music and have to work very hard to learn the songs. But they love to sing."

The choir receives sponsorship from HSBC Malaysia and Great Eastern Life Assurance Bhd.

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