

XTRAVAGANZA

A ROYAL PLAY RAISED HIGH

'Viva Phra Samut' at the Vic Hua Hin restores joy and meaning to Rama VI's old story

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SPECIAL TO THE NATION
Hua Hin

Patravadi Mejudhon's Sanook Express is charging ahead full speed at her enchanted Vic Hua Hin, where her arts-imbued high school, shortly to be joined by a new elementary school and university for the arts, is the focus for enlightenment in both education and dramatic performance.

The latest show, "Viva Phra Samut" ("The Marriage of Neptune"), illuminates Patravadi's penchant for combining both activities. A host of now-successful former students came to perform but also learn more, while her whole school, where arts are a means to learn about life and become good citizens, participated in putting it together.

It seems like no other high-school production – the show is entirely professional and proceeds at a breathtaking pace, packed out with dazzling music, dance and wit.

King Rama VI wrote "Viva Phra Samut" to get people thinking about how to make difficult social choices and to encourage international diplomacy. But Patravadi says performances of the play have become stale and boring.

"It was a challenge for me. I'm very attached to Rama VI because my mother was in his court and my aunt was the first pianist in this country working for him. And I just thought I must do something fun with this script without changing it and show people that he was a great writer and that his play is full of meaning for this country."

Patravadi's production goes at an exhilarating pace, anything but boring. The stage is alive with colour and movement, directed with sergeant-major precision. A crisp-sounding band that includes Patravadi's 16-year-old drummer grandson, Patrakorn Patalavit, plays the snappy new score by Anant Nakkong.

The story presents three potential candidates for the hand of Princess Andromeda. Andre and Constantinos are willing to play tricks to get her, yet would be decent mates but, according to local tradition, to save everyone else from disaster, the Princess absolutely has to wed a Chinaman with a pigtail, who's thought to be a sea god.

Kanant Viranarong as Andre and Piyavit Kantasin as Andre's helper Keril are wonderfully lively and produce great music, the former on ukulele and the latter on violin. They are in fact musicians but wanted to learn to act, says Patravadi. They certainly learned quickly – their acting is lively and with spot-on coordination.

Kantana Phusakit as Christantinos is a trained tenor who teaches singing at Patravadi's school. He too wanted to develop his acting skills and appears alongside the sole current student in the production, Ananchai Tovichen, as Johannes. They also shine in their precision and energy.

Wannasak Sirilar is hilarious as the stereotypical Chinaman. Saravut Marthong has excellent projection



STARRING alongside Patravadi herself, Saravut Marthong is the British sea captain who finally saves the day.

as the weighty British sea captain who finally saves the day. Kirit Chaisinraboon, as the priest Christopher, deliciously conveys single-minded stubbornness. Pichaya Kemasingki offers a struggling King Midas unprepared to block his daughter's sacrifice. And Patravadi herself shows that her body can still flow across the stage gracefully as a grand matron taking tea with the captain.

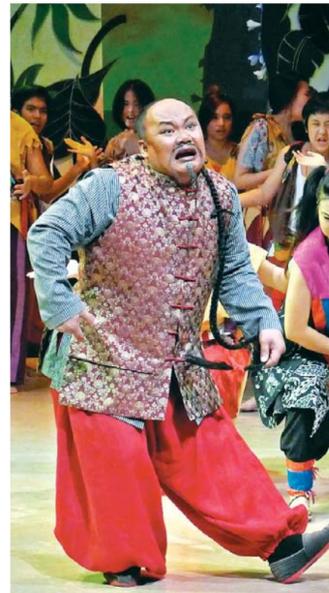
High-school kids are all over the stage, but under such tight direction and discipline that nothing ever seems less than professional. I loved the crowd dancing with fluttering butterfly cut-outs. And the quickstep soldiers were a blast, as were the girls with their twirling flower-covered hoops. This, then, is an evening of effervescent, larger-than-life joy.

The joy, however, comes at the cost of introspection. The one really great – and horribly tragic – human moment is when Christantinos discovers he has lost his bride to his rival and is reduced to tortured anguish. The moment passes quickly. I got the impression that Patravadi preferred not to take her schoolkids too deeply into the dark side of human behaviour. But is one of great acting, and I was torn between lively

cardboard cut-outs and deeper glimpses of the soul. The latter view was underlined by the troubling sight of a foreign sea captain deciding who should marry



MUSICIAN Kanant Viranarong, right, is Andre, one of the suitors for Princess Andromeda's hand. He's assisted by his fiddle-playing helper Keril, portrayed by Piyavit Kantasin.



WANNASAK 'Kuck' Sirilar is hilarious as the stereotypical Chinaman.

TWO MORE SHOWS

- There are two more performances of "Viva Phra Samut", on Saturday and on December 29, at 7.30pm.
- It's in Thai with English surtitles.
- Tickets are Bt500 to Bt900 (50 per cent discount for students). Call (032) 827 814-5 or visit www.VicHuaHin.com.

the princess. Her passive role and a woman's ability and right to make her own choice are not issues to be mulled here.

Don't let this deter you, though. The production is simply too sharp, energetic and completely delightful to miss.

STAGE REVIEW

TO SEE & TO DO

E-mail artsandculture@nationgroup.com



Art for the artists

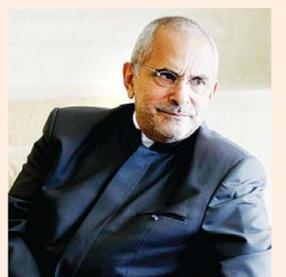
The Stream of Arts to Foster the Artists Foundation celebrates His Majesty the King's 85th birthday with the exhibition "Reflection of HM Royal Father's Teachings" in the Emporium's fashion hall until **tomorrow**. Featuring more than 120 works, artists include Prayad Pongdam, Aree Soothipunt, Nab Sotthibandhu, Supakit Uttaranakorn, Pichai Nirand and Angkarn Kalayanapong. Funds raised will assist ailing artists. Call (02) 259 8345 extension 1084.

Academic tribute

Academic Sulak Sivaraksa marks the 150 years since the birth of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab with a talk celebrating on **Thursday** at 7.30pm at the Siam Society. The prince, who was



Society's vice-president from 1926 to 1943, is considered to be the founder of the modern Thai education system as well as the provincial administration system. He was also a self-taught historian, and one of the most influential intellectuals of his time. On the centenary of his birth in 1962, he became the first Thai to be included in the Unesco list of the world's most distinguished persons. Call (02) 661 6470-7.



A culture of peace

Nobel laureate Dr Jose Ramos-Horta is giving a lecture on "Conflict, Dialogue and Peace in Southeast Asia" on **January 15** at 10am at NIST International School. The event is part of the Asean lecture series "Bridges – Dialogues towards a Culture of Peace" facilitated by the International Peace Foundation. To book a seat, e-mail supraneet@nist.ac.th.

Dancers pay tribute to Paew

National Artists will raise funds for the Thanpuying Paew Snidvongseni Memorial Fund

THE NATION

To celebrate the 109th anniversary of the birth of Thailand's first national artist in the performing arts, Thanpuying Paew Snidvongseni, her descendants, the Thanpuying's memorial fund, her former students and the Fine Arts Department's Office of Performing Arts are stage two charity performances on December 23 at the National Theatre.

They will feature the classical-dance master's most celebrated works – the Sukhothai Dance, Manohra Dance of Sacrifice (an episode from the *lakhon chatri* play "Phra Suthon and Manohra"), the Chuichai Hanao Dance, excerpts from the *lakhon nok* play "Kawee" and a *khon* masked dance from the Ramakien, "The Defeat of Kakanasura".

Onstage will be three other National Artists who, as Thanpuying Paew's most prominent protégés, have inherited her unique style: Dr Supachai Chandrasuwan, Jatuporn Ratanawaraha and Rajana Puangprayong.

Also performing are Bunnag Tantranond, Sudjit Pansung, Pakorn Pornpisut, Wantanee Muangboon and other stars from the Office of Performing Arts.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the Thanpuying Paew Snidvongseni Memorial Fund, which promotes the Thai classical performing arts and provides assistance to senior artists.

ON WITH THE SHOWS

- The shows will be at the National Theatre, 2 Rachini Road in Phra Nakhon District, Bangkok, at 10am and 2pm on December 23, each with different performances.
- Tickets cost Bt100 to Bt1,000 at the theatre box office. For reservations, call (02) 224 1342. For more details, see www.FineArts.go.th.



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HUNTSMAN PUB
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• Cover charge of Baht 800 net incl. 2 drinks.

CHRISTMAS DAY: DECEMBER 25, 2012

ATRIUM
• Christmas Brunch Buffet @ Baht 3,000 net per person. Come 4 pay 2.

HUNTSMAN PUB
• Christmas Buffet Roast @ Baht 1,400 net per person.

Call for reservations at
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