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#SHOWBIZ: RTM Orchestra to entice viewers with Big Band show

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Datuk Mokhzani Ismail Mokhzani says RTM Orkestra Big Band features a stellar line-up of musicians and singer (NSTP/MOHAMAD SHAHRIL BADRI SAALI)

THE Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) Orchestra, which was founded on April 1, 1961, is recognised by the 'Malaysia Book of Records' as the oldest orchestra in the country, with an excellent record of 63 years of entertaining music lovers.

Continuing its legacy, RTM is producing a new television programme for it, RTM Orkestra Big Band.

This features a line-up of renowned musicians and singers under the leadership of music director Datuk Mokhzani Ismail.

The programme produced by the RTM Television Entertainment Unit and Music Services Division highlights the country's great artistes, old and new, namely Salamiah Hassan, Liza Aziz, Roy, Dayang Nurfaizah, Jaclyn Victor, Sean Ghazi, Sharizan Borhan, Aina Abdul, Ernie Zakri, Aisha Retno, Farhan and Ida Mariana collaborating with the orchestra.

RTM broadcasting director-general Datuk Suhaimi Sulaiman makes a special appearance as a host and also performs selected songs.

Delighted with the show's excellent production values, Mokhzani said RTM Orkestra Big Band, which was recorded in Angkasapuri's new orchestra studio, would be RTM's latest programme to be "brought to the international stage".

More importantly, RTM Orkestra Big Band elevates the profiles of artistes, including the current crop of outstanding musicians, composers and singers.

"This programme took time to be realised. Thanks to the help of Suhaimi and everyone in the (RTM) television department, we have produced a world-class programme.

"The orchestra can be seen everywhere. During any concert on RTM, they can be seen performing at the back of each artiste. This year, we have decided to bring them to the 'front'," he said at the RTM Orchestra Big Band press conference at Angkasapuri recently.

Mokhzani said he was careful with the selection of singers so that all of their performances met international standards.

"Singing with an orchestra is not easy. Singers cannot choose their own songs because we choose them. For example, a popular teen idol can sing well on his own but not necessarily with a big band.

"If we sing with a big band, we can't choose a vocalist who sings with a less-than-powerful voice, it will cause his or her voice to be drowned out. The singer must be a vocal powerhouse with a clear voice.

"On stage, there is not much movement and only the singer's voice is heard. So, the singing has to have lots of heart, soul and character.

"A young talent has the potential to give something different to music lovers. This includes Aisha, Aina, Dayang, Sean and the others selected to sing in this programme.

"It is not just about entertainment, we want to promote our singers internationally so that they become like Michael Buble of Canada, who is known for his soulful voice," he said.

When asked about the song selection, Mokhzani said the artistes would sing in various languages, in line with RTM's efforts to promote diverse Malaysian culture on the international stage.

"The RTM Orchestra needs to be a pioneer. We choose songs that have the highest standards and can be played anywhere in the world.

"I'm not worried if this programme does not become as popular as the usual concerts, as long as there is a quality audience, and as long as it serves its purpose of educating the community by sharing its quality music performances," he said.

Suhaimi said he was honoured to be given the responsibility of being a host.

He said the programme aimed to go all out to promote the RTM Orchestra and highlight its latest initiatives to penetrate the global music market.

"This is one of the programmes that we want to highlight for overseas markets so that we can put Malaysian music on the world map further.

"For example, I conduct this programme in English, but at the same time we feature Malay songs. This is one way to build bridges internationally and also promote the versatility of Malaysian music," he said.

The Big Band Orkestra RTM will have six episodes and be broadcast for one hour every Tuesday, at 9pm, starting July 30 via TV2 and RTMKlik.

The composers involved include Mokhzani, Jenny Chin, Jaffar Abd Rahman @ Idris, Mohd Shahhakam Mokhtar, Ruslan Imam, Jimmy Ali, Leonard Yeap, Hadi Maswardi, Luqman Aziz, Lilian Loo Shu Chin, Firdaus Zainal and Azhad Sulaiman @ Zakaria.