

18th September 2011

Inauguration

Peranakan Association Australia NSW Inc

The evening of 18th September 2011 witnessed the long-awaited official launch of the Peranakan Association Australia (PAA) Sydney Chapter. In line with preserving the peranakan heritage and identity, PAA selected Curzon Hall, a heritage 'castle' located in the Sydney suburb of Marsfield for the event. The evening saw some 120 members and guests enjoying an evening of good food, premium wine, loads of laughter and reminiscing when many of Sydney's 'babas and nyonias' gathered to celebrate our unique culture of many Straits-Born Chinese from Malaysia and Singapore.

Official guests representing the Consulate of Malaysia, Malaysian Tourism, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and 'Ayam' Brand were present together with PAA's Melbourne Chapter, President Mr Alfred Chi (Teck Yam), Mrs Soo Chi, and other Melbourne members who travelled up to Sydney to witness the event.

The glittering affair was made especially colourful with so many of the nyonias in their traditional sarong kebayas. And there's no doubting how elegant and glamorous the nyonias looked.

In keeping with the culture, there was also a display of 'bakul siah' many from at least a generation ago, Chinese porcelain ware, some from the 1880s, examples of the traditional and beautiful 'kasut manek' while Mrs Daisy Yap's great grandmother's 150 year old nyonya dress took pride of place. It was certainly generous of Nyonya Daisy Yap to allow her precious 'baju panjang' to be displayed, especially as she had brought the precious item all the way from Malaysia.

The evening started on time - unusual when Malaysians and Singaporeans aren't known for keeping time - with canapes and welcome drinks as the crowd mingled and got to know one another.

The launch opened with a rendition of the Advance Australia Fair (the Australian National Anthem) followed with a brief pause when the PAA Choir started the welcome song.

Sydney-Chapter President Evelyn Tian in opening her President's Speech, shared a congratulatory message from President Peter Wee, Singapore Peranakan Association. She welcomed the guests and members in which she recalled the time in November 2010 when the interest-group meeting was held and the Association formed. She shared PAA's vision of a great future.

The choir, led by Baba Jerry Tan, and his baba singers – Phee Huat, Jim and Donald, delivered the rendition of old Malay songs and a somewhat humorous version of 'Rose Rose I Love You' in English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil while the nyonias – Rose, Lian, Annie, Belinda and Ket entertained with their joget in beautiful, colorful kebayas.

The dinner, a three-course Western meal - alas not Nyonya cuisine - was well received. It was good to see that the food was both tasty and in generous portions, especially in light of many up-scale restaurants serving food that need magnifying glass to see what's on the plate. However, the meal will not be complete without an additional serving of peranakan kueh kueh for dessert, on top of what was provided..

The second musical renditions had many appear on the dance floor, showing off many Peranakan's ability to dance the rumba, cha-cha and of course the 'joget'. Dancing while wearing the 'kasut manek' can be difficult so it wasn't unusual to see many of the nyonias kicking off their 'kasuts' and dance.

The celebrations continued and just before dessert was served, President Alfred Chi delivered his speech and the two Presidents, led the Toast to PAA The choir then returned to encourage a sing-a-long session from song books that were provided at each table. It certainly helped with remembering lyrics and everyone enjoyed the festivities. Nothing like a good old sing-a-long to revive memories and release inhibitions as many made it to the dance floor to show off their ballroom skills.

There's little doubt the official launch of the PAA Sydney-Chapter was a huge success. By the evening's end, everyone was smiling, laughing and appeared to have thoroughly enjoyed themselves. And why not? The combination of good company, good food and good entertainment, plus the bonus of a 'give-away' pack of Ayam brand products and the addition of nyonya cakes with dessert and coffee helped complete an event to be remembered.

Everyone also received the book 'Gateway to Peranakan Culture' which will be useful for many of the younger (and more mature) members, many of whom are showing a real interest in our unique culture.

President Evelyn Tian and her Executive Committee are to be congratulated for seeing the Association's successful Sydney launch. There will be many events of interest to come and the Sydney members can look forward to a strong and viable Peranakan Association Australia (NSW) Sydney-Chapter, one that will help strengthen the ties of the Australian association with its Singapore (hard to believe the Singapore Chapter is 110 years old) and Malaysian chapters.

Phee Huat Cheah
Editor
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