



Sawadee Singing Hotelier

Bangkok is full of surprising personalities. On a recent trip there, IRA HIDAYAH discovered Kamala Sukosol, a multi-lingual philanthropic singing hotelier who lends her voice for a cause.

"Apply gold leaf to the back of the Buddha image." It means that one should not do charitable deeds simply for the praise or imminent rewards. A good deed should go unseen.

This Thai proverb resonates deeply with Kamala as she believes that a person should do charity without expecting anything in return. "This is one truth I wish more people would live by. There are many people out there with the means and ability to help others, but they don't. It's a great pity."

Talent to help

I first heard about her when we were dining at the Siam City Hotel.

We had been given a copy of her *Oldies to Goldies* album which features her singing in French and English. She is at

ease belting out jazzy numbers in foreign languages such as Spanish, Russian, German, Hebrew and Portuguese.

The scion of business tycoon Kamol Sukosol, related that her father bought a piece of land in Pattaya in 1975 to build a hotel. "Even though neither of us had any experience in this kind of endeavour, that's what we did. And that's how we started working together."

Since then, they have gone on to own and run the Siam Hotels and Resorts chain which consists of three properties in Bangkok and Pattaya, with a fourth one called The Siam, a five-star boutique hotel due to open this October.

Ace of hearts

As of 2011, according to Thailand Tatler, Kamala's annual charity concerts have raised over 30 million baht. In 2009, Forbes named her as one of Asia's 48 Heroes of Philanthropy. She humbly notes that the recognition has spurred her to work even harder and she will never stop.

"Before striking out on my own, I often had people soliciting me for help with various charities. I decided it would be better to initiate something on my own as I didn't want to be one of those people who simply writes a cheque and knows nothing more."

"I wanted to really put in effort and raise awareness about certain issues. As it turns out, I was quite successful the first time, so I kept on doing it, year after year."

Having never been professionally trained as a singer, she jokes about being African in her past life as she loves to sing jazz. A graduate of Columbia University with a Masters degree in International Affairs, she considers using her singing skills as the best platform for her altruistic work.

The first concert *An Evening's Entertainment with Kamala Sukosol* was held in 1982 to benefit the



Cardiac Children's Foundation of Thailand.

Since then she has released 22 albums and donates 100% of all proceeds to charity. Other goodwill entities she regularly contributes to include The Red Cross Craniofacial Centre and Ramathibodi Foundation's Liver Transplant from Parent to Child Programme.

"As a mother and grandmother, I think it's very important to help children and families who are less fortunate than me."

Lyrical ties

And truly, apples do not fall far from the tree. Her eldest, daughter Marisa Sukosol Numbhakadi is an accomplished singer, while her elder son, Kamol 'Sukie' Sukosol founded an India record company and her other son, Krissada 'Noi' Sukosol is a professional actor-singer.

She concedes it is not hard juggling family life when you are a business owner. "I love my family, so they are my top priority. I just got back from a two-week vacation in Croatia with my three children and their spouses, and four grandchildren. For me, balance is important, but I've always learnt to put my family first."

Indeed, the lady who is "...on the sunny side of 70 and moving on," still gets a rush from problem-solving as a businesswoman and is also the doting grandmother who would do just about anything to make her grandkids happy.

"With my own children, it's different. I try to stay out of their lives as much as possible as they are busy parents and professionals. I'm there for them when they need me. I think it's important to cut the umbilical cord and let your children sink or swim on their own."

Kamala sums up the Thai indomitable, carefree spirit: "Have fun, never be closed off, but open to everything. Be prepared for new challenges and experiences. And do unto others as you would have them do unto you." ✕