

CONNIE ZAMORA

Having a 'Wicked' good time!

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL  
AJPRESS



Galing Pinoy showcases the triumph of the Filipino spirit -- the Filipino's innate perseverance to rise above. A double entendre, Galing Pinoy literally translates to both coming from (or brought to you by) the Filipino and Filipino ingenuity.

IT doesn't hurt to try. It's the motto that FilAm Connie Zamora had when she entered the Universal Citywalk and the musical Wicked production's promotion the "Wannabe Wicked" contest.

The winner would receive the grand prize, an opportunity of a lifetime, the chance to have a walk-on appearance in a Los Angeles production of Wicked and perform on stage at the Pantages Theatre, where the musical is being housed.

Wicked is a hit musical that retells the famous Wizard of Oz story from a different point of view. Rather than seeing Dorothy, Toto or the Scarecrow as the main characters in the Land of Oz, Wicked tells the poignant story of the two Wicked characters -- Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West

and Glinda the Good. The musical has won 20 major awards including the Grammy Award and three Tony Awards. For the 30-year-old mother of four from Cagayan de Oro, Philippines, the contest was a chance to shine on a big stage. And boy, did she shine.

In front of a large crowd that included family and friends at the Universal Citywalk last week-

end, Zamora, after being picked as a finalist, belted a two-minute rendition of "For Good" from the Wicked musical to a panel of expert judges. She won.

"I wasn't expecting to win," she said to the Asian Journal. "I was really

shocked because there were so many good, talented people [in the contest]. "It was so cool. I remember seeing my family screaming and my kids jumping up and down. It was a really nice feeling. I still can't believe I won."

For winning the contest, Zamora nicknamed "Nile" like the river, received four tickets to Universal Studios, four tickets to the hit musical Wicked prior to her walk-on appearance, the walk-on role with the cast of Wicked and ten tickets the night of her appearance.

**15-minutes of fame**  
Zamora knows that this is her 15 minutes of fame. After the contest, her phone couldn't stop ringing from family and friends. Local NBC and radio stations interviewed her.

"I'm just surprised," she said. "I'll tell you what I told them [after I won] 'I'm so speechless.' I didn't even know what to say. I'm so excited."

Prior to entering the contest, she was just a mother of four working as a field representative for a construction union and every Sunday sang in the local church choir.

She said she sang in a few musicals in high school and studied voice at the Musician's Institute in Hollywood.

Her singing career was sidetracked when she gave birth to her first child.

"I'm just the typical mom," she said. "I'm married with four kids."

It was her brother, Ryan Maulit after watching and becoming a big fan of Wicked, who referred her to the contest.

She admits that she's never seen the show Wicked and was quite embarrassed to be in the competition with so many of the hit musicals fanatics.

Her brother gave her the Wicked CD, something that she would listen to every day.

So on a whim and with nothing

to lose, she decided to enter the contest. Her brother videotaped her singing "For Good", one of the five suggested songs, and sent it in.

"I was like let's see what happens," she said. "I wasn't in there thinking 'I'm in it to win it.' I have kids that love to sing too. I made it a family activity. Me and my daughter joined and it was fun."

After entering the contest, Zamora would check every week the contest website to see if her name made the cut. And every week she would see her name on the list.

"It was really tough competition," she said. "I couldn't believe it."

She was chosen as one of the 15 semi-finalists, and then moved on to the live final performance

held at the Universal City Walk. "I went in there the night of the finals and there's not really much you can do," she said. "I sang the song again but this time, there were a lot of people that night. My cousins and relatives, I have a big Filipino family and they were all there. I sang and did my thing."

After all of the performances, she stood in front of the whole crowd with the rest of the finalists waiting anxiously for their name to be called.

When they announced Zamora's name it took a while before she recognized it.

"I just stood there and I was waiting and when they finally said my name it took a minute to click in because I'm so used to everyone referring me to my nickname Nile."

She won and now, she's basking in the glow of the victory.

The Wicked organizers have not announced when she will make her appearance or which character she will walk on as.

But for Zamora, everything has been a dream come true.

"My daughter said they are probably going to make me play a munchkin character because I'm so short."

To check out Zamora's winning rendition of "For Good" go to <http://www.citywalkhollywood.com/wickedvote/index.html>



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