

Jason Ignacio

Dancing his way to his dreams

by MOMAR G. VISAYA / AJPress

NEW YORK—When Jason Ignacio attended the 24th Annual Mayor's Arts Awards, the highest distinction given by the District of Columbia to individual artists, organizations, and patrons of the arts, he did so without any expectations.

"There was no way I was going to win. I went to the awards night to have fun," Ignacio recalled.

Not only did he have fun that night, Mayor Adrian Fenty of Washington, DC bestowed upon him the Outstanding Emerging Artist Award.

Now, Jason is known in the nation's capital as the Filipino ballet dancer and choreographer, and yes, the outstanding emerging artist, too.

"I was shocked. To receive this award from the Mayor of Washington, DC was very special. I knew when it happened that this was going to change my life," Ignacio told the *Asian Journal* in an interview.

Ignacio, now a professional dancer with CityDance Ensemble, began his dance training at the age of 12.

In the Philippines, he trained at Ballet Philippines, Philippine Ballet Theater and Steps Dance Studio. As a member of the Earth Savers Dreams Ensemble for five years, he traveled across Asia, the United Arab Emirates, Europe, and the United States. In 1997 he was sent by the International Theater Institute of the Philippines to study traditional Korean ritual dance at the University of the Theatre of Nations in Seoul, Korea.

At a very young age, Ignacio was conquering the world through dance.

"I don't come from a well-to-do family so traveling was a luxury but because of ballet, I was able to see parts of the world I only dreamt about before," he said.

In January 2001 and at the age of 19, Ignacio moved to New York City where he continued his dance training with a scholarship at Ballet Hispanico, a fellowship



from the Ailey School, and apprenticed for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. He lived in New York until he moved to Washington, DC in November 2007.

This decision to move halfway across the globe was particularly hard for the young Ignacio but one of his teachers, Sofia Zobel-Elizalde prodded him to take the New York scholarship.

"She believed I had what it takes to survive in New York," Ignacio shared.

For almost six years, Ignacio battled it out in the Big Apple, until he came to a point when he asked himself if it was all worth it. He thought long and hard and came to a conclusion. He packed his bags and moved to the nation's capital.

"When I moved here, it felt as if I finally found a home here in the States," he said.

Ignacio began working on

his craft and created his own identity as he got involved with CityDance Ensemble, an award-winning contemporary repertory dance company.

Less than a year later, he was proclaimed by the *Washingtonian Magazine* as one of the "Top 20 Show Stopper Artists" of Washington, DC.

Honor

Ignacio pointed out that the award was a personal honor that he wanted to offer to the Philippines, the land of his birth.

"It is a very humbling experience to be recognized in the performing arts community. All I can think of is how proud I am to be Filipino," Ignacio said in a statement.

He thanked the Philippine Embassy for its sustained support for Filipino artists in the Washington, DC area.

"Having the generous support from the Philippine Embassy



made me feel accepted and gave me a doorway to give back to my country," he explained.

In a statement, Philippine Ambassador to the US Willy Gaa congratulated Ignacio, saying, "The recognition given by the District of Columbia to Jason Ignacio is a testament to his talent and to the artistry of our people."

"Born and raised in the Philippines, Jason has proven to be an innovative talent here in the United States. He is in a position to achieve even more with his passion for dance and his advocacy for the environment," the ambassador added.

In another statement, CityDance Artistic Director Paul Em-

erson said, "CityDance's commitment to green practices, and to using art as a tool to foster awareness and spark dialogue, is a critical part of who we are and what we do."

"The fact that Jason, an artist from Manila, can find inspiration through this, and can create an idea of such resonance that it warrants a Kennedy Center Commission, is inspiring for all of us," added Emerson.

Nod to heritage

Last February, Ignacio was also awarded the John F. Kennedy Center Millennium Stage Local Dance Commissioning Project for his work entitled *The Mountain*, which centers on the



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.



eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines.


The Millennium Stage Local Dance Commissioning Project, a program that supports the local dance community by nurturing the creation and presentation of new dance work to a wide audience, gives the Commission Award each year to two local choreographers or companies.

Ignacio's *The Mountain*, set to a musical score created by sound data of volcanic seismic readings

interpolated into recognizable musical elements, will be presented on the Millennium Stage of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in September 2009.

"I am integrating some Filipino folk dancing and folklore into *The Mountain* to create awareness and for people to have an idea about my background as an artist," Ignacio shared.






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