

OPINION & FEATURES

Flowing like wine



FASO during rehearsals

ONE of the best musicians of all time, Ludwig van Beethoven, once declared, "Music is the wine which inspires one to new generative processes, and I am Bacchus who presses out this glorious wine for mankind and makes them spiritually drunken." And true enough, music has provided people inspiration throughout the years. It has been like wine flowing endlessly for everyone to enjoy and immerse themselves in.

Music might have evolved over time, changed how we listen to music—from

sic has never wavered, and the fact that regardless of our religious beliefs, our

beliefs. Collectively, we bop our heads to a catchy melody, we hum to a familiar tune, we bask in the triumph of a "nobody" turning into an "Idol," we gasp in disbelief at a controversial lyric and we recall our fondest memories at the sound of a song from yesteryears. We may have our own preferences in terms of genres or types but every musical piece does not fail to resonate with us.

On May 17 at the Saban Theater in Wilshire Blvd., California, at 6pm, music will bring us together once again with the Gala Performance of the first Filipino-American Symphony Orchestra (FASO). This is a historical event which would no doubt unveil the amazing musical talent of Filipinos. And though we may never always agree on the issues dealing with politics or religion or others, it is certain that on that day we will all be delighted and overwhelmed and can agree on one thing: Thank you for the music indeed. ■

EDITORIAL

and advances in technology has vinyl to CD to Ipod—our love for music it is the one thing which binds us all race, our nationality or our political beliefs.

People raring to vote in 2010

A Union Rep. Victor Ortega is right: President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo can run for prime minister in case of a shift to the parliamentary system, as can former Presidents Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada and Corazon Aquino. In fact, running for member of parliament in Pampanga may well be on Ms Arroyo's agenda, for as my Pampangueño friends point out, she has been making quick hops to her province with regularity each week, as at no other time in her career. The problem, however, is that before this happens, there has to be a shift first to the parliamentary system through Charter change.

But majority of the people do not want Cha-cha now, with only a year to go before the presidential elections, as it is being perceived as a means to enable Arroyo to prolong her stay in power. The people are raring to vote for her successor and their local officials in 2010, and I agree with many political pundits and sectoral leaders who opine that this administration would be pushing its luck too far if it forces Cha-cha now. Fortunately, House leaders see this clearly and they are now talking about Cha-cha through a constitutional convention after 2010. If after that time, the shift should come about and Arroyo decides to reenter politics, she doubtless would win in Pampanga, and there would be nothing wrong with her campaigning for the vote of her peers.

I watched on TV the first of the so-called "debates" among a handful of presidential aspirants at the Ateneo de Manila University last Tuesday, and it looked more like a getting-to-know-you session with Richard Gordon, Mar Roxas, Gilbert Teodoro, Ed Panlilio and Francis Escudero than a tough debate with hard questions. But I trust we will get to that point. I thought Gordon and Roxas were fair in their treatment of Arroyo, citing their positive experiences while working with her, and agreeing that her weakness was her failure to rein in corrupt subordinates and relatives. I thought Teodoro was a brave heart to openly espouse Arroyo's cause, given the palpable anti-administration audience recruited by opposition figures there.

In the end he won plaudits from the mostly young people for his lack of self-consciousness in talking about her achievements. But Francis Escudero showed why he's rating well in the surveys: he has no platform except to rabble-rouse in his attacks on Arroyo, which appeals to the anti-Arroyo youth. He sounded "Kenko" several times, sending the young audience into stitches. But to the older folk he did sound hollow.

Last Tuesday, May 12, I observed that with the number of aspirants joining the presidential race, we would again have a minority president.

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

Pundits have noted that in such situation, the winner would be unable to project a strong mandate and become vulnerable to vested interests. A solution to this was offered by Iloilo Rep. Raul Gonzalez Jr. last April 13 when he filed House Bill 6183, which calls for run-off elections between the top two contenders within three weeks after the election. But since a run-off election would require amending the Constitution, Gonzalez proposed that it be treated as a "surgical" constitutional amendment, to borrow constitutionalist Fr. Joaquin Bernas' memorable phrase. That means an amendment process like an ordinary piece of legislation, except it has to be passed by a three-fourths vote in each chamber instead of by a simple majority.

Another problem is that the Constitution requires every amendment be approved directly by the people in a plebiscite. Gonzalez's brother, associate dean Dennis Gonzales of the Ateneo School of Government, pointed out in a recent interview with Cecile Alvarez and me that one difference between our system and Germany's is that in the latter, constitutional amendments are

acted upon only by parliament, which explains why amendments can be passed easily; if any questions arise these are brought to a specially-created constitutional court. In the last 60 years, he said, a total of 60 amendments have been approved, or about one for every year of the Bundestag's existence. Here amendments have to pass through the proverbial eye of the needle.

In a recent chat, Comelec Commissioner Rene Sarmiento was careful to point out that there has as yet been no bidding for election machines and so there is failure of bidding. What has failed is the effort of bidding companies to satisfy the specifications set forth by Comelec's special bids and awards committee, but he stressed that these companies are allowed to file motions for reconsideration and complete requirements within three days.

I asked Sarmiento why the Comelec does not follow the suggestion of election lawyer Romulo Macalintal to use the 1,991 machines the Comelec paid for in 2004 although the P1.3 billion purchase contract with Mega Pacific was invalidated by the Supreme Court. Macalintal recalled that the case was dismissed by the Office of the Ombudsman for lack of evidence, and the money paid was never returned by the supplier. Moreover, he said they were certified as reliable by Science Secretary Estrella Alabastro, and the government continues to pay P4 million annually for their storage.

Sarmiento replied that the new Poll Automation Law, RA 9369, calls for full automation from the precinct level to the transmission stage (at a total cost of P11.3 billion), whereas the Mega Pacific machines are good only for transmission of city and provincial results, i.e., partial automation.

I believe that what keeps the Comelec from touching those machines, more than anything else, is the controversy its mere mention would kick up anew. Nevertheless, I share Macalintal's concern that the automation of the 2010 elections is imperiled by the failure of all the firms to qualify so far, even as the vote counting machines continue to gather dust in the bodegas. (*Inquirer.net*)

Tourism Act will bring tourists and dollars

THE signing into law by the President of the National Tourism Policy Act of 2009 is deemed to bring in foreign tourists—and dollars—and help get the country up and away from global financial straits.

Very happy about the signing is Independent Senator Richard "Dick" Gordon, principal author of Tourism Act of 2009, which, he says, will equip Tourism Secretary Ace Durano and tourism stakeholders with "all the power, funds, and tools that if used properly, will lead to an exponential growth in foreign tourist arrivals."

Dick, a former tourism secretary himself, said he had crafted the bill with "the vision of empowering the entire tourism sector and creating a policy environment conducive to the growth of the industry." The law will make the tourism industry "an engine of investment, employment, growth and national development."

The law establishes "tourism enterprise zones" in strategic areas in the country. Former chairman of the Subic Metropolitan Authority, Dick proved that tourism can transform wastelands into havens for investment. In Subic, investments reached \$3 billion a few years after the United States military abandoned it.

The new tourism law provides measures that will make it easier for foreigners to set up business within tourism zones. Section 77 of the law mandates the establishments of offices where prospective Tourism Enterprise Zone investors can register to obtain incentives and benefits as well as all necessary licenses and permits.

Section 86 of the law provides for incentives

such as income tax holidays spanning six years which will be given to investors; gross income taxation of only 5 percent; 100 percent exemption on all taxes and customs duties on the importation of capital equipment; and the exemption of transportation and spare parts from tariffs and duties.

Foreign investors will also be allowed to lease land in the Philippines for a period of 50 years which can be renewed once for a period of 25 years.

It will also be noted that during his stint as tourism secretary, Dick launched the "WOW Philippines!" campaign, which he used to transform the country's tourism industry, then plagued by a negative image of kidnappings and the SARS disease. The WOW! Program resulted in the increase in foreign tourist arrivals from under one million in 2001 to two million a year in 2003.

During the dark days of martial rule in the '70s and middle '80s, a group of Christians persevered in advancing church planting activities. Hotels became venues for those who wanted to study God's word. The hotel ministry strategy started in Hongkong in 1973 and was brought to the Philippines in the middle of the '70s. Bible study and worship services were held in government and private offices, hotel function rooms, cinemas and restaurants. Dr. Eli Javier conducted a Friday night Bible Study at the Where Else Disco House of the Manila Intercon Hotel. Thirty-five members of this

group, met at the basement of the then Sulo restaurant.

In May 1984, this small band of committed brothers and sisters started Light of the World Christian Center, with Dr. Javier as the founding pastor. From this group, some Christian workers started their own ministers in other places. Today, the ministry has since grown, and is now spread out in Luzon and Mindanao. Light of the World is today ministering in about 202 churches, outreaches and cell groups.

To commemorate Light of the World's 25th founding anniversary, a three-day thanksgiving celebration and grand reunion will be held May 15-16. Dr. Javier and Rev. Dr. Arnold Santonia, among others, will conduct a seminar for all their pastors on May 15. Other activities are a thanksgiving banquet, during which Rev. Atty. Omar Vigilia will give the inspirational message and the launching of offerings and pledges for the spiritual multi-purpose facility in Antipolo City donated by the Suarez family as a house of prayer and fasting. The Sunday worship service on May 17 will gather all the Light of the World family to a praise and worship celebration, with a message to be delivered by Rev. Dr. Santonia.

Speaking of tourist destinations, Flor's Garden in Antipolo is attracting local tourists. The garden is more than just five hectares of foliage, flowers and trees. It's an educational destination for nature lovers, using as it does, natural gardening

methods. Farmhands make fertilizers and insecticides without the use of chemicals, but rather with materials around and inside the garden.

Visitors, who include young students from private and public schools, banking executives and private entrepreneurs from Metro Manila, have fun exploring Flor's Garden that is divided into four sections. Jardin ng Buhay consists of edible plants which many have considered as weeds or just ornaments, like Blue Ternate. Botika Garden or God's Pharmacy abounds with medicinal plants, herbs, even weeds, such as the lowly Daamong Maria that is excellent for cuts and wounds. No Filipino Should Be Hungry! tells visitors about plants on which people during the war and peace time, can survive on—like *Takip Kuhol*, or the Gota Kola, which is a memory enhancer, camote and talinum, native spinach, and the tiniest pipino. The Grow Fresh Air! Section consists of plants that best take out gases and carbon dioxide from the air. A portion is devoted to a seedling nursery for those who want to grow their own gardens at home.

Then the young and old tourists have plenty of exercise as they walk on a hiking trail to a vermiculture section where natural fertilizers are made, then to a pen housing two non-smelling pigs, then to a coffee nursery, a kalamansi orchard, and a mango plantation, a bamboosetum (owned by the sister of Flor's Garden owner), and a forest of old and young trees planted by youngsters headed by Ramon Gozon Madrid. Surrounding the farm are creeks, over one of which a hanging bamboo bridge has been built. (*Philstar.com*)

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