

SABAN THEATRE, BEVERLY HILLS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER A historical stage for a historical debut

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO
AJPRESS



Rabbi David Baron, President of Saban Theatre in Los Angeles

IT IS ONLY FITTING that the very first Filipino American Symphony Orchestra (FASO) will hold its inaugural concert in an historic stage on May 17, Sunday. The prestigious venue for FASO's gala concert, Saban Theatre, is one of Los Angeles' Art Deco Masterpieces which has been the venue of many historical events in the world of the performing arts.

The president of Saban Theatre, Rabbi David Baron, expressed his excitement for the forthcoming concert. "We are very honored to be the stage and venue for the Filipino American Symphony Orchestra's gala concert. The Filipino American community shares so many of our important values and high regard for culture and the arts. For all the important roles they have played in our country, the Filipino Americans are so highly regarded. They are among the most respected communities in America for their contribution to society and their superb artistry," said Rabbi David Barron.

Originally named the Fox Wilshire, the 1910-seat theatre in Beverly Hills first opened in 1930 as a vaudeville movie house. Designed by renowned theatre architect Charles S. Lee, the Fox Wilshire building serves as an interesting example of Lee's early Art Deco style with its rich plaster work and heavy sculpture. The art deco hall and entrance hall were bedecked in silver and black with coral drapery and seats.

Fox West Coast Theatres built Saban Theatre to house their first run feature films. For the first 50 years of its life, it served as one of the premier movie palaces in Los Angeles and has hosted numerous premieres and special events. Some of the notable premieres and special screenings in the theatre are the 1953 premiere of *How*

to Marry a Millionaire starring Marilyn Monroe and Lauren Bacall, the first Donald Duck cartoon in cinemascope by Walt Disney *Grand Canyonscope* -which ran with the studio's classic feature *20,000 Leagues Under the SEA*, the 1960's special screening of *GI Blues* starring Elvis Presley and attended by Ronald Reagan, and the 1970's exclusive engagement of the film *Woodstock*.

In 1981, the Saban Theatre was renovated and converted to a stage venue. It has seen many exciting concerts and productions including Billy Crystal's *700 Sundays*, Chris Botti Live in Concert featuring Sting and Paula Cole, The National Ballet of Spain, The Australian Pink Floyd Show, and shows of Richard Pryor, Laurie Anderson and Spandau Ballet, among others.

"The Saban Theatre is one of the most magnificent theatres in Los Angeles," said Rabbi David. "It is our mission to be the stage and venue for historic events such as this; to be the center for the performing arts. We welcome different ethnic cultures to come together to Saban and share their culture with others in the city. Its historic stage is the perfect match for FASO's gala concert," Rabbi Baron added. ■

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plished pianist who plays the contrabass in FASO, is optimistic. "I'm very excited," Pi said via email. "I feel that something good will come out of this, in terms of lifting the spirits of our people and, hopefully, instilling in them the feeling of unity and pride as Filipinos."

Pi, who described himself as "an engineer by profession and a musician by avocation," champions rondalla music in Southern California. He teaches rondalla courses at UC Riverside (he also taught the first ever Philippine string ensemble at UCLA). "I've never played in an orchestra," he wrote. "I'm more of an aficionado as far as playing the bass is concerned. It's gratifying to know that I can contribute in some way to a wonderful and successful concert."

"Bob is really doing a good job, considering that he has to manage individuals with different levels of experience and ability," Pi said of their orchestra leader. "Overall, I believe he has the right temperament and patience to lead it."

Pi is confident that a bright future awaits Faso after it makes its hot-ticket gala night debut tomorrow evening at 6. He explained: "The ultimate goal of FASO is to establish itself as a legitimate institution that nurtures Filipino talents and promotes the beauty of our culture, particularly in music. I'm all for it. I believe that, as Filipinos, we should continually strive to make people aware of our heritage through the musical medium." ■

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