

God, Sex and Blue Water

NEW YORK – What happens when you bring an age-old religious tradition from the Philippines to the modern world of Hoboken, New Jersey? Conflict, one may say, and in Linda Faigao-Hall's play *God, Sex and Blue Water*, there's more than enough conflict among the characters to keep the play afloat.

Laling Kintanar (Lydia Gaston) and her daughter Clarita (Leanne Cabrera) move to Hoboken from an island around Cebu in the Philippines to live with Laling's brother Max (Andrew Eisenman). Devout believers, mother and daughter bring with them their religious beliefs and idiosyncrasies, including Laling's self-crucifixion, much to the consternation of her now Americanized brother Max.

The virginal Clarita left the convent as a novice and in more ways than one, she gets culture-shocked the moment she steps on American soil. A dashing young American man named Ryan McCarthy (Brian Andersen) enters her life and makes it just a little bit more complicated.

Clarita gets smitten with Ryan and thinks that she might be falling in love with him. Her personal conflict is two-fold, one with her mother, who doesn't like the idea of her falling in love this soon; and the other with Ryan because she is keeping a big secret

from him, a secret too huge she fears he won't ever understand. The fact that Ryan is agnostic makes their relationship more challenging and Clarita begins to question if God intended for her to meet him so that she could change the way he thinks, and not the romantic way she had hoped.

The four actors bring to life characters that are humanely flawed and do so wonderfully. Gaston is magnificent with her performance of a true and unrelenting believer, who would have herself crucified every single year because of a vow she had to make when God gave her a gift, Clarita.

Cabrera as Clarita was such a sight to behold. She was both enigmatic and ethereal and made the viewers believe that she herself has a gift from God, and that this gift would be gone if she continued her relationship with Ryan. She delivered her lines flawlessly and poignantly and her moments questioning her conflicted self were among the play's highlights.

Eisenman and McCarthy provide stable support to the mother and daughter tandem, with Eisenman providing some comic relief to a story a few critics would call "too heavy". Kudos to director Nelson Eusebio III for keeping the story-telling fluid with just the right pacing and for tackling a topic other organizations wouldn't touch even with

by MOMAR G. VISAYA
AJPress
a ten-foot pole.

During the short Q-and-A that followed after the show, Faigao-Hall relayed the story that for the past ten years, she had been looking for a theater organization which would stage this play.

Her quest ended when Living Image Arts told her that they were interested in bringing the play to life.

"We picked up *God, Sex and Blue Water* not because it is written by a Filipino but because it is good. It is our mission to stage compelling and innovative new work," Mia Vaculik, Living Image Arts' executive director told the Asian Journal.

Asked if she ever felt giving up when no one would pick up her story, Faigao-Hall remarked, "All the time. I actually gave up on it."

"I am very happy to see it on-stage finally after ten years. I find that a victory of sorts. They did such a great job," added Faigao-Hall, who earned her MA in English Literature from New York University and doctoral studies in Educational Theater at Bretton Hall College in England.

God, Sex & Blue Water is Faigao-Hall's fifth play on Theater Row since 2004, after *Sparrow* (LIA), *The A-Word* (Diverse City Theater Company), a revival of *The Female Heart* (June 2007) and its world premiere with Ensemble Studio Theater and DCT in 2004. She has been featured on Asian Journal's Galing Pinoy for all her achievements in the theater world.

For her, watching the characters she created come alive on stage is an amazing experience. "It's like heaven on earth," she quipped.

Faigao-Hall has just completed a full-length play, *Dying in Boulder* and is currently working on a new one entitled *Lay of the Land* about a Filipina activist, fleeing from the Marcos dictatorship, looking for a home in the East Village in the 80's. ■

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