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'Karim at Jasmin' Dazzles Guests at Consular Corps Benefit Ball

by DR. RAMON SISON-GELUZ

In 1994, the International Committee for the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra began its tradition of honoring the Consular Corps and featuring a different country every year in a benefit ball.

For its 58th International Benefit Ball, the Philippines was the featured country in *The Sights and Sounds of the Philippines* and the Philippine Consulate made a decision that the night's cultural presentation would be excerpts from Dr. Ramon Sison Geluz's multi-awarded *Karim at Jasmin*, the first ever original Filipino opera performed in the United States.

The opera presentation also featured dancers of the Kultura Philippine Folk Arts. According to Consul General Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon, based on the reactions from the guests consisting of members of the diplomatic corps, their spouses, and staunch supporters of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philippine Consulate, *Karim at Jasmin* proved to be one of the most spectacular cultural presentations since its inception in 1994, and the most elaborate of all the previous cultural programs.

As the night's emcee, popular TV personality, Janelle So, introduced Dr. Ramon Sison Geluz and Kultura's founders, Celia Defato and Dr. Nadina Jose, gongs and drums began to herald the beginning of the opera as the wedding party of Prince Karim, portrayed by Cres San Jose and Princess Rajita, Joan Cano, with the evil General, Ogie de Guzman and the High Priestess, Lorelei Palacpac. They descend from the sweeping staircase towards the center of the Grand Hall of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion amidst the dazzling massive chandeliers and bejeweled ceiling studded with glass diamond ornaments.

Guests couldn't help but peek through the massive table center pieces made of orange, rust, and red colored tropical flowers and gaze in awe at the spectacular costumes of the performers as the Kultura dancers perform the *Singkil* bamboo dance with utmost skill. While effects of rain and thunder fill the ballroom, and Karim sings his praises to the Goddess of the Lake, portrayed by Everlita Rivera-David, the Kultura dancers perform the graceful *Kinakulangan* dance with sparkling jeweled umbrellas and flowing scarves. The audience fell in love with *Karim at Jasmin*, the water nymph, played by Maria Cristina Navarro as they sing their haunting duet. The power of Everlita's voice is felt as the Goddess of the Lake bids fare-

well to her daughter, Jasmin, who has become a mortal to marry Prince Karim.

The audience is once more intrigued in *The Battle of the Lake*, an operatic Quintet performed by the opera singers while Kultura performs the *Kuntao Silat* war dance. The majority of the audience become teary-eyed and some are actually moved to tears while the dying Karim said his farewell to his wife Jasmin and their unborn child, and Jasmin sings her amazing aria, *Jasmin's Lament*, for a coloratura soprano. The finale number is an unforgettable

rendition of *The Child of Peace* as Jasmin presents her newborn baby to Karim's people and is blessed by the departed spirits of the General, Rajita, and Karim while the *Vinta* dance is performed by a skillful dancer on top of bamboo poles and the other dancers mimic the fishes in the lake as the newborn leader is presented to his people.

At the end of the performance, amidst thunderous applause, bravos,

and standing ovation audience, the cast of *Karim at Jasmin* together with the Kultura dancers are joined by Dr. Ramon Sison Geluz and Ms. Celia Defato. The evening's performance was directed by Dr. Nadina Jose.

Karim at Jasmin with Kultura has planned shows scheduled in Los Angeles in September and October this year.

For more information, please visit www.karimatjasmin.com. ■

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