

OPINION & FEATURES

Working out a merger

FORMER President Fidel Ramos has a lot to say about the recent merger of the administration's Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) with Lakas, saying that it was done with "undue haste." He feels that there is a reason why details about the merger were not presented to most of the Lakas members, and that it did not go through "proper consultation with all the party stakeholders."

Ramos, however, who is the chairman emeritus of Lakas and co-founder of the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats, believes that the merger should have been handled properly.

Hardly a week, the merged political powerhouse are said to be showing cracks. Some have even said that disputes between members of the parties might result in the divorce. Former Speaker of the House and Lakas co-founder Jose De Venecia boldly predicted that the merged party would eventually collapse. He in fact, resigned as Lakas president emeritus on the eve of the merger.

It seems that the Philippine political machinery

is working up on speed. We would like to believe that the merging of two strong political parties could help narrow down vote-worthy candidates for the 2010 elections, but then again being able to compromise, agree and work on a single ideology takes more than just a simple merger. The sad part is, the whole nation has witness politicians bicker with each other rather than try to be able to get along.

Whatever happens in the end, it is our hope that leaders of these two parties will remember the main reason why Lakas and Kampi were established—and that is, to serve the country and its people. (AJPress)

EDITORIAL



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, with Congressman Arthur Defensor (L), member of the unification committee, and Gabriel Claudio, presidential political adviser and head of the unification committee, announces the merger of Lakas-CMD and Kampi, saying this is proof that the 2010 elections will push through.
Inquirer Photo by Lira Dalangin-Fernandez

A Promising Gala Debut

by THOMAS AUJERO SMALL
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THERE was a riot of press coverage in the Los Angeles Filipino and Asian media over this event. But in the local mainstream and music media, there was absolutely zero coverage. I suppose this makes sense, in that the occasion was huge among Filipinos, but a non-event to Los Angeles at large. But it seems odd that the dominant media is so oblivious to a major part of its population and potential audience. I imagine that in our ongoing cultural and electronic revolution, this may be one aspect of journalism that will change.

Filipino culture has a very musical history. There is an ancient Asian and Malay-Polynesian folk heritage, with the *Kulintang* gongs of the south and the songs and dance traditions of the north. There is also a Western European influence that first came to the Philippines in the 16th century with the Spanish conquistadors. This evening began with the projection of black and white archival footage of the African-American singer Nat King Cole stunningly performing one of the most popular and beautiful Filipino folk songs, *Dahil Sa'yo*. The Saban Theater, formerly the Wilshire Theater, is a beautifully restored western Art Deco palace. In a typical architectural plan for a theater of that period, there is one balcony and elaborate lobbies on two levels. The silver, black and gold decorations surrounding the proscenium arch are spectacular, as are the angular stained-glass windows in gray and pale green on each side of the hall. The room was about two thirds full, with an almost entirely Filipino crowd dressed to the nines.

The orchestra opened with the American national anthem followed by the Philippine national anthem, for which the audience joined to provide the lyrics. The conductor turned around to conduct the audience as well as the orchestra. A symphonic suite of folk songs arranged by the 20th century Filipino composer Lucio D. San Pedro was the first real challenge. The orchestral performance felt a little tentative, even anemic at first. This was not a surprise for their first concert. The surprise was the excellence of the flute and clarinet solos, and how crisp they were, overall. The audience interrupted

the best passages with spontaneous applause.

The Overture from the Barber of Seville and the Tchaikovsky waltz from *Sleeping Beauty* served as the warhorse showpieces. The orchestra and conductor were delightfully nimble, even if their tone and blend left much to be desired. The dynamics were subtle and agile, and they showed their chops in the fast sections. The horn player was accomplished and the conductor displayed both professionalism and showmanship.

Soprano Stephanie Reese, a popular Filipina singer, was thrilled to be onstage with the orchestra and began with a medley of Tagalog songs. She began the truly "pops" part of the evening, performing with a microphone. But the songs themselves make up an intriguing genre of song, vocal melodramas that are in a sense parallel to the tradition of the *chanson française*. These Filipino songs are romantic to the extreme, even sentimental, but gorgeously evocative and melodic. Nat King Cole's *Dahil Sa'yo* is available on YouTube. Ms. Reese mentioned that she had just returned from Manila, and that the buzz in musical circles there was all about this orchestra. Her version of *Nessun Dorma* was full-powered and entertaining, if not as brilliant as Pavarotti.

Tenor Pete Avedaño offered the finest performance of the evening. Although he too was amplified, his light finely textured voice was ideal for art songs. His performance seemed to reach beyond the range of a typical Filipino pop singer (which is actually nothing to sneeze at) toward the training and quality of a classical tenor. Composer Lucio D. San Pedro studied in the Netherlands and

at Juilliard in the 1940's, before returning to the Philippines and eventually being named a National Artist. His song *Sa Ugoy ng Duyan*, described as a lullaby, is written in a Western mode but beautifully uses the cadences of the vowels and consonants of the Tagalog language. As lovely as the Irish "Danny Boy," Avedaño's performance was heart-rending. Selections from *Phantom of the Opera* closed the first half of the concert, accompanied by an aerial dance that was like a trapeze act from *Cirque du Soleil*.

In the second half of the concert the opening was that of a mature regional orchestra. Mindanao Sketches by Col. Antonio Buenaventura, one of the best-known Filipino composers, is a significant orchestral tone poem that represents Filipino music with honor. Comparable to the Mexican composer Revueltas, the piece was impeccably played, including rhythmic, percussive shouts and clapping from the orchestra. The folk dance troupe that performed in the aisles of the hall was also outstanding, comparable to Bayanihan, the Philippine National Dance Troupe. This was the Filipino-American Symphony Orchestra at its best, in excellent music that is played by no other ensemble.

There have been a number of classical ensembles that have been started over the last several years here in Los Angeles and not all of them have thrived even though they had auspicious beginnings. If this orchestra needs to fulfill a "pops" roll in its community in order to prosper, perhaps it has discovered a strong business plan to support and articulate Filipino music to a larger audience.

This symphony may have to serve as both the Hollywood Bowl and Disney Hall. The rest of the concert, including the popular singer Joey Albert, satisfied their sizable audience's desire for Filipino pops. Ms. Albert's comment was intriguing: "This is the unfolding of the dream of every Filipino who dreams of seeing our music on the world stage."

For her rendition of *Bayan Ko*, another famous Filipino patriotic song, Ms. Albert was joined by three other singers to form a quartet. Their operatic rendition of this Filipino classic earned an instant standing ovation. The final two pieces of the concert were examples of authentic contemporary classically oriented compositions that were not very strong. Although the pieces were well played, and there was an impressive violin solo by the concertmaster. The first encore, the Theme from *Rocky*, affectionately and humorously honored today's most celebrated Filipino, world champion boxer Manny Pacquiao. The final encore, another quartet rendition of a patriotic song, *Ako ay Pilipino*, was also a delight.

I also recently attended a lecture/concert with the Filipina composer Christine Muyco and the pianist Nita Quinto that demonstrated that Filipino composition and scholarship are absolutely at the leading edge of classical music. These musicians could have been onstage at New York's Poisson Rouge or at IRCAM. They clearly had European classical training and were also steeped in the ethnomusicology of their region as well as in the latest developments in post-classical music, worldwide. If they could join forces with the FASO, it could be remarkable. ■



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1150 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90017-1904
Tel.: (213) 250-9797 • Fax: (213) 481-0854
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