

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

# FASO makes mark in history

PAGE A1 ◀

songs, and kundimans (romantic songs). The opera and pop numbers were provided by three contemporary Fil-Am singers and a Filipino-Canadian singer—Stephanie Reese, Pete Avendano, Kit Navarro and Joey Albert.

Fil-Ams interviewed for their impressions by Asian Journal had a singular thread: the FASO's debut performance is impressive and it deserves seconds. "I think that they (FASO) can pull in a larger audience," offers John Mina, who is one of the directors of the Jazz Society of the Philippines, USA (JazzPhil). "How about the Hollywood Bowl next time." Rex Sampaga, Mina's co-director at JazzPhil is equally impressed, saying "FASO is quite amazing in this concert." Grace Walker of Glendale's Commission on the Status of Women is already dreaming of a moonlit night concert at the Hollywood Bowl.

Opera singer Stephanie Reese, fresh from a five-month singing stint in the Philippines, did a turnaround and sang Filipino songs for the first time. And for someone who did not speak Tagalog at all, Ms. Reese did a very fine job, not missing a word; and her American accent made her Tagalog songs sound even more endearing to the concertgoers.

"I was more nervous this time," admits Reese, who came in from

abroad barely a few days before the concert. "I wanted to show the other half of my music; that I really love Filipino culture. I feel so honored to be a part of this event that is celebrating our roots," she told Asian Journal.

Marikit (Kit) Navarro who played Jazmin, and Pete Avendano, who played Karim, in Dr. Ramon Sison-Geluz's highly acclaimed opera, "Karim and Jazmin," breezed through their numbers with amazing virtuosity.

FASO had a few challenges as well. It is composed of musicians with different levels of musicianship, according to Bob Shroder, who agreed to talk to this writer immediately following the concert. "We are not like the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra," Shroder tells Asian Journal. He said that FASO is basically a volunteer symphony orchestra. Some of the members are college students, and some are part time musicians who cannot commit to a weekly rehearsal schedule.

"I think everybody did an excellent job by wholeheartedly giving their best musicianship," Shroder said. "This concert is phenomenal because there is no gap between the orchestra and the audience. We are totally connected, and we are always reaching out, right from

the beginning."

"From the time we played Star Spangled Banner, we hit our strides. We were playing what they (audience) crave, and apparently what they were hearing were the songs that they liked," Shroder opined.

FASO played mostly classical ballets, opening with a Tchaikovsky composition. Then played compositions by legendary Filipino composer Lucio San Pedro, and a medley of Filipino kundimans (romantic songs) inspired by American composer Bernard Greene;

a segment from the popular opera, Phantom of the Opera with an added visual layer provided by an aerial dancer that interpreted the music with dance movements while hanging twenty feet high from the ceiling.

"This is a great start," comments seasoned producer Ted Benito. He said, however, that he had not watched a concert where the conductor also played the role of master of ceremonies. "To hear our music as lushly played is absolutely phenomenal. But there is room for improvement," Benito said.

"I cried after the first number," attests Becca Godinez-Miranda. "I cried after the second and third numbers. It is well worth the effort. Bravo!" Jazz pianist and composer David Benoit—whose career as a smooth jazz musician bloomed after a Manila concert in the late 70s—was agog. "I am really impressed by how they delivered the music," he told Asian Journal. "I like their (FASO's) music; it's like being in Manila again." ■

# All praises for FASO

PAGE A1 ◀

and proud to be a Filipino.

The people who trooped to the Saban Theatre to watch the Filipino American Symphony Orchestra gala concert were all one in heaping praises for the evening's historical performance. Here are some special quotes from some special people:

"The concert more than met my expectations. They truly make us proud to be a Filipino. They've given added honor again to the Filipino American community here in Southern California. Not only in Southern California but throughout the United States because they are the first and only Filipino American Symphony Orchestra. So, I encourage everyone to come and support their future performances. It's a treat. Invite your friends here in the US to come and witness their great performance."—Philippine Consul General Mary Jo Aragon, Los Angeles Consulate

"This is so phenomenal. I just think it's about time we have this. I'm so proud to be a part of this evening."—Jennifer Paz, formerly of *Miss Saigon*

"It was great and I'm so happy and proud that Roger and Cora had the FASO to show the world and the rest of the US that we have it too and to make use of our local talents and not have to import talents from the Philippines to do things here in the US."—Celia Defato, Kultura Philippines Folk Arts

"The orchestra was amazing. This one is specifically special because it's really showing the culture of the Philippines. I've never seen anything like it. I've seen people cry in the event. It's so emotional. I'm organizing an event with the Los Angeles mayor to get exposure for this orchestra. This is an amazing event."—Hogan Lee, Asian Professional Exchange

"I think this is the best thing the Filipinos have ever done and I'd like to say congratulations to Roger and Cora because I think this is going to be a nostalgic but very historical event."—Eddie Sotiangco, Chairman, Sotiangco Group of Companies

"The concert is awesome. It's outstanding and right now, I'm speechless. FASO, you guys are like off the charts right now. I mean that!"—Edsel Godwin Sotiangco

"This is fantastic. You made history. You made the Filipino community very, very proud. This is immeasurable. Great show!"—Errol Santos, Business Development Consultant, Hollywood Presbyterian Center

"It's amazing how Filipinos are coming out and showing what we're really made of. It's so exciting. Filipinos are starting to show their talents and making it known to the rest of the world."—Rich Cabael, CEO, VuQo Inc.

"Very passionate. Very exciting. First of many, I hope."—David Benoit, Composer, Pianist, Conductor

"This is actually the first time I'm watching an orchestra and I'm actually speechless. It's just a very exciting thing. I love it."—R. Santos, Los Angeles

"I think it's awesome. It's really, really nice."—Mary Ann Pagsibigan-Pimenta, Bander Law Firm

"We enjoyed it very much. Very good work!"—Dan Manuel/ Glen Treibitz, Hollywood Piano

"I'm so happy this evening. Dreams really do come true, you know. Roger and Lito, congratulations! We keep doing big things for the Filipino. Yay!"—Cecile Ramos, president of Historic Filipinotown Neighborhood Council

"I think it's been an amazing performance. It's a pride and a pleasure to watch so many talented people of all ages perform. It's so great to be here."—Catherine Banales, Los Angeles County Music Center

"Quite exciting! Hopefully, there'll be many, many more concerts to see."—John Claude Gummo, The Cascades. ■

# Charice makes single debut on Oprah

PAGE A1 ◀

The song is partly an emotional prayer whose lyrics are about what one would say in a letter to God.

It has just been posted on YouTube—the video-sharing website where the world discovered Charice—and is the first single in her forthcoming debut album being produced by her musical mentor, David Foster.

It is actually a cover version of a composition by Diane Warren (who also wrote Aerosmith's *I Don't Want To Miss a Thing*; Celine Dion's *Because You Loved Me*; and Toni Braxton's *Unbreak My Heart*).

**Oprah show**

The 16-year-old Charice first sang the song on America's highest-rating TV show *Oprah* only on Monday—the day it was also released as a digital download.

On the Amazon Bestsellers chart, *Note to God* ranks behind the Black Eyed Peas's *Boom Boom Pow* but has overtaken Lady GaGa's *Poker Face*, Miley Cyrus' *The Climb*, Taylor Swift's *Love Story*, Beyoncé's *Halo*, and Coldplay's *Viva La Vida*.

On the iTunes chart, Charice's single is ahead of Eminem's *Beautiful*.

Charice was again featured in a high-profile show on May 9 at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she

performed with Foster in a tribute concert for Celine Dion.

**June 12 celebration**

On May 24, Charice will make her second appearance as a guest on the Italian musical variety show *Ti lascio una canzone (Leavin' You a Song)*. Its producers reportedly insisted that she return after having sung in the program's season premiere in April.

She comes home to Manila on June 8 to participate in the Philippine Independence Day celebrations on June 12. She flies back to the United States on June 13 to finish recording her album.

Charice's local music label, Star Records, has released her second Philippine album, *My Inspiration*, which features original compositions by Filipino songwriters and a cover of Helen Reddy's "You and Me Against the World"—in which she duets with her mother Raquel, who informally trained her to become a singer.

*My Inspiration* has likewise landed at No. 2 on the best-selling local albums chart of Odyssey Music & Video, a nationwide record store chain.

Charice is scheduled to have a major concert on June 27 at SMX Convention Center beside SM Mall of Asia in Pasay City. ■

# NV officials want more people to visit Las Vegas

PAGE A1 ◀

he added during the senate committee meeting last May 13.

Sen. Reid's statement came as he discussed the importance of tourism to Nevada, as well as his efforts in Congress to boost tourism around the country.

Nevada has been suffering from lackluster tourist visits since the start of the year, due to the sagging national and global economy.

In Las Vegas alone, visitor volume dwindled by 8.7 percent from January to March this year, compared to the same period last year. Convention attendance, meanwhile, dropped by almost 30 percent during the same period, data from the Las Vegas Conventions and Visitors Authority showed.

This has been a problem for Las Vegas residents who work in

the hotel and casino industry that has been implementing persistent massive layoffs since last year.

MGM Mirage, Nevada's largest employer, has reduced its full-time workforce by more than 1,000 in Nevada over the past year, and Harrah's Entertainment, the world's largest gaming company, has laid off about 2,000 workers in the state since January.

"The recent decline in visitors to Nevada has unfortunately contributed to the worst state budget shortfall in the state's history," Sen. Reid said during the May 13 senate hearing.

For this reason, the local government in Nevada has been pushing for increased promotions for tourists and business conventions alike.

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