



Hi! Society
By MONET LU

La Greta: Irresistibly Complicated

WHEN IT COMES to glamor, sophistication and class, one Philippine showbiz personality distinctly glitters. Gretchen Barretto sparkles in an unparalleled way. She's intriguing, beautiful, volatile and as her latest album would profess, complicated.



Gretchen Barretto

artist.
This is the Gretchen I know—passionate and expressive. I also know her to be resilient in the face of challenges. To me, Gretchen possesses the stuff legends are made of. To La Greta—enjoy life, enjoy love!

The author is a Marikina-born, award-winning celebrity beauty stylist with his own chain of salons across Southern California and Las Vegas, Nevada. Ultimately, Monet is known as an all-around artiste who produces sold-out fashion and awards shows, as well as unforgettable marketing campaigns. Monet is also the founder of the revolutionary all-natural beauty products available at www.skinbymonet.com. He supports many humanitarian efforts to include projects in his native Marikina, The Bantay Bata Foundation, and many more. To contact Monet, please visit www.monetsalon.com for more information.

I met Gretchen many moons ago during her first few trips to the US. She was young, fresh and so very delightfully *kikay*. She is super *makuwento* and just interesting to be around. I remember it was around that time when she was trying to get over a break-up with a showbiz boyfriend. It was also a time when she was just getting to know her current partner, billionaire Tonyboy Cojuangco.

With our common friend Mary Ann Pimenta, I've produced shows involving Gretchen here in the US, including Reflections 4, where she flew to LA unexpectedly at the last minute to model a bridal masterpiece by Louie Mamengo while being escorted by Richard Gomez.

It was in one particular project that we had a disagreement—very typical of a star-producer relationship. I guess it was serious enough to create a falling out and we never saw or spoke to each other for a long time after that incident.

From then on, I would just see her on TFC giving interviews about her controversial life. We weren't on friendly terms but I was still enthralled by the very candid and public Gretchen Barretto we all have come to know and love.

About two years ago, while vacationing in Manila, our friend Mary Ann invited me to lunch. Mary Ann said Gretchen was going to be there and that she wanted to see me.

Upon arriving at the restaurant, Gretchen was so welcoming and sweet to me. She even said *hindi nya matandaan na nag-away kami*. I still had the fragments of the argument stored in my head but to Gretchen, that

chapter was a bygone.
That's when I realized, Gretchen is the type of person na *hindi nagtatanim ng sama ng loob*.

She knows how to forgive and forget. Instantly, I felt very relieved. In no time, we were catching up just like old times. As usual, she was still as *makuwento* and *kikay* as ever.

The Gretchen that you see on TV being hunted by controversies isn't necessarily the same Gretchen that you will see in a private setting, when she knows she's just surrounded by close friends.

We have to admit, whenever Gretchen talks, everybody drops what they're doing to take a listen.

With all her risque quotable quotes, she entertains, she sparks reactions and emotions from her public.

Hailed as one of the most beautiful faces in Philippine movies, Gretchen draws admiring stares wherever she goes.

She is an effortless fashionista. You can see it in her understated fashion and natural but elegant simplicity.

She started out as a movie actress, having starred in blockbuster movies with her contemporaries in late 80s and 90s.

Gretchen has since ventured into recording albums. Her first record titled, *Unexpected* was certified Platinum.

Her latest album is aptly named *Complicated*. In her albums, she shares songs that tickle her heart and soul.

In them, she bears her passion, sentimentality and essence as a woman and an

Martin in 'Vocal Soup'

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and will always be one hot mama!" We all look forward to share the stage with her, but more excited to share the dressing room.

AJ: You were recently involved in a brouhaha regarding the singing of the Philippine National anthem. Has the brouhaha died yet? Was it good for your career?

MN: Many say that good or bad news is good publicity. I disagree. I didn't ask for all this exposure. My only goal was to not let our champion down and to sing the National Anthem with all my heart and soul. My only fear was forgetting the lyrics. That's it. I, like so many, never knew or heard of any law that prohibits singing the anthem with all your heart and soul so I was blown out and sincerely not prepared for what has been so truly out of proportion. I wish the lawmakers of our country were this passionate about more

world changing matters.
AJ: What are you doing in Manila; are you doing some concerts there?

MN: I'm doing ASAP, finishing a new CD, planning a big concert in September and preparing for a series of Independence Day shows in London, England.

AJ: Please tell us when you are coming to the US to publicize this latest gig.

MN: will be there only a few days before the show because of my London gigs.

AJ: Do you have new compositions that will be part of this show?

M: Clint and Domenick wrote a few originals for this show, one of which is the title cut of the show entitled, *Vocal Soup*. My one and only spot number is a medley of my hits. Most of the show will be all four of us on stage together. We even sing back up for each other. A new and friendlier concept untried

by anyone on the strip, so far as I know.
AJ: Is this the big mainstream break that you were dreaming about?

MN: every time I put one foot on any stage that is not in the Philippines could be that break.

AJ: How is your family doing?

M: family is great. All three boys are with me now in Las Vegas. It's a dream come true!

AJ: Will you be doing a big concert in Manila before doing this new show in Vegas?

M: my next big concert in Manila will be on September 3 and 4 at the Araneta Coliseum. It's entitled, *AS1* for the first time in history, together on one stage, Gary Valenciano & Martin Nievera in concert! That is a whole other interview. Let's have some *Vocal Soup* first! ■

God, Sex and...

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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 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 onstage 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 Filipino activist, fleeing from the Marcos dictatorship, looking for a home in the East Village in the 80's. ■



At Exquisite Concepts, Int'l. formal launch & unveiling ceremony (L-R) Mila & Nanding Mendez of Special Edition Press, Glenn Ab

EXQUISITE CONCEPTS, INTERNATIONAL Takes off with a bang

LAST SUNDAY, May 17, all roads seemed to lead to Diamond Hills Road in Marlboro, New Jersey for the formal launch of Exquisite CONCEPTS, Int'l., the latest addition to the roster of entertainment production outfits this side of the East Coast.

Composed of three enterprising career-oriented friends who are all equally successful and established in their own respective fields, Exquisite CONCEPTS, Int'l. (ECI) appears to be the perfect embodiment of a promising production outfit with a whole lot of difference to offer and all out to prove its worth. Senen Cabalfin, ECI Executive President and COO, is the Executive Officer of her family owned business, SCCabalfin Services, Inc., and an active figure in community service-related jobs. Glenn Abrenica, ECI Executive Marketing Director, is an energetic master curtain entrepreneur who's into a third generation business of spe-

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