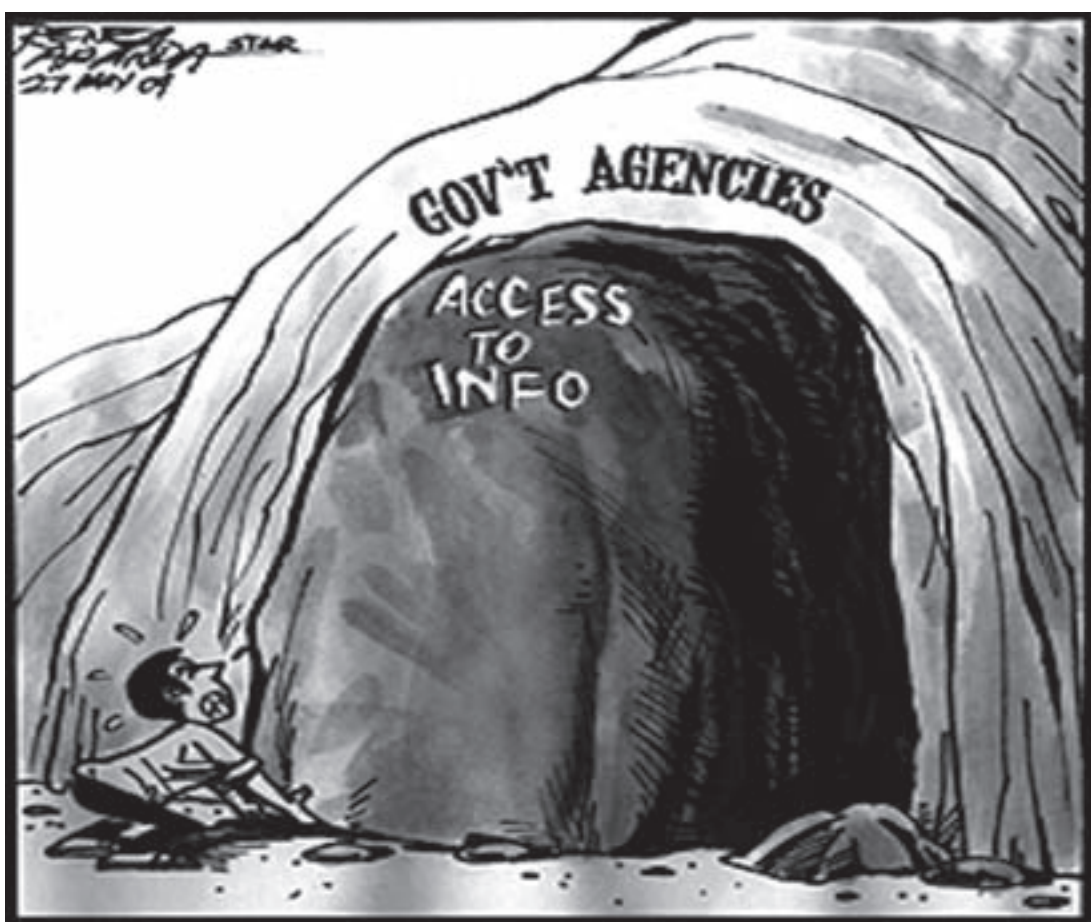


OPINION & FEATURES



Freedom of Information

As the House of Representatives under Prospero Nograles Jr. continues to beat the dead horse that is Charter change, it is also not giving up on the Right of Reply Bill. Under this proposed legislation, lawmakers want to give themselves a license to interfere in the day-to-day editorial decisions of all media organizations.

Meanwhile, journalists await the passage of a law that will enhance their access to public records. Media organizations have been fighting for greater access to information on matters of public interest, including corruption cases. This is an exercise of a right enshrined in the Constitution. Section 7 of the Bill of Rights states: "The right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized. Access to official records, and to documents, and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions, as well as to government research data used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen, subject to such limitations as may be provided by law."

Instead of promoting this right, a government that has thrived on opaqueness has expanded the interpretation of those limitations, preventing the nation from finding out the whole truth about government deals such as the broadband network contract with ZTE Corp. Congress, which should

exercise oversight functions on the executive, has sat for nine years on the proposed Freedom of Information Act.

In a special report, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism documented 14 major cases where officials in 11 government agencies denied the PCIJ's requests for access to public records. The officials include justices of the Supreme Court, military generals, and Malacañang's presidential appointees. The offices include those handling major government contracts and loan agreements.

The House passed its version of the Freedom of Information Act in May last year, after nearly a decade of advocacy mainly by media groups. The Senate, now preoccupied with sex videos and political maneuvering for the 2010 race, has yet to pass a counterpart measure. Before Congress creates a new right—the privilege of reply—through legislation, which would benefit mainly public officials averse to media criticism, it should first pass the Freedom of Information Act. (*Philstar.com*)

GUEST EDITORIAL

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.



FASO 2009

Photo courtesy of Robert Shroder

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 no 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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