

GETTING TO KNOW FASO

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO
AJPress

Tagumpay "Pi" M. De Leon - Double Bass

Pi de Leon is an engineer by profession and a musician by avocation. His musical experience came at an early age, being the son of the late renowned nationalist composer and Philippine national artist Felipe Padilla de Leon and the late Iluminada Mendoza, an accomplished pianist. He plays all rondalla instruments, the piano, accordion and the violin. The "De Leon Rondalla" was already appearing in various Philippine functions in the early 60s.

Five years after he migrated to the US in 1971, he started playing for the Pamanlahi Dance Troupe (now defunct). He also formed the Hiyas Rondalla, active from 1978 to 1985. In 1985, he joined the Fil-Am Family Cultural Group where he collaborated with Mr. Nitoy Gonzales, the renowned rondalla maestro of the famous Bayanihan Dance Troupe from the Philippines, to establish the Fil-Am Rondalla. In 1991, they co-founded the Rondalla Club of LA together with Leonilo "Boy" Angos, the music director of Kayamanan ng Lahi Performing Arts Group.

Pi De Leon has played in or directed rondallas for annual Philippine Cultural Nights in various universities and colleges. He has also participated in International Folk Dance Festivals held in Marseille, France and Sicily, Italy in the summer of 1990 and 1993 and also in the 1995 Northwest Folk Life Festival in Seattle, Washington. In between his playing schedules, he conducts rondalla classes and workshops, including his current tenure as a rondalla instructor at UC Riverside. In 1997, he was awarded a grant by the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department to train future rondalla instructors through workshops designated as "Master Teacher Apprenticeship Class"

Victor Coo- Cello

Victor Coo is currently a Doctor of Musical Arts in Cello Performance candidate at the Michigan State University. He earned his Master of Music at University of Maryland, College Park and a Bachelor of Arts in Music degree from Columbia Union College, in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Coo began playing the cello just before entering the Philippine High School for the Arts. While studying with Amador Tamayo and Wilfredo Pasamba, he won the NAMCYA and the Haydn Cello Concerto competitions in Manila. He then had the opportunity to participate at the Interlochen Arts Camp in Michigan, and was selected as one of the concerto competition winners to perform with the World Youth Symphony Orchestra. He continued his musical training with Johanne Perron at the Conservatory of Music at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida. During his time in Florida, he won several competitions and awards including the National Society of Arts and Letters, the Boca Pops Competition, and the Conservatory Concerto Competition. While in Maryland, he was the recipient of the Neil Tilkens Music Award at Columbia Union College and the winner of the Homer Ulrich Awards competition at the University of Maryland.

As a former principal cellist and soloist of the New England Youth Ensemble, Victor has performed with the group in Carnegie Hall in New York, The Kennedy Center in Washington DC, and has toured with them to Jamaica, England, Scotland, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Canada, Mexico, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Switzerland, and Iceland. Since his well-received solo performance of Dvorak's Concerto with the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra in 2005, Victor Coo has won the Casadesus Prize at the Ecole d'Art Americaines de Fontainebleau, France in 2006. His previous attendance in 2003 on a full scholarship in Fontainebleau also gained him a Chamber Prize (Kodaly Duo). Subsequently, under the auspices of the Ecole d'Art Americaines de Fontainebleau, Coo performed Desert Call by Dalit Warshaw on October 2006 in New York at the Yamaha Salon.

A chamber music enthusiast, Coo has collaborated with well known artists such as Ilya Kaler, Yuri Gandelman, Yizhak Schotten, Suren Bagratuni, Ralph Votapek, and Richard Sherman. His recent collaboration with Taiwanese pianist, Ya-Hsin Wu, led them to perform at the BDO Francisco Santiago Hall in Manila, Philippines, Chih-Shan Hall at the Kaohsiung Cultural Center, Taiwan, and at the Grace Baptist Church in Taipei, Taiwan. He has held masterclasses at the University of the Philippines, University of Santo Tomas, St. Scholastica's College, and the Philippine High School for the Arts.

Victor is a student of Suren Bagratuni at Michigan and was under the tutelage of Evelyn Elsing in Maryland. In addition, he has had masterclasses with Orlando Cole, Ronald Leonard, Timothy Eddy, Marc Drobinsky, and Anne Martindale-Williams. He took up his Bachelor of Arts from the Columbia Union College, graduating summa cum laude.

Jonathan Arevalo Coo-Viola

Jonathan studied viola under Estonian violist Iris Biin while finishing his Master's in Piano and Literature at the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, New York. He believes that even at an early age, children can be trained to play the viola right away. Although he teaches at the Ateneo de Manila University and St. Paul University Manila, Jonathan travels once a month to Isabela to teach young violists who are members of the Cagayan Valley String Ensemble in the Philippines.

Mini Matic Zabala - Flute, Piccolo

Born in Manila, Philippines, Mini is the 2nd child in a family of 7 brothers and sisters. Her parents are Atty. Tomas Matic, Jr. (1955 Philippine Bar topnotcher and Harvard Law School scholar) and Justina Quiray (they recently discovered that she played a role in helping the guerillas during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines -www.banipang.org/history)

Mini graduated with a degree of Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from the University of the Philippines. She taught Chemistry Lab at De La Salle University for 1 semester. She then worked as a Lab Technician for 7 years with Mobil Oil Philippines where she met Sonny Zabala (from Palawan). Soon after the Martial Law's travel-ban was lifted, Sonny and Mini packed 2 suitcases and left for Warsaw, Poland where Mini was an IAESTE exchange student at the Polish Institute of Biochemistry.

In recognition of Mini's laboratory work, her mentor Dr. Wlodek Zagorski named her as co-author of a paper published in the European Journal of Biochemistry. From there, armed with their student IDs, the Zabalas traveled by train, bus, and hitchhiking throughout Eastern Europe. Travel-weary, they settled in Athens, Greece where at first the two worked in factories. Through an English newspaper, Athens News, Mini responded to an ad and got a job with Dowell Schlumberger, a company that provided cementing services for oil wells. Mini was sent



Tagumpay de Leon, Double Bass



Victor Coo, Cello



Mini Matic Zabala, Flute-Piccolo



Jonathan Coo, Viola

to France for training then worked for 2 years in Greece. She was then transferred to Tabasco, Mexico to take over the Laboratory Supervisor position. She had the distinction of being one of a handful of the company's female International Staff. They stayed in Mexico for 3 years - Sonny found a job with Flopetrol. From there they relocated to the USA. Mini and Sonny have a son, Mark, who is now Director of Development Projects with Warner Bros. Records..

Mini's musical background dates back to when she was still in elementary and high school at Stella Maris College. She took piano lessons with Ms. Leticia Rapatan and had her Premier Recital. She was also the drummer with the school Rondalla. At the University of the Philippines, Mini joined a group of college friends and formed a singing group, The Note Belchers, performing in campus and on TV with Mini on the guitar. She also sang Alto with the UPSCA Choir.

In the US, Mini took private flute lessons. She played with the Los Angeles Pierce Symphonic Winds and went on tours with them to France, Italy and England and Scotland. She also played with several other groups including the Lo-Mar Orchestra, Jericho, the Senior Band at Local 47, The College of the Canyons, St. Dominic's Church in Eagle Rock, and performed as orchestra flutist for some shows.

When not busy working, she enjoys spending quality time with family and friends, gardening, aerobics workouts, going on trips and outings, and photography. ☺

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