

FASO makes mark in music history

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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." ■

RP tourism boom produces robust increase in investments; widens travel, employment

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ucts, medical tourism and conducive investment climate. I'm glad our efforts are paying off," said Tourism Secretary Joseph 'Ace' Durano.

Travel/tourism is one of the country's top money-makers; the other one represented by the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who continue to remit billions of dollars to the national coffers.

For its contribution to the government's Comprehensive Livelihood Emergency Employment Program (CLEEP) the DOT, through the *Trabaho sa Turismo* (TST) has opened an annual recruitment fair for tens and thousands of applicants nationwide.

The DOT is also promoting the country's top tourist spots to second and third generation Americans and Canadians by holding an annual Ambassadors, Consuls General and Tourism Directors Guide Tour (ACGTD) on July 11-

17 with some 500 participants, highlighted with a once-in-a lifetime experience of meeting President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The DOT is constantly upgrading its campaigns and projects in quality and quantity when it comes to infrastructure facilities and intangibles like media and food service.

"We have to keep up with the world, the competition is particularly stiff but we can survive if we have foresight translated to action," the Tourism honcho said.

DOT's Plans and Promotions Division reported that new hotels and resorts opened a total of 1,231 additional rooms at the cost of P8.16 billion and hired 1,286 employees.

To meet the increasing demand for tourism services, the DOT endorsed five development projects worth P6.323 billion in this year's first quarter, which

will generate 6,340 employment opportunities for local residents in the said tourist areas.

A US\$ 200-million luxury spa and resort is also set to be developed by Banyan Tree in a 55-hectare property in Diwaran Island off Palawan to generate 8,000 direct and indirect jobs during the planning, construction and operational stages from 2009 to 2012.

With regards to new tourist facilities, the country's biggest man-made lake, the P20-million, 18-hectare Lago del Rey, was opened recently to tourists by the provincial government of Camarines Sur.

This new tourist product complements the wakeboarding park set up by the local government unit (LGU) in 2005, which also offers family-oriented activities such as boat riding, fishing, and swimming, among others. (PNA)

Fil-Am playwright's ten-year old project staged, finally

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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 on-stage 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 Filipina activist, fleeing from the Marcos dictatorship, looking for a home in the East Village in the 80's. (*Momar G. Visaya*)

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