

# Stephanie is ready...

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I assumed that I was," she says. It was, apparently, all the encouragement that she needed. At four years old, she was already performing for her relatives and when she turned eight she joined a choir that let her sing all over the world. "I think it was a calling," she recalls, "because lots of people enjoy singing but for whatever reason I actually pursued it."

Of course there is also the fact that she was actually good at it. In fact, Stephanie was so good that opportunities kept opening up for her, giving her career a continuous push forward. When she was still in the university studying theater arts, she and her friends made a trip to New York during one spring break. "It was there where I auditioned for Miss Saigon," she recalls. "They asked me to be part of the German company and I said yes so I left school."

But even before she had set foot on the Miss Saigon stage as Kim, she was able to snag another role, that of Esmeralda for the production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which would be staged the next year. "And from

five years, she went on stage eight days a week. It was a bit exhausting but for Stephanie it was worth it. The experience was so rich that when she went back to the US she was able to put up a show based on her European adventure. "It was a one-woman show called *The Journey*," she says. "Basically, it's a story about a singer and her voice. (In the show) I speak to this ethereal light, which represents my voice. It's sort of my friendship between me and my gift."

*The Journey* got favorable reviews but what she was most proud of was her accomplishments behind the curtains. Not only was it cathartic (she was able to exorcise some of her demons), it was also creatively satisfying. Writing her own material gave her a certain kind of rush that she had yet to experience until then. "I could do whatever I wanted to do and I had a story to tell," she says. "I felt that I had accomplished something. I mean I wrote and directed (a show). I couldn't believe that I had accomplished that."

But as life would have it, her fervent desire to perform would be shortly cut off. After her successful one-woman show, John, her boyfriend of one year would figure in a fatal car accident, a tragedy that left Stephanie shattered. "I went through a very painful time and as a result of losing John, I didn't sing," she says. "I gave up everything."

It would take an invitation from Gawad Kalinga to lure her again to the stage. But even then, she went with it half-heartedly. "I only showed up to do the Gawad Kalinga event because my parents were very worried about me," she admits. "I was in LA and they were in Seattle. I went there to sing but I was so over (performing)." What changed her mind, however, was a video of a Filipina losing everything in a typhoon. "I was in tears (when I saw the video)," she recalls. "Something in my heart changed.



I felt that I wasn't alone. I understood that there are people who lost so much more than I did. It just opened my eyes to the bigger picture and inspired me to come to the Philippines."

Suffice to say that it was the beginning of yet another journey. Since then, Stephanie has gone back to what she loves the most, performing. She has also put out two albums, *The Voice* and *Stephanie Reese at her best*, and has garnered a few awards in the process, including Artist and Performer of the Year award at Las Vegas Second Annual Trade Show and a Reflections Award for arts and entertainment. Recently, Stephanie also had the opportunity to sing with Patti Labelle and Natalie Cole, an experience that she describes as phenomenal.

Stephanie's experiences had led her to finally decide to go on a solo career and she is keeping her fingers cross that her luck and talent would take her to far more places. "I just hope that I would have more and more opportunities to sing and share my music around the world," she says. With the kind of talent and passion that she showed during her concert, Stephanie Reese might just get her wish. And judging from her much-lauded performances for the gala concert of the Filipino American Symphony Orchestra held last May 17 at the Saban Theatre, the world will definitely see more of Stephanie. ■



*Hunchback* I auditioned for *The King and I*, which brought me to London," she added. "My mom is still waiting for me to get a degree."

But then again, it was an education that only a very few get to experience. For almost

# Not obsessed with being top Kapuso talent

by BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR. *Inquirer.net*

REGINE VELASQUEZ is genuinely perplexed that she's dubbed "GMA 7's No. 1 female star," a distinction confirmed by a well-placed network insider.

"I'm just happy that GMA 7 still trusts my abilities as a host, actor and singer," Regine said in an exclusive interview with *Inquirer Entertainment*.

Being the unofficial *Kapuso* Queen is just a nifty bonus, she insisted. "I don't obsess about stature. I always remind myself that I'm just fortunate to still be working... though there are younger stars out there."

Naturally, the flip side of being No. 1 is being perennially busy. Regine is swamped with work, and is seen on television daily.

### Mean machine

Weeknights, she appears opposite Robin Padilla on *Totoy Bato*. Saturday evenings, she hosts the reality talent search *Are You the Next Big Star?* Sunday afternoons, she sings on the musical-variety show *SOP*.

"I don't feel like a person now," she jested, implying that she's had to function like a machine. "But it's good. Work is a blessing."

For *Next Big Star*, it's not uncommon for her to wrap up in the wee hours of morning. "It's because at the start we had 151 contestants. Now, we have 40. Actually, it's the deliberations that take long."

Her only complaint about work is that it takes her away from boyfriend Ogie Alcasid. "I get to see my Honey (Ogie) on Saturdays, [when] we both don't have commitments," she said.

Good thing, she added, that Ogie is occupied with work, too. "He has three TV shows (*Bubble Gang*, *Hole in the Wall* and *SOP*) and two movies (*OMG* with Judy Ann Santos and *Spoiled Brat: Yaya and Angelina* with Michael V)."

The sweethearts make as much time as possible for each

other. "He visits me, picks me up, and we go out... just the two of us," said Regine.

Last time they had such a "date," she said, was for the Judy Ann Santos-Ryan Agoncillo wedding in San Juan, Batangas, on April 28. Regine and Ogie sang *The Prayer* for the Offertory during the church ceremony.

"It was a taping day, but I went with him," Regine recalled. "I finished *Totoy Bato* at 1 a.m. I waited for Ogie and we left for Batangas at 4 a.m."

They've grown close to the Agoncillos and would sometimes go out on group dates with them.

Does she also see herself walking down the aisle soon? "I don't really plan that," Regine said. "Actually, we cannot plan yet. We

cannot even talk about it (Ogie's annulment case from first wife Michelle van Eimeren is ongoing). But I'm happy for Judai and Ryan; they've gone through a lot as a couple."

Just like Ogie and Regine. ■



Regine Velasquez

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