

ON ITS 50TH YEAR

'The Fantasticks' returns to the Rep stage

by CATHY AZANZA / Inquirer.net

THE *Fantasticks* enjoys the distinction of being the world's longest-running musical. It opened in 1960 in a little theater called Sullivan Street Playhouse in Greenwich Village, New York, and went on to captivate generations of theatergoers for a record-breaking 17,162 performances.



That translates into the curtains rising for nearly 42 years. It is, to this day, considered a gem of a musical that allows audiences to build a world using imagination and experience a love story that grows to be intensely and beautifully real.

This year, *The Fantasticks* marks its 50th anniversary, and Repertory Philippines joins in the celebration with its own production of this endearing musical-theater classic.

In its history, Rep has staged *The Fantasticks* three times—the first in 1974 in its ninth season, with artistic director Baby Barredo in the title role of the dreamer Luisa and acclaimed musical theater actor Cocoy Laurel as Matt.

Subsequent productions boasted a roster of respected stage veterans such as Menchu Lauchengco-Yulo, Gia Macuja, Liesl Batucan, Jaime Blanch and Raymond Lauchengco inhabiting the leading roles of Luisa and Matt.

New stars

This season's production of *The Fantasticks* features two new theater stars who are thrilled to be able to tell this timeless story and become a part of this particular Repertory Philippines tradition.

Playing the role of Matt is young theater leading man and television host PJ Valerio. PJ made his debut on the Rep stage playing the role of Matthew in the satirical musical *Altar Boyz*. He has also flexed his acting chops in musicals like *First Name*, *Joseph the Dreamer*, and Stages' *High School Musical*, where he played the scene-stealing role of Ryan Evans.

His good looks combined with his dramatic ability also made him a natural choice to portray the lead role of Romeo in Villa Teatro's production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

In fact, PJ says that what truly struck him about *The Fantasticks* is that it reminds him very much of *Romeo and Juliet*, except this time the tables are turned on the young lovers. In a fine twist, we find out that the fathers have conspired to stage a feud in order to ignite the romance between their children.

"It has the same elements that make Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* a classic," says PJ. "And there's a very nice message to never be afraid to experience life no matter how cruel it can be. It takes courage, but it's how you learn."

Crystal-voiced

Playing opposite PJ is the crystal-voiced Julia Abueva as Luisa. At only 13 years old, Julia has the resumé of a veteran professional performer. She first enthralled audiences at age seven with performances at the Esplanade Theaters by the Bay in Singapore.

Since then, Julia has taken on lead roles in eight musicals, lent her voice to the animated film *Sing to the Dawn*, taken to the studio for two recordings, and played to a sold-out theater in her first solo concert.

She was also chosen as the Best Child Performer of 2007 at the Aliw Awards and was featured on *Oprah* as one of the World's Most Talented Kids.

Recently Julia shared the stage with pop icon Debbie Gibson in *The Superhero Diaries* in Singapore, a musical that explored an alternate comic-book reality where superheroes were the ones who needed rescuing.

"At first, I wasn't sure if I would be right for the role of Luisa, so I researched the plot and it excited me. I listened to the entire soundtrack, and found I already knew some of the songs. I just fell in love with the entire musical," she says.

Julia agrees with her leading man that *The Fantasticks* is just meant to be an enduring favorite.

"This show has got such beautiful music, a great story, characters anyone can relate with, and a really sweet ending. It's not too good to be true, like a fairytale; just like life is not always beautiful. When we experience the real world, there will be difficulties, and what we experience will not always be perfect. But, it's those experiences that make us stronger, better people."

The other members of the cast are Jake Macapagal (Narrator/El Gallo); Jaime del Mundo (The Boy's Father/Hucklebee); Dido de la Paz (The Girl's Father/Bellomy); Miguel Faustmann (The Old Actor/Henry); Red Concepcion (The Man Who Dies/Mortimer); and PJ Rebullida (The Mute).

The Fantasticks with book and lyrics by Tom Jones and music by Harvey Schmidt; based on Edmond Rostand's *Les Romanesques*, runs July 3-July 26 at Onstage Theater, 2/F, Greenbelt 1. For ticket inquiries or show-buying opportunities, call 8870710 or visit www.repertory-philippines.com.

Ai Ai: Sarah deserves title

by MARINEL CRUZ / Inquirer.net

"SARAH is worthy of the award. She's very hard-working. She deserves the success she is experiencing now," comedienne Ai Ai delas Alas said of fellow *Kapamilya* artist Sarah Geronimo, winner of the Box-Office Queen of 2008 Award.

Tough rivals

Ai Ai, last seen in *Ang Tanging Ina N'yong Lahat*, was Sarah's toughest rival for the award given Sunday, June 21 by the Guillermo Mendoza Memorial Foundation Inc. (GMMFI) in a ceremony held at the RCBC Auditorium in Makati City.

Sarah is the lead actress of Star Cinema's romantic comedy, *A Very Special Love*. Ai Ai was proclaimed Comedy Box-Office Queen of 2008.

"It's a special award. I think the

foundation created it for me," she said. "I'm thankful for the recognition. I consider every award I receive very important."

In previous interviews, the comedienne questioned the way GMMFI picked its Box-Office awardees. She said box-office records would show that "Tanging Ina" made more than *A Very Special Love*.

"What's important is that the people I care about know the truth," Ai Ai told the *Inquirer*. "They are proud of me."

John Lloyd Cruz, Sarah's love-team partner in the Cathy Garcia-Molina film, bagged the Box-Office King Award. Dolphy and Vic Sotto (*Dobol Trobol*) were crowned Comedy Box-Office Kings.

"I [just] hope the award brings [me] more opportunities for work," said Ai Ai.

With Erap

In fact, she is set to make a film with former Philippine president Joseph Estrada, for screening at the end of the year. "It's similar to the comedy film, 'Meet the Fockers.' I still have to sit down with my producers to discuss details, but I'm very excited," she said.

Meanwhile, weekday mornings, Ai Ai co-hosts *Ruffa and Ai* with actress-beauty queen Ruffa Gutierrez. "We have so much fun on the show, according to our guests," Ai Ai said. "Ruffa has become a very good friend to me. We go out a lot to eat or attend parties."



Sarah Geronimo with John Lloyd Cruz



Ai Ai delas Alas



Annabelle Rama with daughter Ruffa Gutierrez

Annabelle, John Lloyd in 'make-peace' meeting

ANNABELLE Rama won't confirm it but an unimpeachable Funfare DPA said that she and John Lloyd Cruz had a 'make-peace' meeting arranged by Johnny "Mr. M" Manahan, head of the ABS-CBN Talent Center.

The 'amicable' meeting came on the heels of Annabelle's reconciliation with daughter Ruffa Gutierrez last June 15 at the wake of Douglas Quijano at the Heritage Park, Taguig City.

Mother and daughter had been at odds because Annabelle didn't approve of the rumored romance between Ruffa and John Lloyd who both denied that there is anything romantic between them, contrary to claims by 'eyewitnesses' that Ruffa and John Lloyd are often seen together in 'secret' dates.

Annabelle was in Hong Kong last Sunday, June 21 to accompany son Richard Gutierrez who had a show there.

She left last June 25 with husband Eddie Gutierrez and Ruffa for LA for a holiday.

At the same time, John Lloyd is also leaving with ABS-CBN stars for a promo show, also in LA.

The lovers, er, 'friends' share a birthday, June 24. Asked if there's any chance that Ruffa and John Lloyd might celebrate together, Annabelle said, *Ewan ko!* (*Philstar.com*)

Star Magic at 17



IN CELEBRATION of its 17th year, a star-studded extravaganza on *ASAP 09* ushers ABS-CBN Star Magic's grand anniversary celebration on June 21. *ASAP 09* shall present superb production numbers showcasing the talent and beauty of the Star Magic artists. Expect to see Star Magic artists who are the young royalties of today's showbiz in a glamorous fashion show with outfits from top-caliber designers with Nyooy Volante with his band Rythmic Circle providing the music. There will also be song and dance numbers ranging from high-energy, standards and inspirational. Footages of the Star Magic basketball and volleyball teams, rehearsals and acting and dance workshops shall also be shown. After the anniversary kick-off in *ASAP '09*, the Star Magic artists shall leave for the US for the much awaited *Star Magic, The World Concert Tour*. For the first time, Star Magic artists will get to showcase their talents, All in one night, All on one stage. With more than 40 artists coming, Piolo Pascual, John Lloyd Cruz, Kristine Hermosa, Bea Alonzo, Sam Milby just to name a few. TFC, Asian Journal, ALAS Cargo and The law offices of Michael Gurfinkel proudly brings you the concert event of the year! VIP tickets have been sold out but there are still some great seats left. Be part of history being made, Get your tickets now. Don't forget June 27, 2009 7pm at The Citizens Business Bank Arena in Ontario, Only 30 minutes away from downtown LA plus Free Parking. This show is also brought to you by ARKO Foods, RCBC Remit center, Oliver Tolentino, Cherrys Salon, Sheraton Ontario and All Access. For tickets, call now (909)592-8951 or visit our website at www.starmagicworldtour.com Later this year, the stars shall once again come down from the heavens as they party the night away in the 3rd Star Magic Grand Ball.

17 years of Star Magic... 17 years of discovery, management and development of artists. Star Magic has truly gone a long way from the time when then ABS-CBN President and Chief Operating Officer Freddie Garcia and Johnny Manahan hatched the idea of creating a stable of new stars exclusively for ABS-CBN. 1992 was the magical year as ABS-CBN Talent Management and Development Center was given life. October that same year, *Ang TV*, the hit youth afternoon show that spawned many mall shows, live concerts and record albums, was launched. *Ang TV* was also the door for the likes of the young Claudine Barretto, Angelica Panganiban, Rica Peralejo, Kaye Abad, John Prats, Angelu de Leon, Victor Neri and many more to enter showbiz. Later in November 1995, *Star Circle Batch 1* was launched, led by the late Rico Yan. The magic continuous with ABS-CBN Star Magic! So remember watch *ASAP 09* this coming Sunday at 12 noon on TFC, then watch them LIVE!! At the Citizens Business Bank Arena on June 27, 2009 7pm for Star Magic!! The World Concert Tour!!!

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