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SUPER SELECTS

Girls jazz wanna have fun

By Troy Bernardo
Philippine Daily Inquirer

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MANILA, Philippines—Having conquered “American Idol,” the catwalks of Paris, and the summit of Mt. Everest, nothing, it seems, could stop the Filipina from stretching out her wings, doing her own thing, and soaring to greater heights.

Now, she has even conquered the cool, sophisticated world of jazz.

“I have over a hundred gigs a year, in clubs, festivals and private events in the US mostly, but also recently in South America,” said Marlene del Rosario, vocalist and pianist, composer and producer—the Filipina behind the Marlene Jazz Ensemble. “Sometimes, I have to pinch myself. Is all this real?”

It certainly is. Back in college, Marlene was such a favorite in Freshman Nights and other school concerts that no one was surprised when she continued to moonlight as a jazz musician, even while working as a telecommunications executive.

Even Zsa Zsa Padilla and Randy Santiago recorded her tunes, which included a pop chart hit. In 1992, she represented the Philippines in the Asian “Song for Children” songwriting competition in Toyama, Japan. Her entry, “Children of the World” (which won 2nd place) was subsequently presented by a hundred children to Pope John Paul II when he visited Manila.

“I grew up with the music of Apo Hiking Society, Ryan Cayabyab, Gary Valenciano, Pat Castillo, and Kuh Ledesma,” Marlene added.

Her father was a jazz musician as well. He had the good fortune to meet a lot of topnotch legends, including Duke Ellington and Earl Hines. Gary Burton once jammed at their house in Bel Air together with her father’s group, the Executives Band, which opened Frank Sinatra’s concert. Together with this band, she also performed for Princess Chulabhorn of Thailand as well as ex-presidents Fidel Ramos and Cory Aquino.

All that jazz

Now, after seven years in Boston, the college student with the sultry, soulful voice has come back as one of the few female pianists in the world of jazz who also performs as vocalist and composer.

“I’ve performed in a castle, in an aquarium right in front of the penguins, a carwash, and even in a museum,” said Marlene, who was a guest artist at the Philippine International Jazz Festival last week and opened for Omar Sosa, a world-renowned Cuban pianist. “But nothing compares to the excitement of performing in my country.”

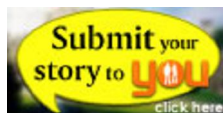
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It's inspiring to hear this from someone who has had concerts and television appearances—and followers—in South America, the US, and Southeast Asia; as well as two CDS, "Crying Days" and "Marlene, Live! With a Little Help From Her Friends," both under Blue Earth Music, flying briskly off the racks.

Though she hopes to see more Filipinos in the international jazz community, she'd rather think of herself as a musician in a global community.

"I'm not overly conscious of a particular role due to my nationality," she said. "I'm more interested in developing as an artist—and that has nothing to do with my race. But we Filipinos love music and you don't need to coerce one to sing a tune or two. We have a lot of excellent musicians!"

She returns home as one of them.

Catch her live at the 7th Note bar and restaurant, Makati Golf Club (Zuellig Loop), 7232 Malugay Street, Bel-Air, Makati tonight at 8:30 p.m. Joining her are Anthony Morris (saxophone), Colby Dela Calzada (acoustic bass), and Fritz Barth (drums). Call 8405731 to 45.

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