

'Awit ng Buhay' is a rousing success

All-Cayabyab Show is the The First of Its Kind



"I AM so touched..." gushed Maestro Ryan Cayabyab as he was called onstage for the curtain call of *The Music of Life: Awit Ng Buhay*, the first of its kind to be staged at the elegant open-air Ford Amphitheatre in Hollywood. The August 8 concert was the first time a Filipino composer was honored at the historic venue, and the first time Philippine music was the main feature, and the first-time a cast of US-based Filipino artists gathered to perform the songs of one composer woven into a storyline that touched base with the heart and soul of the Filipino.

Cayabyab, the audience, the deluge of photographers and the Ford management never knew what they were in for. The impression of many was that it would be a variety show of sorts, with one song sung after the other. Everyone was pleasantly surprised to witness a seamlessly staged musical, superbly sung and acted by Lara Avengoza, Erwin Andaya and Edsel Sotiangco. Their honed voices expressed the joy and pain of a Filipino family, bound by love, torn by economic woes, but reunited by perseverance.

The show was opened by Three of A Kind with an rousing performance of Cayabyab's first indelible hit *Kay Ganda ng Atang Musika*, which set the tone for the evening. As Three of a Kind's Ed Nepomuceno took his post as Musical Director, leading the 6-piece band which included exceptional FASO musicians Robert Shroder and Kendro Calica.

Writer Annie Nepomuceno,

also of Three of A Kind introduced the 'song of love'--*Awit Ng Pag-sinta* culled from the ballet *Rama Hari*, one of the numerous jewels in the Cayabyab treasure trove of songs. The Philippine Chamber Singers-LA and The Harana Men's Chorus filled the stage with their glorious voices in the enchanting number.

Iduyan Mo exemplified the Filipino matriarchal society with Annie Nepomuceno on lead vocals with dance interpretation by Celia Defato and Alexandria Defato of Kultura Philippine Folk Arts. A child, engagingly played by Joaquin Francisco, gets a lesson on survival from his father, played by Three of A Kind's Gelo Francisco with the entertaining *Da Coconut Nut*.

Nais Ko is performed by Erwin Andaya with such aplomb, many found it unbelievable that it was his first lead role. The long-time soloist of the UP Madrigal Singers unflinching tenor voice hit the high notes unwaveringly. Lara Avengoza made her first appearance as the ingénue choir soloist in *Memorare* as she becomes the apple of Erwin's eye.

The typical timid courtship is enacted in *Kailan* sung by Jasmine Trias, who has blossomed into a brilliant performer, expressive and engaging. A solo violin and guitar accompany Erwin in *Sa May Bin-*

tana, a harana of sorts. The jazzy *Mamang Kutsero* takes us on Lara & Erwin's first date, and upon declaring undying love in *Iniiibig Kita*, Lara appears in the wedding scene impeccably dressed by the uber-talented couturier Alexis Monsanto.

The second act opened with a lively scene of kids from the Bahay Kubo Center in *Street People* as they played typical Filipino street games. Lead child performer handled his non-working microphone with such grace, deserving of applause when a working mike was handed to him by Ford staff. The heart-wrenching *Paraiso* was sung in close harmony by Sotiangco, Avengoza & Andaya, with Jasmine Trias doing the lead, showing the musical skill of the performers as the staging kept them remote from each other.

The awful truth is depicted as mothers often leave their families, a story too common and painful in today's society. As overseas workers, the Philippine Chamber Singers-LA perform the acapella *Tsismis* animatedly, tackling the challenging piece with conviction. As the couple separated by miles

of ocean pine for each other, an ethereal Jasmine Trias dressed in another Monsanto creation sings *Kahit Ika'y Panaginip Lang* with just the right amount of emotional delivery.

The audience was brought to tears as Edsel Sotiangco sang *Mama's a maid in London...I need her...I got to be with her...and see to it that we're together once more...* There was not a dry eye in the house. At that moment, non-Filipinos in the audience developed a newfound understanding of the hardships in other

countries.

The sacred choral work *Anima Christi* depicted the Filipino's faith and devotion, which more often than not brings on a spark of ingenuity. Nowadays, Filipinos have begun investing in local businesses that serve a global market. Because of this, Avengoza makes her way home in *Limang-Dipang Tao*. As the family is united they declare *Ikaw Ang Tunay Na Li-gaya*.

Awit the Buhay is the brain-child of Three of A Kind. The the-
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