

The Passing of an Old Order

by LOUIE JON SANCHEZ
AJPress

When master rapper Francis Magalona died last Thursday, just as his show *Eat Bulaga* was to go on air, there was a passing of an old order. He was 44. By all measure, 44 is young, and he was really young. He still had so much to do, so many songs to sing, so much energy to electrify Pinoy popular culture. He could have even done many other performances, as he wished, that he wanted to join his *Eat Bulaga* family in their shows in the United States. But leukemia had overpowered him and had taken him away from us. We have lost a king, a royalty, a master who sang our songs. Or rapped them, because after all, he was the King of Rap, our country's answer to MC Hammer who ruled the airwaves during the 1990s.

Watching the tributes that have been given to him, here and elsewhere, one important theme emerged, a theme that basically sums up his life and times—the nation. When his contemporaries—or to be more precise, the others that followed him—were singing the mundane, he was writing the verse of a nation in transformation, a nation that has just risen from the ashes of anarchy and dictatorship. People who have lived through the 1990s would never forget how he broke through the scene singing, nonetheless, a call to remember who we are. Still in the nationalistic tradition of the '80s and the '70s, Francis M, as he was fondly called, wrote and uttered the pride of his race—our race.

heard from the olden times. Francis M made them sound so '90s, so cool. When he seemed to "lecture" on work and persistence ("trabaho mo, pagbutihin mo, dahil kung gusto mo ay kaya mo."), race and identity ("kung may itim at may puti, / mayroon namang



Francis and Pia at Kawayan Cove

kayumanggi"), or peace ("ang magkaaway, ipagbati, / gumitna ka at huwag kumampi"), he did not sound didactic; ironically, his art was deeply immersed in the didactic mode of popular literature.

Remember Doctrina Christiana, Urbana at Felisa, the conduct booklets and even the confessional lists of the frailes, even the *Pasyon*? But since he was coming from a subversive art form, rap, Francis M made sure he not only transgressed, in the strictest sense of the word. He turned rap, not only into our own subculture. He made it into a culture. When the intelligentsia look down on

Pinoy rap music, the high art-low art cycle simply repeats and emphasizes the widening cultural gap. Francis M, though he may never know it, was the cultural compromise. As a son of popular culture—and popular icons, Pancho Magalona and Tita Duran, he was the icon who could stand side by side with Tondo Boy rappers and belt with high-end clubbers. He is a quintessential creature of popular culture, being able to traverse both the kaleidoscope worlds of the *masa* and the *sosyal*.

Apparently in death, the people whose doors have been opened by Francis M, the master rapper, have one by one emerged, saying their thanks, attributing to him their own personal successes. They speak the new text about,

for, and of Francis Magalona. When *Mga Kababayan Ko* emerged as a hit, he provided us a new language, not only with his art form (rap music) but also in his medium (the fashion, the dance movements, the native musical instruments, the words). He was first and foremost young (and will never grow old, contrary to what he said to his friend, the singer Ogie Alcasid: Don't worry, we will grow old and drink coffee with our grandchildren).

In the '90s, he was the face of the emerging youth, a voice in the wilderness of coup d'etat and corruption,

US bases about to flee, and looming natural disasters. What people would probably remember is that he never really grew up (but not in the Peter Pan way). His energy, and his life probably embodied the aspirations of the young for this young republic in a lot of pain and suffering perpetrated by poverty and injustice. It would be so easy to say that his was the '90s image of Juan dela Cruz when he dressed Filipino singing *Mga Kababayan Ko*.

But he did not dress up as Juan dela Cruz. He dressed up as Francis Magalona. When they say that "he was great," "he was kind," or "he was the best," as we have probably heard, they're just stating the obvious. Except for Joey de Leon, who was keen enough to call Francis M the "little boy," nobody has understood the language Francis M offered all of us. Our hope must live on, even if we all have to wither in the physical level. When the iconic Juan dela Cruz was always rendered as the "barriotic" (to borrow from fictionist Mes de Guzman) struggling man, Francis M created a new image of the Filipino—youthful, vibrant and wise. Hope never fails, and never dies, and so does nationalistic faith.

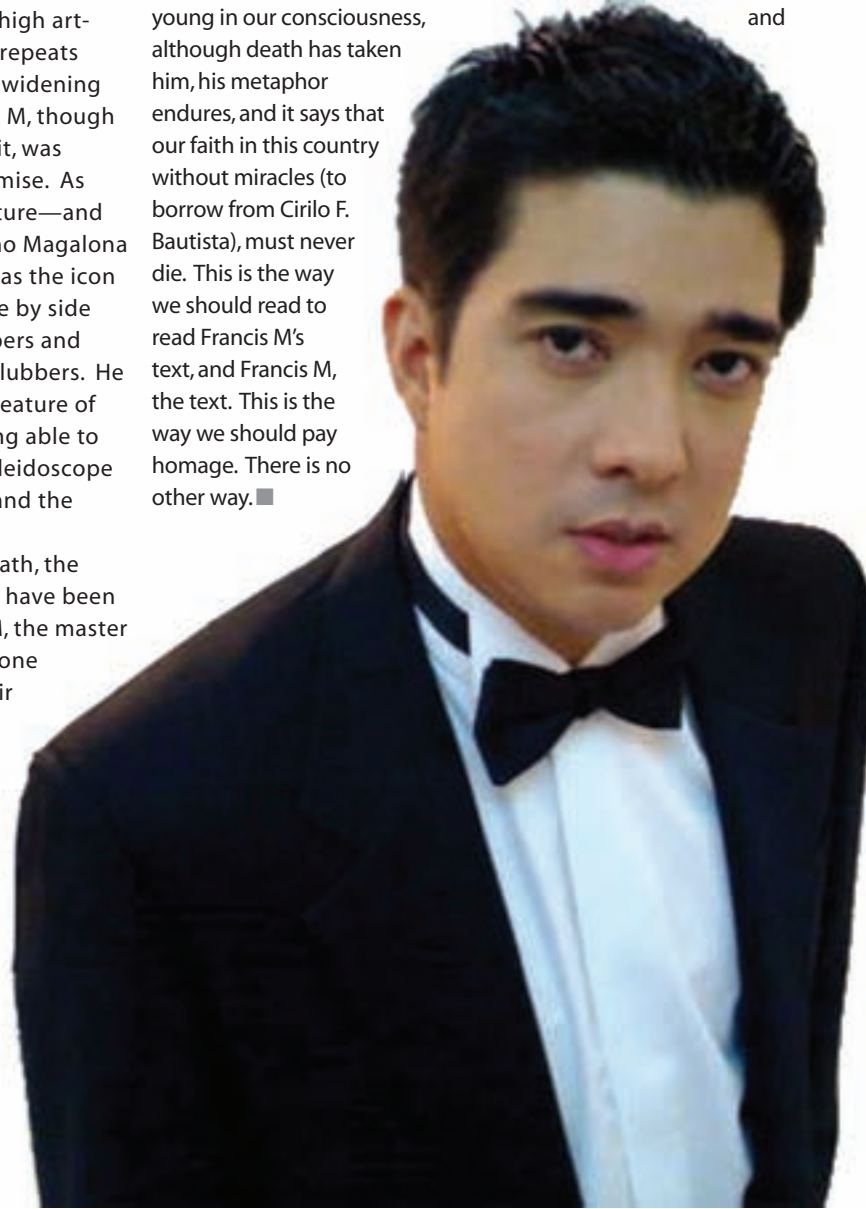
The way he rapped too was not American. His brand of Pinoy rap, sounded like Tagalog poetry, with the regular rhyme schemes reminiscent of the *Balagtas*. He was surely coming from that tradition too, and he had totally enmeshed the popular art form into our own cultural peculiarities. He was a son of hip-hop, had wanted to be famous as a breakdancer, had aspired to be different. *Mga Kababayan Ko* is a landmark because Francis M risked to perform something different—to perform Filipinoness, in all its complexity and color, in a music industry that remains to be flooded with colonial trends, fads and movements.

When he died last March 6, what was taken from us was only the body. He will be forever young in our consciousness, although death has taken him, his metaphor endures, and it says that our faith in this country without miracles (to borrow from Cirilo F. Bautista), must never die. This is the way we should read to read Francis M's text, and Francis M, the text. This is the way we should pay homage. There is no other way. ■



Francis Magalona while undergoing chemotherapy for leukemia

Photos from francismagalona.multiply.com



Artists Voice Out to Stop the Violence on Women

by FE KOONS
AJPress

Gielle Tongi, a talented actress from the Philippines showed her abilities on stage but most of all, she was relevant and funny with that Filipino accent, pronouncing "f" instead of "p" and "b" instead of "v". She said, "I am an angry Bagina! I don't know why they have to stuff me with a bunch of cotton balls called the tampon and not feathery cotton sheet!" She was one among the many female performance artists, and actresses who showcased the literary readings of *Vagina Monologues*, a Broadway play written Eve Ensler which won the Obie.

Among the women who did the readings were Tatyana Ali, Edelyn Aubrey, Esperanza Catubig, Alison dela Cruz, Janelle So, Prosy delacruz, Leslie Lewis Sword, Antoinette Taus, and Tamlyn Tomita.

But the TVM is not the only highlight. An earlier performance *A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and A Prayer* was just as moving. This groundbreaking collection, edited by author and playwright Eve Ensler, featured pieces from *Until the Violence Stops*, the international tour that brings the issue of violence against women and girls to the forefront of our consciousness. These diverse voices rise up in a collective roar to expose, and examine the insidiousness of brutality, neglect, a punch, or a put-down. There was Maya Angelou on women's work; Michael Cunningham on self-mutilation; Dave Eggers on a Sudanese abduction; and Carol Gilligan on a daughter witnessing her mother being hit;

Both *The Vagina Monologues* and *A Memory, a Monologue, a Rant, and a Prayer* is a call to the world to demand an end to violence against women. Outstanding among the performers was singer and stage actress Becca Godinez, a character who is a party pooper because she tells the truth about sociopolitical issues and realities of life. Dion Basco

as the mutilation artist was funny in a sort of underacting way that you feel that he really enjoys destroying art works.

In both shows, Leslie Lewis Sword was awesome on stage, reading about Sudanese abduction and shouting for the vaginas in the world to unite as she held the crotch of her classic looking trousers on stage.

Of course, the Tagalog monologue of Prosy dela Cruz is really, really funny with metaphorical symbolism of "the flood" which recalls the traumatic experience of an elderly lady when she was young and how the semen made the car of the guy she was with "dirty". Esperanza Catubig likewise delighted the audience with her character as the *Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy*. Using her talent on making different types of orgasmic moans, she showed a diva's moan, a Brown student's moan, a Jewish woman's moan as the audience members giggled and laughed.

The controversial monologue aptly done by performance artist Alison dela Cruz is about a 16-year-old girl who realized that she is a lesbian as she describes a sexual experience with an adult woman. Alison performed the *Little Coochie Snorcher* monologue so well that the experience was very positive.

We all remember Tatyana Ali, who was Ashley in the hit comedy *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. A Broadway trained actress, Tatyana displayed as thespian qualities as she read the monologue on being the comfort woman, the ianfu who was raped by the Japanese military during World War II and who never apologized for the crimes they had done. Ali expressed the pain of the comfort women who are now probably in their 80s. With a tough voice, she demanded "Say sorry to me", speaking about the Japanese government who refused to apologize to the comfort women who were raped. Historians estimate 200,000

women, mostly from Korea and the Philippines but also from China, Indonesia and the Netherlands, were pressed into prostitution for millions of Japanese soldiers stationed throughout Asia before and during World War II. Some were forced to sleep with up to fifty men a day.

Tamlyn Tomita notably known for her role in *The Joy Luck Club* and *Karate Kid Part II* was the climax of the show. Tomita inspired all of us in the reading that was meant for everyone to do something to stop the violence on women and children.

Camille Velasco sang from her debut solo album. Musical artist Eleanor Academia played the keyboard and whose music bridged the monologues.

The beneficiaries of the two shows were the Bantay Bata Foundation which rescues and provides rehabilitation for abused children in the Philippines, and the Center for Pacific Asian Family which implements programs and services on domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse in the Asian Pacific Islander community in Los Angeles.

V-Day, a global movement against violence against women and girls, began in 1998 on Valentine's Day as a benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues*. The play by Ensler is based on interviews with more than 200 women about their memories and experiences of sexuality. By last year, V-Day had grown to 2,300 benefit shows in 76 countries. It has raised more than \$26 million (?19.75 million) for shelters for battered women, rape hot lines, safe houses in Africa to protect women from genital mutilation and other causes.

Kudos to Ted Benito who produced the show and dedicated the Filipinos producers to his mother, Fe Benito.

As my daughter Hazel and I left the theater, we knew we felt really well as women. As Filipinas, the V-Day 2009 taught us that there is much to be done to stop the violence against women and young girls. But we know we will be strong supporters of the movement until the violence stops! ■



Artists who read the monologues: (L-R) Prosy dela Cruz, Leslie Lewis Sword and Janelle So. AJPress Photos by Fe Koons



Tatyana Ali and Alison dela Cruz, performers of the V-DAY 2009: FILIPINAS last March 7.