

Simply fantastic!

by ROCHELLE C. PANGILINAN / AJPress Manila

IT'S a plot that's been done a countless times before in celluloid, TV and musical stage: a girl and a boy meet and fall in love; however, a running-off-into-the-sunset ending eludes them as feuding families cause them to stay apart. While this storyline has never failed to engage audiences for years, one can't be blamed for hoping for something different.

That is why thank God for *The Fantasticks*. In 1960, Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones combined their creative forces for *The Fantasticks*, loosely based on the play *The Romancers (Les Romanesques)* by Edmond Rostand. This musical tells the story of two dotting fathers who pretend to feud to ensure that their kids fall in love, believing that kids do what their parents forbid them to do. The fathers' scheme work and the kids do meet and fall in love, and in between there are touches of drama, romance, comedy, fantasy and lots and lots of hummable and even danceable music—it is a musical after all.

The Fantasticks has continuously charmed audiences the world over since its debut, making in the world's longest running musical, and recently it had its premiere run at OnStage in Greenbelt 1 and has been delighting audiences. *The Fantasticks* adds yet another one to Repertory Philippines' impressive list of locally staged musicals and plays, and it is definitely a must-watch. Even with no *Moulin Rouge*-esque production numbers, the musical will grab your attention and you can't help but sing its most famous tune, *Try to Remember*, after watching it.

Directed by the renowned Baby Barredo, *The Fantasticks* features up-and-coming young stars PJ Valerio and Julia Abueva as the young couple Matt and Luisa, as well as veteran stage actors Jaime del Mundo and Dido de La Paz as the "feuding" fathers. Acclaimed actors Jake Macapagal, PJ Rebullida, Miguel Faustmann and Red Concepcion also star.

The Asian Journal had a chat recently with PJ and Julia, both of whom have shown tremendous promise of great success in the industry.

Julia, who is based in Singapore, is delighted to have had a chance to work with Repertory Philippines, citing that she is currently on her summer break from junior high school and was looking forward to doing something she truly loves.

"Luisa is a very different role from the ones I usually play," she says. "It's my first ingénue kind of role. It's actually my first kiss onstage. It's been such a great experience."

In person, Julia seems to have a lot of common with Juliet—innocent but playful and very full of cheer. Her eyes light up when she mentions that when she goes back to Singapore, she hopes to have her second solo concert there when *The Fantasticks* ends its run end of this month. She had already released two pop singles in Singapore and is determined to try everything in music, TV, film and stage.

PJ, on the other hand, is not new to Repertory Philippines but always cherishes the opportunity to work with them. At his young age, he has done several musicals, including *Altar Boys* and *Mulan Jr.* He also appears in a youth-oriented TV show on TV-5 and *Walang Tulugan with the Master Showman* on GMA-7. All these while studying Computer Science at STI (he's on his first year), and he plays guitar for a band too.

"It's just time management," he says with a bright smile and the confidence of a master. And while he's bent on staying busy with his TV appearances, his music and his studies, PJ says it is really onstage where his passion is.

"The stage is times 10 when it comes to energy. So my scope of energy really has to be like WOW," he says. Judging from the energy he put on the role of Matt, this definitely is something he won't have a problem with.

The Fantasticks will run until July 26. For tickets, call 8870710 or logon to Ticketworld.



Julia Abueva (top left); PJ Valerio (bottom right) and scenes from the musical
AJPress Photos by Andrew Tadalán



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