

HIGH PROFILE



THE MAGAZINE OF **PAGCOR** / PHILIPPINE AMUSEMENT AND GAMING CORPORATION / WWW.PAGCOR.PH / ISSUE 2 – SPRING • SUMMER 2009

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into the major league
of destinations in Asia



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FROM YOU!
PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTER TO:
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editorial



t

o be “high profile” you need to have guts to face the odds and take chances in life. You expose yourself, show your hand, show what you’re made of. No playing close to your chest, no folding when the going gets tough. Nobody can ensure the rewards, but this is when the game gets exciting.

There are always those who choose the low-profile road, but we say, “if you’ve got it, flaunt it”. Talking about who you are and what you believe in as a corporation creates a better business environment and if on top of it you can please a wider audience, then you’ve found your reward.

With *High Profile* PAGCOR has decided that there is a lot to show as far as the Philippines is concerned: a lot of artists, intellectuals, destinations, small and great victories. There is also a lot still to do, so that the efforts of some translate into a better life for others.

That’s why we chose a patriotic cover: top model Isabel Roces embodies the pride, the welcoming spirit and the beauty of these islands that enchant everyone who chooses to come.

Spring/Summer is traveling season for Americans and Europeans and despite the recession, many will be looking at Southeast Asia as a holiday destination. Through *High Profile* we provide a window into the Philippines to show not only its alluring destinations such as Davao, but also a more complete vision of the country’s artistic life.

High Profile intends to blend people and lifestyle with corporate news. In this issue we feature a preview of PAGCOR’s new dance extravaganza, *Flow*, which proves that the Philippines can rival other entertainment centers and become not only a tourist and gaming destination of great importance in Asia, but also a platform for talent.

“Few countries in the world are so little known and so seldom visited as the Philippines, and yet no other land is more pleasant to travel in than this richly endowed island kingdom,” wrote Fedor Jagor, a German ethnographer, more than 100 years ago. Anyone who has been here will share the same feeling.

Marco Venditti
Managing Editor

contributors



Jun De Leon

Veteran photographer Jun De Leon doesn't deny that he loves order. The fact is immediately apparent in his studio, where everything seems to be in its place in spite of the upcoming shoot. Books are perfectly aligned on shelves and the camera waits at the center of the white room for model Isabel Roces. "My studio, my rules," says Jun with a smile. One of the foremost Filipino artists behind the camera, once his job starts it's easy to see why he is so sought-after: he easily coaxes Isabel into embodying the welcoming spirit of the Philippines for our cover.

Marc Nicdao

At 28 Marc is probably the favorite photographer of the edgiest publications in the Philippines. As we tell him what we would like from the photos of model and actress Teresa Herrera, he nods and smiles: his whole being projects energy. At the shoot one wonders what will come out of this apparent mess: people walking to and fro, helping with lights or the wind machine, or standing behind the camera and trying to see what he sees. Oblivious to all of them, Marc moves around, camera in hand, encouraging Teresa and the result is...magic.



Tina Arceo-Dumlao

A multi-awarded journalist who has been covering the business beat for 18 years, Tina is currently a desk editor at the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the Philippines' leading newspaper. As a scholar of the University of the Philippines, she considers it her duty to not just write about hard economic news, but also to put on paper the many flavors, experiences and unique traits that make her country a wonderful place.



Brent Hannon

As an 18-year-old exchange student Brent made the first of many visits to Davao, when he fell in love with the Philippines. He moved to Hong Kong in 1989, days after earning a journalism degree from the University of Missouri. He has been in Asia ever since, writing for travel and business publications. From his current base in Shanghai, he travels to the Philippines as often as he can, where he writes articles about diving, hiking, city life, and Filipino food.

Luminosi Studios

John Taca and Igor Maminta are partners at Luminosi Studios, and it's here that Jenine Desiderio comes to portray belly dancing for our second issue. There is concentration during the shoot, while John and Ivan capture Jenine alone and then with her fellow dancers, the Scheherazades. But at the end of the session the music and dancing lead to laughter and joking around, a reflection of the spirit of these young photographers who are conquering their space with professionalism but also creativity and fun.



HIGHLIGHTS

The latest. The newest. The best. The brightest.

TEXT: KRISTINA OMBAO (K.O.)/ANNA SOBREPEÑA (A.S.)

A TIME TO BUILD

For the state-run Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR), the year 2009 is a time to pursue great possibilities. It signals the initial construction phase of the Philippines' most ambitious tourism and leisure project.

In the last quarter of 2008, PAGCOR granted provisional licenses to three of the four major investors in the Bagong Nayong Pilipino Entertainment City Manila, including SM Investments. With these licenses, Japan's Aruze Corporation and the subsidiaries of Filipino company Alliance Global Inc. (AGI) and Malaysia-based Genting Berhad Group can jumpstart the establishment of their approved concepts by the second quarter of the year. Each developer will invest at least US\$1 billion in the project.

Also, the city government of Parañaque on the southern part of Metro Manila, signed Resolution 188 to endorse the Entertainment City Manila as a special economic zone. Under this agreement, PAGCOR's multibillion-dollar project will occupy some 120 hectares of land along Parañaque City's reclamation area to beef up the country's entertainment and tourism potential.

As a special investment district, the Entertainment City is expected to provide project locators with economic incentives as well as jobs to the residents of the host city. (K.O.)



Star of Iloilo

The Dinagyang Festival of Iloilo City, on the southern part of the Philippines, is already a crowd-drawer in its own right. But this year, there was more to the city's colorful parades, costume-clad revelers, and a banquet table full of native dishes. For the first time, *Wanders* — the musical and acrobatic show produced by PAGCOR — was performed in Iloilo City for free, leaving thousands of spectators in sheer amazement.

Iloilo City Tourism Officer Ben Jimena said because of *Wanders*, the Dinagyang Festival this year became a double-whammy treat for the natives of Iloilo, as well as the local and foreign tourists. More than 10,000 revelers flocked to the Sports Complex in La Paz district to witness the "once-in-a-lifetime" musical extravaganza. As an advocate of the local tourism industry, PAGCOR Chairman Efraim C. Genuino flew in to Iloilo City to take part in the cultural festivity that was originally intended to give honor to the patron saint Señor Santo Niño. (K.O.)





Manny does it again

Philippine boxing champ Manny Pacquiao has once again proven his mettle in the ring during his December bout with American “Golden Boy” Oscar de la Hoya.

Despite his opponent’s remarkable reputation in the world of boxing and the “mismatch” between the two fighters – de la Hoya has a bigger build – Pacquiao’s punches and unexplainable speed left his match utterly defenseless. In round nine, the “Golden Boy” physically gave in, giving the Filipino fighter a renewed sense of pride and a brand-new claim to victory and fame.

Pacquiao is currently preparing for a fight with British “Hitman” Ricky Hatton on May 2, 2009 in Las Vegas. (K.O.)

Upping the Ante

After the success of the Asian Poker Tour held in the Philippines and Macau last year, Manila has once again been chosen to be the jump-off point for the 2009 tour.

Of the hundreds of players hailing from all parts of the world, it was the Philippines’ very own Niel Arce who championed in the main event, and took home a prize of US\$185,000. The young Filipino poker enthusiast has shown the world that although poker is not as popular in Asia as in Western countries, Asians can definitely stand out.

Following Arce’s place were Steve Yea of Korea and Casey Kastle of the United States. (K.O.)

ALL THE BEAUTY ON EARTH

It was a defining moment for Carla Paula Henry, a beauty from the southern part of the Philippines, when she bested 84 other candidates vying for the Miss Earth 2008 title.

More than the glamour of winning in an international pageant contest, Henry – the first Filipina to be hailed Miss Earth since this pageant was launched in 2001 – is faced with an intimidating task that continues to challenge environmentalists all over the world. Although she’s no panacea for climate change dilemmas, Henry is expected to advocate high impact ecological campaigns and sustainability programs that will encourage people to do their share in saving the planet.

But the young beauty is undaunted. She said the first step in changing the world is influencing people’s mindset, especially the youth. And more than anything, she will enjoy the young people to protect the planet by keeping them informed, empowered and involved.

“The best gift that we can give to the younger generation is a living planet that is still fit to sustain life. But we need to educate them now so that in the future, they will not only care for the environment but also pass on the legacy that we have taught,” Henry said.

The pageant, held in October 2008 at the Clark Expo Amphitheater in Pampanga, the central part of the Philippine Island of Luzon, has drawn thousands of guests from various parts of the globe. The Miss Earth 2008 pageant runners-up were Miss Tanzania (Miriam Odemba) as Miss Earth-Air, Miss Mexico (Abigail Elizalde) as Miss Earth-Water and Miss Brazil (Tatiane Alves) as Miss Earth-Fire. (K.O.)



MODERN

LUXURY



Only ten years in the business and Kenneth Cobonpue has already successfully penetrated the world market, establishing a respected name in furniture design. Initially veering away from the business started by his mother, he discovered it was the medium to express creative passions. His pieces have a distinct personality, drawn from the inherent character of the materials coaxed into form by skillful hands. "They cease to be mere house objects," the internationally awarded young man says. "Rather, these are tokens of the imagination." Cobonpue makes the case for the successful branding of modern Filipino furniture that sells very well alongside European luxury names with over 50 years of tradition behind them. Among his clients are celebrity couple Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie who first picked up the Voyage Bed of bended steel and rattan for their son before buying a few more for their Malibu residence. (A.S.)



Filipino flavors

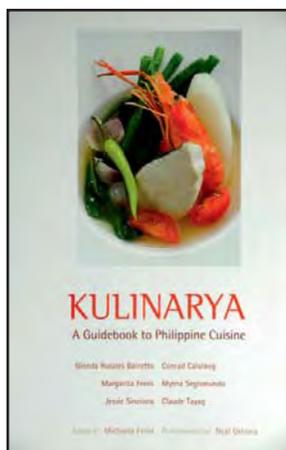
Abe in Serendra was established by the late restaurateur Larry Cruz, who conceived a menu that honored his father and their Pampango roots. His kitchen upholds the integrity of the regional fare and steps up by presenting everyday favorites as haute cuisine. Effort is made to present regular Filipino food as a visual delectation while keeping the familiar flavors at par, if not better. The atmosphere in the dining area replicates meal times in a family home with a cacophony of voices calling across tables for more of the *kare-kare*, *lechon pata cubano* or the *Bicol Express*. (A.S.)



HIGHLIGHTS

FOR FOOD LOVERS EVERY WHERE

Six of the country's celebrated chefs came together to produce what may well be the authoritative guide to local food. *Kulinarya, A Guidebook to Philippine Cuisine* by Glenda Barretto, Conrad Calalang, Margarita Fores, Myrna Segismundo, Jessie Sincioco and Claude Tayag was the result of many discussions to define essential Filipino fare. Taking into account the cooking methods, presentation and flavors from 22 regions and 92 provinces in an archipelago of 7107 islands, the 240 page volume has the ingredients to serve local cuisine for a world market. Rather than confine dishes to one single interpretation, the authors focus on ingredient selection, presentation and preparation that establishes quality through variations. (A.S.)



Extravagant elegance

The accessories of Arnel Papa are distinguished by an exuberance translated into big, bold and attention-grabbing. The designer from the jewelry capital of the Philippines creates adornments using locally sourced material, capitalizing on a natural and raw finish. His creative instincts brandish gold plated metals, large colored stones and fresh water pearls with wood, leather or carabao horn. Rich in texture and contrasts, the accessories have found a market abroad over the last 20 years. The items are one-of-a-kind, inspired by his environs, rather than trends. Nevertheless, these are as much fashion statements as rich embellishments for women with flair. To see more Arnel Papa, go to pages 50 to 54 and 60 to 65. (A.S.)

WELL HEELED

Fashion designer Cesar Gaupo's foray into bespoke footwear was a natural development in his more than 30 year career. "Beautiful clothes need to have a great pair of shoes," the respected couturier said. Creating for women who care only for the best, he brought his trademark fine craftsmanship and high quality material to shod the well-heeled. "It isn't edgy but modern, sexy and feminine," he says of his line. Artistry and functionality come together in a range of distinctive designs. He describes himself as a nature lover who finds inspiration in all living things. To see more Cesar Gaupo go to pages 51, 54 and 65. (A.S.)



What's on this Spring and Summer

APRIL

Every 2nd week



MANAOAG PILGRIMAGE

Every 2nd week of April, devotees and pilgrims flock to Manaoag, Pangasinan, to the shrine of Nuestra Señora de Manaoag for the feast of the patroness of the sick, the needy and the helpless. Her image is believed to be miraculous.

Pangasinan

CONQUER MOUNT APO

An annual summer climb to Mt. Apo, the country's highest peak.

Davao City

13-20

5TH NATIONAL CAVING CONGRESS

The Congress aims to foster relationships among cavers in the country and to help develop the knowledge and attitude of the tourism industry community. The Sierra Madre Outdoor Club and Sang-at Salug Outdoor Club are pioneering groups and are collaborating in the event.

San Miguel, Baggao, Cagayan

13-17

MAY

PULILAN CARABAO FESTIVAL

Hundreds of festively adorned carabaos are paraded by farmers on the street leading to the church. There they are made to kneel down to pay homage to San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of farmers.

Bulacan



© Joey Yamane

FLORES DE MAYO

Flores de Mayo is held nationwide during the month of May. Literally meaning the "flowers of May", this fiesta commemorates the search for the Holy Cross by Reyna Elena and her son, the Emperor Constantine. This Philippine-wide fiesta is marked by a parade of maidens escorted by young men under floral arches. The main participant represents Reyna Elena and the emperor.



© Edwin Loyola

PAHIYAS

Farmers give thanks to San Isidro Labrador for a good harvest by decorating their houses with brightly colored rice wafers called *kiping*.

Lucban, Quezon

15





JUNE

WORD JAM: SPOKEN WORD FESTIVAL

10-24

This spoken word series featuring new works in poetry, short story, essay and the novel intersects with music, theater, dance, film and visual arts festivals. Writers perform these pieces with drawing, dancing and multi-media in "found" spaces at the CCP.

**Cultural Center of the Philippines,
Various Venues**

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Celebrate the *Araw ng Kalayaan*, or Independence Day, in the streets of the country as the love of costumes and revelry is put on display once more.

12



JULY

BOCAUE RIVER FESTIVAL

5

The highlight of this Philippine fiesta, held every first Sunday of July, is the fluvial procession in honor of the miraculous *Krus ng Wawa* or Cross of Bocaue. Devotees douse each other with water as they scramble to ride the pagoda boat.

Bulacan

MUSIK UNDERKUNSTRUKTION

New symphonic works find their musicians in a world premiere. A co-production with the Metro Manila Community Orchestra (MMCO).

Cultural Center of the Philippines

15

AUGUST

KALIBONGAN FESTIVAL (HORSE FIGHT & BLOOD COMPACT)

Kalibongan is a manobo term for a Grand Festival. The Manobos, Bagobos, and other highland tribes from the different parts of the province go down to Kidapawan to show off and proudly display their traditional and cultural heritage. The natives display their own version of partying with a horsefight and a "blood compact" peace ceremony, among others.

Kidapawan City, N. Cotabato

14

24

WI-FI BODY: INDEPENDENT DANCE FESTIVAL

The festival presents landmark pieces of independent dance companies and choreographers. It gathers dance artists who have been producing and creating exciting, innovative work in contemporary dance in the Philippines. Through July 5th.

Cultural Center of the Philippines



PARADA NG LECHON

Literally translated, this "parade of roasted pigs" is a celebration of the feast of St. John the Baptist. Roasted pigs are dressed up and paraded around town before being eaten.

Balayan, Batangas

24

VIRGIN LABFEST 5

Now in its fifth year, the Virgin Labfest has earned a solid reputation for its exciting and provocative line up of "untried, untested, unpublished and unstaged" plays from playwrights both young and old.

Cultural Center of the Philippines

24-28



CINEMALAYA '09: INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL

A digital film festival and competition that aims to discover, encourage and honor the cinematic works of Filipino filmmakers who boldly articulate and freely interpret the Filipino experience with fresh insight and artistic integrity.

Various venues.

More information at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

17-26

3rd week

KADAYAWAN SA DABAW

This festival gives thanks for the bounty of fruits and flowers like the waling-waling orchid blooms, indigenous to the province. Colorful floats are bedecked with beautiful orchids and other flowers in the grand parade.

Davao City



© DOT, Davao

© DOT, Davao

CREATING MAGIC

TEXT: MARY ANNE R. CONDE PHOTO: MARCO VENDITTI

By its modern day definition, an alchemist is someone who has the power to transform something common into something extraordinary. He is a man whose imagination combines things we normally wouldn't, and with a magical result.

This title could be used to describe Efraim C. Genuino, the creative mind behind two much talked-about theatrical productions now showing in Manila – *Wanders*, which has been touted as 'the best musical in Asia,' and the newly launched dance concert *Flow*.

Both shows combine various elements of theater. *Wanders* is a marriage of music and dance spiced up with a dash of humor and high-flying acrobatics. *Flow*, on the other hand, is a multi-sensory experience using the latest light and sound technology to highlight interpretative dance sequences, stunts, magic tricks and an exhibition of both vocal and instrumental prowess.

The shows' casts are equally diverse, with local talents performing alongside acrobats from China as well as dancers from Russia and Cuba.

Putting all these together may seem like far too great a risk. If handled without an eye for detail and a sense of spectacle, the result could be a discordant mishmash that is as appetizing as an over-seasoned dish.

But with Genuino at the helm, the production team behind *Wanders* and *Flow* has been able to intertwine all elements and at the same time bring out the strengths of each culture represented.

Some might say that producing shows – no matter how innovative – is nothing out of the ordinary; it is for someone like Genuino.

Far from having years of experience in theater, either onstage or behind the curtain, Genuino is a businessman, who happens to be the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR).

As the CEO of the state-run gaming firm, his main priority is managing a company that employs over 12,000 people and controls 13 casinos, several slot machine arcades, VIP clubs, online casinos and internet betting sites across the country.

So what does a man who is in the gaming business have to do with theater?

"Since entering PAGCOR, I have made it my mission to transform the corporation into more than just a casino gaming enterprise," Genuino explains. "Our foray into theatrical productions represents our paradigm shift from gaming to entertainment."

After watching some of the best shows around the world and with his awareness of the exceptional talent of Filipino entertainers, Genuino was encouraged to produce shows that could be comparable if not better than what he had previously seen.

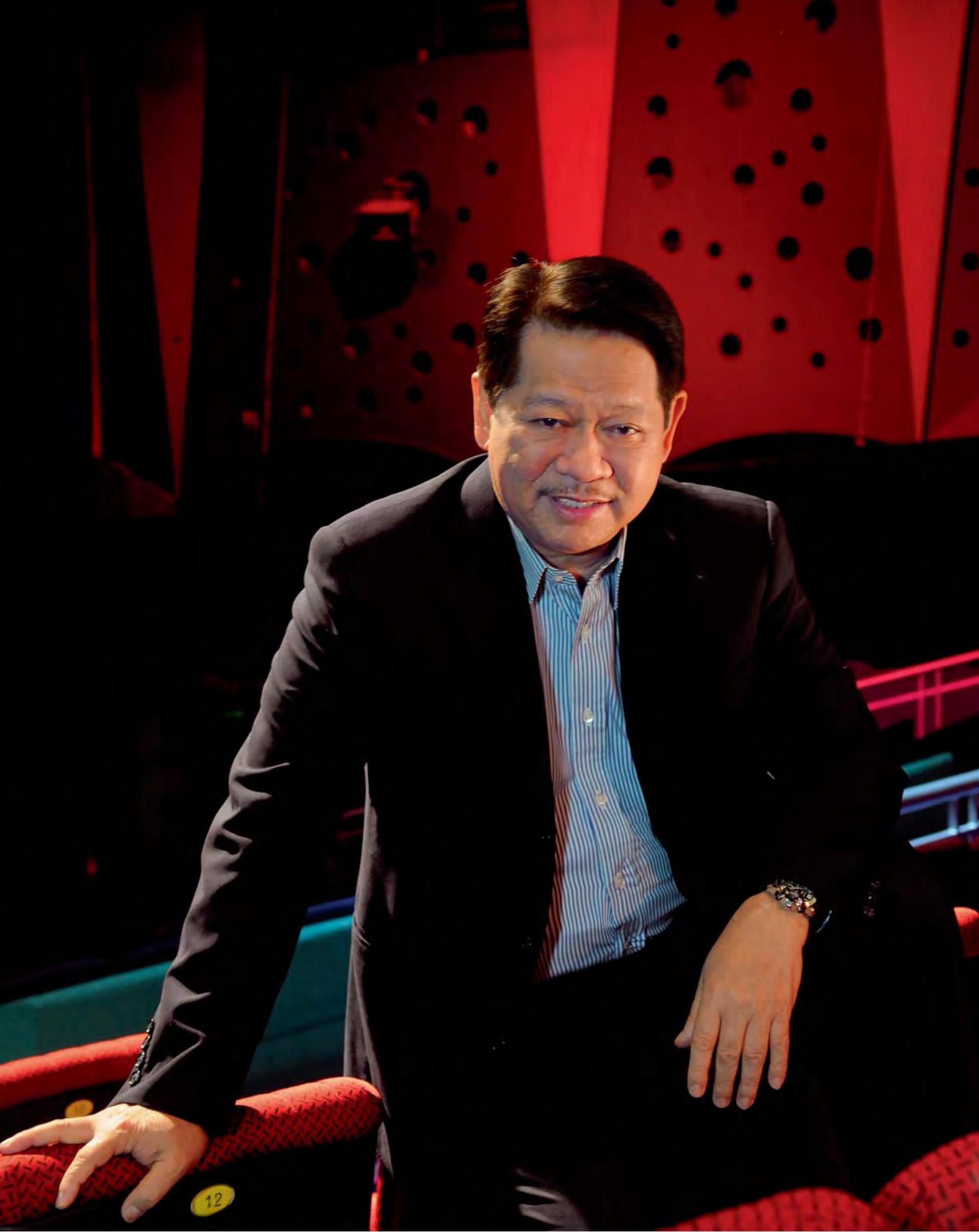
Genuino pulled out all the stops in his latest projects. He even completely renovated the PAGCOR Grand Theater to accommodate the technical requirements needed by the new shows. The 1,200-seat auditorium now boasts several hydraulic lifts and top-of-the-line stage lighting and sound technology.

"This is the beginning of a new generation of Philippine entertainment and it is PAGCOR that has initiated it," Genuino proudly says. "We want to show the whole world that we have the capability of producing shows of this magnitude."

But more than just a business decision, creating *Wanders* also serves a more altruistic role. The show aims to be a launch pad for the career of local entertainers.

Genuino also disclosed that there are at least three to four more projects in the pipeline. Each will be launched just in time for the opening of the Bagong Nayong Pilipino Entertainment City project.

A man like Genuino cannot literally turn lead into gold or create the elixir of life. But his extraordinary ability to find opportunity in places where others have not considered looking coupled with his boundless determination to realize his dreams are more profound than alchemy. □





Rafael Butch Francisco

President and COO of PAGCOR, the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation

A post-graduate in Human Resource Development from Ateneo de Manila University with a Baccalaureate from De La Salle University, Rafael Butch Francisco, President and COO of PAGCOR, answers questions on the gaming sector in the Philippines and the wider world. With casino operators' share prices falling and credit-rating agencies projecting a bleak scenario, Francisco faces brand-new challenges as the manager of an industry that was thought to be recession-proof until very recently. An active member and a former governor of Rotary International, Francisco also underlines his social commitments and community-building initiatives for a depressed area of the capital.

PORTRAIT: JESUS S. CASABAR PHOTOS: AL MARTINEZ

A myth says that players will keep betting as the economy slows down, still hoping for a big win. Is gaming truly a recession-proof industry?

With figures in hand from the last two quarters of 2008, there is no doubt that the gaming industry is facing a slowdown. From Vegas to Macau, casino operators have been affected by the worldwide recession and revenues have declined, even though the gaming industry in the Philippines has weathered the storm better than other markets.

Why?

Both Macau and Vegas went through an expansion-frenzy over the last few years and several mega projects, worth billions of dollars, are still under construction there. Normally when operators enter the final stages of a project they need additional financing and unfortunately this coincides with a period of credit crunch with little liquidity available in the market. In the Philippines, on the contrary, we didn't build new casinos to generate additional income, therefore reducing our expensive capital outlay sensibly.

Being conservative has paid dividends but doesn't this situation worry you, considering that PAGCOR is about to launch its own multi-billion dollar Entertainment City?

Of course it does, but we are counting on reliable and solid partners for this project. Genting of Malaysia, boasting major investments as far as the UK, is Asia's number one casino operator. In the Philippines it paired up with Andrew Tan, one of the country's most successful businessmen with an impeccable track record in the property business and together they form a formidable joint venture. Aruze of Japan has been profitable despite a continuing slump in their national economy ▶▶



“EVEN THOUGH PAGCOR HAS ITS OWN CHARACTER AND IS NOT A LISTED COMPANY, THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD UNANIMOUSLY DECIDED THAT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY WERE GOING TO BE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF OUR MANAGEMENT STYLE.”

» and SM Investments of the Philippines belongs to the country's wealthiest family with major interests in retail and banking and continues to be extremely liquid.

So the Entertainment City chose its strategic partners well?

Last year I attended the G2E in Las Vegas, the world's largest gaming tradeshow, and I was happy to hear Andrew MacDonald, a principal lecturer at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and a former employee of Genting, speaking about the Entertainment City. During his intervention about gaming in Asia, he mentioned that the Entertainment City will probably be the last integrated resort ever to be built in the region. His arguments were that this project was backed by very solid operators and PAGCOR continues to be at the top of the list. We are the second biggest earner for the national government next only to the Finance Department and it is one of the most profitable corporations in the Philippines.

What is the latest news about the Entertainment City?

As committed in the provisional licensing, the three locators are expected to begin construction in the first quarter of 2009. We have been holding meetings with their representatives here in Manila every week since the beginning of the year and there are no signs that the construction will be delayed due to the global downturn. The three locators have secured an investment of US\$1 billion each in the Philippines, which is a relatively small figure compared to other similar projects they are developing in Macau and Singapore. In other words, the scale of their investments is not so prohibitive and the project should not experience major delays due to financing.

How would you describe the overall performance of the company last year?

The last two quarters were tough as the revenues were affected by both the financial crisis and the Christmas holidays, which historically have never had a positive effect on gaming, at least in the Philippines, but overall it was still a good year. PAGCOR's revenues were up 8-12 percent in 2008 amounting to a total of US\$ 630 million.

What about a forecast for the middle and long term?

According to market research conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers last year, PAGCOR is looking at a 17.9 percent compounded annual growth rate in the period 2008-2012. They went back studying our performance as far as the 1990s to come out with this estimate, and even though it was released prior to the international financial crisis, we believe this forecast to be quite accurate, especially considering its conservative nature. As for the short run, we know we will to adjust our forecast for 2009 to around a 3 percent growth rate down from the projected 8 percent. In 2011 though, due to the opening of phase one of the Entertainment City Manila, we should be able to generate additional revenues exceeding the US\$1 billion mark.

You seem to be quite at ease speaking of large figures even though you are not a man of the industry. How do you manage to run a company like PAGCOR with little previous experience in the gaming sector?

I have many years experience in business and in human resource development both academically as well as in my professional life. At the end of the day, to run a company means to manage people and make them an important asset of the organization. This is what I have been doing at PAGCOR since I joined the top management and the numbers show that our approach has been a successful one. PAGCOR was created to generate income and redistribute it in society to people in need, but in the process our employees were almost forgotten. My recommendation along with the Chairman's, upon joining the board of directors, was to redirect the attention to our employees, making sure that their salaries and benefits were in line with other major corporations either public or private. Since then healthcare, housing loans, retirement, and other benefits have improved significantly and as a result we feel that our employees are happier, increasingly loyal and performing better for the benefit of the company and the Philippine society as a whole.



“ I SOMETIMES SPEND WEEKENDS WITH MY WIFE AND OTHER ROTARIANS, VISITING SOME OF THE PROJECTS THAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED IN THE PAST. THIS OFTEN TAKES US TO DEPRESSED AREAS OF THE CITY AND IT’S LIKE A REALITY CHECK FOR ALL OF US. MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE WOULDN’T BE COMPLETE WITHOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF HELPING PEOPLE WHO HAVE LESS THAN I DO. ”

Speaking about social commitments, you are an active Rotarian having held the position of president of the club in Makati Central in 1993 and that of governor of Rotary International in District 3830. Does Rotary Club give you more opportunities to interact with people and help community building?

I enjoy helping people and Rotary, which in essence is a volunteer organization, gave me this opportunity in the past and continues to do so nowadays. I sometimes spend weekends with my wife and other Rotarians, visiting some of the projects that we have accomplished in the past. This often takes us to depressed areas of the city and it’s like a reality check for all of us. I was lucky to have a successful career, but my professional life wouldn’t be complete without the possibility of helping people who have less than I do.

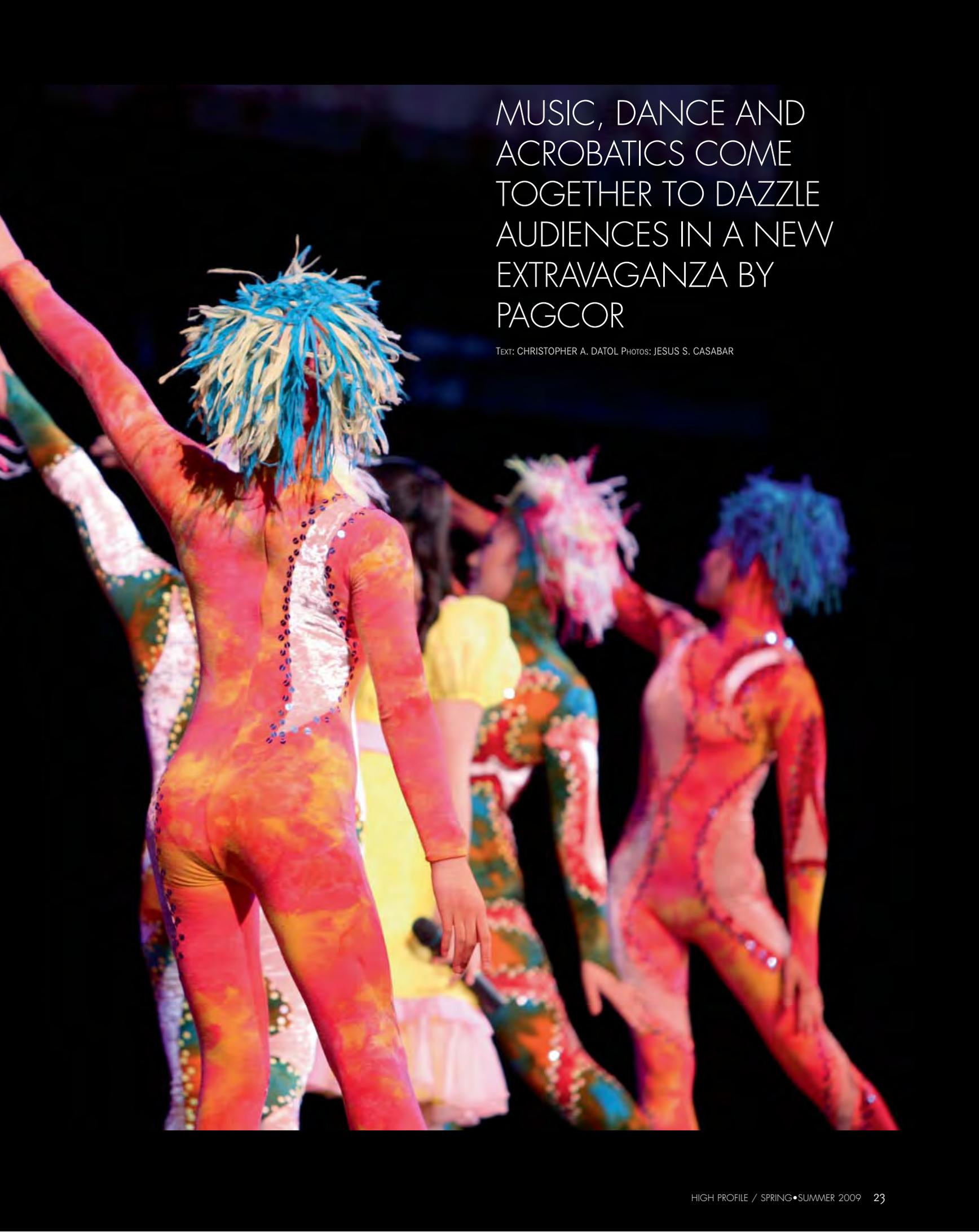
Corporate governance is also one of your personal inputs as a manager. To what extent were you able to implement it at PAGCOR?

Even though PAGCOR has its own character and is not a listed company, the members of the board unanimously decided that transparency and accountability were going to be essential elements of our management style. Of course as a state-owned company we have to report to the Office of the President, that is our duty, but we also feel responsible for the people’s welfare and that’s why we want to apply a strict corporate governance policy.

Under our charter, only 50 percent of our income is required to be monitored by the state auditors, but we allow ourselves instead to be audited for every cent that we spend or earn. This is a decision of the board which I have actively supported and I am immensely proud of it. □

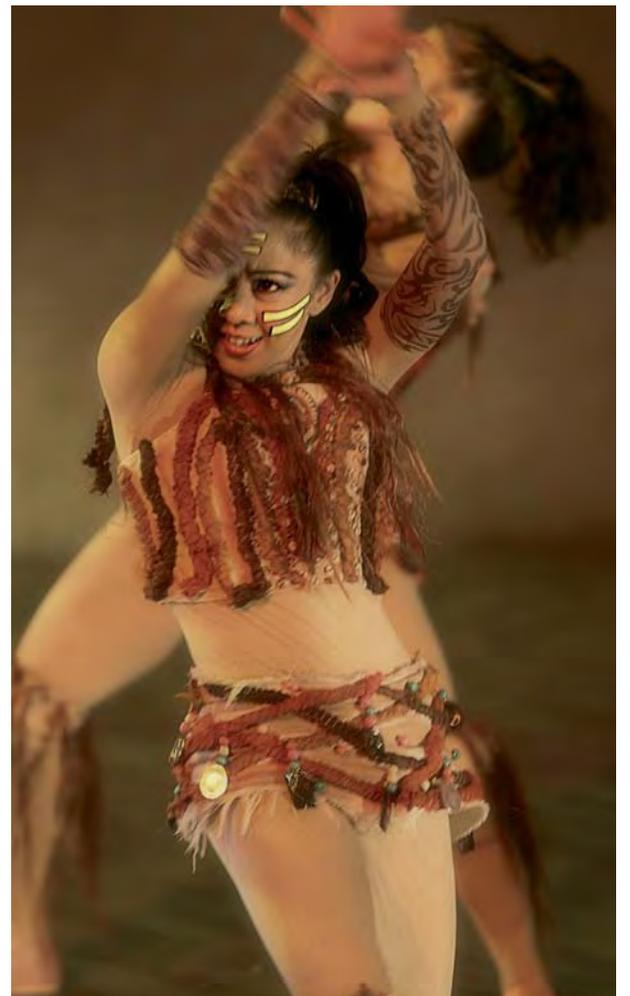
MLOW





MUSIC, DANCE AND
ACROBATICS COME
TOGETHER TO DAZZLE
AUDIENCES IN A NEW
EXTRAVAGANZA BY
PAGCOR

Text: CHRISTOPHER A. DATOL Photos: JESUS S. CASABAR



Less than 10 minutes before show time and there they were: 138 performers from around the world, waiting backstage and looking excited as they were about to stage a demanding theatrical production. In one corner, I chanced upon a group of young Filipinos dressed in flesh-colored, body-hugging costumes doing some stretching. Across from them, older men in suits, members of the 21-strong band, were engaged in animated discussion. A young Latin woman used her hands and broken English to communicate with two Asian-looking girls, while the next room was filled with performers putting the last touches to their makeup.

Director Bong Quintana and his crew were in another room tinkering with their laptops or sipping drinks, but they had enough time to utter a friendly “Hi” to this curious writer who was introduced by the producer, Chito Cabalu. After the pleasantries, Cabalu asked the show’s technical director, Jay Aranda, to give me a quick tour around the theater while he went about getting updates from his production staff.

There were probably bigger worries that night than me while they put on one of the first performances of *Flow*, the second theatrical production by PAGCOR which is set to rival the entertainment offerings of other gaming destinations. ▶▶



PREVIOUS PAGE: Drums beat to a primitive tune as the stage and theater are filled with members of an ancient tribe. As they move together in a crescendo, *Baila*, or *Dance* is born.

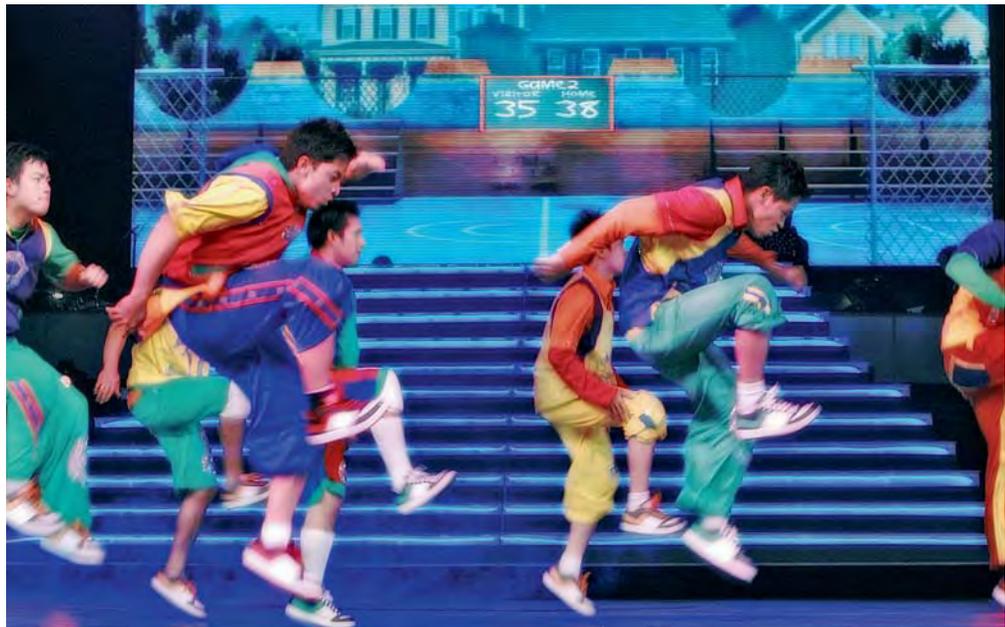
THIS PAGE, ABOVE: Backstage, the acrobats stretch, getting ready to celebrate the arrival of *Baila*.

BELOW: *Baila* is white and luminous, still a child, as she is greeted by a song.





ABOVE: Adolescence is all about athleticism in a high school environment. As the bicycle turns, more and more acrobats jump on. RIGHT: The boys hit the basketball court with their trainers in a modern street dance.



» Cabalu, who is also behind PAGCOR's first production *Wanders*, is accustomed to the pressure of entertaining big audiences. *Wanders* was hailed as "Asia's best musical show" throughout its run, so the challenge to match or even surpass it could have given the producer's team the jitters.

But for a man whose job is to bring top acts like Michael Jackson, Sting, Mariah Carey, and Whitney Houston to Southeast Asia on a regular basis, staging *Flow* is just another challenge to be cherished.

"There was a conscious effort to make *Flow* better than *Wanders*," Cabalu revealed. "For *Flow*, we are using a bigger 21-piece band led by Mel Villena, more sophisticated lighting and stage equipment, new acrobatics and illusions, more than 200 costumes by renowned designer Eric Piñeda, and a story line that will engage the audience's attention."

Since *Flow* is basically a dance show, extra emphasis is placed on a well-defined choreography. Pooling their efforts are dance disciples from such notable groups as Hotlegs, Whiplash, and The Manoeuvres.

"Just as *Wanders* earned the reputation of being the best musical show in Asia, I am optimistic that *Flow* will soon be the most sought-after dance performance in the Philippines and even in Asia," said PAGCOR Chairman Efraim Genuino, who aims to elevate the local entertainment industry onto the global platform.

Flow begins with a dramatic touch. Dancers dressed in African costumes and face paint come in from the back, front, and the side entrances to the surprise of the audience. The first number, a ritualistic tribal dance, introduces Baila, a graceful creature born into the world of music, whose life mirrors the creation of dance. »»

Sequence of Flow

- Preamble
- African w/ Silk Act
- Finally w/ One hand balancing act + contortionists
- Bebot
- Circus w/ ball juggling, human juggling and Bkt act
- Tap
- Parhous w/ floor acrobats + Rope Act
- Big Sister/Naughty girl w/ minor illusion
- Sleppin Out - w/ minor illusion
- Sing, Sing, Sing w/ major illusion
- Flamenco
- El Simbo/Tango w/ leather straps
- Private dancer w/ ballet act
- Bathroom/Salon
- Chaser
- 2nd Chaser
- End of show



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
The sequence of *Flow* according to Director Bong Quintana; The tap dance number has a metropolis such as New York or Manila as background; In the adulthood numbers, singers and dancers sway to a sensual rhythm; A prayer before going onstage; The beat of the drums, this time in a more modern setting.





© Marco Venafiti



© Marco Venafiti

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Waiting to join the other dancers on stage; The performers try on different hats before going out; Filipino singers add their own sense of music to the sophisticated *Stepping Out* number.

NEXT PAGE, ABOVE: The tango offers a stark contrast between red and black, passion on the floor and the daring of acrobats who plunge from the ceiling.

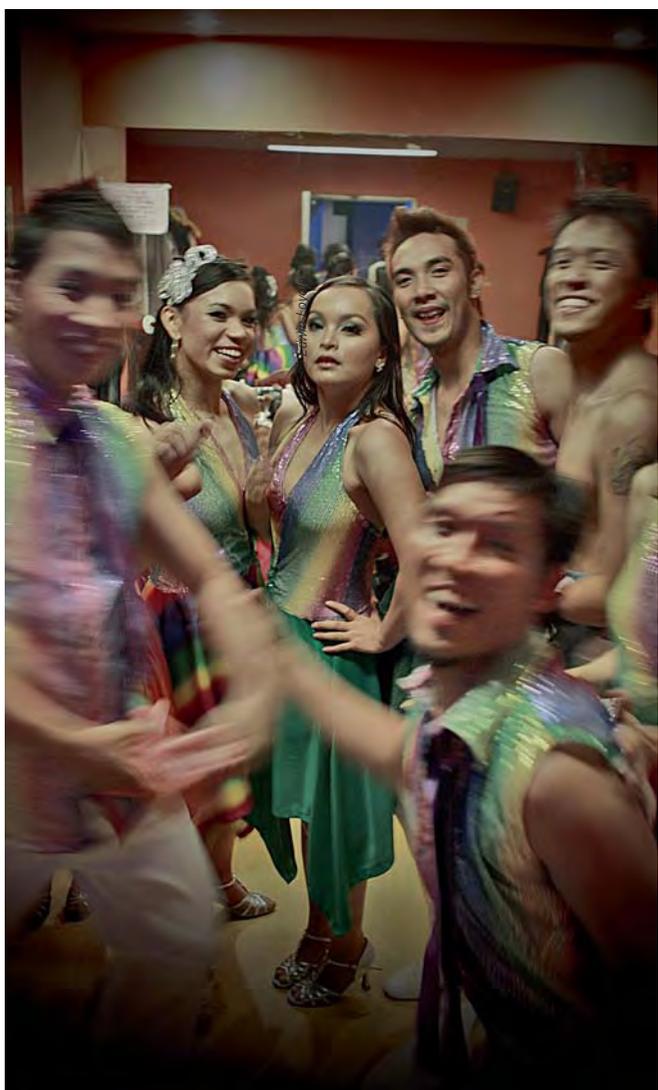
BELOW: The Cuban dancers bring silvery white feathers and Latin hip movements to a Las Vegas-style number.







© Marco Vencitti



ABOVE: The flamenco is also a dance of love and seduction.
BELOW: Preparing for the salsa number, Filipino dancers laugh it out backstage.

» The succeeding numbers are filled with big dance moves complemented by acrobatic acts, colorful costumes, lighting effects, and eye-catching, digitized LED screens that move with the show. Cabalu noted that the technology used for *Flow* was tempered to enhance, but not overpower the performers on stage.

“We use a special software for the LED screens to synchronize the video with the show. The moving light emitted is in tungsten. We’ve been making history in terms of production design and we’ve definitely upped the ante,” he added.

Baila ages through the show as various performers take on the lead role, and her knowledge of rhythm and movement matures while going through the steps of hip-hop, tap, jazz, and other ballroom disciplines. When she reaches adulthood, Baila learns to move with her heart by combining everything she learns about dance and life.

The show ends with a glittering fusion number in which all dancers from all of the various disciplines merge together to celebrate life and rhythm. There is a medley of catchy tunes such as *Boogie Wonderland*, *Rhythm of the Night*, *I Wanna Dance with Somebody*, and a splash of confetti spills onto the theater. By then, the audience is up on its feet, swaying with the beat.

Another first for *Flow* is the use of Chinese acrobats who also dance – an extraordinary feat in the regional entertainment industry, Cabalu noted.

“Chinese acrobats usually train since they are three years old, but not all of them get to be trained to dance. I am fortunate to have found talented dancers at the Chang Zhi Acrobatic School in Sham Xi province,” he said.

The rigorous rehearsals, lasting up to 12 hours a day for four months also resulted in perfect timing for the dancers. Closer ties were forged to break down cultural barriers for a harmonious working relationship both on and offstage.

In effect, all 138 performers – 37 Chinese, 15 Cubans, with Filipinos comprising the rest – move together as one dance company. The Cubans’ skill comes out effortlessly while rendering ballroom disciplines like the tango, rumba, and salsa as well as flamenco. Add the Filipinos’ outstanding aptitude for music and you get an act that enraptures the audience.

Despite the positive feedback the show has already generated, Cabalu explained that *Flow*, just like *Wanders*, is still a work in progress. “We are putting in more elements, studying other sequences, and taking out parts that aren’t as effective. We want to communicate the message of dance to our audience: just like love, it is a universal language to be shared with all.” □

Minds at Play

Together, Jose Benedicto, Joselito Mendoza and Dario Cordero's areas of expertise account for 80 percent of PAGCOR's revenues; their shared knowledge would enhance any casino in the world.

TEXT: MARCO VENDITTI PHOTO: JESUS S. CASABAR

When watching glitzy casino films or James Bond as he collects the earnings from his chips, have you ever thought about what it takes to put the gaming experience together for millions of players across the globe?

Essentially, it takes brains. In PAGCOR, Jose C. Benedicto, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff, Joselito Mendoza, Vice President Slot Machine Department and Dario Cordero, General Manager Gaming Department are the people whose work, unnoticed by the customers, helps determine how PAGCOR's floors are administered, how guests are attended to and how employees perform on a daily basis. In fact, they are largely responsible for the Philippines' reputation as having the friendliest gaming establishments in Asia.

Although chance is involved in gaming, there is a lot a management team can do to make the experience pleasant ►►



Dario Cordero, General Manager Gaming Department; Jose C. Benedicto, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff (center); and Joselito Mendoza, Vice President Slot Machine Department

» for players regardless of the result. The credo of Jose Benedicto, a former Chancellor of the University of the East with a PhD and MBA in Management, is that pinpointing responsibilities empowers the employees and ultimately translates into better service. “This is what I have been doing since I joined PAGCOR, as people feel much more motivated when they know their responsibilities. It inspires them to do their best,” says Benedicto.

While in the private sector these arguments may be taken for granted, in a state-owned institution like PAGCOR which employs thousands of people nationwide, they are not always a given. Benedicto is an active Rotarian and strongly believes in service and marketing to position PAGCOR above its competition. “We systemized and applied management science and ethics to all aspects of the business, from slot machines, treasury, security, marketing and customer relations,” says Benedicto. As Chief of Staff, he meets monthly with the heads of each of PAGCOR’s departments under his supervision to discuss their operations and duties; he is known within the company for his academic intelligence and sound practical advice.

“If you have an MBA, you are supposed to be well-rounded and that’s what it takes to fulfill my tasks. But ultimately, all the credit for the success of our operations, including the shift from mainly gaming to a total entertainment company, should go to our Chairman, the person truly responsible for turning this company around and making it what it is today,” says Benedicto.

PAGCOR’s revenues amounted to US\$ 630 million in 2008, with the biggest chunk coming from table gaming.

“With 52 percent of PAGCOR revenues, table gaming still contributes the lion’s share of the company’s profit,” says Dario Cordero. There only 500 tables available in the Philippines for blackjack, baccarat and others, a number that is small compared to Macau where the Venetian Hotel alone is planning to hold 800 tables by the end of the year. “The number of tables per capita in the Philippines is still very low compared to other markets,” admits Cordero, “but the launching of the Entertainment City will revolutionize the offer as well as attracting a much larger number of tourists per year.”

Cordero and his team are getting ready for that historical moment. “Each company has strategies to stay ahead of the competition, but implementation is what makes the difference,” he says, quoting one of the basic teachings of *The Balanced Score Card*, a book by Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton. A multidimensional approach to measuring corporate performance, these ideas could represent the emergence of a new era of management sophistication. “I started introducing the concept of *The Balanced Score Card* in 2003 by personally making presentations to all of the branch managers of PAGCOR’s 13 casinos,” says Cordero. “Thanks to this method we can now monitor the

WITH THE POTENTIAL TO ATTRACT MANY MORE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE TO THE PHILIPPINES AFTER THE LAUNCHING OF ENTERTAINMENT CITY, PAGCOR’S EXECUTIVES ARE ALREADY PUTTING THEIR BRAIN CELLS TO WORK ON THE STRATEGY FOR THE YEARS TO COME.

performance of our staff, from the dealers all the way to the managers, and even the customer’s satisfaction. Now we have a measuring system,” he says.

As it becomes increasingly complicated to run corporations, a more sophisticated approach is needed to quantify and evaluate performances, but the introduction of new technologies is also essential. PAGCOR’s slot machine department is making the most of this trend.

“Slot machines used to be the realm of older players, especially women,” says Joselito Mendoza, “but over the last few years the customers’ profile has changed dramatically and the game attracts a much younger crowd now.” Although the game has fundamentally remained the same, the old mechanical machines with a pulling handle are long gone. “People still call them ‘slot’, but essentially they are now electronic games,” says Mendoza.

Thanks to this generational change, the slot machines’ profit has increased exponentially over the last few years. “Our department accounted for only 15 percent of the company’s revenues in 1994, while last year it reached 48 percent and we are looking at a 50/50 scenario in 2009,” says Mendoza.

Although they represent the most expensive segment of the industry precisely because of technological innovations, PAGCOR is looking to increase the number of slot machines. “Australia has 150,000 slot machines for a population of less than 20 million; in comparison, in the Philippines we only have 10,000 slot machines for a population of over 85 million,” points out Mendoza.

While gaming still faces resistance among certain segments of the Filipino society, the fact that PAGCOR is gradually shifting to a more diversified form of entertainment is radically changing the perception of the industry. The launching of the Entertainment City has the potential of attracting 30 million visitors a year from China, Taiwan, Japan and other countries where there is no legalized gaming according to sector analysts. With these numbers in mind, PAGCOR’s executives are already putting their brain cells to work on the strategy for the years to come. □



Café Games

AS E-GAMES CAFÉS BECOME MORE ATTRACTIVE AND SLEEKER, THEY ARE DRAWING IN A BRIGHTER CROWD WHO IS DELIGHTED TO BE ABLE TO PLAY FAVORITE GAMES IN THE RELAXED AMBIANCE OF A VIRTUAL CASINO.

TEXT: TINA ARCEO-DUMLAO ILLUSTRATION: JOSEF BOATELLA PHOTO: JESUS S. CASABAR

Some people relax by watching the latest box-office hit. Others nurse cocktails at a bar, dance the night away in an exclusive club or indulge in the gustatory delights of a top-ranked restaurant. But for a growing number of Filipinos, their idea of temporarily leaving their worries behind is spending a few hours in a sleek and welcoming e-Games café. Here, they get their entertainment fix playing the slots or baccarat with an ice-cold drink in hand and that irresistible chance of winning the jackpot served on the side.

There are over 120 of these PAGCOR e-Games cafés in the Philippines, mostly in Metro Manila, while more and more are in the pipeline to create a more private alternative to the traditional casinos operated by the state-run Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR).

Such an extensive network makes the Philippines the leader in café-based online gaming in the world, according to Dennis O. Valdes, President of PhilWeb Corp. The company is responsible for the software and the cash management services behind the PAGCOR gaming café network. Valdes believes that café-based online gaming works well in the Philippines because most Filipinos still access the Internet through cafés. They would rather pay for the time they spend surfing the worldwide web instead of investing in their own computer and high-speed broadband connection at home. "And our gamers prefer the low-key café to the glitzy casino...there is no need to get too dressed up in a café," Valdes adds.

It also helps that the Philippines has a regulatory institution like PAGCOR in place that makes some forms of gaming legal, thus allowing the online gaming industry through the ►►

“I LOOK AT GAMING AS A FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT, SOMETHING PEOPLE MAY DO ON THEIR WAY HOME FROM WORK INSTEAD OF GOING OUT FOR A DRINK.”



Dennis O. Valdes, President of PhilWeb Corporation.

» e-Games cafés to flourish. “PAGCOR provides that firm regulatory framework for online gaming to work,” says Valdes.

And work the concept has, which explains the phenomenal growth from just 35 e-Games cafés fitted with a handful of games in 2006 to a network of 123 with over 130 games to play in just a few short years. Baccarat, slots and blackjack, however, are still the strong favorites, accounting for a combined 90 percent of the games played online.

“We see the market for 500 of these e-Games cafés. We are starting to expand some more in the provinces,” says Valdes. It’s not just the geographical reach that’s expanding, the market is, too. Valdes explains that when the first e-Games cafés were put up, around seven of the ten of the patrons who came in and presented the required show money of 500 pesos were men. Most of them came in between midnight and three in the morning to the dimly-lit cafés and were partial to baccarat.

But as the cafés improved in looks and ambiance, the women started trickling in. Today, there are brighter interiors, more comfortable chairs and bigger LCD television screens, leading to women representing half of the daily estimated 15,000 players who walk into the e-Games cafés around the country. In fact, a woman holds the record for the longest stay in a café, spending 12 hours playing the slots. This, however, is more the exception than the rule. Most women just play the slots for a few hours in small groups, while some go to the cafés during their lunch break. Couples are also becoming a major market – husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters – who are out to have a good time in a different sort of venue.

“We tend to attract a pretty upscale clientele. And that’s really the same people we want to tax, too,” says Valdes. He views the online gaming industry as an effective means to channel money into government coffers, thus cementing PAG-

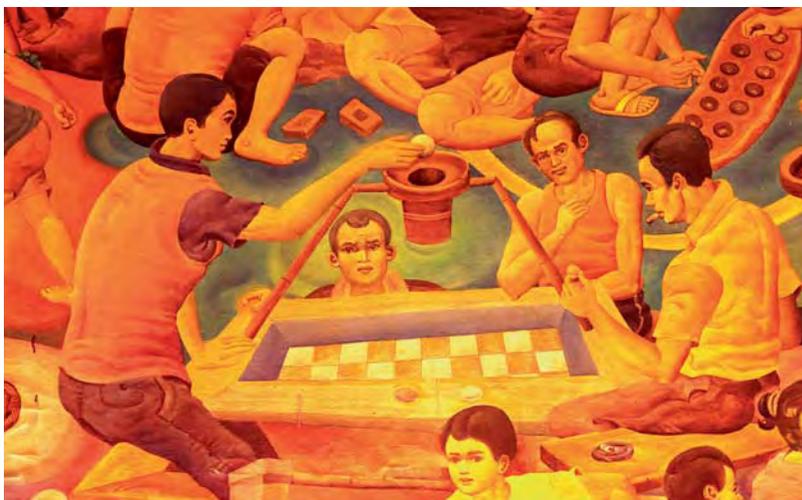
COR’s rank as the second largest revenue source of the country. It is the Robin Hood principle at work – getting money from the rich to give to the poor.

In addition, as more entrepreneurs invest in e-Games cafés, Valdes sees even more money coming in to finance various PAGCOR projects dedicated to helping the less privileged. There is money indeed to be made in operating a PAGCOR e-Games café as the investors are guaranteed a 28-percent share of the gross revenues. This should be enough to cover labor costs and rent while leaving a good slice behind for profit.

The profit potential explains why of the 123 PAGCOR e-Games cafés operating today, only 17 are owned by PhilWeb. The rest are owned by individual entrepreneurs, some of whom have small chains of between 10 and 12 cafés. The balance of 72 percent is split between PhilWeb and PAGCOR. Valdes declines to say exactly how the balance is divided, merely saying that PAGCOR gets the bulk of the money coming from the network of PAGCOR e-Games cafés. It’s a split that PhilWeb is happy with and Valdes is looking forward to another good year for online gaming despite economic uncertainties that have prompted a lot of Filipinos to restrict spending to more essential budget items like food, clothing and rent.

“We have so far been isolated from the economic difficulties and I am positive about this year. I look at gaming as a form of entertainment, something that people may do on their way home from work instead of going out for a drink,” Valdes says, though he admits that some negative views still persist in the mainly Roman Catholic Philippines. Valdes is confident that online gaming and spending time in the casinos will eventually gain more respect; he is even exploring the possibility of bringing the concept of e-Games cafés to other countries in Asia with a regulatory authority similar to PAGCOR. □

Davao: Small is beautiful



ABOVE: The murals inside PAGCOR Davao represent indigenous games.

BELOW: The façade of the Grand Regal Hotel with the entrance to the casino.

Sometimes it's not essential to be big to make a sizeable profit. Awarded with the best profit-plan performance in 2008, PAGCOR Davao at the Grand Regal Hotel has fewer tables than many other of the corporation's venues, a cosier feeling and exotic murals representing indigenous games; yet it has managed to embody the true spirit of a family operation.

"If I see a player that I know well betting too hard or losing too much money at the tables, I often advise them to reconsider, almost like a friend," says Arthur Malatag, Davao Casino's Branch Manager.

With nearly 40-years experience in the industry, Malatag knows that a personal touch translates into greater business, especially in the gaming sector.

Boasting among the highest standards of living in the region, Davao is home to an increasing number of companies. Malatag believes that his casino will remain the center of the city's entertainment scene as the population continues to rise. □





Banquet of Hope

TEXT: KRISTINA MAE R. OMBAO PHOTOS: JESUS S. CASABAR

As a famous American talk show host once said, “Giving is not about being able to write a check. It’s being able to touch somebody’s life.”

Following suit, PAGCOR as the Philippines’ second top-earning government corporation, makes paying forward random acts of kindness nothing short of habit. But in spite of its immersion in a myriad of community development programs, the state-run gaming firm is widening the scope of its social commitment – this time to feed the undernourished.

In the last quarter of 2008, PAGCOR Chairman Efraim C. Genuino led the launching of a massive food program designed to address the burgeoning issue of malnutrition in the Philippines. According to a United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report, more than five million Filipino kids aged five and below suffer from malnutrition every year. Unfortunately, this scenario has not improved in the past 15 years.

Dubbed *Sagip Musmos* (Save a Child) PAGCOR, this supplemental food program is intended to augment the existing programs of the Philippine government. In partnership with the Philippines’ Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Education (DepEd), PAGCOR subsidizes the daily nutritional needs of underweight children at community-based day care centers and public elementary schools nationwide. Meanwhile, its partners identify the program beneficiaries and periodically assess their development during a six-month period until the children reach their ideal weight.

According to Genuino, PAGCOR will ensure the sustain-

ability of the nourishment program by conducting monthly charity bingo sessions nationwide, proceeds of which will be used to fund the project on a long-term basis. “We have taken upon ourselves to be part of the campaign to feed our country’s children because we believe that a healthy nation is a strong one,” the PAGCOR chief said.

Initially, the *Sagip Musmos* Program has served the nutritional needs of more than 5,000 indigent students from all over the archipelago. The first phase is planned to finish in March 2009, while monitoring reports conducted by PAGCOR’s casino branches nationwide have indicated a promising outlook since the program’s launch: that curbing malnutrition in the Philippines is not an impossible feat if done with conviction.

“Nowhere in the history of our province has there been [such] a gigantic concern for the malnourished pupils in public elementary schools than what PAGCOR has just initiated,” said Glody Castillon, officer-in-charge of the DepEd in Bacolod City of the Philippines’ Western Visayas Region. “It is fulfilling to know that while the DepEd educates the country’s hope, PAGCOR feeds,” she added.

Bacolod City was chosen as the venue for the alimentary supplement program’s first provincial launch. Prior to this, numerous food donation sessions were introduced in various schools in Manila, gaining the nod of various sectors in society.

Who needs a banquet fit for a king? A simple and nutritious meal, spiced up with an act of kindness could be the undernourished Filipino child’s meal ticket to a brighter future. □



NEWPORT CITY

TEXT: JOSE MAURICIO PHOTOS: JESUS S. CASABAR

*U*nder construction adjacent to Terminal 3 of Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport is a 25-hectare urban resort that includes a shopping-cum-entertainment center, a casino and three hotels – the five-star 365-room Marriott slated to open this year, the six-star Maxims with 176 suites and a 1,060-room, three-star property, both set to launch in 2010. The Philippine government has designated this complex, called Newport City, a special tourism economic zone.

Travellers International Hotel Group, the main investor, is a joint venture between Alliance Global Group Inc. (AGI) and Star Cruises Ltd. AGI is a sister company of Megaworld Corp., the flagship firm of Filipino property magnate Andrew Tan which is developing the Newport City resort. Star Cruises is the world's third-largest cruise line operator and part of the Genting Group, the Malaysian-based gaming conglomerate founded by legendary casino and resort billionaire Lim Goh Tong who died in 2007.

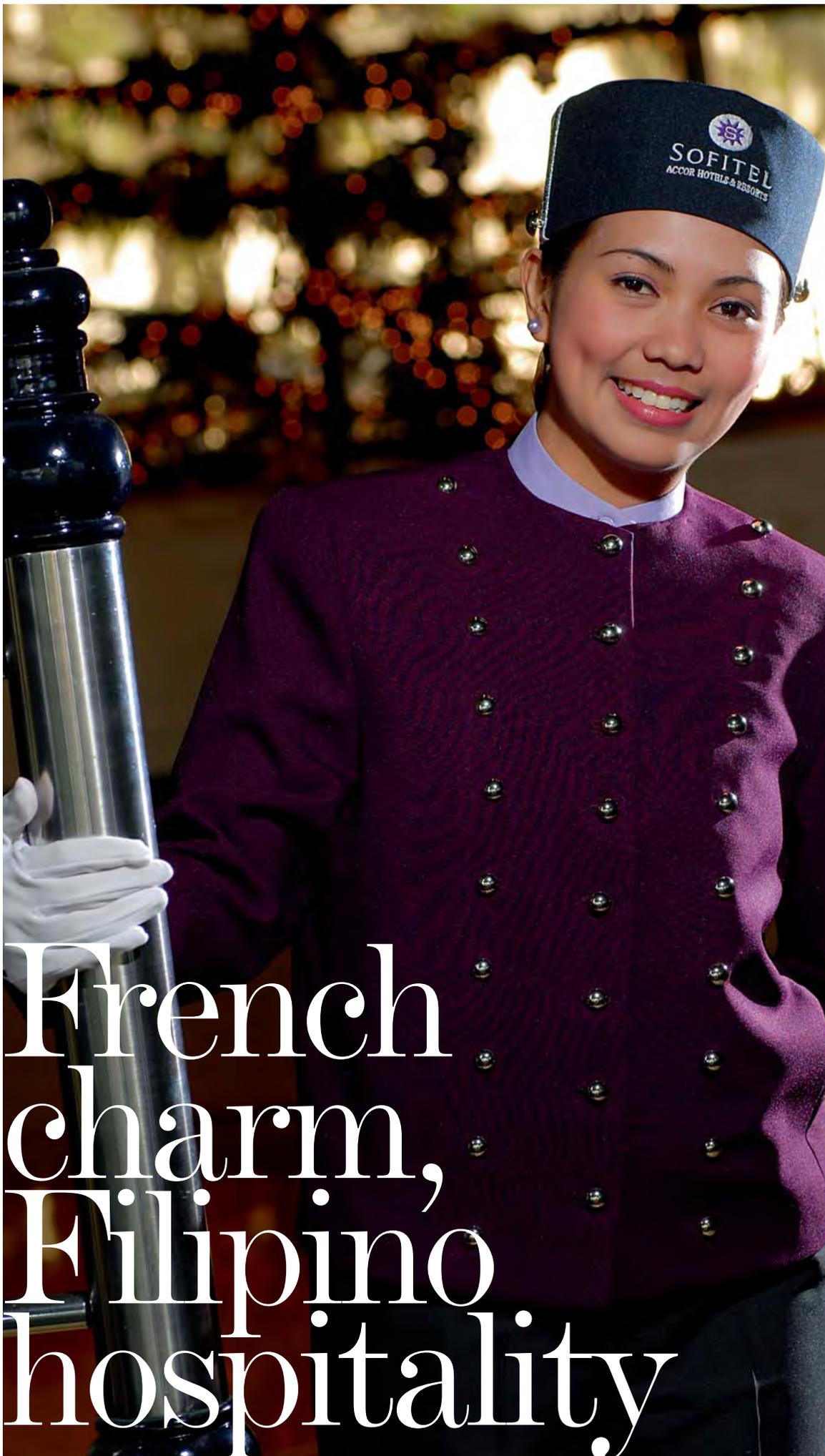
Travellers is also participating in the development of Manila Bayshore, a 40-hectare section of PAGCOR's Entertainment City. In total, the US\$20-billion Entertainment City will encompass eight square kilometers (800 hectares) as an entertainment, shopping and tourism district on reclaimed land along Manila Bay. PAGCOR hopes the project will propel the Philippine capital to become an Asian gaming hub to rival Macau and Singapore. Travellers was granted a provisional license by PAGCOR in June of last year to operate the integrated resorts. Construction of the first phase of Entertainment City started this year.

The participation of Travellers in the Newport City and Entertainment City projects highlights the mounting international interest in the Philippines as an investment destination and growing private-sector support for the country's ambitions to develop its entertainment, tourism and gaming industries. For

Star Cruises, Newport City "is an important landmark in our strategy to expand our franchise in the fast growing gaming and tourism industry in the Asia Pacific region," said the group's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Lim Kok Thay, Lim Goh Tong's son, in April last year when its alliance with AGI was announced. "With the growing awareness of the Philippines as a popular tourist destination and a potential hub for leisure and entertainment, we believe this is a unique opportunity for Star Cruises to extend its footprint in this exciting market." Star could tap its two-million-strong customer base, as well as that of its parent. Genting is to operate Singapore's second casino resort that is expected to open next year on Sentosa Island.

It was tycoon Tan who brought Star into the PAGCOR orbit. Through Megaworld, Tan had participated in the development of PAGCOR's Hyatt Hotel and Casino in Manila. Four years ago, when the opening of the third terminal of Manila's airport was stalled, he purchased the land next to it where Newport City is now rising. For Tan, who has until now focused on property development, this project is his first foray into entertainment and gaming.

PAGCOR believes other real estate developers and private-sector groups will follow suit. It is eager to attract more international investors such as Star and Aruze to the Philippines. Aruze is a Japanese pachinko and slot-machine maker that also won a provisional license from PAGCOR and invested in a US\$2.5-billion resort casino and entertainment complex that will be part of Entertainment City. Aruze holds a 22 percent stake in US gaming group Wynn Resorts. PAGCOR's hopes seem to be coming true. SM Investments Corp., the holding company of Filipino retail king and property developer Henry Sy, is joining with Australian partners in another casino project in Entertainment City which is near its flagship Mall of Asia. □



French charm, Filipino hospitality

THE **SOFITEL** PHILIPPINE PLAZA MANILA OVERLOOKS A DAZZLING BAY AND HAS ALL THE AMENITIES OF A RESORT WHILE BEING CLOSE TO THE CENTER OF THE CAPITAL. STAYING HERE IS A TREAT TO ALL THE SENSES.

“This area used to be flooded with water,” says Bernd Schneider, General Manager of Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila as he looks at the property below from one of the balconies on the 10th floor.

The story goes that Imelda Marcos, while driving David Rockefeller around Manila, had a vision for a cultural center and a five-star hotel to accommodate international dignitaries. The rest is history and the pleasure a guest experiences entering this superlative hotel, part of the European group Accor Hotels and Resorts.

While it boasts 609 rooms with private balconies facing Manila Bay, “the Sofitel Manila feels like a resort even though we are five minutes away from Manila’s historical center,” explains Schneider.

A distinguished French *savoir faire* also welcomes guests upon stepping into the hotel; from the scent filling the air, the music compiled by a French DJ to match the day’s various moods, a luxurious spa and the refreshing variations of cuisine available at the Spiral restaurant — “one of the best kept secrets in town,” Schneider, a former chef, points out. □



Clockwise from above left:

The hotel façade.

Bernd Schneider, General Manager of the Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila

The lagoon-shaped pool.

SOFIT Yoga section. Sweating has never been this cool.

Spiral's Chinese dining area.

LeSpa. Enter a realm away from the everyday.

A scintillating atmosphere, intoxicating cocktails, cool bands, fab food and a great view over Manila Bay are the hallmarks of **7 Pecados**.

The **Opera Suite**.

LeBar. From cocktails to dinner with hors d'œuvres, salads, sandwiches, steaks. Drinks in the comfort of your leather chair.





In the absence of words



DESCRIBED AS “ZEN-LIKE” BY CRITICS, LAO LIANBEN ENJOYS THE SILENCE OF HIS STUDIO, WHERE MOST OF THE SPEAKING IS DONE ON CANVAS.

TEXT: ANNA SOBREPEÑA PHOTOS: MARCO VENDITTI

Lao Lianben appears pained to speak. His words come slowly. Yet, one word can fill a canvas eight feet high and five feet wide, and capture the sound of language to give it dimensions beyond what the senses normally apprehend.

“I translate the sound of the word,” he explains quietly. “How would the sound look? How can I make the word ‘obliterate’ visual?” He labors for weeks and sometimes months; beginning with a layer of acrylic, then crosshatching with graphite, then comes more acrylic paint and more crossed lines. This technique is repeated as many times as it will take for the medium to speak

to him. It is tedious and repetitive. Sometimes, after many long hours and days, he will destroy the work if it fails to convey the idea from which it came. “Painting is personal,” he reasons. “It is a very private vision.”

“There is no recipe in painting,” continues Lianben. “I work through mistakes. I put in a lot of things, then decrease them until I feel it is finished.” Intuition determines when a work is done and only happens when the resulting canvas says something back to him. Sometimes, ideas come easily. Other times, they take a while to crystallize in his mind. “I cannot start a ▶▶





Lianben's studio is not a factory where he churns out canvas after canvas, and he exercises a sense of detachment from his finished work. "I exhibit my best, then let go," he says, "that way, I don't keep comparing but move on to the next."

Lianben likes to smoke as he paints. Though a form emerges, it can be erased or painted over if he feels it has not expressed what he wanted to say.



▷ painting without lighting a cigarette,” he admits. Smoking and drinking coffee, as much as five cups a day, help him stay focused.

“I work slowly,” he says. He stays with each canvas till it is completed. “I paint because I want to say something.” Art patrons who come to visit him will find he has no inventory from which to make a selection. His studio, he explains, is not a factory where he churns out canvas after canvas. It is laborious process to create the visual from a thought. “Painting is very stressful,” he reflects. It is a confluence of vision, ideas, and the need to express these using a technique that demands much patience and time.

There is a deliberate absence of color on his palate. Lianben believes much more can be seen when there are no bright hues to distract. “Color shouts at you,” he explains, “I like a painting that speaks little by little, growing on

you.” Natural appearances are reduced to black and grays, white spaces, lines, forms and textures, which critics have described as Zen-like. Yet, he makes no attribution to Buddhist influences. The sensibilities his works convey are extracted from within.

He keeps very few works for his personal collection. He has exercised a sense of detachment, not keeping a catalogue of who buys his paintings. Lianben feels his best works are with other people, some of whom he does not know. “I exhibit my best, then I let go,” he says, “that way, I don’t keep on comparing, but move on to the next.”

His work space is where he is most at home. Being among the brushes and rags, the tins of latex, frames and canvases, he finds the quiet he is most comfortable in. The studio is, he feels, the place where an artist is most real. Being in touch with who he is, he can be even more himself in his art space.

“Painting and daily life are different,” he explains. There are practical concerns that need to be addressed when living in a house with a family. He is married to Lilia Cruz, also a visual artist, with whom he has three children. “I married Lilia with 7,000 pesos in my pocket,” he laughs.

Lianben recognizes that interaction with other people requires going outside oneself. It is the demand of interpersonal relationships to react, to converse, to relate. Alone in the studio, he is not obliged to engage. He prefers the quiet. Sometimes, he just sits there and takes in the dust, the paint drips, the pencils and papers strewn on the drawing board and feels perfectly happy. He shares images of his studio on his website. The online walk-through provides a glimpse of where he spends much of his time. There are no descriptions or text. “Words are not my medium,” he says plainly: “it’s line, form and paint.” □





Desiderio's Desire

To the men out there who are about to read this article, we suggest you sit back and relax.

TEXT: MARCO VENDITTI PHOTO: JOHN TACA AND IGOR MAMINTA

Don't try to understand belly dancing; it's a world in which we are merely entranced spectators.

"It's like jumping off a plane," says Jenine Desiderio. Also known as J9 among friends in the music industry, she is the artist responsible for promoting this ancient form of dance in the Philippines. "Women of all ages are now getting close to belly dancing because it empowers them, as long as they feel in touch with their own femininity."

And they had better be, because belly dancing leaves little to the imagination when it comes to women's body parts and the many sensual ways in which they can move.

"All I have done is to re-package the style by mixing belly dancing with pop music elements," explains Desiderio, who dances and sings to the rhythm of famous hits by Shakira or Beyoncé, even though her renditions feature exotic instruments like sitars.

"Adding a contemporary element allows me to draw in the audience, but what they are experiencing is authentic belly dancing."

Desiderio's performance on stage is supported by two fellow choreographers who have years of training in belly dancing. "They call us Jenine and the Scheherazades," she says with a smile, "after the legendary Persian queen of One Thousand and One Nights who saved her life through storytelling."

She feels belly dancing tells the story of women's emancipation and sexual liberation.

"That is why belly dancing is becoming so popular in the Philippines nowadays, and in a way is replacing ballroom dancing as a form of social interaction," Desiderio explains. "Although we are a Catholic country and sometimes quite conservative, new generations of Filipinos are making giant steps to catch up with international trends, mainly thanks to high-tech communication. There is no turning back."

Belly dancing is a form of art full of historical connotations and it was something Desiderio kept in the back of her mind for many years. "I experienced belly dancing at the beginning of my career when I was only sixteen years old and performing in Dubai's hotels. The sensuality and the rhythm of the music was something dramatically different to my ears and senses...ever since [then] I kept it inside me until I finally decided to revive it."

Desiderio is no neophyte when it comes to the artistic scene in the Philippines. A multi-talented and versatile artist, Desiderio had an early start in the industry and landed a major role as Kim in the London production of *Miss Saigon*, a part she kept for four years between 1989 and 1993.

"I have been through many forms of art in my career, from theater, cinema, television and recording, but truly I consider myself to be a solo artist and belly dancing allows me to express myself the fullest," she sums up. □

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is shown from the chest up, sitting in the driver's seat of a car. She is wearing a shimmering, silver, sleeveless top and a dark, possibly black, skirt. She is looking forward with a focused and determined expression. The car's interior, including the steering wheel and dashboard, is visible in the background. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

TERESA GO



ES LIVE

TERESA HERRERA HAS GRACED THE COVERS OF MAGAZINES AND THE BIG SCREEN, AND NOW SHE IS CONQUERING TELEVISION. AS THE HOST OF THE FILIPINO VERSION OF *PROJECT RUNWAY*, SHE ANNOUNCES "WHAT'S IN AND WHAT'S OUT" IN FASHION.

PHOTOS: MARC NICDAO
TEXT AND CONCEPT: CARMEN MOURA
STYLIST: CHECHEL JOSON



THIS PAGE: DRESS BY PATRICE DIAZ; SHOES: TERESA'S OWN; RING: STYLIST'S OWN; BRACELETS BY ARNEL PAPA. RIGHT PAGE: PANTSUIT BY RANDY ORTIZ, AVAILABLE AT MYTH. ACCESSORIES ARNEL PAPA. PREVIOUS PAGE: METALLIC TOP AND SKIRT BY PARADI; PATENT CORSET PYTHON BELT FROM MYTH; GOLD AND SNAKESKIN CUFF BY PEPITO ALBERT; EARRINGS BY ARNEL PAPA; SHOES BY GAUPO.

the first thing you notice about Teresa Herrera are her eyes. Not only because they are a limpid green, but because they manage to express curiosity, tranquillity and energy all at once. The green eyes are the gift of an Irish or Spanish ancestor, a recessive gene from a few generations ago. Teresa, however, is proud to describe herself as fully Filipina, though she grew up in the United States and still divides her time between LA and Manila.

Having developed a successful career modelling in Asia since the age of 18 when she was “discovered”, Teresa went back to LA to pursue acting, landing a role as an anchorwoman alongside Robert Downey Jr. in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* and working in theater and commercials. “Before the Asian thing got popular with Lucy Liu, they didn’t know how to define me,” Teresa laughs. “Because of my looks and my name I could be Caucasian, Asian, Eurasian or Latino.”

But last year she ignited the small screen as the presenter for the first season of the Philippine version of *Project Runway*. She didn’t think twice when she was called to audition: “It’s probably the only reality show I watch, because I love the creativity,” she says of the original program. “It’s not just about the conflicts, it’s about the talent. If you have the talent, the clothes are going to survive on the runway.”

At the audition, the cue card with the lines she was supposed to say at the opening of the program was lost, but with

her own particular brand of efficiency mixed with matter-of-factness she waved the problem away and told the cameras to roll, remembering the signature lines by heart: “In fashion, one day you’re in and the next day you’re out...”



She was even more delighted when her designer friend Rajo Laurel was chosen to be the Michael Kors to her Heidi Klum. But Teresa brings her own sense of self to the program, and the Filipino warmth which makes it a much less confrontational show than its American counterpart. Her parting line to contestants who leave is not the final-sounding *auf Wiedersehen* of the American version, but can roughly be translated as “best wishes.”

“What I most loved about the show is to see how creative people here really are,” says Teresa. “They get very small budgets, and many of them come from the provinces, yet they are able to make truly beautiful things using our natural fibers. I think that has to do with our love for beautiful things. Filipinos have a great attention to detail. That’s why they are hired by international fashion houses.”

Teresa seeks to manage the contradictions in her life through balance. At the photoshoot she is focused and full of vital energy and almost every single picture is good, yet she doesn’t forget to laugh and chat between takes. She has developed a career in the business of fashion and entertainment, which is fast-paced and often cruel, but she also teaches yoga. “That’s my anchor, and my way of giving back,” she says. Having studied yoga in LA under Shiva Rea, Teresa focuses on the ►►



DRESS BY RANDY ORTIZ; ACCESSORIES (NECKLACE, EARRINGS, BANGLES) BY ARNEL PAPA; SHOES BY GAUPO; MAKE UP BY XENG ZULUETA; HAIR BY ANGEL SALIAN.

// I GREW UP IN
 AMERICA, BUT FOR ME
 THIS IS HOME.
 THERE I'M VERY BUSY,
 BUT HERE I FEEL
 THAT I AM LIVING
 LIFE.

» disciplines of Vinyasa Flow and Trance Dance, a merging of yoga and freeform dance invented by her mentor which is meant to tap into people's creativity. "In my classes I use everything from Marvin Gaye to African music," she says.

Her restlessness ultimately takes the shape of creativity. With Rajo she has developed the Isla Resort Collection, a line of beachwear in silk and other fine fabrics which can be found through her web (www.teresaherrera.net). "We were having lunch one day in LA and we started talking about beachwear. Then we started literally sketching on napkins and by the end of the meal we realized our first collection was there, so we made it. We have created two collections so far."

Voted one of the most beautiful women in the Philippines several times, wooed by fashion photographers for her professionalism and energy in front of the camera, Teresa has now gone live on television, but best of all she gets to spend time discovering more and more about the country where she was born. "I grew up in America, but for me this is home," she says. "There I'm very busy, but here I feel that I am living life."

Project Runway will come back to the Philippines' TV screens this summer. □

Victory at Sea



When businessman and environmentalist Vince Perez turned fifty, he decided to do two things: take to the sea, and write a book about it. The result is an exciting account of the *Subic Centennial* race to victory in the South China Sea.

TEXT: JESSICA ZAFRA PHOTOS: ROLEX/CARLO BORLENGHI

Vince Perez has been sailing since childhood. His father, Vicente Perez, had sailed around Oyster Bay as a cadet at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. As a Commander in the Philippine Navy, Perez senior took up sailing as a hobby, and Vince and his siblings spent their weekends at the Army and Navy Club.

Vince's banking career took him to Pittsburgh, New York, London, and Singapore, but he never got over his love of the sea. While he was a partner at the Wall Street firm Lazard Frères, he bought a small boat which he christened *Leigh Ann*, after his wife Leigh Talmage. When the couple returned to the Philippines in 1996, they acquired a Mumm 30 sailboat built by the legendary Bruce Farr, called it *Lethal Viper*, and won a few regattas. ▶▶



PREVIOUS PAGE: Sail change on the Sydney 46 *Subbic Centennial*.

1: IRC Racing Division Start on Victoria Harbor, Hong Kong.

2: On March 20th *Fortis Mandrake* (HKG) is leading the fleet.

3: *Subbic Centennial* and *Ffreefire* (HKG) in the IRC Racing Division start.

4: *Challenge*, from the Philippines, tries to make up time.

5: *Subbic Centennial* wins the race on corrected time. Vince Perez is second from the right.

»» The following year Vince's friend and fellow banker Ernesto "Judes" Echaux invited him to join the syndicate that acquired *Subbic Centennial*, a 46-foot Sydney yacht designed by Iain Murray and built by Australia's largest yacht builder, Bashford International.

The boat was named for the Centennial of the Philippine Republic, and it did its home country proud. During its debut year in 1997, *Subbic Centennial* won the Raja Muda Regatta in Malaysia, the King's Cup in Phuket, and the Straits Regatta in Singapore. Vince was part of the crew in the Singapore race, and he joined them again in 1998, when *Subbic Centennial* won the China Sea Race. This biennial race, which started in 1962, is considered one of the world's greatest offshore races, a test of tactics and nerve. It starts at the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club and ends at the Subic Bay Yacht Club in Olongapo, Philippines.

Subbic Centennial went on to bag the most coveted sailing trophy in Asia, the Thomas Lipton Cup.

In 2001 Vince was appointed Secretary of Energy in President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's administration, and he made the decision to quit sailing. He stepped down as Energy Secretary exactly four years later.

Then in March 2008, ten years after their China Sea Race victory, Judes Echaux asked Vince to join the team once more. "Naturally I was excited at the prospect of sailing again, but I was also full of apprehension," Vince recalls. "I had not trained since 2000. I was completely physically unprepared for such a challenge. I had hoped to have a few weekends to

practice my sailing skills, but I just never found the time. A week before the race, I even considered dropping out of the *Subbic Centennial* crew."

In the end he decided to accept the challenge to mark his 50th birthday. The crew for the 2008 Rolex China Sea Race was composed of medal winners from the 2007 Southeast Asian Games. Judes Echaux was skipper, Jamie Wilmot the senior coach, Stephen Tan the cockpit manager, and Vince the co-skipper.

"I was seriously out of practice and could not be trusted with the heavy lifting," Vince laughs. "Although Judes had graciously given me the honorary title of co-skipper, my actual role — for which I was fairly qualified — was that of ballast."

Despite its combination of experience and fresh talent, *Subbic Centennial* was not considered one of the favorites in the race. The competition included formidable entries from Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong, and another Philippine entry, *Challenge* led by Manny Tanco.

A conservationist and advocate of sustainable energy, Vince had just been named Chairman of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Philippines. His vice-chair, Lory Tan, had urged him to keep a log of sightings of marine life during the China Sea Race. Vince not only kept a log, he also described the hardships and humorous moments of the race and reflected on his personal and professional journey of the past fifty years. The result is *Chasing Moonlight: My Mid-Centennial Victory*, an action-packed, often revealing account of the 2008 Rolex China Sea Race.

The race ended in another victory for *Subbic Centennial*. □



3



Excerpt from ***Chasing Moonlight: My Mid-Centennial Victory*** by Vince Perez

March 20. Thursday. 1803h.

First radio positioning.

The sea was so rough, it was impossible to cook anything on the stove. So dinner was a single cinnamon roll. Later we had saltines and coffee. Warm coffee never tasted so great!

Fortis Mandrake was leading the fleet, sailing in 19 knots of wind, with 500 miles to the finish. We were eight nautical miles south of our desired rhomb line, the imaginary straight line between Hong Kong and Subic Bay, which would be our shortest route.

We continued to hike out on the port rail to balance the boat in the strong winds. Waves were crashing onto those of us sitting closest to the drenched bow. We endured this

punishment for we knew that counter-balancing the boat on the windward rail could give us an extra half a knot in cruising speed. With gusty winds, we hardly saw any birds or marine life. Once we thought we spotted the black dorsal fin of a shark. Sadly, it was only the floating corner of a black garbage bag! Waves began crashing onto our bow. Driving rain tattooed our sails. Green water sloshed over the deck, and white lather spilled over the rails. We were slammed up and down over waves that tested our riggings and strained our buttocks. Thick salt spray from the incessant whitecaps stung our faces. We kept our heads low, barely sheltered by our hoods from the wind-driven rain.

As darkness fell I lay down along the rail and drifted into a troubled sleep. It was the sleep of exhaustion from bearing the brunt of the angry sea for hours. I felt snug wearing my

foul weather jacket and trousers, until one enormous wave smashed onto the deck. Suddenly my eyes popped open: cold water had seeped into my clothes and touched bare skin! Seawater had entered my foul weather gear, my shorts and even my thermal underpants. I was soaking wet. Later during that wretched night, Judes and I decided to strap on life harnesses to the lifeline around the boat. This was a safety precaution in case a large wave washed one of us overboard. The life harness was also a life jacket. Suddenly a rogue wave smashed onto me, crashing down with such force that it triggered the automatic inflation of my life jacket. Picture me sitting there with my hair dripping wet and plastered onto my scalp, wearing a yellow balloon like a fat, loud necktie. Mercifully there were no cameras present. © VINCE PEREZ



Sailing Heaven

WITH 7,107 ISLANDS IN THE ARCHIPELAGO, IT'S A WONDER FILIPINOS RIDE IN CARS AT ALL. TRAVELING BY WATER WOULD SEEM THE MORE PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE, AND FOR AN ELITE GROUP, SAILING IS BECOMING THE FASHIONABLE METHOD OF MOVING AROUND.

Text: JESSICA ZAFRA Photos: JESUS S. CASABAR

the Philippines has a long and ancient maritime tradition. When the Spanish arrived in these islands in the 16th century, the natives were sailing in *caracoas* – fast, sleek warships with one or more tripod masts and double outriggers.

Today local craftsmen still make boats based on traditional designs. Philippine sailboats are fast, lightweight, and easy to handle. They can also be easily disassembled for maintenance and storage.

Filipinos have always felt at home in the sea. At present, about a quarter of a million Filipinos are employed on cruise ships, tankers, and boats of all kinds throughout the world.

Modern recreational sailing in the archipelago dates back to 1927, when James C. Rockwell, Joseph A. Thomas, Aubrey P. Ames, Stewart E. Tait and A.S. Heyward formed the Manila Yacht Club (MYC). Devoted yachtsmen, they established the club on Manila Bay where sailors and hobbyists could meet, network, and engage in friendly competition. The club's primary goal is to encourage and develop boating in the country.

The most dramatic period in the club's history occurred after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The American Commonwealth government confiscated the boats docked at the MYC so the Japanese could not use them to attack the military base on Corregidor Island. Sailing came to a full stop in December 1941 and did not resume until 1945, when Manila was liberated. The US Army occupied the MYC premises, which were restored to the club in 1947. Around that time the club began to accept women members.

In the 1960s the club began to participate in international sailing competitions. It should be noted that the Philippines was the first Asian country to participate in the yachting events in the Olympics. Club membership then was composed primarily of Americans and other expatriates, whereas these days there's a good mix of local and foreign members.

"The yachting industry in the Philippines has been growing steadily since 1996 and it's finally becoming a social phenomenon," says Ildelfonso G. Tronqued Jr, Commodore of the Manila Yacht Club. "More and more people are buying new foreign-made yachts... [and] new generations of Filipinos increasingly enjoy water sports activities." Tronqued joined the club in 1998, and became Commodore in 2002. Besides the founder James Rockwell, Tronqued has been at the helm of the organization longer than anyone else.

"The Manila Yacht Club now has 440 members. Although it is open to everyone, the actual process of membership can last between 60 to 90 days. During this trial period, the members of the committee examine the applicants in almost every aspect, from their behavior to their sailing skills. It is a system that we have inherited since the heyday of the club and we've kept it untouched." The black ball system is a thing of the past: "We are against any form of discrimination," Tronqued adds.

One important change came about in 1998, when the height of the seawall was raised to protect the boats anchored at the MYC basin. Before that the maintenance and safety of the boats had been an issue as the Philippines is prone to typhoons and storms. The next year, the club added floating berths which help to protect the boats.

"Half of the fleet in our berths and moorings normally join our popular offshore races," Tronqued says. "These include the Punta Fuego Race, Subic, Boracay, and our annual inshore regat-



Ildelfonso G. Tronqued Jr., Commodore of the Manila Yacht Club

ta, the President's Cup." The Manila Boracay Race and the President's Cup Regatta in Subic attract many foreign competitors.

The high point of the 2008 sailing season was the victory of the Filipino boat *Subic Centennial* in the Rolex China Sea Race. *Subic Centennial* skipper Judes Echaz was subsequently voted Yachtsman of the Year. "We are proud that *Subic Centennial* is now mostly at MYC," Tronqued says.

Apart from the Manila Yacht Club, sailing aficionados can choose from a number of yacht clubs, marinas, and resorts in the Philippines. Taal Lake Yacht Club in Batangas has been cited as the country's "sailing mecca" by Lonely Planet travel guidebooks. Maya-Maya Yacht Club and Reef Resort, Punta Fuego Yacht Club, and White Cove Resort, among others, are also located in Batangas.

The Puerto Galera Yacht Club in Mindoro was founded by yachtsmen who wished to live among the historic bays of Puerto Galera, and to provide a place of welcome for other cruising boats passing through the island. In recent years, residents have sought to improve the livelihood and income of the town by promoting Puerto Galera as a water sports destination. Palawan, Cavite, Bataan, and Subic are home to several yacht clubs and marinas, and the number is expected to rise as more people discover the joys of sailing in the Philippines. □

HIGH LIVING

Escape to Manila

BEAUTIFUL,
YOUNG AND
FAMOUS, THEY
MEET IN MANILA
FOR A NIGHT OF
FUN. THEIR
FASHIONABLE
CLOTHES ARE BY
SOME OF THE
BEST DESIGNERS
IN THE
COUNTRY.
BUT ARE THEY
TAKING
ENOUGH CARE
NOT TO BE
CAUGHT BY THE
PAPARAZZI?

PHOTOS: RONNIE SALVACION
STYLING: CHECHEL JOSON
MAKE UP: KRIST BANSUELO

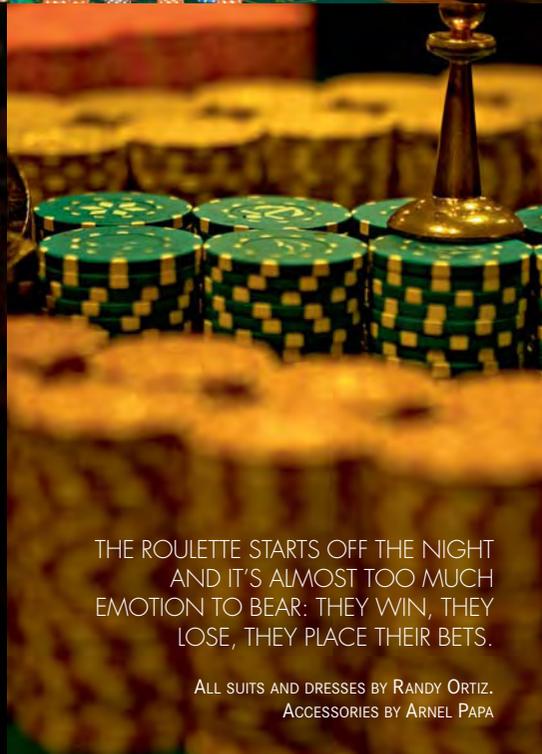




BEFORE GOING DOWN TO THE CASINO,
IT'S A WOMAN'S WORST NIGHTMARE:
THEY ARE WEARING THE SAME DRESS!
THANKFULLY, IT'S BY PATRICE RAMOS - DIAZ.

LEFT: SHOES BY GAUPO; RIGHT: SHOES BY RANDY ORTIZ;
ACCESSORIES BY: ARNEL PAPA; MEN'S SUITS BY: RANDY ORTIZ.

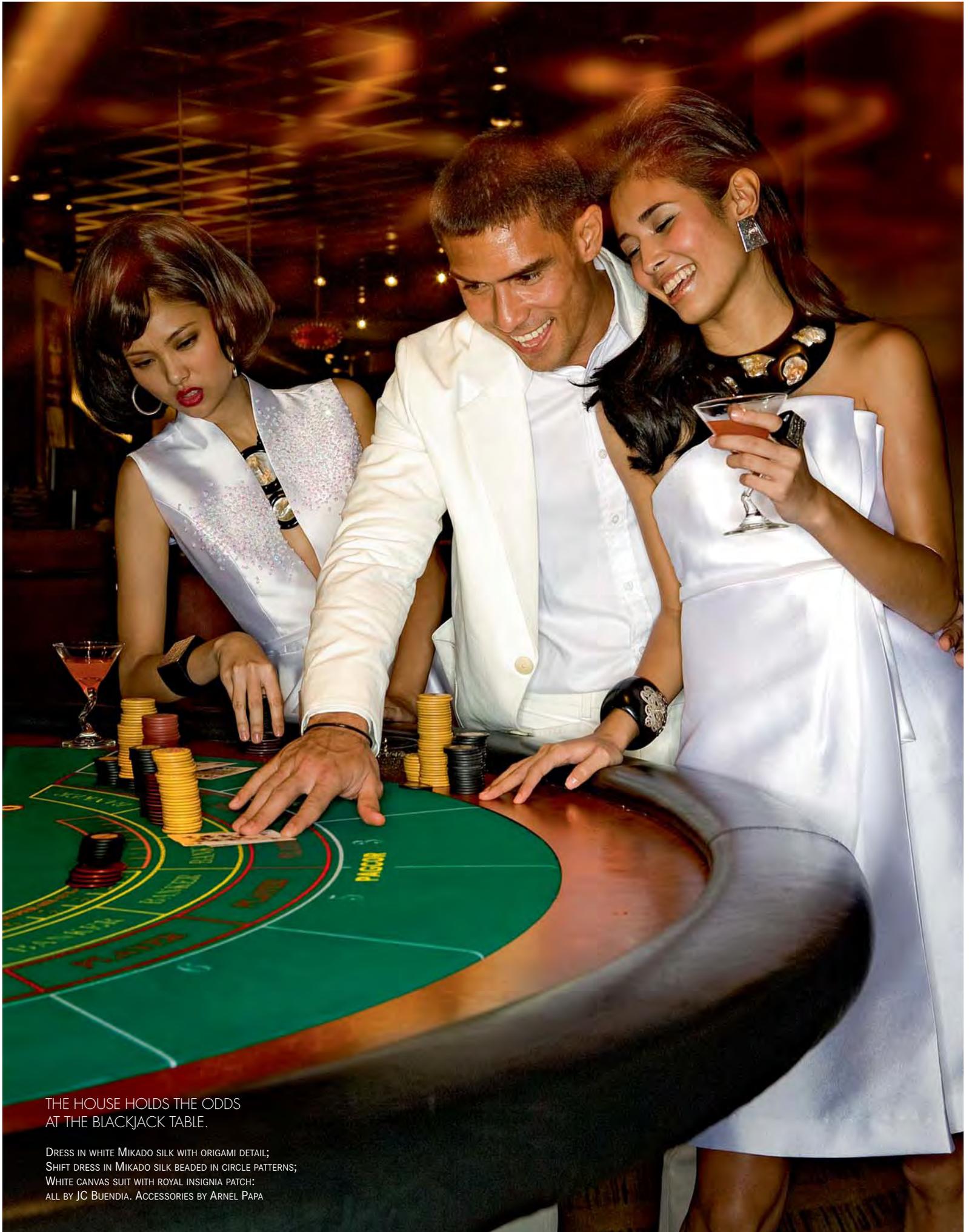
HIGH LIVING



THE ROULETTE STARTS OFF THE NIGHT
AND IT'S ALMOST TOO MUCH
EMOTION TO BEAR: THEY WIN, THEY
LOSE, THEY PLACE THEIR BETS.

ALL SUITS AND DRESSES BY RANDY ORTIZ.
ACCESSORIES BY ARNEL PAPA





THE HOUSE HOLDS THE ODDS
AT THE BLACKJACK TABLE.

DRESS IN WHITE MIKADO SILK WITH ORIGAMI DETAIL;
SHIFT DRESS IN MIKADO SILK BEADED IN CIRCLE PATTERNS;
WHITE CANVAS SUIT WITH ROYAL INSIGNIA PATCH:
ALL BY JC BUENDIA. ACCESSORIES BY ARNEL PAPA

HIGH LIVING



SHE SECRETLY LOVES THE SLOT MACHINES,
SO SHE TAKES A MOMENT AWAY FROM
THE OTHERS TO INDULGE HER PASSION.

FLOUNCE AND LACE APPLIQUÉ HALTER COCKTAIL IVORY DRESS IN
PINA SILK BY PATRICE RAMOS-DIAZ; SHOES BY RANDY ORTIZ;
CLUTCH BY INABEL ENVELOPE BY PEPITO ALBERT.

THE NIGHT IS OVER, THE DAY IS ABOUT TO RISE, AND THIS IS THE IMAGE THAT WILL INEVITABLY MAKE THE PAPERS TOMORROW.

ROMPER ON BROWN LACE BODY SUIT BY RANDY ORTIZ;
RED MAN'S PANTS AND SHIRT BY RANDY ORTIZ;
GREEN JERSEY DRESS BY PATRICE RAMOS DIAZ;
SHOES BY GAUPO; ACCESSORIES BY ARNEL PAPA



MODELS (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT): JON HALL, ANA SIDECO, KAYE AGNES, ALFREDO FLORES. ALL DESIGNERS CAN BE FOUND IN GREENBELT 5, MAKATI. OUR THANKS TO THE HYATT HOTEL & CASINO, MANILA.

HIGH LIVING



THE GOLDEN PEARL IS NURTURED
IN THE CALM AND PRISTINE
WATERS OF NORTHERN PALAWAN.

The Legend of the Golden Pearl

THE FABLED GOLDEN PEARL, WHOSE MOST BEAUTIFUL HUE IS SAID TO BE ATTAINED IN THE PHILIPPINES, NEEDS OVER FOUR YEARS OF EXTREME CARE IN THE PUREST OF WATERS TO COME TO LIFE.

Text: TINA ARCEO-DUMLAO Photo: SCOTT TUASON

*t*hough done six or seven times a year for the past 20 years or so, the harvest of the mature, cultured *Pinctada maxima* is still met with equal parts dread and almost unbearable anticipation. Holding their breath, the highly-skilled artisans of fine jewelry manufacturer Jewelmer carefully pry open the lips of the world's largest pearl-producing oysters to see if they have yielded the prize for which they have been waiting as long as five years – the Philippine golden pearl, with a special hue and inner glow not found anywhere else in the world.

Cheers erupt all around as they collect the latest batch of flawless, living gems that prove beautifully that man and nature can harmoniously come together to create something perfect. The experience of beholding the valuable pearls is nothing short of spiritual. While man may have played a big role in their production, bringing a coveted golden pearl into the world is no less a miracle.

Daniela Fenix-San Agustin, Marketing Manager of Jewelmer, says the long, arduous journey of producing cultured Philippine South Sea Pearls starts back in the laboratories of Jewelmer where the *Pinctada maxima* - which only grows in the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia - is bred in carefully controlled conditions.

Here they are nurtured up to eight months at which time the *Pinctada maxima*, specifically the gold-lipped variety that produces the golden pearls, should be about the size of the tip of the pinky finger. Then the precious cargo of oysters is carefully

transported to the “grow-out” areas in the calm and pristine waters of Jewelmer's pearl farm in northern Palawan where the *Pinctada maxima* is left to grow for another two years.

The juvenile oysters are then brought back to the laboratories and “operated” on to insert the nucleus, a bead of organic matter from the Mississippi region of the United States that will form the heart of the pearl. A Japanese technician inserts ►►



The *Pinctada maxima*: the golden shell from which the Philippine South Sea pearl emerges.

▷ the nucleus and adds a piece of microscopic tissue or *saibo* from a donor oyster that previously helped produce the best pearls from the latest batch of oysters.

The gold-lipped oysters bearing the nucleus and *saibo*, upon which they will work their magic to produce the pearls, are first kept in the laboratory for a day or two to recover from their ordeal. Then they are sent back to the pearl farms where they are pampered for the next three years.

Work does not stop there, however. Far from it.

Every day, highly-trained Jewelmers go down as far as 30 meters to check on the *Pinctada maxima* neatly arranged in baskets with six oysters each. The baskets are meticulously cleaned and the oysters are checked to ensure that they get the most from the nutrient-rich waters. At the lab, some dedicated biologists even go to the extent of singing to the oysters to coax them into producing pearls with the highest levels of luster, surface quality, shape, size and color that determine the pearls' worth.

San Agustin says Jewelmer does not let up on the caring and nurturing of the *Pinctada maxima* because it is so delicate. So sensitive, in fact, that they are adversely affected by changes in the temperature, salinity and even tidal patterns. These unwanted changes are reflected on the pearls nestled in their bellies. A

two-degree fluctuation in the water temperature, for instance, will easily kill the highly-sensitive oysters and any fluctuation in the level of nutrients, pollution or major disturbance in the weather would leave a scar on the pearls.

It's no wonder then that the Philippines' pearl farms are concentrated in the isolated waters of Palawan, called the country's last ecological frontier, where Mother Nature still reigns supreme. The seas in this southern Tagalog province are not easily accessible to man and are usually spared from the typhoons that regularly visit the country facing the Pacific Ocean, thus making them perfect hideaways for the fragile oysters.

The *Pinctada maxima* repays such careful attention by yielding the longed-for pearls that range from white to champagne to gold with the thickest nacre, or iridescent coating of the pearl. The nacre that is created by layers of perfectly aligned conchiolin and aragonite crystals produces that glowing luster and orient that make the large South Sea pearls a cut above the freshwater and Akoya varieties.

Only 10 percent of each batch of harvested pearls are gold, the rest range in color from white to champagne, which explains the 30-40 percent premium over the common white pearls that jewelers pay for the deep gold gems.



Baby oysters are cleaned and individually accounted for. From now on, they will be kept in baskets.



Above water, farm workers go about their daily routines on rafts that give them access to the baskets, and which they must guard.

As isolated as its pearl farm is in the town of Balabac, where Jewelmer is leasing 5,000 hectares of marine reserves, it is also starting to feel the steady march of climate change. San Agustin says this is why Jewelmer, which is responsible for putting the Philippine South Sea Pearls on the world map of fine jewelry, has taken it upon itself to protect the environment. Fighting to keep climate change at bay is not only good for the country, it's good for business, too, especially now that the world has a greater awareness of the unique attributes of the rare Philippine golden pearl, which is unparalleled in its orient or inner glow.

Fine jewelry houses such as Chopard, Tiffany and Co., Chanel, Piaget, Van Cleef & Arpels and Mikimoto have been adding Philippine South Sea Pearls to their collections. Princess Caroline of Monaco recently ordered an opera-length strand of perfectly matched 13-16 millimeter golden pearls (ordinary pearls grow to a size of only 4-6 millimeters) to the tune of US\$320,000 and a Russian pearl lover just paid US\$200,000 for a rare 42-millimeter Baroque golden pearl.

These developments have made Jewelmer optimistic about the prospects of the South Sea Pearls, the Philippines' national gem. "What we are saying is that the world of pearls is not just black and white, there's gold, too," San Agustin concludes. □



Oysters are cared for by divers, who must periodically turn them so they get the nutrients they need.



Finally, after four or five years, the precious golden pearl sees the light of day.



When Othello realizes that Desdemona has been

true to him and that he has killed her out of unjustified jealousy, he says with wild regret that he “threw a pearl away richer than all [his] tribe.” It’s commonly thought that diamonds speak of a man’s adoration more eloquently than anything else: women proudly flash their engagement rings before their friends’ envious eyes. Pearls, on the other hand, are something they inherit from their mother or grandmother.

But to express the loss of someone infinitely dear, one of the greatest poets of all time chooses to compare Desdemona not to a diamond or gold but to a pearl.

Didn’t Shakespeare choose a pearl because in fact it says preciousness like nothing else?

Of all pearls, the South Sea variety is the most sought-after in the world, as they are the biggest and most beautiful, and the rarest among these is the golden pearl. It is so unique it takes 4 to 5 years to cultivate and it can only come to exist in the cleanest, most crystalline waters. The best specimens of this color, with no hints of brown or green, are known by connoisseurs to come from the Philippines, from the azure waters of Palawan. Strands of the golden pearl, which range from a light champagne to a deeper, more golden hue, have been known to fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The saying goes that diamonds are a girl’s best friend, and Marilyn Monroe did breathlessly sing the tune; yet when Audrey Hepburn peers at the diamonds displayed in the windows of Tiffany, she is wearing...pearls! □

MULTIPLE LAYERS OF LUSTROUS, NATURAL COLORED GOLDEN PHILIPPINE SOUTH SEA PEARLS BY JEWELMER

PHOTO: JUN DE LEON TEXT: CARMEN MOURA
MAKE-UP: CHECHEL JOSON MODEL: ISABEL ROCES

DECLAR ATION

OF



A LACK OF CAPITAL AND DECLINING AUDIENCE NUMBERS CONSTRICTED FILMMAKING IN THE PHILIPPINES. IT ALSO PARADOXICALLY ALLOWED A GENERATION OF DIRECTORS TO BRING GRITTY AND CONTROVERSIAL FILMS TO THE SCREEN.

Text: JESSICA ZAFRA

INDEPEN DENCE

ABOVE: Jim Libiran directs *Tribu*. (photo by Leanne Jazul)



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: *Jay* shows how the media manipulates the truth; Director Francis Xavier Pasion and Best Actor winner Baron Geisler receive top honors at the 2008 Cinemayala Festival for *Jay*; Authenticity is key in *Tribu*, where gang members played themselves (photo by Leanne Jazul); Director Jim Libiran with Assistant Director Rayg Generoso (photo by Luis Liwanag); *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* showed that indies could succeed at the box office; *Serbis*, by Brillante Mendoza, was the first Filipino film to compete in Cannes in 20 years.

There have always been indies in Philippine cinema. Long before “indie” became the buzzword for a fresh, non-traditional approach to filmmaking and long before American independent filmmakers like Steven Soderbergh and Gus Van Sant made their first features, Filipino directors recognized the advantages of working outside the mainstream movie studio system.

Insiang, the movie that introduced Filipino cinema to Western critics in 1976, was a low-budget indie. Its director, Lino Brocka, alternated between conventional studio productions and edgier social realist dramas openly critical of the Marcos administration. The latter, of course, were indies.

Maverick filmmaker Mike de Leon is the grandson of Narcisa de Leon, matriarch of LVN Studios, the dominant film company of the 1950s. However, many of the younger De Leon’s provocative auteur films such as *Itim* (Black), *Kisapmata* (The Blink Of An Eye), and *Bayaning Third World* (Third World Hero) were made outside the studio system.

Iconoclast Eric de Guia, better known as *Kidlat Tahimik* (Quiet Lightning), has never made a studio film, nor is it likely that mainstream production companies would allow him to make *Mababangong Bangungot* (Perfumed Nightmares) or *Sinong Lumikha Ng Yoyo? Sinong Lumikha Ng Moon Buggy?* (Who Invented The Yoyo? Who Invented The Moon Buggy?). *Kidlat Tahimik*, who regularly turns up at film events in a tribal ensemble of G-string and headdress, is recognized as “the father of local indie cinema”.

In the 1990s the standard indie bearer was Raymond Red,

whose feature films *Bayani* (Hero) and *Sakay* (based on the life of the revolutionary hero General Macario Sakay) were meditations on Philippine history and the struggle against colonialism. Red, his brother Jon, and their contemporaries from the Mowelfund (Movie Workers’ Welfare Fund) film workshops made art house, experimental films that challenged the Hollywood-derived formulas of the major studios. *Anino* (Shadow), Raymond Red’s short film, won the Palme d’Or for short film at the Cannes film festival in 2000. His long-overdue feature film is currently in production.

In 1997, the once-lucrative film business in the Philippines began a long downturn. Audience numbers steadily declined. Film production, which had averaged 200 movies a year since the 1970s, fell precipitously. The studios attempted to deal with the downturn by slashing production costs. For instance, Regal Films introduced the *pito-pito* (seven-seven) method of filming: low-budget movies that were shot in less than two weeks.

This stringent arrangement appealed mostly to younger directors in search of their big break. At least two major directors have emerged from the *pito-pito* system: Jeffrey Jeturian, whose “quickie” *Pila Balde* (Fetch a Pail of Water) fused Brocka’s social realism with a mordant sense of humor, and Lavrente “Lav” Diaz, whose *Kriminal Ng Baryo Concepcion* (The Criminal of Barrio Concepcion) mystified general audiences but was embraced by the cognoscenti.

Both filmmakers have fulfilled their early promise, creating vital, uncompromising works that reflect contemporary Philippine realities. Jeturian’s most recent project *Kubrador*



LONG BEFORE “INDIE” BECAME SYNONYMOUS WITH A FRESH APPROACH TO FILMMAKING, FILIPINO DIRECTORS WERE FINDING FREEDOM OUTSIDE THE STUDIO SYSTEM.

(The Bet Collector) follows the lead character as she makes her daily rounds in a Manila slum.

Lav Diaz is probably the Filipino director most recognized by Western critics at the moment. His ten-hour *Death In The Land Of Encantos* was the closing film at the 2007 Venice film festival, and he has been honored with retrospectives and tributes in Rotterdam, Fribourg, and other festivals. Diaz’s films are not for the average viewer: *Batang West Side* (West Side Avenue) clocks in at five hours, *Ebolusyon Ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino* eleven hours, and *Heremias Book One* eight. Their length aside, these films require more from the audience, but offer greater artistic rewards. Diaz is from the art house side of the indie spectrum, Jeturian from the more accessible side. “Indie” in the Philippines is defined primarily by who funded the movie, but aesthetic divisions have begun to emerge.

In an effort to revitalize the local movie industry, the Cinemalaya Foundation launched an annual competition for filmmakers who have directed less than three full-length features. Ten filmmakers each receive 500,000 pesos as seed money to produce a feature to be screened during the Cinemalaya festival at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

The first winners of this competition were *Pepot Artista* (Pepot Movie Star), the directorial debut of acclaimed screenwriter Clodualdo del Mundo, and *Ang Pagdadalaga Ni Maximo Oliveros* (The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros), written by Michiko Yamamoto and directed by Auraeus Solito. *Maximo Oliveros* went on to have a successful theatrical run,

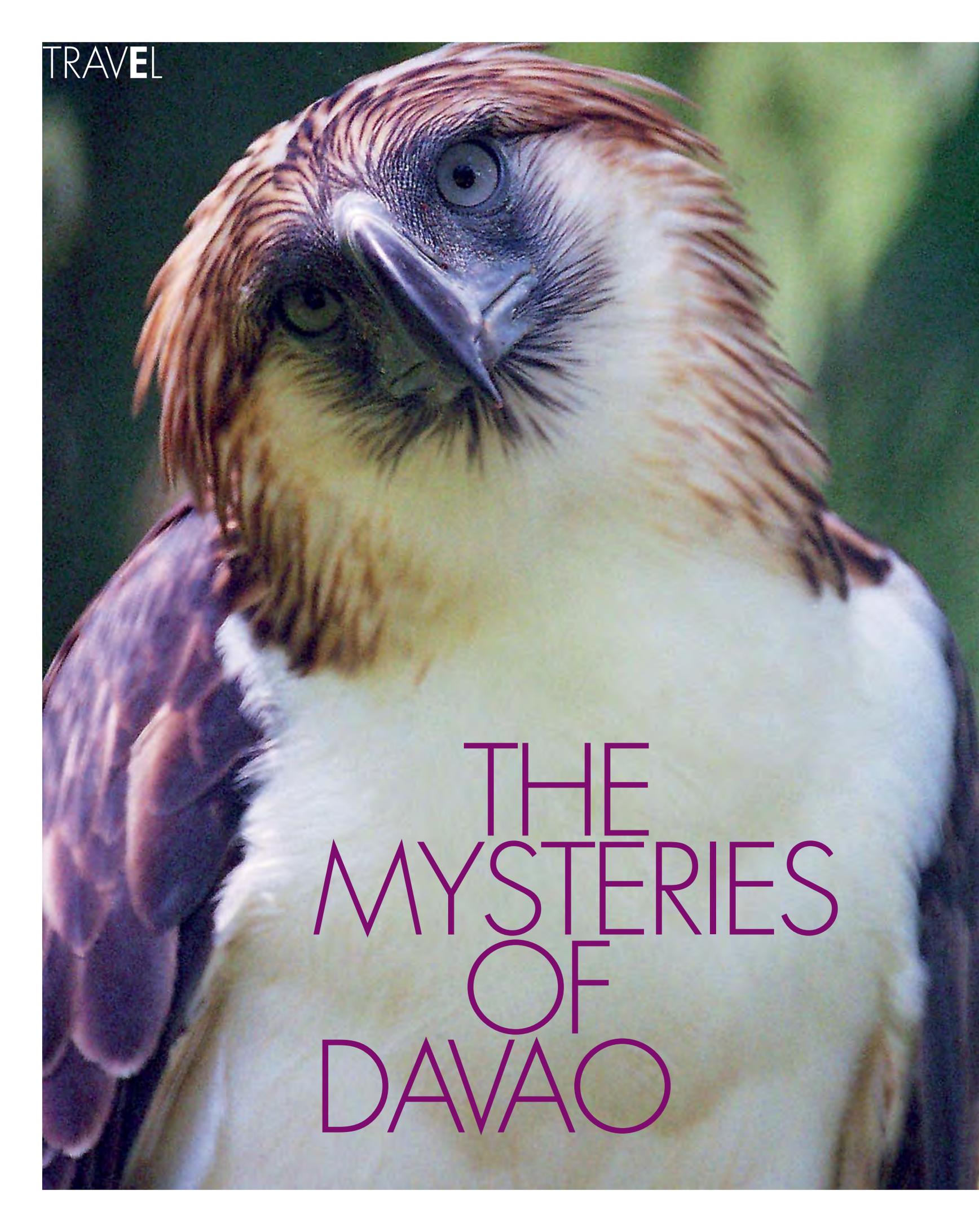
demonstrating that indies could also be financially profitable and it was the first local production to compete at the Sundance film festival.

Cinemalaya has gone on to become a launching pad for film directors and their passport to the international film festival circuit. Broadcast journalist and multi-faceted film director Jim Libiran made the switch to features with *Tribu* (Tribes), a harrowing look at the warring gangs of Tondo, Manila. It starred actual inner-city gang members who wrote their own gangsta rap poetry and declared a truce so that the movie could be shot. The young filmmaker Francis Xavier Pasion wrote and directed *Jay*, a comedy about how the media manipulates the truth to generate higher audience ratings.

The cable TV channel Cinema One launched its own filmmaking competition, Cinema One Originals. Its winners have included Sherad Anthony Sanchez’s *Huling Balyan Ng Buhi* (The Woven Stories Of The Other) about the last shaman of a tribe whose existence is under threat, as well as Jerrold Tarog’s *Confessional*, about a filmmaker who finds himself listening to the life story of a highly intelligent, corrupt politician.

The Cinemalaya film festival founded by Amable “Tikoy” Aguiluz is an annual showcase not just for acclaimed films from all over the world, but for the work of local indie filmmakers. Among them are Raya Martin, whose *Indio Nacional* and *Auto-Historia* defy conventional modes of storytelling, and Brillante Mendoza, whose audacious *Serbis* became the first Filipino film to compete at Cannes since Lino Brocka’s *Orapronobis* two decades ago. □

TRAVEL



THE
MYSTERIES
OF
DAVAO



DAVAO, ON THE ISLAND OF MINDANAO, OFFERS MARKETS WITH EXOTIC FRUITS, CRYSTALLINE WATERS TEEMING WITH LIFE, A RICH ARRAY OF FAUNA, EXPRESSIONS OF ISLAMIC CULTURE AND THE HIGHEST PEAK IN THE COUNTRY FOR TRAVELERS LOOKING A LITTLE BEYOND THE EASY BEACH LIFE.

Text: BRENT HANNON Photos: COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM, DAVAO

LEFT: The Philippine eagle is endangered, but can still be found in Davao; RIGHT: Different varieties of orchids inspire one of the famous festivals of the island.

The soul of Europe can be found in its great cities but in Asia, it is often just the opposite. Consider the Philippines: there is much to do in Manila, but the country's heart and soul are found in the provinces. Here, far from the bright lights of the big city, you can find fiestas, friendly people, famous local fruits and flowers and foods, and the ever-present natural beauty.

In-the-know visitors to the Philippines take full advantage of this, flying to Cebu to see its Spanish heritage and relax on its beaches, or driving north to enjoy the rice terraces of Banaue and Sagada. But even enterprising travelers often stop short of mysterious Mindanao, one of the least-known islands in the archipelago. They are missing out, because here, city-weary travelers can soak up the serenity of rain forests and beaches, or they can dive deep beneath the tropical seas, plunge into caves, cast for tuna, climb tall volcanoes, shop for native textiles and carvings, eat the sweet local fruits and fresh seafood, and see the rare flowers, birds, and animals that thrive in this emerald-green, ultra-fertile landscape.

The jumping-off point for Mindanao is Davao, a spread-out modern metropolis that has the friendly feel of an over-

grown village, rather than a busy city. Visitors to Davao soon realize that Mindanao is refreshingly different from the rest of the country. The soft lilt of the Cebuano dialect replaces the Tagalog of the north; the markets overflow with turmeric, curry, lemongrass and other Southeast Asian spices; and mosques and headscarves and other signs of Islamic culture abound.

Shoppers love Davao for its low prices and fun venues, including Magsaysay Market, which spills over with a half-dozen delicious varieties of bananas and mangoes, along with rare and tasty tropical fruits like lanzones, rambutan and mangosteen, and yes, the pungent durian, Davao's most famous home-grown product. Similarly, at Aldevinco Shopping Center, you can find native batiks and one-of-a-kind woodcarvings hand-made by the area's indigenous tribes, and at a fraction of their big-city prices. A clutch of fine restaurants also awaits, ready to serve must-try Davao dishes like *inihaw*, a ceviche made from fresh local tuna and flavored with palm vinegar and calamansi juice, along with seafood platters, coconut-flavored adobos, tropical fruit plates, and many other island specialties. ▶▶





PREVIOUS PAGE: The face of an Ata-Manobo woman tells vivid tales of her tribe; Ondoy, a young Ata-Manobo boy, was trained by the elders of his tribe in Talaingod to become a master epic chanter.

THIS PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Marine life, from the beautiful to the bizarre, abounds in the waters around Mindanao; Catching the waves; Another of the many types of orchids to be found here.



» Nor is nightlife lacking in this full-throttle southern city, as Matina Town Square and the Venue Compound offer a variety of dine-and-drink choices, while Rizal Promenade leans more toward pure nightlife, with discos and nightclubs. Visitors in search of a real thrill can always pull the handles and spin the wheels at PAGCOR's Davao Casino, in the Grand Regal Hotel.

Sooner or later, though, you will wish to explore the white-sand beaches and jade-green mountains that surround the city in a warm embrace. The nearest nice beaches are on Samal Island, a 15-minute boat ride away. Samal Island has stretches of sand to suit every taste, from posh five-star resorts to simple setups with hammocks and nipa huts, where visitors can sunbathe and snorkel the days away. Scuba divers will find plenty to do on Samal Island, where the aqua blue waters feature World War II shipwrecks along with dazzling numbers of tropical fish that swim among the blue tube sponges, red whip corals and white sea fans.

Davao visitors should also consider a trek to the top of Mount Apo, the tallest peak in the Philippines. This two-to-four-day hike is a rite of passage for residents, and visitors are often inspired

to conquer the towering volcano themselves. The climb takes trekkers up the super-lush volcanic slopes and through the climate zones, from rain forest and jungle that feature rare butterflies and birds fluttering through the glades, on up to the grassy slopes and rocky scree at the 2,954-meter summit.

A less vigorous view of these Mindanao miracles – butterflies, orchids, and exotic birds – can be enjoyed at Malagos Garden Resort, an hour from downtown Davao. The resort has many samples of the lovely waling-waling orchid, with its translucent yellow-green petals tipped in vibrant purple, while horseback riding, birdwatching, camping and other holiday pastimes also beckon. Eden Mountain Resort, a mountain getaway high on the flanks of 2,693-meter Mt. Talomo, likewise offers a cool escape from the hot tropical lowlands, along with spectacular views of the Davao area.

Malagos is also home to the Philippine Eagle National Center, where you can catch a close-up of the slate-gray wings, snow-white body and three-meter wingspans of these magnificent raptors. More than 30 Philippine Eagles live here, including the only one ever born in captivity. Visitors who want to get extra-close to nature can wrap a small python around their necks and watch crocodile feedings at the Crocodile Park and Butterfly House in nearby Maa.

Finally, no visit to Davao is complete without a taste of the durian. This spiky oddity is found throughout Southeast Asia, but it reaches its most pungent peak in Davao, where aficionados flock to sample the finest and least expensive durians on the planet. This creamy, pulpy, seedy fruit is not for everyone – it tastes like a combination of over-ripe cheese and wet jungle – but newcomers can settle for softer options, like durian-flavored ice cream and candy. You won't forget the durian anyway, since its signature aroma wafts through all the markets and streets of this little-known southern getaway. It is just one more reason to escape the city and enjoy the soft southern charms of Davao. □

In their sanctuary baby turtles have broken out of the egg and begin a short but perilous walk to the sea; Mount Apo, the highest peak in the Philippines.





Private heaven

There are only seven villas in Malipano Island. As the staff opens the doors of mine, I am dazzled by the beauty of the private porch.

Looking out onto a flat horizon where the sky meets the sea, the private semi-circular porch is made of beautiful wood using traditional Filipino materials and techniques. It is decorated with taste, using many Asian details, heavy chairs, couches, hammocks, throw pillows, and there are several corners where you can enjoy a chat, read or sleep a siesta.

The low, wide window of the master bedroom allows a postcard-perfect glimpse of coconut trees and sky as soon as I open my eyes in the morning. Two more bedrooms, as well

as several bathrooms and an interior living room upstairs complete the villa.

The Pearl Farm Beach Resort has 70 rooms across the way in Samal Island, but the villas, nestled among the vegetation in Malipano and following the contours of a pristine beach, are the stuff of dreams. For those who do not want to just enjoy the breeze on the porch or a swim in the azure sea right in front of them, Malipano also offers three holes of golf on the west side. The villas are very recommendable for honeymooners, or for a romantic getaway that is the height of beach chic, combined with the strictest privacy. TEXT: CARMEN MOURA

www.pearlfarmresort.com

Arctic Ocean

Beyond the Galleon Trade

The Acapulco-Manila trade brought silver, vegetables and fruit to the Philippines and took coveted Eastern goods to America. Though it encouraged greed, the trade also enriched the history and culture of three continents.

TEXT: GEMMA CRUZ ARANETA ILLUSTRATION: MERCIA FUOCO

In the 1500s, the Spaniards in the Philippine islands were mostly stragglers from previous sea expeditions like Magellan's. They were in dire need of food, supplies and reinforcements, but fearful of crossing the Pacific in the long and treacherous return voyage to the Vice-Royalty of New Spain in Mexico; at that point the return had yet to be charted.

When the audacious Felipe de Salcedo left Cebu in 1564 aboard the *San Pablo* he arrived in Mexico nearly a year after. He carried a precious cargo of cinnamon bark from Mindanao which had miraculously survived the trip and he made a small fortune selling the sought-after spice in Acapulco.

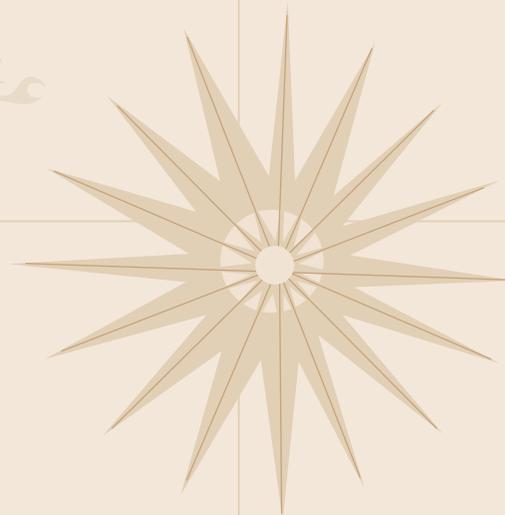
That was how the galleon trade began, according to some historians. After Salcedo's celebrated feat, one or two ships known as the *Galeon de Manila* or *Nao de China* would set sail every summer to cross the Pacific Ocean, the one from Manila or Cebu taking an easterly direction, the one leaving Acapulco sailing westward.

From 1565 to 1815, when Mexico declared its independence, 108 galleons criss-crossed the Pacific Ocean: 30 were shipwrecked (ten of them at the treacherous San Bernardino Straits) and four were captured by British corsairs. Involvement of native Filipinos in the galleon trade remains unrecognized and unheralded as most writers depict our ancestors as mere brute force conscripted to cut and haul timber to distant shipyards. However, historians Dr. Jaime Veneracion and Dr. Floro Quibuyen say that native ship builders improved the designs of the bulky

Pacific

Indian Ocean

N



Spanish ships, making them more seaworthy in Asian waters; in fact, they argue that Fray Andres de Urdaneta learned his navigational skills from hanging around the natives of the Philippine archipelago and surrounding islands.

Because of the longest and most successful transpacific trade in history, the Philippines were honored by the Catholic hierarchy. "Manila became the first primate city in Southeast Asia by the early 17th century, as much as two centuries ahead of other regional centers which attained this status only in the 19th century," writes Dr. Benito Legarda, Jr. in his erudite book *After the Galleons*. In pre-Hispanic times, affirms Dr. Legarda, this archipelago was "among the last to receive some of the major cultural influences of the region, but with the galleon trade, it was in a position to gather together trade flows from many directions."

Curiously, Fray Joaquin Martinez de Zuñiga, (parish priest of Calumpit, Pasig, Parañaque and Malate and Provincial of the Agustians in 1806-1810) reported that because the galleon trade was so instantly profitable, the Spanish colonial authorities had virtually abandoned the development of the natural resources of the Philippines and thus failed to strengthen incipient local industries that were already producing trade-worthy goods. They could very well have laid a stable industrial base for the Capitania-General de Filipinas and encouraged inter-island trade through the sustained distribution of goods. Many other trading centers would have sprung up within the archipelago, developing the countryside. But, "no one dedicates himself to this task because it is looked upon as incapable of making a man as happy as the Acapulco trade," Fray Zuñiga wrote in his *Estadismo de las Islas Filipinas*. He also pointed out that only prominent families, employees appointed by the king such as governors and judges, had become wealthy by virtue of the galleon trade, yet the descendants of other Spaniards and Europeans who had settled in Manila were not fortunate enough to take part in this lucrative trade and lived in utter misery.

Fray Zuñiga was aware that the galleon trade was vital for Manila because it brought huge amounts of Mexican silver, which then became the standard in Asia. He keenly observed: "When business in Acapulco is good, the supply of money is more than enough during which no one would like to work and at all times this money is poorly distributed. Excepting the little amount received by those engaged in this trade, a small percentage set aside for charitable institutions, the rest of the profits of the Acapulco galleon trade remains with the freighters who become rich overnight. As a result, all the Spaniards aspire to engage in this trade and become rich and prominent in Manila in a short time."

A severe critic, Fray Zuñiga stressed that there was no progress in Manila and the entire Philippines for that matter because of the way the colonial authorities grossly mismanaged

the Manila-Acapulco trade. Aside from the privileged freighters, members of the Tribunal de Comercio were given concessions. Owners of real estate properties who had promised to engage in agricultural production were awarded space in the galleons. The idea was for them to produce tons of indigo, iron, sugar, kilos of black pepper, coffee, cotton and other textiles as the galleon trade was supposed to foment agriculture so that eventually, the Philippines could dramatically increase its share in the transpacific trade and substitute items imported from China and other corners of Asia. Indeed, that was a valid plan, but people involved with the galleons always found ways to evade regulations and make fast money.

Although well varied, Philippine exports made up only ten percent of a galleon's cargo. The products ranged from: bees wax, hemp and cordage, sleeping mats, hand-woven nito mats, petticoats, hammocks, blankets and sail cloth from Ilocos; fabrics for bed covers from Lubang; gauze from Cebu; gold dust and cotton stockings made in Manila; linen sheets, tablecloths, bed canopies, mangos, tamarinds, rice and cinnamon from Mindanao. Chinese, Japanese and Southeast Asian products transported to Manila comprised the bulk: Chinese silk, Persian rugs and exotic tapestries, church vestments, religious items of specially carved ivory, elaborate iron grille work, borax, lead, mercury and copper, Indian cotton and ready-made stockings, skirts, robes, jewelry (usually smuggled among bales of cloth), porcelain and earthenware, inlaid furniture and slaves. A diversity of agricultural products came from Mexico and other Spanish colonies in South America, among them: chicos (dried sweet corn), avocado, cacao, agave (the plant used to make tequila), papaya, tomato, arrow root, lima beans, squash, carambola (star fruit), caimito (a purple star apple), pineapple, guava, cactus, peanuts, yam, cassava (a starchy root from the yucca tree), varieties of pepper and camotes (sweet potatoes). Ornamental plants also found their way to the Philippines, so today you can still find the lily-like canna (also known as the *Bandera Española*, "Spanish flag") and other flowering plants like the mimosa, calachuche, lantana, periwinkle and *ipil-ipil*.

Although the galleon trade was riddled with corruption and contraband, even if it aggravated the inequitable distribution of wealth and resources and cultivated sinful desires for easy money and speculation, the Manila-Acapulco exchange had an indelible impact on the socio-cultural life of three continents: Asia, Europe and America. The unprecedented massive exchange of goods and technologies, vocabularies and cuisines, beverages, architectural designs, musical talent, artifacts and handicrafts was extremely enriching for everyone involved. □

(Source: Archives & Library of Saul Q. Hofilena)

Ocean

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

BY JULIE Y. DAZA



ILLUSTRATION: SEAN MACKAOUI

For the last 36 years, Remy has been going to work in Quiapo, Manila's bustling commercial district where jeepneys crisscross the streets in a frenzy of noisy, carbon emission-crazy traffic. She sits on a stool no higher than 10 inches from the ground, facing the majestic doors of the Quiapo Church whose dome and spires are recognizable to every Filipino as the vortex of their capital city's Catholic faith.

Remy, 60-something with missing teeth and silvery short hair, is one of more than a dozen fortune-tellers whose counsel is sought on the busy church square by many. Among them, the Catholics whose religion frowns on fortune-telling. Like her colleagues, Remy advertises a wide range of abilities: card reading, palmistry, astrology, feng shui...the works. It doesn't matter if customers never come back for a second reading, card readers are at it day in and day out, year after year without losing a beat, and more importantly, without being kicked out by the parish priest or his superior, the archbishop of the diocese.

While Quiapo's mix of Christianity and superstition confounds foreigners, Remy knows that it spells good business for her. The church attracts year-round devotees of the Black Nazarene, a wooden sculpture of Jesus, but especially on January 9th when thousands upon thousands of people participate in the Quiapo Fiesta. Mostly men come in their sweat-stained T-shirts and blue jeans to take part in a procession and Mass, ask for favors and offer their gratitude. The holy day is always a nightmare for the police, but the locals cannot imagine the city without the extraordinary event.

In Quiapo the East and West intersect, allowing for the sacred and the profane to madly, merrily co-exist. Spirituality is the largest of the colorful contradictions that mark the Filipino psyche and it is demonstrated well beyond the Quiapo district, where you can find college students of elitist Catholic universities who carry medals of saints in their pockets as well as lucky Taoist charms. Shops display figures of a young Jesus alongside a pot-bellied Buddha and are ensured brisk sales. Families moving into a new house commonly ask a priest to

bless their dwelling, and just to be doubly sure, they consult a feng shui master for advice on where to position objects and furniture. The word for fortune-tellers in the vernacular is *manghuhula*, which means someone who makes a guess, yet each one will insist that they are God-fearing churchgoers. Even the pastor in an upscale neighborhood knows his astrological sign as well as the important religious observance days from his hometown and his childhood.

The Philippines is, verily, a festive country. There's a *fiesta* (Spanish for feast, party, holiday) every day in some town or another because there is a saint's day to be celebrated every day in the liturgy. But saints aren't the only excuses to throw a party and have a good time.

The Buddhists among the Chinese-Filipino community celebrate fiestas in grand temples that showcase the pagoda style of architecture. They offer fruits, flowers, cakes and sweets in the smoky temples on the feast days of the deities who watch over their kitchens, their wealth, their health and their businesses. On the Lunar New Year, usually in late January or early February according to the Gregorian calendar, the sky is lit up with fireworks as Buddhists dine on "prosperity dishes" and give children red envelopes stuffed with crisp bills. These practices have become so widespread and entrenched that Filipinos of all beliefs don't hesitate to greet each other with "Kung Hei Fat Choi!" (Happy New Year) or to visit a Taoist temple to seek the advice of a monk for all matters regardless of how mundane, such as signing a contract or finding a job abroad.

Indeed, the Chinese presence is strongly noted along with the Spanish influence. The American influence is probably most felt in the theories and intricacies of democracy, as well as atheism and pragmatism, but that's another story. Could this eclectic heritage explain the need for Filipinos to be on the safe side by subscribing to religion, fatalism, fantasy, Oriental mysticism and animism all at once? As a famous fashion designer puts it, "There's no harm in believing, is there, if by believing you avoid bad luck?" □

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