.

# Friday, October 12, 2007

## [The Chase for Magno Rubio: by Bernardo Bernardo]




Hi, Friends!

*Just sharing: I wrote an article on how I chased after a role in the award winning play, THE ROMANCE OF MAGNO RUBIO. Said 'tell all' is featured in the current issue of Filipinas Magazine (October which, happily, is also Filipino American Heritage Month). Hopefully this will help raise the show's profile in the Filipino community, especially on the West Coast.*

*You may consider this a gentle reminder (for you or someone you know in the LA area) to experience MAGNO RUBIO at the Los Angeles Theater Center from October 25 to 28, where we open the Latino Theater Festival. c',)*

*Love,*
*Bernardo Bernardo*

THE PLAY:

Limited Run of THE ROMANCE OF MAGNO RUBIO at the Los Angeles Theater Center, Theater Two from October 25 to 28, as the opening play of the Latino Theater Festival.

OBIE Award-winning play of “The Romance of Magno Rubio” to have L.A. Premiere at

the New LATC on October 25

WHAT: “The Romance of Magno Rubio.” The award-winning play.
WHO: Written by Lonnie Carter.

Based on a short story by Carlos Bulosan. Additional Filipino text by Ralph Pena.
Directed by Loy Arcenas. A production of Ma-Yi Theater Company.

WHERE: THE NEW LATC, Theatre 2, 514 S. Spring St., Los Angeles, CA 90013.
WHEN: Oct. 25-28, 2007. Thurs.-Sat. at 8, Sun. at 3.

ADMISSION: $28. Students, seniors and groups of ten or more, $15.

RESERVATIONS: (323) 461-3673 (via the Ford Amphitheatre box office service, WEDNESDAY TO SUNDAY FROM 12 PM -6 PM).

GROUP SALES: (213) 489-0994.
ONLINE TICKETING: www.thenewlatc.com

LATC, a landmark building and City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs facility operated by Latino Theater Company in downtown’s Historic Core, is completing reconstruction and is being reborn as THE NEW LATC. The building is re-opening in grand style with an international festival of theatre and dance. “The Romance of Magno Rubio” is an event in that festival, performing in the venue’s 280-seat Theatre 2.

Winner of 8 Obie Awards, “The Romance of Magno Rubio” here makes its L.A. Premiere.

The play is set in the central valleys of California in the 1930s. Magno, a diminutive Filipino migrant worker, longs for love. Each night before going to bed, he peruses his collection of Hollywood magazines, dreaming of his own Silver Screen romance. One night, he finds a lonely-hearts ad for Clarabelle, a woman from Arkansas who is looking for a pen pal. Believing he’s found the answer to his dreams, he hires a co-worker to write to his blonde beauty.

Working dawn ‘til dusk, picking asparagus by the pound so he can buy love by the word, Magno’s infatuation with Clarabelle grows with each letter received. He proposes marriage and wires money for his fantasy girl to come to California so they can start their new life together. But as Magno soon realizes, reality and dreams don’t always align.

The cast includes Arthur Acuna, Bernardo Bernardo, Ramon de Ocampo, Jojo Gonzalez and Paolo Montalban.

Director Loy Arcenas’ many credits include “Watcher,” “Middle Finger,” “Swoony Planet,” “Flipzoids,” “Stop Kiss,” , Jon Robin Baitz’s adaptation of “Hedda Gabler, and

more. Also a first-rank Broadway designer, Arcenas has won design awards from the L.A. Drama Critics Circle, Bay Area Critics Circle, the Jefferson Award, and an Obie for sustained excellence of scenic design.

Playwright Lonnie Carter's other plays include "Lemuel Gulliver," "Mothers and Sons," "The Soverign State of Boogedy Booogedy," "Necktie Party," "The Big House," and more. A Guggenheim and NEA fellow, he teaches playwriting at NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

Carlos Bulosan (1911-1956) wrote the short story on which Carter's play is based. Commissioned as a writer by FDR in 1945, Bulosan was blacklisted as a radical activist by Senator Joseph McCarthy less than a decade later. Bulosan's fiction includes "America Is in the Heart," "The Cry and the Dedication" and "The Sound of Falling Light."

Ma-Yi Theater Company is the nation's premier Asian American performance company. Since its founding in 1989, Ma-Yi has endeavored to develop, produce and present plays and performance works that explore and affect the Asian American experience.

Set design: Loy Arcenas. Lighting design: James Vermeulen. Original music and sound design by Fabian Obispo. Costume design by Clint Ramos. Original movement by Kristin Jackson.

*"Trust Ma-Yi Theater Company to make a classy contribution…The ensemble rocks the house!...Gonzalez straddles the story like a giant…What keeps us involved is the skill with which helmer Arcenas has adapted traditional Filipino musical rhythms and storytelling traditions and flawlessly integrated their joyous aspects into a… grim tale.*

*"No less than street-corner rap, the play's insistent musical beat (pounded out by sticks that double as martial arts weapons) and rhyming verses (adapted from the Filipino literary tradition of Balagtasan) draw the faithful into a community experience from which outsiders need not feel excluded."----Marilyn Stasio, Daily Variety*

BERNARDO'S ARTICLE ON FILIPINAS MAGAZINE:



"ONSTAGE WITH MAGNO RUBIO"

For our closing night, after a highly successful Off-Broadway run, I gave each member of the cast of The Romance of Magno Rubio a little figurine of Magno clutching a golden heart, standing atop a tiny raft of bamboo tied with twine, with my heartfelt dedication:

On board the S.S. United Snakes
On a Manong's journey like no other
We danced to echoes of distant voices
Broken by the sharp raps of deadly arnis sticks
As we sang of bunkhouse hopes and dreams
Stretching from a stooped, forgotten past
Alive, at last!

It's safe to say that my attempt at blank verse did not give playwright Lonnie Carter any sleepless nights, but I meant every word. I am shameless about this: I chased after every opportunity to appear in Lonnie Carter's The Romance of Magno Rubio after seeing the Laguna Playhouse production. To be more precise, right after scraping myself off the floor, absolutely stunned at the beauty, wisdom, strength and truth articulated by the entire cast every single second they were onstage. Our voices, our story. An excellent Filipino cast in a heart-breakingly beautiful Filipino play on a mainstream All American professional stage. Sweet.

It was too good to be true.

Don't get me wrong, a fairy long time ago, I could have been one of the original "taray-queens," cursed with the cynic's perennial cocked eyebrow, ever ready with the sniff and snooty pout and a bored critic's slasher put-down disguised as wit. I mean, all those Obies

and those raving reviews from the Off-Broadway run... and the Manila premiere! What was that all about?

I'll tell you what. Probably the best 90 minutes you'll ever spend in the theatre in your whole theater-lovin' life. Trust me. I'm not easy to convert. (Uhuh! Winkwink-nudgenudge!) But these guys got me singing Hallelujah and chasing after Loy Arcenas, the director, for an audition. I googled him. Did my research. Found his e-mail. Called him, saying I will fly anywhere, anytime to audition, should there be a need for a cast replacement, filler, understudy, whatever. Not so subtly, I ended by saying: I got to be part of this.

And I did.

Who knew? Loy Arcenas is, true enough, a gifted director (from the awesome minimalist chicken-coop bunkhouse set to the choreographed minutae of each actor's Manong movements and characterization, the imprint is unmistakably Loy's); still, he's the same somewhat nerdy-statuesque- Zen- genius and occasional dingbat I knew from Manila and London days when we were both hopeful students in theatre arts. Jojo Gonzales, (fabulous as Magno,it turns out) was a fellow underpaid and recognition-challenged comedian and TV co-host in Manila during our sisig and SanMig youth. As for Art Acuna, Ramon de Ocampo, Orville Mendoza and Ron Domingo, a certified skeptic would be quick to dismiss them as, well, basically Fil-Am yuppie-homeys playing at being down home Pinoy farmers! And Lonnie Carter... is white!!! What were they doing with Carlos Bulosan?!

Well, they were breathing life into what is essentially a slim short story, and in the process helped create a little play that could. (And, incidentally, merited Lonnie Carter the title of "Honorary Pinoy").

From Off-Broadway to Manila, from Laguna Playhouse to Victory Gardens Theatre (Chicago) and Longwharf, then back to Off-Broadway at the Culture Project Theatre as the crowning glory of the recent 1st National Asian American Theatre Festival in New York --- the play, as a somewhat surprised Lonnie Carter puts it, " just keeps getting better!" And who am I to disagree?

The Bunkhouse Boys (as the former and current castmembers of Magno Rubio call themselves now) are, understandably, biting at the bit to get Little Magno to Broadway. For now, the next stop for The Romance of Magno Rubio will be its Los Angeles premiere and limited run, from October 25 to 28 when it opens the Latino Theater Festival.

Don't miss it. It's about time you retraced the route to your roots. Your inner Manong is waiting for you!

Posted by Xpressions at 5:39 PM

# Laughter still the Best Medicine: Happy Slip.Com



Check out my video about the YouTube meetup on 7.7.07 in NYC!Hope to see you there!! =D<3 Christine