

For Immediate Release

August 19, 2007

MABUHAY FESTIVAL—Undeniably still the biggest and the best!

(Toronto, ON) – The 2007 Mabuhay Philippines! Toronto Summer Festival came to a close a smashing success last August 18, according to the officers of the Philippine Independence Day Council (PIDC), organizer of the annual festival. The conclusion was based partly on the very large turn-out (approximately 9,000) that surprised even organizers led by PIDC president Jun Enverga, considering the many Toronto and family events all taking place in the same week. Visitors came not only for the value-for-money entertainment provided by big-name Filipino artists but also for the 140 booths that showcased products and services at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, venue of the festival.

Mr. Enverga said that comments from out-of-towners boost the claim of success. Over an icy glass of *halo-halo*, Lydia Curtis from New Jersey commented, “I go to Mabuhay Festival every year. *Para akong nasa Pilipinas!*” Cristina Afable of Kitchener affirms: “PIDC always delivers *kaya bilib ako sa kanila*”. Tony Balda of Chicago echoed what was foremost in the minds of the socially-conscious: “I enjoyed the whole show, *lalo na may charity pa para sa GK!*”

“*Sulit!* I never got so much worth for my \$15,” exclaimed Irene Brayo of London, Ontario. Lisa Mapagay said it was well worth traveling all the way from Detroit, Michigan to see Ms. Joey Albert at the festival. “It’s much larger than what we’re used to seeing in Houston,” writes Lina Umali in an email from Texas (with a group of US-based fellow alumnae of the College of the Holy Spirit, she took time out from their international reunion in Toronto to see the festival). The many encouraging comments from the thousands of revelers buoyed up the spirits of exhausted organizers and volunteers united in the spirit of *bayanihan* and community building to pull off the biggest Filipino event in these parts of North America.

The Convention Centre was transformed into one huge Philippine Fiesta as envisioned by **Deo Moreno**, artistic director. Unique in this festival was the multi-stage and theme concept. The “Baylehan Corner”, ably handled by dance instructress **Leonie Manzanares**, was an early favorite particularly among dance aficionados. They joined competitors of the “Dancing to be a Star” contest on the dance floor. There were so many dancers that they spilled from the corner onto the aisles. Not to be outdone was the “Ligaya Stage” where the local Elvis and Tom Jones performed to the delight of the crowd. A band stand—call it what you like. The Ligaya stage had all the mix of entertainment, thanks to the creativity of producers **Ely Torrenueva** and **Zena Zagala**. And to those who didn’t know their fancy at the moment there was the “**Tambayan Corner**” under **Ate Merf** of Mabuhay Radio. Many were amazed at the possibilities at this corner that was at once a basketball court, a stage for folksingers and karaoke enthusiasts, and a place to play *dama* and *sungka*. “This is the busiest *tambayan*,” an onlooker quipped.

The minimalist Main Stage became spectacular with the star-studded array of performers who took turns in entertaining the audience throughout the day-long affair. The day started with a Holy Mass officiated by **Fr. Mark Villanueva** of the Filipino Chaplaincy. In his homily, Fr. Villanueva emphasized the strong influence of Faith plays upon Filipino culture. The mass was followed by the opening remarks of the untiring and dedicated Festival Chair, **Minda Neri**, who highlighted the role of the officers, performers, volunteers and the community as a whole in making the event hugely successful. This segment was emceed by **Marianne Dimain** of CityTV.

The formalities over, the program immediately went on high gear with the premiere of “*Yakan*”, the new dance suite of the multi-awarded Culture Philippines of Ontario. This was followed by *SalinLahi*, a most-applauded musical revue directed by veteran performer **Maricel Perez**. The production made everyone breathless with excitement as the **Little Miss Philippines, Mr. and Miss Philippines, Candace, Grace, Roy, Michael, Glen, Jasmine, Sheila** and many outstanding talents performed in the show.

Harana Uso Pa Ba? Unforgettable, touching , funny....superb--- are only a few words used by the audience to describe the show. Thanks to **Josie de Leon, Rodney Ronquillo, Cheryl Samson, Darius Ciria, Alvin Alba, Cecille Arcilla** and a host of other talents for making the evening truly memorable.

There was no let up in the stream of crowd that kept on arriving, adding to the building excitement as the day wore on. The **Lilac Cana** and **Emil Zarris** tandem in “Freedom to Love” just made the crowd ecstatic. What a lovely musical pair they looked! Momentarily the audience shifted its sight to follow the ensuing *Santacruzán*, chaired by **Rosemer Enverga**. The young ladies were truly beautiful and regal in their gorgeous gowns. This must be the longest and most prestigious *Santacruzán*. The procession was followed by Fusion of Fashion, a creation of the Miss Philippines Pageant winners. A sight to behold, it was also a tribute to the artistic talents of our youth and a product of PIDC’s beauty pageants.

The premier dance company, **Fiesta Filipina Dance Troupe**, went on stage with its usual impressive repertoire of dances and songs. Elegant in their costumes, the dancers reinforced the sense of Filipino culture and heritage among the audience. **Estring Aguinaldo**, the troupe’s executive/artistic director, did it again! Then came power-packed singer **Jennifer Camacho** and her dancers, changing the rhythm on stage with their electric performance. The crowd could not help but dance to the funky beat of their tunes.

The Mabuhay Festival was where the famed **QP8 Band** from the Philippines played to a Toronto audience for the first time. The group certainly left a good impression upon the crowd that got young and old alike dancing and waving their arms in the air. Ethel Stewart swore “ I feel like I am young again”, eliciting laughter from the crowd. Singing sensation **Maricel Perez** joined the band and made her mark as one of the most exciting local artists to watch. This, too, was her first performance in Toronto after a long stint in Asia and the US.

The crowd just could not keep still, especially when in another segment **Cris Reyes** of CityTV emceed and announced a special guest, **Martha Joy** of Canadian Idol fame.

Martha appeared to a drum roll of wows among the crowd. Obviously, it was her chance to thank the Filipino community—through the music of her velvety voice-- for its support during the major Canadian singing competition.

The crowd just got crazier by nightfall, even rapturous. They just could not wait for the main event. Then the voiceover was heard: “Let us welcome **Jeanne Young! Louie Reyes!, Stephanie Reese!** and **Joey Albert!** The crowd simply went wild or quietly awed (some had tears in their eyes!) as one by one some of the most famous names in Philippine entertainment came out. Jeanne started with a rendition of songs of faith. Then Louie Reyes led the audience down memory lane with her retro music. *Miss Saigon*-- Stephanie Reese--just broke the music sound barrier with her old *Miss Saigon* favorites. Finally, Joey Albert, the star of the show, appeared. This may have been Ms. Albert’s nth performance in Toronto but with everybody standing on their feet to welcome her proved her enduring appeal to the crowd. And from here on it was just one great party throughout the rest of the evening that some hoped would not end.

Sadly, the Mabuhay Festival had to end. But as **Jun Enverga** reiterated, there will be another day to celebrate Philippine Arts, Heritage and Culture. His message of Unity, Community Transformation, Charity and the promise to build a Gawad Kalinga Village for the poor and the needy in the Philippines, surely touched the hearts of the multitude that aptly bade each other *au revoir* with chants of “*Mabuhay! Mabuhay! Mabuhay Tayong Lahat!*”