

Take a bow, PIDC

by **Ricardo J. S. Caluen**

The curtains fell on this year's Mabuhay Festival to lusty shouts of *mabuhay*. And quite appropriately so. After all, by any yardstick, the Philippine Independence Day Council may have broken its own record in terms of the overall successful conclusion of the annual festival which has now become a fixture in Toronto's summer festival scene.

I went to the festival rather early, just in time for me to join my friends Loida and Elena (who manned the Kababayan Community Centre booth) for lunch. We ordered favorite Pinoy dishes from the different concessionaires. I had initially complained of my *ukoy*. It was tasty but for the missing baby shrimps (or was I served vegetarian *ukoy*?). Then there was the problem of the table arrangement that made passage in between tables extremely difficult. Earlier, I anticipated the embarrassment of my press ID not being honored for admission (although I was in possession of the blue ticket that would open the gates of the festival to me). But, yes, overzealous volunteers followed the festival policy to the letter--that everyone who entered had to have a ticket and his wrist stamped. Later, I learned that even Maricel Perez, director of the *SalinLahi* portion of the program, had difficulty getting in!

The "admission policy and procedures" needs revisiting and I have registered my observations on the conduct of the festival to management as soon as "issues" arose. I have received assurances that observations such as mine are welcome and given due consideration in future planning for the festival. I guess I am nitpicking at this point. After all, in the over-all scheme of things, the Mabuhay Festival was an unqualified success. And I am glad of this outcome because having met the expectations of paying patrons is no small consolation to the organizers, all volunteers in this not-for-profit endeavour. *Sulit*--as one regular festival visitor was heard saying.

I had a sense things were proceeding very well because as early as 2 p.m. capacity was approximately 90% met. Such was the mood of the event in that instance, giving Minda Neri, festival chair, a chance to join me for a quick-fix of caffeine downstairs. Later, Jun Enverga, PIDC prexy, would heap copious praises upon Ms. Neri who is largely credited for the over-all success in the conduct of the festival. Minda has earned her spurs. A latecomer in the thankless job of community involvement, she has become a poster lady for the newly-retired with a sense of purpose, giving much of her time volunteering for PIDC where is currently vice-president.

As a self-declared culture vulture and music lover, I was naturally interested in the artistic portion of the festival. Artistic Director Deo Moreno deserves all the kudos he has been getting for a job-well done in stage management and the

creative design of the cultural program that had a smooth run from start to finish (save for the few technical glitches that could happen in any stage events). Deo himself was masterful as emcee during the in-between portions, losing perhaps only to the handsome and young Scott Brown because of age. The latter, Mr. PIDC 2007, was in his element, announcing the sequences of the fashion show with great flair as if a seasoned TV host. (Another very young lad stood out during the fashion show---Gino Gardiola-- not only because he is also a looker but because he was the only male model, excepting the little boys who escorted the Little Miss PIDC winners who sashayed down the stage.)

As to the dance and musical numbers itself, there was something to cater to everyone's varied taste. I was very impressed with the performance by Culture Philippines-Ontario as it premiered its Yakan (Mindanao) dance suite. Later in the day, the veteran Fiesta Filipina Dance Troupe opened its segment with the dance of the Igorot, thus, completing the south-north breadth of the country.

Being partial to jazz and Broadway, I much appreciated the duets of Lilac Cana and Emil Zarris. Maricel Perez' opening number with the QP8 Band was a segue of sorts to Ms. Louie Reyes' inimitable style and voice. Possessing elements of the style Chakka Khan and Aretha Franklin, Ms. Reyes might as well be dubbed the Philippines' Queen of Jazz, is she has not yet been crowned with that title.

The QP8 Band got the house dancing with their funk and rock n' roll. Why, even Mila Garcia and fellow members of CASJ momentarily set aside the serious task of campaigning for social justice to go with the flow and dance to the music. Jun Enverga and fellow PIDC officers, obviously in a celebratory mood, also danced with the crowd unabashedly.

Morale among PIDC members was very high that night for they knew early on that all their efforts paid off. Even volunteers expressed their elation over their involvement in Mabuhay Festival. This can be gleaned from the email of Bernie Sychangco, head of the corps of volunteers, to PIDC where he mentions the volunteers' desire to work again at next year's festival. Story has it that the adrenaline level of the erstwhile president of the Ateneo Alumni Association was so pumped up during the festival that he momentarily forgot his wife was in labor. I guess it was this same sense of commitment and fulfillment that made Mr. Ben Ferrer, a senior who manned the gates for hours propped up by a cane.

Perhaps these excerpts from a letter of a first-time Mabuhay participant best exemplify the kind of community support PIDC is getting these days. And I quote:

Wow, what a fantastic event! Congratulations on a beautifully organized and executed Mabuhay Festival event. The Pillars would like to commend the officers, the organizers, the volunteers and everyone involved for putting on a very successful event. Jun Enverga must be justly proud of your team! And his team will continue to rely on him to deliver such a stellar program of events.

The Pillars feel specially pleased to have participated because this is the first year that we have been involved with PIDC. In fact, with too much excitement and delight, we blasted our energies and resources to showcase the "Red, White and Blue Pista Ng Pillars float" at the Mabuhay Parade. Just the sight of the people signalling thumbs up at us as we danced on the float and waived at the crowd made us so happy, that's for sure. We really had so much fun and we really enjoyed it. The Mabuhay Parade showed the widespread support for the Philippines through the many spectators, it showed how valuable our unity and tradition is, it showed the Filipino spirit at its finest, and having said that, the parade is something wonderful to look forward to every year. Hats off to you Suzy Llanera!

We hope that PIDC and the Pillars will continue to cooperate with one another in the future. We look forward to working with you again and again. Let's hope the Mabuhay Festival tradition lives on.

On a personal note, I deeply admire the way the event was organized with focus on ingenuity, creativity, teamwork, integrity and experience. I really cannot think of enough adjectives to describe the event. (signed by Rheza Evangelista, Secretary & Public Relations Officer, The "Original" Pillars)

For now the din of a Filipino fiesta has ebbed, the *banderitas* stowed away. Jun and Minda and everyone else in PIDC---just sit back and relax for a much-needed rest. But before you do, take a bow for a well-deserved applause from the community.