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ENTERTAINMENT



Ima: Happy to be back

DIRECTLINE By Boy Abunda (The Philippine Star) Updated June 10, 2011 12:00 AM Comments (0)



After a decade of being away from the local theater scene, Ima takes on two new projects in Aida and In The Heights

Ima Castro has got to be one of the happiest people there is. Quick to appreciate jokes, to smile back even at strangers, and to give an encouraging pat on the shoulder, she is the type who won't be first to bring up the fact that she is a source of Pinoy pride for playing Kim in Miss Saigon in London's West End.

When Ima throws her head back and gives forth that melodious sound of mirth, well, the world appears like new and anyone who hears it, realizes that, to quote a line from a song, "Life is not at all that bad, my friend..."

Then again, Ima has reasons to be especially joyful these days. Back in the Philippines after a decade of being away, she has not just one, but two roles in separate Atlantis Productions' presentations namely Aida and In The Heights. Ima plays the title role in the first and Vanessa in the second.

The singer disclosed that though she has performed before an international audience many times over — in Japan, Dublin, Birmingham, Singapore, Hong Kong, just to mention a few — she still considers the Filipino audience the toughest to please because there are just so many excellent singers and actors here.

"If before, the world discovered that Filipinos make excellent theater actors, now, people are beginning to see that we also have what it takes to conquer the US mainstream music scene," she said, referring to the likes of Charice, Arnel Pineda and apl.de.ap of Black Eyed Peas, who are storming up the charts in the US and all over the world.

Ima, herself, contributes to this perception about Filipino talents by touring with a band of ex-Miss Saigon cast members. They hold concerts all over the UK singing favorite songs from various Broadway musicals. Though she didn't say it, we're sure she, in particular, gets standing ovation left and right, for that voice that has made unforgettable hits out of the songs Shine and Nanliligaw, Nanliligaw.

Apart from Miss Saigon, some people are not aware that Ima recorded the romantic ballad You're My Number One with no less than Enrique Iglesias, who, himself, has Filipino blood running through his veins from his mother's side. She has also lent her voice on tracks in albums by Mike Francis and David Pomeranz.

The Pinay, who notes bemusedly the traffic in Manila, the mosquitoes in her house in Tiaong, Quezon, and the heat on the streets at midday as if these add to the charm of Pinoy life, has also done concerts with tenor Russell Watson; and did a workshop for a new musical called Desperate!, which is based on the '80s film of Madonna titled Desperately Seeking Susan. Ima also recently recorded demo tracks for the upcoming West End musical, Sacrifice.

Despite having sung many songs in her lifetime, Ima is agog doing Aida in which she'll get to perform publicly, the tune Written In The Stars composed by Elton John. She loves the duet version of Elton and LeAnn Rimes of that song and she hopes to breathe a different vocal perspective in her version.

The Tony Award-winning Aida tells the story of a Nubian princess who fell in love with a captain in the Egyptian army. As forbidden loves blossom between them, the young lovers are forced to face death or part forever. Aida will run at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati from June 24 to July 10.

In The Heights, on the other hand, is, according to the New York Times, "a musical about chasing your dreams and finding your true home, with enough energy to light up the George Washington Bridge." Vanessa, the character that Ima plays, is a salon worker with big dreams of moving downtown. Ima is reunited with director Bobby Garcia, who was her first director in the Manila run of Miss Saigon and was pivotal in selecting her to succeed Lea Salonga. In The Heights runs from Sept. 2 to 18, at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati City.

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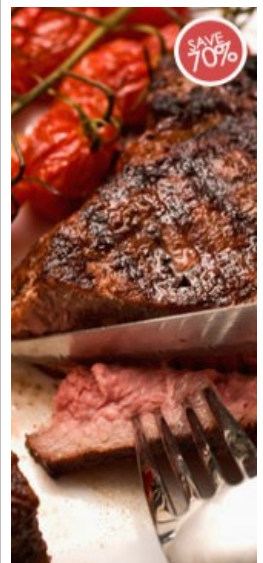
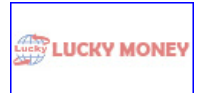
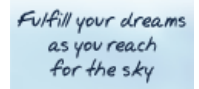
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