

Entertainment

The rise of a new Dawn

By Adrienne Sarmiento-Buenaventura (The Philippine Star) Updated April 11, 2010 12:00 AM



Dawn Zulueta plays Desiree Armfeldt in Atlantis Productions' *A Little Night Music*.

MANILA, Philippines - Dawn Zulueta is back on the legitimate stage, this time as the iconic Desiree Armfeldt in Atlantis Productions' staging of the Stephen Sondheim classic, *A Little Night Music*, directed by Bobby Garcia.

She is bound to enchant and surprise theater audiences everywhere with this latest role. As a film actress, she is known to reap awards and is no stranger to strong-willed romantic portrayals on the silver screen. Dawn is set to breathe life into the very same role originated by Glynis Johns on Broadway in 1973, Elizabeth Taylor in the film adaptation in 1977 and currently Catherine Zeta-Jones in the hit Broadway revival. Across the globe Amy Irving is playing Desiree in St. Louis and Greta Scaachi portrays Desiree in Paris.

How Dawn creates her own take on the character of Desiree, an actress at a crossroads, will be something to watch.

A Little Night Music is a waltz-kissed musical about the chaos of mismatched lovers and is inspired by Ingmar Bergman's film *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Dawn gets to sing the hauntingly beautiful piece *Send In the Clowns*, which is also the show's best-known song and Sondheim's biggest hit.

She has immersed herself in the material, embracing the script, lyrics and music, and is approaching the project with passion and excitement, not unlike her approach to any artistic endeavor. She says, "I'm trying not to watch too many *YouTube* excerpts of the current show on Broadway as I want to avoid a subconscious imitation. I really would like to get all my cues only from Bobby, who I deeply respect and trust as a friend and director.

Curious kibitzers, theatergoers and Dawn's fans will be treated to a well-prepared comeback, as this is Dawn's return to musical theater after 12 years. Last seen as Elsa Montes, the Conga Queen from New York in the musical *Larawan*, she also again gave a critically-acclaimed performance in her most recent appearance on *Maalaala Mo Kaya* in an episode titled *Tsinelas*, which underscored the importance of family.

And while family is top priority for her (Dawn is married to Rep. Anton Lagdameo and they are proud parents of Jacobo Antonio and Ayisha Madlen), she welcomes this role of Desiree as a worthwhile challenge. Dawn says, "I had a glorious experience in the first and last musical play I performed in, and I've wondered if I would ever do another one again, until I met with Bobby, who asked me if I would like to play Desiree. He sent me the music and excerpts of the Broadway play now being played by Catherine Zeta-Jones, and I felt confident enough to take on the part."

Having found joy in marriage and motherhood, she relates what she has learned about love, which is the musical's core and reason for chaos, and says, "From my past experiences, I have found love can be chaotic especially young love. There is the tendency to make simple circumstances complicated. And I have also learned that it is better to stay true and honest about one's self, instead of playing the cat-and-mouse mind games."

From the looks of it, audiences can look forward to a fresher side of Dawn the actress, her craft refined even more by the fire of experience. Dawn compares her soon-to-be theatrical alter ego to her own self by saying, "I believe there are parallels between me and my character Desiree. I do know something about having the right love at the wrong time. But some precious experiences are best kept secret in the refuge of personal history; and only suitably employed in my craft."

As to what she feels audiences can expect from her return to the legitimate stage, the award-winning actress says, "The audience can expect me to give a committed performance. I will be playing a role I have never portrayed before. That in itself lends to an exciting journey of discovery for me as well."

Bobby, who will be directing *A Little Night Music*, says, "We are thrilled to have an actress of Dawn talent, class and grace leading the cast. I am certain she will create an unforgettable Desiree Armfeldt."

She may have had a long respite from musical theater and film, but Dawn continues to remain one of the country's most respected actresses, and certainly knows how to create anticipation for whatever endeavor she's about to take on.

Her return to the stage in *A Little Night Music* is not to be missed.

Select shows nights and matinees are available for interested block buyers. It's also a once in-a-lifetime fundraising opportunity for your organization or entrepreneurial venture. *A Little Night Music* opens in October at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati City. For details, call Atlantis Productions at 892-7078 or 840-1187.

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