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ENTERTAINMENT



Spelling Bee minus the torture

DIRECTLINE By Boy Abunda Updated July 01, 2009 12:00 AM



The Tony Award winning musical will return for limited repeat performances from July 3 to 12 at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati.

favorite teachers as coaches or they would hire teachers from neighboring towns to do the coaching job. Preparation was vigorous, strenuous and competitive. I did not win in the spelling bee. In one contest I spelled psychic, "saykick!" *Tatay* went home and prayed for rain. A storm stopped the spelling bee.

I won in the declamation and oratory contests. It was so very hard to spell supercalifragilisticexpialidocious which to us was so strange. None of us has seen *Mary Poppins*. The yearly event ended only when the Parents Teachers Association realized they were subjecting the poor students to torment in front of everybody in the town plaza.

I had fun watching Atlantis Productions staging of the 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee at Carlos P. Romulo Theater in RCBC Plaza in Makati. I imagined myself one of the guys. I imagined the pressure they had to go through to win the contest. I imagined their ordeal trying to please their parents. And I also imagined, maybe these contestants just wanted to have fun. Being there made me realize that it too was fun to be part of the *Spelling Bee* audience.

The Tony Award winning musical will return for limited repeat performances run from July 3 to 12 at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati and then will travel to Singapore for an August run at the Victoria Theatre.

Spelling Bee centers around a fictional spelling bee in Putnam County, New York. Six kids in the throes of puberty face off in the battle of their lives. They compete against each other as well as members of the audience. Three adults help adjudicate the proceedings: A nostalgic former spelling bee winner, a mildly insane Vice Principal and The Official Comfort Counselor completing his community service to the state of New York. *Spelling Bee* has a Tony Award winning book by Rachel Sheinkin and music and lyrics by Tony Award winner William Finn.

No two *Spelling Bee* shows are ever alike, as *Spelling Bee* features "starring roles" each night for two volunteer audience members and two surprise celebrity guest spellers. Celebrity guest spellers

In high school, when you were a spelling contestant you were expected to bring honor to the school and to your family. It was big deal to be part of the spelling bee contests. In terms of excitement, it was the closest I could get to joining a beauty pageant.

The spelling bee was the most prestigious contest along side oratory and declamation. These events were usually held in the town plaza. Members of the community from the barangay *tanods*, teachers, parents, neighbors, pet dogs and cats attend this prestigious event. The whole community was there to witness your victory or your dismal defeat. People would bring *banig*, umbrellas, wooden stools, *huri* fans, like they were going to a religious pray over. And it seemed like it was. Earlier during the day, the town crier went around the entire town to announce the contest. Armed with an empty, used Rebisco biscuit can and a wooden stick, the crier in his "bandillo" (announcement) would smash the can repeatedly with the cane like he was flagellating a repentant sinner during *Semana Santa*. It was a highly anticipated event that contestants got their

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one of the groomsmen at the wedding of his ex-wife Michelle van Eimeren to her Australian fiancé Mark Morrow sometime in November later this year.

When the value of life gets cheaper



STAR BYTES By Butch Francisco

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during the recent sold-out run included Lea Salonga, Jett Pangan, Pinky Marquez, Cheska Ortega, Leo Rialp, Jon Santos, Cherie Gil, Sen. Chiz Escudero, Noel Trinidad, Gabe Mercado, Sitti, Miguel Mendoza, Gina Alajar, Christian Bautista, Isabella Gonzales, Franco and Ayen Laurel, Geneva Cruz, Wency Cornejo, Menchu Lauchengco-Yulo, Rajo Laurel, Nyoy Volante, Teresa Herrera, Aiza Seguerra and Raya Mananquil.

Featured in *Spelling Bee* are Cathy Azanza-Dy, Pheona Baranda, Johann dela Fuente, Carla Guevera-Laforteza, Lorenz Martinez, Noel Rayos, Felix Rivera, Joel Trinidad and Shiela Valderrama-Martinez.

Director Bobby Garcia says, "We are so thrilled to repeat *Spelling Bee*, a show that has brought us so much joy. We are even more excited to be traveling to Singapore in August to perform the show there!"

Spelling Bee is directed by Bobby Garcia, choreography by Chari Arespacochaga, set design by Tuxqs Rutaquio, lighting design by Johnsy Reyes, costume design by Twinkle Zamora, vocal coaching by ManMan Angsico and musical direction by Jojo Malferari. It is made possible through a special licensing arrangement with Music Theatre International.

For details, call 892-7078 or 840-1187.

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