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## Arts & Leisure

### Laugh while learning to spell

Due to a mistake of our office telephone operator, I was unable to attend the press preview of Atlantis Productions' 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary opening play, *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam Spelling Bee*. Since I badly wanted to write my comments about this play in this week's column, I bought tickets for the March 21 evening performance. I was correct in my hunch. The play celebrates the triumph of doing the best you can, even if you do not win. It is important that you should enjoy what you do.

I recommend that all of you see this hilarious comedy musical during its short run that lasts until April 4. The play lasts about 105 minutes and is performed without an intermission. You will come out of the theater refreshed.

It is about six young people in the throes of puberty, overseen by grown-ups who barely managed to escape childhood themselves, learn that winning isn't everything and that losing doesn't necessarily make you a loser.

The funniest moments are due to the ridiculousness of the "Bee" bylaws and behavior. Some of the funniest lines are those concocted by the judges to place the spelling words in context. For "phylactery" either of a pair of square leather boxes containing Jewish religious texts — they come up with: "Billy, put down that phylactery — we're Episcopalians." These lines are delivered with excellent timing by Joel Trinidad as the Vice-Principal Douglas Panch. Likewise delivering some very hilarious lines is Cathy Azanza-Dy as Rona Lisa Pereti, former winner of the Spelling Bee and now the "Number One Realtor in Putnam County."

The six contestants are desperate to avoid elimination and have entirely different personalities. Director Bobby Garcia gathered an excellent cast for this play: the home-schooled oddball, Leaf Coneybear (Johan de la Fuente), goes into a trance to spell "capybara" (a tailless South American rodent). The arrogant plump and pompous slob with a speech impediment William Barfee (Rycharde Everley) spells out "lugubrious" with his "magic foot." The unfortunate daughter of two gay fathers Logainne Schwartzandgrubenniery (Pheona Baranda) writes "strabismus" (an inability of one eye to achieve binocular vision with the other) invisibly on her arm. She chairs her elementary school's Gay-Straight Alliance. Former champ and alpha male-in-the-making who is beginning to learn the ups and downs of puberty, Chip Tolentino was expertly played by Felix Rivera (Off Broadway in New York, Filipino Jose Liana was very successful in this role). Asian-American overachiever Marcy Park was skillfully played by Thea Tadiar Everley. As a sweet, unassuming girl with an overextended father and a mother who is absent on a spiritual quest, Olive Ostrovsky was delicately handled by Carla Guevara-Laforteza. She gives a very sincere performance and becomes the emotional center of the show. Lastly, dispensing hugs and juice boxes to eliminated contestants as part of the community service requirements of his parole, Mitch Mahoney (expertly cast in this role is Noel Rayos), also has his moments, one of them being his rousing gospel-style "Prayer of the Comfort Counselor."

Almost all the songs in this musical are comic flavored and far more memorable for their very clever lyrics than their animated "Broadway-style" melodies.

The show's other key element is its audience participation. Every night two volunteer audience members and two celebrity guest spellers are invited onstage, even being amusingly maneuvered into choreographic participation in some numbers. The night I went, Rachele Gerodias and Francine Dy were the celebrity guests and the audience member consisted in a very pretty girl with a mini skirt and a young teenaged boy. All four were very cooperative and contributed to the success of the show. Rona Lisa Pereti's animated introductions of each speller are particularly enjoyable as they stepped up to the microphone.

The show has a funny, touching book by Rachel Sheinkin and a lively score by William Finn. For tickets and reservations, call Lawyn at 892-7078/840-1187 or visit [www.atlantisproductionsinc.com](http://www.atlantisproductionsinc.com).

#### WHAT'S ON IN MANILA

- **Instituto Cervantes** (T.M. Kalaw St., Ermita, Manila) will screen *El capitan veneno* (Captain Poison) on March 28, 6 p.m. It is about an orphan from Cordova who was nursed by a wild goat. He has such a bitter character that everybody calls him Captain Poison. Free admission but I suggest you call 826-1448 for seat reservations.
- **Repertory Philippines** 2009 Summer Workshop will offer the following this year: Advanced Acting Workshop (for advanced students of past workshops who are seriously thinking of a possible career in the theater); Adult beginners acting workshop (open to adults 17 years old and above, who have no previous acting or workshop experience); Repertory Summer Camp (open to children from ages five to 16 years old who would like to experience the fun and excitement of rehearsing and learn about what it takes to stage a show); Voice (where you explore your vocal potential). All classes begin on March 30 from Monday to Friday. They culminate with a performance/recital during the last two weeks of May at Onstage, Greenbelt One, Makati City. For reservations, call 887-0710 or proceed to Rep's office at C2 — Bldg C, Karivin Plaza, 2316 Pasong Tamo Ext., Makati.
- **Paco Park Presents: The Guitar and Other Strings**, featuring the Berea High School of Sciences and Arts Guitar and String Ensemble Vista Verde, Cainta, on March 27, 6 p.m., at the San Marcelino, Manila park. Free admission. For details call 302-7374.
- **Pianists Della Besa and Anamaria de Guzman** present *Duo Piano Concerto*, featuring Filipino compositions on March 31, 7:30 p.m., at the Little Theater of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.
- **Koine** presents two one-act plays by Diel de Mesa, *Old Apologies* and *AYAYAYAYAYAYA!!* on March 27 at Ten02 Bar in Timog Ave. corner Sgt. Ybardolaza St., QC. They star Kate Alconga, Dingdong Novenario, Jenny Lou Orlina and Dian Calderon. For tickets and inquire call 433-7886, 0917-972-6514 or e-mail [kfti2001@yahoo.com](mailto:kfti2001@yahoo.com).
- Ronan Noone's full-length monologue, *The Atheist*, will have a one-night performance on March 27, 7:30 p.m., at Teatrino, Greenhills Shopping Center, San Juan. The play charts the story of Augustine Early, an amoral tabloid journalist as he blackmails and uses people to break as many headlines as he can. It is a dark comedy that sets out to take the worst of our selfish instincts and subject them to the scrutiny of a darkly comic lens. Bart Guingona stars and directs this play. Tickets are available at TicketWorld (891-9999) or through

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JUAN ANTONIO LANUZA

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