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ENTERTAINMENT

Where rollerskates & love collide

By [Adrienne Sarmiento Buenaventura](#) (The Philippine Star) Updated August 02, 2010 12:00 AM
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Xanadu stars Rachel Alejandro and Felix Rivera

MANILA, Philippines - Atlantis Productions brings to Manila yet another exciting, whimsical and funny [musical](#) *Xanadu*. It is a comical story set to [music](#), where theatergoers will be treated to a blast-from-the-past '80s experience, complete with disco-crazed outfits, dances, big hair, and yes, rollerskates! It's the same musical that gave fame to the chart-topping song *Suddenly*, performed by Olivia Newton-John and Cliff Richard.

Xanadu is a tale set in 1980, revolving around Clio, a Greek Muse who takes a trip from Mt. Olympus down to sunny Venice California to inspire a struggling artist named Sonny who refuses to give up his dream of creating a roller disco. Clio dons the disguise of Kira, an Australian roller girl, and their worlds collide when she unexpectedly gets entangled in

forbidden love with the mortal Sonny. Clio risks getting banished to the underworld because of this love, while her jealous sisters plot against her for breaking the rules.

Once more, two recognizable names and faces in musical theater face off in this whimsical, musical love story, and they are none other than Rachel Alejandro, portraying the dual roles of Clio and Kira, and Felix Rivera as Sonny.

Here they are as they share about the preparations they each have been going through to make *Xanadu The Musical* an enthralling show, and their thoughts on following dreams, the things that inspire them, the people who motivate them, and lessons learned from starting out in showbiz and theater.

How did you prepare for your role in *Xanadu the Musical*? And how do you plan to make your role fresh for your audience to get into the '80s vibe, which is the very era of the story?

Rachel: Although the setting is in the '80s, I think the songs in the musical, some of Olivia Newton-John's biggest hits, are timeless. People of any age will enjoy them and be able to sing along think both my *lola* or anyone as young as my youngest teen-age sister would appreciate the humor. I don't have to do anything special but be an effective part of the story-telling.

The biggest challenge here is the rollerskating by far. I'm not as well-coordinated as some of you might imagine.

The other thing I have to work on is my Australian accent. It has to be an exaggerated version of Olivia's accent. I won't go into too much detail 'cause I don't want to give away the punch-lines and the plot. Other than that, I just need to stay out of the sun for a while before we start the shows so I can get back to my original fair complexion. This is a huge sacrifice on my part because I love being golden brown. But the *morena* look won't go so well with the platinum blond wig I will be wearing in the show.

Felix: Personally, it's more of getting the '80s feel authentic, more than updated, that's important. In making it authentic you get to make the New Wave generation reminisce about their era, and you give the following younger generations a taste of what it was like during that decade.

As for the role of Sonny, it's going to be a delicate balance between parody and honesty. It can't be all quirks and [comedy](#). There has to be truth in the character that people can still sympathize with. That way, they go home not just with laughs but with a story to

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To prepare for the role, I went to New York for skating lessons. In fact, our instructor is like the Yoda of skating. This guy has been dancing and skating since the time of Gene Kelly. In fact, he *has* performed with Gene Kelly in the past. Lezly Zeiring has probably taught more than 15,000 students since 1979, so I, along with my co-actors Anthony Ong and Glen Llanes, am grateful to have taken lessons under him.

Aside from skating, I also took my *Xanadu* material to vocal coach Matt Farnsworth who has unlocked aspects of my [singing](#) I've never realized before.

As for diet and regimen, I guess I'm just lucky I'm the type who's genetically on the thin side so I eat anything I crave for without having to deal with weight gain. I do train hard at the gym regularly with my trainer Sam Bacaltos.

The musical's theme is about following your dreams in spite of limitations others set out for you. Would you say you can closely relate to this, considering all you've achieved (Rachel, with her more than 20 years in show business, and Felix, being considered the "golden boy" of musical theater, doing four plays and big roles all in one year?)

Rachel: I've always been the type of person who won't take no for an answer. "When there's a will, there's a way," I always say.

I think each and every one of us has the potential to do or be anything we want if we really put our mind to it. The only thing that has kept me from getting some of the things I wanted was myself. I was either being very negative or I just got side tracked and settled for something less than what I truly desired.

Lately, I've discovered that there is no limit to what I can achieve if I focus on the things that really make me happy.

Felix: I still honestly feel a little awkward whenever I hear the phrase "golden boy." I sincerely just see myself as a student of this theater industry. Compared to my colleagues who have been doing theater since their childhood, I'm just a rookie who's still exploring my possibilities.

But yes. I do believe that it's up to us how far we go. If you truly believe you're good at something, then go for it despite people's doubts *and* despite people's praises. Too much praise, without a grain of salt, can also be a very dangerous thing. Humility, objectivity and hard work: I believe these are the elements one should have to reach one's dreams and goals.

How is this new challenge (your roles in *Xanadu*) special for you compared to the numerous ones you've already played in musical theater?

Rachel: Learning how to rollerskate is proving to be the most difficult thing I've ever had to do for a role. Puppet workshops are a breeze compared to this. In the beginning, when I was learning puppeteering for *Avenue Q*, I doubted myself also 'cause it was painful to handle the puppets. I eventually built up the muscle endurance required. Roller-skating is different because if you are tense, all the more you can't skate. Over-thinking it is the worst thing you can do. I've never been a sporty or physical person. My mind is telling me "I'm going to fall," but I have to counter that and be relaxed. Easier said than done.

Felix: For starters, this will be the first time I'll be performing with rollerskates. It will take great focus to incorporate singing, dancing, acting and skating without injuring myself. Second, I was born in 1982 so the '80s is a little alien to me. I have to do my research about that era. Third, I'll be juggling *Xanadu* and *A Little Night Music* very closely. I have to be careful not to switch my singing styles for the two shows.

Xanadu is a story also about inspiring an artist. What have been your inspirations or motivations?

Rachel: Being in-love of course! Pain is also a good motivator and inspiration.

Felix: My family has been my inspiration ever since I started. My parents have expressed their concern before when I chose this career but they gave me the chance and the support to prove myself. And more than proving myself to them, they helped me prove myself to be myself. They've stood by me all the way. I especially thank Von de Guzman who trained me in my early days as a performer, and all my directors especially Bobby Garcia and Chari Arespacochaga who never stopped nudging me (and shoving me when necessary) to become more than what I currently am. Sonny, the male lead in the story is an artist out to prove himself.

What are lessons you've learned that you can share with aspiring artists?

Rachel: As long as the audience can see you're having fun performing for them, they will appreciate it and enjoy with you. That's the best thing I've learned in the over two decades I've been a performer.

Felix: Just have humility, objectivity and hard work. And always treat your craft as a means of service, *not* as a means to be famous. I always remind myself that I do what I do because I want people to feel alive through the shows we do; recognition is just a by-product. Since our craft is a meant to serve people, we must also do all we can do to give the people our best because the people and our craft deserves nothing less.

For sure it's going to be an explosively entertaining spectacle, and for sure, not just theatergoers who love the '80s will enjoy *Xanadu The Musical*.



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Not only does it have two incredibly passionate performers like Rachel and Felix who guarantee to give their all, but *Xanadu* is bound to make its special mark on the audience with its songs and the story, when the curtain rises for every show.

Directed by Bobby Garcia, the story weaves through the very relatable things that stir the emotions and touch the heart — working for what you want, dreaming, believing and relishing and excitement of standing on the brink...or in this case, the rink, of love. Watch out for *Xanadu The Musical*.

For details, call Atlantis Productions at 892-7078 or 840-1187.

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FUNFARE By Ricardo F. Lo

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DIRECTLINE By Boy Abunda

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Is Robin quitting Pilipinas Win Na Win?



FUNFARE UPDATE By Ricardo F. Lo

According to *Funfare Update's* VDPA (Very Deep Penetration Agent), when Robin Padilla bids goodbye to the viewers of the new ABS-CBN show *Pilipinas Win Na Win* (PWNW, replacing the defunct *Wowowee*) tomorrow, it might be for good and not just for the meantime.

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