

Lea dazzles in spellbinding show

Written by RYAN SONGALIA
Friday, 10 June 2011 23:39



Lea Salonga meets with Filipino Reporter correspondent Ryan Songalia (left) and author/PR specialist Carissa Villacorta after the show. (Photo by Rob Delacruz)



Filipina singing legend Lea Salonga felt at ease thousands of miles away from Manila on opening night of her three-week return engagement at Café Carlyle in New York City's Upper

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East Side.

Why not?

After all, the Tony award-winning Broadway actress and singing sensation practically came of age in New York City.

“The thing about New York City is that, I feel like I grew up here,” said Ms. Salonga, who first made an impression on the Big Apple over 20 years ago, originating the lead role of Kim in “Miss Saigon.”

“I turned 21 in the city, lived on my own for the first time in the city, bought my first apartment in the city. A lot of these big milestones growing up were experienced here.

“Beyond what it means to me professionally, it’s just the personal things, the growing up, the dating, having a boyfriend, breaking up with a boyfriend, that I only first experienced here.”

Salonga was greeted by a diverse crowd in the intimate Café Carlyle on opening night June 7, where famed movie director Woody Allen has performed every Monday evening with the Eddy Davis New Orleans Jazz Band for years.

“Let’s do it!”, Salonga exclaimed to herself as she headed towards the stage for her first number.

Part of her 70-minute set included singing Tagalog ballads such as “Laki sa Layaw” and “Ikaw,” while mixing up her play list to include jazz and even country numbers.

Between songs, Salonga entertained the crowd with life lessons from a lifetime on stage, such

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as “Never break up with your Xbox” and “Tequila fixes everything.”



Lea Salonga delivers an unforgettable intimate show at Café Carlyle. The show runs until June 25. [\(Photo by Tristan Fuge\)](#)

Salonga, who has performed around the world in venues such as Carnegie Hall and England’s O2 Arena, admitted that there are unique challenges to performing in front of a smaller crowd.

“The thing about large venues is there is a lot of stuff you can hide behind,” said Salonga.

“There’s a whole big stage and people don’t usually see you up close. When it’s an intimate venue like this where there’s no such thing as a bad seat and you’re unaided by any kind of

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technology except for a microphone, which all it does is amplify your voice, there's nothing to hide behind. That's the challenge of doing a room that is this small and intimate.

"It's a little intimidating for any singer to go in there without a safety net. If you're out of tune, that's just too bad. All you have is you, a couple of musicians, and an audience that can see every single flaw, nuance and emotion in voice, face and body. You're absolutely naked on stage."

The reaction from audience members were unanimously positive, bolstered by a bonus meet and greet opportunity in the Café's hotel lobby.

"It's definitely an intimate, brighter joyful side of Lea, that I think New York audiences will be treated to and that has never been largely shared in that intimate sense in the past," said Victor Lirio, a longtime friend of Ms. Salonga and Filipino stage actor.

"I love that we bring a global Filipino talent of Lea Salonga's caliber to New York because we need to let people know outside of the Philippines about the talent that we have," said Fil-Am philanthropist and board member of the Philippine Development Foundation Ronna Reyes Sieh, who attended a performance of Salonga's engagement at the Carlyle last year.

"The nice thing about this set is that I felt incredibly prepared going on and doing this tonight," said Salonga.

"It was just a matter of getting in there, putting on my dress, opening up my mouth and singing."

Ms. Salonga will be performing Tuesday through Friday nights at 8:45 p.m., and Saturday nights at 8:45 p.m. and 10:45 p.m.

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Salonga won't be leaving town any time soon, however.

Salonga will soon be returning to musicals in the near future opposite George Takei in "Allegiance."

Salonga will portray Takei's sister-in-law Gloria Suzuki in a family drama set during the Japanese-American confinement during World War II in 1942.

The workshop for the play begins at the end of July.

Ms. Salonga is also releasing a live compilation CD featuring recordings from last year's Carlyle engagement titled "The Journey So Far."

The collection will be available on July 1 on iTunes and other electronic markets, and on store shelves Aug. 9.

"These are songs that are really part of her," said Chris Keaton, executive producer of her new album.

"They've been part of her career from when she started singing as a little girl until the March of 2010. These are some of the songs that she sang as auditions for shows and songs that just meant something to her in her life."

This summer is shaping up to be a busy one for Ms. Salonga, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

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“I think I’m used to being busy, I’m happiest when there’s something happening,” said Salonga.

“I think I feel the most content when I’m working.”

Ryan Songalia is a member of the Boxing Writers Association of America [BWAA] and contributes to GMA News and the **Filipino Reporter** newspaper in New York City.

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Lea Salonga with ace photographer Rob Delacruz.

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Lea Salonga with daughter Nicole Beverly. (Photo by Tristan Fuge)