

Introducing: Boni B. Alvarez, playwright of 'Mix-Mix: The Filipino Adventures of a German Jewish Boy'



Mark McClain Wilson, Myra Cris Ocenar, Angelita Esperanza, Jill Remez, and Giselle "G" Tongi in "Mix-Mix" at LATC. (Photo by Grettel Cortes Photography)

Between 1937 and 1941, the Phillipine Commonwealth had an [Open Door Policy](#) that allowed over 1,300 Jewish people to find refuge on the islands during World War II.

Playwright Boni B. Alvarez's "Mix-Mix: The Filipino Adventures of a German Jewish Boy," currently showing at Latino Theater Company in collaboration with Playwrights' Arena, captures the experience of survivor Ralph Preiss whose family took part in the migration for safety.

Producer Olga Garay-English attended Preiss' 90th birthday celebration over Zoom and recognized there was a story to be dramatized. She approached Jon Lawrence Rivera to direct and Alvarez to write the play. Alvarez went straight to interviewing Preiss for about six months, learning more about his story, and spending a total of about two and half years

developing the show.

Alvarez knew of the Open Door Policy beforehand but got to investigate a specific story of the historical moment. Preiss went to the Philippines as a child after his father got approved for the visa — escaping Nazi Germany — and soon called the islands his home until he was 19.

“I was really fascinated with the fact that he moved when he was nine,” Alvarez said. “His parents shielded him from the gravity of what they were trying to escape, so he thought of everything as an adventure.”

He added, “There's always something fascinating and kind of tragic and hopeful about a child that has to endure a war, not knowing the intricacies of what they're facing.”

The play, which made its world premiere this month, focuses on the last three months of the war when Japan invaded the islands, forcing refugees like Preiss and his family into the heights of Mount Banahao. Alvarez infuses the months in the mountains with flashbacks to reflect the importance of storytelling as a form of escapism during this time and movement, a tool that pulls the emotion and tension out of the characters.

“Mix-Mix” represents new creative territory for Alvarez. Most of his work tends to be dark, even when it is a comedy, but this time the narrative is hopeful. He attributes this to the perspective of the young characters offering a sense of optimism. More importantly, the story represents someone real.

“There's that desire to represent them well, but also, you have to be respectful about how you translate their story,” he said.

You can see the fruits of Alvarez's archeological dig and delve into Preiss' story until Jun 16 at LATC.

LOCATION: 514 S. Spring St. Los Angeles, CA 90013

DATES: May 9 - June 16

TIMES: 8 pm Thurs. thru Sat., 4 pm Sun.

PRICE: \$10 - \$48

LINK: <https://www.latinoteaterco.org/mixmix>