

'Mix-mix' adventures of Jewish refugees in WWII Philippines

Fleeing both Nazis and Japanese atop a volcano

By LOUINN LOTA
Contributor

LOS ANGELES – About 1,200 European Jews sought shelter in the Philippines to escape the horrors of the Holocaust, and “Mix-Mix: The Filipino Adventures of a German Jewish Boy,” presents a sentimental story of one such refugee and his family.

FilAm playwright Boni B. Alvarez and FilAm director Jon Lawrence Rivera tell the story of Rudy Preissman, a Jewish teen from Rosenberg, Germany, who escapes with his family to the Philippines, only to go on the run again during the Japanese occupation during World War II.

Delightfully, play producer Ralph Preiss, 93, who’s the inspiration for the character Rudy, attended the Saturday, May 18, 2024, premiere of “Mix-Mix,” stating he enjoyed the production at the Los Angeles Theatre Center in downtown Los Angeles. Rudy is played by Casey J. Adler.

“Any story that bridges a gap between two cultures is worth telling in the world we live in. Boni wrote such an epic show that speaks to the current moment,” Adler told Broadway World in an interview published May 17, 2024. “I (only) had a faint understanding about the Jews that escaped to the Philippines.”

Kudos to scenic-projection designer Nicholas Santiago as he set the stage as the steamy jungle atop Mt. Banahaw volcano, replete with coconut palms and lush-looking vegetation. The kulintang choreography by Reggie Lee and fighting scenes by Alvin Catacutan lent authenticity to the plight of the Preissman family and their Filipino friends who helped them in their escape.

Jill Remez plays Rudy’s mother, Lena, and in Rudy’s dreams, plays his rabbi Cantor Weissman. Mark Doerr plays Rudy’s father, Isaac, and hilariously also plays Frieda, Rudy’s girlfriend in Germany. Mark McClain Wilson plays Markus, a former soldier and now-refugee.

The FilAm cast included: Alexis Camins, Angelita Esperanza, Kennedy Kabasares, Myra Cris Ocenar, and Giselle “G” Tongi, who accompany and protect Rudy’s family from the Japanese.

As the group longed to have more to eat than tugi/tube yams, especially for Rudy’s bar mitzvah, they fantasized about lumpia, pansit bihon, palabok, canton, and kaldereta. Even steamed rice and kalamansi juice would’ve been welcomed as Rudy dreamed of the first time he ever had the hallowed halo-halo (mix-mix in English) shaved ice fruit, bean and ice cream dessert.

Even the comedic scenes were packed with the bittersweetness of unripe mangoes. At one point, we see Rudy dreaming and restless, perhaps wrestling with the fear of death or wrestling with letting go of the fond memories of life before the war.

“Ralph (Preiss) escaped with his family to the Philippines after Kristalnacht 1938. In the play, this troop of unlikely heroes make their way into the precarious protective cover of a dormant



Ralph Preiss watches play with his three daughters and granddaughter. (Photo by Lydia V. Solis)



Mark McClain Wilson, Myra Cris Ocenar, Angelita Esperanza, Jill Remez, and Giselle “G” Tongi. (Photos by Grettel Cortes Photography)



The Ensemble with Casey J. Adler



Giselle “G” Tongi and Kennedy Kabasares

volcano ... learning to reconcile and bask in the joy of being alive.” “Mix-Mix” dramaturg Arnab Banerji said in his program notes. “Mix-Mix,” with 10-minute intermission, runs Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays 8 p.m. and

Sundays 4 p.m. through June 16, 2024, through the generosity of supporters of Latino Theater Company and Playwrights’ Arena. For tickets, (213) 489-0994 or www.latinoteaterco.org.



Jill Remez and Casey J. Adler



Mark Doerr, Giselle “G” Tongi, and Jill Remez