

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

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Filipino heritage in great sorrow and great joy

It won't take you long into a performance of *Philippines Historama* to arrive at a deeply painful and simply beautiful understanding of the tough and tender peoples of the Philippine archipelago. It takes me about the same time, not long, to see and feel the same way about Filipinos when I stay in their beloved homeland. The same is abundantly obvious when either you or I visit any Pinoy family in their warm American home.

The conclusion we reach is: These folks have suffered so much, so long. And in equal opposite amount, these families seem to celebrate just as much, so often.

"How's that even possible?" you have to ask yourself. After centuries of cruel mismanagement by imperial Spain, then by the United States, then by Japan; after 70 years of independence marked by alternating cycles of great idealism and bad governance — how can Filipino optimism still be so present? But then, on second thought, maybe humbling personal sorrow balanced by infectious communal joy, are actually essential if a people are going to stay healthy and happy. Sure it is. And sure they are.

Gripped by grief, Thais mourn death of beloved

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coronation.

It is not clear who the regent is in the absence of a king and what are the constitutional implications.

Television channels ran non-stop footage devoted to the life of the king, who was deeply revered and held up as a unifying figure in the politically fractious country despite two coups in the last decade alone.

Most Thais have seen no other king in their lifetime and thought of Bhumibol, who reigned for 70 years, as their father and the embodiment of goodness and godliness.

Although a constitutional monarch, he wielded enormous political power and served as a unifying figure during Thailand's numerous political crises. But in recent years, he suffered from a variety of illnesses that affected his kidneys, brain, lungs, heart, and blood. He remained publicly detached from recent political upheavals, including the 2014 coup that brought Prayuth, an army general, to power.

"His death means that the Thai political system must find an alternative focal point around which to unite the country's factionalized population," said Tom Pepinsky, a Southeast Asia expert at Cornell University.

He said one challenge that royalists will face is the possibility that the monarchy's popularity would be undermined by the crowning of Vajiralongkorn, who does not command the same respect his father did.

Bhumibol Adulyadej (pronounced poo-mee-pon ah-dun-yaa-det) became king in 1946. He anchored the Southeast Asian country through violent upheavals at home and communist revolutions next door with a blend of majesty and a common touch.

So revered was Bhumibol that his portraits would be displayed in virtually every Thai home and business, generally

Celebrating national Filipino American History Month

Carmelita Salonga Tapia, founding producer and director of *Philippines Historama: A Celebration of Filipino Heritage*, answers this central question simply. "I am a Filipino. Take me for what I am," she says proudly. "Take me for what I am because of this history." She's been saying so over four years of west coast touring with the cast and crew of *Historama*, out of her new home grounds of Victoria, B.C.

Madam Carmelita will be saying it again during *Historama's* single evening performance on Saturday, October 29 at downtown Salem's historic Elsinore Theatre. Her all-volunteer production team of more than 44 artists, technicians, and civic activists are sponsored by Oregon Filipino community elders Jaime J. Lim and Dory Osilla-Lim, as a proud centerpiece to national Filipino American History Month.

The U.S. congress recognized the month of October as Filipino American History Month in 2009, following the Filipino American National Historical Society's 1988 declaration of Filipino American History Month. Portland's City Council made the same official proclamation

depicting him in arduous travels to remote villages, where he often went to see the situation of his subjects first hand.

But recently, whenever Bhumibol appeared in public, he was in a wheelchair, waving feebly at his subjects. Even those rare appearances stopped as he became confined to the hospital.

He died a little before 4:00pm on October 13, the palace said. It said he passed away peacefully.

"He is now in heaven and may be looking over Thai citizens from there," Prayuth said in a statement. "He was a king that was loved and adored by all. The reign of the king has ended and his kindness cannot be found anywhere else."

Messages of condolences poured in from across the world.

"With a creative spirit and a drive for innovation, he pioneered new technologies that have rightfully received worldwide acclaim," U.S. President Barack Obama said. "His majesty leaves a legacy of care for the Thai people that will be cherished by future generations."

French President Francois Hollande hailed the king for "exceptional human qualities ... his profound sense of justice, his care for modernity and sustainable development." Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi described him as "one of the tallest leaders of our times."

Besides Vajiralongkorn, the king is survived by his 84-year-old wife Sirikit who herself has been ailing and rarely seen in public in years. The couple has three daughters — Princess Sirindhorn, the most beloved royal after her father, Princess Ubolratana, and Princess Chulabhorn Walailak. Sirindhorn is unmarried; Ubolratana is divorced from her American husband and their two daughters live in the U.S.; Chulabhorn is also divorced and has two daughters.

Associated Press journalists Nattasuda Anusonadisai, Natnicha Chuwiruch, Jerry Harmer, Kiko Rosario, and Tassanee Vejpongs contributed to this report.

Philippines Historama: A Celebration of Filipino Heritage

October 29, 5:00pm

Downtown Salem's
Historic Elsinore Theatre
170 High Street S.E.
Salem, Oregon

Tickets:

www.elsinoretheatre.com
www.philippineshistorama.com

earlier this year.

Salem's performance will begin with an homage to the island nation's indigenous peoples, followed by short plays, song and dance numbers representing the arrival of Chinese and Muslim merchants and settlers; the arrival of Spanish armies and priests; the successive struggles against ruling Spaniards, occupying Japanese and Americans. *Historama* then continues on to the excesses of the Marcos era; the sudden assassination of opposition leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino; then the national optimism of President Maria Corazon "Cory" Cojuangco-Aquino's years.

"Future generations will know"

Historama producer Carmelita Salonga Tapia says she is deeply indebted to her co-writer, Philippines historian, national labor and trade attaché attorney Bernie Julve for the historical fidelity as well as the steady reassurance he provided in the development of the *Philippines Historama* project.

It is a Filipino community commitment reinforced by Jaime Lim and Dory Osilla-Lim, by the Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Oregon (PACCO), and the Council of Filipino American Associations (CFAA) of Oregon and Southwest Washington — all of them providing the local leadership necessary to bringing their precious history to town.

Nepal's most popular Buddhist nun is a musical rock star

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an insect."

Her singing offers listeners a way to practice meditation and "is about invoking a spiritual quality," she said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "That is what I rejoice in."

She refused to say how much money she has earned from album sales and concerts, but said she donates much of it to education charities through her Nun's Welfare Foundation and runs a kidney hospital.

Still, compared with most Nepalese living in the impoverished mountain nation, Drolma lives like a rock star — with a luxury car and a new home in an upscale neighborhood of the capital of Kathmandu.

"It is a very conservative point of view thinking that a nun should be poor and wearing rags. That's a wrong attitude," she said. "My concerts make very good money, my CD sales make very good money, and I think that helps me to afford such [a] comfortable life."

Drolma said she was 13 when her mother allowed her to join the Nagi Gumpa nunnery to escape from an abusive father. She also dreaded getting married, as she would likely have been forced to do as it was the custom in Nepal at the time.

"I had the impression that getting married was the worst thing to do in life," she said.

At the nunnery, just north of Kathmandu, she learned to chant the Buddhist scriptures. But while most recited the lines quickly, she stood out — chanting melodiously and drawing the other nuns' admiration.

In 1994, American musician Steve Tibbetts visited the nunnery and, being impressed with her voice, recorded her singing. He returned after receiving interest from U.S. record companies, and recorded Drolma's first album, *Cho*,

"Philippines Historama is about portraying Philippine history so our present and future generations will know and remember our past."

— Jaime J. Lim

Filipino-American elder, civic activist,
entrepreneur, philanthropist

"*Philippines Historama* is about portraying Philippine history so that our present and future generations will know and remember our past," says Manong Jaime. "Today, most millennials don't even know about the dictatorship that Marcos inflicted on the Filipino people, because most textbooks teaching our youth have not updated our history for 30 years." Those were 30 intense years. And that's a lot of history lost to Filipinos, to Americans and Filipino Americans.

It won't take anyone long into Saturday night's *Historama* performance to arrive at a deeply felt understanding of the tough and tender peoples of the Philippine archipelago.

It is a history of misrule by imperial outsiders and arrogant insiders. And yet, all these excesses notwithstanding, the Filipino story is also one of irrepressible idealism, responsive and responsible leadership.

Unspeakable sorrow balanced by contagious communal joy, it's all there — it's in *Philippines Historama: A Celebration of Filipino Heritage*, it's in the Republic of the Philippines, it's evident in every last Pinoy household of the Great Filipino Diaspora.

released in 1997.

The album royalties and performance fees that came after left Drolma a bit stunned. Most Nepalese have humble lives, with a quarter of the country's 28 million people living in poverty and heavily reliant on subsistence farming and remittances from family members working abroad.

"The question was, what do I do with the money?" she said. "I realized that this money can help me fulfill my dream, so that is how I started the school."

She set up an educational foundation and opened the Arya Tara school, on a mountainside just south of Kathmandu. The boarding school offers about 80 girls, between five and 18 years old, free lessons in Buddhist scripture as well as math, science, and computer skills. The foundation also covers the cost of sending the girls to college.

The students, similarly clad in saffron robes, giggle and smile when talking about Drolma.

"Ani is more than my mother. My mother gave me birth, but Ani raised me, gave me education, took care of me, and is the only reason that I have reached this far," said 17-year-old Dolma Lhamu, who is now enrolled in college.

Drolma is similarly adored at the kidney hospital she runs in Kathmandu, where hundreds of patients receive free dialysis twice a week.

She said it's her work at the hospital and school that keep her singing and accepting invitations to perform. For the critics who question her globetrotting lifestyle or high income, she has little patience.

"People in society will have different opinions," she said. "I try my best to see how I can improve my attitude toward life, toward people, and toward the world, and to find ways to make the best use of my life."

"I am famous today, but tomorrow people will not know me. It fades away. That is the reality," she said.