

UPA&FR Propagates Filipino String Ensemble Tradition

2019 Recap

For 27 years, the New Jersey-based **University of the Philippines Alumni and Friends Rondalla (UPA&FR)** has been propagating the Filipino native string ensemble tradition called *rondalla*, presenting musical programs that integrate Philippine history, culture and traditions to diverse audiences. Second/third generation Filipino children learn about their musical heritage, and other nationalities also enjoy Philippine music whenever the UPAFR performs at **various community events**.

At their **International Day** featuring the Philippines, 200 youngsters at **Maugham Elementary School** in Tenafly, NJ learned about the Filipino rondalla string instruments which include the *bandurria*, *laud*, *octavina*, and guitar.

On the occasion of its **10th anniversary celebration**, the **Filipino School of NY & NJ** was grateful for the presence of the UPA&FR who welcomed guests with native music, as well as played accompaniment during the students dance medley. Their parents and grandparents enjoyed the song selection, a treat which reminded them of their childhood. It was a nice intergenerational partnership with the school to keep our culture alive.

The **Heritage of Asian Pacific Islanders Festival (HAPIfest)** at The Woodland in Maplewood, NJ mentioned, "The delightful plucked string ensemble of the UPA&FR played traditional pieces celebrating the musical dynamism of the Philippine Islands".

The UPA&FR represented the Philippines at the **First Annual Long Island Multicultural Celebration**. The Asian American Cultural Circle of Unity which organized the event commented how the audience enjoyed watching every part of each different, unique, and beautiful performance. It was a truly meaningful exchange of culture.

The Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs received a lot of positive feedback last year, so the UPA&FR was once more invited to perform at the second **Rockin' the Reservation Festival**, a family-friendly event at **Watchung Reservation** in Mountainside, NJ.

ArtPride New Jersey, an arts advocacy organization, thanked the UPA&FR for the absolute pleasure of learning more about traditional Filipino music and sharing it with their members from across the state at their **annual meeting** at the newly-opened **Avenel Performing Arts Center** in Woodbridge, NJ.

The **Philippine Heritage Center** (PHC) in New York, congratulated the UPA&FR, a performer and awardee at their **5th anniversary celebration**, for being chosen to receive the PHC 2019 Service Award for its dedication and contributions to the Filipino community.

The UPA&FR is a consistent **annual recipient of grant funding** from the **Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders** and the **New Jersey State Council on the Arts**, a division of Department of State. The 2019 grant funds were used in **outreach concerts** held at the following senior facilities: **Piscataway Senior Center, The Parker at Stonegate Assisted Living in Highland Park, Perth Amboy Senior Center, St. Joseph Senior Residence in Woodbridge, and the Old Bridge Senior Center.** Aside from performing different genres of rondalla music, the group also played various popular melodies familiar with the different ethnicities at these senior facilities. Their joy of hearing the same repertoire played by the UPA&FR at formal concert theaters: priceless.

The Hispanic audience at the **Careway Adult Center** in Elmwood Park, NJ appreciated the Spanish influence in the Filipino repertoire presented by the UPA&FR.

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA), a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts granted **UPA&FR president Diane Valencia** her third **Folklife (bandurria music) Apprenticeship Grant**. The award letter mentioned its deepest appreciation of her dedication towards preserving traditional art and enriching the cultural landscape for residents of New Jersey.

The UPA&FR members also participated in the **NJSCA Folk Arts for the Homebound Program**, performing in the home of an individual who was very interested in the Philippine bandurria art form.

And to cap the year, the UPA&FR added joy and solemnity with Filipino Christmas music to the Holy Mass at the traditional **Simbang Gabi** (a devotional nine-day series of Masses in anticipation of Christmas) at the St. Raphael Church in Livingston, NJ.