



Hobnobbing with Beautiful Musicians

by Mae Tulagan

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5:30 AM - I woke up Wednesday morning excited because I knew I was going to Los Baños in the province of Laguna for the first time ever. And I was going for free!

See, I was joining the CCP's trip there for the Asia-Europe Music Camp press con--not as a reporter, though, but a traveler.

(The press people in the coaster didn't know, of course. Until now. I mean, if they're reading this. If they know they've something like this to read at all.)

10:00 AM - We left the Tanghalang Pambansa (that's the new name of the CCP main building, in case you're still in the dark), and despite my better efforts to just take in the change of scenery from smoggy city to breathtaking countryside, I fell asleep on my seat, just after I took a picture of our party in the coaster.

I hope I didn't snore. Shucks.

I was Zzzing all the way until

11:15 AM - I was roused from my short but sweet sleep by the cool fresh air that blew in through the window, which my newspaper reporter seatmate and college batchmate, whom we shall call Stef, opened. We were ascending this steep incline to Mt. Makiling, and I was surprised when I looked at the clock that it's barely been an hour and a half since we started the trip and already we were at the National Arts Center.

It's to the Clubhouse we first went because that's where the press con was going to be held. We waited for awhile downstairs while the music camp delegates were having their orientation. I could hear each one of them introducing themselves, but I hardly caught any names.

Okay, more like I couldn't pronounce them.

When we finally came up, my stomach was grumbling like a tiger. Oh no, you say that for *growling*... Right. That's when I remembered that the hotdog-on-a-stick I brought as *baon* was probably sharing its stink with my t-shirt in the bag by then.

But I couldn't be bothered to take it (hotdog) out of the bag, because the beautiful people around me were much too distracting.

There was this violinist from among the delegates. I don't know her name. I never learned that day because all I could do was snap her pictures while she was pretending not to notice. All I was able to gather was that she's Finnish and she's a musician and she's a real beauty.

But so much for my lesbian tendencies.

Lunch came first, then it's off to the tables to mingle with the musician delegates.

The first guy I talked to was Tasis from Cyprus.

He shot the first question: "Do you know where Cyprus is?"

"Cyprus? Yeah..." I looked nervously at Stef, who was next to me and who heard him ask me where his country was.

Then he laughed.

I was relieved that he did. It meant he knew I didn't know and he wouldn't quiz me anymore.

"I know where it is on the map," Stef piped up. "It's in the Middle East." What a save!

Tasis just nodded his head and smiled, so I thought we were wrong. But I just found out we weren't. 'Cause Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, *is* in the Middle East although it is south of Turkey. Now this one is geographically part of Europe, as claimed by Ruffa in one of her interviews in *The Buzz*. Sometimes it does help to watch some TV. But I should've paid better attention in geography class.

Wait, so if Cyprus is in the Middle East, why is he part of the Asia **Europe** Music Camp, which this event is? I'm confused again.

Anyway, I tried to redeem myself by "interviewing" him: How old are you? (26.) What's your major? (Percussion.) What year are you in? (4th.) What school? (Some university in Europe--I forgot to take it down.) Till when are you staying? (He's extending by some days, to check out business prospects for rattan.) Why rattan? (Because he'd need it for making instruments.)

Then it was his turn to ask *me*: What's the population of Manila? (I'm not sure, I said. I just shrugged.) What is the ratio of the women to men? (I stupidly said there are more men and than women before admitting I got it confused, when the Italian guy Stef was interviewing, Fausto, said it didn't look like that.) When is the summer around here? (I paused before saying between March and May because I had to collect my thoughts. His teeth were blinding me.)

Tasis (I'm not even entirely sure I got his name right) flashed his pearly whites again, not because he wanted to make an impression but because he found it funny that I seemed clueless about Manila. He said as much, too.

I guess I didn't do very well in redeeming myself.

Or maybe it didn't matter that I didn't. After all, he followed up with more questions.

"Were you in Makati last night?"

"Yeah, I was. That's where I work."

"I saw you at...what's it called...the Landmark."

"Are you sure? 'Cause I was at one Makati mall last night, but it was at the Power Plant."

"But I could've sworn it was you I saw."

Okay, mister, if you insist. I just wonder who goes around using my body without my knowledge...

Then he went on to say he believed it was me because he saw a girl with the same mobile phone as I had, and the same small sock to keep it in.

But doesn't every other person around here keep his/her cellphone in a sock that fits? Isn't it like a national practice?

The guy must've found it weird. Or cute. Or weird. Which, come to think of it, it is.

Before the conversation got anywhere near flirting, the program started. Turns out Tasis was the only guy in the room I'd get to talk to. And I thought I'd get a European boyfriend (or girlfriend) before the day was over. Too bad.

What followed were some musical presentations which I would know how to describe were I a musicologist, but as it is, I'm the kind of person who cannot tell Britney Spears's voice from Mickey Mouse's squeak--which doesn't really make me in a position to discuss music. Plus the only notes I can read are those I make in my own scrawl (synonym: chicken scratch); sometimes, not even.

So there I was, listening to the beautiful people from Europe and Asia make beautiful music (that's all I know how to describe it) in a beautiful venue with beautiful panoramic views of Laguna de Bay and the mountains of Rizal, and all I could think about was how I wished the camera's batteries wouldn't die on me because it would've been a shame to miss capturing NAC on film (or memory card, rather). Besides, I'd have gotten clobbered by my bosses (if not myself) had that happened.

Noticed that I forgot to keep track of the time? This means that I had a jolly good time taking pictures, thanks to my cam's batts that did *not* give out.

The next time I looked at my watch was when it was announced that we were already leaving. This was at 3:00 PM – We filed onto the tourist bus (the coaster was gone!) and dropped by other products of Mrs. Imelda Marcos’s “edifice complex” in the NAC, from all of which I’m singling out St. Marc’s Chapel because Stef was gushing that it’s where she’d like to get married. And if memory serves me right, it was featured in an Aga Muhlach-Regine Velasquez starrer years back (*Pangako...Ikaw Lang*, was it?). At every stop I took pictures, of course, until the memory card--not the batteries--reached its capacity.

And then the bus peeled out of there, stopped for awhile at a Collette’s outlet where I bought a box of *buko* pie for *pasalubong* (that I knew my officemates were expecting) and started making its way back to Manila.

I got off at the MRT and made it to the office just before

5:30 PM - My colleagues pounced upon not me but what I brought them. Tsk, tsk.

I didn’t get a European boyfriend (or, again, girlfriend) but I’d sure like to see these beautiful people again when they fiddle with and straddle their respective instruments (musical, hey) at the I’mPULSE culminating concert. If you wanna see them in the flesh, get yourself to the CCP on Tuesday at 8 PM and see the objects of my twisted desire.

Mae Tulagan likes some of Britney's songs. She's not sure if that's a good thing.