

Innovations in Theater Towards Engaging Young Audiences in the Philippines

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GENERAL TRENDS IN PHILIPPINE THEATER

Categorized and ranked according to popularity

A. MUSICAL

Combination of known Broadway musical and local celebrities take the biggest share of Filipino audience

B. FILIPINO LITERATURE-BASED

Adaptations from popular Filipino Literature and curriculum-based materials have consistently brought in busloads of students to the theater venues

C. EXPERIMENTAL

Maintained a quiet, niche audience and if sustained can be an emerging popular trend



FACTORS AFFECTING THE TENDENCIES IN THE PHILIPPINE THEATER

Opportunities

Huge audience base: 49K public schools and 21M elementary and high school students

Limitless possibilities for creation and promotion brought about by new media, availability of creative resources brought about by an emerging network of artist communities and more dynamic cultural managers



Threats

Ticket Pricing: cost of production vs paying capacity of the audience

Lack of viable performance space

Culture and arts exposure are not prioritized in the curriculum

Multitude of other options available for leisure and education

Those have been our challenges as well as a theater company....



PETA

- **We are a 46 year old theater company. Established in 1967 with the mission of pursuing a theater for people's development**
- **We are considered as one of the pioneers of contemporary Filipino theater, have produced more 400 plays, mostly originals and in the language, outlook and spirit that is Filipino, tackling issues relevant to its audiences.**
- **We have trained artists, young people, teachers and non-artists who believe in the power of theater to unleash people's creativity.**
- **We manage our own Theater Center, a creativity hub for its members, partners and networks.**



We know that we do is important. But with all the challenges, it has become very difficult to get audiences to the theater. How do we stay relevant?

“There is an audience out there... they have to be coaxed out of their hiding places.”

- McCann Erickson, Philippines

HOW ?

Challenges

Making theater more accessible and affordable

Making theater more engaging so that young people can relate to it. And at the same time, make decision makers in schools and other educational institutions see the value/ relevance of the plays for their students.

Making theater more exciting so it can compete with the buffet of entertainment choices available for the audience



Innovation: Going Beyond Entertainment – The Educational Theater

A. Contemporizing and Popularizing Icons

This is our National Hero



This is how PETA introduced his character to young audiences



Innovation: Going Beyond Entertainment – The Educational Theater

BATANG RIZAL (YOUNG RIZAL)



BATANG RIZAL (YOUNG RIZAL)

Format: 1 ½ hour musical comedy

Makes use of puppetry and multi-media for transition

To differentiate, characters of the present are in colorful costumes while characters from the past are in sepia tone

Mobile Production



BATANG RIZAL (YOUNG RIZAL)



One of PETA's longest running plays: It opened in 2002 and is still running to date due to requests by schools

Almost 300 performances

Has toured more than 30 cities in Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao and the National Capital regions

It taught history in an engaging manner....

And It has carried the message that heroism is not only in grand acts of courage. Heroism may be found in little acts of kindness and in the decisions that they (the children audience) make.



Innovation: Going Beyond Entertainment – The Educational Theater

B. ADVOCACY THEATER : INFORMANCE

PETA had always been known as a theater for advocacy. Performances that promote children's, women's and human rights have always been in our repertoire of plays

THE PHILIPPINE EDUCATIONAL THEATER ASSOCIATION
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Vincent A. DeJesus'
SI JUAN TAMAD, ANG DIYABLO
AT ANG LIMANG Milyong BOTO

Director: Phil M. Nobler
Assistant Director/Additional Dance Choreography: Carlos Marabata
Playwright/Musical Direction/Composer/Arranger: Vincent A. DeJesus
Dramaturg/Additional Screen: Lisa Magpalar
Additional Screen: Ajay Hernandez
Production Design: Renee Juan
Lighting Design: Andoy Villanar
Cinematographer: Duha Terapia

Featuring:
Via Antonia, Marc Balayan,
Lafert Bactamante, Jason Co,
Vincent B. DeJesus, Alvaro Espinosa,
Shawly Gomez, Carlos Marabata,
Jae M. Medina, Nicole Manalita,
Marling Ong, Victor Robinson,
Zhen Eric, Fernado, Renee Daryl Ramos,
Robert M. Soria, Duha Terapia

CASTING CALL:
THE VIRGIN VOTER'S CAMPAIGN
I WANT MY FIRST VOTE TO COUNT!

THIS PRODUCTION WAS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF:
MISEREOR THE HILTYEYES FOUNDATION FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

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Innovation: Going Beyond Entertainment – The Educational Theater

B. ADVOCACY THEATER : INFORMANCE

TANDANG SORA: OUR GRANDMOTHER THE HERO



An advocacy campaign by the Quezon City Government to promote the SEVEN VIRTUES OF TANDANG SORA to the children of the city.

TANDANG SORA: OUR GRANDMOTHER THE HERO

A “Maleta” (Luggage bag) Musical about the old lady of the revolution



TANDANG SORA: OUR GRANDMOTHER THE HERO

24 performances in 24
barangays in Quezon City,
Philippines

60 workshops for children
ages 5-12

Fully funded by the Office
of the City Vice Mayor
allowing more than 12,000
children from low-income
communities to watch the
performances and attend
the workshops



CONCLUSION

PETA faced challenges brought about by financial considerations, space limitations and the perception in the Philippines by making careful study/research on the audience and taking stock of our strengths. Innovations were integrated in the performances to make them accessible, engaging, entertaining and still relevant

Our bottomlines have always been these three: **aesthetic**, **relevance** and **viability**.

These ensure that the integrity of our work is not compromised and our mission/vision is safeguarded at all time despite the need to become sustainable.



CONCLUSION

In more affluent countries, theater and the performing arts already referring to breaking the barriers of conventional theater in terms of -

- Site-specific plays: New spaces adapted for performance
- Multi-disciplinary types of performances
- New ways of doing performances: spoken words, verbatim theater, lecture performances
- Writing theater with the audience
- Non-text based theater



CONCLUSION

However, in a developing country like the Philippines, the trend is still very much into enhancing existing conventional practices. And it is up to the artists organizations to find creative and innovative ways of -

- Developing content that is market sensitive rather than market driven
- Contemporizing and other forms of experimentation in interactive performances
- Turning non-traditional spaces into viable performance spaces through site-sensitive productions
- Creative and alternative means of finding fundings to create performances and to bring audience to the theater
 - Finding ways to engage the audience beyond the traditional means and to nurture that engagement and turn the audience into loyal and growing patrons and advocates of theater

