

‘The Injury’: Where Softball, Theater, and Filipino Culture Coalesce

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Bob Flor is interested in softball, theater and Filipino-American culture. All three coalesce in his most current play, “The Injury,” a ten-minute piece that will be performed as part of the Eclectic Theater Festival this month.

“The Injury” in its current format developed through multiple stages, starting with memories and family memorabilia.

“When my father died in 2003, I inherited trunks that were tucked away in his basement,” Flor says.

Flor then found inspiration in his uncle’s papers.

“These belonged to my Uncle Baltazar ‘Bob’ Flor, who was the playwright for the Filipino community during the ‘20s and ‘30s,” he says. “The trunk contained one surviving play, several programs, shards of plays, many love letters to him, poems to women and letters from a priest scolding him.”

New inspiration then arose from fellow community members.

“I showed these to Dale Tiffany, who suggested these could make a fascinating play. That was the seed of the idea.” Flor says.

“Not knowing anything about writing a play, I asked Toni Bajado, a local Filipino poet and playwright, about it and she recommended Freehold Theater,” he adds. “I enrolled, then branched out into courses at ACT Theatre and Hugo House. Both are great teaching theaters.”

One of Flor’s many ideas, to dramatize the Pinoy softball team of the 1970s, started small — one-minute small, to be precise.

“My initial thought when ... asked for a one-minute play was ‘You must be kidding!’” Flor says. “I thought it would be more like a skit or a television advertisement.” But Flor let the process percolate.

“I thought about it and dreamt a dialogue based on playing softball on team Pinoy and on Gohan, another Asian-American team, as well as an experience playing in the over-40 Asian basketball league,” he says. “I got up in the morning and wrote the short one-minute play, which [was] published. The following week, Stephanie Timm from ACT sent the course requirement for a 10-minute play, so I added nine minutes.”

These formed the seeds of a full-length play called “Pinoys Play Baseball.” As Flor reports, “I actually drafted the entire play, but let it sit because I knew the version didn’t work. It was cumbersome and complicated with too many characters.”

But that led to the birth of “The Injury,” which Flor says draws on some of the same characters. This new short play attracted the attention of director Maria Batayola. “‘The Injury’ is very well written,” Batayola says. “It’s a 10-minute, surreal slice of life. In the midst of a ball player getting injured and writhing in pain, his two buddies discuss everything but the sun. Very funny, very sad, very revealing about human nature.”

Flor and Batayola feel fortunate in their casting of the show.

“There are a number of talented Filipino actors around Seattle,” Flor says. “For ‘The Injury,’ we were fortunate to get Matt Dela Cruz, who is studying in New York, but home for the summer; Ryan Floresca from ArtsWest Theater, and Fernando Argosino, who works with Pinoy Words Expressed Kultura Arts.” Dela Cruz describes “The Injury” as a special opportunity.

“I told Bob I’d be more than happy to participate in ‘The Injury,’ especially since I get to play a Filipino role, which has been a very rare occurrence for me as a Filipino American actor in the theater scene.”

As director, Batayola reports a smooth rehearsal process.

“When working with new material, the goal is to see how the material does as written works,” she says. “Rehearsals are fun — actors delving deep into motivation and bringing themselves to the characters. Bob is very disciplined. He does not micro-direct, but rather, listens, watches and take notes.”

Dela Cruz has also found the process stimulating.

“Bob clearly loves this play and has a great understanding of the history the play takes place in, which has helped tremendously,” he says. “I also like Maria’s directing style because she has brought up stuff about Filipino culture that I haven’t even realized existed. That and the fact that she is helping me bring my ‘physical acting’ side to this role (due to my characters’ injury) has been a great addition and one that I am excited to showcase.”

This production brings Flor full-circle from his childhood experiences of theater. “I’ve attended plays ever since I was young,” he says. “The first play I saw, other than grade-school Christmas pageants, was ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ at a youth theater. I’ve always attended theater, but never in my right mind thought about playwriting.” Now he has written several plays, and is looking forward to the next stage.

“‘The Injury’ isn’t my first play, but it’s the first to have been selected for performance,” he says.

With such a wealth of family and cultural material at his fingertips, Batayola concurs that Flor is well-positioned to grow into the local theater scene. “He has several plays that are ready to be produced.”

“The Injury” will show Friday, June 7 at at the Eclectic Theater Festival on 1214 Tenth Avenue in Seattle. More at eclectictheatercompany.org/one-act-play-festival/.