

A Wonderful Surprise

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER



Photos by Mic Diaz

What began as a celebration of **Stevie Wonder's** music turned into an unforgettable night when the music legend himself made a surprise appearance at WONDER-FULL at Grand Performances in Downtown Los Angeles on July 18.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, WONDER-FULL brought together generations of fans for an outdoor dance party dedicated to Wonder's extraordinary musical legacy. Presented by Footlong Development and Nancy Arte Productions, the evening featured DJ Spinna, DJ Monalisa, MC Cognito and special guests spinning Wonder classics, remixes and music he produced for other artists.

The biggest surprise came when Stevie Wonder appeared in person and shared news about his long-awaited album, *Through the Eyes of Wonder*. Planned for release in 2027, it would be his first studio album since *A Time to Love* in 2005.



Held at California Plaza as part of Grand Performances' free summer programming, the celebration was especially fitting as 2026 marks the 50th anniversary of Wonder's landmark album *Songs in the Key of Life*. His unexpected appearance transformed an already special tribute into a night Los Angeles music fans won't soon forget.

CHAT WITH MIC

Keeping Philippine Music Alive

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER

For ethnomusicologist and cultural bearer **Bernard Ellorin**, music has become a way to preserve Philippine culture while helping Filipino-Americans better understand their heritage.

Ellorin's journey began at the age of 10, when his mother enrolled him in classes at the Samahan Filipino American Performing Arts and Education Center in San Diego. She wanted him to experience Philippine culture through the arts at a time when Filipino representation was limited in schools and media. His first Filipino instrument was the banduria, followed by *kulintang* two years later.

That early exposure eventually led Ellorin to pursue ethnomusicology and study the diversity and history behind Philippine musical traditions. He became particularly drawn to *kulintang*, a gong music tradition rooted in the southern Philippines and connected to the country's broader Southeast Asian heritage.

Today, Ellorin continues that work as music director for the Pakaraguian Kulintang Ensemble and Samahan Performing Arts. Through workshops, performances, after-school programs and collaborations with student organizations, he helps introduce Philippine music to new audiences and younger generations.

For Ellorin, preserving the music also means understanding where it comes from—the people, history and cultural context behind each tradition. His work reminds Filipino-Americans that music can be more than something we hear or perform. It can also be a way of knowing where we come from.

DON'T MISS OUT!

Check out the full interview in *Chat With Mic* on the Mic Diaz Presents Youtube channel.



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CHAT WITH MIC Episode 74: Bernard Ellorin



Photo by Edrian Pangilinan

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COMMUNITY

Sri Lanka Takes Center Stage at the 45th Annual Lotus Festival

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER



Los Angeles' rich cultural diversity was on full display as thousands gathered at Echo Park Lake on July 11–12 for the **45th Annual Lotus Festival**, an annual tradition celebrating the many Asian and Pacific Islander communities that call Southern California home. This year's festival honored Sri Lanka, inviting visitors to experience the island nation's vibrant traditions through music, dance, food, arts, and cultural exhibits. Hosted by the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks in partnership with Lotus Festival, Inc., the free, family-friendly event featured cultural performances, artisan vendors, community organizations, educational exhibits, and international cuisine.

Visitors enjoyed live entertainment throughout the weekend, including traditional Sri Lankan dance and music, multicultural performances, and the popular Dragon Boat Races, one of the festival's signature attractions. Guests also explored artisan booths, cultural exhibits, nonprofit organizations, community resource tables, and family-friendly activities while taking in the beauty of the blooming lotus flowers.

Food was another highlight of the festival, with vendors offering flavors from across Asia and the Pacific. Among them, Neri's Restaurant proudly represented the Filipino community, serving authentic Filipino cuisine alongside a variety of international specialties.

Festival attendees also saw Miss Cambodia Jocelyn Chun in traditional Cambodian attire, adding to the weekend's colorful celebration of Asian cultures.

As families enjoyed performances, discovered new cultures and connected with community organizations, the annual Lotus Festival once again showed how arts and culture can bring people together. The festival remains a place for Los Angeles' diverse communities to share traditions, celebrate their heritage and experience the cultural richness of the city.

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Art that Confronts History

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER



Filipino artist **Rey Zipagan** brought history and social realism to the canvas during an art exhibition held July 18 at R.O.K. Art Gallery in Los Angeles.

Zipagan's work explores the post-colonial realities of violence, corruption and economic exploitation in the Philippines. His detailed paintings draw from history and use dramatic visual storytelling to examine difficult moments in the Filipino experience.

History has long influenced Zipagan's art, including works exploring the Philippine-American War and the Balangiga Massacre. Through his paintings, he encourages viewers to confront the impact of war and colonialism on people and communities.

The exhibition also featured artwork by Denmark De la Cruz, a Pangasinan-born artist known for socially conscious paintings addressing poverty, inequality, corruption and the vulnerability of children.

Together, their works of art demonstrate the power of art to tell stories, confront difficult realities and bring greater attention to Philippine history and contemporary social issues.

UPCOMING EVENTS

JULY 19

- Sunday Sessions free summer dance series at Gloria Molina Grand Park, DTLA
- Sensory Mornings at the Infinity Mirrored Room, The Broad, DTLA

JULY 24

- Live music and DJs, Hauser & Wirth, Arts District, DTLA
- KCRW Summer Nights, Museum of Latin American Art

JULY 25

Mariachi El Bronx & Tijuana Panthers, Grand Performances, DTLA

JULY 26

DJ Nights feat. Nikka Costa & Anthony Valadez, Plummer Park, West Hollywood

Every 1st Thursday of the Month

ArtNight DTLA, Spring St., Broadway and Grand Ave.

Every Friday this Summer!

- Barnsdall Friday Wine Nights, Barnsdall Art Park
- Chinatown Summer Nights, Central Plaza, Chinatown
- Dance DTLA, The Music Center, DTLA
- KCRW Summer Friday Nights, various locations

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