

IN THE MIX

BY MIC DIAZ PRESENTS

ISSUE ZERO | FOUNDERS EDITION | SUMMER 2026

Playback Jukebox

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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VOICES SHAPING TODAY.

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From the Publisher

WELCOME TO ISSUE ZERO: FOUNDERS EDITION OF IN THE MIX MAGAZINE BY MIC DIAZ PRESENTS

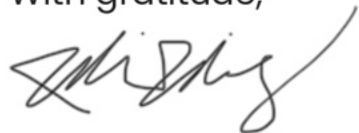
Created to celebrate culture, community, creativity, and connection, *In the Mix Magazine* shines a light on the people, stories, businesses, artists, and organizations that inspire us and shape our world.

This inaugural issue coincides with *In the Mix: Live!*, a celebration of five years of Mic Diaz Presents and *Chat With Mic*. Within these pages, you'll meet talented performers, discover insightful articles from our contributing writers, and explore stories that inform, inspire, and connect—from entertainment and culture to business, travel, wellness, and relationships.

Thank you to our contributors, advertisers, sponsors, partners, performers, and readers who believed in this vision from the beginning. Your support has helped turn an idea into reality.

Welcome to *In the Mix Magazine*. We are honored to have you on this journey with us.

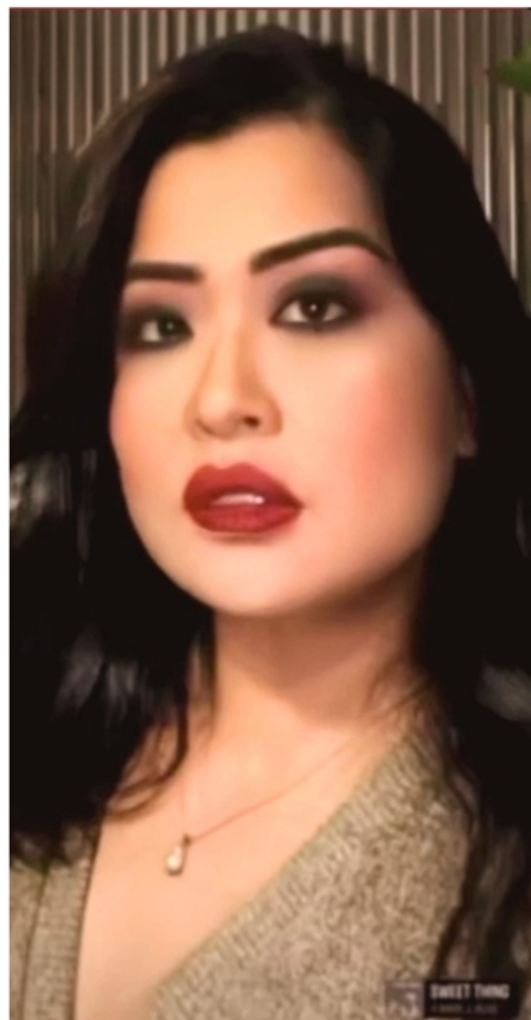
With gratitude,



Mic Diaz

Founder, Publisher & Editor-in-Chief

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“

*Stories have
the power
to inspire,
to connect, and
to create
change.*

”

Voices In the Mix

Meet the writers, creators, and storytellers whose voices and perspectives help bring In the Mix Magazine to life.



Mic Diaz

Founder, Publisher & Editor-in-Chief



Mic Diaz is a storyteller building platforms that celebrate culture, community, and You. Get to know Mic Diaz and discover the story behind Mic Diaz Presents.

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Every issue begins with a story. Every story begins with a voice.

With Gratitude

Thank you to our Creator, advertisers, sponsors, community partners, contributors, performers, volunteers, and supporters whose generosity and belief in this vision helped bring *In the Mix Magazine* to life. We are forever grateful for your support.

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“At the end of the day, we have to ask ourselves why we do what we do.”

– RONSON PROVIDO

Photo courtesy of Ronson Provideo

COMMUNITY

Carlton Cares: Faith in Action

BY MIC DIAZ

For more than two decades, Carlton Cares has been guided by a simple mission: helping people through faith, compassion, and community action.

Founded by Ronson Provideo and supported by his wife, Caroline, Carlton Cares serves underserved communities through feeding programs, clothing drives, care packages for unhoused individuals, and partnerships with grassroots initiatives in both the United States and the Philippines.

What began in 1999 as small neighborhood gatherings outside Provideo's family home in the Philippines eventually grew into Paskuhan sa Barangay, a community outreach effort that continues today through the support of family members, neighbors, and volunteers.

Now based in Southern California, Ronson and Caroline continue that mission by supporting individuals facing hardship, homelessness, and instability. Inspired by their faith and a commitment to service, they believe meaningful change happens through consistent acts of kindness and human connection.

Supporting that mission is Carlton Group, the parent company behind businesses in engineering, construction, renewable energy, and real estate development. Despite its growth, the organization's focus remains the same: creating opportunities to serve others and make a lasting difference in people's lives.



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DROP OFF: NORWALK



Johnny Itliong on Preserving His Father Larry Itliong's Legacy

BY MIC DIAZ

Some interviews stay with you long after the cameras stop rolling. My conversation with Johnny Itliong for Chat With Mic was one of those. As the son of labor leader Larry Itliong, Johnny grew up in Delano, California, surrounded by the Filipino farmworkers known as the *Manongs*. Raised in a Filipino-Mexican household, he learned the values of hard work, self-reliance, and service. Those lessons helped shape him into a licensed electrician, accomplished chef, and community advocate.

Johnny's childhood was also shaped by witnessing the struggles of immigrant farmworkers who labored long hours in the fields for low wages and difficult living conditions. He saw firsthand the sacrifices made by his father and the *Manongs*, whose efforts helped launch the historic Delano Grape Strike of 1965 and unite Filipino, Mexican, and other farmworkers in the fight for dignity and fairness. Listening to Johnny, I could hear both pride and purpose in his commitment to preserving this important history.

As I listened, I reflected on my own childhood in the Philippines. I remember hearing my parents talk about how scarce and expensive grapes had become. Grapes were a luxury, often brought home as *pasalubong* by relatives returning from the United States. Only years later did I realize that even families thousands of miles away felt the ripple effects of the grape boycott. Today, Johnny continues to share the stories of the *Manongs* and ensure that future generations understand the role Filipino-Americans played in labor history. Our conversation reminded me that history lives in people, memories, and stories. Thanks to Johnny Itliong, the voices of the *Manongs* continue to be heard.





CAGAYAN RIVER
Photo by Lensman Traveller

TRAVEL

Beyond the Itinerary: Behind Every Journey

BY HAJJIE ALEJANDRO, JR.

Travel looks effortless from the outside—a confirmed booking, a smooth itinerary, and a memorable experience. But behind every seamless journey is a system built on trust, timing, and precision.

Having spent more than two decades in the travel industry across Asia, the Middle East, and the United States, I have learned that travel is not simply about selling destinations. It is about solving problems before they happen.

A strong travel business is built on three things: relationships, knowledge, and responsibility. Relationships create trusted partnerships that keep things moving. Knowledge comes from experience, understanding destinations, and knowing what works. Responsibility means recognizing that clients are placing their time, money, and often once-in-a-lifetime experiences in your hands.

Technology has made booking easier, but it cannot replace accountability. At the end of the day, travelers may forget the details of their itinerary, but they will always remember how smoothly their journey went. Behind every successful trip is a travel professional committed to building trust and delivering beyond expectations.



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Why River Cruising Is Travel's Hottest Trend

BY ALVIN ADRIANO, LUXURY TRAVEL ADVISOR, TRAVELWISE INTERNATIONAL



Photos by Alvin Adriano

Rising costs continue to shape travel decisions in 2026, prompting many travelers to look more carefully at where they spend their vacation dollars. Yet rather than traveling less, many are seeking experiences that deliver greater value, convenience, and enrichment in a single trip. That preference is helping fuel one of the hottest trends in travel today: river cruising.

I discovered this firsthand on a sailing from Amsterdam to Frankfurt, an itinerary that revealed the true appeal of traveling by river. Rather than juggling multiple hotel bookings, packing and unpacking each day, and managing daily logistics, I leisurely sailed along the Rhine and watched Europe unfold from my floating front-row seat.

The adventure began in Amsterdam, where historic canals, vibrant neighborhoods, and rich maritime heritage provided the perfect introduction. As we sailed, each day brought a new landscape and story. Medieval towns, terraced vineyards, grand cathedrals, and centuries-old castles appeared around every bend. We also discovered the legendary tale of Lorelei, one of the Rhine's most enduring myths.



Alvin Adriano

Some of my favorite moments happened on deck. Watching mist rise from the river at sunrise, passing picturesque villages, and enjoying uninterrupted views of Europe's countryside created a sense of tranquility that is increasingly rare in modern travel. After days on the river, we arrived in Frankfurt, the perfect blend of old and new, and a chance to reflect on the experiences and friendships made along the way.



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FOOD

More Than a Recipe: Stories We Pass Down

BY KATHERINE INIBA

The aroma of garlic, onions, and ginger sizzling in a pan instantly transports me back to my childhood and reminds me of home. For my family, food is more than nourishment—it is a connection to our heritage. Through family recipes, we share memories, learn about our history, and keep our culture alive.

One of the first dishes I learned to make was chicken empanadas. It was a labor-intensive process that involved boiling and shredding chicken, preparing the filling, making the dough, and assembling each empanada. While many kids my age might have considered it a chore, I loved every minute of it. I enjoyed helping my mom prepare her famous empanadas, a dish so beloved that people often asked her to cater special occasions.

But the recipe was only part of what she was passing down. As we cooked, my mother shared stories about learning Filipino dishes from my grandmother. In those moments, I realized I was part of a tradition that stretched across generations.

Years later, after moving in with my grandparents, I had the opportunity to learn directly from my grandmother. I watched her make crispy fried empanadas using simple ingredients and whatever filling she had on hand. Some of my favorite memories with her were spent in that kitchen, listening to stories about her childhood while we cooked together.

Like many Filipino families, our recipes were never written down. Whenever I asked for exact measurements or cooking times, the answer was always, “You just know.” At the time, it was frustrating. As an adult, I understand that these recipes were learned through observation, practice, and time spent together.

Today, my sisters and I feel a responsibility to preserve those recipes for future generations. We could easily find recipes online, but those recipes are not ours. Family recipes carry stories, memories, and traditions. Through them, we remain connected to our heritage and the generations whose legacy lives on in every meal we share.



From Pilita to BINIchella: 67 Years of OPM

BY ELESÍ

Those of us hooked on Original Pilipino Music (OPM) have always dreamed of the day our local narratives would resonate globally. I first fell in love with OPM during a 1985 APO Hiking Society concert. It was a musical extravaganza and a cleverly encoded rebellion. I felt firsthand how art could be resistance. But the dream of global recognition started much earlier. Brilliant artists chipped away at the glass ceiling for decades, starting with Pilita Corrales in 1959. She bravely championed recording in our native languages, paving the way for the milestones we see today.

So why did it take 67 years to reach our generation's global tipping point? The answer lies in cultural authorship. Think of the Korean invention of *Hangeul*, an intuitive alphabet that gave people an accessible system to express themselves. Korea did the exact same thing for global music by inventing the modern pop matrix. Our Filipino musicians studied this highly efficient system. They mastered it and completely nativized it. By pouring our own soul, indigenous languages, and kapwa into that modern framework, they provided a vessel for our Filipino stories to shine luminously on their own terms.

*“Authenticity is currency,
and the world is buying.”*

– ELISEO ART “ELESÍ” SILVA



Saira “Bunny” Paras at Coachella 2026 Week 1

We witnessed this magnificent alchemy in April 2026 when BINI officially launched Filipino Pop into the global stratosphere at Coachella. History has a poetic way of coming home. In May 1965, Larry Itliong stood in those exact Coachella fields leading a victorious labor revolution. He succeeded by uniting agricultural workers and speaking the diverse languages of our people. Fast forward 61 years, and eight young women reclaimed that same space. They transformed the *salakot* from a humble sun shield into a golden crown of global sovereignty, giving the world chills as they introduced themselves in Tagalog, Batangueño, Bisaya, Bicolano, and Ilocano.

BINI proved that heritage is not a niche. Authenticity is currency, and the world is buying. When we stop trying to dilute who we are to fit a global mold, we unlock our innate genius. We are no longer the outliers. We are the main characters. By telling our stories unapologetically, we stop outsourcing our identity and start exporting our essence. That is true wealth, and the kind built to endure.

FILM & TV

More Than a Show: A Love Letter to Nurses

BY MARK LABELLA

Nurse the Dead is more than a television series. As the first Filipino studio-produced series filmed in Hollywood, it represents an important step forward in visibility, storytelling, and representation. At its heart, *Nurse the Dead* is a supernatural workplace comedy about nurses, ghosts, grief, chosen family, and the beautiful chaos of people trying to keep each other alive. Beneath the laughter is a story about resilience, connection, and community.

As showrunner, I believe leadership is service. It means protecting the story while supporting the people who bring it to life and creating opportunities for others to be seen and heard. That philosophy is especially important, because this story centers on Filipino nurses whose contributions to healthcare are immeasurable and too often underrecognized. For generations, Filipino nurses have cared for families and communities with compassion, strength, and grace.

Nurse the Dead may be a comedy, but beneath the humor is a love letter to nurses, immigrants, caregivers, and everyone who continues showing up for others during life's most difficult moments. I wrote this series from grief, memory, and my years in healthcare, inspired by the nurses I worked alongside, the patients we lost, and the families who kept going.

What began as a personal story quickly became a community effort. Artists, nurses, immigrants, caregivers, families, and friends contributed their time, talent, and heart. They didn't simply work on this project—they helped build it. Because while this story may be about ghosts, it is ultimately about the living and the communities that carry us forward together.



Photos courtesy of Mark Labella



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MUSIC

schizo and his Lokalpinoy Playlist

BY LE-VAN DE GUZMAN

The Filipino-American independent music scene in Los Angeles is more than a collection of bands playing small venues and community events. It is a living archive of culture, identity, and shared experiences carried through distorted guitars, heartfelt lyrics, and crowds that feel more like family reunions than concerts.

For decades, Filipino-American artists have used music to tell stories of immigration, belonging, resilience, and cultural pride. Local venues, backyard gigs, and community gatherings have become spaces where Filipinos connect and celebrate what I call "lokalpinoy."

This playlist is a handpicked collection of artists who have helped shape that journey. Many are longtime friends whose bands I've followed and supported for years, alongside a few recent discoveries. Together, these tracks capture the spirit of Filipino-American independent music from Los Angeles, New York, London, Manila, and beyond.

Beyond being just a mere "sound trip," this playlist serves as cultural preservation—a growing archive of Filipino-American voices and experiences.

I'm LeVan De Guzman, but most people know me as schizo. I've been a fan, supporter, and archivist of lokalpinoy since 1994. Enjoy the playlist—and play it loud.

**"BEYOND BEING
JUST A MERE
'SOUND TRIP,'
THIS PLAYLIST
SERVES AS
CULTURAL
PRESERVATION."
- schizo**

SCHIZO'S PLAYLIST

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Signal 3 - Labu Labu
Swimming Pools and Movie Stars - One
Zipcode - Traffic
New Day In August - Jane's Song
Rubberband - Kampana Ng Ice Cream
Monster Turned Machine - Anything For You
Belaire's - Sommar
Finest Summer - Finest Summer Song
Mayday - Celestial Hearts
Something Came Up - Search Is Over
Sexy Jay - Sa Bintana
Bryan, Kars & Yunyon - Malayo-layo
Julie - Flutter
Overpass - Union Station

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A portrait of Jascel Valencia, a young man with short brown hair and a light beard, wearing a black turtleneck sweater and black pants. He is sitting on a metal stool, leaning forward with his arms crossed, looking off to the side. The background is a plain, light gray.

Jascel

VALENCIA

Breaking Boundaries Through Music

Jascel Valencia is a singer, songwriter, dancer, and creative artist best known as a member of the internationally acclaimed dance group Junior New System. Recognized for the group's appearances on Asia's Got Talent and America's Got Talent, Jascel has built a career defined by passion, artistry, and fearless self-expression.

Performing under the artist name Nerdie, Jascel continues to expand his creative journey through original music. His recent releases showcase his versatility as an artist while inspiring audiences to embrace their individuality and pursue their dreams without limits.

Photo by Mark John Almeria

Janice

JAVIER

A Voice of Strength and Soul

Singer and performer **Janice Javier** rose to national prominence as a finalist on the first season of *The Voice of the Philippines*, where she earned widespread recognition for her powerful vocals and soulful performances as a member of Team Apl. Before her television breakthrough, she spent years performing across Asia as a professional singer, sharing stages with both Filipino and international artists.

Known for her heartfelt delivery and commanding stage presence, Janice continues to inspire audiences through music that reflects resilience, passion, and authenticity. Her journey from international performer to celebrated recording artist has made her one of the most respected voices in the Filipino music community.



Honore

Blending Heart, Soul, and Sound

Honore is a Los Angeles-based singer, songwriter, and producer known for his genre-blurring blend of R&B, Pop, and Afrobeats. Influenced by artists such as Prince, Miguel, Pharrell Williams, and Tems, he creates music that combines soulful melodies, thoughtful songwriting, and contemporary rhythms into a sound that is both intimate and captivating.

His recent releases, including "L.O.V.E.," "Haven," and the upcoming single Sunlight Vibes, showcase his signature style of pairing emotional storytelling with smooth grooves and irresistible hooks. Beyond his original music, Honore is also the creative force behind The Purple Generation, a tribute to Prince, Bruno and the Hooligans, a Bruno Mars tribute band, and 3 of a Kind, a celebration of iconic '90s boy band hits.

Photo by Bob Genius



Jane

PROVIDO

A Voice of Faith and Inspiration

Singer and performer **Jane Provideo** is the lead vocalist of Optimum Groove Band, captivating audiences with her powerful voice, heartfelt performances, and uplifting spirit. A Grand Winner of Pinoy PopStar Talent 2007, Jane has built a reputation as a versatile entertainer whose passion for music shines through every performance.

Known for her inspiring journey as a performer, mother, and woman of faith, Jane continues to connect with audiences through music that celebrates hope, resilience, and joy. Whether performing with Optimum Groove Band or on her own, she brings authenticity, warmth, and energy to every stage she graces.

Photo by Robert Ryan

Thor

VALIENTE

Talent with a Purpose

Torrance “Thor” Valiente is a singer, composer, actor, and philanthropist whose passion for performing began at the age of five through appearances in teleseryes on ABS-CBN and GMA. A two-time grand finalist on *Tawag ng Tanghalan* and alumnus of *The Voice Teens Philippines*, Thor continues to make his mark in the entertainment industry through music and acting.

Beyond the spotlight, he dedicates a portion of his talent fees to organizations that support sick and underprivileged children. Now competing in *Viva’s Next Big Star*, Thor is pursuing his dreams while using his platform to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Photo by Marco Valiente



Photo by Mic Diaz

More Than Music, It's an Experience

BY MIC DIAZ

What began as a one-off performance among friends has evolved into one of the most distinctive live acts in the Filipino-American music scene. **Playback Jukebox**—featuring Paco Arespacochaga, Benjie Collantes, and JJ Buencamino—was never part of a grand master plan. In fact, the band didn't even have a name when they played their first show.

What brought them together was a shared love of music, particularly New Wave, alternative, and pop influences from the 1980s and beyond. Drawing from decades of experience as musicians, performers, producers, and songwriters, the trio discovered a creative chemistry that continues to fuel the band's growth and success.

For Playback Jukebox, music is not simply about playing songs—it's about ownership. Whether performing an original composition or reimagining a beloved classic, the group believes every artist should bring something meaningful to the stage.



*"Music is not simply about playing songs—
it's about ownership."*

– PLAYBACK JUKEBOX



Photo by Mic Diaz



"We're not just playing songs. We're creating the ultimate music experience."

- PLAYBACK JUKEBOX

Photo by Mic Diaz



Photo by Jaja Arespacohaga

Their original songs, including "Malabo," "Won't You Come Home (I'm Sorry)," and "Autumn," balance infectious melodies with themes of love, hope, and human connection.

Beyond the music, Playback Jukebox has built a loyal following through its energetic performances and musicianship. Blending nostalgia with originality, the band creates an experience that resonates with audiences across generations.

As Playback Jukebox continues to perform in the United States and the Philippines, the band remains committed to creating memorable musical experiences that celebrate the enduring power of music.

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ENTERTAINMENT

Not Every Singer Is a Performer

BY PACO ARESPACOHAGA

The gap between singing karaoke in front of strangers and performing on stage is not nearly as wide as many people think. In fact, there are plenty of karaoke singers who can sing just as well as some performers. Talent alone is not what separates the two. The difference is found somewhere else: purpose.

Most people sing karaoke for themselves. It's a chance to relax, have fun, blow off steam, and enjoy music. There is nothing wrong with that.

Performing is different. A performer steps onto a stage with the intention of sharing something with others. The music is no longer just for personal enjoyment. It becomes a vehicle for connection. Every song is an opportunity to move people, make them smile, bring back memories, lift their spirits, or help them forget their problems for a few hours.

That responsibility requires commitment. The audience sees a two-hour show. They don't see the countless hours spent rehearsing. They don't see the money invested in instruments, equipment, transportation, wardrobe, lessons, and training. They don't see the sacrifices made along the way—missed weekends, long drives, late nights, and the discipline required to keep improving year after year.

Yet performers continue because they understand that what they do is bigger than themselves.

The applause is nice. But those things are not the reason most performers keep showing up. They keep showing up because they love music and want to share that love with others.

When a performer walks off stage knowing that someone sang along, danced, smiled, remembered a special moment, or felt a little better than they did before the first note was played, then the mission was accomplished.

That's the difference. One is entertainment for yourself. The other is service through music.



Photo by Mic Diaz

A close-up portrait of Paulina Quizon, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, looking slightly to the side with a gentle smile. She is wearing a dark top and a large, ornate earring. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Paulina

QUIZON

A Versatile Voice in Music

Singer and performer **Paulina Quizon** is a familiar presence in the Southern California music scene, known for her versatility, powerful vocals, and passion for live entertainment. As a member of several bands and musical projects, she has entertained audiences with performances that span a wide range of genres, showcasing her ability to connect with listeners through every song.

Whether performing at concerts, community events, festivals, or private celebrations, Paulina brings professionalism, energy, and heart to the stage. Her dedication to music and her love for performing continue to make her a respected and sought-after talent in the Filipino-American community.

A close-up portrait of Jane Magan Chang, a woman with long, wavy, light brown hair. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a bright pink top and a silver, textured choker necklace. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Jane

ROCKSTAR

Beauty, Music, and
Inspiration

Jane Magan Chang is a singer, performer, and entrepreneur who brings passion, creativity, and authenticity to everything she does. Active in her church community, she is also a gospel singer whose faith serves as a source of inspiration in both her music and daily life. Jane is known for sharing messages of hope, encouragement, and positivity through song.

Beyond her musical pursuits, Jane is the owner and creative force behind Jane Rockstar Salon, where she has built a reputation for helping clients look and feel their best. Through both her artistry and entrepreneurship, she continues to empower others while making a meaningful impact in the community.

Photo by Jensen Quijano



Caren

MEMPIN

A Voice of Passion and Perseverance

Caren Mempin is an award-winning singer, recording artist, and entrepreneur known as the "LA Pop Rock Diva."

A finalist in Discovery Philippines 2022 and a Grand Finalist at the International Indian Icon competition in Chicago, she continues to earn recognition for her talent and dedication to her craft.

A recording artist under Starlink Promotions led by Garth Garcia, Caren recently released her single "Here I Am."

Caren is preparing to launch her latest original song, "Sana ay Ikaw na Nga." Through her music and artistry, she continues to inspire audiences while pursuing excellence on and off the stage.

Imelda BOSING

The Sampaguita of Los Angeles

Singer, performer, and community advocate **Imelda Bosing** has long been a beloved presence in the Filipino-American entertainment scene. Known as the "Sampaguita of Los Angeles" for her powerful rock vocals inspired by Filipino rock icon Sampaguita, she has entertained audiences throughout Southern California for many years with her passion, and unmistakable stage presence.

A regular performer at community events, concerts, and cultural celebrations, Imelda is also recognized for her versatility, often drawing comparisons to rock legends through her dynamic performances. Through her music and dedication to the community, she continues to bring people together while celebrating the enduring spirit of Filipino music and culture.

Photo by Janice Javier





GG

STARR

A Timeless Voice

Singer and entertainer **GG Starr** continues to captivate audiences with her powerful vocals, engaging stage presence, and love for timeless music. A familiar face in the Filipino-American entertainment community, she has built a loyal following through performances that blend energy, authenticity, and heartfelt connection with her audience.

Known for her passion for classic hits and soulful performances, GG Starr brings warmth and personality to every stage she graces. Whether performing at community events, live music venues, or special celebrations, she remains committed to sharing the joy of music and creating memorable experiences for audiences of all ages.

Photo by Phillip Ner

April

VELASCO

Bringing Energy and Elegance to Every Stage

Singer and performer **April Velasco** has become a familiar presence on stages across Southern California, captivating audiences with her powerful vocals, versatility, and engaging stage presence. As the bandleader of the April Velasco Band, she delivers a dynamic mix of classic favorites and contemporary hits that keep audiences singing and dancing along.

Known for her passion for live entertainment, April brings warmth, energy, and authenticity to every performance. Whether headlining community events, concerts, weddings, or special celebrations, she continues to create memorable musical experiences that connect people through the universal language of music.



A portrait of Garth Garcia, a young man with dark, wavy hair, looking off to the side. He is wearing a dark, patterned blazer over a black shirt and a gold chain necklace. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Garth

GARCIA

Music, Heart, and Purpose

Singer, songwriter, actor, and entrepreneur **Garth Garcia** is a recognizable force in the Filipino-American entertainment community. Known as the Fil-Am Prince of Pop, he is a former Star in a Million Season 2 finalist, a four-time honoree among the 75 Most Influential Filipino Americans, and the artist behind the chart-topping single "Always in My Head," which reached No. 1 on the U.S. iTunes Electronic Chart in 2023.

Beyond music, Garcia is the CEO and founder of Doctors on the Go, Starlink Promotions, and Starlink Music & Video. Through his businesses and artist development efforts, he continues to create opportunities for emerging talent and elevate the visibility of Filipino-American artists nationwide.

Photo by Joey Borao



Jake

MARTIN

Keeping the Dance Floor Alive

Jake Martin is a founding member and driving force behind Club Manila Los Angeles (CMLA), one of Southern California's longest-running Filipino dance music collectives.

For nearly three decades, Jake and CMLA have helped bring the energy and spirit of Manila's club scene to Los Angeles, creating unforgettable experiences for generations of music lovers.

Known for his passion for music, DJ culture, and community, Jake continues to unite audiences through infectious mixes of disco, New Wave, house, and dance classics. Through CMLA, he remains dedicated to celebrating music, friendship, and the timeless joy of the dance floor.

Photo by Jason Bascon Photography



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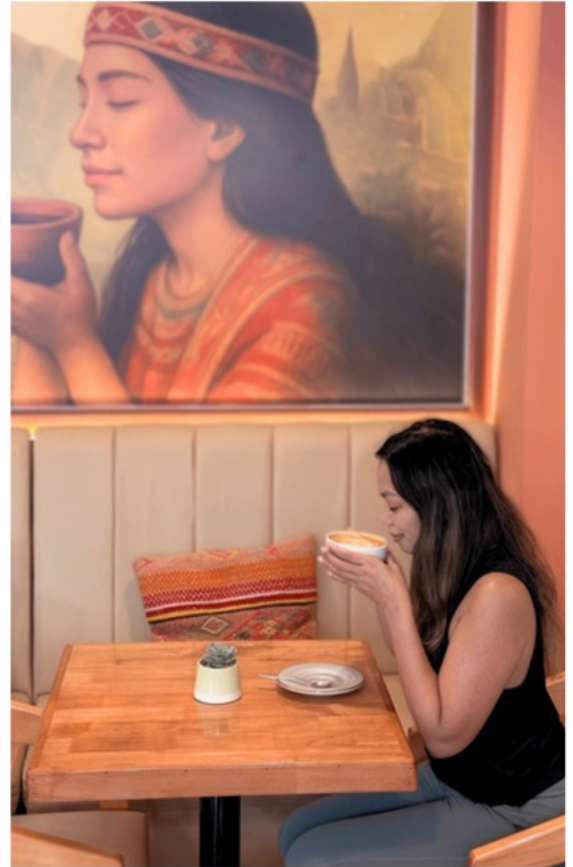
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The Quiet Reinvention of Modern Women

BY ELIZA LEIGH BRILLANTE

Nowadays, women are rebuilding their lives quietly. Whether a major life change has happened or not, we are seeing a different version of the modern woman emerge. She is no longer reinventing herself only after heartbreak, loss, or survival. Sometimes, she changes simply because she wants to. Something within her begins to crave more softness, more peace, and a life that feels more aligned with who she truly is.

You can see this version of women in small, everyday moments. She sits alone in a coffee shop without feeling the need to explain why she is there by herself. She wears clothes that make her feel comfortable instead of dressing to meet expectations. She chooses slower mornings, smaller circles, and quieter joys because she no longer measures fulfillment by how busy or exhausted she feels at the end of the day. More women are beginning to understand that fulfillment does not always come from productivity or from constantly proving something to the world.



I remember always saying that I was not really into flowers. Looking back now, I think it was easier to say that than admit I wanted those small gestures too. In many ways, I was giving people permission not to show up for me in that way. Now, I realize it no longer matters, because I can buy my own flowers, just like the song, but from a gentler place. There is something comforting about being able to give that kind of care to myself. It feels like a more grounded kind of independence, one that allows vulnerability and self-worth to exist together.

Perhaps that is the quiet reinvention happening all around us. Women are beginning to understand their value beyond what they can provide for others. We recognize the emotional labor we carry, the ways we hold families together, and the warmth we bring into our friendships, workplaces, and communities. More women are finally beginning to ask themselves what it would look like to pour some of that same care back into themselves too.

Modern reinvention no longer needs to be loud in order to be meaningful. Sometimes, it looks as simple as protecting your peace, choosing softness, or buying yourself flowers on an ordinary day. Maybe the modern woman is not becoming harder after all. Maybe she is simply BECOMING.

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RELATIONSHIPS

What Migration Teaches Us About Love

BY ISABELLA ROSE ALONZO GATTI, LMFT

Growing up in the Philippines, many of us learned something about love long before we ever entered a romantic relationship. We learned that love and distance could exist together. A parent left to work abroad. A mother called from another country. A father missed birthdays, graduations, and family dinners because providing for the family meant being somewhere else.

For many Filipino families, migration was an act of sacrifice and love. Families survived because of it, and opportunities were created because of it. But survival often leaves emotional footprints that are easy to miss. As a couples therapist, I often see the lasting impact of migration, family separation, and sacrifice in the stories people bring into their relationships.

Many children in transnational families learn that people can love you deeply and still leave. They learn that sacrifice and absence often go hand in hand. Many grow up resilient and appreciative of the sacrifices made on their behalf. Yet resilience and grief often coexist. A child can feel grateful and lonely, proud and abandoned, loved and deeply missed.

Years later, those children become adults and carry these early experiences into their relationships in ways they may not fully recognize. Some become fiercely independent. Others become highly sensitive to separation or carry a deep sense of responsibility for others. These are not flaws. They are adaptations.

Migration shapes more than geography. It shapes identity, belonging, family systems, and sometimes our understanding of love itself. Understanding these influences is not about blaming our parents or questioning their sacrifices. It is about honoring the fullness of the story. Migration changes where we live. Sometimes it changes how we love. And perhaps understanding those connections is one way we can hold our stories—and each other—with greater compassion.





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Filipino-American Men and Mental Health

BY PEDRO MORANTE, PMHNP



For many Filipino-American men, strength is something we are taught early. It may look like working long hours without complaint, sending money home, protecting the family, staying quiet during pain, or saying “I’m okay” even when we are not. In many homes, love is shown through sacrifice. But sometimes, the same silence that helped us survive can keep us from healing.

I think of the Filipino-American man who is the dependable son, husband, father, brother, nurse, veteran, student, or provider. He carries expectations from two worlds: to honor family, succeed in America, respect tradition, and never appear weak. He may be smiling at church, showing up at work, or caring for everyone else while privately struggling with anxiety, depression, trauma, grief, substance use, or burnout.

Mental health challenges do not mean a man lacks faith, discipline, or gratitude. They mean he is human. Our minds and bodies respond to stress, loss, discrimination, financial pressure, migration stories, and generational trauma. Asking for help is not turning away from Filipino values. It can be a deeper expression of them.

Healing may begin with one honest sentence: “I have not been okay.” It may begin with a conversation with a trusted friend, a family member, a pastor, a therapist, or a psychiatric mental health provider. Support does not erase masculinity; it strengthens it.

Filipino-American men deserve spaces where they can speak without shame and be heard without judgment. We can honor our families while also caring for ourselves. We can be strong and still need support. We can break silence without breaking tradition.

When one man chooses healing, he gives permission for others to do the same.



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FITNESS

It's About Living Better

BY CHRISTIAN YLAGAN, FOUNDER OF EVERPRIME HYBRID FITNESS

Somewhere along the way, fitness became associated with six-pack abs, crash diets, and unrealistic expectations. While there's nothing wrong with wanting to look good, lasting fitness is about much more than appearance.

At EVERPRIME Hybrid Fitness, we believe fitness should help you live better. It should make you stronger for your family, more energetic for your career, more resilient against disease, and more confident as you age. The physique is simply a byproduct of doing those things well.

Many people approach fitness with an "all or nothing" mindset, chasing quick fixes and relying on motivation alone. But sustainable fitness isn't about perfection—it's about consistency. Fitness should fit your life, not take over it.

"Fitness isn't tested in the gym. It's tested in life."

– CHRISTIAN YLAGAN



Christian Ylagan, Founder of Everprime Hybrid Fitness

True fitness combines strength, endurance, mobility, and longevity. It's being able to carry groceries without getting winded, play with your children or grandchildren without pain, and enjoy life's experiences without physical limitations.

As we age, fitness becomes even more important. Every workout, healthy meal, and positive choice is an investment in your future. The goal isn't simply to add years to your life—it's to add life to your years.

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We Took the Sauce... Now Let's Build Wealth

BY KATHY CURRENT

*“Many of us were taught how to survive,
but not how to build wealth with peace.”*

– KATHY CURRENT

If you grew up Filipino, chances are someone in your family left Jollibee with extra sauce packets, napkins, and utensils... just in case. No judgment. We were raised by resourceful people.

I still remember sitting at the table as a child, staring at a plate of rice and vegetables I couldn't finish. My mom would look at me and say, “Eat everything. God will be mad if you waste food.” That was how love showed up—not through conversations about abundance, but through reminders to be careful, not waste, and always think about tomorrow.

Looking back, it wasn't just about food. It was about the fear of not having enough. That mindset can travel quietly through generations, shaping how we think about money, spending, and security.

Many of our parents came to the United States with a dream, grit, and determination. They stretched everything—money, food, energy—and made it work. One chicken could feed a gathering. Cool Whip containers were never thrown away. Nothing went to waste.

At the same time, survival habits don't always translate into wealth-building habits. Many of us were taught how to survive, but not how to build wealth with peace.

I've worked with enough families in mortgages and ministry to see a pattern. Success on paper doesn't always equal peace in real life. Women are doing incredibly well—smart, capable, respected—yet still feel tension around money because no one ever showed them a different way.

The next phase for many Filipinas isn't about proving anything. It's about learning to handle money with clarity rather than emotion, intention rather than obligation. What we inherited was resilience. What we build from here can include peace.

So yes, take the extra sauce if you must. Just don't bring scarcity with you into a season that was meant for growth.

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Travel Smart: Personal Security Abroad

BY JOS ILAGAN

The U.S. Department of State regularly issues travel advisories to help Americans assess security risks abroad. These advisories range from Level 1: Exercise Normal Precautions to Level 4: Do Not Travel, warning travelers of potential threats and, in some cases, advising them to postpone or avoid travel altogether.

While tourists and business travelers can often change their plans when conditions worsen, expatriates living and working overseas do not always have that flexibility. Instead, they must adapt by increasing their security awareness and taking proactive measures to protect themselves and their families.

Executives of multinational corporations can be particularly vulnerable to criminal and terrorist threats, not only because of their positions but also because they may be viewed as symbols of political or economic influence. For organizations operating in high-risk regions, protecting personnel is a critical responsibility.

Personal security begins with awareness. Individuals should remain alert to suspicious activity near their homes, workplaces, and daily routes. Establishing predictable routines can increase vulnerability, so varying travel schedules whenever possible is a practical precaution. It is also important to exercise discretion when conducting business, meeting new contacts, or discussing personal and professional matters in public settings.

"Security is not about living in fear..."

- JOS ILAGAN

When traveling or living abroad, maintaining strong community connections can also enhance safety. Trusted neighbors, colleagues, and local contacts can provide assistance and information when needed. Likewise, avoiding isolated areas and ensuring access to help during travel can significantly reduce risk.

Ultimately, security is not about living in fear, but about staying prepared. Criminals and terrorists often rely on surprise and opportunity. By remaining vigilant, recognizing vulnerable situations, and responding proactively, individuals can reduce risks and better protect themselves and their loved ones.

The greater your awareness, the greater your ability to travel, work, and live abroad with confidence.



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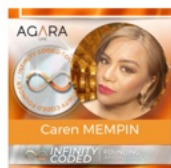
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