

Amidst a pandemic, the Canada Day Extravaganza emerges strong

by Michelle Vargas-Lao and Juro Kim Feliz

In an unprecedented manner, the Filipino Canadian Artist Association of Quebec (FCAAQ), The Filipino Channel Canada (TFC Canada) and the Government of Canada brought everyone together virtually to share national pride in being part of Canadian society. In spite of the physical distancing measures mandated across Canada due to the coronavirus pandemic crisis, every Canadian resident has been encouraged to celebrate Canada Day from the comforts of their homes. For this year's Canada Day, Filipino-Canadians and the Canadian community were invited to join a nationwide Facebook livestream event called the "Canada Day Extravaganza Virtual Celebration 2020" to celebrate Canadian diversity and commemorate the confederation of Canada since 1867.

Local and national Filipino-Canadian artists participated in the livestream event from 12:00PM to 9:00PM EST all across Canada, showcasing their talents and virtually sharing the stage. Over 150 prizes were given away—the Montreal community pitched in and showed their support through sponsoring and donating prizes for lucky viewers. The livestream garnered a total of over 25,000 views. Moreover, the FCAAQ received federal financial support from the Canadian Heritage for the first time in its organization history.

Guests, performers, and collaborators worked together to make the livestream program possible.

Local talents in Montreal kicked off the virtual celebration. Aiesha Janelle Cunanan, Katrina Faith Corpus, Jodelle-Victoria Peralta-Gagaoín, and Chris Foz-Elamparo presented dance tutorial segments. Tamara Calatin-Radegonde, the champion of the Search for Filipino Canadian Talent 2020, produced a segment on wearing makeup, along with performing songs with the keyboard. FCAAQ All Stars and past participants of the Talent Search serenaded viewers with entertaining songs—these artists include singers Renzie Ivan Costales, Jessica Jane Quiocho, Joseph Harry Villegas, Renny Gintaos, Ashley Seguin, and multi-instrumentalists Rocco Torigno, Kirsten Gail Calma, and Isabella Caci.

Aireen Vargas, Lydia Fernandez, and Maria Marla (the Zumba ZIN'S of Montreal) joined forces to hold an hour of zumba class to viewers. Meanwhile, Amanda Rodriguez addressed the unsung heroes and victims of COVID-19 as a consultant and the current Nurse Manager of the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital (Centre universitaire de santé McGill et IR-CUSM).

Artists across Canada also kept viewers engaged with video segments of their performances. From Ontario, the 1 Manila Band featured Stephanie Valencia (vocals), Peter Mangaser (guitars), Adrian Dela Cruz Perlas (guitars), Ivan Cunanan (bass), and Sonny Escueta (drums). A Virtual Filipino-Canadian Performers segment brought artists together from different cities—Elysha Nolasco and Niko Hinayo from Calgary, 4Beats (Jhune, Johana, Cheska, Mic) from Ottawa, and Raffy Swap-One (Raffy, Mary) from Winnipeg.

In Quebec, MVL Sounds Montreal included Michelle Vargas-Lao (vocals), Rex Padida (drums), Ricardo Periodica (lead/rhythm guitar), Minh Dien (keyboards), Marlo Chu (rhythm/lead guitar), and Anthony Muje (bass).

Botch and Ikay Tampilik also joined the ranks from Quebec, along with Beautiful Sabotage that featured Dy Zapanta (vocals), Pedz Zapanta (cajon), and Deth Baltazar (bass).

An opportunity to feature various photographers in Montreal included Delsys Montreal, Cristy Celeste Hunter, Adrian Diamzon, and Jeannie A. Gonzalez. Overflowing support came from local organizations including the Federation of Filipino Canadian Associations Quebec (FFCAQ), Knights Of Rizal Montreal Chapter and Mackenzie Central Chapter (c/o Sir Ramon Posadas Kgor), the Filipino Heritage Society of Montreal, and the Filipino Nurses Association of Quebec (FNAQ).

The much-awaited highlight of the Canada Day Extravaganza featured TFC's one-hour segment with Kapamilya Artist Ms. KZ Tandingan, hosted by Barangay USA's Gelo.

In support of the FCAAQ, key political figures contributed their messages of celebration for Canada Day to all constituents and members of the public. These leaders include Canadian Heritage Minister Steven Guibault, Philippine Ambassador in Canada Petronila P. Garcia, MP Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal), MNA David Birnbaum (D'Arcy McGee), Montreal councilor Marvin Rotrand (Snowdon), Quebec Liberal Party leader Dominique Anglade, and Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Throughout the virtual celebration, Rhea Foz and Dominique Brillantes appeared as a spectacular dynamic duo in hosting the whole event. Michelle Vargas-Lao produced the show and took charge of the programming, while Mikaela Lorraine Lao-Aquino directed the livestream. Production staff included Archie Muje of A.M.PhotoBooth (videographer), Jef Buenafe (videographer), Anthony Muje and Jose Alberto Suarez-Juarez (sound technicians).

The FCAAQ extends their gratitude to major collaborators (TFC Canada, Canadian Heritage) in making the "Canada Day Extravaganza Virtual Celebration 2020" possible. Special shoutouts are in line to major sponsors: Marilis and Rey Padilla of Marche Filipino, Mei Mendoza and Roland Bebilone of SM Services Corp., Anthony Muje and Michelle Lao of MVL Services Inc. and MVL Productions, and John Diaz Peroramas of Imagina.

The event would not also have been possible without the help of the FCAAQ Executive Board: Michelle Vargas-Lao, Marilis and Rey Padilla, Noel and Eva Quitain, Juro Kim Feliz, Jodelle-Victoria Gagaoin-Peralta, Delia Gagaoin-Peralta, Anthony Muje and volunteers.

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The livestream is archived and available at <https://www.facebook.com/canadadayextravaganza>.