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*The
Good Life*
PASSION FOR LIVING WELL



NATURALLY WOVEN TRUNKS
WITH LEATHER STRAPS
FROM PRIZMIC & BRILL

GEORGE YANG

Singing the lessons of life

he could have rested on his laurels, sat back and enjoyed the benefits of a spectacular life well-lived. George Yang is a success story that should be required reading for everyone aspiring to make something out of themselves without sacrificing values and principles. He brought the iconic American fast-food chain McDonald's to the country and reaped manifold returns. It was sufficient enough for him to retire comfortably but there was something else he wanted to do.

The self-made man began a new career as a classical vocalist, fulfilling a lifelong dream. "I've had a few occasions to sing and realized that it was fun to do," he says. "I continued doing it and got more interested. It also got more challenging. I'm no longer a spring chicken," he says chuckling. "But I got better as I was encouraged to do more. Why am I doing it? Because I can."

CONSTANT PRESENCE

As a young man, Yang was always driven and motivated. His wife Kristine tells stories of him working these jobs simultaneously and still having time to help with her own ventures. Throughout his life, music has always been a constant. He cites an early inclination towards pop and rock music, but adds that what he really prefers are old standards. "They have more meaning. The songs last forever. When I was young, I would already appreciate the music of Frank Sinatra, Matt Monro, Bing Crosby, Perry Como. I also like instrumental, particularly piano music. I find them relaxing."

The story of how he began has been told many times. Years ago, he was with a few business associates inside a club by the lake. Discovering that he could carry a tune, his good friend, balladeer Jose Mari Chan encouraged Yang to pursue singing. Yang enrolled in voice classes, honed his vocals and went on to release three full-length albums. The first two were pop recordings, the latest one, *Abraxas Yang*, is a collection of some of his favorite classical songs. Haunted by the overwhelming response not just from colleagues but also from classical music aficionados, Yang continued to sing and perform well into his senior years. He participated in several musical performances, including the off-Broadway Filipino zarzuela *Something to Grow About*. "I liked the arts but only as a listener or someone to be inspired by, but I never really got involved. Now, I'm really enjoying it."

ENJOYING LIFE

Yang has given up the day-to-day operations of his companies to his sons, particularly Golden Arches Development Corporation, the local franchisee of McDonald's. "I only get involved with the strategic planning and the policy making. If a problem comes up, they consult me. They're mainly on their own, but I'm involved in new projects. I'll look into it to see if it's viable. I'm still active and go to my office everyday, but not as early," he smiles.

When he doesn't have a singing engagement, Yang spends weekends playing golf. He also hits the courts for a game of tennis. Another of his thrills is watching the wrestling action of the Ultimate Fighting Champion (UFC).

Whatever else he has planned for the week, Sundays are spent with the family. Yang usually goes out with his wife and grandchildren and eats breakfast Sunday mornings at Italianis, where he is part owner. They take a late lunch, after one or one-and-a-half, at some restaurant with the whole family.

PASSING IT ON

Standing on the empty mainstage of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Yang is at ease. He is as much at home on centerstage as he is inside a boardroom or the corner office of some high rise. The tapian has lived one dream and is now living another. The coomony of his accomplishments is not lost on him, but instead of reveling in the moment, he wants to pass on the lessons of his life to the next generation. He established the Classical Music Foundation to support music students, believing there is a need to hone the talents of future musical sensations. The lesson for his own progeny is simpler and more straightforward. "I tell my grandchildren nothing is impossible. I don't want to look at their grandfather. He sings at an age when other men cannot even get up from bed."

"They should have a goal and work at their dreams," he adds. "You have to work hard. That's a given. There are no shortcuts and nothing is free. If you think you can relax and success will just come to you, there's no such thing." He also believes in maintaining the highest level of ethics and integrity. "I was brought up by my father, who was taught by my grandfather to treat people fairly and be honest about everything."



ANTONIO COJUANGCO

Another side of his heart

Inside the Lucrecia P. Kasilag Artists Room at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Antonio "Tony Boy" Cojuangco is huddled in one corner with Emily Abrera. Dressed in casual dress shirt and black trousers, he appears to be in deep conversation with the advertising luminary, herself wearing an elegant satin gown. Across the room, George Yang is talking animatedly with Gregorio Yu, Vincent Abella and Jose Eduardo Vitug. All look dapper in dark suits. They punctuate their sentences with quick nods and hearty laughs. Suddenly, Cojuangco looks up and says, just loud enough for everyone to hear, "Let's ask him."

Cojuangco catches Yang's attention and throws him a question. "Tell me, how often do you eat at McDonald's?" The others chuckle, aware of Cojuangco's good-natured ribbing of the man who brought the world's number one fast food chain to the Philippines. Yang smiles and, not missing a beat, answers, "Twice a week. And you know what my favorite is? The double cheeseburger. Delicious."

It is rare to find colonial names in business, hibernating in a relaxed, laidback manner. Within the walls of the CCP, absent the antiseptic lights of their offices and boardrooms and away from the stress of the daily grind, the tycoons and moguls are ordinary men and women living their lives as they see fit, pursuing interests beyond the commercial and the corporate and indulging in one of their passions.

GUITAR MAN

Cojuangco's eyes reflect a steady resolve, a comforting welcome, an intense concentration, even a glint of mischief all at once. His voice is soft and hoarse, the result of a delicate operation to remove polyps in his throat early last year. He talks in what sometimes seem like a whisper. The uneven tone adds to convey a quiet dignity and depth. It is difficult to ignore him when he speaks.

"I play guitar, but I'm not really good," he says in undisguised humility. It is an understatement. Anyone who has performed classical guitar in front of an

THROW PILLOWS AND DIRECTORS CHAIR WITH LEATHER BACK AND SEAT BOTH FROM PRIZMIC & BRILL





COUNTERPOINT

*Musical suites for leaders
of the 21st century*

BY PAUL JOHN CAÑA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CYRUS PANGANIBAN

When the Cultural Center of the Philippines celebrates 40 years, big things happen. This March, some of the country's captains of industry headline a musical gala dubbed as COUNTERPOINT. Leaders of the business community take centerstage and perform for the benefit of the CCP.

Local advertising icon Emily Abrera is the docent who will guide the audience through the different suites of the concert. The program is premised on the book *Ten Universal Principles of Great Art and Their Applications to Leadership and Management* by Eduardo Morato, Jr., management guru of the Asian Institute of Management. ABC 5 President Antonio "Tonyboy" Cojuangco will play classical guitar with the Guitar Friends





Ensemble, whose members include prominent executives Gregorio Yu, Vince Abella and Jose Eduardo Vitug, Golden Arches Development Corporation Chairman George Yang will perform excerpts from the operas *La Traviata* and *Rigoletto* alongside acclaimed soprano Rachel Gerodias and the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra. And Jaime Zobel of the Ayala Group of Companies will read excerpts from poems by Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda.

COUNTERPOINT is a connection between culture and commerce. It shows another side of men and women who normally move in business spheres. This added dimension to their public image shows that a good life has many facets. Channeling energies beyond the pursuit of the profit margin add up to a well-lived life. This is the refrain played many times over by the men and woman who take centerstage in COUNTERPOINT.

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