

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

January 2003

Giving them Hope and a Song

By Penny Poole

Chelí Banta is employing her musical gifts in an unusual approach to economic development — by guiding promising children of low-income families to use an instrument and play in an orchestra.

Currently working on her Ph.D. in development studies at the University of Santo Thomas (UST), Cheli has adapted a system developed in Venezuela to teach marginalized and street children classical musical through western orchestral instruments. But Cheli is trying a similar approach using the Filipino rondalla — a stringed orchestra of more or less 30 instruments.

The Venezuelan National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras and Choirs has a fabulous track record of

using music to foster social and community development by capturing the musical and artistic interest of young people. Dr. Jose Antonio Abreu is the father of the system, which has trained thousands of Venezuelans — many of them troubled youth — to play in an orchestra. He believes that "Music is a way for children to express themselves, a fundamental way to communicate, and therefore it has an immense social value."

With Cheli's research using the instruments of the rondalla, she hopes to offer alternatives to marginalized Filipino children — who, normally beginning at age 6 or 7, start work at 5 a.m. as vendors, scavengers, cleaners, or car watchers. Some stay in school, but many do not.

The study integrates the Venezuelan musical model into Philippine music education to improve the prospects of

those involved, help motivate positive behaviors, and create livelihood opportunities that are more wholesome and sustainable.

Cheli hopes her research project will develop performance skills as a catalyst for personal growth and self-discipline, as well as teamwork. It is even expected to have implications for national economic stimulation, if implemented broadly.

MWF participants viewed a ten minute segment of a 60 Minutes TV program that documents the Venezuelan phenomenon. But we were all convinced before that when we heard a group of 14 children ably playing six songs on instruments they had only begun to learn a month before.

Cheli is working in two public schools, representing underprivileged

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We are here on earth to do good for others.
What the others are here for, I don't know.

— W. H. Auden

In this world everything changes except good deeds and bad deeds;
these follow you as the shadow follows the body.

— Unknown

Genuine politics — even politics worthy of the name — the only politics I am willing to devote myself to — is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility expressed through action, to and for the whole.

— Vaclav Havel

Ethics, too, are nothing but reverence for life. This is what gives me the fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, promoting, and enhancing life, and that destroying, injuring, and limiting life are evil.

— Albert Schweitzer. Civilization and Ethics, 1949

Next MWF Meeting

When: Monday, January 20, 2003, 6:30 p.m.

Where: Cecilia Leung's home, 44 McKinley Road, Makati Located near the Holy Trinity Church, look for the red gate. Arrive early and view the large array of beautiful Chinese antiques.

What: Mara Pardo de Tavera, head of the organic market in Makati, will speak about eating healthy in Manila — what to buy, where to get it, and where to dine — and other health and food concerns.

Bring: A contribution to the potluck dinner.

Feb. meeting: February 17, 2003



Voice of the Chair

By Lisa Kircher Lumbao

Religious Fundamentalism

By Dean Jorge Bocobo

Women of the world, whether Muslim or not, whether contestants in beauty pageants or not, are under attack from a rising tide of religious fundamentalists who refuse to go quietly into the oblivion that modern secularism and liberal democracy consigns them to. Indeed, humans, whether female or not, can glimpse this phenomenon of our times in the horrific sectarian violence that has enveloped Nigeria, Africa's most populous country.

Riots between Christians and Muslims this past week, in the cities of Kaduna and Abuja, Nigeria, where the annual Miss World beauty contest was to be held, have taken the lives of over a hundred people. They were sparked by a commentary in a major Nigerian newspaper, *This Day*, in which it was too tongue-in-cheekly suggested that the prophet Muhammad might well have chosen one of the contestants for his harem. (Having many wives is a privilege given to him, and him alone, as Allah's prophet, by the Holy Koran. But many powerful Muslim males in history, perhaps suspecting the true authorship of the relevant passages,

have done the same, this being the source of many misconceptions about Muslim marriage among strictly monogamist Christians. And the promise of a harem of 70 virgins in Paradise, has possibly inspired many a suicide bomber into self-destruction.)

It is not so well-known however, that the recent violence is only part of a civil crisis gripping Nigeria over the jurisdiction of shari'a courts that has already immolated thousands of lives in the name of recalcitrant religion. Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, but has a strong Christian minority, to which belongs its elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo. In the year 2000, Nigeria's National Council of States had agreed to suspend the adoption of Islamic shari'a law by some of the northern states, and to uphold the federal penal code in all criminal cases.

Progressives hailed the landmark agreement, but Islamic fundamentalists resisted it. Militants stoked the fires of religious hatred to uphold the power of the shari'a courts. This, Amina Lawal, a young Nigerian woman knows very well. She was condemned to death by stoning last March for adultery in Katsina state, because she got pregnant after being divorced from her husband. Her male lover was exonerated for "lack of evidence." Her defense, suggested by Islamic lawyers, is most curious — a long held belief that the human zygote can remain dormant in the womb for years before developing into a fetus. Her case is on appeal and execution stayed until 2004, because of worldwide attention and the efforts of Amnesty International.

There is more to the pageant riots and Amina Lawal's case than meets the eye. Religious fundamentalism has been on the rise throughout Africa for years. They are but a manifestation of

The common dogma [of fundamentalists] is fear of modern knowledge, inability to cope with the fast change in a scientific-technological society, and the real breakdown in apparent moral order in recent years....

That is why hate is the major fuel, fear is the cement of the movement, and superstitious ignorance is the best defense against the dangerous new knowledge.... When you bring up arguments that cast serious doubts on their cherished beliefs you are not simply making a rhetorical point, you are threatening their whole Universe and their immortality.

That provokes anger and quite frequently violence.

— G. Gaia

the ongoing clash of civilizations that has precipitated the first world war of the 21st century, the war on terrorism. I say this because religious fundamentalism is also the very soul of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist movement.

Although militant Islamists claim to be fighting for the umma, or the universal community of 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide, they are not doing so equally for the 600 million or so who are females. They are against education for women, against political and economic rights for them, and they want to turn the tides of history against the liberating force of democracy. Fundamentalists are against gender equality for women. They hate to see women taking their places in schools and government, business and churches, as well as driving cars and baring their bodies. They feel threatened and blame Western civilization, with its liberal culture, for upsetting age-old patriarchal traditions. We saw what the terrorists would rather have, in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban, where women were reduced to nonentities under an oppressive burqa of male religious supremacy.

Although church-influenced media have been treating the issue gingerly, the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy is also caught in the jaws of a moral crisis over eye-popping revelations of sexual misconduct by its clergy,

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The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Penny Poole**, Programs, Newsletter. **Beaulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 818-2887 or 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

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Selected and Edited by Beaulah P. Taguiwalo

My friend P in Bacolod e-mailed this to me recently, so I thought I'd start the year on this note.

From the e-mail circuit

Five ways to get your gray matter going

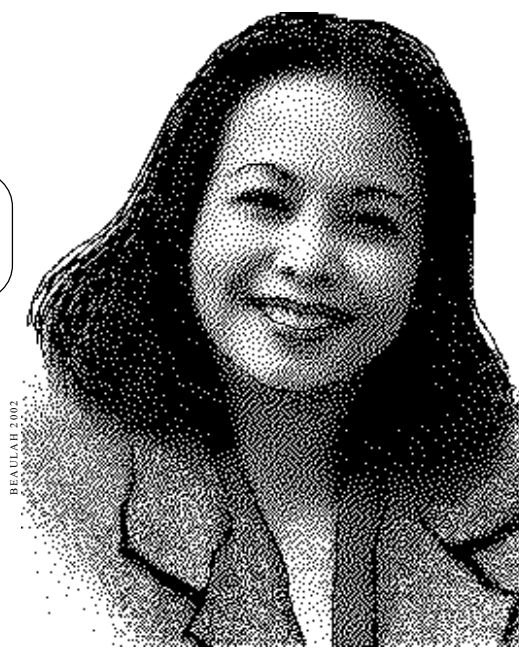
By Sara Eckel for Lifetime

Once you're done with school, it's common to feel that because you're no longer constantly packing your brain with new facts and figures, you're getting dumber by the day. But that needn't be — and, in fact, that isn't — the case. According to Robert Restak, M.D., author of "Mozart's Brain and the Fighter Pilot: Unleashing Your Brain's Potential," just as you can improve your body's health by exercising it, you can enhance your mind by exerting it.

"Throughout our lives, the brain retains a high degree of plasticity — it changes in response to experience," Dr. Restak says. "If (a person's) experiences are rich and varied, the brain will develop a greater number of nerve-cell connections. If the experiences are dull and infrequent, the connections will either never form or die off." Here are some of Restak's suggestions for boosting your brainpower:

Bend your mind. Crossword puzzles and brainteasers do more than simply pass the time: They can actually help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Restak explains that the brain is unique among a body's organs; the liver and kidneys wear down with use, but the brain actually improves the more we activate it.

Challenging the



Women's Voices, Women's Faces

*"They're Protestant;
it figures."*

We were looked upon as somewhat quaint; we had our melodic forthright hymns... the perhaps undeserved reputation of not closing in on the tough deal, for allowing ourselves to be imposed upon, for being overquick in admitting wrongdoing, or for an unforgiving cheerlessness when faced with the clack of plastic tiles from a neighbor's mahjong playing....

— From "Notes on Growing Up Protestant in a Catholic Country" by Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas, writer and administrator of the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa.

brain in any way — with a game of chess or a Dickens novel — will improve cognition. "By making active efforts to remain mentally agile, you increase the chances of growing new nerve cells and the likelihood that your brain will maintain and increase nerve-cell connections and circuits," says Restak.

Indulge your ears. Music stimulates brain circuitry, which is why musicians have larger cerebellums than the rest of us. Fortunately, you don't need to play an instrument to build up your brain. "Simply listening to music you enjoy activates parts of the frontal lobes and the limbic cortex on both sides of the brain," Restak explains. During tomorrow's commute, turn off the local shock jock and pop your favorite CD into the car stereo. By the time you get to the office, you'll be calmer — and a bit smarter.

Use your hands. Whether you're typing up a report, driving a car or cooking dinner, your hands are constantly doing your brain's bidding. In fact, no part of the body is more closely linked to the brain than the hand. That's why developing nimble finger skills enhances brain function. "When you do something requiring finger dexterity, you're exercising a large part of the brain," explains Restak. "Unfortunately, we live in a society where there is a de-emphasis on mind-finger control. Surgeons have it, but try checking the fine-finger development of a lawyer, an

accountant or a public-relations executive." To counter your finger-flimsy lifestyle, take up an old-fashioned hobby that requires fine detail work, such as sewing, crocheting, model-ship building or bike repair.

Stand tall. Working out may make you slimmer, but it could also make you smarter. Restak says that standing exercises strengthen the brain's balance and coordination centers, which also improves cognition. He recommends exercises that build leg strength, balance, coordination and flexibility. His favorite: tai chi, an ancient Chinese slow-motion exercise. "It is tremendous for leg strength and balance because you're often standing on one foot," he says.

Keep the past alive. Memory loss is one of the most common complaints neurologists hear from people over 40. But you can improve your memory simply by keeping a good record of your past with photo albums, videos, scrapbooks and journals. You may also want to keep some "scent memories" — your mother's perfume, your grandfather's tobacco or the suntan lotion you used as a kid. "Smell is so emotionally evocative because the olfactory nerve is the only sensory channel that links directly to the brain's emotional centers in the limbic system," says Restak. Mementos create connections in the brain that could otherwise be lost, thus literally keeping memories alive. ■



Giving them.... (*From page 1*) children in an urban setting. One of the areas she believes this team approach is improving is what she says is a national trait that focuses on family. "We Filipinos tend to think about ourselves and our clan, and not for the whole group." This attitude is not possible in a musical orchestra.

Cheli secured grant financing for the rondalla instruments for both study schools and stipends for the teachers. The children can use the instruments to practice at school only (the wealthier Venezuelan model actually gives the instruments outright to the students, even if they are violent street children). The children pay for the oil and rags they use to maintain the instruments.

With Cheli's rich background in music and grounding in development, her study holds much promise. (She is an associate professor at the UST Conservatory, holds an undergraduate degree in music education from Sta. Isabel College and a Master of Music with a major in Music Education from Columbia University, Teacher's College. She's been teaching music and music education subjects for many years at a variety of music schools including UP, Sta. Isabel College, Yamaha, and Philippine Susuki Institute, and has represented the Philippines internationally, both with presentations and publications. She is the current vice president of the Kodaly Society of the Philippines and Secretary of the Philippine Society for Music Education.) MWF members,

particularly those with formal musical backgrounds themselves, responded to the presentation with many cross-cultural questions.

The instruments will be donated to the schools. For more information on the project, or to make a donation, contact Lisa Lumbao at lumbao@mozcom.com.

Religious.... (*From page 2*)

including priests and bishops. When the American bishops tried to adopt a "zero-tolerance policy" earlier this year against priests in the ministry accused of pedophilia (disordered attraction to pre-pubescent children); ephebophilia (same, but for adolescents), homosexual and "ordinary" rape, they were stopped cold in their tracks by the Vatican, which invoked canon law to protect its priests and bishops from victims and advocates that have been turning up the heat on them. A revised policy was finally adopted only two weeks ago. It demands strict compliance with civil and criminal law, but with protection for those few who may be falsely accused. The latter are few because of the shame and opprobrium that victims must endure to mount an accusation.

This is not a small problem of only one or two priests. Consider that a website maintained by victims, already lists at least 500 priests with credible records of such abuse in the United States alone. In case after case, bishops have protected erring

priests, and literally hundreds of millions of dollars have been paid by the Church in the United States, Canada and Ireland to keep a lid on the scandal. There has been an eerie silence from the Philippine Church on what the local situation might be in the land of Padre Damaso.

In the final analysis, these crises in Islam and Catholicism are not about sex but about power — the power of religious and cultural institutions resisting the historic challenge that democracy and secularism pose. Ultimately, it is about women's liberation, which is to say, human liberation.

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From the e-mail circuit

A Joke (Translated into English)

The UN launched a survey some months ago. The sole question was: "Please give your honest opinion on solving the food shortage in the rest of the world". The survey proved to be a total disaster: In Africa they didn't understand what "food" meant. The Western-Europeans had trouble with the concept of "shortage" while the Eastern-Europeans had forgotten all about "opinion". In the Middle-East they wondered what "solving" implied. In South-America the word "please" was incomprehensible. Asia wondered about "honest" — and in the US they didn't know what the "rest of the world" meant. — Contributed by Joanne Wilson

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