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Rising star

From a coy teenaged singer, Marlisa Punzalan transformed into a star by the end of the X Factor competition. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHANNEL 7.

Fil-Oz singer's star shines

Marlisa Punzalan named X Factor Australia winner

Kristhine Gestano

WHEN MARLISA Punzalan was named the grand winner of the popular television singing competition X Factor on the night of 20 October, it wasn't only the 15-year-old singer from Mt Druitt who was overcome with joy. Most Filipinos and Fil-Australians in Australia were caught up in the merriment. They joined the teenager and her family in basking in what was an indelible moment for Filipinos.

Marlisa's parents are natives of Bataan. Her dad

migrated to Australia in 1982 and in 1990, her mother followed suit. Her joining the X Factor unwittingly gave her kababayans a good cause to come together and weave that Filipino magic. She beat Queensland-born Dean Ray, edging with a slim margin of 0.01% in the text votes. In a television interview, Marlisa said she was resigned to losing the title to 22-year-old Dean whom she described as a complete package. Only when Dean congratulated her onstage that it dawned on her that she was declared the winner.

Meanwhile, Marlisa's

mentor, Boyzone lead singer Ronan Keating, was all praises for the schoolgirl. The X Factor judge, who was always on Marlisa's defence, appeared like a beaming father on the night of the finale. A few days before the grand reveal, he tweeted, "It has been such an honour to mentor Marlisa this year. Whatever happens she's a star in my eyes."

Marlisa's impressive talent is half of the story. X Factor, which counts on votes from supporters to keep contestants in the



Marlisa Punzalan, 2004 X Factor Australia winner. Photo by Sony Music Australia.

Continued on page 12

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Audiologist receives award for service to the Filipino community



Peter Cichello (left) receives his award from His Excellency Governor Alex Chernov.

PETER CICHELO, a Clinical Audiologist from Melbourne, received the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) 2014 Award of Excellence for Meritorious Service, in recognition of his volunteer work in the Filipino community in Victoria and continuous service to deaf children in the Philippines. The award ceremony was presided by His Excellency Governor Alex Chernov, assisted by Victorian Premier The Hon Dr Denis Naphtine MP, The Hon Matthew Guy MLC (Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship) and VMC Chairperson Chin Tan at Victorian Government House in Melbourne on 22 September 2014.

"The VMC Multicultural Awards honours everyday Australians who do extraordinary things in our communities. They are our unsung heroes whose contribution is not widely known or recognised by the general public, but their achievements inspire us to help make Australia a better place to live," commended Premier Naphtine MP.

"It was a total surprise to me," said Peter, who arrived home from his 21st year of

Deaf Mission to the Philippines a day before the award ceremony. "It is humbling that so many people share personal time, resources and skills freely with others in need, regardless of nationality or age, without expecting anything in return," he replied when asked what the award meant to him.

Peter has been actively involved in the community sector since the 1980s, including service on non-profit Boards such as Taralye Deaf School (Burwood) and Family Relationships Institute. His family are members of the Filipino Australian Friendship Association of Geelong Inc, where he volunteered as Newsletter Co-editor in 2002. "It is important for younger members to support the ageing Board Members especially in rural areas, where newsletters, faxes and phones remain the means of communication between rural groups and their friends in Melbourne". Since 2007, Peter's audiology clinics, City Hearing in Kew and Melbourne CBD, have generously sponsored Filipino youth sports, seniors events, charity drives and the December Filipino cultural event Pasko sa Nay-

on (Christmas in the Village) Community Concert at Federation Square in Melbourne (see www.bayanianaustralia.org and www.cityhearing.com.au)

Peter's work for deaf children in the Philippines began in 1990 when he was approached by a Catholic Italian priest to help set up the Gualandi Mission School for the Deaf on Cebu island, Philippines. Other Australians helped the fledgling school, including audiologist Professor Phillip Newell (NSW). The school is now run by the Little Sisters of the Deaf and most of its 100 students come from disadvantaged families in Cebu and outlying islands. Peter donates medical equipment, runs workshops for teachers, repairs the pupils' hearing aids and organises fellow audiologists to support Philippine ENT doctors in outreach medical missions. "I found that people do not want charity; but every year whenever a bad typhoon hits the school, I ring up to ask if every one's okay - and the families value that ongoing human connection far more," explained Peter of his contribution to the local community.

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Gawad Kalinga Melbourne to hold first General Assembly

THE GAWAD Kalinga Melbourne will hold its First General Assembly of Gawad Kalinga Volunteers and Partners on 22 November 2014, 6pm to 9pm at the FC-CVI Multipurpose Hall at 93 Cowper St in Footscray. GK

Executive Director Jose Luis Quinena will be in Melbourne to report where GK is one year after the Yolanda typhoon tragedy. He will also discuss the long term partnership between GK and the Australian government.

Marisa Vedar, Director of Gawad Kalinga Melbourne, also announced that the event will be an opportunity for GK to thank its partners and welcome the new volunteers.

For details, contact Marisa on 0425-831-673.

