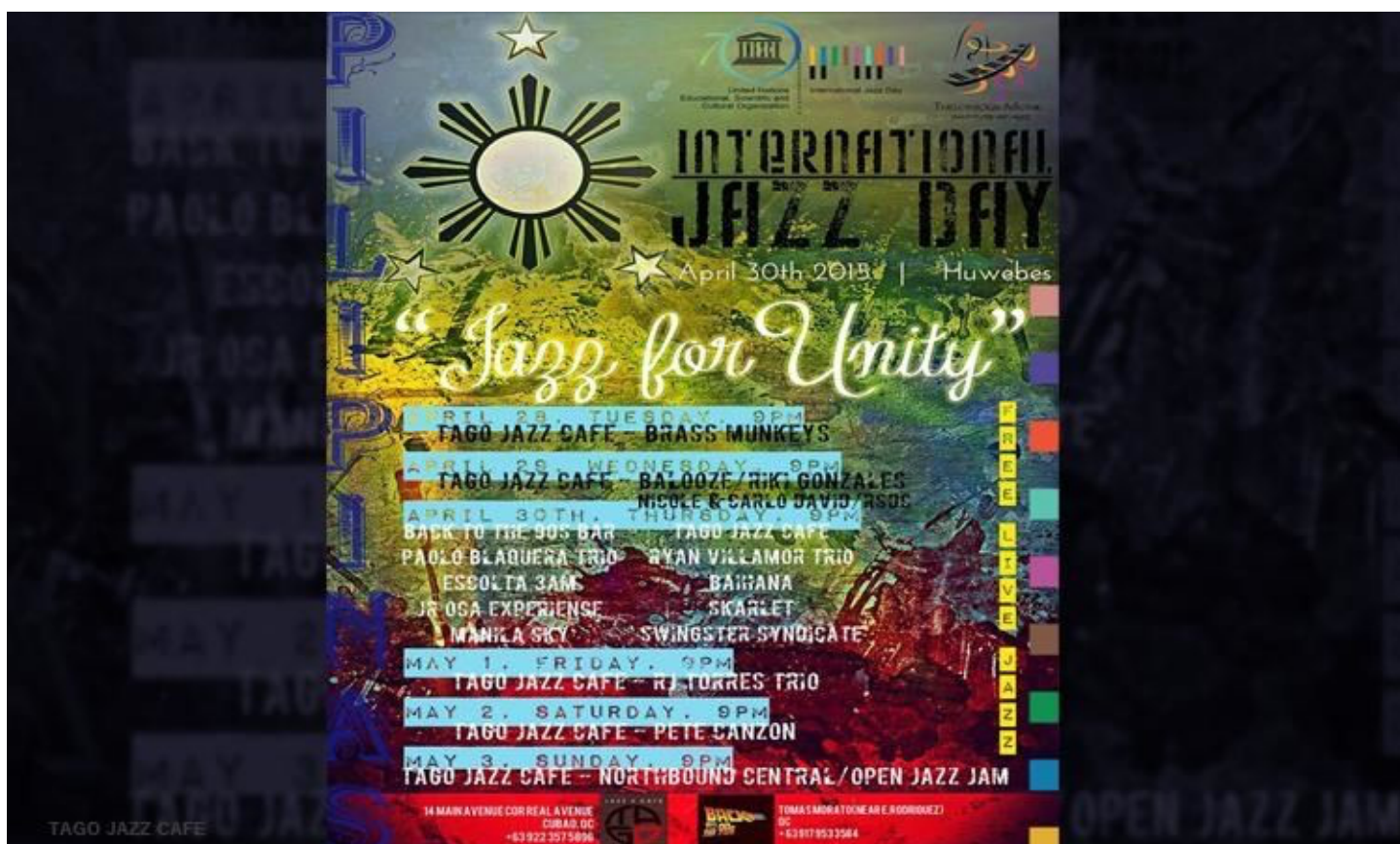


# QC bar leads local celebration of International Jazz Day

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**(CNN Philippines)** — As jazz fans around the world would know, April 30 is International Jazz Day, an annual celebration started in November 2011 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to promote not only the genre but peace and cultural understanding.

For this year's celebration, which falls on Thursday, Paris will be the Global Host City — obviously unreachable for many except the richest Filipino jazz fans.

But these fans will be glad to know — if they don't know it already — that UNESCO is endorsing for the second year in a row one little low profile joint as the hub of activities for International Jazz Day in the Philippines.

This is Tago Jazz Cafe on Justice Lourdes Paredes San Diego Street in Cubao, Quezon City. Long street name, but most regulars there refer to it by its old name — Main Avenue.

Cafe owner Nelson Gonzales — himself a musician, a drummer presiding over the cafe kit most nights — got an endorsement last year from Herbie Hancock.

Yes, it's that Herbie Hancock, the one who composed and performed "Rockit."

He also happens to be the UNESCO ambassador for intercultural dialogue and chairman of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, the lead nonprofit organization that plans, promotes, and produces the annual celebration.

Musical melting pot

The past celebrations have been successful for Tago, a low profile but highly popular joint among jazz fans, who tend to crowd up the small place on certain nights.

Here's a bit of background.

Gonzales started this joint with a group of friends some four years ago. For some reason or another, the other partners fell out of the way. So now it's Gonzales managing the place — besides doubling as janitor, waiter, security guard, guest relations officer, and drummer.

About a third of the customers are themselves musicians — both amateurs and professionals, young and old, a lot of them accomplished. So it's rare night when nobody comes up on the stage to jam with whoever's performing. In fact, that has become pretty much a standard feature.

Somehow, just by word of mouth, or via social media, the place has attracted some celebrities — like Annie Brazil, who was accompanied by Richard Merck and wife Ronnie; film scorer, arranger, composer, and lyricist Nonong Buencamino; keyboardist Henry Katindig and his singer-wife Jeannie Tiongco; and actresses Solenn Heussaff, Georgina Wilson, and Carla Humphries.

Also mainly via social media, Tago has attracted foreign jazz fans and even musicians like keyboardist Todd Hunter and drummer Jeffry Lewis, who dropped in one night with fashion designer Kate Torralba, who also composes and plays keyboard, to jam. Hunter and Lewis came straight from their concert with Dionne Warwick at the Araneta Coliseum.

One notable walk-in customer was New York-based Latin jazz pianist Edsel Gomez, who found the place by searching the Internet. He had come from a gig in Japan and decided to make a side trip to the Philippines, specifically Tago, where he did several performances — for free.

To get a better idea of what this place is about, you can scan through the pictures at the Tago Facebook account.

Six days of jazz

Anyway, this year several other places are joining Tago in celebrating International Jazz Day, which Gonzales welcomes because his joint can only comfortably take in around 50 people. Beyond, it's an SRO crowd with some stragglers taking possession of the sidewalk.



PHOTO BY JECK MANLIQUEZ/CNNPH

Because of his commitment to promoting jazz, Gonzales has decided to bookend International Jazz Day with five extra days of gigs — two before and three after the day itself — for six days of solid jazz.

On the Jazz Day itself, Back to the 90s, a bar on Morato Avenue in Quezon City, will also feature several groups.

One of the owners of this bar is J.R. Oca, a singer-guitarist who was a band mate of Gonzales in Alakpa.

So here's the schedule (all gigs, by the way, start at 9:00 p.m.).

Tuesday (April 28)

Tago

The Brass Monkeys, which is composed of Chris Padilla on vocals, Tim Cada on guitar, Glenn Bondoc on bass, Jayman Alviar on drums, King Ansano on trumpet, Archie Lacorte on alto sax, and Leo Emnil on trombone

Wednesday (April 29)

Tago

Balooze, which is led by composer-guitarist Riki Gonzales (a regular Tago performer).

Carlo and Nicole David — son and daughter of jazz singer Mon David — who will be accompanied by RSDC, a band made up of Tago regular customer-performers: Migs Rañeses on guitar, Juni Sitaca on piano, Tim Dadivas on drums, Gabe Cabonce on bass (the band name is made up of the first letters of their surnames).

Thursday (April 30)

Tago

Ryan Villamor Trio, with Villamor leading on keyboards

Baihana, led by a trio of singers — Krina Cayabyab (yes, she's Ryan Cayabyab's daughter), Anna Achacoso, and Mel Torre

Skarlet, whom many still know as Myra Ruaro, to be backed up by Elmhír Saison on keyboard, Riki Gonzales on guitar, Noel Asistores on bass, and Will Elazegui on drums. Incidentally, Skarlet used to run her own bar — Ten 02 which became Skarlet's Jazz Kitchen, whose regulars, after its closing down for good, migrated to Tago.

Swingster Syndicate, led by Paolo Cortez on guitar, with a movable roster of Tago regulars like keyboardist Chuck Joson, drummer Chuck Menor, and bassist Bergen Nuñez.

Back to the 90s

Paolo Blaquera Trio, led by Paola Blaquera on guitar, with Kid Moll on bass and Les Banzuelo on drums

Escolta 3 a.m., which has Nikki Cabardo on keyboards; Brutus Lacano on drums, and Paolo Blaquera (again) on guitar; and Jun Lazo on bass

J.R. Oca Experience, with J.R. Oca on vocals and guitars, with Empi Katindig Martinez on bass, Paul Santiago on drums, Enzo Bautista on trumpet, Coby Sarreal on saxophone, and Aldous Castro on percussions

Manila Sky, composed of Abby Clutario on vocals and the Chapman stick (a stringed electronic instrument); Aldous Castro on handpans and percussion; C.J. Wasu on tabla and harmonium; Eric Tubon on tabla, keyboard, and seaboard

Friday (May 1)

Tago

R.J. Torres Trio, with R.J. Torres on guitar, Bergan Nuñez on bass, and Nelson Gonzales on drums

Saturday (May 2)

Sax master Pete Canzon backed up by the R.J. Torres Trio

Sunday (May 3)

Tago

Northbound Central, led by Kenneth Castillo on guitar, Bergan Nuñez on bass, Karlo Soriano on drums, and Harold Andrei Cruz on keyboard.