

**LISA MACUJA-ELIZALDE**  
**Artistic Director and CEO**  
**Ballet Manila**

Lisa Macuja-Elizalde has achieved a dream that is generally believed to be impossible for a classical ballerina in the Philippines – bringing ballet to the people and people to the ballet. Undoubtedly the most phenomenal ballerina the country has ever produced, she has had an unparalleled career best summed up by these numbers: 28 years of dancing the lead in over 300 full-length ballets, performed in 90 cities that span five continents around the globe.

A true believer not only in the immense talent of the Filipino artist but also the underlying capacity of the local audience to embrace the classical arts, she returned home after four years in Russia, determined to be a Philippine-based international artist. Since then, she has endeavored to make ballet a spectacle that is accessible and enjoyable to her own countrymen.

Macuja-Elizalde began studying ballet at the age of eight under Felicitas Radaic at the St. Theresa's College School of Dance, where she advanced to become a member of the semi-professional Dance Theater Philippines. In 1982, she received a scholarship from the USSR Ministry of Culture to study at the formidable Leningrad Choreographic Institute (now the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet) in Saint Petersburg under the tutelage of Tatiana Alexandrovna Udalenkova.

Upon graduating at the top of her class in 1984, she became the first foreigner to be invited to join as soloist the historic Kirov Ballet – a revered institution in Dance that has produced some of Russia's most iconic ballerinas and danseurs over the last three centuries. Here, she debuted as principal ballerina in full-length productions of *The Nutcracker*, *Don Quixote* (with Faroukh Ruzimatov as Basilio), and *Giselle* at the Mariinsky Theater.

Returning to Manila in 1986, she was named the first artist-in-residence of the Cultural Center of the Philippines and performed as guest artist with Ballet Philippines until 1988, when she became a principal dancer of the Philippine Ballet Theatre. As an international guest artist, she has performed principal roles with foreign companies in various full-length performances of the classics in Russia, the United States, Cuba, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia.

In 1995, she established her own company, Ballet Manila, together with perennial partner Osias Barroso and ten other young dancers. Ballet Manila has since grown and flourished into the most sought-after and most prolific professional Filipino ballet company, clocking some 5,000 local and 200 foreign performances in the past 19 years.

As Ballet Manila's principal ballerina and artistic director, she has also led the company's performance tours that brought them to 16 cities in Russia, 15 cities in the USA, the Aberdeen Youth Festival in Scotland, the Folk Arts Festival in South Korea, the Asia Arts Festival in China, the Angkor-Gyeongju World Culture Expo in Cambodia, the Philippine Fiesta in Japan, and a concert tour of England and Ireland.

As directress of the Ballet Manila School, she also established Project Ballet Futures, a program where poor but promising young boys and girls are given free ballet training, apparel, meals and allowances to help them reach their dream of becoming professional dancers.

In 2011, Macuja-Elizalde launched her *Swan Song Series*, in which she is saying goodbye to her favorite full-length classical roles within a three-year-period, paving the way for her retirement in 2014.

While already armed with a diploma from the most distinguished ballet academy in Russia, she pursued her academic education and received an Associate of Arts degree in General Studies in 2004, leading to her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management (with honors) in 2007, both from the University of Phoenix, USA.

She is married to businessman and media mogul Fred J. Elizalde, with whom she has two children, Missy and Manuel.

## **AWARDS**

Lisa Macuja-Elizalde was the first Filipino ballerina to bring home a laureate prize – a silver medal – from the 1987 Asia-Pacific Ballet Competition in Tokyo. She also completed the senior division semi-finals at the 1990 USA International Ballet Competition in Jackson, Mississippi, and won 5th place at the 1992 International Diaghilev Ballet Competition in Moscow, Russia.

She has received numerous citations attesting to her world-class achievements. The major ones include: the Order of International Friendship (awarded by Russian President Vladimir Putin) in 2001; the Ten Outstanding Young Persons of the World (TOYP U.S.A.) in 1997; The Outstanding Young Filipino (TOYF) in 1995; The Outstanding Women in the Nation's Service (TOWNS) in 1989; the special Prize for Artistry by the House of Diaghilev (Moscow) in 1992; Quezon City's Outstanding Citizen Award in 1989; and Manila's Patnubay ng Kalinangan at Sining in 1988.

In 2012, she became the first classical artist to be awarded Entertainer of the Year by the Aliw Awards Foundation, having garnered three other trophies in the same competition that year – Best Classical Dancer, Best Concert Collaboration (for *The Legends and the Classics* with Cecile Licad and Lea Salonga) and Best Dance Company (for Ballet Manila). In 2015, she was awarded by the Ateneo de Manila University School of Humanities for her Outstanding Achievement in Humanities.

## **ADVOCACY AND GLOBAL RECOGNITION**

Offstage, Macuja-Elizalde is also recognized for her vision and leadership in the local arts community. She served as Commissioner of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women and as Vice-Chairman of the Philippine UNESCO National Commission. She is also founding board member and treasurer of the Artists Welfare Project, Inc. (AWPI) which aims to provide access to health, financial and legal benefits to Filipino artists and cultural workers. In December 2015, she was accepted as Member the International Dance Council CID at UNESCO, the official world-wide organization for dance. In May 2016, she was recognized with the Filipino Woman of International Distinction Award by the National Federation of Women's Club of the Philippines.

In August 2016, Macuja Elizalde was the first Filipina artist to seat as member of the jury in the Pre-Competitive division of Asian Grand Prix (AGP) Ballet Competition in Hong Kong. She returned as a jury of the same division in AGP 2017 and 2018. In July 2017, Macuja Elizalde was jury member in the 2nd International Scholarship Korea Ballet Competition Seoul, South Korea and in the Malaysian International Grand Prix Ballet.

As an arts educator and advocate, she has also received multiple trophies from the Catholic Mass Media Awards, the KBP Golden Dove Awards, and Gawad Tanglaw, for her groundbreaking art and culture talk show, *Art 2 Art*, which airs weekly over DZRH and RHTV and which can be accessed online via [www.dzrh.com.ph](http://www.dzrh.com.ph).