

# Unity in diversity: Young singers' harmonious journey to NFOT



No one would have thought that a newly formed singing group of learners with various exceptionalities would reach a national competition.

But the choir of Tetuan Central School Special Education (SPED) Center (TCSSC) of Zamboanga City in Region IX did just that. Formed only in September 2018 to compete for the Himig Bulilit of the Division Festival of Talents (DFOT), the group proceeded to the

regional level where they won their ticket all the way to the National Festival of Talents (NFOT) 2019 in Dagupan City.

Donning well-crafted costumes in white and green, the choir of little angels sang in Chavacano as their warm-up song and the Filipino folk song *Pandangguhan* which was the contest piece assigned to them by the National Technical Working Group.

TCSSC Children's Choir is composed of 12 members wherein two are SPED learners: Nur Ayna Abdul, a 12-year-old girl, and Owen Tristan Sarsa, an eight-year-old boy, both visually impaired.

Despite Nur Ayna's condition, she managed to participate in dual events of the NFOT. Aside from the *Himig Bulilit*, she is also a member of a group of contestants competing for the *Madulang Pagkukuwento*, which won second place.

"I am happy to represent Region IX and share my talents with everyone. My skill in acting was already known by my teacher, Ma'am Jeniffer Villanueva, so she decided to include me in the *Madulang Pagkukuwento*. I used to watch teleseryes and imitate the actresses. I actually discovered my talent in singing when I auditioned for the choir formed by our trainers, Sir Anson Atilano and Sir Dionand Alvarez, in preparation for the DFOT," Nur Ayna shared.

Choir trainers Atilano and Alvarez, on the other hand, invested immeasurable efforts in training the children. They usually practice after class, from 4:30 to 7 in the afternoon. Prior to the training, young choir members underwent rigid screening administered by the two trainers.

Alvarez, a former member of a choir, experienced joining an international competition in Hoi An, Vietnam. He lives by the words of his mentor and former coach, the late Sandra Bernardo, who told him, "We will never pass this road again, that is why we have to give the best to our students."

Inspired by his mentor's words, Alvarez began forming a choir since 2012. It was this year's new group of singers, however, which brought him to the national finals.

"Gift is already there. Talent is either innate or acquired. We should not be selfish with the talent that can be learned by the young people by imparting it with them, so that when we're gone, the talent that they have acquired will be shared with the next generation," Alvarez said.

The young choir members felt very excited boarding the plane and having the chance to perform in a national event. Feeling overjoyed, one of the kids named James Teofilo shared their secret to winning the division and regional competitions: "effort and God's guidance."

After the NFOT, the TCSSC children's choir will perform in a national event in their school.

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