

SUNDRY STROKES

By ROSALINDA L. OROSA

**French Spring opens /
Heritage Festival ends**

Manilans are not likely to see another musical performance as uniquely rib-tickling, clever and witty as the *Duel* which opened *French Spring* last Monday at the RCBC Theater.

Pianist Paul Staicu and cellist Laurent Cirade, both world-class instrumentalists, began properly enough with a brilliant rendition of a sonata. After that misleading number, the audience started snickering when they demonstrated how *not* to play the piano and the cello in a series of absurd lessons.

Staicu would run his fingers over the keyboard while standing up, reclining, or lying on the floor. Often, he used his fists, palms and once — even a foot! Cirade performed



The riotous antics in *Duel* could not disguise the virtuosity of pianist and cellist. / Philippine history was traced through love songs.

walking about while carrying his cello horizontally. At one point, he kept bowing on a loose string held on one hand, the listener inevitably wondering how he could do that without going off-key. In another instance, holding a long horn that reached the

floor, he played on this as also on the cello. A "singer" too, he rendered *My Finny Valentine* in a croaking voice, and other tunes in a thin, piping falsetto.

Directed by Agnes Boury, the episodes drove the audience, figuratively speaking, rolling in the aisles, as each character endlessly tried to outwit the other with sly tricks. The taller, bigger Cirade would bully Staicu who, however, would later gain the upperhand.

As the rivalry continued, Cirade manacled both hands of Staicu, who, even then, managed to play the piano. Subsequently, Cirade manacled one of his hands, Staicu remaining with one manacled hand. Exchanging roles, the pianist then did the bowing while the cellist played the piano.

What music emerged? The *Habanera* from *Carmen*! The farce proceeding further with Staicu still doing the bowing on the cello and Chirade doing a one-finger exercise on the piano, what emerged next? Schubert's *Ave Maria*. Chirade, one hand manacled, stood up to sing the song and dance to it! The scene may have appeared irreverent but the parody was conceivably one of the cleverest, most hilarious in the entire show.

Despite the riotous antics, one did not forget for a single moment that these were two virtuosi. Indeed, the outrageous liberties they took on their instruments merely highlighted their mastery of them.

Earlier, Staicu dazzled with a bravura interpretation of the opening chords of Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A Minor* and the concluding rapid runs of a daunting Chopin *Etude*, both classics interspersed with *La Vie en Rose* and other pop tunes dashed off in fits and starts.

A final amusing scene. As Staicu sat before a supposedly rented piano, a recorded voice gave brief instructions. Each time he was about to begin, for instance, the voice would say, "Your time is up." Staicu kept running counter to the recorded instructions, leaving everyone in stitches.

The duo ended as they began, playing a sonata brilliantly as two masters would. With the audience lustily applauding in unison, guess what encore the pals gave; the zaniest version of *La Vie en Rose*! How listeners roared with delight!

Prior to the *Duel*, Ambassador Renée Veyret and NCCA chairman Evelyn Pantig each gave the *raison d'être* for *French Spring*, while Cultural Counselor Franck Hebert minded the myriad details of its opening.
