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Kerry Reid of the Chicago Tribune Calls *Christmas at Christine's* "Sentimental" and "Beguiling!"

True to holiday cabaret tradition, Chicago actor and singer Christine Bunuan fills her solo-show stocking with songs ranging from naughty to nice, sardonic to sentimental. But what Bunuan also offers in "Christmas at Christine's," the first holiday show at Silk Road Rising, is her perspective as a child of Filipino immigrants. When you're raised by people who arrived in the United States with \$500 in their pockets, the holidays are bound to focus on love, not lucre.



"Bunuan fills her solo-show stocking with songs ranging from naughty to nice, sardonic to sentimental."

Bunuan, a veteran of past ensemble revues at Silk Road as well as of "Avenue Q" at the Mercury Theater (where she played Christmas Eve), brings a mix of sass, soul and sweetness to her songs and stories, directed by J.R. Sullivan and with Ryan Brewster at the piano. She also accompanies herself on ukulele with charming insouciance on Nat King Cole's "The Happiest Christmas Tree."

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It has its contrivances, to be sure — the "late" entrance with Bunuan dashing in, shopping bags and cellphone in hand, feels a little shopworn as an opening gambit, even with her determinedly cheerful delivery of "We Need a Little Christmas." But as she settles into the groove, the show takes on richer shadings. And given the current national mood, a show that celebrates diversity (Bunuan's husband, fellow actor Sean Patrick Fawcett, is Jewish) and the can-do spirit of those who pursue impossible dreams provides some needed catharsis.

Not all of Bunuan's selections are holiday songs. Indeed, she sings "The Impossible Dream" from "Man of La

Mancha" as a tribute to her father's indomitable spirit. (From that \$500, her father became an engineer in the U.S. while her parents raised three children and now own two homes.)

(who of course has nothing to do with seasonally appropriate precipitation) in a college production that they both worked on.

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Part of the show serves also as tribute to her extended family in the Philippines, whose images fill an onstage photo album and are reflected in grainy projections. The death of an uncle at Christmastime reminds us of the fragility of life and the need to appreciate loved ones when they're here.

Bunuan's own Catholic faith lies upon the show with an easy grace, mixed with Filipino traditions such as the "parol," a star-shaped lantern recalling the Star of Bethlehem and the rollicking Tagalog holiday song "Ang Pasko Ay Sumapit." The Nativity scene on a downstage table serves as a poignant reminder that the first Christmas story was about a couple like Bunuan's parents, far from their own home, trying to make a new family in the most difficult of circumstances.

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There's also a touch of the macabre in Jim Rusk's twisted "Pretty Little Dolly" (made popular by Mona Abboud) in which the inventory of what the longed-for toy can do grows increasingly disturbing. Bunuan's story of performing in the Goodman's "A Christmas Carol" with a sick-to-his-tummy Tiny Tim recalls the late Spalding Gray's story of a vomiting Wally Webb in "Our Town."

But those mild trips to the gross side are balanced by tributes to friendship, including "You've Got a Friend in Me" and, as a hat tip to her "Avenue Q" role, "The More You Ruv Someone." There's also "Moishe Baby," a Jewish-themed parody of "Santa Baby" created by Bunuan, Brewster, Fawcett, Silk Road founder Jamil Khoury, and Nikki Fawcett.



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The show includes a guest artist each night on one number. On opening night, Bunuan's childhood friend and Chicago cabaret star Johanna McKenzie Miller belted out "O Holy Night." When she hit the lyrics "His law is love and his gospel is peace," it provided a stirring balm for troubled times. Bunuan's low-key but impassioned delivery of Peter, Paul and Mary's menorah song, "Light One Candle," also carried an emotional punch.

Silk Road Rising's determined ecumenical approach to religion has been apparent since its founding. It seems wholly appropriate that their first holiday show should celebrate immigrant success, family loyalty and friendship. Bunuan's show has its self-conscious moments, to be sure. But Bunuan brings beguiling wit and warmth that transcends cheap sentiment. And where else are you going to hear "Silent Night" in Tagalog onstage this year? [Buy Tickets »](#)



Performances thru December 23, 2016

Thursdays at 7:30pm

Fridays at 8:00pm

Saturdays at 4:00pm

Sundays at 4:00pm

*Added Performances Tuesday 12/20 and Wednesday 12/21 at 7:30pm

\$25 Adults / \$20 Students

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