

PHOTO BY CHRISTELLE BINAG



## ARNALDO! IMMIGRANT, CHORINE AND DRAG CHANTEUSE, OH MY!

BY ADAM CONLEY

When Arnaldo took his first tentative steps down the yellow-brick road to becoming Arnaldo! (the exclamation mark signifies the persona of “Seattle’s Premier Drag Chanteuse”) he had little idea that his journey would also help him discover himself. For Arnaldo, Seattle Men’s Chorus (SMC) provided the sure footing and support that empowered him to come out as a proud gay man and performance artist.

Arnaldo’s odyssey has deposited him not so much over the rainbow as smack dab in the middle of it. He joined SMC two years after arriving in Seattle as an immigrant from the Philippines in 1987. His first drag performance was as Madonna in “Vogue” for the *No Talent Show* at the 1991 Chorus retreat. This got him some unexpected attention and Dennis soon asked him to lip-synch “Sooner or Later” in Madonna drag for the Sondheim! concert in June 1991. Arnaldo asked if he could actually sing it, and Dennis told him he’d have to hear him perform it first. Arnaldo sang, Dennis listened and the rest is history.

At this season’s SMC holiday concert, Arnaldo! will channel Eartha Kitt in a special performance of the concert title song “Santa Baby.” He credits Eartha as one of the original inspirations for his drag persona.

But we need to back up a minute. Before Arnaldo! came into being a stand-alone performer and NY Bistro Cabaret Award

winner; and before Arnaldo racked up solo performances with SMC that include Madonna, Carmen Miranda, Patsy Cline, and everyone in between, over, and under (indeed Patsy performed “Down Under” for the 2003 Australia and New Zealand tour), Arnaldo started his journey about as comfortable being gay as he was, at first, speaking English.

He says that early on he spoke English and embraced his gay identity with about as much confidence as any an immigrant Filipino Catholic can. For that reason, making the leap from confident self-acceptance to expressing oneself on stage in full-out drag is particularly remarkable.

“Before the 1991 *No Talent Show*,” observed Arnaldo, “if you had asked me if I would be performing in drag on stage, I’d have told you I’d rather be dead.”

What saved him, figuratively and perhaps literally, was the friendship, support, and opportunities afforded him by SMC. Both on and off stage, Arnaldo’s life shimmers with all the vibrant colors of the rainbow because, “The Chorus helped me accept myself with integrity, and it helped me find and share my own unique voice.” After a pause, he laughed and proclaimed, “Once a chorine, always a chorine!”

Arnaldo!’s upcoming holiday performances:

### *A Cabaret Winter Wonderland*

Julia’s on Broadway

Sundays, Dec 6, 13 & 20, 2009

Dinner 6PM Show 7PM

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[www.dragchanteuse.com](http://www.dragchanteuse.com)

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