

Attention NCCA and CCP! Do Not Railroad Dolphy as National Artist

By Mabuhay C. Bangko – June 12, 2026

The disturbing word from my friends in the local art community is that the late comedian Rodolfo Quizon, also known as *Dolphy*, is stealthily being railroaded as a nominee for the Order of National Artist of the Philippines. There is also a recent news story of Dolphy's son Vandolph expressing his hope that his father, whom he called the King of Comedy, will be named national artist soon.

If this is so, it is very disturbing, indeed.

While Dolphy may be one of the top comedians in the Philippines, that reputation by itself is not enough to justify naming him a national artist.

A review of his half a century record of motion pictures and television programs indicates that Dolphy's comedy is plain and simple slapstick in character -- a laughter-rousing type that makes fun of other people's physical defects and limitations. Dolphy's lines and antics are almost always predictably slapstick.

Take for instance his frequent treatment of his fellow actor Babalu (the late Pablo Sarmiento). Dolphy not only makes fun of Babalu's prominent long chin; Dolphy goes out of his way to describe it in an insulting way, and even pulls at Babalu's chin just to make people laugh at Babalu. That is eliciting laughter at the expense of somebody's physical deformity.

Another example is in the 1974 film *John & Marsha sa Amerika*, where Dolphy plays son-in-law to his mother-in-law Dely Atay-Atayan (the late Adelaida Fernando), there is a scene where Dolphy's Porontong family sees wild animals in captivity.

As the camera pans the scene, Dolphy remarks that a big hippopotamus looks exactly like his mother-in-law. That remark is followed by laughter from the other characters.

That's not art. That's amusement provoked by a shameless disregard for other people's physical defects. It's a typical format in Dolphy's performances.

Another notable style in Dolphy's performances is his support for the underdog. That support, however, is always in the form of instigating insubordination and sloth at the workplace, and fostering disrespect for persons in authority.

In short, Dolphy's films promote threats to industrial peace as well as quarrels and intrigues in the workplace. Most certainly, that is no laughing matter. Dolphy's penchant in that direction is not an artistic endeavor.

Despite his 60-year career, Dolphy failed to improve the quality and level of comedy in Philippine cinema and television. To put it bluntly, Dolphy kept Filipinos laughing but for the wrong reasons. As a consequence, contemporary comedy in local movies and television remains stagnant and even condemned to the basest kind, always focused on people's personal defects, and perpetually highlighting high-strung argumentative quarrels by characters making fun of each other's apparent deformities.

If Dolphy were a real national artist deserving of the title, then his many films and TV shows should have improved the quality of comedy in Filipino cinema and television. They don't.

While Dolphy's career may have provided many Filipinos a humorous break from the rigidity of daily living, that alone does not qualify him to receive the title of national artist.

The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) periodically submits to the Office of the President a list of nominees for national artist. That list is, however, considered by both agencies as confidential.

Considering that a national artist stands to be given a cash award and a regular stipend financed by public funds, that list should not be kept confidential. The public has the right to know who the NCCP and the CCP are recommending to receive public money.

There is also no law which allows the NCCP and the CCP to treat the list as confidential information. This means that if the NCCP and the CCP turn down any taxpayer's request for a copy of the list of nominees, criminal and administrative charges may be filed against the heads of both agencies before the Office of the Ombudsman. ■