

Storytelling is big at FestPac

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When I was a little boy, I played hooky to watch “Birds of Paradise” with Debra Paget, Louis Jourdan and Jeff Chandler. Miss Paget was the virgin island maiden chosen to be tossed into the boiling magma of an angry volcano to placate it. She had fallen in love with a visiting Frenchman, who skippered his schooner into the lagoons of the Tuamotus. There was no taboo stronger than that. How could she have done that when there were so many eligible young men waiting for her, including me?

Although the story was very loosely based on truth, it is highly conjectural that island traditions actually called for the immolation of any beautiful young women. To begin with, how does one approach the caldera of an exploding volcano?

Nothing happened to Miss Paget. She is safe and sound, a happy 83-year-old who spends all her time tending to her horde of poodles, much like the reclusive Doris Day. Something did happen to me, though. I fell in love with the Pacific islands and wanted so much to be a part of it.

In May of 2016, you will have the chance to fall in love with your chosen Pacific culture. May ushers in the greatest event of the Pacific, FestPac 2016. Fear not. There will be no volcanism involved. I can assure you no one from CAHA will be thrown into the gaping jaws of any fiery cauldron, ... well, maybe one or two. Just kidding!

What there will be, though, is something that began some 40,000 years ago when a group of Paleolithic cave dwellers used pigments to depict details of a hunt on the walls of a cavern in Lascaux in southern France. The animals were rendered



in explicit detail and told of the rituals performed during the hunt. It told a story.

Storytelling has always been a feature of FestPac, although it was never officially recognized until the 9th FestPac celebration in Koror, Belau. Andre Artero was telling stories on the lawn of the University of the South Pacific in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, when he was interrupted by a festival speaker who boldly announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, the island of Guam has been totally devastated by a typhoon!”

Polynesians tend to become overzealous when told to relay urgent information. Quite often they do it without corroboration. Frantic phone calls by our delegates revealed there were not too many people on Guam who were aware they were decimated. Apparently, a small banana storm had passed by. The very next day, Andre Artero merrily went along with the rest of his story.

In Palau, our storytellers told their yarns in beautifully prepared venues in the pristine jungles of the island. It was as if time had stopped and allowed the bard to control it. The night sounds of the forest complemented

the primeval atmosphere of the various theaters.

There was never any shortage of storytellers in Pago Pago, American Samoa, during the 10th FestPac. The entire festival ground was built in the shadow of Tutuila’s majestic Rainmaker Mountain, an ancient 656-foot volcanic trachyte plug that resembles a man sleeping on his back. The venues were the oval-shaped Samoan “falles,” which invite the winds that are channeled down Pago Pago inlet, an ancient volcanic caldera. Curious onlookers would stop by and plead to share their very own stories. It was a splendid event marred only by the need to squat on coral pebbles.

The 11th FestPac, took place on the hallowed grounds of the Solomon Islands, on the sands that witnessed some of the bloodiest battles of World War II. In its capital, Honiara, our storytellers performed on hot, pebbled beaches with an added complication — birds. Land and sea birds continually pelted them with minute dung bombs. The venues were constructed in areas where highly territorial birds built their nests. But the stories continued, the stories went on.

Storytelling will be an important component of the 12th FestPac presentations in 2016. At last count there are 13 island nations that have counterparts that mirror our local Oratory Division. This translates to tens of storytellers that will be gracing our festival grounds. Please come and visit us and if you are inspired or motivated in any way, hey! Tell us! What’s your story!

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