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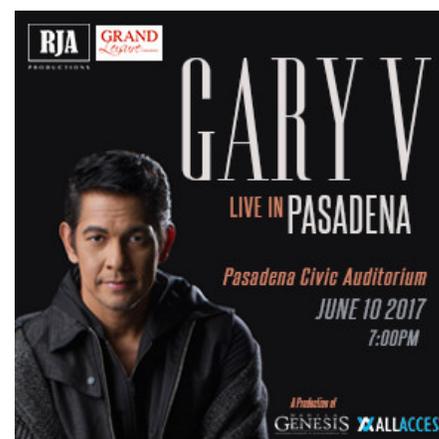
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ASIAN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL & SINEHAN SA SUMMER 2017

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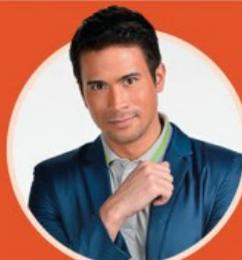


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By Momar Visaya
Published: August 4, 2017 | No Comments

Focusing on Filipino Short Films in NYC Fests

A number of Filipino short films have made it to the lineup of the 40th Asian American International Film Festival (AAIFF40), presented by Asian CineVision in association with Asia Society. The annual fest, held from July 26 to August 5 at Asia Society and Village East Cinema in Manhattan, is the nation's first and longest running Asian interest film festival. This year, AAIFF40 is proud to present 20 feature films and 63 short films representing 18 countries.

A couple of these short films also made their way to the Sinehan sa Summer 2017, an annual month-long event sponsored by the Philippine Consulate General New York.

We chatted with the two directors whose films are being shown in both festivals. At AAIFF, both shorts were under the "Made in NYC: Love Letters to New York" program, which explains that with almost 8.5 million people spread across five boroughs, compelling New York City stories are being told every day. This program highlighted the diverse aspirations, failures, and energy of Asians in the Big Apple.

"Distance" (directed by Craig Nisperos)

Craig Nisperos is a Seattle-born and raised storyteller based in NYC.

As a first generation Filipino-American, he said he wanted to give a fresh perspective on modern day immigration. "Distance" is the story of Craig, a modern day immigrant who struggles with being away from his home and his family. "Even in a city of millions, loneliness is inescapable," the film's short description explains.

"There are similarities with my parents' immigration story and my story from leaving Seattle to move to NYC. The intent was to focus on the mental health aspect of moving away from home and the importance of family in many decisions," Craig shared. "The term Distance refers to the physical and emotional separation from family."

Craig was inspired to do the film "Distance" based on his own experience as a Seattle transplant in NYC for about a decade, including the people he has met along the way, some of whom also moved away from what they consider "home."

There, Craig realized that despite the "great and exciting" feeling to start fresh outside of one's comfort zones, there was an underlying emotion that everyone has experienced – whether it's for a fleeting moment or for a month.

"The problem I noticed was that many weren't willing to openly talk about it. Some friends kept it internal, some when to therapy. After creating Distance, it was interesting to see how many people did open up about the dark side of their experiences," he shared.

Have you always been interested in film-making?

As a filmmaker, Craig got his start with cameras like most people, which he used to document life as he saw it, especially during his travels. After moving to NYC, he developed more interest in photography. When he started to dwell and focus on the story-telling part, he realized he wanted to learn more about the craft of filmmaking.

He gained more experience as he did commercials, music videos, and wedding films where he had to tell stories from 30 seconds, three minutes or 5 minutes.

"Distance" is Craig's first short film.

"The goal of the film was to tell my story of moving away from home. I wanted to say the words I have always wanted to tell my family every time I wanted to move home and also write the words I've heard to keep me moving on in NYC. As mentioned in the Q&A, the hardest part of the film was getting the story right for my parents," he shared. "Without them immigrating from the Philippines, raising me in an atypical Filipino household, and always encouraging me to pursue my passions, I wouldn't have been able to do what I have done, including Distance. Although not every word is autobiographical, I wanted to create something that any viewer who has ever felt the pains of loneliness could relate to."

"The Pleasure of Being Served" (directed by Michael Manese)

Born in the Philippines and raised in Passaic, New Jersey, Michael Manese studied filmmaking at Rutgers University. He is a Web Project Manager by trade and an Advanced Brown Belt Karate student.

“The Pleasure of Being Served” tells the story of Rosa, an undocumented immigrant from the Philippines (played by Maan Cruz) who works for a wealthy family in Manhattan and struggles to make ends up as she desperately works to bring her son to America. Her job as a domestic worker proves more difficult as she is tasked with juggling the logistics of her boss’s girlfriends. After befriending both of them, she’s cornered into making a decision — either be quiet and accept his money or tell the women she cares about of his manipulative lies.

“I’m hoping this project will not only highlight Filipinos and their culture to a wider, mainstream audience but also provide a glimpse of what it’s like to be an undocumented worker working in America,” Michael said. “It’s just something you don’t see on a regular basis on TV or the movies. My long term is to eventually produce a feature length version of this short film that’s set against the background of the 2016 US Presidential Election.”

Michael’s inspiration to do the film comes from two of his favorite movies ever – “Hud” (the name of the male lead character) and “The Remains of the Day,” which coincidentally, feature a cleaning woman, and a butler.

“I like the themes of how some characters, some people deal with getting or not getting emotionally attached to their work. I’ve been an aspiring filmmaker for years. I’m still making films but I need to have a day job and I try to keep my focus on the two separate. Also, I’ve always wanted to do a movie with subtitles. Here was my chance,” he shared.

His interest in filmmaking was piqued way back in the 80s after watching the Woody Allen film “Annie Hall” when he was in high school. He was amazed that Allen wrote, directed, and starred in it, a true auteur.

He couldn’t make films back then so for a while he got into cartooning. At Rutgers, Michael studied film production. He remembers that back then, they were shooting in 16mm and it just became too expensive.

Years later, starting in 2012, he returned to filmmaking, or what he calls “videomaking” thanks to digital technology. His short film “When bart6874 met lulu5547,” a silent film about senior citizens doing online dating made it to 13 film festivals. “Maxine” (2014) an experimental short about a couple breaking up went to six festivals. “The Pleasure of Being Served” (2016), so far this year, has made it to six film festivals as well.

Michael found the screening at the 40th Asian American International Film Festival at the Asia Society Museum great.

“It was a packed house and the reactions, from laughter to gasps, were lively,” he shared.

Buang-Bulawan & Flip the Record

Two other Filipino shorts made it to the lineup at AAIFF40.

“Buang-Bulawan (Fool’s Gold)” was screened under “Mad Mad World” while Flip the Record was under “Nevertheless, She Persisted: Stories of Women”.

“Flip the Record” is a 1980s coming-of-age story set to pulsing hip-hop music where Ness, a Filipino-American teen discovers her identity through a budding talent for turntablism and her place in the local music scene of the era.

The film showcases a little-known but lasting explosion of hip-hop culture that grew out of the Filipino-American community of 1980s San Francisco. This film takes the viewers into the beat of an aspiring mobile DJ crew in ’84, as 14-year-old Vanessa, sick of the constraints and boring piano lessons in her conservative Filipino-American household, starts teaching herself on the sly how to scratch on her older brother’s turntables. We follow Ness as she discovers her talents and

Marie Jamora, an award-winning filmmaker from Manila wore different hats for this film, acting as its Writer/Director/Producer/Editor/Music Supervisor.

Her feature debut, “Ang Nawalala” (What Isn’t There), premiered internationally at the Slamdance Film Festival and was nominated for five Gawad Urian Philippine Critics Awards. Marie began her career as music video and commercial director, directing over 45 music videos and many commercials for some of

the world’s biggest brands including Coca-Cola, Colgate, and Gillette. She received an MFA in Film from Columbia University. She is currently working on her first documentary, Legions of Boom, which is fiscally sponsored by the San Francisco Film Society.

“Having grown up in the Philippines during the golden age of Manila’s indie rock scene, I was fascinated by the revelation that second-generation Filipino-Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area helped shape American hip-hop through Turntablism, and yet hardly anyone knows about it,” Marie said.

With “Flip the Record,” she wanted to change that narrative.

“I wanted to recreate this undiscovered music scene through a young Filipino girl’s experience: how dance music’s high energy connects with her more than her piano lessons, and how — bullied by an older brother who heads his own mobile DJ unit — she finds the courage to stand out and stand up to him through music,” she shared.

“The title has three meanings. First, it’s about a teenage girl who “flips” her older brother’s runty view of her, using his own turntable and mashing up original Filipino music as her means of expression. Second, it tries to reclaim the derogatory term “Flip” (an acronym for “F*cking Little Island People” used by American troops stationed in the Philippines) and give it a more positive, empowering spin. Lastly, we want to highlight and immortalize the contribution of Fil-Ams to American music history,” Marie said.

Buang-Bulawan is a 15-minute short film directed by Terimar Malones. It tells the story of Romel, a seafarer from Iloilo, who faces a dilemma after discovering what’s inside the bag left by Makay, a street vendor he accidentally bumped into.

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