

The art of silent noise

August 21, 2017

Buster Keaton in "The General"

Organizers have always billed the International Silent Film Festival Manila as a unique cultural event that fuses the magic of movies and music in one theatrical experience. Now on its 11th year, the fest gathers another eclectic lineup of films and live performances, at the Shang Cineplex, Shangri-La Plaza, Mandaluyong, from Aug. 31 to Sept. 3.

Highlight of the event is the presentation of Germany's Goethe Institut: GW Pabst's "Pandora's Box" (Sept. 3, 5 p.m.), which topbills screen legend Louise Brooks.

"'Pandora's Box' is easily one of the top four German films in the silent era, along with 'Nosferatu,' 'Metropolis' and 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,'" says Shadin Kitma, program coordinator of Goethe.

The 1929 classic captures the roaring '20s in all its delicious decadence as personified by Brooks' iconic Lulu character.

Kitma relates that there was a certain similarity in Brooks' "Black Bottom" dance with the onstage antics of Sandwich's Raymund Marasigan. As such, the Filipino band was a perfect fit for the German screen gem. "Raymund on vocals ... has a wildness that mirrors Lulu's character well."

The British Council is fielding Anthony Asquith's 1928 film "Underground" (Sept. 1, 7:30 p.m.). Malaya del Rosario, head of the British Council's Arts and Creative Industries, points

out: "We wanted a movie that is still relevant in today's world ... a film that would spark discussions on how urban systems—

such as transportation—can greatly affect people's lives, then and now."

The British Council handpicked the band **Goodleaf** to provide the score.

"Goodleaf's music ranges from groovy, moody to ambient, and this greatly complements the film's essence," says Del Rosario.

Italy is offering a contemporary work by Ruben Maria Soriquez, "A Perfect Family" (Sept. 2, 3 p.m.). It was shot in six countries in a span of 10 years, according to Allesandro Milani, general manager of the Philippine Italian Association.

The band Tom's Story was handpicked to score Soriquez's experimental 2017 movie.

"The band's music is very appropriate for the film. When the director first listened to the band, he was able to visualize the film and associate scenes with the music of Tom's Story," Milani notes.

Japan's offering combines rondalla music with a revered Asian tradition. The Japan Foundation is bringing in a benshi, or silent film narrator (Ichiro Kataoka), to accompany Yasujiro Ozu's 1933 gangster movie, "Dragnet Girl" (Sept. 2, 5:30 p.m.).

From the turn of the century to the late 1930s, silent movies featured not only music, but also a katsudo benshi who performed as narrator, actor and storyteller. Kataoka is a renowned benshi, who has been narrating over 350 silent movies all over the world. Providing local flavor is the Celso Espejo Rondalla, which will play original music to accompany the Japanese masterpiece.

Austria likewise picked a national treasure, Gustav Ucicky's 1927 film, "Café Elektric," (Sep. 3, 3p.m.), which headlines a young Marlene Dietrich.

"It tells a complicated love story involving four people, reminiscent of Filipino telenovelas," remarks Zelpha Bombais of the Austrian embassy's press and cultural affairs office. "We wanted to highlight the similarities of the entertainment fare that Austrians and Filipinos enjoy watching."



Marlene Dietrich (right) in "Cafe Elektric"

This year, Austria is collaborating with popular band Rivermaya for the score. “Rivermaya understands the preferences of the Filipino audience. This band will further narrow the gap between a foreign film and the local audience.”

That’s precisely the idea behind the Silent Film Fest, bringing together divergent worlds: the past and the present, the foreign and the Filipino.

“Our idea of entertainment nowadays seems to be loud theatrics and information overload,” Bombais clarifies. “It provides a respite to viewers who are tired of loud and noisy productions.”

Other screenings and performances scheduled are: Spain’s “El Golfo” by Jose de Togores (1918), with the Talahib folk quartet (Aug. 31, 8 p.m.); France’s “The New Enchantment” by Marcel L’Herbier (1923), with HeloiseLaHarpe (Sept. 1, 9:30 p.m.); Philippines’ “Taglish” by Gym Lumbera (2012), with stoner-metal quartet Kapitan Kulam (Sept. 2, 8 p.m.); and the United States’ “The General” by Clyde Bruckman and Buster Keaton (1926), with the band Flippin Soul Stompers (Sept. 3, 8 p.m.).

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