



Werner Herzog Retrospective

Slave trade abolition
in Cobra Verde



By **RICA AREVALO**

Film director **Werner Herzog** is a leading figure of the New German Cinema.

Born on Sept. 5, 1942, his films are unconventional and important with the art house audience. The Goethe-Institut Philippinen in partnership with the Film Development Council of the Philippines is showing Herzog's acclaimed films until June 4.

On May 20, 6 p.m., *Cobra Verde* (1987) starring **Klaus Kinski** based on the novel, *The Viceroy of Ouidah* by **Bruce Chatwin**, is going to be screened at the **FDCP Cinematheque Manila**.

Kinski plays Francisco Manoel da Silva, nicknamed Cobra Verde, a bandit who walks barefoot and does not own a horse for travelling. People are afraid and run away from him. He tells a bar owner that he never had a friend in all his life.

At that time, slave trade was flourishing in Brazil. Black men were sold in exchange for ammunition, liquor, and silk. Cobra Verde meets Don Octavio, a sugar plantation owner who asks him to manage his fields. He accepted the job offer but impregnated Don Octavio's daughters. To banish him, he was sent to Africa to buy slaves knowing that he will not survive.

Cobra Verde took hold of a garrison, Fort Elmina, improved the place and lived there managing the slaves with Taparica (King Ampaw). The slave trade across the Atlantic and Brazil was their route.

But "black people believe the devil is white" so the King's men captured the two. Bakoko (**Kofi Yirenkyi**) rescues them

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upon the order of the Prince. The Prince and Cobra Verde make a pact to be blood brothers in order not kill each other.

The only white man trained women to be amazons, practicing day and night to attack the king. When the raid happened, the Prince became the new king and took his rightful seat.

Cobra Verde's business partners in Brazil cheated him and issued no payment for its slaves. He writes a letter telling them he has no family or friends in the area and he is the only

white man who became a father of 62 children. It does not give him any satisfaction.

In 1888, Brazil joins the rest of the world in abolishing the slavery. Any shipment of slaves was to be seized in the high seas. Fort Elmina has ceased to exist in the eyes of the law and the death of the slave trade.

Cobra Verde, helpless and lonely, gets his boat and tries to leave. He pulls his boat without success and slumps on the water, defeated. In the end, a text appears, "The slaves will sell their masters and grow wings."

Herzog's film does not compromise. It won the 1988 Bavarian Film Award for Best Production. This is the last collaboration of the eccentric Kinski and Herzog, known for their love-hate relationship. His other films are: *Aguirre, The Wrath of God* (1972), *Nosferatu The Vampire* (1979), *Fitzcarraldo* (1981-82), and *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005).