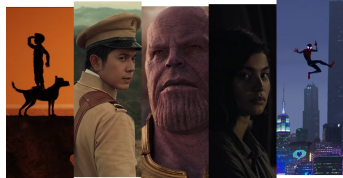

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The 11th Silent Film Festival Is Not Just for Cinema Snobs

After enjoying Filipino indie films, here's what's next.



By **MAAN D'ASIS PAMARAN** | Aug 14, 2017



When we hear “silent film,” we automatically think of Charlie Chaplin—and mostly because Robert Downey Jr. once made a biopic of the mustachioed funnyman who came to represent that early age of moving pictures.

Jay Weissberg, director of the Silent Film Festival in Pordenone, Italy, invites us to think again. “It remains frustrating that more than three decades of cinema are reduced to one figure. No one finds it strange if we read F. Scott Fitzgerald as well as Orhan Pamuk; few think it odd that we can enjoy both Igor Stravinsky and Katy Perry. Yet for reasons I’ve never quite understood, the public gives movies a limited sell-by date before tossing them aside, condescendingly relegating them to the domain of “film buffs.”

Old and new

One of the ways that this form of film is being introduced to Filipino audiences is through the **International Silent Film Festival in Manila (ISFFM)**, which has garnered a growing following since it was first held in 2007 through a partnership between Goethe-Institut Philippinen, the Japan Foundation, Manila and Instituto Cervantes. Now on its 11th year, the first of its kind film festival in Asia will run from **August 31 to September 3**, showcasing nine silent films, a mixture of the classics and modern works, that will be accompanied by live music from local and international artists.

The filmfest will begin with a screening of the 1918 Spanish film *El Golfo* (August 31, 8 p.m.), a love story between a lady of nobility and a former pickpocket whom she has helped send to school. Pinoy world-music rock band Talahib will play in the background using vocals, percussion, and native instruments like the hegalong.

The second day features the UK’s *Underground* (September 1, 7:30 p.m.), A BFI restoration of Anthony Asquith’s subterranean tale of love, jealousy and murder. It looks into the lives of ordinary workaday Londoners in that era set in the 1920s with its double-decker buses, pubs, and public parks as the setting. Music accompaniment is provided by Goodleaf, a Malabon-based indie band that draws from their influences in ambient, trip-hop, post-punk, and vintage dub.

Following *Underground* is France’s *The New Enchantment* or *L’Inhumaine* (September 1, 9:30 p.m.), that tells the story of a love triangle between Lescot, a famous singer who lives in the outskirts of Paris, Djorah de Nopur, a maharaja, and Einar Norsen, a young Swedish scientist. The 1923 classic’s music will be provided by HeloiseLaHarpe, a French-Vietnamese harpist and singer who recently moved to Manila, together with jazz pianist Ryan Villamor and percussionist Aldous Castro.

Italy’s *A Perfect Family* or *Una Familia Perfetta* (September 2, 3 p.m.) by Ruben Maria Soriquez is a modern silent film that documents ten years of the director’s family life, following his son as he grows up, and is shot in six different countries as the family traveled for his work. “I wanted my son to play the role of my son, and so I had to wait for him to first see the light of this world, and then I had to wait for him to be able to act. And while waiting for some years to pass by, I shot family life moments, just like anybody does, but with the aim to use them in this experimental silent film,” Soriquez explains. Instrumental rock band Tom’s Story accompanies the film.

Japan’s *Dragnet Girl* or *Hijosen no Onna* talks about life with the Yakuza in the 1930s. What makes this film even more interesting is that aside from the musical background of the Celso Espejo Rondalla, it will be narrated by Ichiro Kataoka, following the Japanese tradition of having a Katsudo Benshi, or a live narrator that stands by the screen during a live showing.

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quartet merging Pastian Dong and the radioactive Sago Project will provide accompaniment.

The 1927 Austrian film *Café ElektriK* (September 3, 3 p.m.) features silent film goddess Marlene Dietrich, set in the contrast between high society and the criminal world. Music will be provided by Rivermaya.

Great Gatsby fans will enjoy *Pandora's Box* (September 3, 5 p.m.) from Germany, as it looks into the flapper lifestyle of the roaring 20s. Sensationally modern, the film is notable for its lesbian subplot and is one of silent cinema's great masterworks. Sandwich will rock the stage to set the mood.

The filmfest draws to a close with *The General* (September 3, 8 p.m.), which is acknowledged as one of the most revered comedies of the silent era. It tells the story of ill-fated Southern railroad engineer Johnny Gray (Buster Keaton) facing off against Union soldiers during the American Civil War. Background music is by Flippin Soul Stompers, a six-member ensemble with veteran musicians from Pu3ska, Tropical Depression, and Juan Pablo Dream.

Explore more

The Film Development Council of the Philippines is one of the partners of the 11th Silent Film Festival and Chairman Liza Diño says that, as the indie film movement is starting to gain ground in the country, Filipinos can also try out new genres to enjoy. "Film is a marrying of different kinds of artistry, and while at most times, a film is more than the sum of its parts, sometimes the reinvention of its different elements presents a different way of experiencing it. As they are, silent films have a depth that could only be conveyed in its treatment of heightened visuals and movement, but once accompanied with music, it becomes something more evocative."

She also congratulates the ISFFM on its 11th year. "As a developmental agency, FDCP recognizes the importance of silent films in the tapestry of our cinematic culture and history and making it accessible to the Filipino audience."

The film fest is project partnership between Instituto Cervantes de Manila, Japan Foundation Manila, Goethe-Institut Philippinen, Philippine Italian Association, Film Development Council of the Philippines, Embassy of France, Embassy of Austria, British Council, Embassy of the USA, Edsa Shangri-La Plaza and Para Sa Sining. Entrance tickets at the Shangri-La Plaza Cineplex are for free and on a first-come-first-served basis.

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