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Good Music and Silent Cinema

The much-anticipated International Silent Film Festival Manila (ISFFM) returns

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Published August 27, 2017, 12:05 AM

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Images by Noel Pabalate

Silent films are beautiful in their unique way—the absence of dialogue, the strong visuals, and the faux-nostalgic feel. In its heyday, silent films were accompanied by musicians and bands while they played on screen. Live scoring became a phenomenon during the early stages of cinema. Today, that practice belongs to cultural and artistic vaults and museums. It's reduced to a mere cult of the past. This phenomenon can never be replicated but we can always try to revive it and never let it die. That is the purpose of the International Silent Film Festival (ISFF).



From left: Mark Escueta, Mike Elgar, Nathan Azarcon, and Ryan Peralta



Established in 2007 as the very first event of its kind in Asia, ISFF-Manila or ISFFM brings screen junkies and music geeks together inside the theater for an extraordinary experience.

This year, the Philippine-Italian Association, the Japan Foundation Manila, Goethe-Institut Philippinen, the Film Development Council of the Philippines, Instituto Cervantes, the British Council, and the embassies of the United States of America, France, and Austria, are extremely proud to present the 11th edition of the International Silent Film Festival in Manila. The 2017 ISFFM brings together the very best of silent cinema from its nine member-countries, to be accompanied by the best Filipino musicians on the scene and a French-Vietnamese guest artist.

The Festival opens on Thursday, Aug. 31 with Instituto Cervantes presenting the classic action and comedy *El Golfo* (1918), directed by José de Togores. Starring Irene Heredia, Mariano Ozores, and Ernesto Vilches, the film tells the story of Enrique Villar, a tramp, who goes through much trouble to win the heart of his lady love. The rock band Talahib will accompany this film with a live performance.

One of the highlights of this year's festival, a must-watch, is *Pandora's Box* (1929). Based on the controversial plays of Frank Wedekind, the film features the dazzling Louise Brooks in her classic bobbed hairstyle as Lulu. The silent film will be accompanied by the popular band Sandwich, led by local rock icon Raimund Marasigan.

"*Pandora's Box* is easily one of the top 10 German films in the silent era, along with *Nosferatu*, *Metropolis*, and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*," says Shadin Kitma, program coordinator of Goethe.

Also part of the festival is the illustrious band Rivermaya. They will be scoring Gustav Ucicky's *Café Elektric* (1927). It's exciting to see one of the best films in Austrian cinema and one of the best Philippine bands in one medium.

"It tells a love story involving four people, like Filipino telenovelas," said Zelpha Bombais, a representative from 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."

Personally, I am looking forward to the screening of *The General* (1926), which was co-directed by Clyde Bruckman and Buster Keaton. It's not only because it's a classic American film but because it will be accompanied by a very special band, the Filipino exponents of Motown, stax, funk, blues, and soul—the Flippin Soul Stompers. Although it will be a challenge for them to score a film that was made in an era predating their style of music and sound, the band's vocalist, Bing Austria, promises to electrify the crowd by complementing the film well.

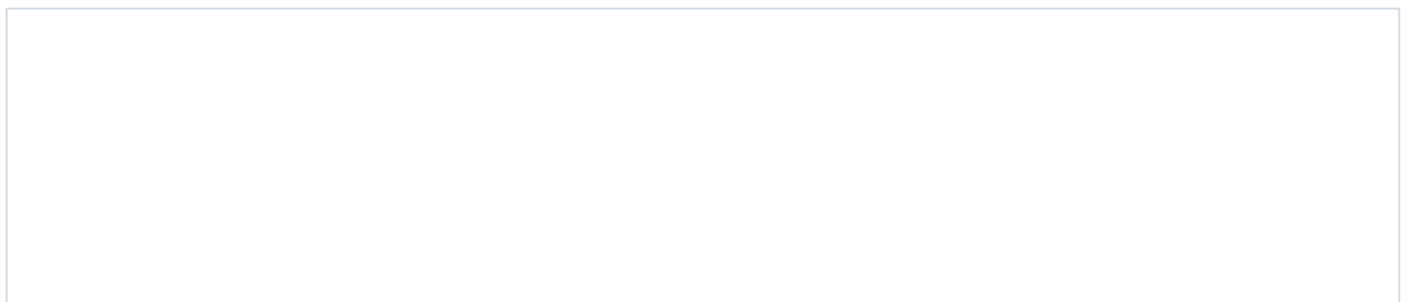
Other films in the lineup are United Kingdom's *Underground* (1928), directed by Anthony Asquith, accompanied by Goodleaf; France's *The New Enchantment* (1923), directed by Marcel L'Herbier, accompanied by French-Vietnamese harpist and singer Heloise La Harpe; Italy's *A Perfect Family* (2017), directed by Ruben Maria Soriquez, accompanied by rising indie math rock band Tom's Story; Japan's *Dragnet Girl* (1933), directed by Yasujiro Ozu, accompanied by the iconic silent film narrator Ichiro Kataoka and the Celso Espejo Rondalla; and our very own *Taglish* (2012), directed by Gym Lumbera, accompanied by the comic instrumental stoner-metal quartet Kapitan Kulam.

This year's lineup is immensely promising. And the best thing about this festival is it's always free!

The Silent Film Festival will run from Aug. 31 until Sept. 3 at the Shang Cineplex, Shangri-La Plaza; www.fdcph.com; Facebook/InternationalSilentFilmFestivalManila

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