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# Going back in time with the Int'l Silent Film fest

August 27, 2019 | 12:05 am



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*NATIVE LIFE IN THE PHILIPPINES* will open the 13<sup>th</sup> International Silent Film Festival.

By **Susan Claire Agbayani**

UNLIKE PREVIOUS years when the Philippines' contribution to the International Silent Film Festival (ISFF) were experimental films, this year it will be a 37-minute documentary filmed in 1913 on the Cordilleran Kalinga tribe titled *Native Life in the Philippines*. It will open the 13<sup>th</sup> ISFF at SM Aura in Taguig on Aug. 30.

The documentary, which had been shown around the world, was directed by the controversial Dean C. Worcester, an American zoologist and photographer who was also a member of the Philippine Commission. His ethnographic photographs helped shape public opinion in the United States for American colonization.

Film scholar and archivist Teddy Co, chair of the film commission of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) selected the documentary for presentation at this year's ISFF.

As usual during the ISFF, the films will be accompanied by live music, and for *Native Life in the Philippines*, the Munimuni band was chosen to do the live score.

“We’ve always had a heart to see different art forms coming together; this time, film and music. We’re a Filipino band (that plays) Filipino songs with Filipino lyrics. We’re excited to see how it comes together: the montage of the different tribal practices, then our music. Our goal is to complement the message of the film, and highlight Filipino culture through it,” said Munimuni’s guitarist/vocalist TJ de Ocampo at a press conference on the ISFF at the Samsung Hall of SM Aura.

Representatives of the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) this year took up on the suggestion to have Munimuni do the live score. “We wanted to introduce something new. We checked Munimuni’s Spotify and YouTube accounts, and their recent ‘*Kulayan Natin*’ music video. The montage part of it is similar to what we wanted to have in our entry this year,” said Jo Andrew Torlao, Festivals Coordinator of FDCP.

At 1 p.m. on Aug. 31, Professor Nick Deocampo of the University of the Philippines will give a lecture on “The Beginnings of Cinema in Asia.” According to the festival’s program, “This lecture on early cinema unpacks the nature of the first motion pictures that reached the region, the cinematic practices that accompanied their arrival, and the reception that greeted their public exhibition. Giving emphasis on the Philippines, discussion will cover how film interacted with the Spanish and American colonial cultures that allowed cinema to become ‘native.’ Recalling how cinema first started opens an opportunity to revisit one of cinema’s most forgotten chapters.”

### **LOST AND FOUND GERMAN FILM**

The German film *Von Morgen Bis Mitternachts* (*From Morn to Midnight*, 1921) by Karlheinz Martin, which was “considered lost in the 1920s, found in 1959 (at the Tokyo National Film Center), and played again in 1963,” will be screened at 4 p.m. on Sept. 1. “This is the most radically expressionist film of the 1920s – at least – the one with an existing

copy. It is the only film I think that we're showing that was preserved in Japan," said Goethe-Institut Philippinen's Program Coordinator Shadin Kitma.

New musical ensemble Anima Tierra will play the live score for the film. "We chose this group because they're not set, as compared to a four-piece band where there's a guitar, bass, drum set. They're more free in their selection of instruments – which is more varied – and which I think would reflect an expressionist film more," said Mr. Kitma.

"We have been performing all over the world, representing Filipino indigenous music and contemporary music around the world. We have to look back to where we're coming from, and for that, we'd been able to bring out elements from different cultures of the world – especially that which bring out the fire and the spirit – in each of the music and we incorporated that in our scoring of the film," said ensemble leader Tapati.

## **NEWLY RESTORED ITALIAN FILM**

"This year, we'll continue on the road we took together with the Cinematheque of Bologna, who is providing us with a beautiful film, Augusto Genia's *L'Onesta del Peccato* (*The Wife He Neglected*, 1918) restored last year or two years ago. We will have an Italian musician, Step&No, who will lead the ensemble The Pocket Orchestra," said Fil-Italian Association's general manager Alessandro Milani. The film will be screened at 8:30 p.m. on Aug. 31.

Stefan&No said that it was fairly easy for him to work on the score because "the film is Italian, and I'm Italian." He noted that "we share a fascination for drama... with Filipino musicians."

## **JAPANESE DRAMA**

While *Orizuru Osen* director Kenji Mizoguchi is well known, unfortunately, "many of his films are not available now, especially for the silent ones," said Japan Foundation Manila (JFM) Director Hiroaki Uesugi.

"We wanted to have a different sound; and at the same time, we wanted to explore talents from the region. We wanted to give

opportunities for regional artists to be presented as well in Manila-centered events or activities,” said JFM’s Roland Samson.

Live scoring *Orizuru Osen (The Downfall of Osen, 1935)* is Mindanao-based band Kaduma ni Karol (“companion of Carol” in Higaonon), a group headed by former Pinikpikan vocalist Carol, “the chant queen.” It will be screened at 3 pm. on Aug. 31.

## SPANISH FILM

Although Diego Mapa and Jay Gapasin have performed at the ISFF previously with other bands (Pedicab, Kapitan Kulam, and the Radioactive Sago Project), this is the first time they’re performing as Tarsius, “an electronic band with live instrumentation,” said Mr. Mapa during the press conference.

They are scoring Carlos Fernandez Cuenca’s *Es Mi Hombre (He’s My Man, 1927)*, which will be screened at 5:30 p.m. on Aug. 31.

Instituto Cervantes’ Jose Fons said during the press conference that Tarsius has performed at the Spanish cultural center’s events and in Spain as well.

“I hope people would look forward to our curation of music for this film. It will definitely not be taken from modern top 40s or anything familiar, but from well-selected tracks. Hopefully educational, but true to the film experience of different genres. We wanted to be more true to the emotions of the film; and not go overboard. We wanted to do something different compared to what we’ve done before with our other respective bands,” Mr. Mapa said.

## THE CLOSING FILM

The movies that have been preserved so far in Austria’s film archive “haven’t been welcoming to all types of audiences,” noted Zeh Bombais, Press and Cultural Attache of the Austrian Embassy. “We’ve always shown more serious films for ‘mature audiences.’” So this year, they wanted to give the ISFF viewers “a family friendly and bonding experience,” where one can bring younger siblings and even parents to watch.

“We really wanted to bring the two eras together: the silent film and contemporary Filipino musicians. Our film, Hans Berger and Ladislaus Tuszynski’s *Kalif Storch* (1924) is set in Baghdad, with the same time, same setting as *Aladdin*, and with glamorous costumes and extravagant setup. We close the ISFF on Sept. 1, 7:30 p.m. with the story of magic, romance and comedy. It’s only fitting to have a band that could match that quirkiness and extravagance in their performance. That’s exactly how we think we see the music of Tanya Markova,” she said.

“We give the artists the liberty to interpret the film how they see fit. We’re open to the films being explored in various different ways that maybe has not been explored in Austria yet. And that’s the beauty of the film played in Manila.”

Tanya Markova, which is known for its references to pop culture and folklore, is a very “visual” band known for gimmicks like putting on makeup and wearing costumes while performing – often eclipsing their “sonic capabilities” – admitted band member John Paul “Japo” Anareta. But this silent film fest will finally showcase their abilities in this department.

“We’re going to add depth and some color to the black and white film. People can expect a lot of improve and surprising stuff,” Mr. Anareta said.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Silent Film Festival runs from Aug. 30 to Sept. 1. Admission is free, on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, check their Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2248725038558888/>