

# KOMEDI

A **komedi** is a film that aims to make people laugh. In the komedi film, characters are placed in a series of ludicrous situations to incite laughter from the viewers.

There are two types of komedi: the **romantic** and the **slapstick**.

The romantic komedi is a love story, with its complement of humor, music, and songs. Its plot usually consists of a series of amorous situations focusing on mistaken identity, chance encounters, and use of disguises.

The romantic comedy tradition in Filipino cinema is traced to Vicente Salumbides' first silent film, *Miracles of Love*, 1925. The hero, a young doctor, falls in love with the picture of a coed on a magazine cover. He seeks her out at her family home and is mistaken for a domestic servant applying for a job. After a series of funny incidents, the doctor and coed fall in love and elope, bringing the entire household after them on a merry chase before they finally wind up before a justice of the peace to get married. Another silent film in this genre is *Tatlong Hambug* (Three Braggarts), 1926. Three men courting the same girl show up for a date. One arrives in his flashy car, another shows up in a *calesa* (horse-drawn carriage), and the third one makes his appearance astride a carabao. In the end, the girl chooses the farm boy, showing the period's preference for country life. The couple later indulge in the "first kiss" in Philippine movies.

Other examples of the romantic comedy are: the Carmen Rosales-Oscar Moreno tandem in *Si, Si Señor-ito* (Yes, Yes, My Lord), 1947; the Pancho Magalona-Tita Duran comedy, *Buhay Pilipino* (That's Filipino Life), 1952; the Nida Blanca-Nestor de Villa starrers,

*Waray-Waray*, 1954, and *Handang Matodas* (Ready to Die), 1956; and the Gloria Romero-Luis Gonzales romantic comedies, *Despatsadora* (Saleslady), 1955, and *Vacacionista* (The Tourist), 1956.

The earliest recorded Filipino slapstick comedy was *Enchong, Ang Medicong Laway* (Enchong, The Spit Doctor), 1915. Both a comedy and a commentary on the medical profession, it reflected the superstitions of rural folk, who have more faith in quack doctors than in men of science.

In the slapstick comedy film, one source of laughter is a psychological or physical defect. Susan Roces is an incurable chatterbox in *Susanang Daldal* (Talkative Susan), 1962. Matutina of the *John En Marsha* (John and Marsha) series has a shrill, high-pitched voice. More often the defect is physical, as in the case of the toothless Chichay or Rene Requiestas, the cross-eyed Pablo Virtuoso, the big-mouthed Carding of the Reycards, the bag-eyed Doro de los Ojos, the toothpick-thin Palito, the dour-faced Billy "Surot" Vizcarra, the bald Pugo and Togo, or the "fat-and-thin" Bayani and Soto. In *Tansan versus Tarzan*, 1961, Dolphy, pitted against Vic Vargas, is pitifully asthmatic.

The source of laughter in slapstick comedy can also come from uncouth manners and boorish behaviour of well-meaning characters. Efren Reyes' unwillingness to take a bath makes him the laughing-stock of society in *Pedro Penduko*, 1954.

In another form of slapstick comedy, the characters featured are considered an "abnormal" object of fun because they go against the predominant views of society. Dolphy in *Jack en Jill* (Jack and Jill), 1952, Roderick Paulate in *Kumander Gringa* (Commander Gringa), 1987, and Joey de Leon in *Barbie*, 1989, portray homosexual or effeminate characters.

Still another form of slapstick derives from toilet humor, as seen in some films of Tito, Vic and Joey, including *The Long Ranger*, 1989, with Rene Requiestas, where the characters make fun of excretory functions.

Manuel Conde's witty portrayal of the bumbling, stumbling, simple-minded folk hero, Juan Tamad, in the *Juan Tamad* series elevated slapstick comedy to the level of social satire. His son, Jun Urbano, later picked up from where his father left off, with his own *Mongolian Barbecue*, 1991. Another film in this genre which was popular in the early 1950s was *Kuwentong Kutsero* (The Rig Driver's Tale).

Some of the early bodabil stage artists rose to fame as masters of slapstick in the Filipino comedy film. Even before the Pacific War, comedians Pugo and Togo already starred in their own film, *Ang Utos ng Hari Hindi Mababale* (A King's Command Is Final),

1941. The postwar period saw Lopito becoming a full star in *Kenkoy*, 1950, while Tolindoy and Chichay came into their own as *Gorio at Tekla* (Gorio and Tekla), 1953. Other comedians did not have star-billing status but their unforgettable performances have lived on in their films. Gregorio Ticman was outstanding as the *sabungero* (cockfight aficionado) in *Texas, Ang Manok na Nagsasalita*, 1952, who gambled away his wife and children's future and later became the picture of contrition, and as the tough military sergeant who made a man out of Fred Montilla in *Bondying*, 1954.

The influence of foreign films on local comedy pictures cannot be discounted. Canuplin was the local version of Hollywood's Charlie Chaplin in the early 1930s, while Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello have spawned a number of fat-and-thin comedy duos from Bayani and Soto, Pugo and Togo, Pugak and Tugak, to Dolphy and Panchito. The Lone Ranger and his sidekick, Tonto, or Tarzan and his chimpanzee, Cheetah, have found their counterparts in Joey de Leon and Rene Requiestas or the Reycards Duet. The Three Stooges inspired the comedy trio of Tito, Vic, and Joey who made a number of films before Tito Sotto broke away from the team to enter politics. Among their films are *Give Me Five*, 1985; *Horsey-Horsey*, 1985; *Send in the Clowns*, 1986; and *Shoot That Ball*, 1987. • J. David and L. Pareja. With notes from P. de Castro III, B. Lumbera, N. G. Tiongson



**RIB-TICKLERS.** Ageless comedian Chichay teams up with funnyman Tolindoy to bring to the screen Mars Ravelo's comical duo in the Sampagulta movie, *Gorio at Tekla*, 1953. (Cesar Hemando Collection)