



Talk has been current, but not ardent enough, about the recent conclusion of a second Golden Age in Philippine cinema. Of

course, the notion of a Golden Age has its share of reputable disputants. No less than Eddie Romero, who surged forward at the start of what may be considered our filmic Golden Age, alluded to ancient Greece in claiming that no such period of clear and concentrated artistic achievement could be reasonably circumscribed anywhere.

On the other hand lies a just-as-ancient necessity in defining parameters for purposes of easier classification and, more important, to enable modern-day observers to draw significant lessons therefrom. Presuming that Golden Ages do exist, no other period becomes more needful in finding out how and why they do than that immediately following the conclusion of such a one.

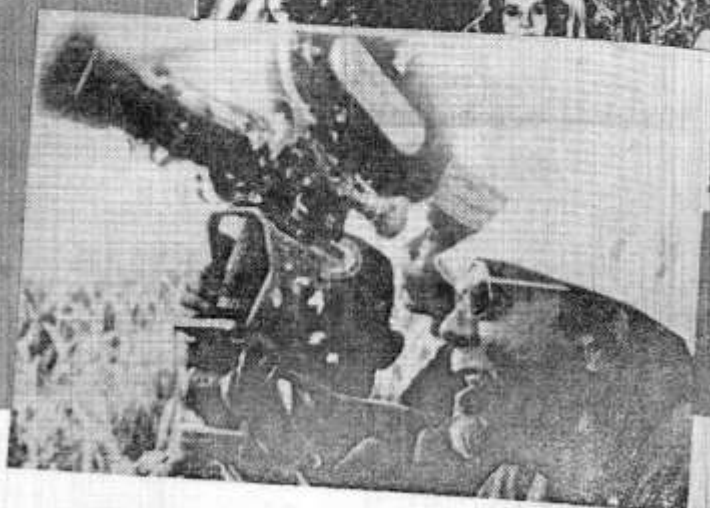
More to the point of Romero's argument, however, would be the obvious difficulty in pinpointing specific periods of artistic productivity. The flowering of Athenian culture could be studied intensively within the context of entire centuries of ancient Greek life; true, certain important artists and philosophers were contemporaries of one another — but this was more of the exception, the rule being one major practitioner being followed, chronologically speaking, by another who would either begin in then break off from the elder's school or tradition, or venture completely on his own in a new, unpredictable direction.

The soundness of Romero's assertion actually de-

rives from the fail-safe construction of his logic. Nothing in human history can ever compare to the Greek's cultural exploits — and so, if we grant that they never had a Golden Age, then there never could have been any such thing since.

Rather than despair over our modern-day limitations in the face of such insurmountable criteria of excellence, I believe we could do well enough in assessing ourselves for more sober, though perhaps less immortalizing, reasons. By this account, a Golden Age need not be a wholly intensive and sustained national outbreak of cultural creativity. A limited period in a specific field, defined according to the concentration of output relative to periods preceding and succeeding it, should prove adequate for the moment.

Eddie Romero

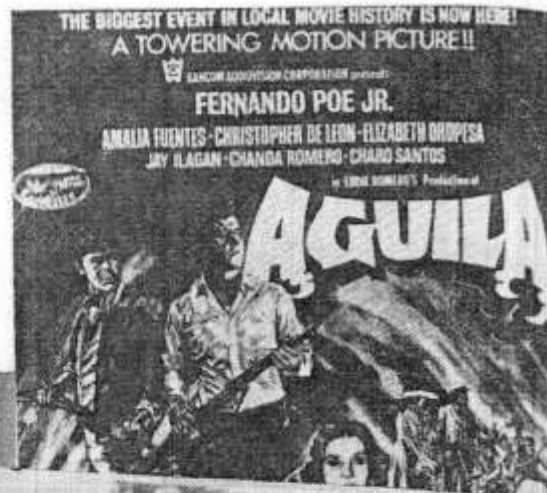


A SECOND GOLDEN AGE

By Joel David

GOLDEN AGE I

The first Golden Age in Philippine cinema has had slightly varied reckonings of its exact duration. All, however, agree to the inclusion of the entire decade of the 1950s. The most important feature of this period is the relative political stability brought about by post-war reconstruction and



the aggressive suppression of the Communist insurgency, paralleled in film by the stabilization of the studio system.

That this phase ever came to a close indicates the short-sightedness of the solutions being applied. Reconstruction commits itself only to the attainment of a previous level of accomplishment (in this case the pre-war situation), while insurgency addresses itself to the overthrow of a government on the basis of a problem – agrarian reform – more persistent than its leaders' understandable aspirations to political power.

The movie industry's studio system, in seeking to institutionalize professionalism and (incidentally?) control the means of distribution, overlooked the natural inclination of talents, including stars, to seek more abundant means of remuneration outside the system if necessary, as well as the willingness of independent production outfits to forsake the studios' long-term advantages and meet the demands of talents in return for faster and more immediate profits.

Hence the interval between the first and the second Golden Ages saw the rise of the independents and the superstars, backgrounded by the revitalization of the peasant-based insurgency and an engineered economic instability that paved the way for the imposition and eventual acceptance of fascist rule.

A NEAR-GOLDEN AGE

The declaration of martial law in 1972 promoted hopes for an end to the country's political and economic difficulties. It also may have forestalled a creative resurgence in local movie-

making brought about by a subsequently admitted social experiment by the censors chief and presidential adviser Guillermo de Vega, who was later assassinated under mysterious circumstances.

A casual review of the products of the pre-martial law '70s reveals what we might have been headed for: socially conscious and psychologically frank products without a compulsion to alienate the vast majority of movie-goers, even in the most artistic instances. Apparently neutral or antipathetic products actually allowed for a lot of leeway in the selection of material and permutations of form and expression. Most significant was the proliferation of "bomba" or hard-core sex films, the direct result of De Vega's extreme libertarianism; but just as important were the counter-reactions, the musicals and love triangles, that provided relief in opposing formats, even for serious practitioners. Moreover, regional (Cebuano-language) cinema had mellowed at the latter portion of a wondrously long curve, providing assurances of alternatives for Manila-based practitioners (which included Emmanuel H. Borlaza and Leroy Salvador), as well as an



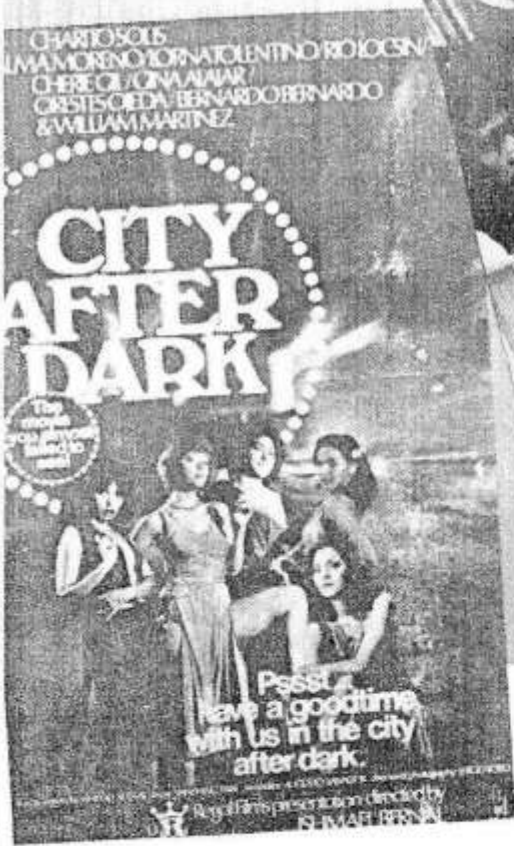
additional stable for the recruitment of onscreen talents, notably the Amado Cortez-Gloria Sevilla and Eddie Mesa-Rosemarie Gil clans.

Ishmael Bernal came up with the last major black-and-white Filipino film and the most important debut of his generation with *Pagdating Sa Dulo*. Lino Brocka, who was to share with Bernal the rivalry for artistic supremacy in the Golden Age that was to come, rebounded quickly with a pair of highly inspired komiks-adapted titles for his studio base, Lea Productions, namely *Stardoom* and *Tubog Sa Ginto* plus an otherwise effective Fernando Poe Jr.





Lino Brocka



Ishmael Bernal

Nympha, he exhibited a fascination for unconventional visual values and thematic, daring properties that were to serve him well during the latter part of the decade.

Other names associated with academe- and theater-based artist circles made their mark with relatively serious attempts, including Elwood Perez with *Blue Boy* and Nestor U. Torre with *Crush Ko Si Sir*. Perhaps more significantly, a number of scriptwriters who were to figure prominently during the forthcoming Golden Age also first figured here, with either solo or shared credits: Torre with his debut film, Bernal with Luis Enriquez's *Ah Ewan! Basta Sa Maynila Pa Rin Ako!* and Orlando Nadres with Tony Cayado's *Happy Hippy Holiday*. Brocka, after writing for Luciano B. Carlos' *Arizona Kid*, provided breaks for several scriptwriting aspirants, among them Nadres with *Stardoom*, Mario O'Hara with *Lumuha Pati Mga Anghel* and Alfred Yuson with *Cherry Blossoms*.

Right after Marcos' martial rule clampdown, and in a sense a consequence of the aforementioned near-anarchic (and therefore pro-creative) bent, came names like Peque Gallaga and Butch Perez with *Binhi*, Romy Suzara with *Tatlong Mukha Ni Rosa Vilma*, Jun Raquiza with *Dalawang Mukha Ng Tagumpay* and George Rowe with *Paru-Parong Ilim*, Nora Aunor's first production, serious film and (it wasn't to be the last such combination) box-office flop. Rolando Tinio wrote for Bernal's *Now and Forever* and Ricardo Lee, using the pseudonym R.H. Laurel, for the late Armando Garces' *Dragnet*.

epic, *Santiago*. This era, rather than the mid-'70s as commonly supposed, also signalled the maturation of Celso Ad. Castillo. In another Poe-starrer, *Asedillo*, as well as a horrific bomba entry,

success of *Tinimbang*, and a whole new breed of filmmakers came to the fore; in chronological order: Lupita Concio (later Kashiwahara) with *Alkitrang Dugo*, Eduardo Palmos co-directing *Saan Ka Pupunta, Miss Lutgarda Nicolas?*, Behn Cervantes' 1986's first with *Sakada*, O'Hara with *Mortal*, Dindo Angeles with *Sintal Ang Bituing Bagong Gising*, Gil Portes with *Tiket Mama, Tiket Ale, Sa Linggo Ang Bola*, and Mike de Leon with *Itim*.

And these were just the ones who either began big or had major follow-up projects. A cursory look at the 1976 Filipino filmography would reveal a handful of other new names which would probably be of interest to those determined to delve deeper into the dynamics of the period. Again, however, the writers ought to sustain more productive study than the also-rans: Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. was responsible for the adaptation of *Maynila* from the novel by Edgardo Reyes, who himself was to cross over presently into the medium with Bernal's *Ligaw Na Bulaklak*. Preceding them were newsmen Antonio Mortel and Diego Cagahastian, who co-wrote *Mister Mo, Lover Boy Ko*, and fictionists Alberto Florentino and Wilfredo Nollado. Mauro Gia. Samonte was to write for Castillo's *Tagulan Sa Tag-araw*, Jorge Arago for Bernal's *Nunal Sa Tubig*, and Marina Feleo-Gonzalez for Kashiwahara's *Minsa'y Isang Gamu-Gamu*. Lamberto Antonio collaborated with O'Hara on Brocka's *Insiang*, Roy Iglesias with Eddie Romero on the latter's *Ganito Kami Noon...Paano Kayo Ngayon?* and Gil Quito with Del Mundo (and Ricardo

Lee without credit) on Mike de Leon's *Itim*.

Sakada would have been the military establishment's typical target for repression, but it unfortunately enjoyed the endorsement of De Vega; Danilo Cabreira's *Uhaw Na Bulaklak Part II* served the purpose even better, deflecting as it did potentially confrontational politics toward the issue of moral rectitude; curiously again, both titles had new writers—Lualhati Cruz (later Bautista) and Oscar Miranda for the former, Franklin Cabaluna for the latter.

GUIDEPOSTS FOR THE TIMES

Three developments, all of the same kind, served to temper the disheartening reality of the military's assumption of local film censorship. The fact that the reconstituted body announced itself as "interim" in nature, implying an eventual return to civilian rule, was belied by even its initial action of enforcing stricter measures to the point of requiring the approval of storylines and screenplays and imposing a code that seemed deliberately directed against the output of serious practitioners. An entire catalogue of anecdotes, sometimes humorous and often infuriating, comprised primarily of dialogue between military censors and intelligent film practitioners, awaits documentation and will definitely help in particularizing the naivete and arrogance of Filipinos suddenly imbued with power and influence.

The above-mentioned developments actually consist of the introduction of award-giving mechanisms by three sectors who were to make bids of varying de-

gree of urgency on mass media in general, and film in particular: the Catholic Church, government and intelligentsia.

The Catholic sector, in reviving its Citizens' Award for Television, expanded it to encompass locally existent media of communication. Significantly, the first Catholic Mass Media Awardee for film was *Nunal Sa Tubig*, which has seen rough sailing with the censors.

The government, for its part, centralized all the annual city festivals in the newly organized metropolitan area in one major undertaking held during the lucrative spell between Christmas and New Year. The first few editions were either idealistic or disorganized or both, so that sensible film producers tended toward a policy of reserving prestige productions for this season. Despite occasional protestations from the bloc of foreign-film distributors and an ill-advised attempt to require developmental messages during the late '70s, the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) has endured as the government's singular contribution to the pursuit of quality in local cinema, its awards being coveted not so much for the prestige they bestow as for the free and favorable publicity they afford otherwise commercially imperiled releases.

The third, and for our purposes the most important, film awards for this period consist of those handed out by the reviewers' circle, the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP), organized in 1976 in time for the first flowering of the second Golden Age. The Urian awards, as these were called, served to recall and amplify the impact of the first MMFF in its echoing of the lat-

ter's best-picture choice, *Ganito Kami Noon*. In fact the FAMAS, so as not to be left too far behind, selected another MMFF entry, *Minsa'y Isang Gamu-Gamu*, for its top-prize winner and observed the Urian's dark-horse selection of Nora Aunor as the year's best actress for her performance in her latest flop-production, O'Hara's *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos*.

The Urian remained the most serious award-giving body for the most part of its first decade of existence, employing a system of viewing assignments, repeated screenings and exhaustive deliberations that would have proved perfect had it been implemented conscientiously and consistently. Whatever the turnout of the MPP's choices for any given year, the fact remains that its nominations were generally reliable re-

flections of the industry's achievements in the medium, and thereby serve as better indicators on the state of the art than the awards themselves.

This point was to be driven home as early as the next year of its existence. Where the MMFF actually defied the cultural establishment, which responded by withdrawing the prizes it handed out to Castillo's *Burlesk Queen*, the Urian responded against the film as a representation of the MMFF's process, selecting an academically defensible but less artistically vital entry as its year's winner, and coming around to the *Burlesk Queen* filmmaker by awarding his next-year entry, which like the previous year's winner was period and epic in scope. Such subjectivity of vision, coupled by a preference for under-

dog nominees, prompted Brocka, the fourth best-director awardee, to castigate the group and reject its future commendations.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the MPP's process right up to the deliberations of prizewinners was refined enough to ensure the accommodation of major accomplishments by the reasonably highest possible standards of filmic evaluation.

FOUR PEAKS

By this account it becomes evident that the performance output of the local film industry's best and brightest tended to observe peaks and valleys, instead of a consistent (and therefore easily predictable) plateau or slope. The first was of course the already described beginning, that yielded *Maynila* on one end and *Ganito Kami Noon* on the other. The second was a good four years after, when the highest artistic point of the Golden Age and, by reasonable extension, of Philippine cinema thus far, was attained with Bernal's *Manila By Night*. Afterward, major-status entries on the order of Bernal's innovations with filmic milieux ar-



Award-giving mechanisms: the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF), above, and the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP), left.

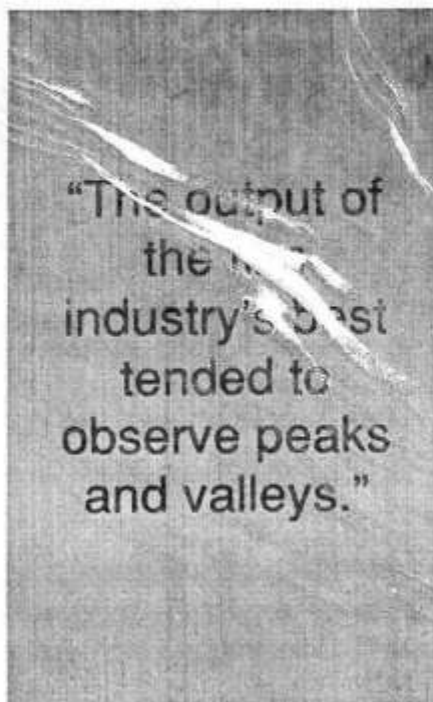


ried with regular frequency, with Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* two years later; Brocka's *Miguelito: Ang Batang Rebelde* still another three years after would close the era, curiously with the same director who helped open it.

This regularity of productivity was in fact cut short by the 1986 revolution, in much the same way that Proclamation 1081 ended the early '70s' creative outbursts. Socio-political upheavals may be the most obvious, but definitely not the only, similarities between the periods in question. Prior to 1986, as before 1972, an era of moral permissiveness held sway in cinema. Immediately after the upheavals, audiences tended to shy away from movie-going and had to be lured back with blatantly commercial products that all but outlawed conscious attempts at artistry.

The second Golden Age in this regard was distinguished by some of the riskiest filmmaking projects in local history: during the turn of the decade one project after another vied in laying claim to being the most expensive Filipino production ever, with audiences seemingly willing to reward these efforts if only for the sheer audacity of the claims.

Each artistic peak mentioned, in fact, also had clusters of other big-budget, even period productions attending it. *Maynila* was period by necessity, since early martial rule forbade derogatory references to the Marcos regime; *Ganito Kami Noon* combined an intellectual concern — the origin of "Filipino" as a historical designation — with the period of its metamorphoses, the transition from Spanish to American colonial rule. Romero was to further flesh out his pursuit of the



identity of the Filipino with three other big-budget and period titles: *Aguila*, which covered the current century; *Kamakalawa*, which was situated during the pre-Spanish mythological era; and *Hari Sa Hari, Lahi Sa Lahi*, which came after the Golden Age and was set also during the pre-Spanish era of regional trade relations. None of these other movies attained the balance between technical competence (*Aguila* would have been the closest) and storytelling superiority (*Kamakalawa* excelled only in this aspect) manifested by *Ganito Kami Noon*, and meanwhile Romero, who was a generation removed from Brocka and Bernal, was exceeded in medium-based modernization by the practitioners who were to follow.

Brocka, for his part, responded to international exposure with a deliberate and sometimes disconcerting minimalization of his filmic abilities. *Insiang*,

Jaguar, *Angela Markado*, *Bona*, *Px*, *Cain at Abel*, and *Bayan Ko (Kapit Sa Patalim)* (in order of release) all may have followed *Maynila* chronologically, but actually antedate it in terms of the filmmaker's capability of matching sweeping special concerns with an appropriately expansive vision. Aside from this, their distinction of having had international exposure in various festival venues here and abroad could perhaps only develop a case for Brocka as an auteur in the non-conventional sense of the word, where one work will have to be viewed in relation to all the rest before it could be appreciated. *Miguelito*, on the other hand, as a vastly improved reworking of *Tinimbang Ka*, is a contemporary but still-critical view of the body politic with its social and, more important, dramatic distentions intact, rather than deflated into microcosmic proportions as Brocka had been wont to do in the case of the other films.

Bernal benefited the most from the effervescence of this period, mapping out a strategy that may have seemed erratic during the time but which denotes in retrospect the most impressive directorial figuring out and working over of the medium since Gerardo De Leon adopted the principles of deep-focus realism. Like De Leon, Bernal proceeded to adopt a foreign trend, this time the then-emergent character-based multi-narrative process, first experimenting with limited success in *Nunal Sa Tubig* then introducing commercial elements on a more modest scale in *Aliw*. The greater profitability of the latter, in terms of both audience and critical reception this time, most likely emboldened him

sufficiently enough to return to large-scale businesses in *Manila By Night*, which in turn may have overstretched his technological capabilities somewhat but also served to accommodate his contributions to an international filmmaking mode in a way that De Leon never managed to.

Manila By Night in effect proved that a personalized and multi-stylized approach to this manner of presentation of material was possible, and that the filmmaker could choose to oppose the expectation of a final and logical conclusion and still justify an open-endedness in terms of his material. After such an accomplishment, a more conventionalized orientation overtook Bernal — one that drew from domestic dramas and comedies prior to *Manila By Night*, the most memorable being *Ikaw Ay Akin*. His only other epic-scale project since *Himala* recalled *Nunal Sa Tubig* in its choice of material (the eternal countryside, as contrasted with the contemporary big city in all of his other films), but the treatment this time was classically tragic rather than milieu-oriented. Bernal's other multi-character projects fared even less triumphantly, among them *Ito Ba Ang Ating Mga Anak?*, *Working Girls* and *The Graduates*. A *Working Girls* sequel released after the Golden Age, so dismayed everyone involved that Bernal has since tended to inhibit himself from such ventures, concentrating instead on small-scale projects where he had considerable success right after *Manila By Night*, *Relasyon*, *Broken Marriage*, and *Hinugot sa Langit*, among others.



Ricky Lee and Pete Lacaba

Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr.



NEW GENERATION

Expediently for Brocka and Bernal, as well as Romero and, in a sense, Castillo before them, the second Golden Age lent an aura of legitimacy to the infusion of new blood in the system. Early on, Mike de Leon and O'Hara persisted with always prestigious and occasionally remunerative projects; with the arrival of the '80s, the splashy debuts of women directors Marilou Diaz-Abaya and Laurice Guillen recalled the heyday of Kashiwahara, then already inactive.

It was Peque Gallaga, however, who demonstrated that even newcomers could buck the system and turn it to their advantage: first he won the scriptwriting contest of the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP) for the storyline proposal of *Oro, Plata, Mata*, then acquired the right to direct it, and saw it right through copping a special jury prize from the Manila International Film Festival as well as major Urian awards, including

best film. Curiously, however, succeeding aspirants could not duplicate Gallaga's procedure; the closest anyone came to it was in using the ECP venue, the Manila Film Center, as Tikoy Aguiluz did for *Boatman*, rather than directing ECP productions, as Pi de Castro III and Abbo Q. de la Cruz did for *Soltero* and *Misiteryo Sa Tuwa* respectively. In this instance the dynamics of governmental support for the industry supplied the causative factors, and a thorough investigation of the matter would yield invaluable lessons for the future.

Before Gallaga's virtuos



Laurice Guillen

one-man coup, the female directors managed to call attention to themselves as viable entities, but how much of the appreciation was prepared by feminist sentiments still has to be qualified. Guillen has a modest and well-appreciated hit with her first film *Kasal?*, then went on to a more notable achievement with *Salome*, which won the Urian best film prize. Diaz-Abaya, on the other hand,

and followed up in an even bigger way with *Salome*. His association with Bernal cemented as consultant for *Manila By Night* and writer for *Relasyon* and *Himala*, he proceeded to devise a female-humanist (typically mistaken for feminist) milieu movie, *Moral*, which Diaz-Abaya directed. *Moral* stands as the only other Golden Age product clearly in the same league as *Manila By Night*; the only other closest sharers of this category would be *Miguelito* and, from the first Golden Age, Gregorio Fernandez's *Malvarosa* – both of which suffer inadequacies that disallow declarations of supreme masterliness. Thereafter, Lee's collaborations with Diaz-Abaya would result in relatively less satisfactory products, particularly *Karnal* and *Alyas Baby Tsina*. He subsequently realized higher degrees of literacy in cinema in his scripts for Mel Chionglo's *Sinner or Saint* and Chito Roño's *Private Show*, produced at the tailend of and released after the Golden Age; higher levels of accomplishment, however, were awaiting him in other film-related media, notably journalism, metafiction and playwriting, all of which he would turn to after the Golden Age.



Marilou Diaz-Abaya



Peque Gallaga

saw her first production, *Tanikala*, sink to the depths of anonymity – and her investment along with it, but rebounded vigorously enough with the MMFF multi-awardee and box-office placer *Brutal*.

In common with the early ascendancy of these two was their scriptwriter, Ricardo Lee. Coming from a shared distinction (with Jose F. Lacaba) for Brocka's box-office bomb but Urian winner and Cannes Film Festival competition entry *Jaguar*, Lee had his solomaster stroke with *Brutal*

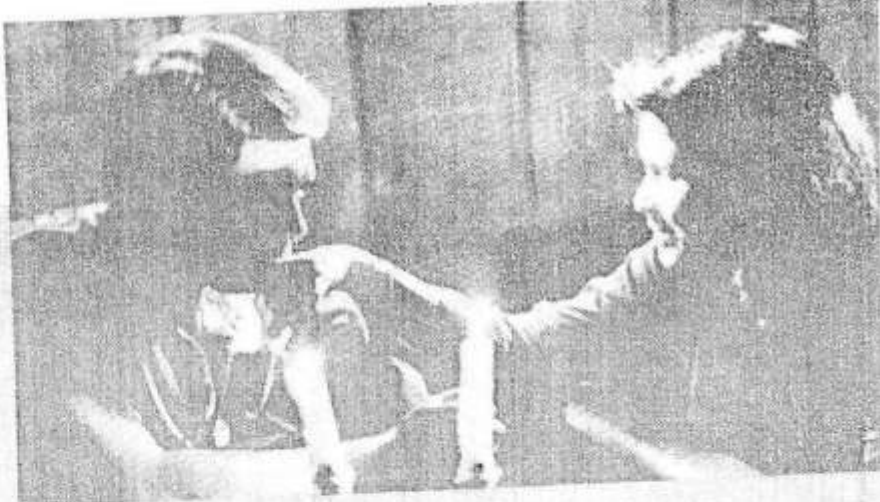
The other directors fared fairly enough in establishing a high level of artistic sensibility in their works. Gallaga made a slightly better epic than *Oro, Plata, Mata* in *Virgin Forest* which met with a counter-reaction probably inevitable considering the earliness and eagerness of the initial response that greeted him. After dabbling in melodrama with *Unfaithful Wife*, he would make one last epic, the fantasy feature *Once Upon A Time*, which had the misfortune of being

released during the period of transition following the Golden Age, when no movie could hope to recoup its investments. Thereafter, he would concentrate on and rise in favor again of his expert handling of the horror genre.

FRINGES OF THE AVANT-GARDE

Gallaga deserves a more lasting recognition for his revitalization of the sex film in *Scorpio Nights* released at about the same period as his *Virgin Forest* and Aguiluz's *Boatman*, and for the same venue, the MFC, as its contemporaries. In being less defensive about its social conscience, *Scorpio Nights* turned out to be a more effective evocation of urban decadence than any local erotic movie ever made.

Two significant directors, Castillo and Mike de Leon, reached their prime in the medium during the middle part of the Golden Age, then settled for relative obscurity afterward. Castillo came out with a series of mostly sex films that never matched the precocity of *Burlesk Queen*, while De Leon observed the Stanley Kubrick model, paralleled to a lesser extent by Gallaga, of specializing in one genre after another. His comeback in 1980 after a three-year hiatus resulted in a major-status movie that has managed to outlast his other works, the political absurdist comedy-musical *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* Along with Brocka, De Leon became a prominent figure at Cannes, where his subsequent output – the thriller *Kisapmata* and propagandistic *Sister Stella L*, plus *Batch '81*, his misanthropic contribution to milieu delineation – were exhibited to mostly favo-



Kasal?



Mike de Leon



able commentaries. After an excursion into melodrama that disappointed him but not his financiers, De Leon shifted, right with the close of the Golden Age, to video with a feature, *Bilanggo Sa Dilim*, that exemplified his directorial coming-of-age.

O'Hara similarly advanced in expertise as the period wore on. After making a financially fruitful comeback (after an absence about as long as De Leon's), he came up with a partially successful milieu movie, *Bulaklak Sa City Jail*, and followed up a previous action-thriller, *Condemned*, with another, *Bagong Hari*. Mostly, O'Hara continued his association with Nora Aunor, who had more resounding results with Brocka and Bernal, but nevertheless managed to augment her store of talent with O'Hara.

One last directorial debutant, Chito Roño, whose *Private Show* came out almost too late for the Golden Age, bears comparison with the aforementioned names. In the period to come, Brocka, by virtue of his conscious holding-back, may have already reprised his role as harbinger of what ought to turn out to be another, or at least an extension of the previous, Golden Age. Chionglo, Gallaga, O'Hara, Roño, Diaz-Abaya, and Guillen are in a position to assume artistic leadership, with Bernal, Castillo and De Leon making authoritative contributions alongside Brocka, and Romero upholding the value of verified virtues in the craft.

The writer will be privileged with greater creative responsibility, as indeed almost all of these enumerated individuals are capable of scripting their and others' works if necessary. Ricardo

Lee will continue holding forth as a major non-directing filmmaker, with Del Mundo, Lacaba and newer members like Jose N. Carreon (*Ikaw Ay Akin, Broken Marriage*), Jose Dalisay Jr. (*Miguelito*), Rosauro de la Cruz (*Scorpio Nights, Virgin Forest*) and Amado Lacuesta (*Hinugot Sa Langit, Working Girls*) regularly providing thematic worth and structural strength. A number of other writers, including Armando Lao and Bibeth Orteza, may have had apprenticeships during the Golden Age, but would seem to have considerable opportunities of playing the field thence.

PERFORMANCES OF THE AGES

Award-sweeping became the in thing, what with the addition of more and overlapping bodies to the already flourishing FAMAS, Urian, MMFF, and CMMA – to wit, the Philippine Movie Press Club with its Star trophy and the Film Academy of the Philippines. Two of these, the FAP and the FAMAS, claim to be industry-based recognitions, although the FAP is more systematically organized according to guilds; this advantage of legitimacy also brings with it the disadvantage of the prevalence of popularity choices, just as between the Urian and Star. The former may be comprised of a number of serious critics, but the latter possesses the humility necessary for thoroughgoing review and evaluation processes.

Despite the propensity of these groups, both collectively and as individual bodies, in setting records for favored artists, the one outstanding performance of the period – and, as in the case of *Ma-*

nila By Night extendible to the entire available history of the Philippine cinema – belongs to that of Nora Aunor in *Himala*, which was honored only by the MMFF. Aunor had been possessed with a search for superior acting vehicles and threw away a lot of her own money in the process, since in essence she mostly had to run against the preferences of her mass supporters. With Brocka, she made perceptible strides in ensuring her lead over the rest of the pack, particularly in *Ina Ka Ng Anak Mo* and *Bona*. But all that was really required of her was a project that had enough scope to demonstrate her far-reaching prowess, with a minimum of editorial manipulation. In *Himala*, the director and writer seemed to have agreed to a mutual stand-off; it was a truly great actress' opportunity of a lifetime, and Nora Aunor seized it and made it not just her role, but her film as well.

Not since Anita Linda in Gerardo de Leon's *Sisa* (circa the first Golden Age) had there been such a felicitous exploitation by a performer of ideal filmmaking conditions – and in this instance, *Himala* has the decided advantage of being major-league and universal. Other consistent stand-outs during the period – and these would be formidable enough as they are – demand to be taken in terms of body of work, not any single individual movie: Vic Silayan for *Ligaw Na Bulaklak, Kisapmata* and *Karnal*, and Gina Alajar for *Brutal, Salome, Moral*, and *Bayan Ko*. Record-setters of this period, specifically Phillip Salvador, Nida Blanca and Vilma Santos, deserve mention if only for the skills and supreme good fortune necessary in attain-

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“The writer will be privileged with greater creative responsibility.”

ing their respective feats. Among newcomers, only Jacklyn Jose of *Private Show* seems to hold forth promise of an order comparable to most of those listed herein.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

What factors could have contributed to this concentration of creativity? The only trend that could be cited with confidence is something commonly perceived as a hindrance, its claims to patronage notwithstanding: active government intervention. The irony here can be traced from the very beginning (of the second Golden Age, that is) – the militarization of film censorship and even beyond, if we were to particularize the controls on culture that the declaration of martial law brought about. With the fullest possible flowering of the Golden Age during the turn of the decade, the irony could not but have heightened further. The government then set in motion the machinery of total institutional support that

was to presently be known as the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines.

To be sure, a compounded series of half-hearted inclinations betrayed the ultimate objectives of the ECP. First it was founded not as a response to any industrial necessity, but to legitimize the then First Lady's Manila International Film Festival. Then, to appease a First Daughter angered by the kidnapping of her paramour, control of the legitimizing body was turned over to her; this must have been perceived as a shrewd decision, since Imee Marcos-Manotoc, perhaps partly out of her rebellion against her parents, had been soliciting the advice of Marcos oppositionists in culture, most of whom had castigated the first MIFF. The granting to her of ECP was expected therefore to placate both her and too-outspoken Filipino film artists.

Palace politics in this regard kept the Marcos family too busy among themselves to pay attention to the moves of film practitioners. Film producers meanwhile were lured by the prospect of greater returns on investment with the introduction of an international venue (specifically MIFF's film market module) on these very shores. Hence, films with big budgets and attendant artistic ambitions began to see the light of, er, theatrical darkness.

Manotoc herself proved to be sincere about her responsibilities, at least during a crucial early phase of her assumption of ECP leadership. The rejection of the MIFF was just a signal to Malacañang of her sincere intentions. By then she had several projects running simultaneously, most of

which had a highly favorable impact on film as artistic endeavor. Witness: the production of script-writing contest winners, subsidies for worthy full-length film proposals, tax rebates for deserving productions, exhibition of otherwise shunned or banned releases, plus a number of relatively minor benefits – first-rate screening venues, a library of film titles and books, short-film competitions with cash incentives, book and journal publications, archival research and preservation, seminars and workshop, etc.

The arrangement was too good to be true, and eventually succumbed to the regime's self-destructive tendencies embodied in this instance in the irrepressible Imelda Marcos. Once Manotoc had been distracted by her election to the so-called legislature, the ECP quickly went moribund, with funds hemorrhaged for the alleged promotion of MIFF in foreign countries and with the Manila Film Center operated according to a prohibitive maintenance cost. This meant that not only would all charitable functions cease, including film productions and subsidies, but also only sure-fire highly profitable titles, which then as now denoted hard-core sex films, could be exhibited at the MFC's exclusive venues.

The expected denunciation by the industry of the ECP's exemption from censorship and taxation, premised on the grounds of unfair competition, was reinforced in part by a bid for survival by the censors body, which with the ECP had reverted to civilian status; a retaliation was also in order, since the ECP under Manotoc had initiated moves to outlaw film censorship. All this

controversy served to act as check on the choice of films for MFC exhibition, ensuring that the new leadership would resort to artistic quality (the very same excuse invoked for the MIFF), if nothing else, as defense. The outcome, in practical terms, was a handful of local erotica, including the previously mangled *Manila By Night*, unmatched in art-consciousness relative to any other period in local history.

The Marcos government, however, could not stem the tide of the anti-dictatorship movement, especially as fortified by the outrage over the Aquino-Galman assassination, and the post-Imee ECP proved to be a most attractive target. In the end, the by-now predictable, and thereby ineffectual, Marcos solution of establishing institutions or transforming existing ones to conform ostensibly to legal requisites was applied in the ECP. The body was dissolved and another one, the Film Foundation of the Philippines (FFP), set up in its place, *without* any change in the organization itself, save for its avowal of now being less public in nature; in fact it was intended to enjoy the best of both worlds—semi-private and thus exempt from censorship, semi-public and thus exempt from taxation.

That the FFP did not differ from ECP except in name would have induced a renewed struggle for the formation of a truly responsive organ for institutional support, but at this point the nation's attention was diverted by the snap elections that led to the people-power uprising that expelled Marcos, shut down his film institution for good and drew to a close the second Golden Age of Philippine cinema.

INTRINSIC REASONS

The futility of pinpointing institutional causes, a legacy of materialist orientations which even artists are prone to resort to, becomes evident when we take other national experiences into consideration. In South American countries, whose colonial and religious histories most closely resemble the Philippines' own, artistic creativity has always been a direct function of political freedom. The same observation applies to contexts closer to home—in neighboring Asian countries. One would expect that the combination of both features—Hispanization and Orientalism—would only intensify this correlation between the practice of politics and the production of art.

Not only do the Marcos years disprove this extrapolation; the few years since provide enough dramatic contrast to further affirm this deviation from an otherwise logical pattern. Part of the answer may lie in the Machiavelianism of the Marcos regime, its perverse pleasure in playing cat-and-mouse games with its opponents, so much so that in the case of industry-based artists, who themselves are no strangers to such dialectics between ideals and realities, a heightened form of creativity is engendered.

This answer could of course cut both ways. A practitioner may just as well be cowed by the double jeopardy of having to please both an immediate boss and an Orwellian Big Brother, and if the displeasure of either may already mean the loss of career and prestige—in short, everything for the artist—then the displeasure of both would amount to sheer terror, if not

paralysis. In actuality, a number of local filmmakers did exhibit indications of the latter syndrome, but these may on the whole be balanced by the others who found favor with either a producer or the regime, in certain cases one against the other.

In the end we could only grant that a major factor for the occurrence of the second Golden Age lies in the superstructure itself—more concretely, in the confluence of film artists who somehow attained a level of individual maturity and collective strength within roughly a common time frame—a force, in effect, capable of transforming what would normally be political and industrial liabilities into aesthetic assets.

This situation couldn't be too phenomenal; a similar one was realized in Italy during the neo-realist era. Locally, the trend toward the organizing of artists, systematization of training (resulting in one extreme in the introduction of formal film studies at the State University) and the expansion of art-consciousness in alternative film and related formats all betoken this contemporaneous ripening of occasional genius, regular expertise and general resourcefulness in the country's most popular mass medium. Final and conclusive proof of course lies in the works themselves—over a decade's worth of major contributions to the art of cinema, on the whole outstanding by any standard, awaiting a comprehensive presentation to a global community that remains all the poorer for not having had the opportunity to strike the proper acquaintance so far.

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