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Manila's Angels

The Manila International Film Festival's palace-aux-musaeum.

by Elliott Stein

The Film Center is an uninviting edifice, stylistically a mix of brutalist branch-bank and Edwardian Durrell-style building. Its harshness jars with its lovely site, for it perches on a strip of reclaimed land jutting from Manila Bay, not far from the Yacht Club and the hydrofoil embankment for Corregidor, where the view is superb and sunsets are spectacular.

When the American fleet, led by Admiral Dewey, sailed in here in May 1898, it signaled the end of the 100 years of Spanish rule. The Spanish-American War was followed by the Philippine-American War (14,000 American soldiers and more than 200,000 Filipinos, one-tenth of the nation), which lasted from 1899 to 1901. The Islands were granted independence from the United States in 1946. This year, a newly negotiated accord was drawn up and reinforced by the symbolic relationship between the two countries: the United States will continue to use the Subic Bay Naval Base, home port of the Seventh Fleet, and Clark Air Base, the largest U.S. Air Force installation in Asia, in return for $900 million in economic and military aid to the government of President Ferdinand Marcos. President Reagan supports the agreement, but it is currently receiving opposition from some members of Congress concerned about the human rights record of the Marcos government.

At the Film Center, before the movies and between shows, it's customary to take a stroll around the broad terraces. In addition to its view of the bay, the terrace offers a wide choice of local food: Kentucky Fried Chicken, Chicken in Bikini, Orange Julus, McDonald's, and Dunkin' Donuts. The roof of the nearby Holiday Inn glowed red in one sign announcing the opening of Saudi Arabia's Manila would coincide with the second Manila International Film Festival.

This Film Center is the only palais d'Élysée in the Philippines. Workmen had been running round-the-clock shifts for several months in order to finish the building in time for the opening of the first MIFF in 1981. When, shortly before 5 P.M. on November 17, the doors were opened, nearly 200 people were burned under fast-opening covers. A security blanket was immediately removed, and chaos could have been avoided. An official announcement, minimizing the accident, had been prepared. Authorities were not permitted access to the scene of the disaster until nine hours after the event. In fact, there were later accusations from survivors that they had been given little help in cleaning up the aftermath. Orders were given to slice in half those caught unconscious in the quick-drying porous cement. Had they been dug out or drilled out whole, construction would have been further delayed. This grayyard stilled claimed over a hundred lives.

Weeks later, when the Center was finished, an exhibition was performed on its steps, presided over by highland priests. A pig was sacrificed. Officials declared that the troubled building was at rest; an invisible angel was now posted on every floor.

Those who attended the gala opening of the 1982 festival were of the opinion that the festival would be most suitable for the wings of invisible angels. The air at the Film Center was thick with thousands of flies. They buzzed around dignitaries, who were observed by television viewers throughout the land looking at the hundreds of amateurs' smudges of miniature masterpiece movies.

Last year's MIFF had other crosses to bear. Theying French film personalities, protecting the human rights record of the Marcos regime; and bomb threats from the urban guerrilla April 16 Liberation Movement, which caused a few cancellations from invited guests. This year the French were there in force, real bomb threats, but ubiquitous body searches, and a body could get thoroughly up a dozen times daily, depending on how many film arrival parties one attended, how many hotel lobbies one entered. A few guests had reason to believe their planes were missed.

If you didn't go to many movies (and many didn't), you might think you were at a giant country club, featuring celebrity sash maces, tugs of war, and sundry excursions. Before each screening, a hush fell in the Film Center inside, the lobby resonated with the music of a marvelous 50-piece Singsing Bamboo orchestra. Whatever the political uncertainties, the festival was festive and did have style—often gaudy, but also warm and ingratiating as the average Filipino.

Opening night, Ishmael Bernal's Hispama was shown out of competition. It was preceded by an Our Father sung by the Philippine Children's Choir and speeches by festival director John Laton and Judy Virgilio, whose greeting to President and Mrs. Marcos from President Reagan and Nancy Vetter led to colorful专区 for Mrs. Marcos's "visionary judgment... and intellectual reach." Inmelda Romualdez Marcos was dressed in a dress of peacock design, and said, among other things, that "the desert of necessity is transformed into a spectacle of wonder, a cinema." President Marcos, in a brief prepared statement, declared: "We need our own cinema, our own filmmakers to remind us, in the words of Adlai Stevenson, 'of the weight of our destiny.'" The First Lady's son, Bolis Arjonillo, patterned after Hollywood, produced musicals, costume epics, and domestic dramas. Rosa Mia, queen of the teatro folklorico, was heard once in every film in which she appeared. Filipino cinema of the Thirties was star-centered, and since colonization had left a legacy of a Caucasian ideal for screen beauty, most of the stars were foreigners, probably mixture of foreign and indigenous blood. Many scripts were based on "konak" books; also they were often direct translations from the stage.

LVN, founded in 1938, was, to a degree, a step up. The actress Lisa M. Mayer was an extraordnary old lady who looked like an Asian Marjorie Main, during the revolution against Spain. The late was Lumiere; a train arriving in La Gomera station, the Czar's carriage crossing the Place de la Concorde. A few years later, the good people of Manila were viewing Edison films about the Spanish-American War in which all of the battle scenes, "the Philippines, had been shot in New Jersey.

In the years following World War I, most films made in the Islands were produced by American-owned companies. The first genuine Filipino production company was Manuel movies, founded by the brothers Jesús and José Nepomuceno. Its inaugural picture, directed by José Dauyong Balad (The Country Maiden, 1920), was based on a popular zarzuela. During showings of this silent musical, live actors sang on stage to accompany the images on the screen.

Hollywood movies were the rage during the Twenties, but in 1926, the Neponceno gave the country a job with Tatling Hamby, the first locally produced film to offer passionate kinaing scenes. Some native stars emerged during the silent era, among them a pretty Muslim girl named Fatangadi Fatangadi Shamsi, whose screen name, fortunately, was simply Sofia Luna. The first all-Filipino film made by the tagalog, Tagalog (Golden Dagger, 1933). At first it had been clear whether local talkies would do their talking in English, Spanish, or the native Tagalog. When they opted for Tagalog, the rise of the national film industry was an important factor in disseminating Tagalog as a national language.

By the late Thirties, most major studios were in operation: Del Monte, Sambulde Bros., O-Taco, Patanes, and Bolis Arjonillo and his partners, patterned after Hollywood, produced musicals, costume epics, and domestic dramas. Rosa Mia, queen of the teatro folklorico, was heard once in every film in which she appeared. Filipino cinema of the Thirties was star-centered, and since colonization had left a legacy of a Caucasian ideal for screen beauty, most of the stars were probably mixtures of foreign and indigenous blood. Many scripts were based on "konak" books; also they were often direct translations from the stage.

The Mini Theater on the top floor of the Film Festival was the site of the most heated media participation, particularly from the foreign and indigenous media. Many scripts were based on "konak" books; also they were often direct translations from the stage.
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A New Wave did eventually break on the Philippine stage, but not as overwhelmingly as in the plays of Zulueta and Sitemey. The film industry was not as advanced in the Philippines as in other countries. A film company was established in 1928, but it was not until the mid-1930s that the industry began to develop.

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Eddie Romero's This Is the Way We Were in 1973. One, his solo dendral debut, is bit of a mess, but it's a stunner.

The film is ambitious epic, alternately reminiscent of Gone With the Wind and 2,000 Mantuca, and shot in Gallaga's home province. The director has remarked that the production is a large undertaking, the filming buildings, the buildings are in an impressive scale of the burning of Atlanta. There is even an Austrian fortress—Wippen, Ravens (Lofti Villanueva), a gaudy silk-lined ride, the musters, the gauzy material, white linens, the fingers are backed off the Following when she refuses to give up their rights. Gallaga leaves central during the long, central section, with continuity going on and the scenes of violence and sex—some of which are superb—become expectations. (The film was intended for 15 minutes after the festival and now runs three hours.) The splinter and surgical scenes derived from the director's love affair with American exploitation films. Several of these are beautifully accomplished pieces of Grand Guignol. Indeed, much of the film seems the director's idiosyncratic idiosyncratic in a movie of vulgar excess who has overdone the sinister, the sinister, the sinister. The film takes place during the war, it is a war film. Hardly any Japanese soldiers are shown. It is mostly a case of Filipinos versus Filipinos. Production design by Don Escaño and Rodolfo Cruz is accomplished and evocative. The script includes a number of talented and attractive young performers: Sandy Andolong (as Maggie), Charlie Glade, Joel Tere. One of the party guests is played by Bob Peep Gelin.

Theatres talk. Playing hookey from the festival, I visited two movie theaters which differed, equally fascinating stories. Few old movie houses remain in Manila of those that did, hardly any have been permitted to retain their original structural identities.

A scene from Peque Gallaga's Gold, Silver, Death.

Christopher de Leon became a major star after this film; it is easy to see why. Gloria Diaz is irresistible as Ditas, the cigar-smoking actress of whom Kulak is fascinated. Ting Ting Fan is particularly endearing in the small role of the merchant; her death scene is shattering. Lourdes Labian is back as飞机, expertly, and eloquent.

This funny, bouncy, well-paced, no

able but light-hearted movie is very serious, and sensible enough to catch its seriousness in charms. By the time it was over, I was proud to have been Filipino.
Veronica Lake, those gallant Paramount army nurses of So Proudly We Hail, took the boat to the island fortress at the entrance to Manila Bay, where for five months after Pearl Harbor American and Filipino troops held out under siege and daily saturation bombing. General Wainwright surrendered here on May 6, 1942. An old Japanese couple I met on the boat had come from Kyoto to find their grandson's grave.

The jungle has reclaimed most of the beachside island. The heavy battles, the long internment in nearby hospitals, the rules of the "mule-bell barrack" are still there. And at "Topside" in a clearing at the foot of a theater with a unique history: the Cine Corregidor, the local movie house of the island's last defenders. The last picture show at the Corregidor was Gone With the Wind.

It was a "Festival for a Cause." Runners and posters all over town proclaimed: in each film screened would be preceded by an announcement informing of the MIFF's bequest. The "bequest" consisted of three positive "medical, mentally, and socially disabled." (Filipino journalist Francisco Tatal noted that this "encompassed the majority of Filipinos.")

Funds for this benefaction were obtained by screening a selection of the famous films of the normally strict censorship laws applied to films shown in public theaters. For two decades, several versions of pictures that had not been released because of their "boldness" were shown in 153 Manila homes, including the home of one Madame Lucy, at midnight, double the normal admission prices. The hottest tickets were for Filipina actresses, who in films like Song of the Exile and Hiyas (A Different Creature), The Virgin People, and The Victim, which contained provocative scenes, were paid $120 by the film producer, Joseph P. Pepis Palomo in the buff. The MIFF collected $6 million. "Seeing bold movies broadens the perspective of the Filipino audience," Mrs. Marcos declared, in a speech that will no doubt be studied for years to come.

Two members of the people of Manila seemed to have survived this exposure — in one case. When Herming-lugdilll Auyong, a taxi driver, arrived home late for dinner after stopping on the way to see Naubang, his wife shot him three times. Computer operator Linda Dastani, in a poll conducted by the tabloid Tempo, "Are We Ready for Unsecond Movies?" answered, "No. Bold scenes have adverse effects on teenagers."

After watching Naubang, Hiyas with my husband, he asked me to go out with him. Though I was not a movie-goer in the Filipino press, the cause of the MIFF becoming a "Festival for a Cause" had involved me in a publicized event that turned into a political issue of anolecereقيادة همزة وفاء. The country is massively in hock to the foreign foreign /debt stands at more than $17 billion. Last year's lavish MIFF was government-funded. But last fall, A.W. Chansler, president of the World Bank, warned Prime Minister Cesar Varsa, who also serves as finance minister, that developing countries have "very little leeway to go on to fresh projects." The International Monetary Fund insisted on a reduction in non-essential budget expenditures.

When the government prepared to cut back its funding, the undaunted are Festival Films. With a few exceptions, they are cheap exploitation pictures with little or no artistic merit. Under the guise of fostering artistic free- dom, the MIFF itself provided a famous precedent in the encouragement of the film industry.

Brocka's "reservations" had led him to keep his films, old and new, out of the festival. The admission had been left: no representation from the country's most prestigious director, a black hole at the center of things.

March 14, at a ceremony in front of the Film Center, the First Lady, dressed in a red gown, spoke to a crowd of schoolchildren, film personalities, and uniformed street cleaners. The occasion was the donation of festival profits to organizations of the handicapped. Mrs. Marcos, in her speech, responded to her detractors: "They said your First Lady is lavish and extravagant...I have always been lavish and extravagant in showing my appreciation of you.

Performers in all the arts (the cast included scriptwriters and directors) would have to be licensed in order to work. The licenses would be renewed yearly, but would be canceled if the "ethics" of the performers did not conform to the standards set by the board. It was generally considered that the licensing regulations were political blackmail: the regime wanted to make sure that performers, especially film stars, were available at all times for appearances in its political campaigns.

During the following weeks, a Free the Artist movement, led by Lita, Brocka, organized a series of protest rallies against the Executive Order. Brocka was joined by other directors, actors, singers, painters, sculptors, and actors.

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Made in America

by Luis H. Francia

Asian-American films occupy—if they occupy a place at all—a rather ten-uous spot in the minds of the moviegoers public. As it is, the films are often confused with Asian films, surely with the elegant works of Ray or Kurosawa or even Brando and his artsy friends or tedious musical melodramas. Anyone seeing Wayne Wang's Chin Is Missing, or Mia Nair's dully-sleeve, semi-Magical Realist Journal, must now recognize that Asian-American films need be reckoned with as a distinct culture, of course, that cultural hybridization—a truly syncretic practice of our times—leads to that spurious category, "eth-nic.

If Asian-American cinema has a history, it dates to 1919, when Seiichi Hay-akawa—a Zen and kendo practitioner who was the first Asian martial artist to emerge from Hollywood's silent era—started his own production company, Hawthorne Pictures. Best remembered as the Japanese commander Sato in David Lean's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Nair wrote, designed and starred in Frank's features. The Hayakawa films emphasized cer-tain themes expected both from Hayakawa and from movies with an "oriental" touch: inter racial love, re-venge, and self-sacrifice. Later, such ex-peditions were mistakenly re-interpreted as racial caricatures—vide Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu. Perhaps the best of the Hawthorne films, because it foregrounds these themes, is The Dragon Painter. Here, Hayakawa explored in alleg-ory from the relationship between love and art: Playing the role of Tatsuo, a wild mountain man-cum-painter, Hay-akawa falls in love with a beautiful maiden (played by his wife, Teuma Aska, his usual co-star). Unfortunately, his artistic powers wane as his love wanes. Realizing this, she leaves him so that the painter in him will once more emerge. Shot in Yellowstone National Park, only one print of the film survives and that, sub tilled in French.

Discrimination and an attempt on his life forced the Hayakawas to leave Hol-lywood in 1922, effectively dissolving the company. They were not to return until 1949, when Humphrey Bogart in- vested Hayakawa to play a small role in Tokyo Joe. Asian xenophobia and World War II had disrupted what could have been a seminal tradition of Asian American filmmaking.

This was, of course, James Wong Howe, the China-born Hollywood cine-matographer who won two Academy Awards for The Rose Tattoo and Hat. His career spanned six decades, and though he was an innovative cameraman—us-ing deep focus years before Greig To-land in Citizen Kane and experimenting with a hand-held camera in Body and Soul—he mainly returned to making his own films. As an enterprise practiced by more than just a handful of people, Asian-American filmmaking remained dormant till the late Sixties, with that decades twin focus on civil rights and ethnic pride. The Vietnam War, how- ever, served as a bloody reminder of past injustice suffered by Asians in the U.S.

Since the Sixties, Asian-American films have mainly centered on anima-tion's tension of cultural group values. Asian-American filmmakers have tried to undermine the frustration of their community, one that must wary forge a new identity that threatens group cohesion, yet is mandated by the string of such past labels as "exotic" or "incurable" that were a function of isolation. Robert Nakamura, a Los Angeles-based filmmaker and one of the founders of Visual Communications (a West Coast-based film production group) says that such films were "needed—it was a void we had to fill.

Still, Asian American Literature a few decades earlier, according to Na-kamura. His own Bito Han, co-directed with D zus Kraus, focuses on the life of Japanese immigrants and their descend-ants seen through the eyes of an eld-ered Japanese worker, Old (played by Makio). The film mines a familiar premise: the erosion of a community's way of life by the intrusion of urban processes in gentrification and street crime, which we do not actually see once seen. Thus the film regrettably lacks dramatic punch, though it was the first U.S.-made feature on Japanese immigrants.

Aesthetically and popularly, Wayne Wang's Chin Is Missing is a more signifi-cant work. This low-budget ($20,000), black-and-white piece was the indie sleeper of 1982, receiving enthusiastic reviews both at FILMEX in L.A. and at New Directors in New York, and achiev-ing something rare—a distributor, New Yorker Films, and a 30-week run at a New York house.

Chin Is Missing spoofs both the pri-vate-eye genre and racial stereotypes. Like Godan, Chin never appears. In stead, we see an insider's view of San Francisco's Chinatown (read any big-city Chinatown), where cooks sing American pop songs and the young male lead (played by Marc Hayashi) affects sassy ghetto monologues to underline his street-smarts. The film under- mines simplistic media images in a way median educational films could not.

The Hong Kong-born, 34-year-old Wang was surprised by the film's success because I thought the film was good, but I never expected that it would take off as much as it did. I thought it was a film limited to a sophisticated Chinese audience, but it turns out that's not. Wang, who directed and pro-duction outfit CIM (an acronym for Chin Is Missing) has just finished principal shooting of his next feature film Sun, this time shot in 35mm and on a budget of "more or less" $300,000. He de-scribes it as a kind of "Chinese-America
cinema" that sets in contemporary times and involving five Chinese-American women and their relationship to one an- other. Tentatively scheduled for a fall release, Sun Sun has a cast including Gnaa Ma, a Hong Kong actress fea-tured in Ann Hui's Boat People—a much discussed film at Cannes—and Joan Chen, currently China's most popular screen actress. There are other Asian American filmmakers just as talented, and certainly more experienced than me. Wang observed, citing Emiko Omori, Lonnie Ding, and Fa-Dong Chen, Fa-Dong Chen is among the most imag-ina tive, if quirky, contemporary, experi mential Asian-American film- making, who describes his works as "documentaries seen through the screen of imagination." In his latest animated film, Spirit of the Dream World, the house animates narrates its life story and the stories of the families that have lived under its roof. The voice is American, but the graphics and colors remind of Chinese-style watercolors. Chen achieves an East-West fusion that, in its casualness, seems entirely mundane.

Probably the premiere and most political Asian-American documentarist is New York-based Christine Choy. Choy ascribes her political bent to her life in China where she lived until just before the Cultural Revolution. A pro- lific filmmaker—she's directed and/or produced fifteen films in 14 years—Choy is one of the prime movers behind Third World Newsreel, the oldest, inde-pendent, political filmmaking organiza-tion in the U.S. Her concerns are with the social and political issues and conditions afflicting minorities, the working-class, and women. To Love, House and Obey, for instance, is an incisive look at white beating. Witty without didacticism, Choy devoted most of the film to the victims and their children. She's just finished another documentary, this time on the Mississip-pi Delta.

Earlier this year, as a sort of prelimi-nary to full-length feature making, Choy made For How Many Goddess in Flight, a short film based on a Gnuu film play, Pla- genre. Though well-acted and techni- cally competent, the film suffers from an air of unreality and detachment from her fictional subject—an old and dying Chinese "bird lady" besieging a modern, urbane, Chinese-American career woman.

Another fine documentarist contem-plating cinematic features is Mia Nair, an India-born, former screen actress. Her black-and-white 1981 film, Jumma Masjid, set in the slums of street life in an Indian village: everything (from ear cleaning to haircuts) is done on the street such that only the Muslim women in their shawls seem curious. Nair's narration renders the film less a cut-and-dried documentary than a stream-of-consciousness sketchbook.

In contrast, Nair's latest film, So Far from India, is a more formal, straightforward color documentary on the life of a young Indian immigrant in New York earning a living at a subway restaurant in the 70s. His family remains in the mother country, he has never seen his baby, and his wife wonders if he will ever send them. The local communi-tion of a particular Everyman's life. So Far from India movingly limns the univer-sity of emigration to strange shores. Nair is now working on the script for her first feature about an educated, Angli-cized mail-order bride imported from India, her typical middle-class India groom, told from the woman's point of view.

Among the filmmakers who debuted at this year's Sixth Annual Asian-America Film Festival in New York, several
“A Wise and Stunning Film!”
— Jack Kroll, Newsweek

“A Very Handsome and Witty Tale of 19th Century Italy... It’s A Fascinating Film and One Not Easily To Be Forgotten... The Performances Are Full of Unexpected Revelations!”
— Vincent Canby, New York Times

“A Legendary Romantic Tale!”
— David Denby, New York Magazine

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Inventions, inventors, equipment

Film processes & techniques

Compiled by American filmmaker and critic Ephraim Katz, here is the one fascinating, fact-packed reference no serious moviemaker should be without. In 7000 entries, it covers the whole world of films and filmmakers from A(Associated Actors and Artists of America) to Z(Valerie Zhuino). The reviews are in—and they're rave.

"Far superior to Leslie Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion":—Best Sellers

"The best there is...a monumental, readable volume to consult, dip into, and keep by the bedside lamp": —Peter Nichols, Screen International

"Juicy and intelligent":—Stanley Kauffmann, The New Republic

"An eminently useful, reliable reference and research tool": —George L. George, American Cinematographer

"Lively and readable...dwarfs most other reference tomes available":—Lionel Hitchen, Library
"Help burn my uncle," Mel cries and whispers.

QUIZ #3: Write a sensible paragraph no more than 50 words that contains in many complete movie titles as possible. Famous films only; but TV films count, as do U.S. or British release titles of foreign-language film. Internal punctuation (e.g., apostrophes in Pinky's) must be included. Scoring: two points for each title (as above) Help! Burn! My Uncle, M., Eli, Cries and Whispers; 12 points, one point subtracted for each word not part of a complete title, or more verifiable titles! (Names listed below.) The winner is Carrie W.C. Moore of New York City, with a whopping 25 titles we're printing her answer in tiny type below. Honorable mentions go to Gary P. Collins of Central Vill. Corn, with 210 titles (our favorite: A Look at LDI for roman numeral 54) and to Marion Tanino of New York City (204 titles). Thanks to everyone who took the time to play our game. Boy, are we impressed!!


CONTRIBUTORS Louis H. Francia has written for The Village Voice, Lucy Gray is a San Francisco-based writer. Kathy Gunst is a freelancer. Dave Kehr is film critic for Chicago magazine and The Chicago Reader. Steve Lawson has written scripts for St. Elsewhere (NBC). Jim Verniere is a New Jersey-based writer.