Patricio Ginelsa Making a Comeback

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress

LOS ANGELES – When Fil-Am Patricio Ginelsa won this year's Canon "Bring It" 72 Hour Film Competition at the LA Film Festival, he received more than just a digital video camera as a prize.

The competition helped him revive a once promising career.

Ginelsa is the founder of Kid Heroes Production, produced the movie *The Debut*, and directed the Black Eyed Peas *Apl Song* and *Bebot*. He won for his short five-minute film called *Being Reel* about a lovelorn screenwriter's serendipitous fleeting moments with the girl of his dreams.

"I feel great and rejuvenated," said Ginelsa. "I've been writing a lot now."

The 32-year Ginelsa has had a serious case of writer's block, a creative dry spell, for the past two years.

After controversy erupted for his Black Eyed Peas Bebot music video in 2006, Ginelsa fell in a small state of depression.

"I couldn't write for a long time after all that happened," he said.

Community Oriented Filmmaker

In 2003, Ginelsa was making his name known in the Filipino-American film community. The USC graduate had just released *Lumpia*, an independent film about a mysterious hero helping a group of Pinoy teenagers overcome trouble in their high school. The low-budget film received a cult following and became an official selection in Hawaii and Toronto film festivals.

Ginelsa received his biggest break the following year when the Black Eyed Peas Allen Pineda commonly known as Apl.de.Ap decided to make a video on *The Apl Song* from the group's hit *Elephunk* album.

Ginelsa lobbied hard to direct the music video and eventually landed the gig.

He knew that it would be a mainstream project, a way to not only talk to about Apl's life, which he discusses in the song, but also a great way for audiences around the world to know about Filipinos and the plight of the Filipino World War II veterans.

The music video featured an all-star-cast of Fil-Ams. Music Producer Chad Hugo of the Neptunes and Actor Dante Basco were among many Fil-Am stars that made an appearance. The video reached No. 1 in the Philippines and received a handful of praise from many American media outlets for its message and video directing quality.

It was only natural when the Black Eyed Peas and Apl.de.Apl released *Bebot* in 2005 that Ginelsa would direct the music video for that as well.

Interscope Records, MTV and VH1 seeing the success of the first video were all willing to play the *Bebot* video.

The video would not only have a large Filipino/ Fil-Am cast but revenues from the music video would also help the Little Manila Foundation build a $2 million museum and cultural center, according to Ginelsa.

However, trouble began to brew almost from the beginning of the production of the music video. Ginelsa wanted to maintain the theme of portraying Filipinos in a positive light, another way for Filipinos to be noticed in a mainstream video. But behind the scenes, some of the producers and music execs had a different idea and wanted a different cast for the video. Ginelsa won creative control but the music video experienced production delays and budget concerns.

The video went 50 percent over budget. Eventually, Ginelsa had to dip from his own savings in order to finish the video.

"Nobody knew I had to do that," said Ginelsa. "It took me two years to repay that debt."

Things only got worse.

A month after the music video came out, a group of academics and feminists wrote an open letter condemning the *Bebot* music video.

The letter claimed that the video "utilized restricting stereotypes of Pilipina women like 'the whore and the shrill mother,' according to a critique written by Erin Pangilinan and Krystle Ignacio on a September 2006 posting on Azine website.

The letter stated, "The video uses three very limited stereotypes of Filipina women: the virgin, the sleeper, and the shrill mother. We find a double standard in the depiction of the virgin and sleeper figures, both of which are highly sexualized."

The open letter was "emailed to everyone," recalls Ginelsa.

"It was in every Fil-Am server, every webpage. It was everywhere online. I didn't realize that the email circulated."

Ginelsa said the letter offended him.

"I'm all for promoting healthy dialogue but they never even tried to talk to me directly about this. These are issues [the letter claimed] I think about and care about," said Ginelsa. "Now, everyone thinks I'm a male chauvinist, that I'm the typical Hollywood film director."

"Instead of the booty shaking video [that many music execs wanted], I wanted the video to be a parody of [Dr. Dre's] *Ain't nothing but a G thing*. I changed approach to casting. I didn't tell any of the girls on the set how to dress and I banned alcohol on the set. It was just a barbecue at a house party."

The following months after the letter, Ginelsa tried defending his stance. He joined open forums and panel discussions held about the "*Bebot*" controversy but none of the academics, which signed the letter, showed up.

"They destroyed my reputation as a community oriented filmmaker," he said. "Now I'm paranoid, whenever a woman or someone asks me about that issue I'm on the defensive right away. I felt like this whole Filipino community thing was not meant for me to do."

Seeing the controversy unfold online, MTV and VH1 decided to pull the video from their lineups. The video can only be seen online in Youtube or other video sharing websites.

So for the past two years, Ginelsa temporarily quit filmmaking and continued his day job at USC. He did a few commercials here and there but the words did not flow so easily anymore. The motivation was not there.

It wasn't until his longtime girlfriend convinced him to enter the Canon 72 Hour Film Competition at the LA Film Festival a few months ago that Ginelsa got his mojo back.

"I had to rediscover my voice," he said. "Working on a deadline forced me to finish the project. My film was chosen and I eventually won it. I discovered so much about myself that I had forgotten. The competition gave me confidence. It rejuvenated me."

He said going through the adversity the past two years has given him a renowned sense of filmmaking.

"I'm still going to live by the same rules," he said. "I'm here to inspire the community. I just have a new game plan and attitude about it. I'm still going to create the stuff I have. I'm still going to write stories." ■

Galing Pinoy

Galing Pinoy showcases the triumph of the Filipino spirit -- the Filipino's innate perseverance to rise above. A double entendre, Galing Pinoy literally translates to both coming from (or brought to you by) the Filipino and Filipino ingenuity.

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