

Gangster film in indie fest

by MARINEL CRUZ
Inquirer.net

MANILA – “I never thought it would happen for real,” young actor Zyrus Desamparado said of the large cut in his right arm, from a bolo wielded by co-actor Daniel Medrana.

The two were filming a fight scene for the action movie *Engkwentro* when the incident happened. Zyrus’ cut was three inches long. “It was an accident. I was given immediate medical help. I’m OK now,” Desamparado told *Inquirer Entertainment* over dinner last week.

Desamparado plays Tomas, leader of a notorious gang called Batang Dilim in *Engkwentro*. The film follows a day in the lives of Richard (Felix Roco) and his brother, Raymond (Medrana), who find themselves on opposite sides of a gang war. Richard is the leader of *Bagong Buwan* and Tomas’ archenemy.

Death squad

To get back at Richard, Tomas orders his new recruit, Raymond, to kill his own brother. Meanwhile, the infamous City Death Squad catches up with all of them. This vigilante group is widely believed to be backed by the city government, headed by Mayor Danilo Suarez (Celso Ad Castillo), and responsible for many unsolved murders of gangsters.

Engkwentro is an entry to this year’s Cinemanila Philippine Independent Film Festival, which runs from July 17 to 26 at the CCP in Pasay City.

Pepe Diokno, director of *Engkwentro* and the youngest to join the film fest at 21, said Desamparado was picked from among 500 actors who auditioned for the movie.

Roco, meanwhile, was Diokno’s top pick for the role of Richard. “We searched everywhere for the boy to play Felix’s brother,” Diokno explained. “We were about to start filming when we found Daniel at an arts forum sponsored by the CCP.”

Inspired by docu

Diokno said the film was inspired by a documentary he made two years ago on two brothers running away from the so-called Davao Death Squad.

The director was quick to point out that the movie is not specifically about the shadowy Davao vigilante group.

He said that the film proved difficult to make: “It wasn’t easy to get funds for this kind of story. Also, we had to employ over 200 actors. Rehearsals were tough. We shot some scenes in Davao but



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it was not a good option in terms of logistics and security. We had to build a set in Makati and Navotas.”

The director related that *Engkwentro* was filmed in real-time. “It’s filmed like a play. *Kakaiba* ang treatment. That makes it hard. The actors had to memorize

everything. The production team was all around the set nonstop,” he explained.

After its premiere in Cinemalaya, Diokno said he has set his sights on a nationwide screening. “The goal is to show this to as many people as possible. We want them to know about the current situation. We want it known that we blame a society that condones this kind of killings,” he said. “A screening in Davao would be good, too.” ■

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