

# 'Kinatay' draws raves, rants in Cannes

by BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Once again, critics are either raving or ranting about the Philippines' Main Competition entry in the ongoing Cannes Film Festival. Early reviews of Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay* (literally, "butchered"), which premiered on Sunday in the world's most prestigious gathering of movies for exhibition and competition, were posted online the very next day.

Mendoza is in Cannes for the second year running. His entry last year was *Serbis*; it was the first time since 1984 that the country had a film competing for the highest honor, the Palme d'Or.

Having elicited both hisses and applause for both movies, Mendoza was described in a weekend report as a "controversial love-him-or-hate-him director."

lfc.com blogger David Hudson expressed it best in his summary of the reviews: "Spillitt!"

*Serbis* is set in a porn-theatre and features long close-ups of festering boils and overflowing toilets. *Kinatay* is about a kidnap-raped victim who is beaten up, then murdered and hacked to pieces.

*Kinatay's* strongest detractor is *Chicago Sun-Times'* Roger

Ebert, who wrote in his blog: "It is Mendoza's conceit that his idea will make a statement, or evoke a sensation, or demonstrate something—only if he makes the rest of the film (apparently, Ebert found the first half passable) as unpleasant to the eyes, ears, the mind and the story itself as possible. This he succeeds in doing beyond his wildest dreams."

Variety, which thoroughly panned *Serbis* last year, seemed unsure about *Kinatay*. Reviewer Jay Weissberg called it "an unpleasant journey." However, he added, "On a purely technical level, [the film] impresses."

On the debit side, Weissberg continued, "The pic's graphic nature does realism no favors." Plus, he said, the film's title could be "prescient ... given the likely drubbing the pic will receive from mainstream critics."

**'Excruciating'**  
Maggie Lee of *The Hollywood Reporter* agreed with Weissberg, summing up the RP entry as a "prurient and excruciating viewing experience that makes the audience partners in crimes of inhumanity." However, Lee conceded that the dramatic thrust was "relentless."

She pointed out: "The deliberately rough-hewn art direction adds to the blunt force of Mendoza's moral outrage."

Spotted in the audience on Sunday was Hollywood director Quentin Tarantino, whose film, *Inglorious Basterds* is also competing for the Palme d'Or. Mendoza related in a text message: "Quentin stayed until the screening's end. We met and shook hands."

Wesley Morris of Boston Globe reported that *Kinatay* received "smattering applause [and] a not-insignificant round of boos."

**Now, the good reviews**  
Mike Goodridge of Screen International found *Kinatay* to be "a nerve-shredding exploration of crime, which is both repellent and grimly compelling."

Goodridge explained that the film "offers audiences no relief or redemption" and is "most notable for its daring in attempting to capture the moment a young man crosses the line into irrevocable evil."

Like Ebert, Lee and Weissberg, Goodridge predicted that *Kinatay* would not be appreciated by mainstream audiences. But overall, he proclaimed it "well-made and more coherent than *Serbis*."

**Unqualified rave**  
Beyond the violence and gore,

Sukhdev Sandhu of The Daily Telegraph hailed Mendoza's film as "fiercely moral."

He explained: "Most people will find [it] either unremittingly tedious, harrowing or vile. Possibly all three. Mendoza is no gore hound. This is a horribly unforgettable denunciation of societal corruption."

Here's an unqualified rave: Daniel Kasman of theauteurs.com dubbed *Kinatay* a "rich vision of so much gloom ... a beautiful thing ... [its] immersion into nightfall stands strong, splendidly, as an independent force."

But talk about ambivalence: Mike D'Angelo of the AV Club wrote in his Twitter account: "[It's] the most audacious film to be shown thus far ... I admire ... its uncompromising rigor—the lengthy van ride ... is a tour de force, but I can't bring myself to like it."

**Not entertainment**  
In a news conference following his film's Cannes screening, Mendoza said, "This is not just entertainment, these stories are real."

*Kinatay* traces 24 hours in the life of a trainee policeman, from his happy morning wedding to his bizarre night out with corrupt colleagues. They pick up a druggie-prostitute whose body

parts they end up disposing all over the city.

Asked about his unconventional technique, the lack of action and slow rhythm in his works, Mendoza said: "I want viewers to have a different experience, to be with the character rather than just watching from outside."

**Dark Asia**  
Aside from *Kinatay*, entries from Korea and Hong Kong also made a splash in Cannes this weekend, almost all of them throwing dark, violent, blood-spattered visions of the world onto festival screens.

Hong Kong's Johnnie To offered *Vengeance*, starring aging French rock idol Johnny Hallyday as a father seeking revenge for a family murder. A gangster movie shot like a western peppered with Triad shoot-outs, *Vengeance* is also one of 20 films competing for the Palme d'Or. Sadly, it failed to wow critics.

Lone exception to the Asian blood-and-gore menu was *Mother*, by Korea's young cult director Bong Joon-ho, although he is no stranger to violence in previous films, such as *The Host* and *Memories of Murder*.

Bong's latest movie is an intense emotional tale of a mother's extreme battle to save her son. It won the award-winning 39-year-old a standing ovation. But even this one, vying for the Un Certain Regard prize for fresh upcoming talent, revolves

around a murder and is fraught with tension. "I'm interested in violence," the filmmaker told Agence France Presse.

Bong cast 70-year-old Kim Hye-ja as a mother prepared to do the worst to save her mentally challenged son. He said in an interview, "This time I wanted to concentrate on psychology. When a father or mother loses their [wits] for love of a child, they can return to the state of beast. A mother can be a noble figure or a savage."

He added, "I am a big fan of Sam Peckinpah's," referring to the legendary US director of violent, but beautifully shot westerns such as *The Wild Bunch*.

**5 from Philippines**  
There are four other Filipino films in Cannes this year. Raya Martin's *Independencia*—a historical drama set during the American Occupation—is the Philippines' first entry to Un Certain Regard, the festival's "more experimental and adventurous section." It was screened on Sunday.

Martin also collaborated with Adolfo Alix Jr. on *Manila*, which will be shown Tuesday, in the Special Screenings category. *Sabongero*, by Filipino-American Janice Y. Perez, was selected for the Short Film Corner.

Also entered in the Short Film Corner is Aissa Peñañiel and Miguel Ocampo's *Manong Maong*, a five-minute, 20-second animation movie. ■

## Charice 'Note to God' tops on Amazon, iTunes

by POCHOLO CONCEPCION  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Filipino singer Charice Pempengco has scored another triumph in her international career when her single *Note to God*, released only in the United States, broke into the Amazon.com and iTunes music charts.

Amazon is America's largest online retailer, while iTunes accounts for 70 percent of worldwide sales of digital downloads and is the No. 1 music vendor globally.

*Note to God* is currently No. 2 on Amazon's MP3 Downloads Bestsellers and Hot New Releases section, and No. 1 on the Movers and Shakers, or the biggest gainer in sales rank as of Tuesday. It is also No. 9 on the iTunes chart.

The song is partly an emotional prayer whose lyrics are about what one would say in a letter to God.

It has just been posted on YouTube—the video-sharing website where the world discovered Charice—and is the first single in her forthcoming debut album being produced by her musical mentor, David Foster.

It is actually a cover version of a composition by Diane Warren

(who also wrote Aerosmith's *I Don't Want to Miss a Thing*; Celine Dion's *Because You Loved Me*; and Toni Braxton's *Unbreak My Heart*).

**Oprah show**  
The 16-year-old Charice first sang the song on America's highest-rating TV show *Oprah* only on Monday—the day it was also released as a digital download.

On the Amazon Bestsellers chart, *Note to God* ranks behind the Black Eyed Peas's *Boom Boom Pow* but has overtaken Lady GaGa's *Poker Face*, Miley Cyrus' *The Climb*, Taylor Swift's *Love Story*,

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