

Cannes is lovelier the second time around

by FERDINAND LAPUZ
Philstar.com

THIS is true for director Brillante Ma. “Dante” Mendoza who won Best Director for *Kinatay* at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival last May 24 in France.

Direk Dante bested previous Palme d’Or and Oscar winners Ang Lee, Quentin Tarantino, Jane Campion, Ken Loach, Tsai Ming Liang and Pedro Almodovar for the award from the most prestigious film festival.

The walk on the red carpet was another memorable experience for *direk* Dante, Coco Martin, Mercedes Cabral (in a *terno* by Joey Feliciano of Angeles City who also designed my tuxedo) and myself. Along with Maria Isabel Lopez (her red gown was designed by Victor Miller from Chicago) and Antonio del Rosario, we were a smaller group compared to last year with *Serbis*.

Post-production was finished in Paris. It was only *direk* Dante, Albert Michael Idioma and French producer Didier Costet who had seen the film in its entirety.

When screening was over, we were not sure about the audience reaction because we knew from the beginning it would stir controversy and it could be more controversial than *Serbis*.

We were surprised when the audience gave the film a resounding applause and standing ovation. What even made it more memorable was the presence of Tarantino who was seated in front of us.

It was tough for us especially after the reviews came out. But we remained focused and we already prepared after what we went through with *Serbis* last year.

We found out that Tarantino has recommended *Kinatay* to his producer Harvey Weinstein. A screener was given to Weinstein because a preview of the film version of is not possible during the festival.

We also learned that Regent Releasing, the US distributor of *Serbis* is also interested.

After Coco, Mercedes and Maria Isabel left early in the week, our producer moved us to two villas. The festival provided us three rooms at the Palais Stephanie (former Noga Hilton) for our first three nights in Cannes.

One of the most memorable nights was when we watched the screening of Tarantino’s *Inglorious Basterds*. *Direk* Dante and Didier were seated in the middle row while Antonio and I were on the left side which was pretty close to the middle row where the cast and crew of the film were seated.

Before the arrival of the Basterds team, other guests arrived and it included Sharon Stone and *Twilight* actor Robert Pattinson.

However, it was pandemonium when Tarantino and his cast led by Brad Pitt with Angelina Jolie entered the auditorium. I was fortunate to take pictures of Brad, Angelina and some of the cast of the film who were in attendance.

Basterds was the only competition film I watched because every time you watch a film at the Lumiere, you are required to wear tuxedos.

Finally, it was the awards day. We were all nervous and anxious but managed to spend sometime relaxing at Cannes Croisette. We were told that the winners would be informed on or before 12:30 p.m.

After relaxing and some walking, we went back to the villas and slept. At around 12 noon, the buzzer on our door sounded. Didier was smiling and he told us we won something.

The festival calls all the winning films’ publicists and tells them their film won something. They don’t tell what category.

Didier told us filmmakers from *Thirst*, *The Prophet*, *Spring Fever* and *The White Ribbon* were asked to fly back to Cannes.

At around 2 p.m., we transferred to Hotel Gray d’Albion. We were given two rooms and one suite for *direk* Dante. Fendi also provided *direk* Dante’s outfit for the ceremony.

At around 6 p.m., we gathered at the lobby and saw the group of *Thirst* by Park Chan-wook. Mercedes was indeed lucky because both her films got awards.

Our second walk on the red carpet for this year was more fun and memorable because we already knew we won something.

When the winners for the Jury Prize (*Fish Tank* and *Thirst*) were mentioned, we already felt *direk* Dante will win the Best Director award. It was already predicted that either *The Prophet* or *White Ribbon* would win the Palme d’Or.

Director Terry Gilliam presented the award. He started by pretending it was him who won the award.

When *direk* Dante’s name was called, we were all teary eyed. He was on stage for several minutes. He delivered his speech and a photo session with Gilliam followed. He was later ushered into the backstage and appeared after the awards ceremony where the traditional photo session with all the winners and jury was held. We managed to snap a shot with jury president Isabelle Huppert.

As soon as we left the stage, along with Didier, former comedian and Swiss resident Evelyn Vargas, our French international publicists and sales agents from The Match Factory, we were brought to different parts of the Palais.

This was the hectic part. There was a photocall, a presscon and interviews with TV crew. This took place while the closing film was being screened. I think this lasted for almost two hours.

There were photocalls and separate interviews for each winner. But for the press conference, *direk* Dante was grouped with Park Chan-wook (*Thirst*) and Andrea Arnold (*Fish Tank*)

After all the series of interviews and pictorials,

we went back to the hotel for a small celebration with the *Kinatay* team. Then we headed back to the Lumiere for the dinner.

It was a great dinner but I was not able to eat well. I was excited to rub elbows with showbiz royalty and I wanted to have the time in the world to mingle and have a picture with them.

Outside the dinner hall, *direk* Dante and I spotted jury members Robin Wright Penn and director James Gray who was in competition last year with *Two Lovers*. We had a brief talk with them and snapped shots.

Then I spotted Isabelle in a secluded area talking to the *Thirst* team. She looks very accommodating so I waited in front for several minutes. When *direk* Dante saw me, he wondered what I was doing.

I told him I was waiting for Isabelle to be free so I can have another picture with her. I waited for at least 10 minutes before she became available.

We truly enjoyed our conversation with Isabelle. She was very wonderful and nice. She remembered visiting the Philippines in the ‘80s and going to Bontoc. However, she forgot to remember the island she visited for 10 days.

I then spotted Italian actress and jury member Asia Argento and grabbed the opportunity for a picture with her. Just like Isabelle, she was very accommodating.

When Asia spotted *direk* Dante talking to Isabelle, she joined in the conversation. I think both of them liked the film because they spoke for almost 15 minutes. Isabelle then introduced us to a famous French actress.

However, I was disappointed with Taiwanese actress Shu Qui, another jury member, who refused to be photographed. Since I was already happy with my pictures with Robin, Asia and Isabelle, I did not mind Shu Qui anymore.

Direk Dante and I also had a chance to talk to Pierre Rissient, the mentor of the late Lino Brocka in Cannes. From what we heard last year during the Paris Film Festival, Pierre was very ill but he looked very well that evening.

He told us Tarantino had left him a letter for *direk* Dante about *Kinatay*. He left the letter in his office in Paris and will have it delivered to *direk* Dante.

Before the awards rites, an article in Metro newspaper was published with Tarantino saying *Kinatay* is extraordinary.

Here are excerpts of the article which was translated to English by Martin Macalintal of the French Embassy:

Is there a film that you’ve like particularly since you arrived?

I can’t really speak about the other films in competition because if I mention two, they will ask me why I don’t mention two more! But if there is one that I would gladly defend, it’s *Kinatay* by Brillante Mendoza because it seems it’s receiving the worst critics up to now. But me, I found it extraordinary.

Precisely, what is your critique...

For a film that puts you in the witness position, I believed it from the beginning to the end, an impression strengthened by the fact that the story is told in real time. The situation is at the same time horrible and ordinary, almost boring. And it is rather crazy that such a thing could be boring! In some aspects, *Kinatay* reminded me of *Outrages*, the film of Brian de Palma. We are witnesses of a murder of this prostitute in Manila, a “disposable” being if we refer to the world she lives in. And the film makes us aware of her humanity, showing her pain. I also adored the flight in the car, in the dark, exciting because we can make out the forms and the sounds.

Direk Dante is very grateful to his actors (Coco, Maria Isabel, Julio Diaz, John Regala, Jhong Hilario, Lauren Novero, Benji Filomeno, Alan, Susan Africa, Cris Garido, Mercedes), directors Mark Meily and Jim Libiran and Arlyn dela Cruz who has cameos in the film, Mayor Ben Hur Abalos and the City of Mandaluyong for their support during the filming and his crew and staff: Assistant director Mark dela Cruz, sound engineer Albert Michael Idioma who joined him in Paris, cinematographer Odyssey Flores, cameraman Jeffrey dela Cruz, musical scorer Teresa Barrozo, editor Kats Serraon, art directors Harly Alcasid and Deans Habal and Centerstage staff Antonio del Rosario, Aurora Cruz, Antonio de Guzman Jr., Rene Colinares, Boyet Abajero and Raymund Nullan, the staff of Wild Sound, CMB Film Services, Opticolors and Optima Digital.

He also expresses his deepest gratitude to writer Armando Lao who also wrote *Serbis* last year.

There is still no assurance if *Kinatay* will have a theatrical release in the country. However, I wish that the film would be considered as the country’s official submission to the foreign language film category in next year’s Oscars.

Kinatay will establish its reputation that began with the Cannes best director award.

If it gets a US distribution, the distributor will handle the publicity and promotion of the film to push for its selection in the final five nominees.

It’s two years in a row for *direk* Dante in Cannes and a Best Director Award on his second year.

There are three Filipino films in Cannes this year: *Kinatay*, Raya Martin’s *Independencia* (Un certain Regard) and Martin’s and Adolf Alix Jr.’s *Manila* (special screening) both produced by Arleen Cuevas. The male actors Sid Lucero and Piolo Pascual, respectively, attended the festival as well.

Three film festivals are putting the Philippines as country in focus this year: Vladivostok, Russia in September, Pusan, Korea in October and Thessaloniki, Greece in November.

Let’s hope that the coming years will be better and that the renewed interest in Filipino Cinema is just beginning. ■

Cannes Film Festival prize winners

CANNES, France—Awards presented Sunday at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival, chosen by a jury headed by French Actress Isabelle Huppert:

• Palme d’Or (Golden Palm): *The White Ribbon*, by Michael Haneke (Austria)

• Grand Prize: *A Prophet*, by Jacques Audiard (France)

• Jury Prize: *Fish Tank*, by Andrea Arnold (Britain) and *Thirst*, By Park Chan-wook (South Korea)

• Special Prize: Alain Resnais

• Best Director: Brillante Mendoza, *Kinatay* (Philippines)

• Best Actor: Christoph Waltz, *Inglourious Basterds* (United States)

• Best Actress: Charlotte Gainsbourg, *Antichrist* (Denmark)

• Best Screenplay: Feng Mei, *Spring Fever* (China)

• Camera d’Or (first-time director): *Samson and Delilah*, by Warwick Thornton (Australia)

• Best short film: *Arena*, by Joao Salaviza (Portugal) (AP)



A scene from the movie *Kinatay*



Filipino film director Brillante Mendoza, right, poses with his Best Director award for the film *Kinatay*, with American director Terry Gilliam during the 62nd International Film Festival in Cannes, France, Sunday, May 24. AP Photo



From left, Filipino director Brillante Mendoza, Filipino actors Mercedes Cabral, Coco Martin, Maria Isabel Lopez, and producers Ferdinand Lapuz and Didier Costet arrive on the red carpet for the screening of the film *Kinatay* at the 62nd International film festival in Cannes, southern France, Sunday, May 17, 2009. AP Photo



Kinatay director and Cannes Best Director Brillante ‘Dante’ Mendoza with director Terry Gilliam. Philstar.com Photo



Philstar.com Photo

Stephanie is ready for her close up

by MARIO M. BANZON
Special to the Asian Journal

STEPHANIE REESE opens her show with a Broadway medley, which is what is probably expected of any singer who has gone through a couple of musicals, including of course *Miss Saigon*, *The King and I*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The show, which was held at a non-descript Makati nightclub, was a benefit for Gawad Kalinga, an organization that helps poverty-stricken communities and survivors of national disasters. Except for the pianist, Stephanie is alone on the stage wearing a glittery dress that sparkles whenever the spotlight hits her. It was, in some way, very theatrical and well, expected.

What is unexpected, however, is for someone like her, who has performed in countless of shows in London and Germany, to sing the songs with as much passion as someone who is still new in the business. She could’ve phoned it in by all means but instead she seems to be giving her all in every song. No wonder then that the young Filipino-American singer is slowly making a name for herself in the US music industry.

Perhaps, credit should go to her family for raising an entertainer with a less than diva-ish attitude. Like most singers, Stephanie has been getting her heart out since she was little. “My parents and grandparents always treated me as if I was a great singer so