CHARO SANTOS
INTERVIEWED BY RICKY LEE

SUCKER PUNCHED!
BARON GEISLER VS KIKO MATOS: THE FULL STORY
ON THE CHARADE THAT UPSTAGED THE ELECTIONS

PLUS SEX ROMPS, POWER SUITS, AND WHITE COLLAR BLUES
THE MAKING OF ISMAEL BERNAL’S WORKING GIRLS
STATE OF GRACE
Fresh from her return to the screen and glowing reviews at the Venice Film Festival, Charo Santos speaks with the screenwriter Ricky Lee on her comeback film and her unparalleled four decade-long career.
CONTENTS

November 2016

FEATURES

66
SUCKER PUNCH DRUNK
The rumors are true. The Baron Geisler-Kiko Matos feud was a set-up that turned the eye of a nation from political turmoil to a mixed martial arts promotion. Paolo Enrico Melendez draws the line between perception and reality with the creative forces behind Busti Mode.

74
THE SUSPECT
The brutal murders of film critics Alexis Tioseco and Nicko Bohinc is a case long gone cold, with the media fire dying away and little consolation to be had in the police investigation. Writer Lauriel Fantauzzo revisits the fallout of the crime, seven years later.

96
FILM FATALES
The silver screen has famously been a man’s to fill with whatever he pleases, but the game has changed now that more women have entered the frame, on and off camera. Rogue sits down with nine of film’s finest females about what it means to be a woman in contemporary cinema.

106
GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN
A masterful dissection of the corporate landscape, Ishmael Bernal’s Working Girls captured the mood of its time. Jerome Gomez examines the people and forces behind the creation of this beloved ode to the working women, circa 1984.

114
THE FORCE AWAKENS
When it was first released, Ang Babae Sa Septic Tank was a critical and surprising commercial success. The sequel, which plays on the tropes of Pinoy romantic comedies, sees Eugene Domingo reprising her role as well, herself. Chris Martinez gives us a sneak peek.

116
LINES DRAWN ON WATER
In matters of territorial dispute, the Philippines is the underdog. But away from the action in the West Philippine Sea, a crew of Navy soldiers foisted a flag on an island in the middle of nowhere to prove a point. Criselda Yubes recalls her time on the treacherous expedition.
CONTENTS

November 2016

SECTIONS

17
AGENDA
Acclaimed film critic Philbert Dy chats with FDCP chairwoman Liza Diño about what kind of change is coming to local cinema; Rizzoli publishes a dazzling retrospective on the works of esteemed auteur Wong Kar Wai; Samantha Lee’s debut full-length film Baka Baka is, first and foremost, a love story.

39
SPACE
Kenneth Cobonpue sped his retro Jaguar E-type through the roads of Bohol for a 3-day race; street art veteran Tornick Ablack A.K.A. Toxic talks about the wildlife of 80s New York and crossing over to the world of galleries; the color blue, when utilized properly, can greatly improve the look of your living space.

49
THE EYE
Rafe Totengco returns from a decades-long hiatus from apparel for a collaboration with Bench; Luminox honors the US Navy Seals with a precision timepiece made to withstand the harshest conditions.

57
THE SLANT
Bernardo Bernardo takes us behind the scenes of Mamitas By Night, and how Ismael Bernal pushed the actor to the limits of his craft; Dwight Gaston recalls the mortifying experience of going naked on camera for the first time; Paolo Enrico Melendez describes how to survive hunting for bootlegs in Quiapo.
“The absurdly right little moments.” These are what we seek movies for, according to the critic Pauline Kael. The following are tributes told by three who have been consumed by that pursuit of film: the performance of it, the sacrifices for it, the risks and gains in the indulgence of it.
Lights, Camera, Soul

A filmic milestone, *Manila By Night* was also a pivotal project for many of its actors. Its unlikely star, Bernardo Bernardo, in an excerpt from his upcoming book *Myth Pa Po Akot (Acting with Legends)*, gives us the view from ground zero.

had no idea what the movie was about. The first time I heard the title *Manila by Night*, I imagined images of sleazy documentary films of the 1960s such as the *World by Night* and *Mondo Cane* series—blockbuster grab bags of exotic travelogue vignettes and bizarre cultural practices around the world tacked together to shock the sensibilities of curious Westernized audiences.

I did not care.

Even when the powers that be at Regal Films made it clear that they were less than enthusiastic about Ishmael Bernal’s decision to cast me, for example, by offering me the heart-stopping talent fee of P15,000 to portray the major role of Manay Sharon, the successful gay couturier, opposite such big-name stars as Charito Solis, Alma Moreno, Rio Locsin, Lorna Tolentino, Cherrie Gil, and Gina Alajar.

All right, maybe my ego was slightly bruised and I vacillated. For half a second.

I would have done it for free. For Bernal. But Bernal, scolded that he was, said: “Do it for me. And do it for P15,000.”

So, I did.

Last century, when Ishmael Bernal and I became friends, people actually still talked to each other. There were no cell phones, no e-mails, no Facebook; heck, Mark Zuckerberg was not even born yet. It was 1971 and I was delighted when Bernal designed to come down from the pantheon of Café Los Indios Bravo’s Algonquin-style Center Table—composed of the likes of Virgie Moreno, Nick Joquinto, Jose Garcia Villa, et al—to make *chika* with me in a dimly lit corner table set for ordinary mortals.

We hit it off almost immediately over totally plebeian *chuchu* of San Miguel Beer. We were both nicknamed Bernie. And we laughed louder than anybody else in Ermita. We were both larger than life—tall, with booming voices—we had presence and we knew it, and we knew how to make an entrance with certified tongue-in-cheek theatricality, quick in dishing out the bon mots over anything culturati or vulgarati and everything decidedly snob (1970s for “gay”).

However, I kept a secret for the longest time. I had been secretly waiting for a chance to work with Bernal since *Pagdating sa Dugo* (1971). We were friends. But not really close. I mean, not close enough for me to even jokingly hint: “Bernie, itti mo naman ako sa next movie mo.”

So, almost 10 years after we first met, and after Bernal had already completed 28 films, I was still waiting in the wings. Understandably, when the phone finally rang in 1979 with Douglas Quijano (celebrated talent manager and in-house royalty-cum-project coordinator for Regal Films) on the other end, saying Bernal wanted me for his next movie, anyone should forgive me now for snatching a cringe-worthy descriptor from Jerry Maguire. He had me at “Hello.”

Of course my role had to be that of a duplicitous, bitchy, sharp, manipulative, well-intentioned gay couturier, Manay Sharon, who loves to direct people’s lives on a whim and just as quickly dump them when they somehow manage to live up to his self-fulfilling prophecy that these ingrates will lie, steal, and take advantage of his goodwill.

But who’s complaining? What serious (read: ambitious) stage actor would not want to cross over from the decidedly limited, Makati-centric Pinoy Broadway theater theater mundo to the relatively more glamorous, prestigious, notorious, and raucously celebrated social activism during Martial Law of Bad Boy Bluebloods, the likes of Bernal, Brocka, et al.? It was a big deal in the 1970s to be working with Bernal. I mean, he was on a roll; a critically acclaimed director and scriptwriter, he had back-
to back nominations at the Gawad Urian and the FAMAS, and his films were big box-office hits.

I was among the last actors to be cast in Manila by Night and, consequently, attended only one pre-production meeting. It was very informal. As I remember, we were seated on the floor of Bernal's apartment, along with production designer Peque Gallaga and his wife Mddie, costume and wardrobe mistress Bing Fabregas, some members of the staff, and Bernal himself. Initial focus was my look as Manoy Sharon. I was casually informed that the color motif would be all white; and so that I didn't look too butch, my hair would have to be dyed a lighter shade. They would also have to shave and shape my eyebrows. Okay.

Importantly, Bernal, who was also writing the screenplay, made sure that I understood that we would use an outline instead of an actual script, a sequence guide, if you will, and that his approach was going to be ensemble-focused and improvisation-driven.

I was not sure what that meant but I nodded in agreement anyway.

Technically, Bernal explained, Manoy Sharon would thread the episodic multi-narrative—the cinematic device linking the lives of several key characters. All of them living on the edge, literally and figuratively, on the darker, seedier side of Manila by night. More importantly, in Bernal's own words, Manoy will be "the conscience of the city."

Of course, I had to ask, "Why a gay character as the conscience of the city?"

Bernal's response, unblinking behind a cloud of cigarette smoke, was short, sweet, and indisputable.

"Why not!"

Additionally, Bernal stressed that Manoy Sharon was not going to be anything like the stereotypical perya queen often seen at the time in Filipino movies. The inscrutable Bernal look he gave me signaled that the role demanded more than a modicum of complexity in characterization and that a certain gravitas was going to be expected. Check.

No red flags. I had complete trust in Bernal. Even when he blithely neglected providing me with a character background of Manoy Sharon. A well-annotated script is every insecure actor's indispensable crutch. Instead, all I heard was the sketched overview of the plotline when I was itching to get my hands on a character study.

Zikh.

Bernal's trust in me became evident when he gave me the freedom to cast my personal friends to play my bar Turles. He knew I would be more relaxed and natural that way. I quickly suggested longtime friends who were not butch types, and who would have the bitches, humor, and fortitude to purvey Manoy's ruses. Choreographer Bobby Ongkitok, character actor Manny Castañeda, and designer Ube Abeleda. For added realism, Bernal cast a relative outsider to my inner circle, Jun Macapinacan, as my designated ayatay. A logical choice, since Jun's character also works for Manoy as a seamstress in his Malate shop.

Now, why would Bernal give me so much freedom? As I told Joel David, noted film critic, Bernal was looking at me directly when he coldly uttered: "Nothing's happening."

That's all it took. A few words and a facial expression so sullen it said: "Bernie, celluloid is expensive. You're wasting time. And money. And you're not giving me anything I can use. CREATE something."

Mentally, I quickly sorted out what Bernal was trying to tell me. And it just hit me. He did not want me to perform right after he said "Action!"

He wanted me to experience the moment. He did not want to hear dialogue. He wanted to listen to a conversation.

Bernal was not about to direct my every move. I had to be more inventive. And real. Fast. I did not have the luxury of fleshing out a character in a play. So, I stepped up and improvised, in this scene and the ones that followed.

Bernal's approach was not about media coverage, but capturing something happening—a truthful human behavior occurring logically and believably from moment to moment, from choice to consequence—in order to push the story forward.

With Bernal firmly at the helm encouraging me to create a character, I began to appreciate the set as a safe, collaborative arena where I could explore and experiment during rehearsals under my director's watchful eye. With the complete mutual trust of true collaborators. I would ad lib during blocking rehearsals to bookend the philosophical riff of Manoy that Bernal would provide, enabling me to me to give the dialogue a more conversational, spontaneous feel.

I also began to quickly read his body language and the subtlety of short directorial prodding. He was very sparing with words, saying only what was needed; flicking his wrist, with a lift cigarette between his fingers, to punctuate a reminder such as "Bernie, too macho" (the New Year scene where I attack Alex outside the Sampalay Gay Bar). Evoking a Hollywood silhouette, for my kissing scene with a reluctant Orestes Oyola (February). Arching back "liko Susun Hayward in Back Street." Harking back to Ancient Greece with arms akimbo while plumbing the depths of anguish, "It has to be a cathartic cry—of Greek Tragedy proportions" (as a preparation for Manoy Sharon's nervous breakdown outside the funeral parlor).

It was fun. I felt empowered and secure. And the creative journey that was Manila by Night remains as one of the major highlights of my career. Robert Altman's Nashville was Bernal's avowed inspiration for the film. And I'm proud to say I saw Bernal at his Almanesque best.

What we eventually wound up with was part
RELATIVITY, part melodrama, part film noir, part satire, part philosophical discourse, part soft-core porn, part social commentary, part Robert Altman, All Bernal.

It was queer vision at work: unblinkingly defiant. Spoken like the true conscience of a country in turmoil, during the Martial Law years. I am now reminded of an article written by Pablo Tarinian years later, after the demise of Bernal and Lino Brocka, where he quotes Marilou Diaz-Abaya on the artistically incisive roles that two great Filipino film directors, Brocka and Bernal, had played in Philippine cinema and history. As Diaz-Abaya succinctly stated: "They both made films in the most challenging times and they responded with valor. Their kind of artistic nobility is now dead." And, of course, they both happened to be gay.

In Bernal's Manila by Night, gay ruled. And in that queer world, you couldn't take the gay out of the city and you couldn't take the city out of the gay. Queerness propelled the narrative. Manay Sharon, whose queer interests drove him to insinuate himself into people's lives as the city's well-intentioned meddler, took it upon himself to guide people toward bettering their lives. Ultimately, however, Manay revealed himself to be a flawed conscience, a duplicitous do-gooder who betrayed the people he supposedly cared for because they failed to meet his moral standards (from which he appeared to be exempt). For the Queen of Despair, drug addiction and infidelity were unforgivable, but the worst sin of all was deceitfulness. After all, Manay did not lie; he just did not tell the truth.

We started out with a rather sketchy blueprint. But we were basically shooting in sequence, chronologically, and the characters were evolving as the story unfolded with its dynamic twists, turns, and interaction of opposing desires. It was like shooting a documentary, as events happened. And it has become one of the best Filipino films ever made. Noted critic Noel Vera calls Manila by Night Bernal's "masterpiece."

Some people actually thought that the film could not be made during Martial Law. Bravely, Bernal's film presented Manila as it really was—rife with drugs, prostitution, poverty, miserable housing conditions, and unemployment—a vivid representation of pessimistic city dwellers feeling trapped, paranoid, and suspicion. Pressed upon by a prevailing anxiety caused by an undurable system that Bernal skillfully avoided blaming directly, but somehow presented in a manner that was so graphically powerful that the former First Lady of the Philippines and Governor of Metro Manila, Imelda Romualdez Marcos, took offense and had Manila by Night censored within an inch of its life.

The title of the film was changed to City After Dark, and all references to Manila were edited or bleeped out. After being butchered (the local dish is pen comes to mind), the film that was supposed to run two hours and 20 minutes long was reduced to only 90 minutes. Worse, toward the end of the film, a deus ex machina type of "developmental transformation" was arbitrarily inserted: a cinematic collage of the lead characters in disjointed snippets of celluloid where a somber voice-over solemnly intoned how the wretched have decided to forsake their sinful ways, atone for past mistakes, and effectively transform their lives. Hallelujah!

Topping injury with insults, still being the norm at the tail end of the dictator's rule, a year-long ban by the Martial Law era censorship board also effectively kept the film's participation as competition entry to the prestigious Berlin International Film Festival—this, in spite of the critical acclaim and the strong buzz that Manila by Night was going to win Golden Bear. The film already had German subtitles. And I had my passport ready, for heavens sake! But in spite of the relentless entreaties of top-tier film stalwart Marichi Vera Perez-Maceda, seconded by presidential daughter Imee Marcos, the Inmovible Madame Marcos of the City of Mayam said No.

Locally, as expected, the FAMAS Awards was already on automatic Imeldific mode and didn't give Manila by Night a single nomination. Unfortunately for them, I was a guest in the TV talk show of Alfie Lorenzo and Douglas Quijano at the same time that top FAMAS board members were promoting their upcoming awards night and touting their illustrious nominees. They got a mouthful from me as I gradually morphed into Manay Sharon live on air. In so many words, I asked the board members how they could possibly ignore such a critically acclaimed motion...
picture that took so much courage to film: a movie invested with the blood, sweat, and tears of our people, with a group of celebrated talents taking risks to bring darkness into light? Sensing a controversial confrontation, the studio decided to extend the show. Coochhie heads intervened.

Happily, Manila by Night got the 1980 Gawad Urian for Best Film. I was handed the Best Actor Award for the role of Manay; Peque Gallaga won for Best Production Design; Bernal was given an award for Best Screenplay. It would be an understatement to say that Bernal was disappointed. Later, during the post-award party at Holiday Inn, Bernal put his unwanted Urian award down on the carpet and jokingly gave it a dramatic lack, saying: “Who wants to win a Best Screenplay Trophy?!”

Mitch Valdes and Peque Gallaga broke into laughter and Bernal and I laughed along with them. Then Ryan Cayabyab, who was hanging out with us, turned to me and very generously announced, “You know, tonight is really Bern’s night.” And he was referring to me, the Other Bern. A grateful, relative newbie in showbiz who managed to sneak past Dindo Fernando (Langis at Tidig) and Phillip Salvador (Beno) to snag the Best Actor trophy.

The Urian trophy, along with boxes of photos, reviews, and press clippings, has long been washed away by Typhoon Ondoy. But a priceless takeaway remains: Manila by Night was my first real lesson in acting for the camera. Of course, 36 years later, with the wisdom of hindsight, it is so much easier to describe the subtle alchemy that had transpired. Experience has provided me the language.

Previous to Bernal’s Manila by Night, I appeared in five other films. However, it was only with Bernal where I began to fully appreciate two things: that the camera is an audience of one, and consequently, that it is my obligation as a film actor to live for that lens. Before Bernal, I was adept at acting out emotions or thoughts, instead of actively pursuing intentions or objectives, knowing how to cry, instead of, for instance, why, how much, and for whom?

I am forever humbled and honored that my first tentative steps towards becoming an authentic film actor began with Bernal’s Manila by Night. I learned how to think, prepare, and behave as a film actor/character/storyteller should, while in the process of creation.

And the lesson continues. Learning how to breathe, move, and have my being through clearly thought-out and very specific arrangement and selection of physical and verbal action. All seemingly discovered, experienced, and expressed for the first time. Fresh and new for each and every take.

Thank you, Ishmael!

THE ARTIST AS CITIZEN

More than 30 years later, Lino Brocka’s speech for the Ramon Magsaysay Awards continue to remind cinema artists that their roles go beyond the movie set.

The filmmaker, like his peers in other media, now realizes that the artist is also a public person. He no longer isolates himself from society. Instead of working in his ivory tower he is a citizen of the slums, of the streets, of the battlefields if need be. The artist is becoming a participant. He tries to be true, not only to his craft but also to himself. What he says on the screen, he also says in the streets. For it is the supreme duty of the artist to investigate the truth no matter what forces attempt to hide it. And then to report this truth to the people, to confront them with it. Like a whip, it will cause wounds but will free the mind from the various fantasies and escapist fables with which “the establishment” pollutes our minds.

To the best of our abilities, and even if we oftentimes fail, we must produce films that will hurt, films that will disturb, films that will not let you rest. For the times are bad and, given times like these, it is a crime to rest. We cannot rest, and should not, while there is a Filipino starving in Negros, an Aquino crying for justice, a victim of police killing in a garbage heap. Although it is the duty of the artist to work for what is true, good and beautiful, first we must expose and fight what is wrong.

In these times, when the government-controlled media hide the truth, when most of what we get is silly gossip, pretty flesh and sensationalized crime, we must go to the streets to find out what is happening. We must listen to those who dare risk their lives and livelihoods, who reiterates once more the utmost duty of the artist, that he be a committed person, taking the side of any human being who is violated, abused, oppressed or dehumanized, and that he use whatever instrument is his—the pen, the brush or the camera.

I accept this award for all such artists, dedicated persons whose names may never be known or published, doing their share, whether in the streets or in prison camps. Some of them may even have died, or at this very moment be fighting for their lives. This award then is for these artists.

They may gag and blindfold you, silence and imprison you, but they will never be able to destroy what made you an artist in the first place—your brave and continuing dedication to the human race.

Together with you I thank the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation for telling us that we should continue our work.