

Centerstage Productions and SWIFT Productions

present

# SERBIS

## [SERVICE]

directed by

**BRILLANTE MA. MENDOZA**



**FESTIVAL DE CANNES**

OFFICIAL SELECTION

COMPETITION

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**Asian Cinema Fund  
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**Technical Specifications:**

Running Time	<b>1 hour, 33 minutes, 29 seconds</b>
Gauge	<b>35mm 1:1.77 Color</b>
Sound	<b>Dolby SR</b>
Language	<b>Tagalog</b>
Year of Production	<b>2008</b>
Country of Production	<b>Philippines/France</b>

**Credits:**

Director: **BRILLANTE MA. MENDOZA**  
Executive Producer: **DIDIER COSTET**  
Producer: **FERDINAND LAPUZ**  
Supervising Producers: **ANTONIO DEL ROSARIO, JC NIGADO**  
Associate Producer: **RENATO ESGUERRA**  
Screenplay: **ARMANDO LAO**  
Story by: **ARMANDO LAO, BOOTS AGBAYANI PASTOR**  
Director of Photography: **ODYSSEY FLORES**  
Music: **GIAN GIANAN**  
Editing: **CLAIRE VILLA-REAL**  
Production Design: **BENJAMIN PADERO, CARLO TABIJE**  
Art Direction: **HARLEY ALCASID, DEANS HABAL**  
Sound: **EMMANUEL NOLET CLEMENTE**  
Casting: **ED INSTRELLA**

**Cast:**

Nanay Flor **Gina Pareño**  
Nayda **Jaclyn Jose**  
Lando **Julio Diaz**  
Alan **Coco Martin**  
Ronald **Kristofer King**  
Jerome **Dan Alvaro**  
Merly **Mercedes Cabral**  
Jewel **Roxanne Jordan**

## **SYNOPSIS**

Morality has two sides—absolute and relative.

The Pineda family operates a run-down movie house in a city in the province which shows dated sexy double-feature films. The family has taken up actual residence in the old building as well. The matriarch Nanay Flor, her daughter Nayda, son-in-law Lando and adopted daughter Jewel take turns manning the ticket booth and the canteen. Her nephews Alan and Ronald are the billboard painter and projectionist respectively.

Nanay Flor had filed a bigamy case against her estranged husband and is attending the court hearing today when, after a number of years, the decision will be finally handed down. It is within this context that the story unfolds. As the rest of the members go about their daily activities, we get a glimpse of how they suffer and deal with each other's sins and vices--relational, economic or sexual.

Alan, who is financially unprepared for marital responsibility, feels oppressed by his pregnant girlfriend's demand of marriage. Nayda, who entered marriage out of tradition, is torn between marital fidelity and her ambiguous attraction towards her cousin Ronald. Nanay Flor, who loses the case, feels betrayed not only by the court judge but also by her son who testified in favor of his father.

Preoccupied with their personal demons, the family is unmindful that inside the movie theater, another kind of business is going on between the "serbis" boys (male prostitutes) and the gay patrons.

Screenwriter: Armando Lao

Director: Brillante Ma. Mendoza

## **OF HOST AND COUNTRY: Brillante Mendoza's Cinematic Deconstruction of the Philippines**

### **INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR BRILLANTE MA. MENDOZA**

***The film seems to have dual themes – one is of course related to the title of the film, SERBIS [SERVICE]. The other relates to the name of the cinema – FAMILY. Could you please explain how these dual themes came about?***

“SERBIS” may be viewed from several levels. That the film, as you say, has a dual theme, it is intentional. Specifically, “SERBIS” refers to the rent boys, including minors, who ply their trades inside movie houses. As such, the question of morality comes into play, not to mention the legality of the whole proceedings. In these parts, rules and laws are more often observed in the breaches. But what is morality, or legality for the matter, in a society wallowing in abject poverty, and the struggle for survival stares at you in the face? Indeed, the whole thing boils down to a question of economics.

In the true story from which the film was based upon, the family that owns the movie house resides in the same establishment. It is not coincidental that the movie house or cinema is named “FAMILY.” And the camera catches the story of a family, dysfunctional and extended, as it unfolds to mirror a country in continuous decay.

In a broad sense, “SERBIS” can mean “SERVICE” of any kind: one’s service to one’s family; the family’s service to its members; the cinema owner’s service to their customers. Or the cinema’s service to moviegoers and others; a citizen’s service to society or country; society’s or country’s service to its citizens; men and women’s service to humanity; humanity’s service to man/woman; and so on and so forth...

***How much do you think the strong matriarchal household in some ways represents the Philippines?***

Most of my films are inhabited by strong women. In “SERBIS,” the dominant and domineering matriarch, played by Gina Pareño, reflects the typical Filipino family where women actually reign and hold things together. The family from which I came from is similar in many respects. The Philippines is basically a matriarchal society with men at the forefront, especially in most of our political and economic affairs. But behind almost every family lurks a powerful woman.

The power wielded by our two female presidents (Cory Cojuangco Aquino, 1986-1992, and Gloria Macapagal Aroyo, 2001-2010) demonstrates their strength against all odds. They have weathered many storms, so to speak, including military coup d’etats and other uprisings. And yet they have prevailed.

***In the story, the character of Alan (played by Coco Martin) is constantly bothered by a large boil on his buttocks. What does the condition represent?***

The boil on Alan's (Coco Martin) buttocks is literally "a pain in the ass." It causes discomfort as many troubles in life do.

Symbolically, Alan's boil points to the unexpected – that nagging thing that sometimes one has to deal with no matter how one tries to avoid it. It happens for whatever reason, but it is a part of us that we have to take on or live with or get rid of in time.

The painful swelling causes Alan to limp, and a glimpse into his real character is made obvious. He has impregnated his girlfriend but the weakling in him is not ready to face the responsibility that the situation entails. Still, Alan goes through the motions of the whole charade and mimics what passes for romance by bedding his woman in the confines of his congested and chaotic space one more time.

In the end, after getting rid of his troublesome boil, with a folk bottle-on–buttock ritual, Alan finally decides to abandon everything – his family (relatives), the movie house, his job, his girlfriend and their scheduled engagement. He packs all his belongings in one bag and quietly leaves, walking against the flow of a sea of religious believers in a seemingly funereal procession. Perhaps he is the usual heel who leaves his country in despair or disgust to look for greener pastures, and is hailed as a new "Global Hero" when he returns after a life of virtual servitude in a foreign land?

***The camera in this film constantly follows each character as he or she wanders around the 4-story cinema – so much so that we begin to also understand the layout of the place instinctively. Was this intentional?***

It has become a trademark, in a manner of speaking, in all my films that the camera almost always follows the characters. We saw that in "Masahista" (THE MASSEUR), "Kaleldo" (SUMMER HEAT) and "Manoro" (THE AETA TEACHER). We also walked the same walk in "Foster Child" (JOHN JOHN) with the characters as they go to their final destination, which is all a day's journey. And "Tirador" (SLINGSHOT), with its various vignettes intertwining, has opened all roads, taken or not taken, by people from all walks of life on and off-screen.

In SERBIS, the small journeys that the camera travels, trailing the varied characters to their nooks and crannies of the four-storey cinema, are deliberate and integral to the film's storytelling. The different levels of the cinema transcend its physical layout as they manifest the many facets of the structure as characters. People and layers are viewed and interpreted in accordance to one's nature, culture, education, experience, vibration or other variables.

## **CREW BIOGRAPHIES**

### **BRILLANTE MA. MENDOZA (Director)**

Brillante Ma. Mendoza was born in San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines. He was a fine arts major who studied advertising at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. He started his career as a production designer in feature films, television, theatre and eventually in television advertising. His production design work was featured in acclaimed local films such as TAKAW TUKSO (FLIRTING WITH TEMPTATION, 1986), PRIVATE SHOW (1986), OLONGAPO, THE GREAT AMERICAN DREAM (1987), and many others.

From feature films, Brillante then moved on to television commercial productions, and became one of the most sought-after and in-demand production designers. From 1990 to 2004, he designed the production for commercials of most major companies such as Asia Brewery, Globe, Jollibee, McDonald's, Procter & Gamble Philippines, PLDT, San Miguel Brewery, Smart and Unilever Philippines. This brought him in close working relationships with politicians and some of the biggest names in the Filipino entertainment industry.

His first feature film MASAHISTA (THE MASSEUR), made in 2005, won a Golden Leopard award (co-winner) in the video section at the 2005 Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland, as well as the Interfaith Award in 2006 Brisbane Film Festival and the Audience Award in Turin.

His subsequent films won further major international awards. MANORO (THE AETA TEACHER, 2006) won the CinemAvvenir at the Torino Film Festival 2006 and Best Picture and Director awards at the Cinemanila 2006. KALELDO (SUMMER HEAT) won the Netpac Award in Jeonju 2007 and the Best Actress Award in Durban 2007. FOSTER CHILD won the Best Actress award in New Delhi 2007, Special Jury award in Kazakhstan 2007 and the Signis Award in Las Palmas 2008. TIRADOR won the Special Jury award in Marrakech in 2007 and the Caligari Award in Berlin Film Festival 2008. It was also given the Best Film, Director and Netpac awards in the 2008 Singapore International Film Festival.

SERBIS is a co-production of the Philippines and France's Swift Productions. It won script funding from the Asian Cinema Fund of the 2007 Pusan International Film Festival, and participated in the 2008 Hong Kong Asian Film Financing Forum (HAF).

## FILMOGRAPHY

2008	SERBIS
2007	TIRADOR (SLINGSHOT)
2007	FOSTER CHILD (JOHN JOHN)
2006	THE AETA TEACHER (MANORO)
2006	SUMMER HEAT (KALELDO)
2005	THE MASSEUR (MASAHISTA)

### **ARMANDO LAO (Scriptwriter)**

Armando Lao started writing scripts in the mid '80s. His most noted works includes TAKAW TUKSO (1986), ITANONG MO SA BUWAN (ASK THE MOON, 1988), PILA BALDE (FETCH A PAIL OF WATER) and TUHOG (LARGER THAN LIFE, 2001) which was screened at the Venice Film Festival.

Lao also handles scriptwriting seminars and acts as creative consultant to other writers. He supervised the script for MASAHISTA (THE MASSEUR, 2005), KUBRADOR (THE BET COLLECTOR, 2006), MANORO (THE AETA TEACHER 2006), FOSTER CHILD (JOHN JOHN, 2007) and TIRADOR (SLINGSHOT, 2007).

### **ODYSSEY FLORES (Director of Photography)**

Odyssey Flores started his career as a cinematographer for movies with AKALA MO (2002). He won awards for Laman (FLESH, 2002) and MAGNIFICO (2003). Aside from SERBIS, he was also the cinematographer in Mendoza's KALELDO (SUMMER HEAT, 2006) and FOSTER CHILD (JOHN JOHN, 2007).

### **GIAN GIANAN (Music)**

Gian Gianan is a professor of music at the University of the Philippines. She served as art director in Brillante Mendoza's KALELDO (SUMMER HEAT, 2006). SERBIS is her first film as a music composer.

### **CLAIRE VILLA-REAL (Editor)**

Claire Villa-Real was the editor in one of the episode of the film GAWAD KALINGA. SERBIS is her second film as editor.

### **FERDINAND LAPUZ (Producer)**

Ferdinand Lapuz established Ignatius Films Canada in 2004 to help promote Filipino films internationally. He represented *MAGNIFICO* (2003), *BABAE SA BREAKWATER* (*WOMAN OF BREAKWATER*, 2003; Cannes Director's Fortnight 2004), *THE BLOSSOMING OF MAXIMO OLIVEROS* (2005), *MASAHISTA* (*THE MASSEUR*, 2005) and *FOSTER CHILD* (*JOHN JOHN*, 2007; Cannes Director's Fortnight 2007). He returned to the Philippines in 2005. Lapuz served as producer/executive producer for Brillante Mendoza in his films *MANORO* (*THE AETA TEACHER*, 2006), *TIRADOR* (*SLINGSHOT*, 2007) and *SERBIS*.

### **DIDIER COSTET (Executive Producer)**

Didier H. Costet, a French national, studied business management at the Paris University and became involved in the independent theatrical business at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival. For the first years, he worked for an independent French firm and bought movies from American companies such as Samuel Goldwyn, Vestron, and New World, as well as looking after their releases in France. In 1992, he opened his own Paris based distribution company named SWIFT Distribution in order to develop his relationship with the French film industry. At that time, apart from his acquisitions, he expanded into the TV distribution side of the business. *SERBIS* marks the first film that Costet produced and co-financed.

## **CAST BIOGRAPHIES**

### **GINA PAREÑO (Nanay Flor)**

Gina Pareño was born to a Filipino mother and German-American father in Gagalangin, Tondo, Manila. In 1964, she won a dance contest on Dance-O-Rama and signed a contract with Sampaguita Pictures. She launched her film career with the film MAMA in 1968 and, since then, has made more than 100 films. The turning point of her career was her role as Amelia in KUBRADOR (THE BET COLLECTOR, 2006) which gave her three international awards from New Delhi, Amiens and Brussels.

### **JACLYN JOSE (Nayda)**

Jaclyn Jose launched her film career in 1984 with the film CHICKAS. In 1985, she was directed by the late filmmaker Lino Brocka in WHITE SLAVERY, which started her ascent to becoming a dramatic actress. She won awards for films such as PRIVATE SHOW (1987), TAKAW TUKSO (1987), ITANONG MO SA BUWAN (1988), MACHO DANCER (1988) and THE FLOR CONTEMPLACION STORY (1995). She has also starred in Brillante Mendoza's MASAHIISTA (THE MASSEUR, 2005) and TIRADOR (SLINGSHOT, 2007).

### **JULIO DIAZ (Lando)**

Julio Diaz made his feature screen debut in SINNER OR SAINT (1984), using the screen name Rani Regaliza. He was launched as a major dramatic actor in TAKAW TUKSO (1987), in which he starred opposite Jaclyn Jose, and HUBAD NA PANGARAP (1988). His other noteworthy films were ALIWAN PARADISE (1982), BAYANI (1992) and SAKAY (1993).

### **COCO MARTIN (Alan)**

He was introduced to feature films in Brillante Mendoza's MASAHIISTA (THE MASSEUR, 2005), which gave him the Best Performer Award from the Young Critics' Circle. Known as the prince of independent movies in the Philippines, Martin made around 10 indie films last year, one of which included Mendoza's TIRADOR (SLINGSHOT, 2007).

### **KRISTOFER KING (Ronald)**

Kristofer King's first role in films was in BABAE SA BREAKWATER (WOMAN OF BREAKWATER, 2003). The film was shown in the 2004 Cannes Director's Fortnight and King went to Cannes to attend the festival. He had brief roles in Brillante Mendoza's MASAHISTA (THE MASSEUR, 2005) and FOSTER CHILD (JOHN JOHN, 2007). He was given one of the major lead roles in TIRADOR (SLINGSHOT, 2007).

### **DAN ALVARO (Jerome)**

Dan Alvaro was one of the major dramatic actors of the '80s in the Philippines. He gave unforgettable performances in films such as CONDEMNED (1984), BAGONG HARI (NEW KING, 1986), HARI SA HARI, LAHI SA LAHI (KING AND THE EMPEROR, 1987) and ANDREA, PAANO BA MAGING ISANG INA (ANDREA, 1990). He also starred in Brillante Mendoza's FOSTER CHILD (JOHN JOHN, 2007).

### **MERCEDES CABRAL (MERLY)**

Mercedes Cabral is a student of Fine Arts from the University of the Philippines. She played a supporting role in the film BALIW (2007) and later won the Best Supporting Actress award at the 2007 UP Inbox TV and Radio Festival for her performance in the digital film BITIN. Her next role will be in acclaimed Korean director Park Chan-wook's upcoming film THIRST.

### **ROXANNE JORDAN (JEWEL)**

Roxanne Jordan is a college student in the Philippines. She has started a career in print and television commercials. She was one of the last girls to audition for the role of Jewel in the film. SERBIS is her first film.

## **PRODUCTION COMPANIES**

**Centerstage Productions** was established in 2004 by Brillante Ma. Mendoza. The company's first project was Mendoza's first film **MASAHISTA (THE MASSEUR, 2005)** which they co-produced with Gee Entertainment. Their first solo production was Mendoza's **KALELDO (SUMMER HEAT, 2006)**. Centerstage Productions also produced films for other directors and projects such as Mel Chionglo's **TWILIGHT DANCERS (2006 Toronto International Film Festival)** and Mark Philip Espina's **SIQUIJOR, MYSTIC ISLAND (2007)**. They also line produced the Filipino-Canadian film by Romeo Candido, **ANG PAMANA (THE INHERITANCE, 2006)** and **FOSTER CHILD (JOHN JOHN, 2007)**.

Other films produced include Mendoza's **MANORO (THE AETA TEACHER 2006)**, **TIRADOR (SLINGSHOT, 2007)**, as well as **SERBIS (2008)**, which is their first co-production with a foreign production.

**SWIFT Productions** was created by Didier Costet in 1992 with the goal of specializing in the acquisition and distribution of quality original motion pictures. SWIFT Productions has three activities:

- theatrical film distribution through its sister company EQUATION (5 to 7 movies per year, among them **RED ROAD** by Andrea Arnold, Jury Prize Cannes 2006, Oscar® nominee **AFTER THE WEDDING** by Susanne Bier, **THE KING AND THE CLOWN** by Lee Jun-ik, **SLINGSHOT** by Brillante Mendoza, among others)
- TV distribution (over 200 titles)
- Video Label

and now production for the first time with Brillante Ma. Mendoza's **SERBIS (2008)**.