

peque gallaga: the flip interview



JESSICA ZAFRA

Most people think *Oro, Plata, Mata* was your first movie.

Tell us about *Binhi*.

Binhi was the first movie and the last project I did in collaboration with Butch Perez. Many people think that my movies changed when I partnered off with Lore Reyes, but I was into collaboration from almost the beginning. Around 1966, Butch and I started doing a lot of things together like scripting, comics, rock concerts and wild shoots of the craziest things you could ever imagine. We were doing music videos before they existed; so much so that Channel 13, when it was still on P. Guevara, asked us if we could do a half hour of whatever it was we were doing on black and white 16 mm film. Of course we said that sure we could. We had never directed a show before on TV. In fact, I didn't even know that there was a control room on a TV setup before I stepped into the studio.

Butch took over the controls and I took over the production. We did a kind of *Laugh-In* called *The Fabulous Gamboa Show* which featured Fabulous Gamboa, the star that never showed up for his own show because he was always late or whatever excuse it was for the week; and we recruited theater people like Mitch Valdes, Jimmy Fabregas, Jon Achaval, my brother Ricky and a really foxy cousin of mine called Ixi Mapua and a lot of other drama students of mine at the time and put up this insane show which nobody watched. The few who did approach me forty years after and tell me how they had never seen anything like it and never have since.

What was crazy about it was that it was a very fast-paced, highly-edited show at a time when the station still had no editing machine, so we had to shoot everything live with hundreds of cut-ins for ten minute segments at a time. If we made a mistake we had to take it from the top. We would insert our MTV-like thingies that we would shoot and for budget reasons, we would edit right on the negative itself: cut and splice the negative and run it through the film chain and reverse polarities so that the negative would come out positive. It was probably the hardest work I ever did in my whole life.

From there we both graduated to musicals, where we both won the CAT Awards for Best Musical with *The Uncola Specials* and a whole slew of others including *The Hilda-Walter Show*, *Changes* with June Keithley, and *The Comedy Machine*, where I discovered Dexter Doria. From there, we bluffed our way into a drama anthology with Rosemarie Sonora in the long running *Oh Rosemarie* where I learned a lot about Filipino cinema from Mama Ateng Osorio. And that led to doing *Binhi*, which was supposed to be the comeback film for Rosemarie; we sort of didn't deliver expectations because we bluffed our way into that project as well.

I bring up that very rough background because I want to let people know the pedigree of *Oro, Plata, Mata*. Everybody thinks that it sprang full-blown from my head, like Athena springing from Zeus's, but I had put in my hours and I had been working in the business one way or another, steadily, for about 11 to 12 years before I tackled a story on my own.

So *Binhi* was a psycho-sexual story about a woman's repressed desires, meant to be shot and presented *a la Elvira Madigan*, which was a Scandinavian art film at the time. What did I know? We were really lucky in our cast: we had Rosemarie, Dindo Fernando, Ronaldo Valdes, Divina Valencia, Gil de Leon and Dondon Nakar, who bagged a Best Supporting Child Actor with that one. We were given a tour of Villa Escudero by the producer, who was a friend of the family's. At the time that there was no resort there, so it was this private house in the middle of all these coconut trees and we flipped. We rewrote the whole script so it could feature everything in the house. And then we were not allowed to shoot there, so we had to adjust everything and shoot all over San Pablo just to get a sense of the original "feel" of the piece.

We had great things in it as well as really embarrassing things that shame me to this day when I remember them. Cinematographer was Joe Batac and editor was Rene Tala. Fifteen years later Lore and I did a film with Rene as editor; he never *dared* tell me, but he told Lore that Butch and I were driving him up the wall, because we were doing two different