

MIFF 2026: Filipino Cinema Proudly Takes Hollywood

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER



Photos by Tony Garcia and Katie Ortiz

For three days, Filipino cinema took center stage in Hollywood as the third annual **Manila International Film Festival (MIFF)** brought filmmakers, actors and audiences together at the iconic TCL Chinese Theatre. From September 3–5, screenings, premieres, filmmaker Q&As and industry programs showcased stories from the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora.

Opening day featured the Los Angeles premiere of Raymond Red's *Manila's Finest*, followed by a community shorts program highlighting Filipino-American filmmakers from FilAm Creative. The opening festivities set the tone for several days celebrating Filipino storytelling while creating a bridge between the Philippine and Hollywood film industries.

September 4 became a landmark day for Filipino representation in Hollywood. That morning, Lea Salonga received the 2,855th star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, becoming the first Filipina to receive the honor. The ceremony in front of the Pantages Theatre brought out an impressive group of artists, with Brandy, Darren Criss and Ming-Na Wen delivering remarks honoring Salonga and her groundbreaking career. Grammy and Academy Award-winning artist H.E.R. was also among those in attendance.

The celebration continued at the TCL Chinese Theatre, where MIFF presented a Lea Salonga Retrospective

featuring the beloved 1995 film *Sana Maulit Muli*, starring Salonga and Aga Muhlach, along with *The Vale: Origins*. Later that evening, MIFF presented a special advance screening of DreamWorks Animation's *Forgotten Island*, inspired by Philippine mythology and culture and featuring a voice cast that includes H.E.R., Liza Soberano, Manny Jacinto, Dolly de Leon, Jo Koy and Lea Salonga.

September 4 concluded with MIFF's Filipino Cinema Block, featuring *Veterano* and the world premiere of *Eddie Romero Remastered: A Century of Filipino Cinema*. From honoring Salonga on Hollywood Boulevard to celebrating Philippine cinema on the big screen, the day reflected both the history and expanding global presence of Filipino talent.

The festival continued September 5 with a packed slate that included *No Room for Love*, *The Road to Sydney*, *58th*, *Quezon*, *Bench: Body of Work*, *East of Western* and *Kappa-Tiran*. Many screenings were followed by Q&As, giving audiences an opportunity to hear directly from the filmmakers and artists behind the work.

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ENTERTAINMENT

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Beyond the screenings, MIFF brought together Filipino and Filipino-American actors, directors, filmmakers, media, entertainment professionals and community leaders. The diverse programming—from historical dramas and contemporary stories to documentaries, shorts and animation—demonstrated the growing range and visibility of Filipino storytelling.

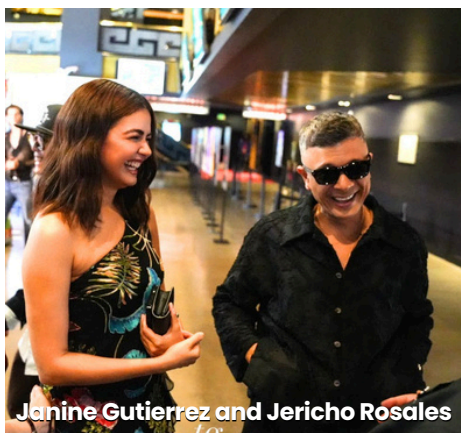
With Filipino cinema filling the screens of Hollywood—and Lea Salonga's name permanently joining the stars along Hollywood Boulevard—MIFF became a celebration of Filipino storytelling, representation and achievement on an international stage.



Photo by Joe Cobilla



Lea Salonga



Janine Gutierrez and Jericho Rosales



Sheryl Cruz



Karylle



Winston Emano, Lisa Lew, and Meriden Angeles



Cast of *No Room for Love*



Producers of *Bench: Body of Work*

Photos by Tony Garcia and Katie Ortiz



Januel Mercado



Raymond Red

COMMUNITY

MangoFest Brings Food, Flavor and Community to Cerritos

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER



City of Cerritos Mayor Lynda P. Johnson, Ornella and Matthew Curry of Tisoy Curative Cuisines and Mic Diaz

Mango took center stage at **MangoFest**, held August 30 on the grounds of the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts, bringing together food, small businesses and community for another lively Southern California festival.

The free, day-long event featured more than 75 vendors, with festivalgoers sampling mango-inspired creations alongside Filipino favorites, street food and other culinary offerings, while browsing merchandise and products from local entrepreneurs.

MangoFest was brought to Southern California by the same festival community behind UbeFest, which has grown into one of the area's largest Filipino food and cultural gatherings. Earlier this year, LA County UbeFest returned to the same Cerritos venue with more than 150 vendors and an estimated 100,000 visitors over two days.

This time, the spotlight shifted from the familiar purple yam



to another flavor closely associated with the Philippines: mango. Vendors put their own spin on the fruit through desserts, drinks and other creative offerings, while the festival itself extended beyond any single ingredient.

Like UbeFest before it, MangoFest showed how food can become a gathering point for a much broader community. Against the distinctly Southern California backdrop of Cerritos, families and friends came to eat, shop, discover local businesses and spend the day together.

From ube to mango, the growing festival series is creating another way for Filipino flavors to find their place within Southern California's diverse food and cultural landscape.



IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Mutch: His Stories, His Lessons, His Legacy

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER

There are people who pass through our lives, and then there are those who quietly become part of who we are. **Maximino “Mutch” Cariño** was one of those people in my life—my mentor, my coach, my adviser and my confidant.

My last photograph with Mutch was taken on May 17, during his final T.O.P. Awards. We take pictures believing there will always be another gathering, another conversation, another chance to say what someone has meant to us. We rarely know when an ordinary moment is becoming a last.

Mutch would call just to ask how I was doing. Those calls often became hours-long conversations filled with stories from his childhood, college years, his time at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC), and decades of producing shows, festivals and major events. His advice often came disguised as anecdotes. Eventually, I realized the stories were the lessons.

Mutch was admittedly a snob in many ways and definitely not a people pleaser. But when he believed in someone, he didn't believe halfway. He moved mountains. I know because he moved some for me. When people doubted me or talked badly about me, Mutch stood by me. Behind some of the biggest events I worked on was his quiet hand—a suggestion, a connection, a phone call, a door opened.

Of everything he ever told me, one thing remains especially close to my heart: he said he saw his younger self in me. He believed in me at times when I didn't fully believe in myself. I will remember the laughter, the long conversations, and one unforgettable night at Denny's with Mutch and friends until four in the morning. At the time, I thought, “How in the world did I get into this?” Looking back, it is one of those seemingly ordinary moments that has taken on a much deeper meaning now that he is gone.

Thank you, Mutch, for believing in me, for standing by me, and for all the lessons you left behind. Your influence will remain in the work I do, the choices I make, and the person I continue to become.

Rest in peace, Mutch. You made a difference in my life, and I will always be grateful.



Photo by Mic Diaz

