

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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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



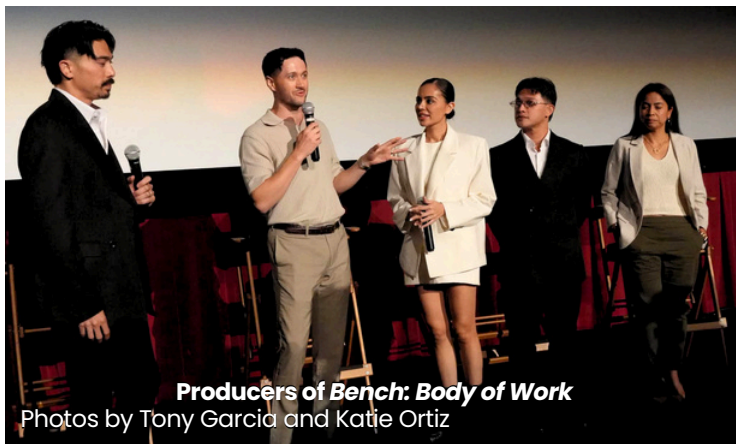
Sheryl Cruz



Karylle



Winston Emano, Lisa Lew, and Meriden Angeles

Cast and Directors/Writers of *No Room for Love***Producers of *Bench: Body of Work***

Photos by Tony Garcia and Katie Ortiz



Januel Mercado



Raymond Red

GALA

MIFF Gala Celebrates Filipino Excellence

BY MIC DIAZ | PUBLISHER



Lea Salonga accepts MIFF Icon Award
with Lou Diamond Phillips



Manila's Finest Director Raymond Red
accepts Best Picture Narrative Award



Reynafé Castillo (daughter of Reynaldo
"Bebot" Momay, the subject of the
documentary) accepts Best Picture
Documentary Award



Jericho Rosales accepts
Best Actor Award



Manila's Finest Director Raymond Red
accepts Best Actress Award for
Ashtine Olviga



Manila's Finest Director Raymond Red
accepts Best Cinematographer Award
Photos by Joe Cobilla

There was something bigger than awards unfolding inside The Beverly Hilton on September 6. As the **Manila International Film Festival (MIFF)** closed its 2026 edition, the **Closing Night Awards Gala** brought together generations of Filipino talent. The evening was hosted by Erin Lim Rhodes, host of *E! News: The Rundown*, Mark Dacascos and R'Bonney Gabriel.

At the center of that story was Lea Salonga. Just days after becoming the first Filipina to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Salonga received the MIFF Icon Award, presented to her by Filipino American actor Lou Diamond Phillips. The honor celebrated a career that has crossed borders, genres and generations.

Music became part of the evening's storytelling. Tamyra Gray, who starred alongside Salonga in the Tony Award-winning Broadway revival of *Once on This Island*, opened the musical performances accompanied on piano by Troy

Laureta, who served as musical director for a portion of the gala. Gray later returned to perform "Reflection" from Disney's *Mulan*, paying tribute to Salonga, whose singing voice as Mulan introduced the song to audiences around the world.

AJ Rafael later served as musical director for Ruby Ibarra and the special "Saigon Sisters" tribute to Salonga. Joan Almedilla, Jennifer Paz, Emy Baysic and Lucy Acuña—all actresses who have taken on the role of Kim in *Miss Saigon*—performed a medley celebrating Salonga's journey from her early career through Broadway and Disney.

The awards reflected the breadth of Filipino storytelling at the festival. *Manila's Finest* won Best Picture – Narrative, with Ashtine Olviga receiving Best Actress and the film also earning Best Cinematography. Jericho

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MIFF Gala Celebrates Filipino Excellence (Continued from Page 3)

Rosales won Best Actor for *Quezon*, while *58th* received Best Picture – Documentary and Carl Joseph Papa was honored as Best Director.

The gala also honored Filipino entertainment legends Nora Aunor and Pilita Corrales with posthumous Lifetime Achievement Awards, accepted by Janine Gutierrez on their behalf. The Briones family—Jon Jon, Megan, Isa and Teo—received the inaugural Generations Award. The Shining A Light Awards recognized *58th* and *Kappa-Tiran*, with Sheryl Cruz and producer Marcos Mamay accepting for *Kappa-Tiran*. BarBara Luna, Priscilla Hunt, *Forgotten Island* and filmmakers Januel Mercado and Joel Crawford also received Trailblazer recognition.

More than an awards ceremony, the gala brought legacy, representation and possibility into one room. For one evening in Beverly Hills, Filipino stories and the people who tell them were not on the margins of Hollywood—they were the celebration.



Briones Family with Lea Salonga after accepting Generations Award



BarBara Luba accepts Trailblazer Award



Priscilla Hunt accepts Trailblazer Award



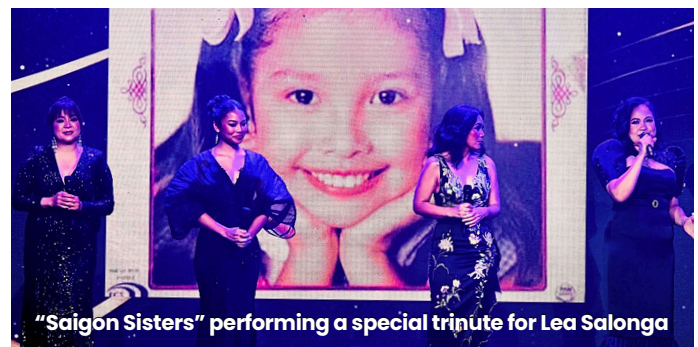
Forgotten Island writers/co-directors Januel Mercado and Joel Crawford, producer Mark Swift, and voice cast accept Trailblazer Award



Kappa-tiran actress Sheryl Cruz and producer Marcos Mamay accept Shining A Light Award



Janine Gutierrez accepts Monty Manibog Lifetime Achievement Award for her grandmothers National Artist Nora Aunor and Asia's Queen of Songs Pilita Corrales



"Saigon Sisters" performing a special tribute for Lea Salonga



Ruby Ibarra and Carl Angelo perform "Salbahe Ako" from Forgotten Island.

Photos by Joe Cobilla