

PHILIPPINES: "GILIW KO" – A JOINT FILM RESTORATION

by

Belina SB. Capul

Secretary-General, SEAPAVAA

INTRODUCTION

The restoration project on the Filipino film classic "*Giliw Ko*" is a joint project between two active members of SEAPAVAA namely, the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) and the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), which are both recognized experts in film restoration in their respective countries. This project is being presented in this forum as a case study in cooperation, designed primarily to show that working together and sharing of skills and resources could achieve far more than working separately.

The project involved 1) restoring a Filipino film classic "*Giliw Ko*", as Australia's centenary gift to the Filipinos in connection with the Philippine Centennial Celebration, 2) printing of the restored elements, and 3) screening the film at the Cultural Center of the Philippines during the opening night of the film festival showcasing "All the Best from Australia" in the field of culture. A staff exchange activity had been incorporated as integrated part of the program.

While the Philippines primarily served as the project's intended beneficiary or recipient, the project was designed as a test case for future projects in the region, exploring practicalities in cooperation never before tried. Using the SEAPAVAA principle of "working together and sharing resources and skill", the two institutions proceeded to identify the tasks that each would do according to what one could do best, and decided to maximize the use of available skills from both the organizations by incorporating a staff exchange activity . NFSA undertook the restoration work in Australia, while PIA did the printing of the restored elements in the Philippines.

Two technical staff , namely *Steve Clark* from NFSA and *Roy Sanchez* from PIA, participated in the staff exchange program, taking turns in visiting each other so that they could assist the other and, together, solve technical problems that may arise in the course of the restoration work.

SELECTION OF THE FILM

The restoration of the chosen film "*Giliw Ko*" posed a big challenge to the technical expertise of the two institutions, PIA, together with the Society of Film Archivists (SOFIA), selected this film for the project on the basis of its historical significance and technical condition .The film represented one of the major outputs of the industry and the first production of a major studio in the country. Historically "*Giliw Ko*" is the only extant film that shows radio at its ascendancy and popularity at that time in the Philippine's history. However, despite its historical significance, the only known copy in existence (16mm print) had been dismissed as beyond repair, both locally and abroad (by a restoration house in Canada).

The condition of the only surviving print copy was such that it was not possible to treat and transfer the sound and image of the film to new film stock using the standard method. The film

was in such delicate condition that a new technique had to be developed and applied if the film had to be restored.

SECURING THE PRINT

The handling and treatment involved risks that could result in damage. A waiver had to be, therefore, secured from the owner, the LVN Pictures, to release NFSA from any liability. This was important to the progress of the project.

RESTORING THE FILM AT NFSA

The restoration process involved copying the soundtrack and image separately.

The 16mm was repeatedly cleaned to remove the grime but only within limits so as not to damage the film. Using an optical machine, the film was copied frame by frame onto negative film stock, and in the process blown up the 16mm into 35mm. Since the original film was buckled and extremely shrunken, the printer had to be modified mechanically. In total darkness, both the technical staff from NFSA and PIA, handfed 3000 ft of film into the mechanism. Due to the buckling and shrinkage of the film, the image was sometimes unsteady.

The soundtrack was read off the 16mm onto magnetic tapes. Because of the shrinkage, new smaller diameter sprocket wheels had to be engineered for the sound reader in order for the copying to work. Some sound was lifted from the videotape made several years ago. The sound was copied onto a series of DAT tapes, digitally cleaned, enhanced, and balanced, resulting in a much more enhanced sound quality.

The restoration process took three months to complete involving nine technicians.

RELEASE PRINT AT PIA

PIA received the restored elements from NFSA this time in 35mm for the final stage of the project- printing the access copy of the film. The NFSA technician helped PIA set up the black and white machine for positive print, and achieve the grading standard appropriate for handling generation losses. PIA worked on the sound synchronization, grading, printing, black and white processing and putting the credit.

It should be noted that when the print was first released in 1939, it was in 35mm. The reduction to 16mm generated some loss in terms of clarity. Furthermore, the conditions of the surviving print put a limit to the quality of the restoration.

PREMIERE SCREENING

Last November 15, 1998, the musical drama "*Giliw Ko*", was premiered at the Cultural Center of the Philippines as part of "All the Best from Australia" Film Festival.

The event was a huge success . It was well attended by a mixed crowd composed of living members of the cast, government officials, industry leaders, film critics, students, archivists , relatives of the casts, as well as local and foreign media . The major female actress, *Mila del Sol*, flew all the way from the United States where she was residing to grace the occasion. Guests cued up to ask for the stars' autographs and milled around the photo exhibit that was mounted to show some scenes from the film and documents of the film restoration process . During the screening, the film drew reactions from the audience much in the same way when it was first shown 60 years ago.

MEDIA/JOURNALISTS' INTEREST

The project generated a lot of interest from the media. In the Philippines, the project was widely written about through feature articles or column items in the entertainment and cultural sections of major broadsheets in the country. Asiaweek also ran a feature article on it after its screening.

In Australia, NFSA received several visiting journalist, who were given demonstrations of the various stages of the work.

Much of the media mileage generated by this project could be attributed to the fact that the project was undertaken in the context of two important national events: the centennial celebration of the Philippine Independence and the All the Best from Australia.

CONCLUSION

The restoration of the film "*Giliw Ko*" represents a high point in the development and on-going promotion of AV archiving in the Asia-Pacific Region. It saw the development of a new technology and approach in restoring films of similar conditions as "*Giliw Ko*". Its output or result and the way it was carried out have far-reaching implications both for the two countries involved and the region as a whole.

For the Philippines, the project enabled the country to retrieve part of its historical and cultural heritage, which, otherwise, would have been lost forever. It also strengthened the capability of PIA in handling similar cases in the future and served as a big boost to the on-going promotion on AV archiving in the country. For Australia, aside from the goodwill it generated among the people of the Philippines, it definitely provided a venue for demonstrating the country's level of development and expertise in film restoration, proving its leadership in this area in this part of the world.

On the regional level, a model for collaborative endeavor was provided, demonstrating how meaningful exchanges and sharing of resources could result in finding creative solutions to problems which, otherwise, would have seemed hopeless.