



Burlesk King

Mel Chionglo

THE PHILIPPINES, 1999

109 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **Seiko Films**
 Executive Producer: **Robbie Tan**
 Screenplay: **Ricardo Lee**
 Cinematographer: **George Tutanés**
 Editor: **Jess Navarro**
 Production Designer: **Edgar Martin Littau**
 Sound: **Leody Maralit**
 Music: **Nonong Buencamino**
 Principal Cast: **Rodel Velayo, Nini Jacinto, Leonardo Litton, Raymond Bagatsing, Elizabeth Oropesa**

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With their raw sexuality and hard-hitting politics, the "Macho Dancer" films, begun by Lino Brocka before his death and continued now by Mel Chionglo, are a unique force within this strong and nourishing national cinema. Because their generic elements are so intrinsically political – young, beautiful provincial boys are recruited to dance and sell themselves to foreign sex tourists and well-off locals – Chionglo is able to explicitly explore hot-button issues that impact Filipino society as a whole.

Burlesk King is, in many ways, a more upbeat work than *Midnight Dancers*, his previous film in the genre. It posits a loving, caring, alternate society to the traditional Roman Catholic middle-class Filipino standard. The love received by the film's central character from this "family" – a criminally-minded friend, the friend's sister and her lesbian lover, a gay couple he comes to know and the hustlers and hookers he spends time with – allows him to overcome the traumas inflicted on him in his childhood.

Harry is a young man from Olongapo, the former site of America's largest military base in Southeast Asia, and a place that still arouses much anger in the country. Like many locals, he is the product of an American soldier and a Filipina; in his case, his abusive father pimped his mother and then young Harry, until the young man had enough and ran away from home. With his best friend James, they head to Manila where they soon find work as macho

dancers, writhing and gyrating to current pop music, an occupation specific to the city's gay clubs. But Harry harbours a hatred within; he wants to learn enough about life to be able to avenge his mother's death by killing his father.

As the film progresses, Harry comes to learn that he owes it to his newfound family not to resort to violence. When he meets his father, a decrepit old man dying of AIDS, he makes a surprising and empowering decision.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Mel Chionglo was born in Lucena City, Quezon, Philippines in 1946. He trained with Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler in New York, and began his film career as a production designer. He also wrote the screenplay for acclaimed filmmaker Lino Brocka's *Mother, Sister, Daughter* (79). Chionglo is the president of the Director's Guild of the Philippines. Selected filmography: *Lucia* (92), *Midnight Dancers* (94), *Lahar* (96) and *Burlesk King* (99).

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