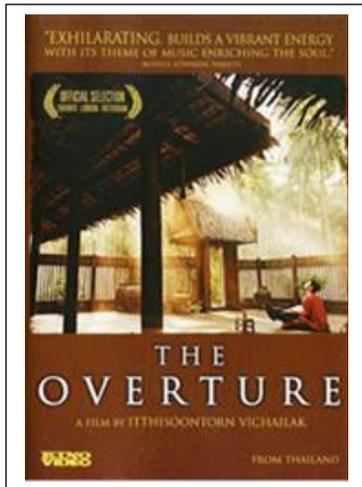


2016 Infusing Southeast Asian Studies Into The Undergraduate Curriculum:
A Faculty And Program Development Summer Institute

Mini Film Series



1. The Overture (2004, 104min)

Thailand

Director: Ittisoontorn Vichailak

Cast: Anuchyd Sapanphong, Adul Dulyarat,
Pongpat Wachirabunjong

A master musician defends his talent and his family's reputation against political interference and artistic challenges in this historical drama from Thailand. Sorn (played as a young man by Anuchit Saphanphong and as an older man by Adul Dulyarat) was the younger brother of a musician who was a master of the ranard-ek, a wooden percussion instrument similar to the xylophone. Sorn was eager to follow in his brother's footsteps, but his family discouraged him until his

brother was killed in a fistfight with rival musicians, and Sorn took up the instrument to honor his memory. While Sorn displayed an easy talent on the ranard-ek, he was also headstrong and lacked discipline, and after impressing local audiences, he first tasted humiliation when he was outclassed in a competition with master musician Im Krun (Narongrit Tosa-nga). From that point on, Sorn dedicated himself to serious study of the ranard-ek and honing his talent in anticipation of another face-off against Im Khun. However, Sorn's rise to the peak of his form comes as the Thai government introduces a sweeping program of "cultural control," as certain traditional art forms were discouraged in the name of bringing the nation a more modernized lifestyle. Released in North America under the title *The Overture*, Hoam Rong was inspired by the true-life story of Thai musician Luang Pradit Phairao.

Wise Kwai



2. The Rainbow Troops (Laskar Pelangi, 2008, 124min)

Indonesia

Director: Riri Riza

Cast: Cut Mini Theo, Ikranagara, Tora Sudiro

Adapted from the popular novel inspired by the life of Andrea Hirata, Riri Riza's *The Rainbow Troops (Laskar Pelangi)* is one of the biggest successes in Indonesia in the last decade. It is easy to see why: on one hand, it is based on a famous literary work which narrates in autobiographical form of the wish for emancipation through education of a large part of the Indonesian people who lived, and still live, under the poverty

threshold; on the other, it is an example of cinema at its most efficient, alternating between hilariously funny moments and utter commotion by harnessing the unstoppable energy and spontaneity from a cast of irresistible kids. As a matter of fact, throughout a career full of ups and downs, Riri Riza has shown more success in winning over the public with his children's films (Sherina's Adventure, 2000, Untuk Rena, 2005) than with his ambitious auteur productions (Gie, 2005, Three Days To Forever, 2007).

The Rainbow Troops is set in Belitung, a little island in the Indonesian archipelago south-east of Sumatra famous for its tin mines. The event narrated in the film is framed by the return in the late 1990s of Ikal ("Curly") to the village where he was born. His memories take us back to the day he started elementary school at the small Islamic school Muhammadiyah in Gantong 1974: a day full of both hope and trepidation. The local director of education tells Mr. Harfan, the principal of this struggling school, that he can't form a new class unless he manages to admit at least ten new students. The memory of this unforgettable day is the start of a heartfelt memoir of the highlights of Ikal and his classmates' journey through education. Their teacher, the caring Miss Muslimah, turns down a post at a more prestigious school in order to continue teaching, and instill hope in, her "rainbow troops", born to miners and fishermen, who haven't got the means to go to a better school.

Riza's touching film, like Andrea Hirata's novel, evokes the fifth principle of the Pancasila (the five principles which provide the foundation for the official philosophy of the Indonesian state): Keadilan social bagi seluruh Rakyat Indonesia - "social justice for all Indonesian people". This is a principle which is, unfortunately, just as overlooked and forgotten in Suharto's dictatorship in the '70s as today, given the persistent social disparity. Effectively, Muslimah's sentence "No-one thinks that poor children also have a right to learn" remains sadly poignant in this day and age. Perhaps it is for this reason that The Rainbow Troops's popularity has spread beyond the big cities and been embraced by the country as a whole. What's more, in the most densely populated Muslim in the world, the role of small religious scholastic institutions remains essential in making sure that the poorest sections of the population get a basic education which goes beyond the mere scholastic curriculum, but also serves as a development in moral and ethical matters - as Mr. Harfan repeats to the Rainbow Troops "Live to give what you can and not to take what you can". Incidentally, The Rainbow Troops gives western audiences a comforting view of Islam and the Islamic education, which as demonstrated by the warm welcome given to this film by the public at the Berlin Film Festival, can help us to go beyond the usual stereotypes and prejudices in order to recognize the universal principles of inclusion and equality.

In addition to this message, Riza's film has an arsenal of other endearing weapons with which it can win over its audience: Muslimah's smile, Ikal's dreams of budding romance, Lintang's bicycle rides and his encounters with the huge crocodile, the evocative songs of Mahar, the Independence Day parade, the trip to a pirate island to meet the shaman Tuk Bayan Tula. But above all, this film leaves behind an indelible rainbow which keeps the hope of a better future alive.

Paolo Bertolin