

# LEONOR WILL NEVER DIE

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY  
**MARTIKA RAMIREZ ESCOBAR**





# LEONOR

## WILL NEVER DIE

2022 | PHILIPPINES | 99 MINUTES | NOT RATED

[OFFICIAL WEBSITE](#)

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# SYNOPSIS

Leonor Reyes was once a groundbreaking figure in the Filipino film industry during its ragtag action cinema glory days, but now she struggles with old age, mounting bills, and the untimely death of her son. While revisiting an unfinished script about a fearless protagonist trying to avenge his brother's murder, Leonor is struck on the head by a falling television set and knocked into a coma. As she lays unconscious in the hospital, fantasy and reality begin to blur when Leonor finds herself awake inside her script, becoming the hero of her own story. An innovative blend of pulpy action homages, playful comedy, and touching family drama, *Leonor Will Never Die* is a wonderfully imaginative tribute to the art of filmmaking.

# LOGLINE

Leonor Reyes, a groundbreaking figure in the Filipino film industry's ragtag action heyday, is knocked into a coma while revisiting an unfinished script. Fantasy and reality blur as Leonor finds herself becoming the hero of her own story.

# MEET THE DIRECTOR

## MARTIKA RAMIREZ ESCOBAR

Martika Ramirez Escobar is a filmmaker-cinematographer based in Manila. After she graduated with honors from the University of the Philippines, her thesis film “Stone Heart” competed at the 19th Busan International Film Festival and won Best Film at Cinemalaya. She is an alumna of the Berlinale Talents Tokyo, Asian Film Academy, Southeast Asian Film Lab, Fantastic Film School and is a recipient of the Purin Pictures Film Fund.

Her first feature film “Leonor Will Never Die” had its world premiere at Sundance, where it won the Special Jury Award for Innovative Spirit. It screened to a full house at TIFF’s Midnight Madness and won the Amplify Voices Award. Martika was most recently awarded New Visions Best Director at the 2022 Sitges Film Festival, among being awarded at other festivals around the world.

Her works are bizarre reflections on her relationship with cinema and cameras.



# NOTES FROM MARTIKA

I was born and raised in Manila, a chaotic but charming city full of character and mystery. Not so long ago, a famous action star with no background in law and governance became the 13th President of the Philippines. I was six years old then and as a young girl, it felt natural for somebody famous to get elected. Today, decades later, after having two more “action star” presidents, I find myself questioning this absurd reality and am surprised by how easy it can be understood once I place it in parallel with our love for movies.



The epiphany is that we love fiction that it can blur our realities. I would spend days watching movies because it can take me to places that will never exist in my waking reality. This film therefore, which is about a writer-director who gets transported into a film she had written, is a concretization of cinema’s effect and our romantic notions of life that can only exist in fiction. Thus, if I had to make one film before jumping off a cliff, I would want it to be about my relationship with cinema – how it takes me places and keeps me sane.

- **Martika Ramirez Escobar**

# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIKA ESCOBAR

BY FILIPINO FILM CRITIC, PHILBERT DY

**PHILBERT DY:** Maybe you can start by telling me about your relationship with the Filipino action movie.

**MARTIKA ESCOBAR:** So, the main idea of the film started back at MOWELFUND. I had a friend, Stephen Lopez, who is also a filmmaker. When we were there, our directing teachers would have friends over, visiting the MOWELFUND, and they just looked like they stepped out of a Filipino action film. We started thinking: we're always surrounded by these older, macho people. Why was it that in the hundreds of films in our history, why wasn't there an action lola? (grandmother)?

That became the seed. And when I tried to dig deeper, I asked myself why, even though I don't remember specifically what Filipino action films I've seen, I can tell you what's in one of them. The tropes, the locations, their manner of speaking; why are they so familiar to me? And I think it's because growing up, I got used to these movies just playing on local television. I absorbed them through the years, and I carried them with me.

I think that realization evolved further while writing it. What is it in the action genre that so many people seem to be affected by it? To the point where one of our action stars became president. And it's not just the one guy. We had FPJ (Fernando Poe, Jr, who also ran for president). And now, we have this iron fisted president, these macho people [in government]. And I could relate to that. As a person, I still kind of feel that they might be saved by those personas beyond the screen. It's kind of sick. That's not reality.

I think it's that: it's how films can change us, and change the way we look at people and life.

**PD:** As a filmmaker, how do you feel in general about the portrayal of violence in movies?

**ME:** I guess it's very different in action movies. It has to be very violent in itself. You need weapons, and blood, and you have to have a lot of people dying. And as a person, that's not how I approach things. In this film, I tried viewing that through the lens of an old woman, to deal with the problems and conflicts that surround her through a tender approach. Through love. Through communication.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIKA ESCOBAR

**PD:** Yeah, that's interesting. I read it as reckoning with this entire genre that presented violence as a solution to problems, which it raises up to a national level. Like it's asking, what kind of country emerges from generations that grew up watching heroes solve problems with violence. Is that what you believe? That you can draw a connection between these films and the problems we're facing as a nation today?

**ME:** I can't say that there's a direct correlation. But I'm sure that's part of what makes violence seem so normal here. There's this constant suggestion that violence could be the solution to things.

**PD:** Is there violence in movies that you enjoy?

**ME:** Well, I don't don't enjoy the violence in local films. When I went back to watch them for the movie, I still found them entertaining. And yeah, that's the sick part. Why am I entertained by violence? I don't even really know.



**PD:** What did you learn from watching these movies again?

**ME:** It's hard what I learned, because I didn't really think about it in that way. I did wonder why they all seemed so similar. I think if you intercut these films with each other, it would be hard for me to identify which film is which. It feels like it's one big something.

**PD:** After watching these films, do you now have a favorite action star?

**ME:** I really liked FPJ. He was the one willing to be brought low until the very end. There's something realistic in his portrayal of a good man.

**PD:** So, you mentioned that the original idea was just an action movie with an older woman at the center?

**ME:** The original idea is this person about to end her life, and ending her life in the film that she's writing. The most fascinating thing for me is seeing a person writing her own life as it's happening.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIKA ESCOBAR

**PD:** What fascinates you about that?

**ME:** I just think that's how we all are. Our decisions are all based on what we think is the next right decision. And that's just how we are, until it ends, randomly. Abruptly.

I think that's just how humans function through our days. I see it as writing. And maybe you can see it like there's someone else writing our lives. That's why there's an editor. A director. We're not the only ones writing our own lives. There are other forces in the world.

**PD:** So, it's like you view the world as this collaborative writing project?

**ME:** Or, it's like, we only think we're writing our own lives, when there's really someone else doing it.

**PD:** Is that like, a religious thing? A higher power?

**ME:** No, it's more of like just asking, why am I doing any of this? Why is any of this happening? Why are there people out there who want to watch a movie? Who is it for? What is it for? I'm always just thinking about this, and I'm always trying to make the right decision. But I feel like the world has its own decisions. As much as we want to write our own lives, we can't.

**PD:** There is a ghost in your film. At what point did you decide that this is a world where people can talk to ghosts?

**ME:** Well, I really feel like we can talk to ghosts. When we need them, they're there. I believe in spirits, in being able to send thoughts to people. And I believe that they respond to us, and we can feel it when they respond to us. Through dreams, or thoughts.

The ghost in the movie comes from a family story. My mother and grandmother told a story about my uncle, who passed when he was 25. There was a time when, as a ghost, he sat beside them in bed. That's the image, for me, that started the whole idea of the presence of ghosts. Like, we live among them. They're here, but we just don't see their bodies.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIKA ESCOBAR

**PD:** That's a particularly Asian thing, isn't it? Like, in Western traditions, if you see a ghost, you freak out. But in Asia, we live among spirits. And in the movie, you make it clear that he's just part of their lives. Is that just part of your outlook?

**ME:** Yeah, I guess.

**PD:** Do you have any personal experiences with ghosts?

**ME:** No, but I do believe it when they send signals.

**PD:** Like what signals?

**ME:** Like, when I was finishing up this film, my grandfather passed away. And I made this wish that this film would be screened somewhere with a large audience someday. I just have this feeling that he was the one that gave me Sundance. He just knew that's what I wanted: a large audience.

So yeah, that's it. When I got the invitation, he was the first person I thanked. But also, I guess these could just be my excuses, trying to make sense of the world. All of us are just trying to find patterns in this life so that it looks like it has meaning.

**PD:** There is a very personal dimension to this movie. You literally put yourself in it. At what point in making the film did that come into play?

**ME:** It was in the script. Maybe the second or third draft. I feel like the movie is also about me dealing with what I want to do in life. I mean eight years ago, I would say it was filmmaking. But now, not as much? I don't know.





# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIKA ESCOBAR

**PD:** So how did we get there? How did you decide to have yourself in the film talking about how the film should end?

**ME:** Well, it's late night, and I couldn't sleep, and I was just thinking if this was the life that was written for me. Because I felt like it wasn't. I felt like there was an editor, or some different planet, or just someone else in control. That's where I put it out, in this scene, where we see the editing.

**PD:** This film has been in production for a pretty long time. How different is the final film from what you had envisioned at the start?

**ME:** I think it's pretty close. By the time we started shooting, I was sure what I wanted to get to. It was in the first four years, developing it, that's when I spent so much time trying to figure out what the story was really about. There was still my young filmmaker self, trying to put so many ideas, so many quirks in this film. That was gradually cut down, until we were left with more mindful, or more meaningful decisions. The film just aged along with me.

**PD:** What do you think was the biggest challenge in making this film?

**ME:** The obvious answer is the funding. That eight years of developing was also eight years of begging. But I think what was tough was finding the right ending for the film. We had four different versions of the ending. When (producers) Mario and Monster saw the ending, they asked, 'where's the narrative? What happened to the arc? Where's the mother and son story?' They were a really big help in finding it.

**PD:** The film is at least partly about this filmmaker coming to grips with what she's done to society as a whole with her work.

**ME:** Yes. I do think she has a responsibility as a filmmaker. She knows that people are going to accept what she puts out there.

**PD:** What do you think your responsibility is as a filmmaker?

**ME:** I just want to contribute some good to people. Make them look at life with more love. That's always been my driving force.

**PD:** What do you want people to be thinking about when they see your film?

**ME:** I just want them to reflect about life; big things or small things. Anything that triggers reflection would be more than enough.







# MEET THE CAST & CREW

## STARRING

SHEILA FRANCISCO | LEONOR REYES  
BONG CABRERA | RUDIE  
ROCKY SALUMBIDES | RONWALDO  
ANTHONY FALCON | DEAD RONWALDO  
ALAN BAUTISTA | VALENTIN  
REA MOLINA | ISABELLA

## CREW

DIRECTOR AND WRITER | MARTIKA RAMIREZ ESCOBAR  
CINEMATOGRAPHER | CARLOS MAURICIO  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER | EERO FRANCISCO  
EDITOR | LAWRENCE S. ANG  
SOUND DESIGNER | CORINNE DE SAN JOSE  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR | MIKEE DELA CRUZ  
MUSIC | ALYANA CABRAL AND PAN DE COCO

## PRODUCED BY

MONSTER JIMENEZ  
MARIO CORNEJO

## EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

AURORA ORETA  
MARTIKA RAMIREZ ESCOBAR  
QUARK HENARES



# SHEILA FRANCISCO | LEONOR REYES



Sheila Francisco is the first Filipina to have performed at the prestigious Royal National Theater of London to rave reviews. Hand picked by Sir Trevor Nunn to portray the role of Bloody Mary in their revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific in 2001. She has also done the touring production of the same in 2007-08 all over the United Kingdom.

She has worked in Singapore a number of times. Singapore Repertory Theater - Forbidden City: Portrait Of An Empress where she played the Empress; Twist of Fate as Mrs Chen (Olivier award winner Anthony Drew wrote a song specially for her; Snow Queen as Grandma; For Action Theater - Chang And

Eng; Pandemonium - The Full Monty as Janette ; Dream Academy - Into The Woods as Jack's Mom. She has done A Rabbit Hole and A Doll's House Part 2 for Red Turnip where she won Gawad's Best Featured Actress; Himala for Sandbox Collective. Ang Huling El Bimbo, Cinderella, Sound Of Music for Resorts World. Joseph The Dreamer, First Name, Lion, Witch And The Wardrobe, Little Mermaid, Widows Orphans and Wildebeests, The Young King, Noah, Honk, Godspell and Fables and Parables for Trumpets. And for Repertory Theater Philippines - Man Who Came To Dinner, Once On This Island, No Way To Treat A Lady, August Osage County and Silent Sky.

Leonor Will Never Die by Martika Escobar is Sheila's first lead role in a film.



## BONG CABRERA | RUDIE



Edralin Cabrera also known as Bong Cabrera is an award winning film and theater actor. He was an Asian Cultural Council Fellow in 2010. He also won acting awards from the Accolade Global Film Competition and URDUJA Film Festival (Best New Actor) for the film *The Sun Behind You*, Cine Filipino Festival (Best Supporting Actor) for the film *The Guerilla is a Poet*, Cinema One Originals Film Festival (Best Actor) for the film *Sa Ilalim ng Tulay (Under the Bridge)*, and from GAWAD BUHAY (PHILSTAGE AWARDS) (Best Supporting Actor) for the play *The Coup*. He is part of the film *Leonor Will Never Die* which premiered in the WORLD CINEMA COMPETITION OF SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL 2022, playing the character Rudie.

Internationally, he performed in Tokyo, Shanghai, Nagoya, Singapore and New York. In between working and filming projects with the theater company, KOLAB CO., he also teaches theater classes in De La Salle College of Saint Benilde, and Philippine High School for the Arts.

He's currently an International Schools Theater Association (ISTA) artist and facilitates Drama workshops in ISTA theater festivals around the globe.



# ROCKY SALUMBIDES | RONWALDO



Born August 30, 1980. Rocky Salumbides was a ramp and print model before starting his career as an actor.

He joined the reality show, *Pinoy Big Brother* and after his stint there, he became part of the cast of the comedy film *D' Survivors* (2010). After that, he experimented with various roles that earned him rave reviews for his performances in films like *Muli* (2010), *TARIMA* (2010), *Kalayaan* (2012), *Lily* (2016), *Neomanila* (2017), *Mga Gabing Kasinghaba Ng Hair Ko* (2017) among others. He won the Gawad Tanglaw for Best Supporting Actor for *Muli*, Cinema One Originals' Best Actor for *Lily* and Golden Screen's Breakthrough Performance Award for *Tarima*.

Salumbides also acted for television and different digital platforms including Signal TV's *Afterlife* (2021) and *My Delivery Gurl* (2022).





LEONOR WILL NEVER DIE | PRESS NOTES



## ANTHONY FALCON | DEAD RONWALDO



Anthony has been part of several stage productions handling various capacities for reputable theater companies in the Philippines and films that have graced highly-regarded local and international film festivals.

This Berlinale Talents Acting Studio alumnus received Best Performance Award, the sole acting citation given by Young Critics Circle Film Desk, for his role in *Mga Gabing Kasinghaba Ng Hair Ko* (2017). He is one of the leads of *Gusto Kita With All My Hypothalamus* which won Best Acting Ensemble in CineFilipino (2018). He is also one of the leads of *Midnight in a Perfect World* (2020) which won Best Ensemble Performance in Society of Filipino Film reviewers. He has been nominated twice for Gawad Urian Best Actor, for his roles in *Requieme* (2013) and *Anino Sa Likod Ng Buwan* (2016).



# REA MOLINA | ISABELLA



Rea Molina began to pursue acting in her high school's theater organization, Dulaang Pule, of Arellano University. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Consular and Diplomatic Affairs and was a member of the college's Office of Culture and Arts - Dulaang Filipino from 2011 to 2014. She is currently working in the U.S. Embassy while doing film and theater acting during her free time.

In November 2017, she played the role of "Lenny" in Tim Dacanay's *Pamantasang Hirang sa Dilim Man* directed by Mr. Tuxqs Rutaquio. She starred in a feature-length film entitled *Hitboy*, an entry to CineFilipino Film Festival 2018, as "Nicky". She has played lead roles in a number of short films, in particular, Celina Mae Medina's *Ophelia* which was selected in the 2019 Short Film Corner of the Festival de Cannes, and Nicole Rey's *Ang Pagiging Babae* where she received a Best Actress recognition from Sine Abierto 2019.



# ALAN BAUTISTA | VALENTIN



Alan Bautista is a stage and television actor. Alan is part of the Actors Company of Tanghalang Pilipino, the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA). Bautista holds a masters and a doctorate in Criminology.







# ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is the prestigious North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary feature films. Recent releases include the seven-time César Award-winning *Lost Illusions*, Mark Cousins's epic documentary *The Story of Film: A New Generation*, and Amanda Kramer's Outfest award-winning, hyper-stylish feature *Please Baby Please*. Upcoming releases include Cannes Un Certain Regard Jury winner *Rodeo* and the Venice Official Competition, *L'Immensità* starring Penelope Cruz. Since its formation in 2007, Music Box Films has distributed award-winning films and art-house favorites that include Academy Award winner *Ida*, *Meru* (from Oscar-winning filmmakers Jimmy Chin and E. Chai Vaserhelyi), Christian Petzold's *Transit*, the popular Swedish comedy *A Man Called Ove*, and the original *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premier venue for independent and foreign films.

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**"A HEARTFELT,  
ZANY TRIBUTE TO  
THE MAGIC OF MOVIES"**

**-A.O. SCOTT, THE NEW YORK TIMES**

