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German Season Kicks Off With Open-Air Cinema

The German Season kicks off with an open-air film screening of Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Central Jakarta this weekend. Photos courtesy of Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau Stiftung

Jaime Adams

A popular European summertime activity is to visit an open-air cinema, offering an unforgettable experience under the stars. The German Season, an Indonesian-German festival, attempts to recreate the experience with a screening of Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Central Jakarta this Saturday.

Celebrating the long friendship between the countries, the festival is initiated by the German Foreign Ministry and co-organized by the Goethe-Institut, the German Embassy in Jakarta, and EKONID, the German-Indonesian Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

When asked why the film was chosen, Heinrich Bloemeke, director of the Goethe-Institut, explained: "Metropolis" is a milestone and one of the biggest masterpieces in the history of film. It premiered in 1927 and was the first film that received the status 'heritage of the world' by UNESCO in 2001."

"Fritz Lang's motion picture is not only the most famous German silent film but also the symbol of a film-architectural model of the future. Critics praised the beauty of the light and shapes and the choreography of the masses. The film uses a dystopian society to explore the dangers inherent in rapid urbanization and industrialization," Bloemeke said, adding that the film's director also incorporated images of a city set in the future, symbolizing a city of hell for material progress and human despair.

"Fritz Lang's vision of the future contains more arresting images than just about any film, and there [isn't] any science-fiction film or TV show that doesn't owe it any debt. In terms of topic and esthetics, it was groundbreaking," Bloemeke said.

The silent film will be accompanied by the renowned German Film Orchestra Babelsberg which will perform the original music score live. To add to the experience, the orchestra -- comprising over 60 musicians -- also hails from the same studio where the film was produced.

Since 1918, there was a film orchestra in Babelsberg that was founded and run by UFA, or Universum Film AG. After World War II, the facility was taken over by DEFA, or Deutsche Film AG and became an integral part of the film studio under the name of the DEFA Symphony Orchestra.

In the early 1990s Klaus-Peter Beyer, a musician who left the DEFA Symphony Orchestra, formed an independent music group.

"Because the DEFA musicians also quit, I invited them to join me and that's how the film-music-oriented orchestra came about. So you could say that the Babelsberg Film Orchestra was born out of the UFA Orchestra and the DEFA Symphony Orchestra," Beyer explains.

"This is also well-suited to the theme 'Metropolis.' I think people see our orchestra today as a continuation of the orchestras that came before it -- and in that way also as an incarnation of the UFA orchestra that long ago played at the premiere of 'Metropolis,' which accompanied the film during its first season in the



public cinemas of Berlin."

Beyer added that "Metropolis" was not only the most spectacular movie ever made in Europe at the time, but was also unique in terms of its music.

"Fritz Lang, together with two other well-known directors of the time, Simona and Pabst, formed an association that asked for the film to be given its own music score," Beyer explains.

"At that time it was still the custom to play classical music, or even pop songs, in place of a film soundtrack. The music was chosen at random, so it did not give the dramatic effect that we know from film music today. This is what we see in 'Metropolis.'"

Lang worked with German composer Gottfried Huppertz to create the score of "Metropolis" -- it was a collaboration that would last for many years, as the duo would team up again for more of Lang's composition's on multiple occasions.

"Huppertz was often asked to show up on set in order to appreciate the story of the film," Beyer says. "This working method was then applied for a long time and is sometimes even used today. A famous example in modern times is the partnership between John Williams and Steven Spielberg."

According to Beyer, the orchestra is no stranger to traveling abroad for live performances, yet each country is different and a new adventure.

"As most of the members of the Babelsberg Orchestra, I have never visited Indonesia before," he says. "The most interesting thing for me is: What is the public like in Indonesia? How will our music be received? How is European music in general perceived? Are Indonesian audiences emotional, and do they show it? These are some of the questions that I've been thinking about and are interesting to me."

For the Goethe-Institut, finding an appropriate venue proved difficult, "it is one of the aims of the German Season to use public spaces for its programs," Bloemeke explains. "That's why we invested a lot of energy into the choice of the right location and the technical requirements of an open-air screening."

Over the course of the next three months, next on the agenda for the German Season is the German Cinema film festival that will open on Sept. 11 and will take place in several cities across Indonesia.

The opening of the exhibition "Cultural Worlds," which is part of the Cultural Preservation Program of the Federal Foreign Office will be held on Sept. 15 in Jakarta, before it will be shown at Borobudur, and in Surabaya.

"Cultural Worlds" is an example of 13 different projects, [including] the restoration of Indonesia's Borobudur temple, the preservation of manuscripts featuring ancient handwriting in Timbuktu, Mali, or the restoration of the old bazaar of Erbil in Iraq; all of which are historical cultural assets that need to be preserved," Bloemeke says.

"Other highlights of the German Season not be missed are the interactive choir concerts with the world-renowned Radio Choir Berlin in Jakarta, Bandung, and Medan, the performance of '100% Yogyakarta' by Rimini Protokoll and Teater Garasi in Yogyakarta [and] the [collaboration between] Papermoon Puppet Theater from Yogyakarta with the Retrofuturisten from Berlin in Yogyakarta and Jakarta," he adds. "But there is plenty more to see and explore."

Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" and Film Orchestra Babelsberg Sept. 5, 6 p.m. onwards Atrium, Teater Jakarta Taman Ismail Marzuki Jl. Cikini Raya No. 73 Central Jakarta Free entry, no prior reservation required