

# Fresh Homemade "Lumpia"

By Emily Magtalas



**On a Roll:** The "Lumpia" cast and crew help in promoting the ultimate homemade film at the March 23, 2003 World Premiere at San Francisco State University.

## Ingredients:

- 1 young visionary filmmaker
- A dozen or so childhood neighbors and friends
- 1 pervasive high school issue
- 1 comic book-inspired storyline
- 1 mysterious *barong*-clad superhero
- Dollop of original music from Fil-Am talents
- Dash of karaoke video
- Generous amounts of campy humor
- 1 video 8 camcorder
- Lots of *lumpia* (Filipino eggroll) for the cast and crew

**Preparation time:** 7 years

## Procedure:

Making "Lumpia," dubbed the ultimate homemade film, is like concocting the familiar, labor-intensive Filipino dish. To make it deeply satisfying is a time-consuming process that requires careful selection of ingredients and lots of hard work and patience.

Filmmaker Patricio Ginelsa, Jr. knows exactly the difficulties of cooking up this treat. While on a break from film school at University of Southern California (USC) in 1996, Ginelsa went back to his childhood neighborhood in Daly City, California to shoot a film with his friends.

"My brother Darriel and I have been making movies since we were 12 years old. While other kids went to the mall, played in the park and watched MTV, we made movies. That was our summer pastime," Ginelsa recalls.

"Lumpia" is the reunion movie the brothers dreamed of. "Unlike the past 'fun'

movies we made in the neighborhood, we wanted a more sophisticated film, both thematically and technically," says Ginelsa.

At that time, the brothers were into Mexican filmmaker Robert Rodriguez's "El Mariachi." Inspired by the low-budget film, the brothers put on their cooking hats. "We wanted a Filipino version of it. We played with that concept and the best we could think of was a mute *lumpia*-throwing avenger."

A *barong*-clad superhero wielding *lumpia* as ammo, may seem like a ridiculous concept, but what appealed to Ginelsa was the pervasive high school issue of FOB-bashing (fresh off the Boeing) that the film tackles. "This issue of internal prejudice within the Filipino community was the real brainteaser."

Through innovative storytelling inspired by Ginelsa's love of comic books, "Lumpia" tells the tale of a superhero who protects a group of new immigrants called "the pack" against American-born thugs known as "the crew," and teaches both sides a lesson through the hero's unusual weapon of choice. "All the characters are extreme characterizations of people I know and people I grew up with," says Ginelsa.

With his ingredients of campy humor, peppered with original music from Fil-Am talents, and a surprise karaoke video, Ginelsa gathered his friends and started rolling with a video 8 camcorder.

Taking seven years to wrap up, the film is a labor of love. "Why seven years? After the summer of 1996, I only completed shooting three quarters of the movie before I had to go back to Los Angeles. After that initial shoot, it was just hard to get everyone back together again. I became busy with my film school projects and college. All my actors graduated from high school and went their separate

ways," explains Ginelsa.

A year later, Ginelsa's best friend Jose died in a car accident. The incident deeply affected him. Then he went through a post-college phase where he didn't know what to do with his life. "At that point, I gave up on 'Lumpia,'" he says.

Then he got involved with the Filipino American film "The Debut," and his love for filmmaking was re-ignited. He also met film editor A.J. Calomay, who had been doing videos for Pilipino Cultural Nights at various colleges in Southern California. Calomay was impressed with the trailer of "Lumpia" shown at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

"(It was) very raw but had lots of character," Calomay says. "It had a satirical tone and I definitely got the humor. The trailer had a lovable, childlike innocence to it, and it was something I could definitely relate to."

"A.J. took my footage and pieced together a kinetic trailer. It opened my eyes. It forced me to see 'Lumpia' in a different light," says Ginelsa.

However, time was still a problem. Most of the lead actors had conflicting schedules. Undeterred, Ginelsa worked around his cast and crews' busy lives, shooting the film part by part. "Most of the time I had to pretend that the other characters were there," says lead actor Francis Custodio, who plays Mon Mon/James. "I was literally acting and speaking to Patricio's imaginary characters."

For the next three to four years, whenever he was in Daly City, Ginelsa would gather whoever was available among the cast. "I acted every summer and even holidays for seven years. Any time I had days off from work, school or from other extracurricular (activities), I would schedule my free time to film," says Custodio.

In the process, Ginelsa also began rewriting the script. "I developed a new twist in the story. You can say that I grew up making 'Lumpia.'"

Cooking up "Lumpia" is one thing, marketing it is another. Ginelsa is taking everything he learned from "The Debut" to market "Lumpia." "The Debut" was built on grassroots promoting. On a smaller scale, I am using all the contacts and friends I made on tour around the country and organizing community screenings everywhere."

These organizations, Filipino college clubs or youth groups, use the film as a fundraiser or as a way to celebrate Filipino American filmmaking. "It's all word-of-mouth, e-mails, and I hate to admit it,

*Continued on page 61*

## Lumpia, *continued from page 52*

Friendster.com," says Ginelsa.

Even the cast and crew do their share of promoting the film. "I try my best to invite my friends and family to any showings," says Custodio, while Calomay tries to attend every screening to "talk about the process of editing the movie and to encourage other Pinoy and Pinays to create their own films and pursue their craft."

Their effort is slowly paying off. Since the film's premiere at San Francisco State University (SFSU), it has gained a small cult-following. This month, the film premieres at the University of San Diego (UCSD) on the 4th and in Cal Poly Pomona on the 19th. This kicks off the Southern California tour of college screenings. On the 24th and 25th, "Lumpia" will be screened at Westmoor High School in Daly City and on the 29th at the University of California in Irvine. Ginelsa is also organizing a tour in Houston, Atlanta and New York.

"There is support out there!" exclaims Ginelsa. "Other independent filmmakers have to rely on film festivals to get their movies shown and exposed. 'Lumpia,' on the other hand, has found another outlet...the community."

Served fresh and saucy, "Lumpia" tickles the palate. ■

**FLASH:** "Lumpia" got accepted at the Hawaii International Film Festival.

*For more information on screenings, visit [www.LoveThatLumpia.com](http://www.LoveThatLumpia.com).*

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