

American Film Showcase sends me to Malaysia!

In May 2014 I had the honor of participating in the American Film Showcase, a US State Department Cultural Affairs program “People to People Diplomacy” administered by USC Film Department.

I spent 10 days in two cities in Malaysian Borneo. In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, I was an advisor for the Sabah Film Academy. 10 Students had been invited to be part of 2 teams, each producing a 10 minute film. The program aims to develop local citizen journalists and media voices. I also gave a full day workshop in Kuching, Sarawak which was a 2 hour plane flight away. These two locales gave me an opportunity to experience the multicultural nature of this wonderful country, as well as the complex political system and geography.

Dinner in Kota Kinabalu



Over the next 10 days, AFS and US Embassy made sure we got to see some sights as well as work for the program: Mt. Kinabalu, an Orangutan preserve, snorkeling on some local islands. My trip overlapped with filmmaker Jamie Redford who was there to screen his film on dyslexia.



But the greatest part of the trip was getting to work at the Sabah Film Academy where I met the entire crew of this ambitious project which is determined to foster a local film industry in Sabah to give voice to this unique part of Malaysia. These citizen journalists show tons of promise!

I also met my well respected fellow mentors: Marcus Vetter, a director from Germany, Jacques Comets, editor from France, and Filius, a Malaysian DP. It was incredible to be part of this international effort which is supported by the Goethe Institute of Germany, Cultural Affairs of France, and the US Embassy.

We worked with the program participants from project pitch, pre-production, production, post, and first public screening - a very ambitious course to say the least.



Team Janessa



Team Marcel



We mentors really grilled them so that they could hone in on very specific elements crucial to successful pre-production, filming, and post production. Then we each gave a presentation.

For my workshop on music for film. I realized that what these teams needed was some really practical information to prepare them for the task at hand, so I tried to orient my presentation to each project's specific needs and how they might use music. They really soaked it up and were very engaged and passionate about learning what they needed to pull this challenging project off.



At the time of my arrival, we only had one composer, Andrew, involved in the program. The week before I left, in emails and on SKYPE calls I had been pushing for the Sabah Film Academy to find another candidate – otherwise, one team would be missing out on the experience of working with a composer. So this first day, Asif, a local musician/producer had been enticed to come along and by the end of my presentation, we had roped him into participating. I've been very impressed with the flexibility and genuine enthusiasm of Asif and Andrew to be part this very challenging abbreviated schedule which is a ton of work and pressure for them.



Andrew and Asif – our music heroes!

By the end of the program, each team had completed a 10 minute work in progress which was screened at the Kota Kinabalu International Film Festival. We advisors decided to split the cash prize and give it to both teams to help finish their films. I was elected to make the presentation.



What a fantastic experience, working so intensively with the Sabah Film Academy, my fellow advisors, and all the program participants. I really felt the universal spirit shared by documentary filmmakers everywhere. We may live in different countries, but we all speak the language of documentary film.

For my other AFS project, I flew to Kuching, Sarawak, accompanied by US State Dept rep Shannon Phang and AFS envoy Jennifer Phan . By the time we got there, it was dinnertime, but the deluge of rain kept us from going out, so we turned in early. I knew the next day would be a real marathon for me with a full day workshop to present and 4 interviews scheduled.





Thankfully you can always pick up some frozen fish at the airport



Arrived in Kuching.....What a beautiful place and our first night featured a dramatic tropical storm complete with lightening and thunder and buckets of rain. As the sky lit up with lightening, I could make out a large river running through the town, just a few blocks from our hotel.



Next day, up early and over to the the Sarawak State Library and Lincoln Corner for my all day workshop: “Career as Music Composer” as part of their 10<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary Celebration. Our hostess, Drang Jite, was so delightful and welcoming. They were very well prepared technically and it was a well organized and publicized event



After my presentation, I was interviewed en masse – I think there were 4 journalists there. I felt like Taylor Swift with the paparazzi! But some of them were really prepared and asked interesting questions.

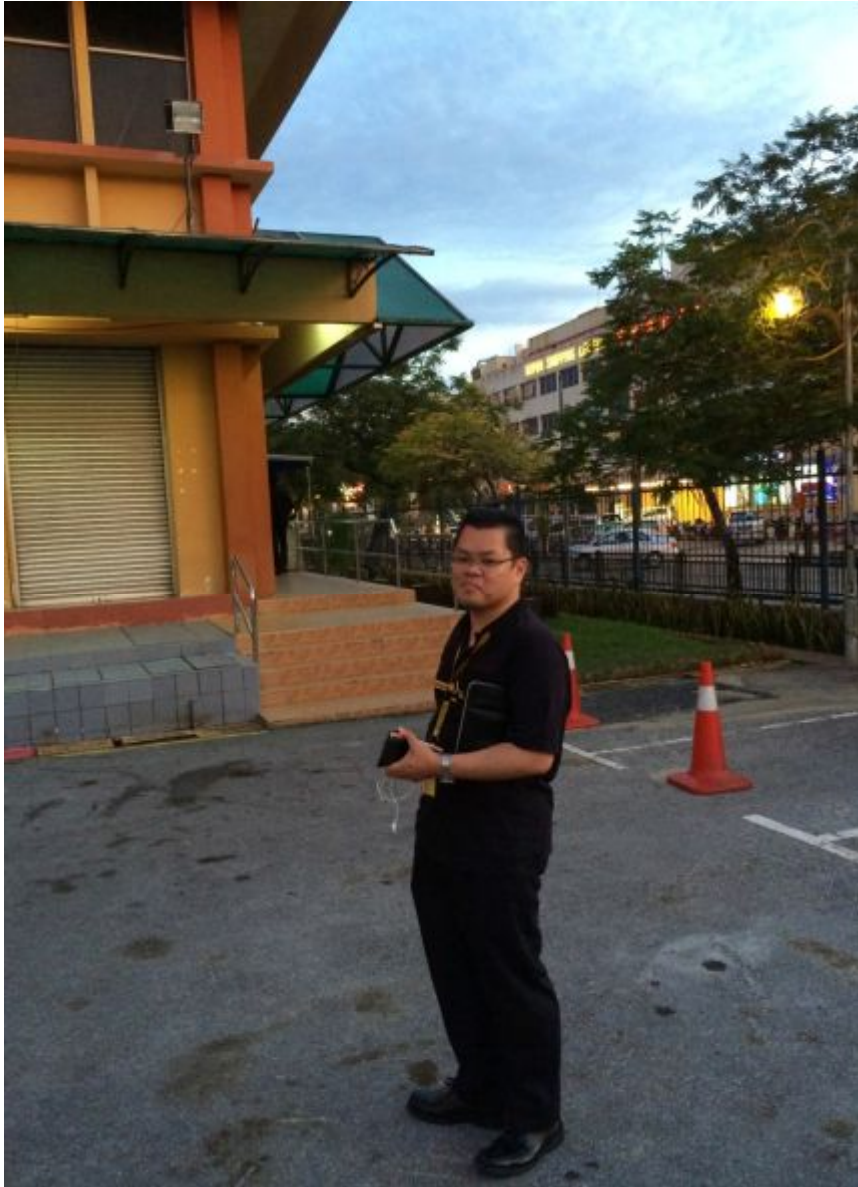


And for the finale, I was presented with some wonderful gifts by the dignitaries in attendance and had a long and enthusiastic photo session with all the participants and officials. Then off to the amazing lobby for more pictures with EVERYONE!



After that I got a personalized and thorough tour of the Library from Drang Jite, our wonderful hostess at the Sarawak State Library







With Interviewer Hendrick Fah and his engineer



Hendrick was very professional, and had clearly done his research. His questions were really interesting and I really enjoyed our conversation. After the interview he explained to me that this radio station serves many different cultures in Kuching, has broadcasts in many languages, and even is responsible for the call the prayer for their Muslim audience.

Shannon, Jennifer, and I walked around a bit to take in some sights near our hotel...









Then back to the hotel after a long, long day. Explored the shopping mall attached to the hotel a bit. Saw some interesting things while looking for a place to have dinner...

And I couldn't resist snapping this shot...



The next day, our wonderful hostess took us about an hour outside Kuching to visit the Cultural Village where life and culture of all the tribes of Borneo seem to be represented. That's where I first heard the sound of the Sapeh, a beautiful Malaysian instrument...and I met Frances – who makes them.



He only had one finished – and thankfully he sold it to me after teaching me how to tune it.



I will never forget the people I met and places I've seen. I can't wait to get another call from AFS!