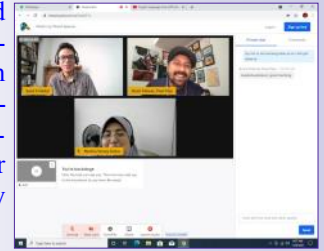


## A Q&A with Bront Palarae By Nazima Versay Kudus & Lim Teck Heng

### At the backstage

The Integrated Language Skills III (ELC231) code and the English Language Club of UiTM CPP have collaborated in organising a programme, with an outstanding Malaysian actor, Bront Palarae. The objective of the session was to encourage students to gain some insights on the movie industry which can inspire them to prepare for their Oral Commentary of Film component of the code. The one-hour session was held on November 6, 2021 from 10.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. It was hosted by the English Language Club President, Mr. Syed Amir Haikal, who is also a student enrolled in the ELC231 code for this semester. The session began with welcoming words from the Head of Department of the Academy of Language Studies, Dr Hajah Rofiza Aboo Bakar. The following is the transcript of the interview.



Haikal: Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh, and good morning to all. I am Syed Amir Haikal, the moderator of the session. Welcome to another episode of What's Up World. Today's session is the collaboration between the ELC231 code and the English Language Club of UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang. This semester, we are learning the Oral Commentary of Film and we are very fortunate to have a renowned actor, screenwriter, film director and producer with us today. He is none other than Bront Palarae.

Bront: Hello! Assalamualaikum and good morning everyone.

Haikal: Welcome, sir. How are you doing today?

Bront: Alhamdulillah.

Haikal: Thank you for joining us. We are really excited to have you here.

Bront: Thank you. It is a great pleasure to be here. Thank you for having me. I just got out of the jungle, so pardon my Neanderthal image. Just came back from shooting two days ago.

Haikal: We are going to have a Q&A session with you. The students are going to post questions in the chatroom. Many of us are curious about the kind of work that you do, on and off screen.

Bront: Sure no problem. Shoot your questions, guys!

Syaqille Zuhair: How has life been like since becoming an actor and what are the challenges you have faced?

Bront: Becoming an actor is a life changing experience and fulfilling in a lot of ways. It quenches my thirst for knowledge. Being an actor, you get to play different personalities and people from all walks of life. One day you play a janitor; the next day you play an assassin or the following day, a football commentator. With each role, you have to do research and in the process of doing research you gain a lot of knowledge and insights into a lot of things. It is an eye opening journey as well. Professionally, I think it is just like any other profession where you have your career ladder where you reach a certain stage and reach a certain plateau for a while and try to make a step up. This takes some time to reach the top – so to speak. Picking up the right project is a challenge. I don't care much about the stuff that comes with acting such as the glitz and glamour part. It never really bothered me before or even now. However, I think picking up the right project has been a massive challenge because there are so many confluences and variables that influence the outcomes of any project. Picking the right material and team and choosing the right co-stars may look easy on paper, yet it can turn out badly.

Husna Imanina Hasli: What has been your most favourite scene of a movie so far?

Bront: Weirdly, I don't watch my own shows. I wouldn't know the outcome of most projects that I have done so far. I have only seen some of them. But in the process of making it, I have enjoyed every scene that I have worked for, some for sentimental reasons and some for technical difficulty reasons and some for the fact that once in a lifetime you get to do stuff like that. The honest answer is I wouldn't know as I don't watch my own shows. However I enjoy the process of making them.

Brian Yapp: Who is the most fun actor/actress that you have worked with?

Bront: Amerul Affendi has been fun and a great joy to work with. We cracked up jokes all the time. We always find different ways to interpret a scene. He always comes up with crazy ideas to surprise you. This is something that all actors seek on a movie set or in a scene. I enjoy working with Sharifah Amani for the same reason. I work with both of them on a lot of projects. That is the kind of fulfillment that we would seek when we are doing a scene together.

Aliya Yusram: What are the things that you have yet to achieve in acting?

Bront: I don't know. I never see it that way. I always see it as an avenue to gain insights into human beings... how they think. I find those more fascinating like how a character would do such a thing, their worldviews and characters from different backgrounds. Giving you the opportunity to understand the various social classes. These are aspects that I find fascinating about acting. In terms of achievement, I don't really bother or think much about it, to be honest.

Nik Danish: How do you adapt with the struggles in life either religiously or physically?

Bront: With age... with my daughter growing up ... there is a sense of what I would not be able to do. I can't be saying "I love you" to a 20-year old girl on the screen. It would be cringy. There are a lot of adaptations; you accept certain things



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have gone beyond what you cannot possibly do. A lot of roles won't suit me anymore religiously. It just goes with the time and I try to accept things that come with age.



Wan Noorli Razali: How far do you think our film industry has developed especially in nurturing people/the community?

Bront: Unfortunately, we are regressing in that department. I think we could, should and must do better. Obviously, it is not happening. Without sounding like a rant, I think the current creative industry is serving one particular segment within the society when the make-up of our society is larger than that. There are a lot of potentials but a lot of them are unfulfilled. Let's work towards that. A lot of us are working very hard trying to find the right material that brings value to our society. It is a slow progress. Let's hope the new generation can bring something more exciting.

Haikal: What is your favourite local movie?

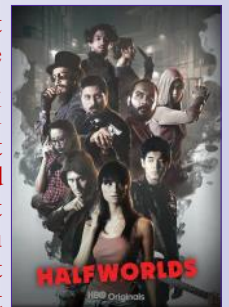
Bront: Once I liked *Roh*. The movies made by the younger generation are more exciting. I can't wait for Adam Zainal's first film project. I hope he will be able to raise some money to make it.

Nurul Athirah: The entertainment industry is said to be full of stress and pressure. What do you do to tackle the pressure that comes from work?

Bront: I am lucky I have no problem in dealing with pressure whatsoever. In fact I enjoy and I thrive in that kind of situation. What got me through, is to find the reason why I do it and for whom I am doing it. Having loved ones matters a lot because it gives a sense of purpose to whatever I am doing. My family has been the pillar of whatever I do and because of that I can endure whatever pressure is being thrown at me. There is a saying, "How do you eat a whale? One bite at a time". No matter how tough the proposition looks, at the end of the day, focus on one step at a time.

Irene Anuar: Can you share your experience working with international actors?

Bront: The good ones are good. The not so good ones are ok. The pay has been nice. Few years ago when I felt I was hitting the ceiling... and I think in any profession in whatever that you guys do after graduation... once you go into a particular field in your professional career, there will be some point when you hit the ceiling... when the outlooks seem like they cannot progress anymore or further, that's what I felt five years ago when I couldn't progress anymore or any further in terms of my career which means the roles that I got somehow felt like a serial déjà vu. There wasn't any joy anymore in receiving scripts until *Halfworlds* came from HBO and that kind of change has led to Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Singapore. What's refreshing about working abroad and working outside the comfort of our industry is that nobody knows you. It is almost like you start all over again. You go back to the drawing board but with the advantage of experience. That somewhat brought me joy about acting again. That is the best gift that Allah has given me. Earlier I had thoughts about quitting. It wasn't fun, it wasn't worth it.



Faris Daniel: Is there any actor/actress you would want to work with?

Bront: I never thought about it but obviously, I would love to work with the younger generations like Shafiq Kyles, Nadhir Nasars, Daiyan Trishas – the whole young generation.

Syed Haikal: Any international actor you would like to work with?

Bront: I never try to dream up something that I don't have a way to achieve. It is like dreaming to live in a palace. There is no point of dreaming when you cannot have a blueprint of how to get there.

Aqilah Syamimi: Which character/scene is the hardest to play?

Bront: The NEXT one... because I haven't done it. Every character comes with its own difficulties. Even though it may seem very easy from the outlook like a casual role or stroll in a park but to bring organicity to a boring role, I won't discount that it can be tough too. Maybe the hardest role is *Ola Bola* because I had to improvise two minute plus three minute of the segment especially when I had a high fever and we shot a scene at 2.00 pm on top of the RTM building. They couldn't shift the scene because the whole cast involved 300 people; it would only wreck the schedule if they did so.

Haziq Fitrie: What is your routine at the film set before the camera starts rolling?

Bront: Try to find something unique in each character and try to transmit to the audience the best you can. I find playing a psycho easy, however, playing a normal guy is tougher. It is hard to bring uniqueness to everyday people. That is the complexity that I try

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to bring to each 'normal' character that I play.

Nureen Shafiah: As an artist, are there any topics or ideas you wish to pursue and present to the audience in your projects in the future?

Bront: I think as human beings, we can't run away from the fact that we are affected by a lot of things as we progress from the socio-political and socio-economic landscapes within the country and at the global level. Of course there are a lot of things to say and yet to be said through the work. I am completing my project called *The Lies I Tell* which deals with hypocrisy. *One Two Jaga* was about corruption and how we treat foreign workers which is an extension of *Kolumpo*. Each project allows me to say something about our country, about our society, about how we behave. You just want to be a mirror that reflects those things back to the audience. I am also trying to write a semi-satire about the city council. The research would normally consume time because you want to understand and verify matters.

Bznzman: How did you become a top and successful actor?

Bront: Pure luck. No matter how much I try to contribute to the work balance or look, whatever other attributes towards the success or the perception of success of my career, I couldn't find a way to get luck from it. Luck has been a major contributing factor and weirdly I think I always benefited from the benefit of generosity of a stranger or strangers. Somehow throughout 21 years of my career, most of the turning points and journey has been about that. A total stranger would come and give me a chance or a gig. I embraced it and it led to a bigger gig.

Nurul Athirah: You have been associated with acts of charity and humanitarianism such as participating in the Emergency Relief Trip to Gaza. How does this act impact your life ?

Bront: The reason for Gaza was I was trying to find myself. My wife, who was my girlfriend back then, and I were trying to find who we were and answers to some of our questions about existential crisis so to speak. She went to Annapurna for hiking (and she is still into hiking now), which I wasn't and still am not. I need to get away from the glitz and glamour of showbiz for a while. I was trying to find true emotions since I was trying to understand human beings and their psyche. I wanted to taste a different kind of sensation and at that time Gaza was heavily attacked in 2013. There was an eight-day truce and I wanted to volunteer at the hospital to immerse myself in tragedy and understand our psychological condition and make myself useful at the same time. It was just trying to escape whatever that was happening in the show business at that time. However, I couldn't get a ticket to go there until Afdlin Shauki found out that I was trying to go. He was making a documentary. So he asked whether I mind joining his team. So I joined his team and it turned out to be one of the most luxurious trips ever where they put us in a five-star hotel which defeats the whole purpose. That is why I have never really spoken about it because it didn't serve its purpose of humanitarian work. But other than that, I work with Global Sadaqah where I help to amplify their campaigns particularly with emergency relief aids.



It's Mal: What is the first thing newbies need to do, in order to get involved in the acting industry?

Bront: I don't normally support the notion of joining show business. Anyone who I have come across or anyone who has shown interest in acting or joining the industry... I would advise against it whenever we interact with the parents or the individual himself or herself. Whatever that I gain there is a major luck that comes into play. Nobody could guarantee that the same luck can happen to others. I wouldn't recommend this profession to anyone. I studied filmmaking, and among the various jobs in the film industry, acting is the best and the easiest one that comes with most perks but I can always go back to writing in case acting doesn't work. Acting has given me a lot of things. To others, I advise not to risk your education, life and potential without having proper plans.

Nik Danish: If you could turn back time and choose a different occupation, what would you choose and why?

Bront: I am ok with what I am and who I am. I don't have any regrets, of course there are things you wish you could do better. I wouldn't swap this with anything in life.

Mohd Daniel: You are also a director; can you share with us some of your experience as being a director? Is it harder than just acting?

Bront: It comes with more responsibilities. The job scope is different and there are a lot of tasks that a director needs to do in terms of timeline and commitment. You are required to commit to a project. Acting is actually easier, but I only direct when I have something to say.

Ainul Mardhiah Azmizam: Who's your role model in acting? Is it Reza Rahadian?

Bront: No, he is a good friend. We have acted together twice. I like different actors for different reasons and attributes. Some for their commitment, some for their techniques, some for the ways they choose their projects, some due to their longevity within the industry. There is no one particular role model.

Zurich Zainal: Doesn't the whole thing about "luck" (as an actor) apply to every other occupation out there? There's risk everywhere, no?

Bront: True, but I was merely answering from the context of show business. With show business the career ladder is a bit different. In corporate for instance, you move as the head of department to another – there is a clear pathway. You can chart your career. With

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show business not so. There were some people when I first joined the industry who were playing the same kind of roles after 21 years.

Ammar Khir: How do you stay away from the controversy that is happening in your personal life?

Bront: Maybe because I separate my professional life from my private life. Nobody has seen my family or knows what I do when I am not on screen... which I don't think they should. That lessens the possibility of things going wrong. With less information, people have nothing to stir up with. I don't normally seek any spotlight anyway. I try to control what I tweet because it can turn to national news especially when it involves what is going on within the country.

Airina: As an actor, how long does it take for you to study about the story or the character given?

Bront: It can be half a day, it can be months, it can be years depending on the complexity and the vision of the director. I would join much earlier from the ideation stage. Normally I am involved with the project two years before we started shooting. For instance, in *Fly by Night* I was involved 4 years before we started shooting. For *Dawn Raid*, we have to track down one particular person who is now residing in Canada for two years in order to get an interview with him.

Haikal: What is the difference between Western movies compared to that of Eastern?

Bront: Western movies are painted through western tinted glass where we could see the world view of the writer. The impulse or response of a particular film is different from the eastern context. On the other hand, the east is always different. Malaysians are in a weird position. There are a lot of replication, copy and paste approach which makes the movie incoherent and jarring in terms of worldview. Indonesian on the contrary are more solid in that sense. They are very sure of what is the idea of being Indonesian – of who they are. Malaysia is relatively a young nation. Persian civilisation stands for thousands of years while the American 300 over years. Indonesia, despite not being much different from Malaysia in terms of years of independence, the former's civilisation is longer. There were frequent halts in Malaysia's civilisation due to colonisations. As a society, we are still going through the evolution process of trying to understand who we are collectively. We are still questioning who we are as a Malay, as Malaysians, and as Asians. We are still going through that existential phase of who we are. Until that is solved, then only it can be reflected in our work. Until then, we will still be in a self-discovery mode.

Shazzy Wazzy: What are your thoughts on the Malaysian film industry?

Bront: There are a lot of unfulfilled potentials for the amount of money being spent on it. The government spends almost a quarter of a billion every five years. That is a lot of money. I hope things get better soon. The younger generation brings much optimism and hope into the space. The number of young directors and writers that come into the space has been exponentially increased. I just hope they don't die down. Then we could see in five years the kind of direction that we want in the Malaysian film industry. Our industry can only develop with the best brains available.

Haikal: Thank you very much Mr Bront Palarae for spending your time answering our questions.

Bront: Thank you for supporting the Malaysian film industry. Hopefully we can improve on our output. Thank you again for having me. It has been a great pleasure.



Hand gestures that are commonly used in a country may be rude in another country. Match each of the following hand gestures to the country in which it is considered rude.

Source: <https://www.rd.com/article/common-hand-gestures-rude-in-other-countries/>

1. Thumbs up

B. Brazil

2. Backwards peace sign

3. The "rock on" sign

A. Malaysia

4. The "OK" sign

C. Iran

D. UK

5. Pointing with index finger

E. Italy & Spain

Answers: 1—C 2—D 3—E 4—B 5—A

Answers to Riddles on page 2:

1. A tongue
2. A carrot
3. A mushroom
4. A shadow
5. Mt Everest; it just wasn't discovered yet

