

Superstar for decades

A star of the silver screen is now a senator, although as **Kriangsak Suwanpantakul** reports, he still makes cameo appearances



Sombat Metanee has starred in over 600 films and won numerous awards, and he has also bagged a Guinness World Record for most film appearances.

After entering show business in 1960, Sombat was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the recent Bangkok International Film Festival 2006. Even though he is no longer seen as a leading actor in films, Sombat still does cameos occasionally, in both foreign and local productions. Now that he has been elected as a Bangkok senator, the silver-screen hero is going to serve the country politically.

Born on June 26, 1937, Sombat has greatly influenced the Thai film industry in a career that spans half a century. Namdee Witta, a television performance troupe leader, cajoled Sombat into taking the first steps.

He made his debut in the television series "Hua Jai Pratana" (Heart's Desires) which was broadcast in black and white on Channel 7.

Joining him in his first appearance was actress Wilaiwan Watanapanich who had previously performed in classics "Sao Kraue Fah" and "Sapan Kam Maenam Kwai".

A bodybuilder, Sombat's well-built personality caught the eye of Kamolsilpa Pappayon Studio's director Noi Kamolwatin, who was looking for a new face for his film "Roong Petch"

(Diamond Rainbow). Sombat co-starred in this film with Ratanaporn Indrakamhaeng, a famous actress amongst the 80 starlets that Sombat courted on the silver screen.

Filmed in 16mm without sound, "Roong Petch", which later became a blockbuster, had to be live-dubbed at all screenings. Sombat Metanee became an overnight success. His subsequent films included "Skao Duen" (1962), "Singh Sang Pa" (1963), "Saming Sao" (1963) and "Nagm-Ngon" (1963). When he starred in the action-packed "Kao Mangkorn" (Nine Dragons), Sombat was regarded as Thailand's next action king.

Later however, he did not mind playing a secondary role against the invincible screen god Mit Chibanacha in "Singh La Singh" (The Lion vs the Lion). It was the right choice, and after the film opened in 1964, Sombat's fame skyrocketed.

His average performance rate was 20 films per year even though a number of studios demanded twice as much from him.

He won the Best Actor Award for "Suek Bang Rajan" (The Battle of Bang Rajan) and had the honour of receiving the award from His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej in person.

Sombat later expanded his talent to directing when he co-directed "Nai Suan Rak" (Love Garden)

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