a film by Royston Tan

Singapore – 2006 – 93min - 1:85 – Dolby SRD – *English, Mandarin*

Presented By

World Sales
Celluloid Dreams

the directors label

In Berlin
EFM Stand 114
T: +49 30 246 497 420
F: +49 30 246 497 419

In Paris
2 Rue Turgot, 75009 Paris, France
T: +33 1 4970 0370
F: +33 1 4970 0371
info@celluloid-dreams.com / www.celluloid-dreams.com

International Press

In Berlin
Celluloid Dreams
Hotel Madison
suite no. 631
T: +49 30 590 051 631
F: +49 30 590 052 631

Magali Montet
E: magali@celluloid-dreams.com
M: +336 7163 3616

Gordon Spragg
E: gordon@celluloid-dreams.com
M: +336 7525 9791
Xiao Wu’s existence revolves around school, an empty apartment and the dubious comforts in instant noodles. One day, his routine is subtly transformed by a tenant in the apartment, who is nursing a heartache. Their paths cross only once in a while. Longing for human contact Xiao Wu tries all he can to make a connection through physical and metaphorical walls in that hour between night and day.
A meditation on absence and longing, 4:30 is about a moment, and a boy’s attempt to cling to it, escaping his drab reality. 4:30 traces the relationship between Zhang Xiao Wu and his tenant Jung, a thirty-something Korean man. Told entirely from the perspective of the boy, this story of two very different characters is less about friendship than about a shared experience and appreciation of solitude.

4:30 was conceived while I was filming my first feature 15. I was doing a lot of late night shoots and would normally still be up at 4:30 am. I realised that this is a very lonely time of the day, in fact I think probably the loneliest. It feels too late to go to sleep yet at the same time, too late to be awake. I’ve heard a rumour that the suicide rate at this time is apparently the highest.

The premise of 4:30 is built around 2 lonely people who share and probably find a kind of unspoken connection through their loneliness. The reason for using a Korean character was in part, a way of thanking the people at Pusan especially the Pusan International Film Festival for their tremendous support for many of my short films over the last few years.

It was also my intention to show that loneliness is universal and cross-cultural hence there is very little dialogue in the film 4:30. Emotions of the characters are told through their body language like their eyes and facial expressions, or subtle cues of their hands. This perhaps also opens more doors to interpretation for the audience as well.
Audiences may be shocked at the idea that a young boy could be left all alone by his parents. Both 4:30 and 15 centre on the lives of youngsters seemingly without any parental guidance. They are left to their own devices and dangers of the world. Can you talk a little about why you choose to represent the lives of children like this?

I can only say that this was wholly intentional. 4:30 focuses on the boy’s perspective, his memories. Childhood memories are never real, they are constructs; I would even say constantly re-edited, amplified and pieced back together with each recollection to give a picture which may not necessarily reflect a hard-line reality.

I don’t think that both 4:30 and 15 should merely be read as social criticism. I don’t see the characters in both films as victims in any way. In fact, if I’m forced to read the two films in this context, I frankly see them as rebels. Resisting the status quo.

Xiao Wu tries throughout the film to catch the attention of all the adults around him - but the adults seem to be closed off to any real form of dialogue - is this a comment of disparity between the young and old in Singapore, that it is the adults who are irresponsible and unable to communicate?

I think I am commenting on the difference between a child and an adult. I believe that children are better equipped in seeing the truth of things. As adults, we make excuses and sometimes repeat them so often that we internalize them, to the extent that we are sometimes prone to being blinded to reality.

The role of women in both your feature films is very peripheral - relegated to just a voice off screen, on the phone or the tv. Can you tell me the motivations behind creating this ‘masculine’ universe?

I don’t think I actually planned for both 15 and 4:30 to be tales that only revolve around men and the relationships they have with one another. Perhaps at an unconscious level, this is attributable to my formative years, spent mostly in the company of my male friends.

I also think that this focus on masculinity forms one of the most important themes in 15. The phenomenon of the Chinese street gangs and the triads was founded in the belief in the brotherhood of men, at the time, a concept that was not really arising from “gender-exclusivity” but by adherence to Chinese values like chivalry, loyalty and self-sacrifice. It was interesting for me to note in 15 that what used to be highly respected principles are ironically only truly held in high-regard amongst young men considered to be at the fringes of society.

As for 4:30, my friends tell me that my characters seem to live in constant fear of being emasculated (hence the lack of female characters and when they appear, they are rather nasty). To me, in 4:30, at least, the ‘feminine’ symbolizes, (and is also a catalyst of) the inevitable displacement (like time and change) of two displaced men clinging on to each other for solace.
Can you tell us a little how you came to shoot the film? Where/how it was shot? Also, how did you find, and work with Xiao Li Yuan to get such an incredible, natural and nuanced performance from a child actor?

I came up with the story of 4:30 during the filming of 15, in the wee hours of the morning, staying up late for the preparation of the day shoot. In the dead of night, I looked out to the urban sprawl that is Singapore and what caught my eye were lit apartment units in the endless blocks of our housing estates. That set me thinking about the stories of the people living there, nocturnal and sleepless. Were they feeling the same thing as me? This unbearable, yet strangely, endearing sense of loneliness?

The film was shot in an abandoned apartment in River Valley Road, an old part of Singapore filled with stretches of shop houses built in the Fifties. I wanted to impart a certain element of timelessness in 4:30. As I mentioned earlier, this is especially important as the film is shot almost from the perspective of a child and his memories.

I first encountered the child actor, Li Yuan, when he was cast in a five-part horror television series, which I was involved in. What drew me to him was his natural ability to get into role and his eyes. To me, his eyes somehow held a certain sense of melancholy. No matter whether he was smiling or laughing. When I decided that I had to have him in 4:30, I spent many months with my co-writer Liam Yeo to tailor the script to him.

Working with a child actor is never easy, especially when it comes to getting them to deliver emotions. What I wanted to capture required him to be honest with his own emotions and as such, the trust between us was paramount. Fortunately we opened up to each other and fast became friends, something which I normally try to avoid when working with actors.

You came into many problems with local censors for your film 15, after the attention it received internationally and with your counter censorship film, Cut. Can you say that things are improving for artists in Singapore?

I think that opening Singapore, in terms of freedom of expression, must not be the result of economic incentives. The powers-that-be must see it as necessary if not imperative, (within realistic limits and in consideration of our national sensitivities) for art in Singapore to be allowed to speak. I believe that self-expression is natural and instinctual, and as Singapore matures as a society, the freedom to explore our identity and our collective soul freely is crucial for its growth. That said, I also believe that all societies practice some form of censorship, in one form or the other, what I do not personally agree with is censorship without just cause.
Xiao Li Yuan as Zhang Xiao Wu

Kim Young Jun as Jung
**Feature Films**
4:30 (2006)
15 - the feature (2003)

**Short Films**
DIY (2005)
Monkey Love (2005)
New York Girl (2005)
Careless Whisperer (2005)
Blind (2004)
Cut (2004)
177155 (2003)
The Old Man and the River (2003)
Mother (2002)
24hrs (2002)
48 on Aids (2002)
15 (2002)
Hock Hiap Leong (2001)
Sons (2000)
Jesses (1999)
Kisses (1998)
Erase (1996)
Remain (1995)
The 29-year-old Tan has been heralded as Singapore’s most promising young filmmaker and the latest cult icon for Singapore. He has collected over 41 international and local film awards for his work to date. In 2001, he won the 6th MVA ASEAN Director of the year, Silver Award. In 2002, the Singapore National Arts Council named him Young Artist of the Year. In 2003, Netpac Jury recognized Royston Tan as one of Asia’s most promising Talents.

Tan’s first full-length feature film 15 adapted from his award winning short of the same name won the Netpac Fipresci World critic award at the 16th Singapore international film festival, it broke the festival’s record as the fastest selling local film in the history of the festival. 15 was also the first ever Singaporean Film to be selected in the Venice Critics’ Week competing the Lions of the Future Award. In 2004, 15 was also the winner of Special Jury Award for Deauville Asian Film Festival as well as Best Director Award in Buenos Aires.

In 2004, Royston Tan was named as one of the “Top 20 Asian Heroes” by Time Magazine for being bold, brave and remarkable in his field. Tan’s willingness to push the creative envelope has made him a hero to the city’s independent artists.

A filmmaker with a huge cult following around the world, his retrospective show 0104, a showcase featuring all his award winning short films over the last 10 years have traveled to ICA London, Chicago, Japan and Singapore with overwhelming response. In 2005, Royston Tan’s second feature film 4:30 became the first Singapore film to be funded and co-produced by NHK Japan.
Zhao Wei Films

Zhao Wei Films, helmed by Eric Khoo and James Toh, is committed to the nurturing of local talent. Its maiden film, “Mee Pok Man” provided a jolt to the local scene in 1995 when it paved the way for the resurgence of film making in Singapore.

It won the Special Jury Prize at the 9th Fukuoka Asian Film Festival and received Special Mention from FIPRESCI at the 8th Singapore International Film Festival (SIFF). It proved that local films could find box office success in Singapore and went on to tour over 30 film festivals worldwide with critical acclaim including Venice and Berlin.

“12 Storeys” followed, being the first Singapore film ever to have been invited to the prestigious Cannes Film Festival in the Un Certain Regard section. Winning two prizes at the Singapore International Film Festival, it also won the Golden Maile Award (Best Picture) at the Hawaii International Film Festival. The film travelled the international film festival circuit and was released in Europe.

Zhao Wei Films also produced the ground breaking TV series “Drive” (1998) which was shot on film and showcased budding young talent with a different director for each episode. It won many accolades and was nominated for the Asian TV awards.

1999 Zhao Wei Films explored more mainstream themes with the commercially successful “Liang Po Po – the movie,” which grossed more than 3 million at the box office. The soccer comedy “One Leg Kicking” had the highest opening for a local film. Both movies were the top grossing Singaporean films in their year of release.

In 2003, Zhao Wei Films produced “15” the controversial, critically acclaimed film exposing juvenile delinquency in Singapore, “15” directed by Royston Tan was selected for the 2003 Venice International Film Festival and the 2004 Sundance Film Festival.

Zhao Wei Films latest feature “Be With Me” by Eric Khoo was selected to be the opening film of the 2005 Cannes Directors’ Fortnight and has been released in Europe and Singapore. It has since won seven awards and has been sold to North America.
Production Company
Zhao Wei Films Pte Ltd
22 Scotts Road
Unit 01-28
Singapore 228221
T: +65 6730 1806
F: +65 6735 1181
James Toh
E: tohjamer@yahoo.com
M: +65 9686 1078
Gary Goh
E: gary@zhaowei.com
M: +65 9855 6073
www.zhaowei.com/430
4:30
A Royston Tan Film