

HAF 25 While You Were Working



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Hong Kong

GENRE | FORMAT | LANGUAGE | RUNNING TIME: Comedy | Digital Format | Cantonese, Tagalog, English | 90 mins

DIRECTOR:

LEUNG Ming-kai

PRODUCER:

Teresa KWONG

Kate REILLY

CHUN Siu-chun

HAF GOALS:

Funds, Co-producers, Sales agents, Pre-sales

BUDGET:

US\$ 700,000

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

First Feature Director

ONE-SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

A Filipino domestic worker prepares for a singing competition with help from her elderly Chinese boss and American neighbour, but the boss disappears, and the younger women must find her.

SYNOPSIS

Elderly Siu-nay migrated from China to Hong Kong as a young woman and became a nightclub singer. She now lives with her daughter, who expects Nay to stay in while she's at work.

Joan is a Filipino domestic worker who takes care of Nay. She's been in Hong Kong for five years and speaks Cantonese. Joan rarely connects with her daughter, or her husband, whose restaurant is struggling.

Lauren is their American neighbour. A literature PhD, she followed her husband to Hong Kong for his finance job. Lauren stays home and tutors primary-school students while her husband is working.

Each day, Lauren hears beautiful singing from an apartment upstairs. One afternoon, she follows the music to Nay and Joan's apartment. Joan is rehearsing for a singing competition for domestic workers. The three women begin spending their afternoons together while Joan prepares. Nay tries to shape Joan in her own image as a performer, while Lauren encourages self-exploration. Nay regales them with stories about old Hong Kong and her dastardly ex-boyfriend. Joan flourishes.

On the day of the competition, however, Nay runs away. Joan delays her performance. She and Lauren race across Hong Kong seeking Nay in her favourite places.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The eighties and nineties were the golden era of Hong Kong cinema, and many of those films were comedies about immigrants. *While You Were Working* continues the tradition of those films. It's dense with jokes and absurdities, embracing singing and dancing, and blurring the line between reality and fiction.

The film is a buddy comedy about three marginal women: a nostalgic, housebound old lady; the ambitious young Filipino domestic worker who cares for her; and their overeducated, underemployed American neighbor. They are left behind in a housing complex each day when most adults go to work. But they find each other, and through their adventures, we suggest new ways of looking at elderly people, domestic workers, immigrants, and even Hong Kong itself.

The relationship between mothers and daughters, whether biological or chosen, is at the heart of the story. There is also bitterness over lost love, and yearning for familiar places. But the film is light and silly, and deep sadness is met with escapism. Realism is disrupted by stylish interludes that recall popular culture of the sixties through nineties. These fantasy sequences reveal what's in the characters' hearts.

DIRECTOR

LEUNG Ming-kai

A film directing graduate of Columbia University, Kai has directed short films that played at top festivals, including *Lock* (2007), which competed at Tribeca, and *Three Boys* (2007), which competed at Clermont-Ferrand and received the highest award at Hong Kong Independent Film and Video Awards. As a cinematographer, Kai shot Sylvia Chang's *Murmur of the Hearts* (2015), which opened HKIFF, and Anocha Suwichakornpong's *By the Time It Gets Dark* (2016), which competed at Locarno and won several Thai best film awards. He also shot Johnny Ma's *Old Stone* (2016), which premiered at Berlin and won Best First Feature at Toronto.

PRODUCER

Teresa KWONG

Kwong is a promoter, curator, and producer for film and media arts. Films she has produced include *Addicted to Love* (2010), *Big Blue Lake* (2011), *Flowing Stories* (2014), *Dot 2 Dot* (2014), and *Napping Kid* (2018).

Kate REILLY

Kate produces, writes, and performs in New York comedy, including variety show *Lock-in!* and improvised *Golden Girls* episodes. She acts in theatre, and has performed for filmmakers including Anocha Suwichakornpong, Giorgio Cugno, and Lee Chatametikool.

CHUN Siu-chun

Chun started as an assistant director for John Woo. She co-wrote and co-directed *La Lingerie* (2008) with Chan Hing-kai. Chun's latest directorial efforts include *The Four Trilogy* (2011-2014) and *Les Aventures d'Anthony* (2015).

PRODUCTION COMPANY

JABES Most Company Limited

JABES Most Company Limited is a Hong Kong-based production house founded by Amos Why, the filmmaker of *Dot 2 Dot* (2014); Stanley Tam, the editor of *Exodus* (2007); and three recent Creative Arts graduates from the Open University of Hong Kong.