

HAF 04 June Snow



REGION: Hong Kong

GENRE | FORMAT | LANGUAGE | RUNNING TIME:

Documentary | Digital Format | English, Cantonese | 80mins

DIRECTOR:

Dean NAPOLITANO

PRODUCER:

Ruby YANG

HAF GOALS:

Funds

BUDGET: US\$ 125,000

SECURED BUDGET: US\$ 10,000

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

First Feature Director

ONE-SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

New York-born Eliza Li, the daughter of Cantonese opera stars and a Wellesley College graduate, claims her identity after leaving her corporate job to follow in her parents' footsteps.

SYNOPSIS

In the classic Cantonese opera *June Snow*, a woman is unjustly accused of murder in order to save the life of her husband's mother. The character is one of the greatest in all of Cantonese opera, and a role that New Yorker Eliza Li, following in her mother's footsteps from decades earlier, has performed. But that was not supposed to happen. In the early 2000s, Eliza, at age 24 and a Wellesley College graduate, dropped a bombshell on her parents: she had quit her job at an East Coast tech company and planned to study Cantonese opera. Her parents, both Cantonese opera stars, were stunned. They had left Hong Kong long before Eliza was born to pursue a new life in the United States. But growing up in New York, Eliza treasured the music of Cantonese opera, its stylized vocalizations, the intricate stage movements of the performers, and the ornate costumes. In her mid-20s – the age when most performers had already been studying for one or two decades – Eliza began to practice. And her discipline and dedication to the craft became an opportunity to claim her identity.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2014, I met Eliza Li during an event at the Asia Society in Hong Kong. I was struck by her personal story: the New York-born daughter of parents from Hong Kong and a graduate of an elite East Coast university. She had worked at Monster.com, a Massachusetts jobs search website, but quit after two years. The corporate world did not appeal to her. Instead, she wanted to pursue a career in the performing art that she had known all her life: Cantonese opera. Eliza's story was one that I had initially wanted to write. But how could I fully capture her life – as well as Cantonese opera, a visually and auditorily rich art form – in a written article? The answer was clear: a documentary. After considering the idea for a few years, I approached Eliza in early 2019 about directing a documentary on her life, her music, her career, and her parents. Eliza is a New Yorker through and through – smart, creative, confident and intrepid – yet she has embraced the beauty and grace of Cantonese opera, which, of course, requires those same characteristics of the performers.

DIRECTOR

Dean NAPOLITANO

A resident of Hong Kong for more than 25 years, Dean Napolitano is an American-born journalist. He has worked for the *Nikkei Asian Review*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, covering politics, business, and arts and culture. He served as a member of the documentary jury for the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 2017. He is also a member of the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents Club, and has served as a judge for the Society of Publishers in Asia awards since 2014.

PRODUCER

Ruby YANG

Ruby Yang has worked on a range of feature and documentary films exploring Chinese themes as director, producer and editor. She won an Academy Award for Documentary Short Subject for *The Blood of Yingzhou District* in 2007. She is known for her feature documentary *Citizen Hong Kong* (1999) and the award-winning documentary *My Voice, My Life* (2014). Affiliated with the Directors Guild of America and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Yang now heads the Hong Kong Documentary Initiative at The University of Hong Kong, which aims to nurture the next generation of documentary filmmakers in the region.

PRODUCTION COMPANY

MBN Pacific Media

MBN Pacific Media is a Hong Kong-based company established in 2015 to represent the work of journalist Dean Napolitano.