

HAF 24 The River Knows Our Names



REGION: Vietnam

GENRE | FORMAT | LANGUAGE | RUNNING TIME:

Drama | Digital Format | Vietnamese | 90mins

DIRECTOR:

Mai Huyen CHI

PRODUCER:

Bui Tran Thanh PHONG

HAF GOALS:

Funds, Co-producers

BUDGET: US\$ \$648,340

SECURED BUDGET: US\$ 195,652

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

First Feature Director

ONE-SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

When an evacuation order threatens to break apart their undocumented sampan community, two young best friends do what they can to stay together.

SYNOPSIS

Little and Big are best friends in an undocumented sampan community on the Mekong. When news comes about land aid, jealousy surges. Little and Big plan to steal the list of land recipients

from the mayor's house and type in their fathers' names. Little is caught by her violent father while sneaking out to meet Big. She is beaten and grounded. Big, who cannot read or write, does the mission alone, crossing out their neighbour Uncle Sau. Two days later, Uncle Sau is found dead in the river. Big confesses to her parents but Little's father laughs at them: he was drinking with Uncle Sau and sure the man drowned when drunk.

A storm hits. The community comes together but faces an immediate evacuation order. The mayor arrives for the land recipients. Big's parents come clean but Little's father silences Little and her mother. Yet, Big's father's name is not on the list; illiterate Big typed in the wrong name...On the evacuation day, Little and his mother unmoor their boats and set off, leaving behind their husband/father. They leave Big's families their new land certificate and the identity paper of Little's father.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My heart broke when I met stateless sampan people living downstream on the Mekong River in 2014. Their stories astounded me, touched me, and stayed with me. I made a short documentary film about their children. The children's innocence, joy, and strength against the backdrop of a rough livelihood touched the hearts of many like mine. After the short, a few friends and I attempted to build a floating school for them but failed to finish. With this feature project, I would like to help bring more of their life stories to the screen. I hope their realities can be seen in an intimate light, and be felt on a more personal level than just words and numbers that saturate the news.

DIRECTOR

Mai Huyen CHI

Starting out as a journalist and then a writer, Mai Huyen Chi has written two feature screenplays that were made in Vietnam (with CJ Entertainment) and the UK (screening in 2019 in the UK festival circuits). Her directorial debut was a short documentary, *Down The Stream*, which was ranked amongst Vimeo's Best of the Year in 2015 and inspired this feature-length film, which will be Chi's first.

PRODUCER

Bui Tran Thanh PHONG

Bui Tran Thanh Phong is a producer and a fixer. Over the years, he has produced and collaborated with directors and filmmakers from around the world, including such well-known TV channels such as Swiss National Television, SBS, ABC News, *PBS News Hour*; Channel 4 & Channel 5 (UK). His production company, K'Noy Films, also founded and organized the first independent Faifoo Film Fest this year. *The River Knows Our Names* will be his first feature film project.

PRODUCTION COMPANY

K'Noy Films

K'Noy Films is a production services company based in Vietnam. Over a decade, they have successfully operated throughout the sub-region of the Mekong River, including Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. From their very first TV show in Laos back in 2010 for the National Swiss Television to the present, they have been trusted as a reliable, knowledgeable and creative local partner in filming, televisio, and photography in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.