

Dream Factory and Rosem Films present



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
IN COMPETITION

A LOU YE FILM



SPRING FEVER



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SPRING FEVER

(CHUN FENG CHEN ZUI DE YE WAN)

A LOU YE FILM

With
QIN Hao, CHEN Sicheng, TAN Zhuo, WU Wei

Produced by NAI An and Sylvain BURSZTEJN
Produced by Dream Factory HK and Rosem Films

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S Y N O P S I S

Nanjing, present day, springtime. Wang Ping's wife suspects him of adultery. She hires Luo Haitao to spy on him and discovers that her husband's lover is a man, Jiang Cheng. It's with this man that Luo Haitao and his girlfriend, Li Jing, form a torrid love triangle. For all three, it's the beginning of asphyxiating, sultry nights of physical abandon that exalt the senses. A sulfurous journey into the confines of jealousy and obsessive love.

INTERVIEW WITH LOU YE

Your first film, WEEKEND LOVER, in 1994, was censored, your second, SUZHOU RIVER, which you filmed clandestinely in the streets of Shanghai, was banned in China and won the Grand Prize at the Rotterdam Film Festival, and SUMMER PALACE, presented at Cannes in 2006, and which dealt with events surrounding Tiananmen Square in 1989, resulted in your being banished for five years. What's your relationship with the authorities in your country today?

The situation hasn't changed much. I started working on the screenplay for SPRING FEVER as soon as I'd finished SUMMER PALACE, and was immediately confronted with a certain hesitancy, let's say, on the part of the producers. As they saw it, since I had been "banished", prohibited from directing for five years, why finance my new film, which they wouldn't even be able to show in Chinese theaters? They all said: "Let's schedule a meeting in five years!". Thankfully, in the end, we were able to secure all necessary funding through the French film financing system and partly from Hong Kong.

In Cannes, in 2006, everything that happened around the production of SUMMER PALACE, the secrets, the censors, the chases and the media attention that ensued, were they beneficial or detrimental?

At the time, I thought, neither one nor the other. But after the dust settled we received the five-year ban. It's true, in the beginning, I was very angry with the Film Bureau, and with Chinese decisions regarding freedom of expression, and I made that known. Which, in turn, aggravated the situation. Now it's ok, because I have no relationship whatsoever with the Film Bureau. Everyone is staying his own corner!

There was significant reaction to SUMMER PALACE and its portrayal of the repression that took place at Tiananmen Square, which is a taboo subject. Even though not the main subject of your film, is it fair to say that SPRING FEVER deals with another taboo, that of male homosexuality?

I'm much freer today than before. When I was writing SUMMER PALACE, I had many discussions with the producers, because we were in a very delicate position and had to go over the material over and over again, crossing things out, reworking things, wasting time in order to get the film past the censors. This time I could just write and I felt completely free because I'm no longer beholden to any kind of governmental body whatsoever.

Is it difficult to be a homosexual in China? How do people react to homosexuality?

Personally, I don't think I'm the best person to answer that. I think that, as with many things, it is not easy. But the situation is much better today than it was a century ago. For example, in the Chinese Mental Health Regulations, dated 2001, homosexuality was still qualified as mental disorder. But, in 2005, there was a real dialogue between the Vice Minister of Health and homosexual associations in the fight against AIDS. It's a huge step forward, even if a number of problems remain to be resolved.

This film is a film about love, the love between two young men. In the middle, there is the cheated wife. Could SPRING FEVER be likened to a kind of inverted JULES ET JIM?

Yes, that's exactly what I wanted to do, tell a love story, full of desire, and the reference to JULES ET JIM is appropriate, it's a film for which I have a deep admiration.

Several times in the film, one of the characters reads a portion of a very beautiful text that marks the two parts of the film, SPRING FEVER and THE FLOWERING SEASON. The first text is actually dated July 15th, 1923. Where does it come from?

I was inspired by a book written by Yu Dafu, an author from the 1920s. The film is not an adaptation of the book, but in the film, the two homosexual lovers read a passage from it after making love. I wanted to pay homage to this author and try to reflect the tone he created. He writes in a very intimate manner. He doesn't describe his characters in terms of social status, or politics: peasant, revolutionary, good guy, bad guy. Instead, he goes into their inner beings, exploring their intimate selves. Yu Dafu uses a literary approach linked to the historic May 4th revolt in 1919, which he took part in. This movement incarnated, among other things, the rupture with tradition and led to the first student protests in Tiananmen Square. I guess there is a little link between my last two films! This ability, to penetrate the interior life of a person, or, at least, the desire to do so has disappeared, definitely since 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded. I think it would be hard for it to come back, even today, while China remains prisoner of its own way of seeing things, this self-imposed obligation of self-definition, of belonging to a whole, of favouring collectivity over the individual. And, therefore, restricting itself, concealing itself, negating its desires, its secret impulses.

The characters in SPRING FEVER are a little older than those in SUMMER PALACE, but they still don't seem to have settled in their lives. A bookseller, a worker in a bootleg textile factory...

In the book that inspired this story, there is also a character who is a manual worker... And she has an affair with an intellectual. They don't have much control over their lives either, and each one is at the threshold of something significant... We experience this ourselves today, this kind of drifting, the difficulty that we all have today of finding our own identities, and maybe it's not such a bad thing.

The body of the film... is the body. Male bodies filmed very close up during lovemaking: naked, physical, abandoned. But you never show the body of the woman who finds herself excluded.

In the beginning, I filmed all the bodies, the girl as much as the boys, but then I realized that she had such a presence, such incredible power in her expressions of jealousy, that to show her body would have been redundant. In fact, in this film, the woman's body is represented by the body of a man, the feminine within the man.

Do you think it's true that for a woman, it is worse for a man to cheat on her, not with another woman, but with another man, because there is no way that she can ever hope to penetrate that mystery? There's that beautiful line when she asks her boyfriend's lover: "That's how you hold his hand?"

What she says at that moment goes beyond jealousy, it's a question that has no gender, and deals with the love that can exist between two beings. To treat homosexuality as simply the opposite of heterosexuality would have been a moralizing, theoretical and simple-minded approach. This girl already gets it. She understands that it's a love between two beings, it's not important that it happens to be between two boys. She's beyond that.

She's beyond that but at one point she cuts her hair! You start the film in a very direct, familiar way. Two boys are in a car, in the rain, they stop and one of them says: "Let's take a piss." But then one minute later we see them in bed and we hear: "I love you". The transition is brutal.

Yes, I wanted to move right into real life, really situating the story at the level of the most banal experiences of everyday life. I didn't want to tell an unusual love story, but a simple true everyday love story. We begin without phrases, without words, without knowledge of intimate manners, wrapped up in the desire to be taken in someone's arms, in physical love. We begin in reality, undisguised, with no makeup, without a magnifying lens.

Was it hard to find actors, specifically for the male roles?

For every project, you think it's going to be difficult to find the cast, male or female. But once again, I was very lucky to find excellent actors and actresses with whom it was a real pleasure to work.

How did you prepare or train your actors in dealing with their own inhibitions to act in scenes that are more erotic than usual? Specifically when they kissed: we don't often see two men kissing on screen with such tenderness yet with such relish.

First, I gave them the script to read, then, let's say, 'technical' articles on diverse aspects of homosexuality. Then some books, or excerpts from books, which weren't necessarily linked to homosexuality but which evoked love situations close to those that they would have to reproduce and live in the film. Then I showed them films. Movies I like, naturally. In particular, John Schlesinger's MIDNIGHT COWBOY and MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO by Gus Van Sant. The rest is a question of establishing trust which must be reciprocal. Since I filmed with a little digital camera, the actors were extremely free and autonomous. I tell them what the situation is, indicate the space they can move in, and, after, I don't interrupt. The space is theirs... They fill it as they wish, with no time limit. There is no "Action!", no "Cut!" Once, I filmed a 40 minute shot! "Letting go" means many, many, very long takes. But if I was able to recreate moments of real intimacy, it was thanks to this method, this almost documentary-style technique. The first few minutes of the shot, the actors are acting, and then, little by little, they enter a more personal dimension, they are more natural, and are able to forget that people are watching them.

Where are we in the film? We find ourselves in a lot of rooms, in beds, the exterior decor is nocturnal and succinct.

I wanted to pick visually insignificant, anonymous locations, with nothing too beautiful or too ugly, so that the audience wouldn't be distracted by the beauty or singularity of the exterior. I also didn't want any lighting set ups or other technical elements to interfere with my characters and the actors' performances. Everything in this story happens in the interior.

Why did you choose the city of Nanjing as the setting for your story? Is it a city that is known for being home to a certain level of freedom of expression?

I think Nanjing is a city that finds itself in the middle, in a "grey zone". It's not as political as Beijing, not as commercial as Shanghai, nor is it as open as Shenzhen or Hong Kong, but it's not as tough as Chongqing and more developed than several cities in Western China. Nanjing was the capital of China for six dynasties and it was the capital of China when Yu Dafu was alive. It is a city that is linked to very dark periods of the country's history, but, situated south of the Yangtze river, it is also full of poetry. I really like this city.

At the end of the film - a little time has passed - and the hero has a large flower tattooed on his chest. What is the significance of this "flowering"? Does it mean that things have finally found their place?

The symbol of the flower being inscribed on the body is important because the film begins with another flower, the lotus, which floats in a pool, and which we encounter again at key moments in the film. The tattooed flower is part of the path of the character, and, perhaps, as writer and director of this film, part of my own journey as well. A flower engraved in the skin cannot be forgotten. In Chinese, we have a saying: "The whole world is a single flower".

DREAM FACTORY HK

Dream Factory HK is a film production company established in 2008.

ROSEM FILMS

Sylvain Bursztejn, president of Rosem Films, has produced more than twenty critically acclaimed films including HALFAOUINE by Ferid Boughedir, THE OAK by Lucian Pintilie, LE CRI DE LA SOIE by Yvon Marciano and THE PERFECT CIRCLE by Ademir Kenovic.

For eight years, Sylvain Bursztejn has been developing his activities in China where he collaborates with both established and upcoming talent. Anaïs Martane, Rosem Films' representative in China, actively participates in the Chinese projects. Rosem Films' efforts have resulted in the production of eight films including: LUXURY CAR, by Wang Chao, Prix Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2006 and SUMMER PALACE by Lou Ye, selected in Official Competition in Cannes the same year.

In 2008, Rosem Films produced LA FIÈVRE DE L'OR (CURSED FOR GOLD) by Olivier Weber, and MEMORY OF LOVE by Wang Chao the following year.

CAST

QIN Hao
CHEN Sicheng
TAN Zhuo
WU Wei
JIANG Jiaqi

JIANG CHENG
LUO HAITAO
LI JING
WANG PING
LIN XUE

CREW

Directed by
Screenplay
Producers
Co-producer
DP
Sound
Editors

LOU YE
MEI FENG
NAI AN / SYLVAIN BURSZTEJN
LOU YE
ZENG JIAN
FU KANG
ROBIN WENG
ZENG JIAN
FLORENCE BRESSON
PENG SHAOYING
PEYMAN YAZDANIAN
DREAM FACTORY HK
ROSEM FILMS

Production designer
Composer
Production

With the participation of

FONDS SUD CINEMA
MINISTRY OF CULTURE
AND COMMUNICATION - CNC
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

With the support of

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