

MICHELE & LAURENT PÉTIN



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SELECTION OFFICIELLE
COMPÉTITION

JOHNNY HALLYDAY
復
VENGEANCE
仇

A FILM BY
JOHNNIE TO



ARP PRESENTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH MEDIA ASIA
A MILKYWAY IMAGE PRODUCTION
JOHNNY HALLYDAY
IN
VENGEANCE
ANTHONY WING LAM KA TUNG
LAW SUEI SIMON YAM
AND SYLVE TUSTOU
SCREENPLAY BY CHENG SIU KEUNG (AKA) CC
EDITED BY DAVID RICHARDSON
MUSIC BY ED TAYLOR
SCREENPLAY BY WAI KA FAI
LINE PRODUCERS ELAINE CHIU
WILLIAM CHENG
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS BING YUEN SHAN
PRODUCED BY MICHELE & LAURENT PÉTIN
PETER LAM JOHN CHONG
WAI KA FAI JOHNNIE TO
DIRECTED BY JOHNNIE TO
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www.arpstudio.com
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SELECTION

Michèle & Laurent Pétin present



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VENGEANCE
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A FILM BY
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Duration : 1h48

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Synopsis

*A father comes to Hong Kong to avenge his daughter, whose family was murdered.
Officially, he's a French chef.
Twenty years ago, he was a killer.*

Vengeance... à la carte

Johnnie To has one passion: making movies. And one favorite pastime: eating well. He makes all his important decisions around a dinner table. The following story is peppered with various restaurants ...

Imagine a small port half an hour north of Hong Kong. The village of Sai Kung is inhabited mostly by fishermen and a few film stars. Enter a fish restaurant that seems identical to all the others on the pier. Go into the kitchen and sit at the table that has been set up there specially. In case you're still wondering, check out the sideboard lined with French wines and vintage cognac. Yes, you're at the table booked by Johnnie To, who lives just around the corner. He has already ordered the meal, a plethora of dishes which he only nibbles at. It's going to be a long night...

It all started during our first dinner in Sai Kung, in March 2006. Having distributed several of Johnnie To's films in France, we had often thought about it. But that night, the wine loosened our tongues and the question was finally raised: "What if we made a movie together which we would produce? What if we shot it in English? And what if we used a French actor?" Since we are in Asia, Alain Delon's name is quickly brought up.

May 2006: back from Cannes where "Election 2" was shown, Johnnie To and his wife Paulina meet their childhood idol. A very French dinner in the hushed garden of a five-star Parisian hotel. The atmosphere is stilted. The actor lays it on thick. Madame gets her

hand kissed, Monsieur his picture taken. We discuss the project and promise all to meet again once a treatment is written.

March 2007: Johnnie To is back in Paris for a retrospective at the Cinémathèque. Another dinner with Alain Delon, another fancy hotel. Johnnie To has started working and is eager to talk about what he has in mind, but Delon won't hear nothing of it: "Stories always sound great when they're told but when you read them, they're disappointing. So don't tell me a thing!"

June 2007: We receive twenty or so pages laying down the framework of what Johnnie To and his scriptwriter have imagined. Codename: "Gunfight". We are thrilled by what we read. But Delon doesn't share our opinion. There will be no more dinners. He pulls out of the project which now seems doomed.

July 2007: A banker friend asks us to read a script offered to Johnny Hallyday, a close friend of his. "Johnny would like a professional opinion. He's not convinced by it, but he wants to make a movie so badly ..."

When we read it, we're clear about how we feel. We tell the banker straight out: "It's way below him. It's better he not do anything than make movies that exploit his celebrity rather than his talent as an actor." The banker calls us back two weeks later: "I told him about your reaction and he'd really like to meet you both."

October 2007: An Italian dinner at the banker's house. There are ten of us at the table. Not much conversation about music, but a lot about film. Johnny tells of his friendship with Melville, his shoot with Godard. He talks about the American movies he loves and the Asian cinema he knows very well. He mentions his favorite films, the directors he admires, the roles he dreams of. There is something terribly sincere about him. Simple, as only real stars can be. Touching and somewhat sad. A sort of French Clint Eastwood. Same modesty, same style, same charisma.

At two in the morning, as soon as we get back in our car, Laurent is ecstatic: "We have to introduce him to Johnnie To ! He's the hero of 'Gunfight'!" He's right, of course. Johnny would be perfect - a hundred times perfect, a thousand times. There's only one problem: Johnnie To has never heard of Johnny Hallyday.

February 2008: Lunch in the too hip but very discreet restaurant of a new hotel near Postdammer Platz in Berlin, where Johnnie To is showing "Sparrow" in competition. In my bag I have "Man on the Train" by Patrice Leconte and Johnny's two last "live" concerts. The two hours of fashionably frugal "world cuisine" may have left Johnnie To hungry, but it gave us time to explain our new casting idea for the part - no doubt surprising, but downright interesting as well.

March 2008: Johnnie To has seen the DVDs and is passing through Paris. He enjoyed the film but was especially fascinated by the concerts. He's ready for a meeting. It takes place near the Champs-Élysées on a Sunday night in a restaurant of which Johnny is part-owner. A memorable meal - after the sushi appetizer, Johnny gives Johnnie a sort of grand tour of French cuisine: foie gras, snails, andouillette, rib-eye steak, as well as sea bream, duck confit, potato gratin and green asparagus.

At the end of the feast, Johnnie To tells of his love of rock and the two of them jump into an a capella medley that spans from Elvis to the Rolling Stones, by way of Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis... Johnny shows Johnnie the picture of Jade on his cell phone. The dinner is a dream. We didn't talk about anything. We got to know each other.

The next day, Johnnie To tells us how charmed he was, but that a problem with dates mentioned the night before leaves everything up in the air. Johnnie To is soon to begin shooting the remake of "The Red Circle" and won't be free for our project until April 2009, when our Johnny will be rehearsing his tour. Nothing seems possible until 2010. In other words, never...

June 2008: Several conversations with Shan, Johnnie To's indispensable translator-assistant-advisor, lead us to understand that "The Red Circle" is falling behind schedule.

July 2008: One Friday morning, the computer lets out a beep, signaling that we've got mail. From Shan: "Finally, 'The Red Circle' has been pushed off until next year. So, if Johnny Hallyday is still free, can we consider shooting in the fall?" Is nine o'clock at our vacation house. 4 p.m. in Hong Kong. And in Saint-Barth ? The cell phone rings. Johnny picks up: "If you're still interested, can we shoot the Johnnie To movie in November?" "It's a deal".

Johnny will never go back on his word. He never spoke to Johnnie To since their dinner. He'll read the finished script only once he will be on location. He won't meet his co-stars beforehand. He's leaving for a country where he's never set foot. No matter. "It's a deal."

Johnny gets himself ready by seeing all of Johnnie To's films. He does back to back interviews and TV shows for his album. He pushes up its release date so he can devote himself fully to the film at the end of October. When we ask him if he wants to push off his departure by a week, he won't even listen. "Let's go. I can't wait to get there!"

November 5, 2008: The world wakes up after the Barack Obama's historic victory. At 1:05 p.m., the Cathay Pacific flight to Hong Kong takes off. On board are Johnny, his sports coach and his two producers.

November 7, 2008: Johnny and Johnnie meet again in the fish restaurant on the island of Sai Kong. Johnnie To has also invited the three other lead actors, Anthony Wong, Lam Ka Tung and Lam Suet. The evening ends with Johnny on guitar, Anthony Wong singing and Johnnie To and Pauline dancing.

November 15, 2008: At 2 p.m. under the sweltering sky, the cast and crew of the film gather on the roof of the building that houses Milkyway, Johnnie To's production company, in the old Kwun Tong neighborhood. During an hour-long ceremony, each person lights a stick of incense and tosses a flower, following the orders of a Buddhist priest who has come to bless the film. At 4 p.m. the shoot begins. That evening, dinner will be held at a makeshift table set up on a street corner. On the menu: grilled chicken, sweet pork, white rice and green vegetables... Whenever we shoot outdoors at night, Johnnie To organizes the dinner: sometimes fish, sometimes a barbecue, depending on the location.

Saturday January 31, 2008: Last day of shoot, last dinner for the entire cast and crew in the private room of a restaurant near Milkyway, in Kowloon. A delicious meal. Crab is the house specialty. A festive atmosphere thanks in part to a raffle organized for the crew. When it's time to make toasts, Johnnie To gives Laurent a fake gun, like the one used by the main character. To Johnny he gives the real clapboard. The adventure ends. One last toast: "Long life to 'Vengeance'!" And we drink to the possibility of one more meal... in Cannes.

Michèle Halberstadt

Johnnie To

Director

What attracted you to Johnny Hallyday?

My producers gave me DVDs of some of his films and concerts. I immediately saw that he had something very masculine about him. The concerts made me understand that he is immensely popular, but I had no idea that he was a genuine idol. But it was only when I met him that I knew we could work together. I had to see him to understand his unique magic. His style, his figure, his presence, his face, his incredible eyes that evoke a past that must have been intense. Something immediately clicked between us, despite the language barrier. We liked each other on a human level. I sensed that there was a mutual understanding, a trust. That's when I knew we could do a film together.

Didn't it seem complicated isolating him in Hong Kong for three months ?

I was afraid he wouldn't adapt well to our way of working. We are light years from an American system with private trailers and swarms of assistants... But he immediately fit in to our work method. We felt that he encouraged us to proceed with our business as usual. He didn't want us to change our habits. On the contrary he wanted to adapt to them. He accepted everything without the slightest sign of protest: the fake rain which he stood under night after night, the dirty streets we sometimes shot in... So, obviously the whole crew quickly adopted him, respected him, liked him. Someone who is so famous, who can be so simple, so cool - it's unhopd for! We really worked well together.

What do you think of him as an actor?

He arrived very concentrated, ready to work. He asked few questions. He just wanted to know if his idea of the scene was the same as mine. He was accurate in his acting, his gestures. His sincerity was clear. We believe in him. He's real. And he did nothing other than devote himself to the film, which is wonderful when you think that in Hong Kong, actors are usually doing two or three films simultaneously. He really gave us all of himself and his time.

Was it a big change for you to shoot mostly in English?

For me, no. For the Hong Kong actors it was difficult! No, the real change for me was to start the film with a written script. Usually I have it in my head and the scriptwriter writes the scenes as we shoot. This time my producers had asked that the story and dialogue already be written. I must admit it wasn't bad. It allowed me to get ideas from people who read it, which was enriching. But making a movie with or without a written script is always the same thing. At first you're the boss who leads it along. Then after a few days it's the film which starts deciding for itself. So there are parts of the script which evolve as the shoot progresses. But besides Johnny Hallyday, no other actor had read it!

Why do you insist that no one knows the story?

To keep the actors natural and spontaneous. They don't have time to create something. They're given a situation and they act it right away. The only person with whom I'd discussed the story was Anthony Wong. In this film he plays a killer who has a certain experience, a certain distance. A wandering samurai who has never settled down. He knows that with Big Mama, Costello is safe. Maybe he'd like to have ended up like Costello...

Tell us about Costello...

He's a man who has lived a lot, probably suffered a lot too. There's a sort of pain in him. His eyes tell stories which his brain has forgotten. That's what interests me. Everything he's experienced, he has forgotten. His eyes are the only trace left. Johnny brought a lot of humanity to Costello. He makes him very moving.

Sylvie Testud came on the set for a few days...

She agreed to come for a very small role, but an essential one since it's what initiates the story. What an actress! She has a lot of professional experience. She knows immediately how she'll act a scene. Her instinct is dead-on. She took advantage of every aspect of her role, as short as it may be. She based it on the fact that above all, she's a mother. She cooks like a mother, protects her children like a mother. And when I saw her on my monitor in her scene with Johnny Hallyday, I didn't understand what she was saying in French but I could read all the emotions on her face.

You like to eat and eating plays a large role in your films, especially in this one ...

Shooting a meal is the simplest and most concrete way to show the ties that bond. Eating is a form of exchange. A simple act. Fundamental. Eating is being alive ...

Johnny Hallyday

Costello

Did you know Johnnie To's films?

Yes, of course I knew his films, as well as his reputation, the aura surrounding him. When you appreciate his work, it's hard not to dream of shooting with him one day. What's more, I bumped into several actors who had heard about the film and they all said to me: "You're so lucky to be shooting with Johnnie To!" They were right and I was aware of it. Making a movie with Johnnie To is a calling card for an actor, a real privilege. So I immediately said yes, even though I'd only read a 40-page treatment. But that was enough. The theme of the story was there. I found it powerful and original.

What was it like, shooting three months in Hong Kong ?

It was my first time to Asia, which in fact was perfect for my character. He's alone and lost in Hong Kong. I was just like him. Even if my family came to see me, even if my producer kept me company for the whole shoot, it's a strange feeling being in a foreign city where you know no one. You're at the other end of the world. You have a hard time communicating. To take a taxi to a restaurant, someone has to write the address on a piece of paper for you. It's impossible on your own because people in the street don't speak any English. I really felt out of the loop, like Costello in the film. In that way, reality proved useful to fiction. People always say that to act a role you have to re-interpret your past. For this movie, I made use of the present. Everything I was experiencing and feeling in Hong Kong went into my role.

How did you communicate with Johnnie To on the set?

Johnnie To speaks pretty basic English. He would explain everything via William, his excellent bilingual assistant who saved me from depression several times! He was my closest link to Johnnie To. But we would communicate mostly with our eyes, without having to speak.

How does he work?

He knows exactly what he wants and everything flows perfectly when he starts shooting. You can immediately recognize the elegance and precision of his directing, as well as his perfectionism. He's obsessed with details. For example, he has a very specific idea of how you should hold a gun ...

He has a very unusual way of directing. The shots are long. They can last as long as two, three minutes, which is very enjoyable for an actor. The opposite of television! What struck me most was his gift for putting the camera where you wouldn't normally expect it. In general, you set the camera up in different areas of one set. But he moves the set without moving the camera. It's wonderful and very surprising. It gives you a very unexpected take on what you're shooting. He knows exactly what he wants but is never against an idea. Usually he ends up saying no. But he's always up for a try. "Try! It may be a good idea... "

How did he direct you?

He has a great deal of respect for the actors and treats us all as equals. He makes us feel loved and respected. You can feel it despite the language barrier. He thinks only of his work. He works all the time, wakes up very early and doesn't have much of a private life. He's also someone whose mood changes quickly. One day he's charming and the next he doesn't say hello, simply because he's thinking behind his video monitor and hasn't seen you. It's not that he's not being polite. He's just totally concentrated. When he's happy he shows it, which is very rare for a Chinese man. We'd rehearse every shot in detail, then he'd shoot it two or three times - five at the most if it was difficult technically. But I got the impression he mostly always used the first take.

Did you manage to communicate with the other actors?

There was like a brotherhood among us, despite the language barrier. Only Anthony Wong spoke good English. The others learned their English lines phonetically. They're great actors, professionals, hard workers. The way they act a role is surprising. It's different from how we act. Their gestures are all very stylized, very visual, very precise. And I really liked how they brought a sense of humor to scenes of bloodshed or suffering. Their acting is offbeat, very modest as well. They keep their emotions hidden, except when they start drinking. I understood this at our first dinner, which started in a restaurant and finished with a few drinks and a guitar and some music. ...

You spent three months with people who don't know Johnny Hallyday...

They knew I was famous elsewhere, but in their country, no one knows who I am. They've never seen me on stage, in concert. They don't know the singer. So no one had any preconceptions about me. I was hired as an actor. That was one of the most positive things for me with this project. Making movies without all that baggage that I've been carrying all these years, meaning my musical career. During those three months I totally forgot Johnny Hallyday.

Anthony Wong

Kwai

Before the shoot, did you know who Johnny Hallyday was?

Absolutely not, so I checked him out on the internet. This guy is a miracle. After fifty years of career, he's still around! When you compare his to musical careers in Asia, it's stupefying!

Then I met him at a dinner that Johnnie To had organized. When I saw him, I was blown away. He's tall, thin, sharp. Very "rock and roll". A lot of presence. Then we started talking and I found him sincere, caring. He and I really got along well on the shoot. I was the only person who could speak English more or less well, so when he felt too cut off, he'd come see me. He'd say "I'm lost.". And I'd answer "You know what? Me too.". He's really a sweet guy.

Talk about your character in "Vengeance"...

It's the third time I've played this character with Johnnie To. There was "Mission", "Exiled" and now "Vengeance". Fifteen years have gone by. I've learned the ropes. I'm more discreet, "classier". I have more of a sense of humor. I've matured. I speak little. And I reveal a bit of my past with the character of Tony, my cousin, and with Big Mama too. I said to Johnnie To when we were shooting the scene with her and the kids: "There are lots of kids. Why do I call this one over? And why is she aggressive with me?" So I imagined that this kid was my own...

How does Johnnie To direct you?

Very simply. He doesn't direct! He says : "Start there, go there and that's it". And if he doesn't like what we do, he screams into his walkie-talkie, shouting at us with his unique sarcasm... But I love him. We're free to try things, to invent. He gets the best out of us and we have delicious meals! Johnny forced himself to eat with us even if I think he was sick of our Chinese food. Johnny was very discreet on the set, very concentrated. He's one hell of a guy and you can tell he has an iron will. I don't at all know Johnny Hallyday like you. I only saw Costello on the set. And I liked him a lot.

Simon Yam

George Fung

When Johnnie To offers you a role, is the answer always yes?

Absolutely, and especially no questions asked. They annoy him. Usually he calls late at night, saying "I'm working on a film. There's a role for you" and my answer is always the same: "Just tell me where you want me to be, and when." ... After just a few costume fittings, I start to see what it's about, whether I'll be playing a good guy or a bad guy...

When you arrive on the set, you haven't read a thing - what does Johnnie To tell you?

Nothing at all! On this film, for example, the first scene I shot was my first scene in the film. We started the day with a shot of the girl who plays my girlfriend, coming out of the room with one of my bodyguards. I watched them acting and I thought: "Why are they like that? Is something going on between them?" Then I saw that I had a lot of bodyguards, at least six. Given my costume and my bowtie, I'd understood that I was a gangster, but with all these people around me, I realized that I was the boss - someone paranoid, jealous, noisy, maybe even a little crazy.

Concerning that aspect of my character, just before we shot the scene of the kiss, Johnnie To asked that I be given a large handkerchief. So, I improvised...

This is why I like coming on the set when I'm not shooting. So the atmosphere sinks in. It helps me understand what's happening and especially what may happen... Then I get my coworkers to talk - the other actors, the crew - to find out what they already know!

Did you know who Johnny Hallyday was before you met him?

I knew he was very famous in France, especially as a singer. I found him charming, with a sense of humor I really could appreciate. We spoke about our families, our favorite movies, and even a little about music. even if I never admitted to him that I can't carry a tune... He's lucky to play Costello. It's a great role...

The Cast

Costello Johnny HALLYDAY

Irene Thompson Sylvie TESTUD

Kwai Anthony WONG

Chu Lam Ka TUNG

Lok Lam SUET

George Fung Simon YAM

Wolf Cheung Siu FAI

Python Felix WONG

Crow Yuk Ng SAU

Inspector Wong Maggie SHIU

Mr Thompson Vincent SZE

The Crew

Director Johnnie TO
Screenwriter Wai Ka FAI

Director of Photography Cheng Siu KEUNG
Sound Steve CHAN
Art Director Silver CHEUNG
Costumes Stanley CHEUNG

Editor David RICHARDSON
Music Lo TAYU

Producers Johnnie TO - Wai Ka FAI
..... Michele PETIN - Laurent PETIN
..... Peter LAM - John CHONG
Line Producers Elaine CHU
..... William CHENG
Associate Producer Yui Shan DING

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..... Milkyway Image

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