

WNCC



WOKING'S NEW CINEMA CLUB

Shanghai Triad

Chinese director Zhang Yimou's latest film "Shanghai Triad" (1995), revolves around the activities of the powerful Triad gangs who dominated Shanghai in the 30's.

The film was awarded the Technical Prize at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, and also renewed the alliance of award-winning director Zhang Yimou with his stunning lead actress Gong Li. This in fact is the seventh film they will have made together.

One might have expected Zhang Yimou to shoot a classic gangland movie with a script that allowed for plenty of violence in the settlement of rival feuds, but instead he opted to shoot a storyline that focuses on the trials and tribulations of an innocent young country boy Shuisheng, assigned to work in the city for a beautiful nightclub singer Bijou (Gong Li).

Bijou, a self-centred cabaret singer and mistress to one of the gangland Triad bosses, leads a double life unbeknown to her powerful boss. Behind his back, she is carrying on a secret affair with his 'No.2' who wants a greater share of the power as well. The young Shuisheng has to grow up fast as he witnesses Bijou's secret affair going on behind closed doors, and the ruthless disposal of those who seek to try and kill his employer.

With the main focus on Shuisheng and Bijou, the mob and their violent actions are effectively relegated to the background.

Certificate
15

Distributor
Electric Pictures

Production Company
Shanghai Film Studio/Alpha Films
UGC/Images/La Sept
Cinéma

With the participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Executive Producers
Zhu Yunde
Wang Wu

Producer
Jean-Louis Piel

Assistant Directors
Yang Xiandan
Nie Chunsheng
Yan Changsheng
Véronique Demaret

Screenplay
Bi Feiya

Freely adapted from Men Gui (Gong Lou) by Li Xiao

Literary Advisor
Wang Bin

Director of Photography
E. Yue

Steadicam Operator
Peter Rosenfeld

Editor
Du Yuan

Production Designer
Cao Jueping

Art Directors
Huang Ximeng
Ma Yongming

Pyrotechnics
Chen Pengyan

Costume Design
Tong Huamiao

Make-up
Mi Zide
Yang Yu

Music
Zhang Guangnian

Music Performed by
The Shost
Qiang
Double Clarinet Soloist:
Yuan Xiaogang
Singer
Gong Li
Chorus:
Yinhe Youth Television
Art Ensemble

Choreography
Wang Qung

Sound Design
Tao Jun

Sound Effects
Qian Shouyi

Western Dress Consultant
Anne Braud

Cast
Gong Li
Bijou (Xiao Jinhua)
Li Baotian
Fang, the gang boss
Wang Xiaoxiao
Shuisheng, the boy
Li Xuejian
6th Uncle
Sun Chun
Song, Fang's No. 2
Fu Biao
Fang's No. 1
Chen Shu
Shi
Li
Fan Li
Jiang Baoying
Cunhua, the Widow
Yang Qianqian
Ah Jiao

For Zhang, this was a necessity. "I took a different line," he declared in interview, "because there's too much violence in movies today. I decided to place the emphasis on the woman and child and to show the pure nature of a child growing up in a cruel atmosphere. It's not necessary to graphically depict that cruelty. To feel it, is enough."



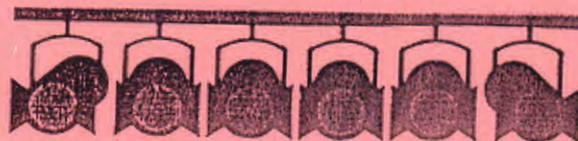
At 46, Zhang Yimou has become one of China's most well-known filmmakers since his graduation from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982 alongside Chen Kaige. His association on and off-screen with his leading actress Gong Li has also aroused interest. Gong Li has starred in all his films to date since Yimou chose her for the lead in his first film "Red Sorghum" (1987). Although they recently separated off-screen, Gong Li denied rumours first aired in Cannes last year, that this film might be their last together.

"Of course, we'll work again," she said, "and I look forward to working with him." Whilst that was the public line in Cannes to questions of this nature, in private Gong Li was reported to be quite upset by the split.

For Gong Li, the role of the showgirl Bijou (Xiao Jibao) was a departure from her previous roles, although there were similarities with the role of the concubine Songlian that she played in "Raise the Red Lantern" (1991). Gong Li was attracted to the role because it was a departure for her. "There was a change of style from what Zhang had already done," she explains "and I was taken by the difference between this character and others I'd played in Zhang's films."

Research beforehand was also important to her. "I like interpreting different roles," she says. "I watched a lot of documentaries from the 30's and looked at films depicting the gangs. This sort of psychological preparation for any role I take on, is very important to me."

Another departure from her parts in earlier films, was the chance to exercise her vocal chords. "I have enjoyed singing since childhood," Gong Li explained to me. "Now people sing in a different way from the past, so I had to imitate how people sang from that period. I'm not that accustomed to dancing in such a sophisticated manner, but with training I got used to it. Thinking about the role now, I realise that with more time to prepare, I feel I could have done better, but I'm satisfied with my performance in the film overall."



Many of Yimou's films have contained allegories to life in contemporary China. In "Shanghai Triad", Yimou picks on a 'get-rich-quick' mentality which he feels has eroded traditional values in present-day Chinese cities. "In Peking, Canton, Shanghai," he says, "people want to earn a lot of money. They want to own certain things and as a result, human relationships have suffered. More Chinese people are lonely, and not out of choice. I wanted to show that behind all this superficiality, there are fundamental things that matter, such as sincerity between human beings."

Yimou has often had run-ins with the Chinese authorities and production on "Shanghai Triad" was halted in September 1994 when a directive from the Ministry of Film and TV forbade Yimou from working on any co-productions with foreign companies for five years. Zhang got over the difficulty with the assistance of the Shanghai Film Studios who took over production. Speaking reticently for fear of more difficulty with the Chinese authorities, Yimou gave the following explanation:

"The way the film was made was the only way possible. I was under pressure so I had to accept it. The subject matter though is not so delicate as in some of my other films."

In many ways, "Shanghai Triad" veers away from the harsh truths Yimou depicted in some of his most recent films such as "The Story of Qiu Ju" or "To Live" and has stronger similarities with his earlier works such as "Ju Dou" or "Raise the Red Lantern". For Yimou, the change of style was vital. "Shanghai in the '30's is a vanished era," he explains, "a myth that exists more in dreams than reality, but I also chose it because I'm trying to produce something new. I never like to repeat myself. The emphasis may now be on atmosphere and character but Chinese audiences at least will appreciate that."

Is the Chinese audience the most important to him? "I'm pleased they want to see my films sure, but right now audiences worldwide mean a great deal to me."

(c) Matt Arnoldi

Title (No of Reactions)	Average Score
Remains Of The Day (53)	8.4
The Usual Suspects (46)	6.8
Once Were Warriors (43)	6.6
Anchors Aweigh (22)	7.2
The Round-Up (18)	5.7
Shawshank Redemption (48)	8.5
It Happened One Night (35)	7.4
Il Postino (53)	8.1
Room At The Top (35)	7.5
Funny Bones (37)	7.7
Shorts Programme (38)	6.6
The Big Sleep (33)	7.7
Deliverance (24)	5.8



"A SUREFIRE WINNER"

how many of you will be going to see "Fever Pitch" on the back of the reviews quoted in the publicity for the film? One Club member in particular would be interested in your views on this - the quote from Sky Magazine "A surefire winner" is from a review by Matt Arnoldi, who is responsible for WNCC's publicity.

Matt - We're not worthy!

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

A warm welcome to Barbara Millington, who has agreed to join the Club's Management Committee to undertake the role of Hon. Secretary. Barbara has joined the Committee just in time to participate in the film selection process for next season!

New members of the Committee are always welcome - if you are interested, please speak to anyone of the Committee at tonight's film or call Iain McGlashan, Club Chairman, on 01932 355179

INTERNATIONAL JAZZ DAY - 31 MAY

Those of you disappointed at the loss (literally!) of "A Great Day in Harlem" from our evening of shorts, may be interested to note that the film is being shown at the National Film Theatre on the South Bank on Sat 31 May. To celebrate this year's International Jazz Day, the NFT is also screening on the same day another jazz documentary "Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser". Contact the Box Office on 0171 928 3232.

24 Reactions giving an average score of 5.8

Some of your comments:

Excellent atmospheric film.

Unremittingly unpleasant!

Not my sort of film.

Reminiscent of a trip down the Basingstoke canal!!!

Rather harrowing.

Still packs a punch but a little dated.

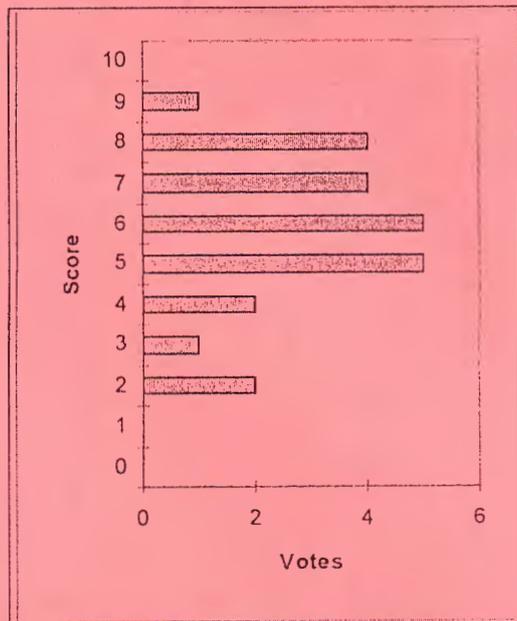
Rather an unlikely foursome bumbling around on the water.
Poor sound quality made story even harder to bear.

Brilliant photography - shame about poor sound.

(These latter comments were made by several of you).

See overleaf for summary of this Season's reactions.

REACTIONS



Helen Sayers.

Whit Stillman's follow-up to his highly regarded *Metropolitan* surveys a likewise scene of languid, loquacious, privileged young people – only here there are none outside the clique offering another perspective. The decorous Ted (Taylor Nichols), who represents a Chicago-based motor manufacturer in Barcelona, entertains an unwelcome visit from his abrasive cousin Fred (Chris Eigeman), an advance man for the Sixth Fleet. Together and separately each embarks on a tortuous affair of the heart. Stillman's *Barcelona*, which although invitingly presented, is mainly a generically ungrateful, enigmatic, and hedonistic Old World populated by disgruntled leftists and foxy young women distinguished by their sexual availability and quaint elocutions. As the plot thickens and the foolhardy Fred assumes a more heroic stature, *Barcelona* seems designed to defend the notion of America in the world – as purveyor of a universally admired lifestyle and defender of universally accepted rights. While the opening title places action during "the last decade of the Cold War", the movie really compresses the last 40 years. Stillman said that the idea came from the title *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *I. Hoberman*, *The Village Voice*.

USA 1993
 Dir/Scr: Whit Stillman
 Leading players: Taylor Nichols, Chris Eigeman, Tushka Bergen, Mina Sorvino, Nurla Badja
 101 mins
 UK dist: Rank Film Distributors

COMING NEXT

8 May 1997



Performance Ends 10.25pm (approx.)



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