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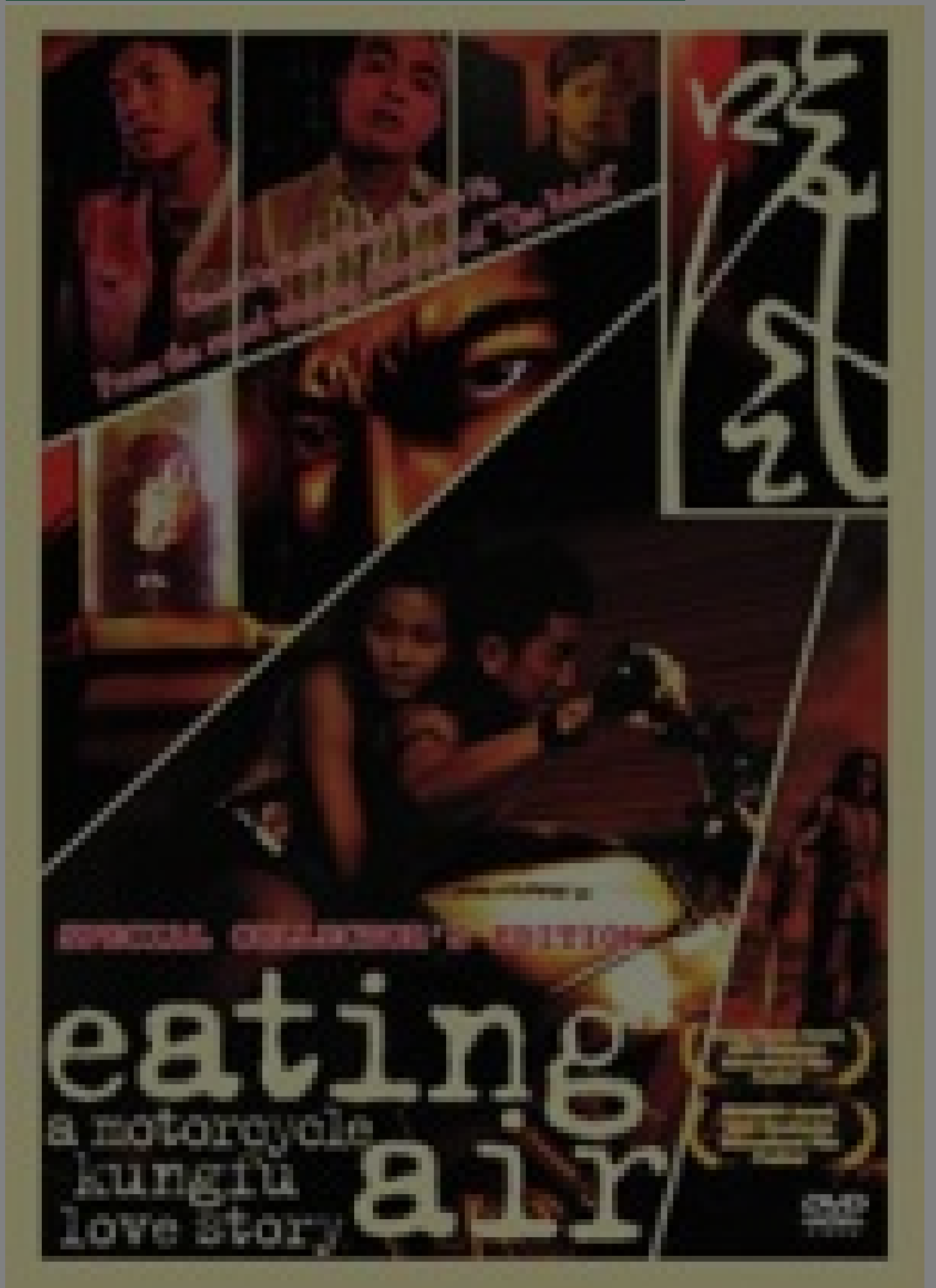
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“Eating Air” Singapore’s Only “Kung-Fu Motorcycle Love Story”



Singapore's only "kung-fu motorcycle love story", 1999 feature film, “Eating Air”, directed by Jasmine Ng and Kelvin Tong, is a film that makes other Singaporean filmmakers proud that there is this one film that is not just “good” but just a well-made film. It brought together the very

there is this one film that is not only "cool" but just a really good film. It brought together new actors, great music and just an indentifiable sense of youthful rebellion and the search of identity. After it's own rounds at the international film circuit, the film saw life again at the 1 st Paris Asian Film Festival in March 2004. Film curator Wahyuni A. Hadi catches up with "Eating Air" co-director, Jasmine Ng.

W.H: Okay, let's begin. It's been a few years since your film, "Eating Air", was made. And now it's being screened at the Paris Asian Film Festival. How does it feel to be back in the festival frenzy momentarily?

J.N: What's still the same is that stomach-churning spilt second before the audience reacts to the first scene, but really, Festival Frenzy, for me, always means chances to watch and discover new films that will fire up your filmmaking fervour and to also catch up with old friends, some of these film fest-circuit vets that you bump into constantly. Also, each time after a festival, I note on hindsight, that we really ought to get off our behinds and promote the film properly NEXT TIME.

W.H: We heard that "Eating Air" was received very well... again. It's a film that continues to be enjoyed. Any part in particular or anything specific that you hear over and over? Why do you think so?

J.N: The kind of comments, more often than not, touch on the love story elements between the lead characters, Ah Girl and Ah Boy. And also on what we call the heartbeat sequence, a sound-designer's nightmare Mount Everest scene (our gratitude to Noh Ghani always), where through a dominoes-effect chain of events, the lead girl and boy first meet – it's all built through foley effects and beats. Some ask about the ludicrous effort it must have taken to psych twelve non-stunt-trained guys, picked off the streets, to form a human pyramid on a moving motorbike – why did we need that scene, what was the purpose? Well, it's our version of exposition. We'd like to think it brings a blush, a widening grin, and then uncontrollable hysterical giggling, all in that particular order.

W.H: And looking back now at your film, how do you feel?

J.N: This probably sounds very precious, but I can't watch it. I usually leave five minutes after it starts and come back during the end creditsroll for the Q & A sessions. It's hard to stomach memories of bad mistakes or potentially deafening silences when the audience don't connect. But on hindsight, very fond of the effort behind the film , from the team and the cast; some scenes still make me beam or blush with barely concealed pride.

W.H: Other films have since come out of Singapore after "Eating Air". Do you notice a similarity or a certain growth pattern?

J.N: In Singapore, each year's crop, I reckon, results from haphazard, sporadic growth – it really seems to come down to individual filmmakers and individual films that happen to get it together enough to mount a film to screen that particular year, rather than discernible trends or patterns that can be extrapolated. From a positive angle, this will always make for unpredictable variety .

W.H: Everyone who meets you must surely ask, "when are you making your next film?". My question is, if you did make your next film and could use any actor in the world, who would it be & why? Think, no budget constraints.

J.N: Guilty pleasure fantasy casting for dream film : - Bill Murray and Brigitte Lin Ching Hsia (editor's note: later referred to as LCH) – as rivals in love. They're both actors that we grew up watching, LCH metamorphosing from Taiwanese tear-jerker teen queen to Warriors from Mountain Zu grace strung up on wires to Chung King Express blonde wig and mac mystery supreme coolness; Bill Murray's streak of misanthropy growing from beady-eyed pettiness to living room heroism, mutating from Saturday Night Live / Caddyshack days, to Groundhog Day to Rushmore & The Royal Tenenbaums and that karaoke star turn in Lost In Translation. Will start to transcribe dream to paper once they drop me an e-mail.

W.H: I think every serious filmmaker has a flaky and mass-appeal side about them somewhere inside whether it is in music, film or food taste. If you have lived through the 80's, it can't be helped, right? So confess, what is the all-time favourite cheesy soundtrack in your life? A song that just makes you feel good.

J.N: Cheesy, feel-good soundtrack though not from 80's, but watched during the early 80s, Flower Drum Song soundtrack(cultivated from childhood days of watching betamax copy daily, ad nauseum with sisters – sang and danced to it, in lieu of Britney Spears MTVs: - we loved this laughably, loveably, politically incorrect, racial-stereotype-baiting extravaganza that is this Rodgers & Hammerstein musical-movie. and only alternated it with Grease2, the only other tape that we had, that could be played on the betamax machine). As for feels-good-to-ache soundtracks : OST from M*A*S*H, the Altman movie – sing along now, y'all : “cos suicide is painless...”

W.H: Last question: when are you making your next film?

J.N: It's gone beyond the point of embarrassment and also it's become too tedious, making up fresh, entertaining answers to that question : will let you know five minutes before my new film screens. Promise refunds if customer dissatisfied.

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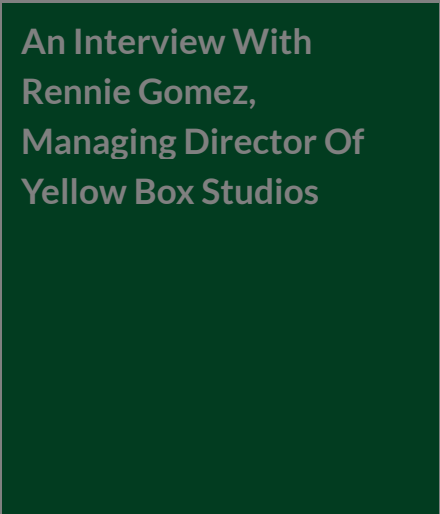
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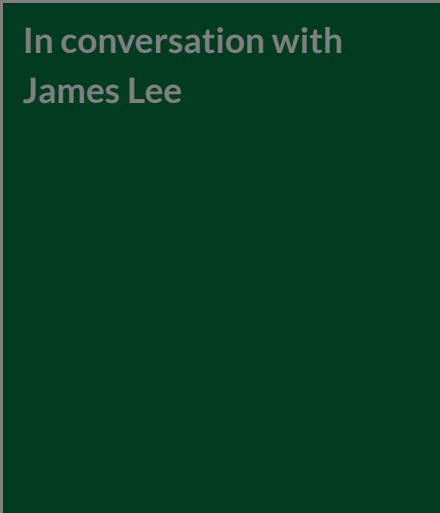
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