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Berlinale FILM CAPSULE: Have a Nice Day (Liu Jian, 2017) China

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson.

Liu Jian mortgages the house to make films! Chinese artist/filmmaker Liu Jian delighted the house at the Berlinale Palast Theater during the 67th Berlin International Film Festival.

Utilizing a warm color palette and an exceptional musical score mixing classical American jazz with traditional Chinese sounds, Liu Jian takes the viewer on a colorful journey through a southern Chinese city drawing several people from diverse backgrounds with different motives into bloody conflict in the darkly comedic, animation feature film, *Have a Nice Day.* But wait, thereâ??s more!

Have a Nice Day is Liu Jian second foray into feature animation film. His first Piercing I, a cold, hard look at the 2008 global financial crisis. Liu Jian is now in production on his third film, a self-reflective animation feature, *School Town*, an autobiographical look at Liu Jianâ??s own life.

In *Have a Nice Day,* Liu Jian allows a bag containing a million yuan to take center stage. Greed and selfish motives take over. The gangster boss who lays claim to the bagful of yuan holds court and wistfully recalls days from future past while pontificating to a subordinate who has spunk and maintains heâ??s an artist. Some philosophical discourse takes place on what exactly constitute art and who can call themselves a true artist. The bag has been lost and/or stolen and a butcher/hitman is sent to recover the money-laden bag.

The bag representing progress continues to move from one point to another. Various, vicarious and unsuspecting, dialoguing individuals reveal social and moral issues issues while clutching the bag of money tightly in hopes of securing a better life. In the end, itâ??s all just an illusory pipe dream fantasy.

Nevertheless, Modern China is in flux and a real war for control is ripe with violence and dangerous activities. With the animation format, Liu Jian is adeptly able to circumvent and soften some of the more distasteful aspects of this movement toward progress while heightening and stylizing the mood in China today.

Along the way, Liu Jian adds some subtle Western influences as he develops nuances of character. For example, the Hitman is a butcher when heâ??s not working for the mob boss. To add depth to the butcher, Liu Jian inserts a *Rocky* movie poster starring Sylvester Stallone on the Hitmanâ??s locker at the meat processing plant.

In recent time, much is made of Chinaâ??s growing economic power and goal of world dominance and, by the filmâ??s end, one of the filmâ??s protagonists, the Hitman, laments, â??without high-technologies we just canâ??t win.â?• The film closes with an earthy mise-en-scene as a large city-scape with shades of browns and grays sits silently while a long, steady rain cascades across the screen in a vertical fashion.

Another beautiful film in the Berlinale Competition. While Chinese animation short films have been in previous Berlinales, Liu Jianâ??s *Have a Nice Day*, is the first feature-length, Chinese animation film to be screened at a Berlinale. Itâ??s a touching expose. And, itâ??s a worthy contender for the Golden Bear. Warmly recommended.

*Featured photo: Courtesy of Liu Jian/Berlinale.de

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