Berlinale FILM CAPSULE: On the Beach at Night Alone (Hong Sangsoo, 2017): South Korea

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson.

Kim Minhee returns to the big screen after her scrumptuous portrayal of Lady Hideko in Chan-Wook Parkâ??s *The Handmaiden (2016).* Kim, as Younghee, portrays an actor out-of-work, in *On the Beach at Night Alone (Bamui haebyun-eoseo honja).* Officially, Younghee has decided to take some time off after having had a tumultuous affair with a married man, a rather considerable Korean societal taboo.

The film opens with Younghee traveling to Hamburg attempting to sort out her life. One of the filmâ??s treasures is its mise-en-scene. In the early scenes, Younghee is shown taking long walks along colorful riverbanks and through wintry parks revealing the depth of her conflicting feelings and desires.

Written and directed by Hong Sangsoo, [*Right Now, Wrong Then* (2015), *Nobodyâ??s Daughter Haewon* (2013) and *In Another Country* (2012)] *On the Beach at Night Alone*, is a think-piece. Utilizing long takes and a stationary camera, Hong gives the viewer an intimate perspective of Younghee as she grapples with issues of love and its pursuit, a common theme in all Hong Sangsooâ??s films. Unbeknownst to her, Younghee has been the subject of tabloid rumors.

Skillfully shot by Directors of Photography, Kim Hyungkoo and Park Hongyeol, the natural beauty and energies of the characters, as well as the filmâ??s mise-en-scene, are highlighted.

In allowing the characters time and space, Hong has written some fairly heady dialogue in the first half of the film, as Younghee explores the metaphysical possibility of her lover following her if he misses her as much as she misses him. Younghee is a woman of some mystery and has an abundance of desire.

In the second half of the film, Younghee search for meaning moves to the forefront. She revisits old stomping grounds in Gangneung, a coastal town with an expansive, recreational beach where she reconnects with friends from her past. While not seemingly a big imbiber of alcohol, Younghee allows herself to be coerced at first and then joyfully partaking while reveling in alcoholâ??s mind-liberating properties.

And, as is usually the case, too much of a good thing can have deleterious effects as the answers Younghee is seeking seem to just slip through her grasp. During an informal dinner party, Younghee and her friends are partaking in the traditional Korean cultural custom of eating together and enjoying Soju, the countryâ??s national drink. Speaking from her now blemished heart and finding courage with her Soju consumption, Younghee has harsh and inconsiderate words for those in her close company as deep feelings and personal truths are unveiled. Sharing a needed, tender, sensuous, on-screen kiss with another female, Youngheeâ??s vulnerability reaches its climax. Afterwards, she retreats to the beach at night alone to just be. At this point, it seems Younghee can only truly find herself in nature.

On the Beach at Night Alone is a beautiful film from start to finish. Intricacies of Korean culture are displayed and explored. Sanghooâ??s exploration of love and the affective role it has in life provides the groundwork for the the protagonistâ??s, Youngheeâ??s, truth and life revelations to unfold in dramatic and profound ways and Kim Minhee devours the complexities of her character Younghee. This was the second powerhouse performance in a row from Kim. For her portrayal of Younghee, Kim received the 2017 Silver Bear for Best Actress from the 2017 Berlin International Film Jury. Highly recommended film.

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