

BEN  
WHISHAW

CHENG  
PEI PEI

ANDREW  
LEUNG

MORVEN  
CHRISTIE

NAOMI  
CHRISTIE

AND

PETER  
BOWLES

'WHISHAW IS MAGNETIC'

AMBER WILKINSON, THE TELEGRAPH

'AN IMPRESSIVELY  
INSIGHTFUL AND  
MOVING TALE'

MARK ADAMS, SCREEN DAILY

'A MEDITATIVE  
FILM OF GRACE  
AND SENSITIVITY'

DAVID ROONEY, HOLLYWOOD REPORTER



# Lilting

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY HONG KHAOU

FILM LONDON presents A LILTING PRODUCTION A MICROWAVE FILM In Association With BBC FILMS STINK SUMS FILM & MEDIA LILTING  
BEN WHISHAW CHENG PEI PEI ANDREW LEUNG MORVEN CHRISTIE NAOMI CHRISTIE and PETER BOWLES  
Music Supervisor CONNIE FARR Music Composed by STUART EARL Sound Supervisor ANNA BERTMARK Make up and Hair Designer ANNETTE FIELD  
Production Designer MIREN MARKANON Costume Designer CAMILLE BENDIA Gaffer Director KILARIEL COCHRANE Line Producer DONNA MAREY  
Director of Photography ULA PUNTIGON Editor MARK TOWNS Produced by DOMINIC BUCHANAN Written and Directed by HONG KHAOU  
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An Artificial Eye Release [artificial-eye.com/lilting](http://artificial-eye.com/lilting)







## SYNOPSIS

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## LILTING

een film van Hong Khaou

**Vanaf 16 april in de bioscoop**  
**2013 • 91 minuten • Groot Brittannië • Engels, Mandarijn**  
**gesproken • Nederlandse ondertiteling**

Na de plotselinge dood van de jonge Kai blijven zijn Chinees-Cambodjaanse moeder Junn en zijn vriend Richard geschokt en in diepe rouw achter. Richard voelt zich verantwoordelijk voor Kai's moeder, het enige familielid dat hij achterlaat. Junn woont in een verzorgingstehuis, spreekt nauwelijks Engels en houdt vast aan de herinneringen aan haar overleden zoon. Richard probeert met haar in contact te komen maar Junn beschouwt hem als een indringer, een man die haar zoon van haar heeft weggenomen. Richard besluit een tolk in te huren zodat Junn kan communiceren met een medebewoner die een oogje op haar heeft. Met het taalprobleem uit de weg komen ook Richard en Junn langzaam tot elkaar.

*An impressively insightful and moving tale - Screen Daily*  
*A meditative film of grace and sensitivity' - Hollywood Reporter*



LILTING

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



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The idea for this story started with my family. We were political refugees from Cambodia, arriving in England in the 1980s. My mother wanted to give her children the opportunities for a future. Being young, we were able to fully assimilate into a new life, culture and language. Regrettably, she wasn't able to integrate so easily and to this day, after 30 odd years is still unable to master the English language. I took this premise as an idea and ran with it. I imagined what it would be like if her lifeline to the outside world was gone – how would she cope?

So language became an integral motif in the story. I wanted to use it as an analogy to comment on communication, particularly the flip side of that. We all know communication brings about understanding and bridge cultural differences. What you also get is that it is equally destructive, with conflicts arising out of it.

I've always wanted to use 'the translator' as a narrative device, because I spent so much of my childhood translating TV shows for my mum. The concern was whether this technique would bear up throughout the film because of the repetition. In the workshop I felt it could work, if the scene was engaging then there was nothing to fear. What you get with this technique is at certain screenings where you have a mixed audience, with some people who are able to understand Mandarin. It creates this lovely dynamic in which a section of the audience react and responding earlier than others. I love it when this happens. It's so nice to see as I feel in some ways it places them in the shoes of the characters.

A big influence for me was John Sayles' film, Lone Star. I love his works; incredible filmmaker. I like the way he blurred the timelines in that film. I thought the tone was just impeccable and I remembered desperately wanting to emulate that in Lilting.

I remember precisely the moment I decided to write Lilting. 3 years ago, my short film was showing at Sundance (2011), I maxed out on all my credit cards in order to go. It turned out to be the most inspiring film festival I've been to. It really affected me, I remembered telling myself that I must make a film before turning 40. The journey getting here has been punishing and tremendous in every sense. I don't think I slept during filming. It now feels wonderfully fitting to have the world premiere at Sundance – 3 years exactly to the day when I was there, which galvanised me to write Lilting.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

### Hong Khaou: „Grief Is Addictive“

bron: LittleWhiteLies

BY SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

06/08/14 11:43

*The Cambodian-born British director reveals how he channelled deep personal emotions into his debut feature, Lilting.*

*Hong Khaou's first feature, Lilting, weaves themes of communication, sexuality, internationalism and grief within the simple story of Richard's (Ben Whishaw) attempts to befriend the mother of his recently deceased lover, Kai (Played by Andrew Leung in flashback). Junn (Cheng Pei-pei) is a proud Chinese woman stranded in an English care home and oblivious to Richard's real relationship with her son. Here, the Cambodian-born British director discusses one of the film's central themes: grief.*

*„Lilting is very personal but it's not autobiographical. There's a lot in it that I know very well. I lost my dad when I was 12. When I first wrote this as a play I was in my early twenties. I was going through a really difficult period and staying at my mother's to recover. I was in the room where he used to live. It's weird how you allow yourself to get into those really horrible... I just let myself remember those memories. Just, what it was like to lose him and not dealing with it for a long time, leaving it till I was a bit older or a bit more mature.*

*„Why is grief addictive? Well, it's such a personal thing, isn't it? When you lose someone very dear to you. It's just such an incomprehensible thing that someone that you really care about... All you have is memories and you keep digging into them and it's soothing. You keep going back because it makes you feel good.*

*„I wanted grief to permeate this film but I didn't want it to be so heavy. My main focus was language and communication and the inter-relationship of two different cultures and generations. When I started writing the story I knew that it would reverberate onto these other side issues: grief, memory and memories specifically dealing with grief. And I remember thinking, ‚I have to just be sincere about these different feelings.‘ Maybe it was my therapy. I know as a family we're not very emotional about things. My mum was probably a lot like Junn in the way she handled the death but the Chinese are a bit like that. ‚Don't show your emotions.‘ Strong, almost stern and strong-willed about it. You can't be seen as too vulnerable.*

*„But mainly I just wanted to be sincere. Here was a scheme to make your first feature on a small budget and I knew that if I didn't have sincerity, I didn't have anything. We've all seen a lot of films where they feel over-sentimental and manipulated and I wanted to avoid those clichés. It wasn't a genre film. There weren't going to be guns or running or car chase sequences. It was an adult drama about the really big poignant moments in life. And those awkward, difficult things that people tend to think are insignificant in a film but if you're living through them, they're huge. Raymond Carver is a writer that talks about those moments. He talks about how a woman sits there at a table and drinks some coffee and she's not sure if she should after having a massive break up with her partner.*

*„I could be talking to you and something could trigger it. We could be talking and he could be there. When the camera pans, in a single take, the memory of Kai returns. Or you give the*

LILTING

*illusion that it's the same timeline. Richard's in the bedroom and he's saying, 'Smell my armpit' and then the doorbell rings and it's the mother and the translator at the door. I wanted to give grief this language but the language is very specific. It's not me trying to be clever. It's to comment on the idea that's grief is literally something you carry on your shoulders all the time. You capture it as an experience so you can take the audience into it.*

*„When you're talking about a subject matter that's very emotive you don't know if you're treading the right line and you've got to be sure that you're on the right side of having earned that sentimentality rather than just being sentimental. The film has a lot of sentiments and it's such a difficult thing to balance. I wanted to have two people grieving in two different ways. Richard, you see him cry, Junn, the mother, you don't see her cry. If you had two people crying all the time, it just becomes a cryfest.*

*„He has to find a way out of there. You end up asking yourself, 'What am I saying if I can't give him a sense of hope at the end?' Love conquers all, right, but you don't want to be so obvious and make it into such a Hollywood way of saying it. You want to find a more sophisticated way of saying it and maybe be subtle about it. You have these two very different people who love the same man but it's a slightly different kind of love but nevertheless it's that love — and the understanding that they both have this faculty — that allows them to find peace with one another. It sounds so cheesy. I get a bit squeamish*



*about it. You then find ways to almost talk about it in a more layered way.*

*„I've been sent a lot of scripts to read and it's made me ask, 'What is it that really gets me excited and that makes me want to put my name forward as a director?' What interests me is when someone can take something very familiar, like the age-old idea of falling in love, and present it in an unfamiliar way and still make me think, 'That's quite interesting the way you juxtaposed that, the way you asked that question' or some observational quality about it. Whatever it is feels surprising or refreshing. Or to take something really, really extreme or unfamiliar and make it feel familiar. 'I've never experienced that but I see what you mean', because that's equally universal. David Cronenberg's Crash does that. Here's this sub-group of people that meet and do such extreme things but they all want love. It sounds so cheesy so that's taking something unfamiliar and making it feel familiar.“*

*As told to Sophie Monks Kaufman.*

## BIOGRAPHY

### HONG KHAOU

Hong Khaou participated in various writers' attachment programs with The Royal Court, Polka Theatre, Dende Collective and Yellow Earth Theatre. He was part of the BBC / Royal Court New Writing Initiatives, where 50 emerging writers were chosen across the country to take part in in-house writing opportunities for various departments within the BBC and Royal Court Theatre. Hong spent 7 years at an independent film distribution company, Peccadillo Pictures, managing their Home Entertainment department. He also regularly attended film festivals and film markets as part of the acquisitions team.

Hong has written and directed two short films, *Summer* and *Spring*. *Spring* (2011) had its World Premiere at the Sundance Film Festival and European Premiere at the Berlin Film Festival. *Summer* (2006), premiered at the Berlin Film Festival.

His debut feature, *Lilting* was produced through Film London's Microwave scheme.

In 2013 Hong Khaou was named as one of the Stars of Tomorrow in Screen International.



### LILTING

CAST AND CREW

CAST  
AND  
CREW



CAST

RICHARD  
Ben Whishaw

JUNN  
Cheng Pei Pei

KAI  
Andrew Leung

MARGARET  
Morven Christie

VANN  
Naomi Christie

ALAN  
Peter Bowles

CREW

WRITTEN &  
DIRECTED BY  
Hong Khaou

PRODUCED BY  
Dominic Buchanan

DIRECTOR OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
Ula Pontikos

EDITOR  
Mark Towns

PRODUCTION  
DESIGN  
Miren Maranon

MUSIC COMPOSED  
BY  
Stuart Earl

CASTING  
DIRECTOR  
Kharmel Cochrane

LINE PRODUCER  
Donna Mabey

COSTUME  
DESIGNER  
Camille Benda

MAKE UP & HAIR  
DESIGNER  
Annette Field

ART DIRECTOR  
Augusta Akerman

1ST ASSISTANT  
DIRECTOR  
Jon Midlane

SOUND RECORDIST  
Pete Cowasji

PRODUCTION  
MANAGER  
Hazel Falck



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