

A Grasshopper Film Release



KAILI BLUES

A film by Bi Gan

113 minutes / DCP / 1.85:1 / 5.1 / China / Not Rated
In Mandarin and Kaili dialect with English subtitles

Synopsis

Bi Gan's brilliant directorial debut—which has collected prizes at the Locarno Film Festival and Taiwan's Golden Horse Awards—is an audacious work that announces a major new filmmaking talent. Country doctor Chen Sheng sets out on a train journey to search for his brother's abandoned child, only to find himself in a dreamlike world where the boundaries between past, present, and future—and between fantasy and reality—are porous. This remarkable visual achievement, which feels as singular and alien as the films of the great Apichatpong Weerasethakul, was shot in the mining village Kaili, the director's birthplace, and incorporates poetry he has been writing since he was a teenager.

About the Director

Bi Gan, a Chinese young director and poet, was born in Kaili, Guizhou in 1989.

In 2013 the film, *Diamond Sutra*, received the Special Mention Award in the Asian New Force Category of the 19th IFVA Festival (the Incubator for Film and Visual media in Asia), Hong Kong.

Kaili Blues is his first narrative feature film. Currently Bi Gan is preparing his second feature film, *The Last Night on Earth*.

Q&A with Director and Writer BI GAN

What was your inspiration for this film?

My uncle Chen Yongzhong, who played Chen Sheng in this film, has played the leading roles in all my other films since I was film student. I am inspired by his vast and complex life experience. He had been associated with the triads, managed gambling house in Myanmar and gone to prison, but now he works in a factory and leads an ordinary but solitude life. This complicated past give him an aura of impenetrable. I am also attracted by his temperament, his slightly awkward body language in front of the camera, and his solitude. Additionally, the intersection of real and illusion is also pulled from my experience, with the death of my granduncle. When my grandma's brother passed away in Zhen Yuan, my grandma, who lives in Kaili, bought a paper coat for the cremation ceremony; however, she did not make it to the funeral as she was very sick herself. From there, I projected this experience on to Chen Sheng, who delivered a keepsake for an elderly woman in the film.

How long did it take you to shoot the film and where?

Over three months, we shot the whole film in the greater area of Kaili, in Guizhou province. These cities are all under the administration of Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture. Kaili is my hometown. It is also the center of Miao culture.

How come the title of the movie appears so late, more than 30 minutes after the film begins?

A title is not just a name of movie. It is an important part to narrate a movie. I don't want the title to prejudice the audience. I prefer to let it be immersed in a film slowly. It's like when you visit people in their own homes in Kaili, first you enter the front gate, going through the front yard before entering the entrance hall, where you finally see the display of the family's ancestor alter and the writing of their ancestor teaching. It is only until that moment, you can find out their family name and family history. Prior to this, you are forced to imagine the family through the look of the house only. This is what I tried to achieve here: Giving the audience a chance to imagine the film before the title shows up.

Why do you prefer using long shot in the film?

As a way of making a living and funding my film projects, I teamed up with Liang Kai, the sound man for *Kaili Blues*, and shot wedding videos in Kaili for a year after graduating from university in 2011. Before then, Kai had an iron rice bowl -- working for the city of Kaili, and was about to be promoted to become a department head. He quit his job and joined me in making movies. We just thought that filming weddings was the closest thing to shooting our own movies. We ended up doing well, and were dubbed "Prince of Wedding Ceremony." Filming wedding banquets, we would hold the camera and followed the bride and groom circulating from table to table, making toasts to the guests. And I realized that filming in long takes like these was very dreamy and liberating. It felt very close to poetry.

Can you tell us about the more than 41-minute-long Dangmai scene, all in one take?

When I was a kid, I enjoyed very much watching adults playing card games. I find the rhythm is especially seductive when the game is slow. And long takes can recapture this kind of rhythm and feelings. Through this 41-minute-long take, I want to blur the boundary of being and nothingness. Some people may find this strange, but others may detect a sense of magic realism in it.

Can you talk about the actors?

Except for two, all the actors in the film are amateur actors. Besides the leading character played by my uncle Chen Yongzhong, Zhao Daoqing, who played the elder doctor, was my grandma's roommate in the hospital. I thought her face is right for the character. The little Weiwei is my step brother Luo Feiyang. This is the second time I casted Xie Lixun, who played Crazy Face. He is a pig feed salesman in real life. The only two professional actors are Yu Shixue (the older Wei Wei) and GuoYue (Yangyang).

How did you write the script?

My characters meant a lot to me. I would imagine that I wrote letters to them, then fantasized about receiving their replies. These enabled me to create their lives, personalities and faces. Over all, I often imagined myself coming from the Moon to build a building on Earth. As an alien, I wouldn't care about its earthy value, such as whether it was a commercial building; the price per square foot; or the expensive downtown location. Instead, what concerned me the most would be its materials, structure, and style. After returning back to the moon and far from the earth, I would only recall if the building was built in a forest or by the ocean. I would think of its inhabitants, their stories and emotions...

There is a lot of poetry in the film. Why?

Film is a direct visual language while poetry is an abstract one. There is a great contrast between the two. I enjoyed the humor produced by their difference when mixing them together. I also found that poetry can increase intensity like a music score.

Speaking of the music, how did you collaborate with Lim Giong?

After finishing the rough cut, I asked someone to show it to Lim. I was extremely excited when I received his quick and positive reply. I knew he actually had to squeeze *Kaili Blues* into his schedule. Besides this film, I heard that he only worked on Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Assassin* in the past year. Working with him, I had a chance to discuss music and literature with him, and was very impressed by his artistic integrity and dedication to the music. I believe this is his first film working with Lusheng, a traditional music instrument of the Miao people. I admire his work very much and hope that I can continue working with him in the future. I really I am grateful to him.

Cast

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Chen Sheng</i> | CHEN YONGZHONG |
| <i>Older Doctor</i> | ZHAO DAQING |
| <i>Weiwei(Child)</i> | LUO FEIYANG |
| <i>Crazy Face</i> | XIE LIXUN |
| <i>Pisshead</i> | ZENG SHUAI |
| <i>San</i> | QIN GUANGQIAN |
| <i>Weiwei(Teenager)</i> | YU SHIXUE |
| <i>Yangyang</i> | GUO YUE |
| <i>Zhangxi</i> | LIU LINYANG |
| <i>Monk</i> | YANG ZUOHUA |

Crew

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Directed by</i> | BI GAN |
| <i>Screenplay</i> | BI GAN |
| <i>Cinematography</i> | WANG TIANXING |
| <i>Sound</i> | LIANG KAI |
| <i>Production Designer</i> | ZHU YUN |
| <i>Editor</i> | QIN YANAN |
| <i>Original Music</i> | LIM GIONG |
| <i>Executive Producer</i> | EDWARD DING SHEN YANG |
| <i>Produced by</i> | WANG ZIJIAN SHAN ZUOLONG LI ZHAOYU |

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