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KONA Tomorrow ED

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King and The Clown



Damn I Look Beautiful

King and the Clown was South Korea's best selling film of 2005, having sold more than 12 million tickets over a span of 7 weeks. But after watching it, it's difficult to fathom the craze, nor about the New York Times hype that it "may be the equivalent of 'Brokeback Mountain'". Not that it is a bad movie, it is actually entertaining and tells an intriguing story in the courts of the Korean emperor.

Perhaps anything to do with the gay theme will suffer inevitably comparisons to Lee Ang's acclaimed Brokeback Mountain. But somehow, the way this film developed, I saw it in a different light - a story between two male best friends, even though one of them might look and behave more effeminately than even some girls do. Instead of jumping to the straight conclusion that both the protagonists are gay, why can't it be a platonic relationship, and that the more effeminate one had chosen what he had to do, i.e. sell backside, because being poor minstrels, they cannot afford to put food on the table? Literally capitalizing on his looks, to bring back the dough. Sure his friend might not like the idea, and it could be interpreted as either being jealous (as a lover), or disapproving (as a friend). Then again, because of culture, this movie might have decided to be more subtle about the theme. Ambiguous to say the least, but it makes for interesting debate if you watch this with a friend.

About Me

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Who am I? Are you sure you want to know? The story of my life is not for the faint of heart. If somebody told you it was a happy little tale... if somebody told you I was just your average ordinary guy, without a care in the world... somebody lied.

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Two friends, Jang-seng (Kam Woo-sung) and Gong-gil (Lee Joon-ki), are impoverished street performers who dream of having their entertaining performances reap rewards they should be getting. They come up with a wildly popular and bawdy performance poking fun at the emperor and his consort, and it's not long before they get arrested, only to have Jang-seng proposition a dare, that if the King doesn't laugh at their skit, they can be put to death.

As fate would have it, their jittery performance brought on a favourable response from the tyrannical King (Jung Jin-young). Having now become official court jesters, their subsequent plays, whose content they obtain from coffee-shop talk of those days, about the royal family and other court scandals, serve as suggestive fuel for the King to break free from his constrictive shackles, and take some serious action according to his whims. But dictator attitudes aside, he casts a lustful eye at Gong-gil, and turns almost childlike when in his presence, in private. The most powerful man in the kingdom, reduced to a vulnerable kid in the presence of a lowly minstrel. What ensues is an interesting look at the relationship dynamics amongst the three men, and with the people around them.

Set during the Chosun Dynasty, King and the Clown has some of the most gorgeous sets bringing to life an era long gone, and beautiful costumes that drown the movie in a myriad of colours. The songs are also fairly pleasing to the ears, and the skits, I believe, are likely to be many times more enjoyable if you understand Korean, instead of having to rely on subtitles.

The movie also makes discreet jibes at those in power, and their ability, or inability, to accept satires about themselves. It is always easy for men in power to dismiss harshly the satires and their creators, but it takes a lot more to be able to look past the comic and understand the issues made fun of. There are brief scenes at courtroom politicking and on corruption, but these scenes are too short to leave any lasting impression or distract the audience.

The cast is a delight to watch as they carry their roles with aplomb. The chemistry between the 3 main leads was almost perfect, especially Jung Jin-young as the temperamental King - childish at times, serious at others, and the androgynous looking Lee Joon-ki truly owned the role of Gong-gil, that even as a guy, I thought he was beautiful to look at (*ahem*).

All in all, King and the Clown is a story of friendship, how good friends fend for each other, how, despite shortcomings and misunderstandings, the best medicine is always laughter, and it's the strength of the bonds between men that can ultimately stand up against fear and overcome any adversary. If only the opening didn't spoil the entire movie.

posted by Stefan S @ 11:57 PM 

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Yasmin Ahmad Spotlight

Movie Reviews

- ◆ Rabun
- ◆ Sepet
- ◆ Gubra
- ◆ Gubra for the Third Time
- ◆ [DVD] Gubra
- ◆ (Link) To Stop The Tears (Nokia Mobile Filmmakers 06)
- ◆ Mukhsin
- ◆ [DVD] Mukhsin

Events

- ◆ Yasmin Ahmad Is In Town!
- ◆ Gubra - Conversations with Yasmin, Sharifah and Alan
- ◆ Gubra World Premiere
- ◆ Sepet & Gubra Double Bill
- ◆ A Gubra Memento
- ◆ TCC Supper with Yasmin
- ◆ [On Location] Mukhsin
- ◆ Rabin VCD Found!
- ◆ Mukhsin TV Spots
- ◆ [On Location] Muallaf

Eric Khoo Spotlight

Movie Reviews

- ◆ 5 Shorts - Barbie Digs Joe, August, Carcass, Symphony 92.4FM, Pain
- ◆ Mee Pok Man
- ◆ 12 Storeys
- ◆ Be With Me
- ◆ (2nd Review) Be With Me
- ◆ Short - No Day Off

Events

- ◆ Eric Khoo Night, Not
- ◆ Be With Me Launch Party
- ◆ Love, Longing and Lounging - Be With Me @ Bar None

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