



## King and the Clown (2005)



Director: Lee Jun-ik  
 Starring: Jun-gi Lee, Hang-Seon Jang, Gam Woo-sung, Jin-yeong Jeong

Tagline: A powerhouse historical epic, political comment and love story

Set in the early 1500s in the Cheosan Dynasty of Korea, we first meet the two main characters Gong-gil (Jun-gi Lee) and Jang-saeng (Gam Woo-sung), when they are a group of travelling acrobats. The leader of the troupe is always pimping out Gong-gil to rich lords and his friend has had enough. There is a fight and Gong-gil ends up killing their boss.

Fleeing to Seoul they decide to try their luck on the streets and Gong-gil's friend walks up to a group of performers and tells them they suck. They put their money where their mouth is and they end up becoming friends with Six Dix (great name!), who gives Gong-gil the name of Captain.

As the market for ordinary performers is not good, Captain decides they should put on a political satire of King Yonsan (Jin-yeong Jeong) who is hated amongst the people anyway. It is very successful with the general populace, but senior minister Cheo-san (Hang-Seon Jang) spies of them and they are arrested. They are beaten and about to be executed when Captain convinces them to do a special show for the king.

The show goes badly at first as the performers are packing death. Captain and Gong-gil manage to save the day with some tricks that make the king laugh. King Yonsan likes them so much, he invites them into the palace to act as jesters and put on shows. It really takes off from there and things get really complicated and engrossing.

I went into this movie knowing that it was the no.1 box office success for Korea and it was a story about two performers and the king, but not much else. I am consistently blown away by the quality of the movies regularly coming out of Korea and this has to be my favourite so far this year.

This is a truly epic production in everything from sets, costumes and high-wire acts that the actors look to do themselves. I know that historical TV dramas are dramas are very popular in Korea, but I have not heard of anything on this scale before. If you want something to show your friends that Korean movies aren't all about the Korean War and people beating on each other then I recommend this film.

The story is based on a play by Seok-Hwan Choi, who also wrote the screenplay for the movie. The dialogue is great throughout, even though there are some references that may be missed by non-Korean audiences.

What I also liked about this film is that the fact that they two main characters are gay is never raised as an issue. People just accept them for who they are and get on with business. Compared to some other movies, one with cowboys springs to mind, where that is the only thing they talk about the attitude is very refreshing.

The main reason you should see this movie are the performances of Gam Woo-

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The main reason you should see this movie are the performances of Gam Woo-sung, Jun-gi Lee and Jin-yeong Jeong as they are perfectly balance against each other.

Gam Woo-sung as Jang-saeng is very brash and impossibly brave, some of his lines are also very funny and I wish I could speak Korean as there were a lot of slang words in his lines that I don't think translated that well.

Jun-gi Lee's performance as Gong-gil is also excellent and you do find yourself questioning whether he is really a woman like the king's mistress was during the story. I really liked the puppet shows that Gong-gil put on for the king as they were very simple, but had a lot of emotion in them.

Jin-yeong Jeong as Jin-yeong Jeong is also interesting as he is regarded as a tyrant by his people, but he is very sensitive and emotional and acts like a spoiled child at times. He is also the only one to just go up to Gong-gil and kiss him, which you wish Jang-saeng would have done at the start instead of acting the tough-guy the whole time.

The supporting cast are also great, especially Six Dix and his pals, and Cheo-san is also a great understated role. The king's mistress is very tricky also and the king's ministers seem very serious and stuffy.

There are a lot of stunts and high wire acts in the film (especially the scene where Jang-saeng dodges the arrows), but I liked the parts where they were clowning around the most, as the actors seemed to be having a lot of fun. The king was also funny when he wanted to be part of the action and when he banged the drum until it broke.

Hopefully this film is very popular on DVD with Korean cinema fans and at festivals as I don't know if is going to get a wide release like other Chinese historical dramas have in the past few years.

Rating: 9/10

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