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THE KING AND THE CLOWN (Korean)



In Korean with English and Chinese subtitles

Genre: Drama
Director: Jun-ik Lee
Starring: Woo-seong Kam, Jin-yeong Jeong)
RunTime: 1 hr 59 mins
Released By: Shaw & Festive Films
Rating: NC-16 (Sexual References)
Official Website: <http://www.festivefilms.com/kingandthecrown/>

Opening Day: 22 June 2006

Synopsis:

Two clowns living in the Chosun Dynasty get arrested for staging a play that satirizes the king. They are dragged to the palace and threatened with execution, but are given a chance to save their lives if they can make the king laugh.

Movie Review:

Who would have expected the feat that The King and The Clown achieved in the Korean Box Office?

This moderate low budget film with it's relative unknown actors had it's difficulties during it's production and was close to shutting down at one point during the production.

However the crew and cast persisted on and became a box office sleeper hit, ousting blockbuster films with big budget special effect films and films with A-list Korean actors. It stayed on to become the Korean Box Office all the Champion. And consider this, this film touches on homosexuality which had been a taboo subject in Korea until recent years.

Quite a miraculous feat and now, Singaporeans will get to see what the draw of this film.

The plot got started with Jang Seng (Kam Woo Sung), a street clown with the audacity to come up with a play that mocks King Yon San (Jung Jin Young). This hilarious and daring poke at their ruler brought them money and attention from the crowds. But then it also gathered the attention of the authority and soon, they had this one chance to perform for the King in exchange for their lives.

Publicity Stills of "The King and the Clown"
 (Courtesy from Shaw)



Performing in front of the King was a nerve wrecking experience and just when death seems imminent, Jang Seng's partner, the effeminate Gong-gil (Lee Joon Ki) pulls a surprise performance and crack the straight face of the King. It pleases the King so much that he requested the clown to stay in the palace to entertain him.

It might seem that all is well now but soon it became a "out of the frying pan and into the fire" scenario for these clowns as the King turn out to be a murderous crazy despot and has taken a liking to Gong-gil.

Kam Woo Sung gave a credible fierce performance as Jang Seng, a tough guy who refused to bow down to any obstacle and would go all out to protect his partner in crime, Gong-gil. The most remarkable bit of his performance was his ability to emulate a certain vulnerability towards his mate Gong-gil amidst his tough gungho exterior.



Lee Joon Ki as the effeminate Gong-gil was another strong aspect of the film. The androgynous features of Lee joon Ki was played convincingly well that it's not hard to believe that there will be high authorities male that fancy Gong-gil over other female beauties. Exterior attraction aside, Gong-gil also demonstrate an unusual strength through a frail character that surprise and adds dimension to this character.

The third and most interesting character among the three would be the despot King Yeon. Jung Jin Young gave a mesmerizing performance here as a maniacal ruler. One moment he is laughing and teasing his followers and a quick snap, he is ordering men to be beheaded. Like Jang Seng character, there an interesting duality to the King's character. It's easy to identify his character as an evil and unnecessary cruel ruler initially but taking a closer look into the King's life would unravel the reasons for the character he had become. Easily one of the most intriguing character among the three as he could install fear to the audience and yet later reel in their sympathy with ease.



Overall, it's an interesting Korean film to catch. On one hand, it had an ambiguous love story between two male clowns and another it has a emotional power struggle in the kingdom which made it an interesting combo for a film. It has intense acting from the trio and a tale that reminisce the situation in "Farewell My Concubine" with a touch of "Brokeback Mountain" in it. Fans of those two movies should try to give this movie a chance.

Movie Rating:



(Intense acting from the actors and a tale that invokes memories of Farewell My Concubine)

Review by Richard Lim Jr

