FESTIVAL DE CANNES
UN CERTAIN REGARD
2021 OFFICIAL SELECTION
STREETWISE
GAEY WA'R
街妹儿
A film by
Na jiazuo
cercamon
THE SEVENTH ART PICTURES STARRING LI QINXIAN, HUANG JIYE, YU AILEI, SHA BAOLIANG, YAO LU PRESENTER LIANG JING SUPERVISING PRODUCER LIANG JING
PRODUCER WANG DONGHUI CO-PRODUCERS ZHU WENJU, JUSTINE D. DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LI JIANENG ART DIRECTOR WANG CHUNMO
EDITOR KONG JINLEI SOUND DESIGNER ZHAO SUCHEN COMPOSER WANG YULONG EXECUTIVE PRODUCER GUAN HU WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY NA JIAZUO

THE SEVENTH ART PICTURES PRESENTS

OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

# STREETWISE (GAEY WA'R)

## (LES NUITS DE ZHENWU)

街娃儿

GAEY WA'R

A FILM BY
NA JIAZUO

2021 - CHINA – DRAMA/ CRIME – CHINESE

# SYNOPSIS

Dongzi, a small-town youth, becomes debt-collector, Xi Jun's henchman in an attempt to pay off his sick father's hospital bills. A cold and estranged parent-child relationship, an unsettling life on the streets, and an ambiguous relationship with a young woman; in Dongzi's shoes, this is what it is like to be twenty-one.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This is a story about “struggle”. The film adopts a polarising approach with sudden stops and starts that create the audiovisual experience.  What blossoms at night, appears to wither in the daytime. The forgotten corners of the city become the focus of the camera’s lens. The green hills and the river on the one hand, and the streetscapes on the other, are the two most important settings in this film, and it is in these two environments that the characters in the story eat, talk, wander, struggle and coexist with one another.

NA Jiazuo, June 2021.

# NA JIAZUO'S Q&A

(DIRECTOR)

**How did you become a film director?**

It was by pure chance. I had written a filmscript and when director Guan Hu and producer Liang Jing at the Shanghai Film Festival read it, they encouraged me to make a film. That's how I became a director.

**Is there a director or film that you particularly like?**

I like lots of directors: Edward Yang, Mike Leigh, Werner Herzog, Sion Sono, Takeshi Kitano, Jim Jarmusch, to name but a few. And there are lots of films I like too. But they all seem very distant. I can only really experience them in the very short moment I'm watching them. The person that helped me most and was able to point me in the right direction was Guan Hu. Whenever I found myself on the wrong path or I was being whimsical about something, he never told me outright, because he was young once too and had been through all that. It was as if we knew what the other was thinking. He would point

something out or try something out and one day it would suddenly dawn on me what he meant. In those moments, I'd feel at ease and things would become clear to me.

**Do you feel there is an obvious or acute sense of conflict inside you? And was that projected in the film?**

It's very obvious in the film. There's plenty of conflict in every individual, but those who don't want to show it, hide it. Each individual hides it in a different way. My film does project that.

**Would you classify yourself as an 'auteur' in your filmmaking?**

I'd say I'm a new age filmmaker, but I wouldn't go so far as to classify myself as an auteur.

**What would you say is your directing style?**

I haven't really thought about what style I might have. I just film in a particular way in a certain moment and do what I feel I have to do at the time. I try my best not to betray that moment.

**At the outset, why did you want to tell this story?**

I'd been thinking, what if I hadn't studied at the affiliated middle school of the Central Academy of Arts? Would I be wandering aimlessly on the streets like the characters in the film? The truth is after getting through that very middle school, I was still wandering. We were all the same. That's why I wrote the story.

**Why did you choose the Sichuan-Chongqing region as the backdrop to your story?**

While we were looking for filming sites, we explored the length of the Yangtze River because the river flows in a particular direction and there are settlements facing each other on either side of the river. The Sichuan-Chongqing region has a similar feel to the one I wanted to project in the story, with cities clinging to the sides of hills, and buildings where the second floor would look out on to the eighth floor of the building next to it. It makes you feel like the spaces are all misaligned. I get vertigo just thinking about it. The tranquility of the rivers and green hills stand in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the streets, but they also coexist side by side. That is mirrored in the daily struggles that people face.

**I get the feeling we could draw parallels between you and the main character?**

At the start, it felt like I was filming myself at the age of 20. But I realized later that I was actually filming the main character. At the beginning, it seemed like I was filming myself, but gradually the character became less and less like me. But he developed out of the kind of person I was at the age of 20. I'm really thankful to the characters in the film because they allowed me to get to know myself again. As for parallels, well, I suppose we're both aimless wanderers.

**I also found out that you were involved in the creation of the main theme song. What are you trying to express with the music?**

We didn't have a theme song for the rolling end credits and I didn't want to pay to get one made, so I wrote the song myself. Ever since high school I've been in a two-man band with a good friend of mine who is also the composer of the soundtrack. For the theme song I wanted a section with me playing solo guitar that would bring people closer to the mood in the film. But a theme song needs lyrics, so I wrote them. I wasn't trying to express anything in particular with the lyrics. I just wanted us to do it ourselves and it had to have energy.

**This was your first feature-length film. What challenges did you come across?**

The biggest challenge was to get the rushes to catch up with my understanding of what I wanted the film to become. During the time it took to get from writing the script to filming and post-production, I had grown from a young man in my twenties to a man in my thirties, and in that time my understanding of things had evolved. So, I had to work hard to make sure the script caught up with my intuition on set. During post-production, I also needed to get the rushes to achieve my vision and intentions for the film. I'm greatly indebted to Kong Jinglei's expertise during the post-production phase.

**There seems to be a rebellious streak in the film that can be seen in the passers-by in the background, in the way our perception of the Sichuan-Chongqing region is turned upside down, in the audiovisual language of the movie, and in the medium and long shots. What were your intentions with that?**

That's because this film suits that theme. After watching Streetwise (Gaey Wa'r), a producer started chatting to me about Andre Bazin, which really pleased me. From the outset, the director of photography and I had settled on using deep focus and medium full shots. Shots like that imply a causal relationship. It's like saying you would only find moments with these sorts of characters in an atmosphere and environment like this one. My view is the narrative is always going to be fragmented. A film can only show a cross-section and the more information contained in an image, the more convincing that cross-section will be. I sometimes joke that deep focus shots are the best, because visually they don't force a particular part of the image onto the viewer. You can choose to look at the person on the left of the image or decide to look at the one on the right. If you don't want to look at the main character in the foreground, you can watch the passers-by in the background.

**After watching the film, I decided I liked its temperament, as well as the fact that it doesn't try to preach to the audience. It simply portrays a fragment of the main character's life, without being too universal with its values. Is that part of what you were trying to convey?**

I don't have the right to preach to anyone because I don't have all the answers. The meaning of life is a philosophical question that the film cannot give an answer to. I'm still fumbling through life and I haven't reached the end of it yet. The goals of the characters in Streetwise (Gaey Wa'r) were forced upon them. They represent those left behind by the idea of universal values. The value of life in this film is seen through the connections, comradery, ethical norms and the idea of "standing by your mates" that are forged over a period of time on a few streets in a third or fourth tier city nestled in a landscape of hills and rivers. That's where the vitality comes from. We only start questioning the meaning of something after we have failed to achieve a goal, right? Suffering leads to philosophical questions and human beings are animals that are characterized by having a subconscious. People often try to organize their lives in a certain way, but they end up living according to what their subconscious tells them, because the subconscious cannot be controlled. That's what vitality is all about.

The famous Chinese novelist, Lu Xun said: "Go, weeds, along with my preface". But you never know where the weeds might pop up next time, or how they will grow. Will they grow again in the spring? Are they going to be battered by the winds or destroyed in a wildfire? They have no idea what they're fighting against because they are constantly under attack and bouncing back. That's an incredible notion.

# LI JIUXIAO'S Q&A

(ACTOR)

**How did you become an actor?**
After enrolling in the Beijing Film Academy and spending four years in the Performing Arts Department, I became an actor after graduation.

**Who is your favorite actor or actor you admire the most?**
My favorite actor is Daniel Day Lewis.

**Are there any directors you would especially like to work with?**
I'd be happy to work with any director. Perhaps the director I'd most like to work with would be "life" itself. If at all possible, I'd like to start again and live a different life.

**What would you say makes a good actor?**
I'm still exploring. At the moment I take the view that you're a good actor if you don't see yourself as an actor too often.

**What is your most significant trait as an actor?**
My most significant trait is: "I am Li Jiuxiao; there's no the other me and if there's another me, it must be my clone."

**How do you see the character, Dongzi? Are there any character traits that drew you to him in particular?**

Dongzi is a street kid from the local town, as suggested in the Chinese film title. He's a bit of a hooligan in everyone's eyes, doing very little all day and without a proper job. But in his own eyes, the people in this town are the ones that lead a strange life. There are so many things he can't understand and so many question marks. This is bluntly described in his "Dunno" tattoo. His name is Dongzi, which means "east" in Chinese. He dreams of the sea, and of freedom. And the ocean is in the east of China. His ideal is freedom, but the reality he lives in is very different. His friendships, love and family

# Li Jianeng'S Q&A

(DOP)

**Which shooting format did you use?**
Redcode Raw 8K 2:1 / Redcode Raw 4K 2:1

**Which movie camera?**
RED Weapon VV / RED Gemini

**What about your mainly-used lens?**
ARRI Master prime / SIGMA FF high speed prime

**Can you tell us about the reason for choosing the equipments above, and the creative thinking behind the filmmaking process?**
Our choice of equipment was to help us achieve the aesthetic goals of cinematography, which is mainly built around the use of deep focus. We used this method to present the state in which the characters' were living, as well as their social situation. In between the cold, restrained medium shots/ long shots, and the violent handheld following shots, we wanted to bring out a feeling of both normalcy and uncertainty; in addition to the use of deep focus close-ups, we tried to look deeper into the characters and bring out the author's perspective on the meaning of life. Due to relatively low-budget production costs, we lacked optimal lighting conditions for deep focus cinematography. So we relied on the development of camera technology, and used the high-sensitivity feature of this equipment to help achieve the deep focus effect pursuant to the film's aesthetic goals. These methods created sharp backgrounds that helped develop the characters, as well as enhance a rougher social ambiance. By reducing softness and concealment at the audio-visual level, the movie becomes more like real life: abrupt and without transition.

# DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Na Jiazuo is an ethnic Manchu, born in 1989 and raised in Beijing. Having learned to draw from the age of nine, he was admitted to the affiliated middle school of the China Academy of Fine Arts in 2006. Upon graduation, he had originally hoped to go to the Dunhuang Grottoes to sculpt or work in mural restoration, but he failed to make the final China Academy of Fine Arts selection list.

In 2010, he was admitted to the Beijing Film Academy and majored in cinematography.

He enjoys being at home playing the piano, reading, sculpting, or simply just chilling. He is allergic to alcohol and doesn't like going out much.

In 2007, at the age of 18, Na Jiazuo formed a six-member band that has since been reduced to just two members. During the summer of 2021, they composed a song called "Me First", which became the theme song of his film, "Streetwise (Gaey Wa'r)". Na Jiazuo created the lyrics, vocals, and part of the composition, and played the guitar accompaniment.

# DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

"The Cloud in the Wind" (2016) (short)

"You Came Too" (2015) (short)

"Neighbor" (2012) (short)

"Cornel and the Christmas Tree" (2012) (short)

# DOP'S FILMOGRAPHY

LI Jianeng was born in 1992. Graduated from the Cinematography Department of Beijing Film Academy.

"Streetwise (Gaey Wa'r)" (2021) – Director of Cinematography
Executive Producer: Guan Hu – Director: Na Jiazuo

"Charlie IX & Dodomo" (2021) – Co-Director of Cinematography
Director: Wang Jing

"Salvation" (short – 2017) – Cinematography
Director: Orkenbek Baysenbay

"E Yi" (short – 2016) – Cinematography
Director: Wan Liyang

"Home Swim Home" (short – 2016) – Cinematography
Director: Wang Yiyu

# CAST

LI Jiuxiao

HUANG Miyi

YU Ailei

SHA Baoliang

YAO Lu

# CREW

Director **NA Jiazuo**

Screenwriter **NA Jiazuo**

Cinematography **LI Jianeng**

Art Director **WANG Chunmo**

Editor **KONG Jinlei**

Sound Designer **ZHAO Suchen**

Composer **WANG Yulong**

Presenter **LIANG Jing**

Executive Producer **GUAN Hu**

Producer **WANG Donghui**

Co-Producers **ZHU Wenjiu** & **Justine O.**

Associated Producers **Hu Jie** & **GUO Zijing**

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