



WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI

Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)

A trip to Buenos Aires reveals the dark side of love as a gay couple (Tony Leung and Leslie Cheung) struggle with jealousy, co-dependency and possessiveness as their turbulent relationship falls apart. Their growing sense of alienation is lensed with a lush dreaminess, a mix of monochrome and vivid colours. This painfully raw romance delivers a devastating portrait of infatuation in all its irresistible cruelty.

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Drawn to Argentina by his enthusiasm for Latin-American literature, Wong Kar Wai made a preliminary reconnaissance trip to Buenos Aires in the late spring of 1996 and went back in August to begin production of the film. His working title was *Buenos Aires Affair*. What was originally envisaged as a six-week shoot stretched through to December. As usual, Wong started with an outline, some pieces of music and a set of ideas and images rather than a conventional script. The narrative base was an on-off romance between two gay émigrés from Hong Kong, complicated by encounters with other Chinese on the road.

The central couple are Ho Po-Wing (Leslie Cheung, of *Rouge*, *A Chinese Ghost Story* and *Farewell My Concubine*) and Lai Yiu-Fei (Tony Leung, of *Hard Boiled*, *A City of Sadness* and *Cyclo*). A young Taiwanese who drifts into Lai's orbit is played by Zhang Zhen (*A Brighter Summer Day*, *Mahjong*). The Hong Kong singer Shirley Kwan also shot a number of scenes, but her pans have gone from the finished film.

As edited, *Happy Together* has lost not only Shirley Kwan but also countless scenes and incidents devised by Wong during the shoot, including an extended episode in which the Leslie Cheung character became a cross-dressing hooker. The finished film is one of the most searing accounts ever made of doomed and destructive love, but also a strong and very moving affirmation of romantic folly.

Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, March 1997

Great expectations stalk director Wong Kar Wai. *Chungking Express*, with its oddball conceits and acrobatic camerawork, was a delicate, fluid delight. But *Fallen Angels*, his next effort, was frantic and dislocated. Seemingly desperate to be Melville's *Le Samourai*, it played like an upmarket pop video (indeed, a Texas video ripped it off shamelessly). Now, even though it has already won Wong Kar Wai the Best Director prize at the Cannes festival last year, *Happy Together* begs the question of whether it is as good as *Chungking Express*. The answer is: yes and no.

An adaptation of Manuel Puig's little-known novel *The Buenos Aires Affair*, *Happy Together* is acutely concerned with surfaces. Initially shot in black and white, our two protagonists, Lai (sad-eyed Tony Leung, the second cop in *Chungking Express*) and Ho (spiteful-pretty Leslie Cheung) are low-profile, alcohol-soaked poseurs. The camera peeks and peers through pillars, as if spying on them, but the characters always behave as if they're being watched anyway. Lai likes to hold himself hunched like Humphrey Bogart; Ho surrounds himself with mirrors. This is a sexualised universe we recognise from Charles

Vidor's *Gilda* (1946) and Jean Genet's *Un chant d'amour* (1950) – hot and yet cold with desire. However, while those films are languorous, *Happy Together* is desperate (money is in short supply and Lai and Ho have to keep moving to survive). The handheld camera mimics this stale urgency. Like a man throwing stones at a pool of water, Wong breaks his images into pieces, each furious fragment crashing into the next, making the head and eyes ache. Midway through, the movie explodes into colour with glowing squares of strawberry reds and banana yellows, rendering it as edible as Jacques Demy's Eastmancolor-fest *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). And yet the tension remains (the surface has changed, but not the reality). A paranoid Lai fears Ho will disappear at any moment and, in a hallucinatory sequence, we watch Ho looking up at the sky and disappearing in a flutter of curtains. Puig's magical realism finds its perfect complement here – the visual world has never seemed less solid or stable.

The virtues and vices of such a technique, though, are hard to disentangle. Because of it, we experience the couple's few slow-motion moments of quiet (in a taxi; dancing in the communal kitchen) as blissful. At the same time, we genuinely want this exhausting partnership to end, and if not the partnership, then the film. The deadlock is broken by the appearance of gentle Chang. He puts into words something we've only half-noticed about our characters – they don't talk (except to rehearse clichéd accusations) and they don't listen. Unlike Lai and Ho, Chang is observant and sensitive, interested in the world around him. He has no time for surfaces. As he says: 'ears are better than eyes – you can see everything by listening.' Chang brings a *Chungking Express*-style warmth into the film. Like the protagonists in *Chungking Express*, there's something pixie-like about him, something effortlessly poetic and ultimately successful. He takes metaphors – particularly to do with heartache – literally, enjoining Lai to dump his abstract sorrow into his portable stereo, and after Lai weeps into the machine, the dream of losing his pain comes true.

Chang is on the brink of sexual awareness, where Lai and Ho have been stewing in it. Nevertheless, Wong avoids any queasy hymns to 'innocent' male bonding. In one stunningly beautiful sequence, we watch Lai and Chang playing football with some young boys in the glaring sunshine. We're out of the shadows at last, but it's so bright we can no longer see – as if, like Lai, we need to be taught to use senses beyond the visual.

And yet in many ways, this is a less elliptical, more conventional film than *Chungking Express*. Early on, we're shown a shot of the Iguazu Falls – foaming like a chocolate malt milkshake – a calm maelstrom, whose spiralling steam the camera respectfully trails. We're not seeing the falls from the characters' point of view, but an authorial one, a somewhat lofty reminder that healing nature will be there, when the men are finally ready to take her in. And once Chang arrives on the scene, there's no doubt Lai is the one who'll be saved and that Ho will remain stuck. A judgement is being made here, that feels a little too easy, a little superficial. *Happy Together* is certainly a less satisfying experience than *Chungking Express* – too messy and too tidy in parts. But it's good to see a film about a gay relationship where the plot is not driven by AIDS or homophobia. More importantly, feelings captured in *Happy Together* linger with a great, scratchy intensity. It's like getting a postcard from the edge, rather than a letter. Frustrating, yes, but infinitely tantalising.

Charlotte O'Sullivan, *Sight & Sound*, May 1998

HAPPY TOGETHER (CHUN GWONG CHA SIT)

Director: Wong Kar Wai
Production Companies: Jet Tone Production, Block 2 Pictures, Prenom H Co. Ltd., Seawoo Film Co. Ltd.
Executive Producer: Chan Ye-Cheng
Producer: Wong Kar Wai
Associate Producers: Hiroko Shinohara, Chung T.J., Christophe Tseng Ching-Chao
Production Supervisor: Jacky Pang Yee-Wah
Production Co-ordinator: Joeseoph Chi Chiong-Chavez
Unit Production Manager: Chang Hsien-Jen
Assistant Unit Production Manager: Joeris Ho Yuen-Chi
Assistant Director: Johnnie Kong Yeuk-Shing
Visual Continuity: Carmen Lui Lai-Wah
Screenplay: Wong Kar Wai
Director of Photography: Christopher Doyle
1st Assistant Cameraman: Lai Yiu-Fai
2nd Assistant Cameraman: Ho Po-Wing
Grips: Ho Ka-Fai, Lau Tin-Wah
Lighting Gaffer: Wong Chi-Ming
Best Boy Electrician: Kwan Wing-Cheung
Electricians: Kwan Wing-Kin, Chan Hon-Sung
Stills Photography: Wing Shya, Julian Lee Chi-Chui
Editors: William Chang Suk-Ping, Wong Ming-Lam
Production Designer: William Chang Suk-Ping
Assistant Production Designer: Man Lim-Chung
Props: Tam Wing-Cheong

Props Assistant: Tam Wing-Hung
Make-up: Kwan Lee-Na
Camera Equipment Supplied by: Salon Films (H.K.) Ltd
Music: Danny Chung
Music Editor: Tang Siu-Lam
Sound Recording: Leung Chi-Tat
Sound Assistant: Li Hing-Keung
Sound Editor: Tu Tu-Chih
Chinese Subtitles: Jimmy Ngai
English Subtitles: Tony Rayns
Publicity: Norman Wang, Sophie Gluck

Cast

Leslie Cheung Kwok-Wing (*Ho Po-Wing*)
Tony Leung Chiu-Wai (*Lai Yiu-Fai*)
Chang Chen (*Chang*)

Hong Kong 1997©
97 mins

This 4K digital restoration was undertaken from the 35mm original camera negative by the Criterion Collection in collaboration with L'Imagine Ritrovata, Jet Tone and One Cool. It was supervised and approved by Wong Kar Wai.

WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI

As Tears Go By (Wong Gok ka moon)

Wed 7 Jul 14:30; Sat 17 Jul 20:30; Mon 19 Jul 20:45

Days of Being Wild (Ah Fei jing juen)

Thu 8 Jul 20:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by season programmer Ann Lee);
Mon 12 Jul 14:30; Mon 19 Jul 18:00

Fallen Angels (Do lok tin si)

Fri 9 Jul 20:50; Wed 14 Jul 14:30; Sun 25 Jul 18:30

Ashes of Time Redux (Dung che sai duk)

Sat 10 Jul 11:20 (+ pre-recorded intro by season programmer Ann Lee);
Wed 21 Jul 20:45; Fri 30 Jul 20:45

Chungking Express (Chung Hing sam lam)

Sat 10 Jul 18:15; Mon 12 Jul 20:50;
Tue 20 Jul 20:45; Thu 29 Jul 14:30

Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)

Sun 11 Jul 15:40; Fri 16 Jul 14:30; Fri 23 Jul 18:10

In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah)

Wed 14 Jul 20:45; Sat 17 Jul 13:30;
Wed 21 Jul 14:30; Thu 29 Jul 20:45

2046

Thu 15 Jul 20:20; Sat 17 Jul 16:10; Sat 31 Jul 14:30

The Grandmaster (Yi dai zong shi)

Tue 20 Jul 18:00; Thu 22 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 20:50

The Hand (Extended Cut)

Thu 22 Jul 18:30; Fri 30 Jul 18:20

My Blueberry Nights

Fri 23 Jul 20:50; Wed 28 Jul 20:40

Presented in partnership with Janus Films and the ICA

Visit [Youtube.com/bfi](https://www.youtube.com/bfi) for a dizzying tour in the World of Wong Kar Wai, guided by season programmer Ann Lee

CHINESE VISUAL FESTIVAL

Opening Night: UK Premiere: Drifting + intro

Thu 15 Jul 17:50

UK Premiere: Love Poem + intro

Sat 17 Jul 12:00

Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue + intro

Sat 24 Jul 14:00

Closing Night: UK Premiere: Shadows + intro

Sun 25 Jul 15:10

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

After Love

Continues from Jun

Nashville

Continues from Jun

The Father

Continues from Jun

Ultraviolence

Continues from Jun

Supernova

From Fri 2 Jul

Another Round

From Fri 9 Jul

Jumbo

From Fri 9 Jul

Deerskin

From Fri 16 Jul

Girlfriends

From Fri 23 Jul

Mandabi

From Fri 23 Jul

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