



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# Happy Together

+ intro by Yi Wang, *Queer East* (on Tuesday 8 February only)

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: Joeseeph 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

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar  
Tue 1 Feb 18:20; Fri 25 Feb 20:45  
Young Soul Rebels  
Wed 2 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Thu 17 Feb 20:45  
All About My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre)  
Wed 2 Feb 20:45; Wed 16 Feb 21:00  
Beautiful Thing  
Thu 3 Feb 20:45; Mon 14 Feb 20:30  
The Handmaiden (Ah-ga-ssi)  
Fri 4 Feb 17:50; Sat 12 Feb 20:10; Sun 27 Feb 17:50  
Rent  
Sat 5 Feb 12:30; Sun 20 Feb 18:10  
Maurice  
Sun 6 Feb 15:20; Mon 14 Feb 18:00  
The Watermelon Woman  
Mon 7 Feb 20:45; Sat 26 Feb 20:30  
Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)  
Tue 8 Feb 18:15 (+ intro by Yi Wang, Queer East); Sun 13 Feb 15:20  
My Own Private Idaho  
Tue 8 Feb 20:45; Wed 23 Feb 18:00 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair)

Brokeback Mountain  
Wed 9 Feb 17:45 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Mon 21 Feb 20:25  
Go Fish  
Wed 9 Feb 20:40; Sat 26 Feb 18:20  
Rope  
Thu 10 Feb 18:30; Tue 22 Feb 14:30  
Victim  
Thu 10 Feb 20:40; Sun 13 Feb 13:00; Mon 21 Feb 18:00  
Desert Hearts  
Fri 11 Feb 20:40; Wed 16 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Head Librarian Emma Smart)  
My Beautiful Laundrette  
Sat 12 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 20:45  
A Fantastic Woman (Una mujer fantástica)  
Sun 13 Feb 18:40; Tue 22 Feb 20:50  
Mädchen in Uniform  
Fri 18 Feb 20:30; Sat 26 Feb 16:00  
Moonlight  
Thu 24 Feb 14:30; Mon 28 Feb 20:45

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