



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 5=

In the Mood for Love **(Fa yeung nin wa)**

The signs were already there that Wong Kar Wai's woozy, hungry, love story was likely to earn a significant promotion in this year's poll. Ten years ago, it stood out as the best-performing film of the 21st century in the critics' list, landing in 24th place. With a fresh generation of critics chiming in – one that cinematically came of age when Wong's film had already attained modern-classic status – it was sure to rise up the ranks.

In the Mood for Love's spectacular top five placement, however, demonstrates the broadly seductive allure of a mid-century Hong Kong period piece that looks both forward and back, wallowing in nostalgia for a purer, lush form of cinematic romanticism while carving out more modern, even avant-garde forms of sensual and psychological expression from its saturated style. It's a film that invites you to think, 'They don't make them like they used to' – even though you know they never quite made them quite like this. The film's essential romantic narrative of forbidden yearnings and missed connections may be the stuff of vintage melodrama, but less familiar is the way Wong expands the simple anatomy of a thwarted love affair into an elastic meditation on personal unrest, political statelessness and the violence of time's unrelenting passage.

The film never tells you it's about any of that, of course. Wong's porous, often headily non-verbal filmmaking trusts us to feel the lovers' ennui and melancholy – and further, to identify it within ourselves – via its sheer accumulation of sounds, images and sense memories: be it the damp wraiths of steam swirling from an opened noodle container, the warm, vinyl-roughened croon of Nat King Cole on the soundtrack or the impossible lobby-card beauty of Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung, both preserved here in their ravishing prime, and somehow convincing as ordinary mortals made movie-star beautiful by love.

We're living through a fairly stifled age of visual storytelling, as the televisual pull of streaming culture encourages filmmakers to think smaller and more literal. As moving as its relationship study is, anybody who thinks of *In the Mood for Love*, however, thinks first of those sensory flourishes and grace notes – it's a film that even, somehow, has a signature scent. Its visual and sonic fragments cumulatively evoke not just a firmly past time and place but a mood, a feeling, a sorrow that drifts from the film's world to ours. That must account for its enduring, even increasing, popularity: it lingers like an unrequited crush.

Guy Lodge, bfi.org.uk

Wong Kar-Wai on 'In the Mood for Love'

Do you know why it took so long for this film to coalesce into its final form?

The project had a very complicated evolution. It goes back to 1997, when we had the idea of making two films back-to-back, one before the handover of Hong Kong, the other after. The first of these was supposed to be *Summer in*

Beijing, starring Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung, but we couldn't reach an agreement about filming in Beijing with the China Film Bureau and so we had to give up. But the actors were still onside, and I didn't want to let the project die. My first idea was to go ahead with *Summer in Beijing* – with 'Beijing' now being a restaurant in Macau. That led to the thought of making a film about food and we came up with three strands of story, one about a chef, one about a writer in the 60s and one about a delicatessen owner. At that time Maggie was supposed to be doing *Memoirs of a Geisha* for Steven Spielberg, so we thought we had only a short time to get it done. We planned the story about the delicatessen owner and then moved on to the one about the writer – at which point I realised that the one about the writer was the only one I really wanted to make.

It evolved as it went along. At first we thought it should be set only in 1962, and then it expanded to end in 1972, spanning a decade in the lives of two people. But after 14 months of filming we realised it was impossible for us to make a film on that scale. So we forgot about the 70s and decided to end the story in 1966. It took me a long time to decide what the end should be. Is it basically a love story about these two characters? Finally I think it's more than that. It's about the end of a period. 1966 marks a turning point in Hong Kong's history. The Cultural Revolution in the mainland had lots of knock-on effects, and forced Hong Kong people to think hard about their future. Many of them had come from China in the late 40s, they'd had nearly 20 years of relative tranquillity, they'd built themselves new lives – and suddenly they began to feel they'd have to move on again. So 1966 is the end of something and the beginning of something else.

Why did you go to Cambodia for the coda?

It was partly an accident. We needed something to make a visual contrast with the rest of the film. It's a bit like scoring chamber music; we needed some counterbalance, something about nature, something about history. We were shooting in Bangkok at the time and so we looked at all the city's temples or wats, but we couldn't find anything that was strong enough for our purposes. Our Thai production manager was the one who suggested Angkor Wat. I thought he was crazy, but he assured us it wasn't as difficult as we imagined. We could spare only five days because we were due back in Hong Kong for post-production and Cannes was looming. Thanks to our production manager's connections, we got permission to shoot from the Cambodian government within 48 hours. We shot over the Cambodian new year. We were supposed to film for only one day, but we ended up spending three days there. And when I found out that de Gaulle had visited Cambodia that year, I wanted that in the film too. De Gaulle is part of the colonial history that's about to fade away.

You make it clear that many of the supporting characters are having illicit sexual relationships, but the central couple do everything possible to repress their feelings for each other. You've even cut the one scene in which they have sex; instead, you show them holding hands in a taxi, implying they'll spend the night together. Is there some link between their repression and the period?

I cut the sex scene at the last moment. I suddenly felt I didn't want to see them having sex. And when I told William Chang [Wong's production designer, editor and closest collaborator], he said he felt the same but hadn't wanted to tell me! You know, what kept me working on this film for such a

long time was that I became addicted to it – specifically, to the mood it conjured up. I most of all wanted to capture that period, which was a much more subtle time than our own. From the very beginning I knew I didn't want to make a film about an affair. That would be too boring, too predictable, and it would have only two possible endings: either they go away together or they give each other up and go back to their own lives. What interested me was the way people behave and relate to each other in the circumstances shown in this story, the way they keep secrets and share secrets.

Why didn't you show his wife and her husband?

Mostly because the central characters were going to enact what they thought their spouses were doing and saying. In other words, we were going to see both relationships – the adulterous affair and the repressed friendship – in the one couple. It's a technique I learned from Julio Cortázar, who always has this kind of structure. It's like a circle, the head and tail of a snake meeting.

And that relates to the patterns of repetition and variation in the film?

I'm trying to show the process of change. Daily life is always routine – the same corridor, the same staircase, the same office, even the same background music – but we can see these two people change against this unchanging background. The repetitions help us to see the changes.

You've tackled the 60s once before, in Days of Being Wild, and you've suggested in your Director's Note that this film might answer the question 'Whatever happened to Days of Being Wild, Part II?' How do you see the relationship between the two films?

Days of Being Wild was for me a very personal reinvention of the 60s. Here, though, we consciously tried to recreate the actuality. I wanted to say something about daily life then, about domestic conditions, neighbours, everything. I even worked out a menu for the period of the shoot, with distinctive dishes for different seasons, and found a Shanghainese lady to cook them so that the cast would be eating them as we shot. I wanted the film to contain all those flavours that are so familiar to me. The audience probably won't notice a thing, but it meant a lot to me emotionally. When we started filming the 1962 scenes, William Chang asked me if we were finally making *Days of Being Wild, Part II*. I'll never make Part II as originally envisaged because that story doesn't mean the same to me any more. But this is in some sense Part II as I might conceive it now.

Interview with Wong Kar-Wai by Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, August 2000

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE (FA YEUNG NIN WA)

Director/Producer/Screenplay: Wong Kar-Wai
©/Presented by: Block 2 Pictures
Production Company: Jet Tone Production
Presented by: Paradis Films
Executive Producer: Chan Ye-Chen
Assistant Producer: Chan Wai-Si
Associate Producer: Jacky Pang Yee-Wah
Production Supervisor: Wong Lai-Tak
Production Managers: Law Kam-Chuen, Choi Suk-Yin
Thai Crew Production Manager: Parichart Khumrod
Assistant Directors: Siu Wai-Keung, Kong Yeuk-Sing
Continuity: Yu Haw-Yan
Incorporating quotations from the writings of: Liu Yi-Chang
Directors of Photography: Christopher Doyle, Mark Li Pingbin
Additional Photography: Kwan Pun-Leung, Yu Lik-Wai, Lai Yiu-Fai, Chan Kwong-Hung
Camera Assistant: Lai Yiu-Fai
Lighting: Wong Chi-Ming
Assistant Lighting: Kwan Wing-Cheung
Camera Crew: Ho Kin-Kwong, Ho Ka-Fai, Lau Tin-Wah
Gaffers: Chan Hon-Sung, Kwan Wing-Kin
Video Documentation: Kwan Pun-Leung, Amos Lee
Stills Photographer: Wing Shya
Supervising Editor: William Chang Suk-Ping
Editor: Chan Kei-Hap
Production Designer: William Chang Suk-Ping

Visual Consultant: Carmen Lui Lai-Wah
Art Directors: Man Lim-Chung, Alfred Yau Wai-Ming
Assistant Art Director: Lui Fung-Saan
Property Master: Wong Chi-On
Prop Men: Tang Nau-Wah, Chan Ching-Nau, Siu Ping-Lam
Thai Crew Props Master: Narong Osaypan
Make-up: Kwan Kei-Noh
Hair Design: Wong Kwok-Hung
Hairdresser: Luk Ha-Fong
Original Music: Michael Galasso
Spanish songs sung by: Nat King Cole
Sound Recordists: Kuo Li-Chi, Tang Shiang-Chu, Liang Chih-Da

Cast

Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk (*Mrs Chan, née Su Lizhen*)
Tony Leung Chiu-Wai (*Chow Mo-Wan*)
Rebecca Pan (*Mrs Suen*)
Lui Chun (*Mr Ho*)
Siu Ping-Lam (*Ah Ping*)
Chin Chi-Ang (*The Amah*)
Chan Man-Lui
Koo Kam-Wah
Yu Hsien
Chow Po-Chun

Hong Kong/France 2000©
98 mins

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah) Mon 6 Mar 20:40; Fri 10 Mar 21:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:30

Late Spring (Banshun) Mon 6 Mar 20:45; Tue 7 Mar 14:30; Sun 12 Mar 18:20

The Night of the Hunter

Tue 7 Mar 18:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:45

Mulholland Dr. Tue 7 Mar 20:10; Tue 14 Mar 20:15

Citizen Kane Tue 7 Mar 20:30

The Searchers Tue 7 Mar 20:35

Beau Travail Wed 8 Mar 14:30; Fri 10 Mar 20:45; Mon 13 Mar 18:20 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies, King's College London)

Daisies (Sedmikráska) + Meshes of the Afternoon Wed 8 Mar 18:20 (+ intro)

Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu) Wed 8 Mar 20:30

Cléo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)

Wed 8 Mar 21:00

Vertigo Thu 9 Mar 14:30; Wed 15 Mar 18:10

2001: A Space Odyssey

Thu 9 Mar 18:00

Singin' in the Rain Thu 9 Mar 18:10

(+ intro by Miles Eady, Film Writer and Curator); Tue 14 Mar 14:30

Man With a Movie Camera (Chelovek s kino-apparatom) Thu 9 Mar 20:50

Persona Thu 9 Mar 21:05

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari) Fri 10 Mar 18:00; Wed 15 Mar 14:30

Close-Up (Nema-ye Nazdik)

Fri 10 Mar 18:30; Wed 15 Mar 20:50

The Godfather Fri 10 Mar 19:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:15

La Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game)

Sat 11 Mar 18:05

Do the Right Thing Sat 11 Mar 18:10

Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles Sat 11 Mar 18:50

Playtime Sat 11 Mar 20:30

Shoah Sun 12 Mar 11:00

Apocalypse Now: Final Cut

Sun 12 Mar 20:00 BFI IMAX

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans Mon 13 Mar 20:35

Taxi Driver Mon 13 Mar 20:40

Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai)

Tue 14 Mar 18:40

The Passion of Joan of Arc (La passion de Jeanne d'Arc) Wed 15 Mar 20:40 (with score)

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://www.bfi.org.uk/join)

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with Sight and Sound, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info:

sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780