



## MAGGIE CHEUNG: FILMS OF ROMANCE, MELANCHOLY AND MAGIC

# A Fishy Story

### **A Fishy Story (Bat tuet maat dik yan)**

Director: Anthony Chan  
Production Companies: Bo Ho Films,  
Mobile Film Productions  
Producer: Leonard Ho  
Screenplay: Anthony Chan, Eddie Fong  
Director of Photography: Peter Pau  
Art Director: William Szeto  
Sound Recordist: Chu Yan Chan  
Cast:

Kenny Bee (*Kung*)  
Maggie Cheung (*Huang*)  
Josephine Koo (*Mrs Ku*)  
Anthony Chan (*Paul Chen*)  
Carrie Ng  
Season Ma  
Chung Lam  
Sin Hung Tam  
Hong Kong 1989  
100 mins  
Digital

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Cheung stars as an aspiring actress who befriends her neighbour, a struggling unlicensed cab driver. Set against the backdrop of the 1967 riots, it is a turbulent yet playful and romantic *Breakfast at Tiffany's*-esque caper. This role, which showcases the star's natural charm, elegance and comic timing, earned Cheung her first Best Actress award at the Hong Kong Film Awards.

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Even in the high-style regions of modern Hong Kong cinema, there is nothing quite like Anthony Chan's *A Fishy Story*. For a start, its casting goes against expectations: boyish Kenny Bee, more often in yuppie comedy parts, is in a dowdy role as a penniless cabbie treated like a toyboy by rich Josephine Koo (best known to western audiences as the lead in Yim Ho's *Homecoming*); and Maggie Cheung, currently among Hong Kong's best actresses, sends up her earlier bimbo image, playing a gold-digging starlet who can spot a diamond at 50 paces.

Then there is the gorgeous chiaroscuro photography by top cameraman Peter Pau, using Platinum Panaflex equipment with Primo lenses. And the whole 'retro' look of mid-1960s Hong Kong, complete with political (Mainland-inspired) demonstrations and taxi-drivers on strike (a variation on a running gag in Hong Kong cinema about the rudeness of local cabbies). Plus the send-up of movie-making that forms the background to Cheung's character.

There are several parallels with Tsui Hark's classic *Shanghai Blues* – the background of social unrest, the romantic-screwball tone of the script, the nail-biting finish – but *A Fishy Story* is less frenetic and more luxuriant. Its most notable characteristic, as befits a director from a former pop group, is its musical feel. There are very few moments when music is not present, either knitting together sequences (such as the repeated use of Jerome Kern's 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'), or right upfront (as in the showstopping production number 'Streetwalker', a cross between 'Big Spender' and *Irma La Douce*, belted out on the soundtrack by local songstress Rita Carpio). Despite the 1960s setting, the total effect is more like a 1940s Hollywood melodrama. The previous comedies of director Anthony Chan (who also pops up in the film as businessman Paul Chen) were little preparation for the explosion of style shown here. The movie won three categories at the Ninth Hong Kong Film Awards in April 1990 – Best Actress (Maggie Cheung), Best Photography (Peter Pau) and Best Art Direction (William Szeto). The original Chinese title, which refers to the Kenny Bee character, literally means *The Person Who Keeps His Socks On*.

Derek Elley, BFI London Film Festival 1990