



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 Ping-bing
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
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
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 (*Mrs Chan, née Su Lizhen*)
Tony Leung (*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©
99 mins
Digital 4K

In the Mood for Love 2001
Director: Wong Kar Wai
Cast: Maggie Cheung, Tony Leung
Hong Kong 2001
9 mins
Digital

The screening on Fri 27 Jun will be
introduced by Sam Wigley, BFI Digital
Features Editor at *Sight and Sound*

Re-releases

In the Mood for Love 25th Anniversary Edition

There is a church in the Alpine village of Wassen in Switzerland which, perched on a hillock in the middle of a valley, can be viewed three times over from the railway that climbs up the encircling mountains. As the train blinks in and out of tunnels on its spiral ascent, passengers first see the church from below. The next time the carriage shunts past, you're looking straight across at it. And the final time, you're looking down at its terracotta roof tiles and weathered cupola. There are not many things in this world that are beautiful from all angles.

The dazzling, 360-degree loveliness of Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* is not the only reason it reminds me of that church. It's also because circling that small white structure feels oddly analogous to circling Wong's film over the 25 years since Tony Leung first sidled past Maggie Cheung on the narrow steps down to the noodle shop. Those three different elevations become three successive states of being with respect to the story's central, worshipful preoccupation with romantic love. Watch *In the Mood for Love* when you have never been in love, or while you are in love, or after love has ended, and each time it will be beautiful. But – and this is the mark of a masterpiece – each time your different vantage point makes the same movie glint differently, the way sometimes it's the red warp of a silk taffeta cheongsam (a traditional high-collared, figure hugging dress) that catches the light, and sometimes it's the green weft.

In the Mood for Love is a film about longing for love, and falling in love with that longing. It deals in the erotics of anticipation, of proximity charged with potential, of possible future bliss so maddeningly close to hand its perfume clings to your clothes. We are perhaps particularly susceptible to this kind of unattainable romantic fantasy before we have experienced the prosaic, messy delights of real-world love for ourselves. And in the whisper-slight story of the two most attractive cuckolds in all of movie history, Wong found the perfect vehicle for fusing his rapturous cinephilia with his affection for old-school movie-star glamour and his unparalleled stylistic dexterity to create the ultimate cinematic representation of idealised, never-realised romance.

Mr Chow (Tony Leung) and Mrs Chan (Maggie Cheung) are neighbours subletting in a cramped Hong Kong apartment building in the 1960s. Everybody in the adjoining flats lives on top of one another, sharing gossip and mealtimes and all-night mah-jong games hosted by genial landlady Mrs Suen (a terrific Rebecca Pan, reuniting with Wong after her unforgettable performance in his 1990 film *Days of Being Wild*). But Mr Chow and Mrs Chan are drawn inexorably closer still by the unhappy knowledge – anticlimactically discovered through the banal details of a handbag and a tie and a series of lies about working late – that their respective spouses have started an adulterous affair. Around this slender storyline Wong weaves a shimmering tapestry of desire from a hundred iridescent barely-there threads, from light and colour, from gazes met and dropped, from literal smoke and actual mirrors.

But the silken rush of dreamlike imagery – courtesy of cinematographers Mark Lee Ping-bing and Christopher Doyle, whose contrasting rich and restless styles combine so uniquely here – is deceptive. It gives the impression of a seamless whole, albeit one partially obscured by door jambs and hatches, and blurred as though viewed through a sudden welling of tears. In fact, many elements of *In the Mood for Love* are borrowed from elsewhere, only to be so expertly repurposed they feel like they originated here. The film's central Proustian madeleine is 'Yumeji's Theme', the often repeated composition by Shigeru Umebayashi, with its mournful violin cascading like liquid over a bed of rhythmic, pizzicato strings. It is music so deeply evocative of Wong's film that to hear even a snatch is to imagine yourself slipping past a lover in a passageway, or leaning lightly, lost in thought, against a wall papered in torn posters. It is to crave noodles and cigarettes and the staccato clicking of heels on concrete. So it's a shock to remember the piece was originally composed for another film, Seijun Suzuki's *Yumeji* (1991). But then, the whole soundtrack is dislocated, just as the most memorable exterior Hong Kong locations were actually shot in Bangkok. Three Nat King Cole songs feature the crooner singing in American-accented Spanish; the Zhou Xuan number that gives the film its Chinese title was originally written for the 1947 movie *An All-Consuming Love*. Even the English title has a purloined cinematic pedigree. Wong chose it because of the wonderful Bryan Ferry

Re-releases

Hidden Caché

From Thu 19 Jun

In the Mood for Love:

25th Anniversary Edition

From Fri 27 Jun

Barry Lyndon

From Fri 18 Jul

Amadeus

From Fri 25 Jul

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

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



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

25 & Under

We want to open up great independent and classic film and TV for all, making it as accessible as possible. If you are under the age of 26, you can get discounted tickets for BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. BFI Southbank cinema tickets are £4, with festival tickets £5, so you can enjoy the very best of cinema from around the world at an affordable price.

Sign up today and verify your age online, and you can start enjoying discounted tickets immediately.

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

cover, but the song 'I'm in the Mood for Love' was first written for the 1935 musical comedy *Every Night at Eight*.

The nods to classical Hollywood abound. Wong has acknowledged a debt to *Vertigo* (1958), especially likening the mildly perverse characterisation and contrapuntal casting of Tony Leung's Mr Chow to that of James Stewart's obsessive detective Scotty in Hitchcock's own tale of thwarted desire. But there are traces of other films noirs and pulp paperbacks – Elvis Mitchell, writing in the *New York Times*, saw Mr Chow and Mrs Chan as characters 'who are usually the victims in a James M. Cain story'. And, of course, there's the indecently luscious, saturated colour palette, present from the instant Cheung blossoms on to the screen in the most vividly floral dress from her jaw-dropping wardrobe (22 cheongsams, each tailored to such a sculptural tightness they are almost fetishwear). The shockingly red curtain in the hotel hallway, the coral blanket on Mr Chow's bed, the acid-green outfit Mrs Chan wears as she sits motionless, silently crying – the riot of colour and clashing pattern contributes to the claustrophobia that permeates every frame.

But the film is not only about this speculative, fantasy future. It is also an expression of an often languorously extended present, of the way the euphoria of love, even when resisted, can make a minute into a millennium. Wong has always loved slow motion, but here, using it sparingly, he heightens its effectiveness, especially as applied to sequences that were hardly moving at a breakneck pace to begin with. We get to inhabit those moments so tangibly we can practically feel the fabrics and touch the surfaces of William Chang's immaculate production and costume design (and with Chang also the editor, the cutting has a similarly luxuriant finish). Dawdling within these fleeting impressions imprints them on us to the extent that Mr Chow is always sheltering from the rain in that noodle-shop passage. Mrs Chan is forever retreating down that red-curtained hotel hallway. And together, they are eternally walking home, playacting the roles of their faithless partners – a pantomime that is not only a rehearsal for some putative confrontation but also, at essence, a gesture of incredible intimacy. There is no closeness closer than that of a shared illusion, especially when the illusion is that you are married to one another.

The big clock that dominates the hallway in Mrs Chan's workplace ticks the hours away. The frequent invocations of birthdays, dinner times, imminent departures and late-night homecomings all pin the film back down to a notional calendar whenever it threatens to set itself adrift entirely from the rules of reality. Each new section is titled with the year in which it takes place, and just before the strange, sad epilogue in Angkor Wat, there is a surprising burst of newsreel footage of President De Gaulle's 1966 visit to Phnom Penh. It as though real history were suddenly reasserting itself now that the dream of love in imaginary 1960s Hong Kong is truly over. Looking across at *In the Mood for Love*, from eye level, it unfolds with startling, tactile immediacy in a present tense that sometimes dutifully obeys and sometimes wilfully disobeys the physics of clock-time.

So much for the futures and the presents it contains. *In the Mood for Love* is just as powerfully a film about the past, especially if you are watching it from that third vantage point when the passage of years and the accrual of experience bring the film's textures of memory and regret glinting to the surface. The movie is suffused with nostalgia for a time and place that, whether it ever was real at all, is now irretrievably gone. A late title card reads 'That era has passed. Nothing that belonged to it exists any more.' But this perspective also makes the film's undercurrents run darker to me now. Its mysteries are more complex, its power less straightforwardly attributable to the pious purity of the central couple's longing and loving and losing. I notice the raw deal the cheating spouses get – just as it is never explicitly determined that Mr Chow and Mrs Chan do not consummate their relationship (in fact, Wong shot a lovemaking scene but wisely decided against using it), it is never explicitly demonstrated that their partners' affair is the tawdry, cruel betrayal we are cued to believe it is.

Perhaps it is the malleable nature of the film's internal chronometry, with every beat simultaneously anticipated, experienced and poignantly remembered, that makes Wong's film itself so unusually immune to ageing. That we are celebrating its 25th anniversary does not, for once, seem so impossible – indeed, it's hard to believe that this strangely eternal movie could be so young. Was there ever a time before *In the Mood for Love*? Surely it has always been there, like an old church on a hilltop, or an ancient temple in Cambodia, or a far-off tree on a distant mountain into which generations of yearning lovers have whispered their secrets.

Jessica Kiang, *Sight and Sound*, May 2025