

Location, location, location



Jack Kao and Lu Yi-ching share great chemistry in *A Place of One's Own*.



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Lou Yi-an's debut feature is a black comedy about the search for home, whether in this world or the next

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Once a rebellious wannabe rocker, Lou Yi-an (樓一安) has become an award-winning filmmaker and long-term collaborator with director Singing Chen (陳志宜). Together, the two filmed Chen's much-acclaimed *Bundled* (我叫阿銘啦) (2000) and last year's *God Man Dog* (流浪神狗人).

Similarly, Lou's feature debut *A Place of One's Own* (一席之地) is also a socially conscious film with a multi-threaded narrative. Co-written and produced by Chen, the movie is a black comedy about the absurdity of contemporary Taiwanese society as told through the stories of a struggling punk rocker and an ailing craftsman.

The film begins with the once-influential punk rocker Mozi (Mo Tzu-yi, 莫子儀) struggling with his music career and facing eviction from his apartment. His musician girlfriend Kasey (Lu Chia-hsin, 路嘉欣), however, is on a fast-track to stardom with her sweet, pop-rock tunes. Their different trajectories cause a severe strain on their relationship.

Meanwhile, in the mountain cemeteries on the outskirts of Taipei, Lin (Jack Kao, 高捷) earns his living as a maker of elaborate paper houses burned as offerings at funeral. Though a master of his trade, Lin lacks the money to pay for surgery needed to treat his cancer. Instead, he sets out to build a palatial paper house for himself to ensure that he will live more comfortably in the next life. Meanwhile, a property developer has his eyes on the land where the Lin family lives because its good feng shui makes it the perfect location for a new cemetery.

Lin's wife A-yue (Lu Yi-ching, 陸奕靜), a psychic who also sweeps tombs for the families of the deceased, tries to pay for Lin's medical bill by making deals with a loan shark and one of her "clients," a ghost who is worried about his widow, who lives in the Sanying Aboriginal Community (三鶯部落).

Bridging the two stories is Lin's teenage son Gang (Tang Zhen-gang, 唐振剛), a computer geek who enters the real estate profession to help his family and finds Mozi's apartment in his portfolio. Mistaking Mozi for a squatter, Gang locks him out of the flat, unaware that this may set Mozi over the edge.

A Place of One's Own has a smart script that examines the meanings of home and land on multiple levels through the comparisons and contrasts created by the different characters and plot lines. On one end of the spectrum is the property developer who sees land as property to be bought and sold for profit. On the other end are the dispossessed Aborigines in the Sanying community. Gang trades virtual property in computer games for

real money, while Lin, a masterful builder of paper homes for the afterlife, struggles to survive on earth. And Mozi, ironically, finds his place in the world only when people go crazy for his music after his death.

As a first-time feature-film director, Lou apparently has a plenty of interesting ideas but lacks the ability execute them with spark and punch. The omnibus narration unfolds in a functional manner — clear enough to keep the storylines straight but a bit too plain to offer surprises. The original rock tunes by guitarist and music producer Showy Showy (徐千秀) are worth noting as the music imbues the movie with a feeling of restlessness.

Audiences who have seen *God Man Dog* will recognize similar stylistic elements in Lou's film, most noticeably the use of religious imagery and the Kao's wonderful deadpan. Infusing his everyman role with life and soul, Kao shares electrifying onscreen chemistry with Lu Yi-ching, who maintains an arresting balance between comedy and authenticity.

As in *God Man Dog*, the story involving a young urban couple is the film's weakest section, as the protagonist's existential distress and torment comes across as more acted than felt. Theater and film actor Mo turns in a slightly stretched performance as a headstrong rocker. Actress Lu Chia-hsin brings the film's watch-ability down several notches with her irritatingly expressionless face.

Film Notes

A PLACE OF ONE'S OWN (一席之地)

DIRECTED BY:
LOU YI-AN (樓一安)

STARRING:
JACK KAO (高捷) AS LIN, LU YI-CHING (陸奕靜) AS A-YUE, MO TZU-YI (莫子儀) AS MOZI, LU CHIA-HSIN (路嘉欣) AS KASEY, TANG ZHEN-GANG (唐振剛) AS GANG
RUNNING TIME: 118 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
IN MANDARIN, TAIWANESE AND AMIS WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY