



Le Voyage du ballon rouge

Flight of the Red Balloon

Hou Hsiao-hsien

FRANCE, 2007
French

113 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Margo Films/ Les Films du Lendemain/ 3H Productions Limited**
Producer: **François Margolin, Kristina Larsen**

Screenplay: **Hou Hsiao-hsien**
Cinematographer: **Mark Lee Ping Bing**
Editor: **Liao Ching Sung, Jean-Christophe Hym**
Sound: **Chu Shih Yi**
Principal Cast: **Juliette Binoche, Simon Iteanu, Song Fang, Hippolyte Girardot**

Production: **Margo Films, 19 rue des Gobelins, 75013 Paris, France. T (33-1) 4707-3412 F (33-1) 4408-0209 fmargolin@yahoo.fr**

CONTACT INFORMATION

US Distributor: **IFC Films**
International Sales Agent: **Films Distribution**

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The helium-filled icon of Albert Lamorisse's beloved *Le Ballon Rouge* serves as the breath-taking inspiration for Hou Hsiao-hsien's first film set outside of Asia. While the original used the balloon as a whimsical tour guide to Paris at its most romantic, this new balloon is a harbinger for intercultural discourse – a symbol for the moments when East meets West. Like the original film, Hou's homage also points to the inspirational connections between art and life that are possible when we use just a bit of imagination.

Hou wraps a charming, engaging story around these gentle profundities. The great Juliette Binoche is Suzanne, a whirlwind of a mother and artist. She works as a puppeteer – Chinese puppet theatre is a running theme for Hou – and is devoted to her young son, Simon (Simon Iteanu). But she is self-obsessed, slightly manic and in need of serious help around the house. She hires Song (Song Fang), a Taiwanese film student living in Paris, to mind Simon. Much of the film tracks Song and Simon wandering through the sites of Lamorisse's Paris, but now seen through Song's – or rather, Hou's – camera.

The rest of the film unfolds in Suzanne's artfully cluttered apartment, where long, often funny takes introduce us to the trio's odd and endearing relationship and the bizarre cast of characters who come for visits, piano lessons and discussions of legal matters.

Hou is probably at his most self-consciously postmodern here, insistent on looking behind the facade of the original film to find out what made it tick. The newly minted

story that issues from his investigation turns out to be a wonderful treat in itself. He is supported marvellously by all three actors, but especially by Binoche, in a role that uses her emotional range to full advantage.

Finally, the last sequence of *Le Voyage du ballon rouge* happens to be one of this year's most transcendent moments set to film, evoking cinema's transformative power in the subtlest of ways.

■ Noah Cowan



Hou Hsiao-hsien was born in the Guangdong province of China and raised in Taiwan, where he rose through the ranks of the film industry to become one of its most acclaimed directors. He has been distinguished by such celebrated films as *A Time to Live*, *A Time to Die* (85), *Dust in the Wind* (86), *A City of Sadness* (89), *The Puppetmaster* (93), which won a Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, *Good Men*, *Good Women* (95), *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (96), *Flowers of Shanghai* (98), *Millennium Mambo* (01), *Café Lumière* (04), *Three Times* (05) and *Le Voyage du ballon rouge* (07).

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