



Millennium Mambo

Hou Hsiao-hsien

TAIWAN/FRANCE, 2001

119 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: 3H Productions/
 Paradis Films/OrlyFilms/SinoMovie.com
 Executive Producer: Hwarng Wern-ying,
 Gilles Ciment
 Producer: Hou Hsiao-hsien, Eric
 Heumann
 Screenplay: Chu Tien-wen
 Cinematographer: Mark Lee Ping-bing
 Editor: Liao Ching-sung
 Production Designer: Hwarng Wern-ying
 Sound: Tu Duu-chih, Kuo Li-chi
 Music: Lim Giong, Yoshihiro Hanno
 Principal Cast: Shu Qi, Jack Kao, Tuan
 Chun-hao, Takeuchi Jun, Takeuchi Ko

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“Looking at the young friends around me, I find that their life cycle and rhythm, birth, aging, illness and death move several times faster than those of my generation. This is particularly true among young girls: like flowers, they fade almost immediately upon blooming. The process occurs in an instant.”

– Hou Hsiao-hsien

Vicky is a hostess at one of Linsen North Road's trendy Yao-tou bars. Engrossed in the narcissistic lifestyle of nightclubs and Ecstasy pills, her romantic attention is divided between two men. Hao-hao, her neurotic and jealous live-in boyfriend, constantly suspects her of infidelities and goes to absurd lengths to check up on her. Vicky resolves to break it off with him once she has drained the \$500,000 from their bank account. Jack, an enterprising gangster with a personal stake in the bar where Vicky works, begins an ambiguous love affair with her which may or may not lead to a closer, more intimate relationship. His presence in her life becomes both a source of trouble and a beacon of salvation.

The first in an intended series in which Hou aims to record the changing lifestyles of people in Taiwan, *Millennium Mambo* was originally touted as a change of direction for the filmmaker. Given the film's neon-saturated urban setting, hedonistic, angst-ridden characters and detached, complacent voice-over narration, one would be inclined to think that Hou has taken a cue

from the younger generation of Asian filmmakers, but the long takes, convincing realism and highly-refined sense of staging all convey Hou's unique cinematic language. A story of female entrapment scored by a throbbing techno thump, *Millennium Mambo* features a radiant performance from Hong Kong starlet Shu Qi, photographed with playful luminescence by cinematographer Mark Lee Ping-bing (*In The Mood For Love*).

■ Noah Cowan



Hou Hsiao-hsien was born in 1947 in China. In 1948 his family moved to Taiwan, where he has helped to shape a distinct cinematic consciousness. He studied filmmaking at the National Taiwan Academy of Arts and graduated in 1972. His fifth film, *A Time to Live*, *A Time to Die* (85), won the International Critic's Award at the Berlin film festival. *City of Sadness* (89) won the Golden Lion at the Venice film festival and *The Puppetmaster* (93) was awarded the Jury Prize at the Cannes film festival. He has also produced such classics as Edward Yang's *Taipei Story* (85) (in which he played the lead role) and Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (92). He was voted the most important filmmaker of the nineties by the International Society of Cinémathèques. *Millennium Mambo* (01) is his fifteenth film.

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