



THE SON

Reviewed by Amy McGee

The Son, released in 2002, was directed by award winning film makers **Jean-Pierre** and **Luc Dardenne** of Belgium. Their background is in documentary film making transitioning into narrative film. Their credits include **La Promesse** and **Rosetta**.

This film is about a carpentry instructor at an industrial school for troubled young men. **Olivier**, the carpenter, is portrayed by **Olivier Gourmet**, who had also worked with the Dardenne brothers in **La Promesse**. The character Olivier leads a pained, simple existence. As the story unfolds, we discover that he is divorced and his deceased son had been murdered. His ex-wife is re-marrying and is expecting a baby, emphasizing the fact he has been unable to move on. His days are spent dealing with the troubled lives of his

students while trying to teach them a trade. He takes a paternal interest in a new student, **Francis**. An unlikely friendship develops between them as we find out Francis had been responsible for his son's murder. Olivier is unable to explain why he has formed this bond when confronted by his ex-wife. Given the opportunity for retribution, Olivier cannot go through with it. The end of the movie leaves the viewer wondering if this relationship will continue or if Olivier will seek revenge.

An ongoing theme in the film is measurement, both figuratively and literally. It explores the distance between characters. The Dardenne's chose to make Olivier's character a carpenter to underscore this theme. Francis is taught how to properly care for a fold-out ruler and later uses it to test Olivier's knowledge.

The Dardenne's employed the use of a handheld camera in the film. This gave it a documentary feel of being there in the scene. The camera angles, especially of Olivier, were sometimes from behind or to the side, not always straight on. This technique was used to show that the film was primarily about getting inside Olivier's head and trying to understand what he is going through. The filmmaker's did an excellent job of tackling a difficult subject.

AMERICAN ASIAN COWBOY

By G.R. Claveria, William Henry and Breck J. Hapner

Dayton Filmmaker G.R. [Guil] Claveria, in his feature-length film American Asian Cowboy, depicts the exploration of an artist through various states of being leading to catharsis and self-understanding. Claveria was motivated to begin his cinematic vision after experiencing the death of his girlfriend, creating a desire to portray the love and pain which both teaches us wisdom and leads us into new arenas of awareness. Claveria wrote about his film in the Dayton Single Source News (May, 2003):

"ON LOVE: The Genesis of my obsession began when I stumbled on an article written about an Asian American musician from Amarillo, Texas, **Lee Tan**. I was intrigued by his attempt to go against the grain and I was inspired to learn more. **Lizzy [Jessica "Lizzy" Stewart]** and I decided to begin a journey, retracing Lee Tan's footsteps. [Then] the unthinkable happened. While driving and videotaping Lizzy the car swerved off the road, hitting trees and killing her instantaneously. My world stopped! Even though I suffered only minor physical abrasions, I carry the emotional dents everywhere I go. [American Asian Cowboy] is my apology and sonnet to the first woman I ever loved.

ON LIFE: This piece has been [largely] self-examination - how tragedy destroys a life [while] giving birth to a new one. I am a person who needs to release pain through the canvas of media. With this film, I hope to blur the lines of perception and give clarity.

ON LEE: **Lee Tan**, as an artist, was never given national recognition but he is significant to others producing art for the sole purpose of expression. He was a Renaissance man...a musician, a painter, writer, poet and philosopher who never wanted anything but to love someone and be loved. That theme is universal...it goes beyond Asian, it goes beyond American...it is the essence of existence. I feel his life had all the elements of the Great American Novel... triumph, tragedy and toughness through times of adversity. Through Lee I discovered many things about myself.

ON THE STRUCTURE: I divided the film into four parts: Red, White, Blue and Yellow Periods. As you watch the film, you discover the hidden symbolisms and metaphors used to express the multi-faceted themes in the movie. The entire movement of the film is symbolic."

Guil also took a few moments to speak with **NID Correspondent William Henry:**

William: What sets you apart from other directors? What message do you send?

Guil: [I don't] want to label myself, to be labelled as a Filipino director - I always cast very integrated, trying to get a variety. I try to add a different twist, though and go against the grain in a counter-cultural style.

WH: How was *American Asian Cowboy* conceived?

GC: I got it off two parts: one was from checking off the boxes on a form asking what my nationality was - and my nationality was Asian-American, right? And I thought: *why was Asian before American?* That's why I titled the film "American Asian Cowboy", because even though I look Asian, I'm completely "Americanized". I was born and raised here and I think like an American more than a Filipino - and that's where the story lies. The message is: "We're ultimately all Americans if we're here in this country." I thought of an interesting concept, of a Cowboy, emblematic of America. Usually you don't see the typical Asian as a "Cowboy". I based a lot of my ex-wife, because the love story is really about her...she's Caucasian. The struggles we went through, the things we saw. We didn't see each other as White or Filipino... we just saw each other.

WH: Has making this film become part of your healing process?

GC: I'm living it every day. It's very personal, a love story before anything else. It's almost like I didn't choose to do the project...it sounds so cliché, but it just came out of me. I needed the release, so I did it. I feel like I have something to say...it's just from a different perspective.

Check out more of American Asian Cowboy at:
www.americanasiancowboy.com

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