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Movies Features

Shift, a short film

By April MacIntyre Aug 22, 2006, 6:07 GMT

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I love [short films](#). Done well, they take a particular subject and present in short format, allowing you to digest the concise matter, illuminating it with a more intense clarity and visceral punch.

'Shift' is a hot film, and worthy to be nominated for an Academy Award © for Live Action [Short](#)

[Film](#). Shot over a year ago in San Francisco, 'Shift' was the recent Danes With Films Winner of the Grand Jury Award for Best Short Film, and it has been sweeping festivals and building great word of mouth within filmmaker communities.

Writer and Director Jonathan Yi has drawn upon his own work and life experiences to create Alex, a half Korean/half Jewish [acting](#) student, who is mistaken to be Chinese and hired to work the graveyard shift of a mailroom dominated by first generation Chinese men, dotted with African-Americans and a sole angry white man.

Alex is played brilliantly in a quiet, bemused and soulfully aware performance by actor Aldous Davidson.

On creating the characters for this [film](#), Yi states: "To my friends' surprise, I learned to deeply respect my coworkers who my friends and I initially wrote off, and instead became disillusioned with my 'successful' affluent friends who dominated my social life. The characters I met every night from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. were the most hardworking and interesting I have ever come across in my life. Their lives are an untold story that I believe deserves to be told."

"Shift" takes us to any corporate lower floor, where men and women work hard, long late jobs that pay little and reward no one. Yi's character Alex enters an industrial world of working men whose humor and banter with each other mask their undercurrent of rage, brokenness and exhaustion in their working roles.

The anonymous warehouse lunchroom serves as Yi's floor for the multi-cultural and diverse age interaction scenes for their venting and humor. Alex works with the older Asian men Oscar and Wing, Paul Sum and Jackson Ning, both actors do a brilliant job portraying the accepting and pragmatic elders of the shift who act as mentors to Alex.

There is the angry white man played well by Tim O'Malley as Marc, who has bounced from one dead-end gig to the next, and upon learning of more cutbacks and eventual downsizing, he eventually breaks through his quiet menacing behavior, reaching out to Alex in an effort to connect somehow. Marc's rage is completely ignored by the other workers who sweep their feelings under their hats in favor of one-upping and keeping the mood lighter.

Shift addresses universal themes of the working class as pawns in the world that are easily replaced with no real remorse.

Alex has a very rich girlfriend, played pitch perfect by pretty newcomer Allyn Rachel who does a chillingly detached turn as Melanie, the girlfriend who reassures Alex he won't be working with "those losers" for long. Her attitude and life is cleverly captured up in shots of the elegant multi-tiered fountain in front of Melanie's home, symbolizing her life and class as the

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top tier "pissing" down literally on the lower classes with cold disregard and detachment.

Yi's short film is a well-conceived, lensed and executed thesis, his hometown roots are in San Francisco, his filmmaking partners and crew are all New York based. He is a [filmmaker](#) to watch, and his virtually unknown cast, in particular, Allyn Rachel, Aldous Davidson, Al Thompson and Paul Sum.

It is worth noting that the crafts of this short film were all executed brilliantly, expert cinematography, excellent muted acoustical scoring, perfect locations, costuming, set design all are top notch.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

During the summer of 2003, Yi returned to San Francisco and attempted to find work for the few months he was home, the only place he could find temp work was the graveyard shift in the mailroom of Charles Schwab, a trading/investing financial institution.

Despite hearing about working class issues, it took Yi working side by side with first generation Chinese and African-Americans to realize just how much he had to learn about life and realities of class and work struggles.

While Yi's affluent upwardly mobile friends slept, he worked with people who all held two or three full-time jobs and never got a chance to sleep. Ironically his job was to send financial statements to millionaires.

UPCOMING SCREENINGS

28th Annual IFP MARKET | New York, NY
 Angelika Film Center (18 W Houston St. New York, NY)
 Tuesday, September 19, 2006: 1:00 PM | Angelika Theater 2

Oakland International Film Festival | Oakland, CA
 Grand Lake Theater (3200 Grand Ave. Oakland, CA)
 Thursday, September 21, 2006: 3:30 p.m.
 Friday, September 22, 2006: 10:30 p.m.
 Saturday, September 23, 2006: 7:00 p.m. (Best of Shorts: Competition Narrative)

San Diego Asian Film Festival | San Diego, CA
 UltraStar Mission Valley (7510 Hazard Center Dr. San Diego, CA)
 October 12-19, 2006

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