

ely
film
society

may
2018

the
notes

coming up
@ kings lynn

○ **FILM:** Thursday 14th June 7.30pm
ALL ABOUT EVE

○ **SOCIAL EVENT:** Friday 15th June
All day Trip to Aldeburgh and its
cinema

○ **FILM:** Thursday 12th July 7.30pm
THE BIG SICK

further details klcc.uk

Chungking Express

Wong Kar-Wai, Hong Kong 1994

Written by Wong Kar-Wai

Brigitte Lin Woman in blonde wig
Tony Chiu-Wai Leung Cop 663
Faye Wong Faye
Takeshi Kaneshiro
... He Zhiwu, Cop 223
Valerie Chow Air Hostess
Jinquan Chen
... Manager of 'Midnight Express'
Lee-Na Kwan Richard
Zhiming Huang Man
Liang Zhen The 2nd May
Songshen Zuo Man

Music by Frankie Chan, Michael
Galasso and Roel A. García

Cinematography by Christopher
Doyle and Wai-Keung Lau

During the troubled production of *Ashes of Time*, which was supposed to be Wong Kar-wai's third film, the director took some time off, sat down and did what anyone in his position would do: made another movie. And he did it with a fast-paced, highly improvisatory shooting schedule, writing pages of the script during the day and shooting them at night. The



result, *Chungking Express*, is among Wong's most exciting films and is an early precursor to the expressive odes to romantic longing that have come to define his work.

The title is symbolic of the film's lively, anything-goes sensibility, representing the pair of largely unrelated stories that make up its bifurcated narrative. The first story, which takes place mostly at Chungking Mansions, focuses on a lovesick police

officer, no. 223 (Takeshi Kaneshiro), pining over his ex-girlfriend May. The officer has taken to collecting cans of pineapple that expire on May 1, his birthday and the day on which he will give up on his ex. Some of these layered puns border on the precious, but annoyance is avoided through Wong's visual style. Wong and cinematographer Christopher Doyle create a hazy, dreamlike world that, through stylistic techniques like

copious use of slow motion and step printing, heighten the tension of the officer's romantic desires.

The officer's moping ends when he runs into a woman in a blond wig (Brigitte Lin), who Wong suggests is caught up in some sort of mob-run drug ring. No. 223 runs into the woman during the film's opening chase sequence, and then later on in a bar, where he picks her up and takes her to a hotel room, where she promptly falls asleep. Wong treats no. 223's lovesickness with humor (as when the officer foolishly eats dozens of cans of pineapple in one sitting) and tender sensitivity (as when he polishes the blond-wigged woman's shoes before leaving the hotel), and he ends the segment with his typical mix of regret and romanticism. No. 223 is still alone, but he's free to keep looking for love.

But Wong doesn't focus on the search. Upon resolving no. 223 and the blond-wigged woman's relationship, he ditches their story for another that more closely resembles the narratives that have



My best film is always my next film. I couldn't make *Chungking Express* now, because of the way I live and drink I've forgotten how I did it. I don't believe in film school or film theory. Just try and get in there and make the bloody film, do good work and be with people you love

Christopher Doyle, cinematographer

dominated his recent work. Beginning at a restaurant called the Midnight Express, *Chungking Express's* second half focuses on another police officer, no. 663 (Tony Leung Chiu Wai), and Faye (Faye Wong), a waitress at the restaurant who falls madly in love with the officer. No. 663, himself the victim of a recent breakup, ignores Faye, who takes up sneaking into no. 663's apartment and cleaning it. When no. 663 discovers Faye in his apartment, it kicks off a typically Wongian romance—aching, beautiful,



WONG KAR-WAI
Born 17 July 1958
Shanghai, China

impermanent.

Despite the liveliness of *Chungking Express's* first half, it's this second story that catapults it into the company of Wong's best films. As in *In the Mood for Love*, Wong repeatedly finds the perfect visual and aural complements to his characters' romantic rapture, as in the stunning (goddamn stunning) slow-motion shot of Faye watching no. 663 drink a cup of coffee, or the screwball comedy of Faye's apartment-cleaning sequences, or the ways in which Wong uses the Mamas and the Papa's *California Dreaming* (over and over again) to express the lovers' tumultuous relationship.

Wong sometimes gets flack for his

occasionally purple dialogue (and sometimes, as in *My Blueberry Nights*, he damn well deserves it), but in a film like *Chungking Express*, words don't matter. To Wong, love isn't something you can talk about; words are inadequate, empty, inevitably reductive. Love is something you see, sense, feel, and *Chungking Express* is one of Wong's purest evocations of its excitement and heartbreak.

Matt Noller
Slant magazine

ONE NATION, TWO LANGUAGES

“ Mandarin and Cantonese are not mutually intelligible.

In other words, while often referred to as “dialects,” they are as different as two separate languages. This is complicated, however by their sharing the same writing system. There is no such thing as “written Mandarin” or “written Cantonese,” and references to such, in screenplays or conversation among people hoping to make a film with Chinese content, is a telltale sign that you know little about China.

The written language is all just “Chinese,” and for all intents and purposes, it is equivalent to a world in which the sentence *Puella pulchra est* were spoken among French people as *La jeune fille est belle*, and Spaniards as *La muchacha es linda*. Certainly Mandarin and Cantonese are related in the way Romance languages, or English and German are, and a few words in Cantonese and Mandarin will share a pronunciation. Nevertheless, speakers of either who have not studied the other's language will not be able to understand each another.

[...] Wong Kar-Wai's films like *Chungking Express* and *2046* feature an element that is little remarked-upon in the West: in them, Cantonese-speaking and Mandarin-speaking actors address and answer one another in perfect comprehension without skipping a beat, a kind of radical utopianism, a fantasy of a world in which Chinese people can all get along in perfect understanding. ”

from <http://chinafilm insider.com/chinasplaining-mandocanto/>

**NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
THE CONFORMIST**
(Bernardo Bertolucci,
Italy 1970)

Monday 18 June

www.elyfilmsociety.com

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