

CATHERINE DENEUVE

in

SPIRIT WORLD

a film by
ERIC KHOO

Singaporean director Eric Khoo (known for "Be with me" and "Ramen Shop") is currently in production of his next movie in Japan with french icon Catherine Deneuve in the leading role. She will be surrounded by japanese actors Masaaki Sakai, Yutaka Takenouchi and Jun Fubuki.

SYNOPSIS

Legendary singer Claire flies to Japan for a final sold-out concert.

When the show ends, so does Claire's life on earth.

But an unexpected new life in the spirit world - where she will be guided by Yuzo, one of her biggest fans – awaits.

SCREENPLAY

EDWARD KHOO

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

ADRIAN TAN

PRODUCTION

**m.i.movies,
ZHAO WEI FILMS,
FOURIER FILMS,
KNOCKONWOOD,
WILD ORANGE ARTISTS**

INTERNATIONAL SALES

GOODFELLAS

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ARP SELECTION



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PRESS & INFORMATIONS

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I have always dreamt about making a film where spirits would take on the lead roles and shine out a ray of hope - a spiritual epiphany.

From "Mee Pok Man", my debut feature back in 1995, with the fleeting ghost father to the spectre parents in "Ramen Shop" (2018), the presence of spirits in our world has been a thematic staple of my films.

Having grown up on a steady diet of "Twilight Zone" TV episodes during my formative years and falling in love with the simple love stories of yesteryear I thought: wouldn't it be romantic if two lonely souls could find love in death - in the spirit world?

I have always wondered about that Bardo state where either the spirits roam the earth before they ascend or are destined to be earthbound for eternity. What determines the ultimate outcome? This is an unanswerable question that has consistently occupied my imagination.

Music has always been my fuel and inspiration for my creative process and I want it to be the core of this film where our two musical souls compose a song together that they had been unable to achieve in their living years. Through destiny and karma, these two strangers come together to shine a light to a struggling, broken individual who has lost his way.

Together with my son, Edward, it has been a heartfelt, inspiring journey watching films together during the COVID-19 pandemic, listening to the music of the Beach Boys and talking about guardian angels and how to make a film consisting of these disparate and yet harmonious elements.

I hope that "Spirit World" will be able to bring together these wondrous touchstones of our lives (and beyond) into an emotionally resonant and spiritually fulfilling experience.

Eric KHOO

SPIRIT WORLD

DIRECTOR'S INTENTION NOTE:

I've always wondered what happens after death – what the afterlife might be. It's an existential question that has preoccupied human beings forever and constitutes the basis of many religions and philosophies. We will never know the truth, of course, and can only imagine answers.

Spirit World explores the discovery of humanity in a hereafter – beyond the gulf that separates death from life – where we find what remains of souls, redemption, love and guardian angels.

Our central character, Claire (Catherine Deneuve), is a French pop singer who enjoyed her moment of glory in the 1960s, a little like Françoise Hardy.

That she dies in Japan is integral to the story, since she finds herself not only in the strange world of the afterlife, but also in a country that isn't her own. Her sense of bewilderment is heightened and the role of her guide, Yuzo, made even more crucial. She is drawn into the family setting of Yuzo and his son Hayato, and this journey will ultimately allow her the opportunity of redeeming herself and finding her daughter Elsa.

Japanese spiritual values are also fundamental to our film – the belief that all natural things (trees, rocks, flowers, animals, even sounds) contain a divine element.

In Japanese culture, the supernatural plays an important role and destiny is held to exert a powerful influence at every moment of life. Apparently fortuitous events can have major consequences and should never be overlooked in life's great fantasy.

The film's visual atmosphere and tone draw inspiration from the paintings of American artist Edward Hopper. This realism foregrounds the emotional isolation, the solitude, that form the background to our narrative intention, both in the real world and in the afterlife.

We will achieve our artistic goal by shooting with ARRI cameras equipped with fixed focal length lenses, in order to capture the best image quality and shallowest depth of field. Shooting with two cameras will also allow us to better capture the interaction between characters.

In particular, given that Claire and Yuzo communicate in different languages (French and Japanese), we would like this unusual form of dialogue to be as visually fluid and natural as possible.

Since Claire and Yuzo are spirits, their movements will be expressed in a way that transcends space and time, as if they were being teleported – in contrast with Hayato, who must move physically from one place to another. There will be no special visual effects; all these contrasts will be achieved by material means, working on location, largely with natural lighting.

To better distinguish the spirit world from the real world, the mis-en-scène will move between fixed and stable shots, dynamic moving shots and subjective shots from Claire's point of view. This visual technique, combined with the creative use of music and sound design, will enable audiences to find themselves in the afterlife at the same time as Claire.

The use of intimate close-ups will capture the characters' inner worlds.

Spirit World is a tribute to the music and musicians of the past – a means of conveying that even though life is hard, even though it declines after reaching its peak, the music remains. This is why Claire and Yuzo are musicians - a key character element that forms the heart of their relationship. Music therefore lies at the center of the film's narrative.

It is why Claire was in Japan and why Yuzo and Meiko, his wife and Hayato's mother, fell in love when they were part of the same musical group. Throughout the film we will hear music recalling of the sounds of the 60s.

Claire and Yuzo compose a song in the afterlife – "The Song of the Spirits" – that echoes the theme of the film. The tune is taken up by Hayato – the only one who can hear it. Claire thus becomes his muse, and her redemptive journey is complete.

Spirit World expresses a passion that goes beyond a simple project - the hope that death is not the end and that love can sometimes transcend and overcome it. Life continues, even after death. I hope these are the thoughts and the message that audiences will take away with them after seeing Spirit World.

Eric Khoo

PRODUCER'S INTENTION NOTE:

SPIRIT WORLD is a film born from desire.

Catherine Deneuve's desire to continue the Asian adventure that began with *The Truth* by Hirokazu Kore-eda (2019) and which delighted her.

Her passion and her great knowledge of Japanese cinema naturally led her to join this international project which will be shot in Japan – a country where she has never filmed.

Her desire to dare to venture into the spirit world.

The desire of Eric Khoo to continue to question ideas of spirituality, and of ghosts – these invisible beings who haunt the world of the living.

To speak to us about those who refuse to view death as an inescapable ending but who, on the contrary, consider it as a passage.

His desire finally to work with the most iconic actress of French cinema, and to dare to do the impossible with her, and take her to explore the invisible world of spirits.

Then there was my desire to play a part in this meeting of two great artists whom I admire, and to see them enter into a dialogue on these vital questions of life and death.

Considering the spirit world as a new existence where reconciliation and solace would perhaps be possible moves me greatly.

The films of Eric Khoo – champion of quality auteur cinema in his country both through his directing and his choice of productions – succeed in speaking to a wide audience while addressing intimate issues.

His films are shown in all the major festivals worldwide and critically acclaimed. When Zhao Wei asked me to participate in the making of this film, I enthusiastically accepted.

4 companies joined forces to see the project through to completion:

- Zhao Wei Films, Eric Khoo's Singapore-based company, is very active in the production of work by young Singaporean filmmakers, *The Apprentice* by Boo Junfeng, which screened at the Cannes Film Festival in Un Certain Regard, among others.
- Fourier Films, led by the redoubtable Shozo Ichiyama, unwavering defender and fellow traveller of the greatest Asian filmmakers (Jia Zhang-Ke, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Hirokazu Kore-Eda etc). He is also director of the Tokyo International Film Festival.
- Wild Orange Artists, led by Yutaka Tachibana, produced Eric Khoo's latest film, *The Flavor of Ramen*.
- Knockonwood Inc., headed by Shin Yamaguchi, who previously collaborated with Yutaka Tachibana on *The Flavor of Ramen*. Shin has extensive knowledge of filming in Japan, and his expertise is invaluable.

In France, I am lucky enough to be accompanied by Michèle and Laurent Petin (ARP Selection) whose expertise and knowledge of Asian cinema are beyond question. We must not forget that they were the first to release Chinese, Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Japanese films in France and have never paused in their discovery and support of filmmakers such as Kore-eda, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Eric Khoo, Wong Kar-Wai, Johnnie To and a host of others...

Finally, Goodfellas will handle international sales.

My company will take care of the French part, as well as the travel of the entire team to Japan. We plan to do work in France, in order to support the film not only from a financial but also an artistic point of view (music, costumes, dialogues etc.).

The Île-de-France region support fund is essential for us because it will allow this unique and audacious project to see the light of day.

Matilde Incerti