

Young director's debut takes bold dive into Shanghai culture



Director Shao Yihui

Xu Wei

It was a bold move by Shao Yihui, a young female director who is not a native of Shanghai, to shoot the romance film “B for Busy” in full Shanghai dialect.

Movies using the local dialect have been missing from Chinese cinema since the 1994 comedy “Shanghai Fever” but at least Shao once lived in the city for six years.

Since its release on Christmas Eve, “B for Busy” has made over 100 million yuan (US\$15.7 million) at the box office. On China’s film and review website Douban, it has received a rating of 8.3 out of 10, the highest so far for a home-grown 2021 film.

Many people are impressed by how the movie depicts multiple aspects of the city, including rich cultural and art elements that are elaborately merged into the plot and scenes.

“Shanghai is a magical and incredible city,” said Kitty Zhou, a 40-something company worker from Suzhou, Jiangsu Province.

“No other city in China is as romantic and delicate as Shanghai. People in the city frequently attend theater performances, art exhibitions and film screenings. They read English

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books. In the film, even a street cobbler can talk about art and women in English proverbs and take his daily coffee in refined porcelain at the shoe repair stall,” she said.

“B for Busy” is the film directorial debut of Shao, a graduate of Beijing Film Academy who was born in the 1990s in Shanxi Province.

Unlike what many filmmakers might do, Shao didn’t train her lens on Shanghai’s iconic skyline and landmark highrises in Pudong to showcase modernity.

Instead, she captured the city’s romantic charm and warmth through ordinary people’s daily lives, scenes and dialogue.

Almost all of the leading actors, including Xu Zheng, Ma Yili and Wu Yue, are natives of Shanghai. Most of the movie’s scenes were shot in the old lanes and structures of Xuhui District.

The movie’s title implies its comedic and simple plot about Mr Bai, a 50-year-old Shanghai uncle’s busy but seemingly futile attempts to find love.

Divorced for many years, the lonely man, who teaches people to paint, falls in love with Ms Li, a 44-year-old advertising worker. She is raising her child on her own after divorce from a British husband.

However, the path to true love is not so easy for middle-aged people who have deeper thoughts about life’s challenges and the complexity of relationships.

From Mr Bai’s perspective, the film scans three other Shanghai women who have subtle feelings for him. Ms Li is an elegant white-collar lady with an enthusiasm for drama, Bai’s ex-wife is a tango lover, and Gloria is a rich woman with plenty of time for fun.



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