

DONG-JU: THE PORTRAIT OF A POET

PRESS KIT



113 MIN | KOREAN | 2.39:1 | Black & White | DOLBY 5.1

SYNOPSIS



During the Japanese occupation, when few things were allowed to Koreans, two cousins of same age, Dong-ju and Mong-gyu were born in the same house and grew up together. For Dong-ju who dreamed to be a poet, a die-hard actionist for ideal Mong-gyu is the closest friend yet a mountain hard to surmount. When the Japanese forced Korean to change their names into Japanese ones, the two headed to Japan to study leaving their country in turmoil. Upon arriving in Japan, Mong-gyu became more actively involved in the resistance movement against Japan while Dong-ju was still trying to express the tragedy of the time through his poems and the conflict between the two only got deeper against their will.

And now here's the film that portrays the eternal story of YUN Dong-ju and SONG Mong-gyu who had lived as life-long friends and rivals in the time of darkness.

ABOUT MOVIE

**71 Years after his death,
the fulgent youth of legendary poet YUN Dong-ju finally portrayed on silver screen!**

DONG-JU: THE PORTRAIT OF A POET is an honest depict of the youth of poet YUN Dong-ju who had dreamed of living the life of poet in the times of darkness when few things, not even the name, the language and the dream were allowed for Koreans.

Writing a script about the life of this legendary poet was initiated by the director LEE Joon-ik when he became curious why we'd never seen any film or even TV film on YUN. His wish to transfer the story about the times and people through which YUN's poems had been born and survived on the big screen has been brought into shape when the director SHIN Yeon-shick (LIKE A FRENCH FILM, THE AVIAN KIND and ROUGH PLAY) became on board of this project as screenwriter. What moved the director and the screenwriter the most out of this great poet's life was that the irony that YUN could be able to be a poet only after this death. SHIN says 'YUN was a young man who couldn't be a poet in his lifetime despite his wish to be one. Because he was not recognized as a poet when he was alive, his poems feel much more bitter and sad.' as the reason on why he was most attracted to YUN's life among all the poets from the same time. The director and the writer wanted to portray YUN's life as the one of a young man who wanted to accomplish his dream but got discouraged due to the turmoil of the time and they focused on showing how and when each of his poems were born along the way of his life. And they chose the juxtaposition of relevant poems at the scenes of the crucial times in his life such as his departure from hometown, his decision to change his name into a Japanese one and his years at Yonhi College, etc. so that the poems could resonate deeper in the hearts of the audiences. LEE Joon-ik said, 'I wanted to make a film deserving the poems of YUN' as his aspiration in making a film out of the great poet's life for the first time in Korean film history. And this film will get to the heart of the audiences with its honest and sincere storytelling without colorful technique or exaggeration.

ABOUT MOVIE

From KING AND THE CLOWN and THE THRONE

to DONG-JU: THE PORTRAIT OF A POET!

**The new vision towards history and affectionate eyes for human
of Director LEE Joon-ik in his brilliant challenge.**

Since he became the first Korean director who drew more than 10 million admission with a period movie with KING AND THE CLOWN, director LEE Joon-ik has crossed genres directing various films such as ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE BATTLEFIELD, RADIO STAR, SUNNY, HOPE and THE THONE. Through every film he made, his unique directing skills and the affectionate eyes for the human were always present. And now he came back with the story of 'Dong-ju' and 'Mong-gyu' who lived the uncompleted youth in 1945.

Even for LEE who has been acclaimed as the master of period piece in Korean cinema, to make a movie out of the life of poet YUN Dong-ju was not an easy challenge. "I had only one thing in my mind; to tell the audience how the life-long friends YUN Dong-ju and SONG Mong-gyu overcame the dark period and how YUN's poems survived throughout the times." LEE said and added, "I also hope this story of the beautiful youth who had to end his days at the age of 28 would make both the elder audiences and the younger audiences feel the senses of youth again and meanings of life respectively."

DONG-JU: THE PORTRAIT OF A POET, 11th film by LEE Joon-ik depicting the uncompleted shining youth of YUN Dong-ju and SONG Mong-gyu would resonate in the hearts of the youth living this present time.

ABOUT MOVIE

The faces of youth, KANG Ha-neul and PARK Jung-min impeccably incarnated as dreaming 28 year-olds of 1945 Dong-ju and Mong-gyu

Two passionate young actors KANG Ha-neul and PARK Jung-min travelled back 71 years of time to revive the portrait of the youth living the time of Japanese occupation when nothing, the true name, the language, and even the dream, was allowed for Koreans.

“I wanted to experience myself the power that YUN’s poem, loved regardless generation and times, and as an actor, to take on the challenge of portraying the poet’s sensibility giving birth to them.” KANG Ha-neul unveiled what drew him to this story. To be under the skin of the poet, KANG has kept reading his poems and the books about him as well as practicing the unfamiliar languages of Japanese and north Gando dialect. “The first thing was to memorize all the dialogues and putting the emotions in them came after that. I put the dialogues everywhere, even on my fridge to memorize them.” On top of this, he took on a harsh diet to incarnate the poet who got emaciated in prison. And despite others dissuasion, he volunteered to shave his head in real in the scene where YUN has his hair shaved by the Japanese soldiers. He never stopped trying hard to slide into the skin of the poet inside and outside. The director LEE Joon-ik praised “Every second and minute of the film, KANG was YUN Dong-ju.”

ABOUT MOVIE



PARK Jung-min, who has shown the chameleon-like performances through various films including BLEAK NIGHT and OFFICE, plays YUN's cousin, lifetime best friend and rival Mong-gyu. PARK immediately was drawn to the character when he read the script. His passion and concentration on the project even made him travel alone to the birthplaces of YUN and SONG in China while preparing for his character. "I don't care much about what others say when I do what I believe right. And that part of me resembles a lot to Mong-gyu who tried to achieve what he believed right even fighting against his times." PARK said about his character. Among many brilliant scenes of SONG in the film, especially the speech at hometown and the pitching in front of the Korean students in Japan is the result of PARK's hard works of practicing the unfamiliar dialect and breathing the emotions in the dialogues on top of that. And for the scene of his parents visit him at the Fukuoka prison, PARK didn't eat or drink from 2 days prior to shooting and played Mong-gyu at the verge of his last breath perfectly and made the director LEE say 'I couldn't help but crying when filming.'

The expectations about the chemistry created by KANG and PARK living the youth of 1945 in DONG-JU: THE PORTRAIT OF A POET is getting higher than ever.

ABOUT MOVIE

Memories to a poem, Love to a poem and Loneliness to a poem.

YUN Dong-ju's beautiful poems resonated on KANG's mild voice!

When transferring the life of poet YUN Dong-ju on the big screen, one of the essentials was to have his poems intact in the film. LEE Joon-ik chose to 'play them to the ears' instead of 'showing them to the eyes' so that they could be naturally a part of the film. The poems read by the mild and clean voice of KANG Ha-neul are interconnected to the most important moments of the poet in the film.

[The New Way] over their departure in the train to Yonhi College when Dong-ju leaves his hometown with Mong-gyu is a prelude on their future, [A Night Counting Stars] over his night ballade with Yeo-jin who made Dong-ju's heart flutter adds the fresh sensitivity to the scene. *'My face remaining in a rust-blue copper mirror. Why does it look so disgraced, which dynasty the remains belong to?'* Lines from [Confessions] reflect the young Dong-ju's agony and pain living the times of Japanese occupation when he was forced to change his name into a Japanese one for pursuing his studies in Japan. And [Prologue] over Dong-ju getting emaciated in Fukuoka prison maximize the young poet's tragedy and suffering.

KANG Ha-neul went through many thoughts for reciting the poems and finally decides to be as calm and sincere as possible to execute it. He put his focus on making the poems naturally blended into the scenes. Director LEE was more than satisfied with the result saying 'KANG breathed the accurate voice into the poems.' As the screenwriter SHIN said, 'YUN Dong-ju's poems have changed when the poet's life was put at a turning point' and KANG's voice impeccably expressed these essential moments and emotions still living in his poems.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Poetry in BLACK & WHITE:

portrait of youth honestly in black and white without colorful addition

This film was shot in B&W. Even for the veteran director like LEE Joon-ik who already directed 10 films before, it was a challenge as it was the first black and white film he made. Lee said the reason why he "chose black and white to portray the poet YUN and the independence fighter SONG whom I saw only through their pictures in black and white, it was my humble wish to invite their passionate young souls cordially on the black and white screen." As it is not easy to identify the objects if there are things in similar colors, director LEE and crews discussed and prepared carefully for the strength of lighting, mise-en-scene, movement of the characters before the shooting. Also when you shoot in black and white, you can focus more on the actors and emphasize characters' situation and feelings. So in DONG-JU: PORTRAIT OF A POET, it was really efficient to describe Dong-ju and Mong-gyu's anxiety for the dark period more dramatically. Thanks to all the crews who tried to avoid too much of camera movement and considered the room of the emotions caused by natural lightings such as candle light, only to deliver the emotions of two young men to the audiences, the film DONG-JU could be made with the high degree of perfection in black and white.



PRODUCTION NOTE

Poetry of SPACE:

portray the feelings and relations through the space

As director LEE also mentioned that the most difficult challenge and also the part to be praised most in this film is production design, it was quite a challenge for the production design team to create the space during the Japanese Occupation which there is almost no remains for this.

To find the similar space to Yong-jeong village where Dong-ju and Mong-gyu grew up, production team searched all around the country but had difficulties to find the place which has the similar atmosphere. But just like a miracle, they found Wang-gok village in Go-sung where northern style houses are preserved. This unique structure that all kitchen, living room, and rooms exist under one roof was the right one to show the relations of the family surrounding Dong-ju and Mong-gyu and also the sign of that time and region.

Along with Go-sung, Sorok Island was the place that production team owed much. The shooting was prohibited after 6 PM in Sorok Island, however, the preserved nature and old buildings from the Japanese Occupation period of the island provided the best space to portray the student days of Dong-ju and Mong-gyu. Production team put lots of efforts creating Dong-ju's room where he made etude of poetry and thought of many things with details. They created the square manuscript paper and notebooks based on the research, reproduced the scribbles on the notebook covers, and put the books on the desk which were known as YUN's favorite.

The interrogation room was created to express the color of the film well. To portray the tension between two characters in the closed space more drastically, director designed the movement of the Japanese investigator to put his back against the window in any case while Dong-ju to continuously get the purity lighting. The space created through the historical research and film team's efforts to express the relationship and emotional layers in those spaces would help the audiences to feel that they are in that period 71 years ago when Dong-ju and Mong-gyu lived.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Poetry of COSTUME:

Expressing Dong-ju and Mong-gyu's traces through costume

It was crucial to have costume for Mong-gyu and Dong-ju based on the historical research as they were real persons.

There are three big sections for costume in DONG-JU: private clothes, school uniforms and prison uniforms. The production team tried to express pure sides of innocent boys rather than the dark mood during the Japanese occupation through private clothing during their childhood in Yong-jeong. So Dong-ju who is dreamy yet shy longing to be a poet mainly wears knits to maximize the pure and warm feelings while aggressive activist-type Mong-gyu wears shirts to maximize his enterprising spirit. The costume design team also put lots of efforts to create the school uniforms as the most famous picture of poet YUN is the picture of him in school uniforms. As a result, they re-created the hat of Yonhi College (which is now Yonsei Univ.) that was never seen in any period dramas before and embroidered 'L', the emblem for a college of liberal arts, on his uniform collar from his famous picture.

In addition, one of the biggest principles of costume design team designing the prison uniforms was to add the Korean sensitivity while creating them based on the historical research. Costume designer was afraid that it might offend the audiences to re-create the uniforms based on the original design which has the belt around the waist like the judo uniforms so decided to add buttons instead of belt while keeping the basic design. Also the inmate numbers in Chinese characters of Dong-ju and Mong-gyu on the uniforms were very special as those were written by director LEE Joon-ik himself. To adjust the unique nature of shooting in black and white in which the details of the texture would be prominent, all the materials were checked through black and white filters on smart phones before cutting. The costumes in DONG-JU recreated based on the historical research with the consideration of details such as the personalities of the characters and sentiment of the age, played one of the notable parts to strengthen the sincerity of Dong-ju's and Mong-gyu's lives.

CHARACTER&CAST

"I am ashamed that I wanted to be a poet."

A dreamy young man

who wanted to become a poet

|| Dong-ju

Dong-ju is a pure and shy young man who suffers from the objection from his parents against his will to write poems and cannot say a word in front of a girl he likes. He envies his cousin yet best friend Mong-gyu whose essay wins at Spring Literary Contest thinking Mong-gyu is ahead of him and also feels intimidated seeing Mong-gyu act aggressively. When lost his name in the dark age or longing for his country, Dong-ju writes poetry.



Up and Coming Actor Who Would Carry Korean Film Industry || KANG Ha-neul

From TV series to a big screen, KANG has been playing characters to represent the youth. This time, he incarnates YUN Dong-ju, Korea's most beloved poet. To portray the great young poet whose life is literary known to every Korean, KANG pushed himself extremely; reading all the books on YUN, going through the severe diet and having his head to portray the changes after being put into jail. KANG was Dong-ju himself with his passion and the youth of this poet would move the audiences' hearts.

Selected Filmography

C'est Si Bon(2015), Twenty(2015), Empire of Lust(2015), Mourning Grave (2014)

TV Series

Incomplete Lives(2014), Angel Eyes(2014), The Heirs (2013)

CHARACTER&CAST



"You write poetry, I will be the one to fight with guns."

Dong-ju's best friend yet rival

|| Mong-gyu

Dong-ju's old friend and cousin who started and ended the life with Dong-ju together. Unlike shy and reserved Dong-ju, Mong-gyu is the young man who aggressively acts out for what he believes. Mong-gyu who holds the gun instead the pen dreaming of the new era is the continuous stimulus to Dong-ju.

Well-prepared actor with solid base || PARK Jung-min

After his strong debut in BLEAK NIGHT(2011), PARK has been building his career all around the big screen, television and the theatre. Just like director's Lee's comments on PARK that PARK's charm exactly overlapped with the things that SONG Mong-gyu had, he was just like the re-incarnation of Mong-gyu. And on top of this, PARK added his color portraying the character. Before shooting, PARK paid a visit to YUN and SONG's birth place in China and SONG's grave. With his passion to portray SONG Mong-gyu impeccably, his performance would leave the unforgettable trace in audiences' hearts.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

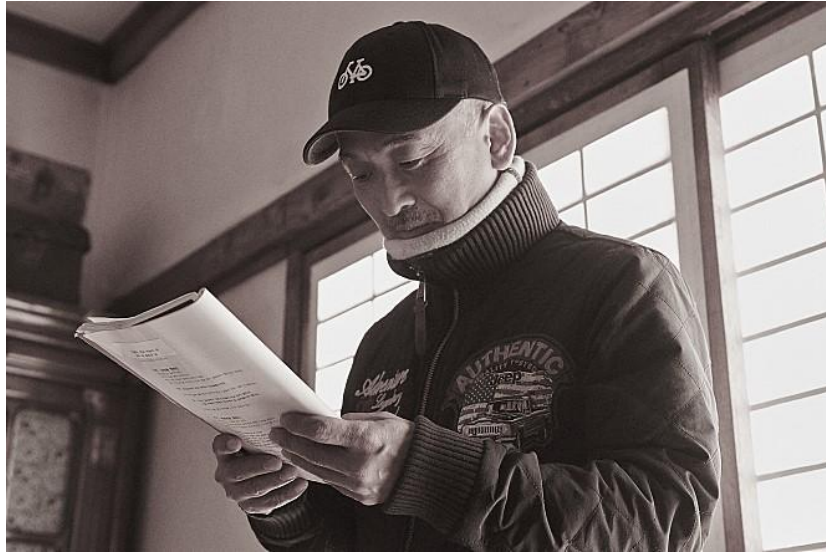
OFFICE (2015), MAD SAD BAD (2014), HOT YOUNG BLOODS (2014), TINKER TIKER (2014), BLEAK NIGHT(2012)

DIRECTOR

"The beautiful young man who finished his life at the age of 28.

The poetry he left still remains deep in everyone's heart after 71 years

and still moves me time to time."



The director solacing the youth and the time || LEE Joon-ik

Master LEE whose films including KING AND THE CLOWN, HOPE and THE THRONE stroke the audiences' hearts with grandeur and sincerity this time turns his attention toward the sparkling youth during the dark age: Korea's most beloved poet who couldn't enjoy the life as poet when he was alive, YUN Dong-ju and his lifetime best friend SONG Mong-gyu. Director LEE explained the reason why he made the film on this poet that he wanted to show how one of Korea's most famous poet struggled the period with whom and how his poems remained in this country. With the story of two young men who couldn't flourish their passion and youth because of the dark period they lived, director LEE wants to approach to the young people now with the emotional echo. Director LEE shot the film in B&W to pay the respect to those young men and to portray their story avoiding too much excitement or elaboration. The story of Dong-ju and Mong-gyu who tried their very best to keep what they believed during the time when you couldn't act or say as you thought directed by master Lee's sincere yet crafted directing would offer the emotional and touching experiences to audiences.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

THE THRONE (2015), HOPE (2013), BLADES OF BLOOD (2010), SUNNY (2008), THE HAPPY LIFE (2007), RADIO STAR (2006), KING AND THE CLOWN (2005)

THE POET'S CHRONICLE

1917

Dec 30, YUN Dong-ju born at Myung-dong chon in Manchuria.

Sep 28, SONG Mong-gyu born at YUN's house.

1925 Age of 9

YUN entered the Myungdong elementary school.

SONG and MOON Ik-hwan entered the same school at the same year.

1929 Age of 13

YUN started magazine 'New Myungdong'.

SONG Myungdong elementary school became the people's school and later forced to be the public school by China.

1932 Age of 16

YUN entered Eunjin middle school. Attended various activities including football and speech contest.

SONG and MOON entered Eunjin middle school.

1935 Age of 19

YUN transferred to Pyongyang Soongsil middle school. His poem 'Imagination' published in literary magazine 'Soongsil Hwalcheon'.

SONG's short story 'Drunken Spoon' won the spring literary contest by Dong-a Daily. Quitted school at April and entered Nakyang military school in China.

1936 Age of 20

YUN dropped Soongsil to protest shrine worship. Transferred to Gwangmyung school.

SONG joined independent movement in China. Sent to Ong-gi police after being arrested. Got listed as the person under surveillance after the release.

1938 Age of 22

YUN entered Literary Dept. of Yonhi College (Yeonsei Univ.)

SONG entered Yonhi College.

Both met Kang Cheo-joong.

1941 Age of 25

YUN graduated from Yonhi College. Changed his last name as Hiranuma to study in Japan.

Tried to publish his collection of poetry, 'Sky, Wind, Star and Poetry' only with 77 copies but failed.

He wrote 3 copies, kept one himself, presented other two to master LEE Yang-ha and JEONG Byung-wook.

1942 Age of 26

Jan 24, YUN wrote his last work in Korea, 'Confession.' Entered English Literature Dept. at Rikkyo Univ. in Tokyo. Transferred to English Literature Dept. at Doshishya Univ. in Kyoto.

SONG changed his last name as 'Somura.' Entered Western History Dept. at Imperial Univ. in Kyoto.

1943 Age of 27

July 14, YUN got arrested for independence movement. His works and diary during his stay in Japan were impounded.

July 10, SONG got arrested by Japanese police.

1944 Age of 28

YUN was sentenced 2 years in prison for violating the peace maintenance law.

SONG was sentenced 2 years in prison on the same charge as YUN's. Got imprisoned in Fukuoka prison with YUN.

Both got imprisoned in Fukuoka prison.

1945 Age of 29

Feb 16, YUN died in Fukuoka prison.

March 6, YUN buried in Yongjeong Central Church cemetery.

'Self-portrait in the Well' and 'New Road' were recited at the funeral.

March 6, SONG died in the prison with his eyes open.

SONG's father and cousin SONG Hee-kyu buried his ashes in the mountain of Myung-dong Jangjeon.

1948

January, YUN's poetry collection, [Sky, Wind, Star and Poetry] got published by Jeong-eup-sa with the prologue by JEONG Ji-yong and the epilogue by KANG Cheo-joong.