



PRESS KIT

13 Little Pictures
presents

SMALL HOURS OF THE NIGHT

A film by Daniel Hui

103 mins
English, Malay, Mandarin
Black and White
Singapore

Shooting format: 16mm
Screening format: 2K DCP, 5.1 Surround Sound

LOGLINE

A woman is trapped in a dark room, being interrogated by a man. Through the course of one long night, their conversation gets increasingly haunted by ghosts from the future.

SYNOPSIS

Singapore, in the late 1960s — the newly independent country is still grappling with its identity. In a dark room, a woman is trapped, being interrogated by a man. Through the course of one long night, identities and duration start to blur. Ghosts from the future haunt their conversation, telling of a bizarre tombstone trial that speaks to the state's nascent political and legal landscape.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Daniel HUI is a filmmaker and writer. A graduate of the film program in California Institute of the Arts, he is one of the founding members of 13 Little Pictures, a critically acclaimed independent film collective in Singapore. He wrote and directed *Eclipses* (Pixel Bunker Award for International New Talent, Doclisboa IFF 2013), *Snakeskin* (Special Jury Award TFFDoc, Torino FF 2014; Award of Excellence, Yamagata IDFF 2015; Special Jury Mention, RIDM 2015), and *Demons* (In Competition, Kim Jiseok Award, Busan IFF 2018; Berlinale Forum 2019).

FILMOGRAPHY

Demons - 2018, 16mm, 83 minutes

Snakeskin - 2014, 16mm, 105 minutes

Eclipses - 2011, 16mm, 105 minutes



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Small Hours of the Night is a small film. It is a film about small incidents — small gestures, small emotions, small changes of light, and the small characters in history. These small characters are important to me — we, the small characters, are the ones who shape history, who shape society; we, the small characters, are the ones who make the big people in power tremble.

This film only has two characters on screen; it takes place in one room in real time, and it has no reverse shots. These restrictions have made me realize a whole new mode of thinking and filmmaking. Just like the man in Jack Arnold's *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), when you start seeing things in the infinitesimal, you gain the entire universe. And so instead of focusing on broad strokes, I focused on the small details; instead of changing geographies for breadth of scope, I was interested in seeing how a single place can breathe, expand and contract; instead of telling a story with jumps in time, I wanted to see how duration can slow down and speed up. In short, I wanted to create the feeling that we're all familiar with — the feeling of lying sleepless at night, while the entire world rushes through our head.

What rushes through Vicki's head is what has rushed through mine countless times at night — it is the question of how society is shaped through law. For Singapore, as for many other places in the world, the criminal court is a place where public mores and taboos are defined. The court sets an example of what is allowed and disallowed; it publicizes this through its sentencing, and disseminates the sentencing through the press; the public is then expected to follow suit. The 1983 Tan Chay Wa tombstone trial depicted in the film intrigued me because of this very reason; it intrigued me not because it was a major incident — in fact it has largely been forgotten — but because through it we can see the practices through which Singapore became the way it is now — harsh punishments for trivial crimes, stifling of opposition voices, and the absurdity of a censorship that spares no one, not even the dead.



There are five characters who speak through Vicki — four are based on real figures, and one is imagined. They are, in order:

Tan Chay Wa

The person whose tombstone is at the heart of the trial. Part of an underground organization linked to the guerrilla Communist movement, he fled Singapore to Malaysia when he found out he was wanted by the state. In 1979, he was arrested by the Malaysian police and charged with possession of a weapon, which was a capital offense. He was later sentenced to death and hanged in Kuala Lumpur in 1983.

Tan Chu Boon

Tan Chay Wa's brother. He accompanied Tan Chay Wa's body back to Singapore, and was later instructed by his brother's wife to engrave an inscription on the tombstone. The tombstone eulogized Tan Chay Wa as a martyr and hero who sacrificed his life for his country's liberation. Because of this inscription, Tan Chu Boon was charged by the Singapore government for sedition, because the inscription was deemed 'subversive' and 'glorified the Communist cause'.

Catherine Tan Mui Choo

A convicted murderer who participated in the ritual killings of two children. She was the wife of self-styled medium Adrian Lim, who manipulated and beat her into submission. The child murders were the most sensational court case in Singapore during the 1980s, fascinating and horrifying the nation. Most of the text from this section of the film was taken verbatim from her court testimony. She was represented by the same defense lawyer as Tan Chu Boon.



E C Foenander

The prosecutor of the tombstone case. A known prosecutor and judge, he presided over many trials of trivial crimes in the 1970s and 80s. While some details of his personal life have been fictionalized, the dates and sentences in this section were mostly taken from newspaper headlines that published the outcome of every criminal case. In a twist of fate, he would later be the judge that convicts the defense lawyer of Tan Chu Boon.

Vicki

The only fictional character in the film, but perhaps the realest. A woman, from our time, who is researching the tombstone case and the defense lawyer. She represents the paranoia and fear that activists today — who still face routine oppression and discrimination — have to deal with.



As with every film, there is also one hidden character, perhaps the most important: the defense lawyer of Tan Chu Boon and Tan Mui Choo, **J B Jeyaretnam**. Outside of the court, he was the first opposition politician to win a seat against the ruling party in the 80s. He was later convicted by the government for yet another trivial crime, causing him to lose his seat in the parliament, and paving the way for the ruling party's total dominion. He was later sued to bankruptcy by the country's rulers and, towards the end of his life, had to resort to selling his self-published memoirs at bus stations.

The real-life characters in the film have no names. This was done for safety reasons and also because they could be anyone, even me and you. The shifting of realities and identities - like what happens in a dream - is important for me, because the boundaries between us are always changing and forever being re-negotiated. Just like duration, which can never be segmented and laid out in space, identities are never fixed — they are nebulous, they mutate and undulate, and through the folding and transgressing of their borders, they create history.

CAST

IRFAN Kasban

Irfan Kasban is a transdisciplinary artist who takes on roles as writer, director, lighting, sound, set and/or multimedia designer in hopes to create intricate universes as a celebration of space and time. He has actively worked with Ekamatra since 2006, and held a position as associate artist since 2010. The Theatre Practice also gave him an associateship in 2019. In 2020, Irfan was conferred the Young Artist Award by the National Arts Council, Singapore. As a freelance artist, Irfan takes on many experimental projects, working with numerous talented artists, which has expanded his practice and perspective. Motivated by the pursuit of emotional authenticity and guided by visceral ephemerality, he continues to redefine the boundaries between performance and the audience. Irfan's current area of interest and research is art as ritual healing.

YANG Yanxuan Vicki

Yang Yanxuan Vicki was the lead actress in Daniel Hui's *Demons* (2018). She has also appeared in Hui's *Snakeskin* (2014), Kris Ong's "Sunday" (2019) and Nelson Yeo's *Plastic Sonata* (2022). Yang was also the script supervisor of Yeo Siew Hua's *A Land Imagined* (2018); director of "Your Order is Nearly Complete" (2014); and assistant director of "Wormhole" (2012; dirs. Yeo Siew Hua & Nelson Yeo). A writer by profession, Yang has written for Cinematheque Quarterly (National Museum of Singapore), the Singapore International Film Festival, and Asian Film Archive. Co-founder of the online magazine POSKOD.SG (2011-14), Yang also creates the COCKEYE film zine and stickman comics.

CREW

TAN Bee Thiam – Producer

An alumnus of Berlinale Talents, Rotterdam Lab, and European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs (EAVE), Tan produced Daniel Hui's *Small Hours of the Night* (2023), *Demons* (2018), *Snakeskin* (2014), and *Eclipses* (2011); Glen Goei and Gavin Yap's *Revenge of the Pontianak* (2019), Lei Yuan Bin's *03-FLATS* (2014) and *White Days* (2009); Liao Jiekai's *As You Were* (2014) and *Red Dragonflies* (2010); and Yeo Siew Hua's *In the House of Straw* (2009). As a director, his works include *Fundamentally Happy* (co- director) and *Tiong Bahru Social Club* (2020). He founded the Asian Film Archive in 2005 and directed the Archive from 2005 to 2009; he curated films for the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) from 2014 to 2017.

LOOI Wan Ping - Cinematographer

A founding member of the film collective 13 Little Pictures, cinematographer-editor-director Looi Wan Ping (Lei Yuan Bin) was conferred the Young Artist Award in 2012 by the National Arts Council, Singapore's highest award for young arts practitioners. As Director of Photography, Looi worked on Anthony Chen's "Haze" (2007; In Competition, Berlinale Shorts 2008); Daniel Hui's *Demons* (Berlinale Forum 2019), "One Day in June" (2010) and "Dreams of Youth" (2008); Liao Jiekai's features *Red Dragonflies* (2010) and *As You Were* (2014); and Boo Junfeng's "Mirror" (2013) and "Plague" (2018). As Lei Yuan Bin, Looi also directs, shoots and edits his own features, including award-winning fiction *White Days* (2009) and documentaries *03-FLATS* (2014; International Architecture Biennale in Venice 2015), *I Dream of Singapore* (Berlinale Panorama 2020) and *Baby Queen* (2022). Looi is an alumnus of the 2016 Berlinale Talents and the 2008 Asian Film Academy (Busan).



PRODUCTION COMPANY

13 Little Pictures

13 Little Pictures is a film collective based in Singapore. Its partners are Berlinale Talents alumni: Daniel Hui, Lei Yuan Bin, Liao Jiekai, Sherman Ong, and Yeo Siew Hua. Making films and friends at the same time, 13 Little Pictures works together in the belief that taking this journey together — challenging, inspiring, helping, and supporting each other — fosters a sense of community in our individual exploration of the possibilities of cinema. In 2020, the Berlinale Talents featured our collective as a free spirited film collective that leaves old hierarchies behind, producing passionate filmmaking as a consequence. In 2021, MUBI spotlighted us as emerging auteurs, with refreshingly bold storytelling, "an important voice in the increasingly vibrant world of Southeast Asian cinema".

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