

# YOU'RE A BIG GIRL NOW

A Film by Tze Chun

## ABOUT



### LOGLINE:

A Singaporean orphan is bought by a brothel, escapes to Hong Kong with an older prostitute, then returns to Singapore to uncover the mysteries of her childhood. Based on a true story.

### SYNOPSIS:

Singapore, 1950s. In this true story, AH FONG, a five-year old Chinese orphan, is bought by a small brothel in the red light district. She spends her formative years living in its back rooms among other little orphan girls, growing into the role of their friend, confidant, and sister. The Madame of the house has a path for these girls: they are to do housework until they turn twelve, at which time they will move to the front of the house to start working as prostitutes. But the stubborn and intelligent Ah Fong strays from this wretched path. While she loses her sisters to prostitution, she excels in school and becomes a favorite of Madame's daughter-in-law, who secretly arranges for Ah Fong to be taken away from the house by YOK YING, a prostitute making her escape to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, Ah Fong suffers under the hand of Yok Ying, who is resentful of being saddled with an adopted daughter. Living in an uncaring, lonely world, Ah Fong becomes obsessed with attaining independence and going to the United States. Throughout her teens, she goes to school by day and works in sweatshops by night, secretly squirreling enough money away to repatriate to the U.S. Before she goes, however, she returns to Singapore for some unfinished business -- to find her old friends, and to find her real parents...

Based on the true life story of Ai Cheng, the writer-director's mother, YOU'RE A BIG GIRL NOW is an ensemble drama following the multitude of characters that Ah Fong encounters while growing up in a brothel on Singapore's Lavender Street. The film is about one girl's refusal to give up hope, her tooth-and-nail struggle for personal freedom, and her triumph in the face of the impossibly harsh conditions of her upbringing.

### AWARDS & HONORS:

- IFP No Borders Co-Production Market, 2007 & 2009
- Sundance Creative Producing Lab & Fellowship, 2009
- Tribeca All-Access Key Ingredients, 2010
- Shanghai International Film Festival Co-Production Market, 2010

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## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



### STATEMENT:

I always knew about my mother's childhood, but always in bits and pieces. Four years ago, one of her oldest friends, a girl who grew up alongside her in a Singaporean brothel, died of cancer. That was the impetus to spend the next two years interviewing my mother and the dozen other women who grew up in the house on Lavender Street. Since many were illiterate, it felt enormously important to be able to document their stories. Seeing these women in person, you would never imagine that they had gone through these horrible experiences. It speaks to their inner strength that they were able to endure so much, but yet continue in their daily lives unabated and undeterred.

After accumulating 600 pages of research and over 30 hours of video and audio interviews, I sat down to write this screenplay, sending my mother ten pages at a time to make sure I was getting the heart of the story right. My mother and I both agreed that the crux of this film was not exploitation. Rather, we wanted to tell the story of these women's proactive, tooth-and-nail struggle for personal freedom and their eventual triumph.

In the end, I hope this film will give a voice to the thousands of women like my mother and the women of Lavender Street -- those who have compelling stories, but no means to tell them.

### VISUAL CONCEPT:

The visual style of YOU'RE A BIG GIRL NOW will be a heightened realism. Lighting will be naturalistic, as in the early films of Hou Hsiao Hsien and Jia Zhang Ke, but instead of the tableaux framing of "typical" Chinese films, we will use telephoto lenses and shoot scenes primarily in close up and medium shots to stay intimate with the characters. Camera movement will be organic and move with the characters. The film will be approximately 70% handheld, with the remaining 30% shot from a fluid-head tripod (to encourage camera movement).

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## CREATIVE TEAM



### **TZE CHUN | Writer-Director**

Tze (pronounced "Z") Chun is a filmmaker working out of New York City and Los Angeles. He was born in Chicago and raised outside of Boston, and received his bachelor's degree in film studies at Columbia University. His debut feature CHILDREN OF INVENTION premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and went on to be one of the most-awarded and best-reviewed films of the year. It won 16 film festival awards, including 7 Grand Jury or Best Narrative Feature prizes. The film was released theatrically in March 2010 to rave reviews--Manohla Dargis of the *New York Times* said the film is "A fine feature debut...while the politics are there, you might be too busy choking back tears to notice"; *Variety* said it is "Urgent, artful...austerely poetic"; and *USA Today's* Claudia Puig said, "I loved this movie. I can't remember when I have loved a movie quite as much as this one."

Chun's short film WINDOWBREAKER was selected to play at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, as well as over thirty other high-profile international festivals. It won the audience award at the 2007 New York City Short Film Festival and best short film at the 2007 Vietnamese International Film Festival. That same year, Chun was selected to participate in Tribeca Film Festival's All Access Program with his feature ARTIFICIAL DISSEMINATION and IFP's No Borders International Co-Production Market with his feature YOU'RE A BIG GIRL NOW. In the summer of 2007, Chun was named one of Filmmaker Magazine's "25 New Faces of Independent Film."

Along with his writing partner Mike Weiss, Chun served as a staff writer on Darren Star's ABC's Primetime Drama "Cashmere Mafia," created by Kevin Wade and starring Lucy Liu. The pair were hired for the show off their original pilot, "Getting in Good," a tongue-in-cheek drama set in the uber-competitive world of Manhattan private school admissions.

Chun is currently working on multiple writing and directing projects. His sci-fi short film SILVER SLING premiered in March 2010 at SXSW and SFIAAFF as part of FUTURESTATES, ITVS's new online series of short films by notable emerging directors.

Chun also works as a painter and visual artist. He is represented at CVZContemporary gallery in Soho, and has commissioned portraits in private residences in New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston, and New Orleans. Chun also painted the original artwork for the poster of Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck's Academy-Award nominated HALF NELSON (THINKFilm) as well as the children's book drawings used in the film.

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## CREATIVE TEAM

(continued)

### **MYNETTE LOUIE | Producer**

A New York-based independent film producer, Mynette produced Tze Chun's award-winning Sundance feature, CHILDREN OF INVENTION. She also co-produced Andrew Bujalski's critically acclaimed MUTUAL APPRECIATION, named one of the top ten films of 2006 by *Entertainment Weekly*, *Film Comment*, *the Village Voice*, *Artforum*, *Greencine*, and *The Onion's AV Club*, among others. In 2008, she was selected by IFP as one of two emerging American producers to participate in Cinemart's Rotterdam Lab, and recently participated in the 2010 Berlinale Talent Campus.

Mynette is currently in post-production on Patricia Benoit's UNTITLED HAITI PROJECT, a Sundance Lab project and winner of the inaugural Time Warner Storytelling Award and Sundance Annenberg Award. The film stars acclaimed author Edwidge Danticat and is being produced with Karin Chien and Ben Howe. She is also developing several narrative features, including Eric Lin's WHY WE PULL THE TRIGGER, winner of the 2007 NYU Richard Vague Production Award, and selection of the 2009 Film Independent Directors Lab and Fast Track program. Mynette was selected as one of five fellows for the 2009 Sundance Creative Producing Fellowship with Tze Chun's YOU'RE A BIG GIRL NOW. She is also on the Selection Advisory Committee of the Sundance Institute's Feature Film Program.

Mynette previously worked at the Hawaii Film Office, where she authored the state's 15-20% refundable production tax credit, oversaw the \$7.3 million renovation of the state-owned film studio, and developed programs to foster local independent filmmaking. She also worked in business development and marketing at SportsIllustrated.com, Jupiter Research, and Time Magazine. A native New Yorker, Mynette graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard University with a B.A. in East Asian Studies, focusing on Chinese literature and film.

### **LORNA TEE | Executive Producer**

Lorna Tee graduated with a B.Ed from University of Surrey. After graduation, she worked as a theatre practitioner, drama teacher, film producer and arts activist in Malaysia and Singapore. In 2005, she moved to Hong Kong and worked with Focus Films where she was the senior manager for marketing and distribution. Next, she joined *Variety* as Business Development Manager (Asia) and was responsible for the growth of new business in the region. After that, she was the General Manager of Irresistible Films, in charge of scouting for film projects and managing production and distribution. Currently, she is developing a slate of independent and big budget films from Asia and the USA.

She is also on the board of advisors for Cinemart (International Film Festival of Rotterdam), Jakarta International Film Festival, Asian Film Awards and Pusan's Asian Film Market. Amongst her producing credits are THE BEAUTIFUL WASHING MACHINE, THE SHOE FAIRY, I'LL CALL YOU, RAIN DOGS, CRAZY STONE, LOVE STORY, BEFORE WE FALL IN LOVE AGAIN, MY MOTHER IS A BELLYDANCER, AT THE END OF DAYBREAK, and MY DAUGHTER. She has also been a juror and panel speaker at festivals and markets including the Berlinale, Shanghai, Rotterdam, Barcelona Asian Film Festival, Jakarta, Asia Media Festival (Singapore), Hong Kong FILMART, Tokyo TIFFCOM, PIFF & PIFAN (S Korea), Udine Far East Film Festival, and more.

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## CONTACT

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