



*"I fell for the [2005 Cannes] Fortnight's opening film, 'Be With Me' ... I didn't have any idea what was going on for the first half hour, but was in tears by the end, which is fairly rare (big surprise)"*  
Manohla Dargis, *The New York Times*

## BE WITH ME

A Film by Eric Khoo



Singapore, 2005. English, Cantonese, Hokkien and Mandarin,  
With English subtitles, 93 min

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## SYNOPSIS

BE WITH ME is a tapestry of three stories woven around the themes of love, hope, and destiny. Although the main characters come from different backgrounds and lead different lives, they all long to be with their loved one.

“Meant To Be” is about an aging provision shopkeeper grappling with loneliness. Just when he is about to give up hope, he chances upon an autobiography which changes his life. The autobiography in this story is real – it is the story of Theresa Chan, who plays herself and shares her remarkable life experience in the film.

“So In Love” is the bitter-sweet chronicles of two teenage girls in a love less ordinary. A chain of events spark off a flurry of SMS messages that will drastically rewrite the blueprints of their lives.

“Finding Love” follows the mundane life of a middle aged security guard who has two loves in life -- food and a high flying professional who works in the same building he does. The first he indulges in with great passion; the second, alas, he can only admire from afar. He decides to bridge the divide with a letter.

Unbeknownst to them, these different souls will share the same stage in a play written by Fate, one which involves the themes of love, tragedy, and redemption. The characters in the movie are fictitious except for Theresa Chan. Deaf and blind since she was 14, Theresa – who is now 61 – is a remarkable woman who has triumphed over her disabilities to live an amazing life. She is the film's beacon, a symbol of strength and hope.

## CAST AND CREW

### Cast

Theresa Poh Lin Chan	Theresa Chan
Ezann Lee	Jackie
Samantha Tan	Sam
Seet Keng Yew	Security Guard
Chiew Sung Ching	Father
Lawrence Yong	Son
Lynn Poh	Ann

### Crew

Director	Eric Khoo
Screenwriters	Eric Khoo, Wong Kim Hoh
Executive Producers	James Toh, Jackie Khoo, Freddie Yeo
Producer	Brian Hong
Director of Photography	Adrian Tan
Editor	Low Hwee Ling
Sound Designer	Kazz
Music	Keven Mathews, Christing Shum

## AWARDS AND FESTIVALS

*Cannes Film Festival* – Director’s Fortnight Opening Film

*\*\*received a 5 minute standing ovation after being shown at Cannes*

**WON** - FIPRESCI Prizes for Best Film & Cinematography -*Stockholm Film Festival*

**WON** - Best of East Asia - *Indianapolis International Film Festival*

**WON** – The Sabam Prize for Best Screenplay – *Flanders Int’l Film Festival in Ghent*

**WON** – Special Mention – *Tokyo Int’l Film Festival*

**NOMINATED** – Prix Screen Int’l Prize – *European Film Academy Awards*

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** -- *Toronto Int’l Film Festival, Telluride Film Festival, Vancouver Int’l Film Festival, Chicago Int’l Film Festival, Film Festival Brussel*

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION, BY DIRECTOR ERIC KHOO

“Love, Hope and Destiny. For more than a year, my co-writer Wong Kim Hoh and I grappled and struggled, trying to pin these themes down in a script.

“It was only in the summer of 2003 that Fate brought Theresa Chan – who’s deaf and blind – into our lives at a wedding dinner. When she learned that I make films, she immediately told me that I should make one about Hope. I thought to myself: ‘How ironic... that’s what we’ve been desperately trying to do.’

“Overwhelmed by her personality and vigour for life, I asked if she’d act for me. Without any hesitation, she lifted her wine glass and said loudly: ‘On!’

“We began to communicate through letters. I discovered that this one person represented everything I wanted to say in the film. What followed was a Parker pen from her in the Christmas of 2003 and on my birthday in March 2004, a watch. I got her hint -- *start writing and stop wasting precious time!*

“In the fall of 2004, we wrapped BE WITH ME in 16 days.” – *Eric Khoo*

## ERIC KHOO INTERVIEW WITH THE PALM SPRINGS *DESERT SUN*

Stephen Ashton

Special to The Desert Sun

January 15, 2006

Eric Khoo brought Singapore filmmaking to the attention of critics and audiences with his first feature, "Mee Pok Man," which he followed with his internationally renowned "12 Storeys." His newest film, "Be With Me," opened the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes last May. It won hearts with its simple, natural humanistic approach. The unique film of three interwoven stories draws us into the lives of extraordinary "ordinary" people with practically no dialogue, but strong emphasis on communication. Slowly we are drawn to the emotional core of Khoo's world.

Each of the three stories has a different approach. In "Meant to Be" an aging shopkeeper grapples with loneliness. His destiny changes when he comes across a special autobiography. In "Finding Love," a middle-aged security guard has two loves in his life: a passion for cooking and a woman he admires from afar. His only chance is to write her a letter. "So In Love" is a teenage love story wherein the characters communicate the urgency of thoughts in instant messages on their cell phones.

During exclusive interviews in Cannes and this week in Palm Springs, filmmaker Khoo revealed his inspiration, motivation and approach to cinema.

**QUESTION: Your film is wonderful - very unusual in its ideas and approach. What was the initial idea for this film and your original intent?**

**ANSWER:** I wanted to do something on the themes of life, destiny and hope - all told in various stages of life. For more than a year, my co-writer Wong Kim Hoh and I grappled and struggled, trying to capture these themes in our screenplay.

**Q: What was the turning point for you? What brought it together?**

**A:** I was at a wedding dinner and met this amazing woman. She was deaf and blind. We were talking and she learned that I make films. She immediately said, "You must make a film about hope." I told her that ironically I was trying to do just that. I had an instinct! I asked her to be in my film right on the spot! We started to write to each other and I learned she had a remarkable life and had written an autobiography in Braille. The woman is Theresa Chan and she is a complete inspiration.

**Q: I love the way that you weave the stories and themes together (isolation and communication, love and compassion, the emotional impact of lovingly preparing and sharing food). Tell us about your process of writing with this in mind.**

**A:** It was decided from day one that we make almost a silent film and have communication expressed in a unique way such as the cooking of food for a loved one and how it can heal a broken heart. Each of these different souls are to be impacted by fate as they experience love, tragedy and redemption.

**Q: Your cinematic approach is sometimes more visual than verbal. You give us (the viewers) a chance to feel the images rather than being carried by the dialogue. Can you speak about that approach?**

**A:** We wanted our audience to have the time to experience the moment and live through the spaces of our characters - to be with them and to really feel and hopefully reflect upon their own lives.

**Q: Absolutely. The way Theresa triumphs over her obstacles makes our lives seem that much more rewarding. You have tremendous insight into the world of the disabled characters in the film and even have established a special fund to help the disabled. Can you speak about how you gained this insight and tell us about the foundation work?**

**A:** Theresa Chan has been a real inspiration to us all and without education, she would not have become the person she is now. She is 61 and has been blind since 14. She spent 10 years in America and received an education and even learned to ice skate, dance, ride horses and cook. This is her first film, but she is a natural actress. The Be With Me Fund is to help the disabled through higher education and to support them with some financial assistance.

**Q: What future project can you tell us about?**

**A:** I am currently working on a digital film for the Jeonju Film Festival in Korea called "Digital Short Films by Three Filmmakers." My subject matter is about an Indonesian woman from a rural village coming to work in Singapore as a foreign maid.

### **ABOUT THE CAST:**

Unbelievable though it may sound, BE WITH ME marks the acting debut of almost the entire cast.

**THERESA CHAN**, who inspired BE WITH ME, is a feisty 61-year-old. Deaf and blind since 14, she spent more than 10 years in the United States where she not only received an education, but learned how to dance, ice skate, ride horses, cook and knit, among other things. She played Juliet on stage in a college production of *Romeo And Juliet*. BE WITH ME is her first movie role. Director Eric Khoo called her “a natural actress. You just need to tell her once what you’re after and she gets it immediately.”

**CHIEW SUNG CHING** is a retired office administrator. A keen movie buff, he tutored Eric in English when the latter was a boy.

**SEET KENG YEW**, a gourmet and an avid Formula One fan, is new to acting. As a food-loving lonely security guard, his role in BE WITH ME is “meaty” in more ways than one.

**EZANN LEE** is a new face on television and she got her break in the memorable role of a troubled teenager traumatized by an evil witch in Kum Kum, directed by Eric Khoo for the Seventh Month horror series.

**SAMANTHA TAN** is an undergraduate studying Estate Management at the National University of Singapore.

**LAWRENCE YONG** an accountant and an old friend of the director, he landed the role as the social worker because of his smile and his good aura.

## **ABOUT THE CREW:**

### **DIRECTOR**

**BE WITH ME** is Eric Khoo's third movie after a seven-year absence. Eric is credited for reviving Singapore's film industry 10 years ago with his provocative *Mee Pok Man* which picked up prizes at festivals in Singapore, Pusan and Fukuoka. His sophomore feature *12 Storeys* in 1997 was critically lauded all over the world and was the first Singaporean film to ever have been shown at the Cannes Film Festival. *Time Out Film Guide* (UK) said the film "is so truthful it hurts" while *Time Magazine* praised it as a "tragi-comic take on life." In addition, Eric has produced several feature films and TV series; he was conferred the Youth Award by the Singapore government in 1999 for his dedication to filmmaking and contributions to society. Eric runs his own production company Zhao Wei Films, based in Singapore.

### **SCRIPTWRITERS**

**ERIC KHOO** co-wrote the script with **WONG KIM HOH**, a journalist with Singapore's biggest newspaper The Straits Times. Kim Hoh writes an award-winning interview series: *A Life Less Ordinary* which profiles colorful Singaporeans from all walks of life. One such subject was Theresa Chan. Singaporean culture critic Alvin Pang wrote: "News features like Wong Kim Hoh's *A Life Less Ordinary* have thrown up more intriguing real-life personalities than your average Hollywood script." Kim Hoh conceived this series while working on the script in 2003.

### **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

**ADRIAN TAN** is one of the top TV commercial directors in Singapore. His attention to detail and sumptuous visual sense have earned the former stills photographer a lot of respect in the Singapore ad industry. His list of blue chip clients include StarHub, Citibank and Mercedes. Adrian also directed *Bridge*, an episode from the Eric Khoo produced TV series *Seventh Month*.

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

**JAMES TOH** collaborated with Eric Khoo on the screenplay for the critically acclaimed *12 Storeys* in 1997. An ex-management consultant, he is now a partner at Zhao Wei Films. He has also gone behind the camera and among others, has directed an episode for the TV series *Drive* and a segment in the love trilogy, *Stories About Love*. More significantly, he wrote the White Paper which resulted in the formation of the Singapore Film Commission in 1997.

**JACKIE KHOO** is an ex-banker. She has produced or executive produced all of Zhao Wei's films, from *Mee Pok Man* in 1993 to Royston Tan's *15* in 2003.

**FREDDIE YEO** is the general manager of Infinite Frameworks, one of the best post production facilities in Singapore. One of the most ardent supporters of Singapore's fledgling film industry, Freddie has supported and nurtured many local film talents including Bertrand Lee and Royston Tan.

## PRODUCER

**BRIAN HONG** studied film at St John's University in New York and worked at HBO and The Comedy Channel in the early 1990s. He has extensive experience in broadcast operations and was the production manager for *Mee Pok Man*. He also produced *12 Storeys* and collaborated with Eric Khoo on several movies and TV projects.

## POST PRODUCTION

**EDITING: LOW HWEE LING** has edited Jack Neo's *The Best Bet* and she has also worked on the short films of some of Singapore's most creative talents including Royston Tan's *Careless Whisperer* and Bertrand Lee's *Birthday* which was screened at the Venice Film Festival and which won the Best Asian Short at this year's Bangkok International Film Festival.

**MUSIC: KEVIN MATHEWS** has scored the music of several Eric Khoo projects including *Mee Pok Man*, *12 Storeys*, and *One Leg Kicking* among others. A lawyer by day, and music composer by night, he has a band called Popland. **CHRISTINE SHUM** graduated with magna cum laude in Professional Music from the Berklee College of Music. She is a prolific music composer for radio and TV commercials and is also in inflight entertainment consultant on audio programming for various airlines. Her skill on the piano are much sought by A-list Asian performers such as Sally Yeh, Stephanie Sun and A-Mei.

**SOUND DESIGN:** Sound engineer **KAZZ** has worked on several local films including *Return to Pontianak* and *Perth* by Singaporean filmmaker Djinn. A member of the hard core punk band Opposition Party, Kazz also worked on the sound design for Eric Khoo's horror TV series *Seventh Month*.

## ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT:

Film Movement is a distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films. Film Movement releases films both through traditional windows and simultaneously via a first-of-its-kind subscription service called the Film Movement Series. Film Movement Series members receive an award-winning feature direct from the world's top festivals, along with a bonus short film, on DVD to own every month.

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