

Satu - Year of the Rabbit: Joshua Trigg's Breath-taking Debut

Satu – Year of the Rabbit, written and directed by Joshua Trigg, is a moving piece about a young orphan boy Satu (Itthiphone Sonepho) living in the Pha Tang Temple in Laos. When bombs are discovered close to the temple, a 17-year-old girl, Bo (Vanthiva Manichan), seeks refuge and quickly befriends Satu. From there, they go on a journey to find Satu's mother, who left him at the temple as a child.



The film opens with a woman carrying a baby through the river in her arms. Crying, she places the baby down by the door of the temple and leaves. Presenting the audience with a slow-paced film seeped in gorgeous imagery.

Fast forward in time, and we are introduced to Bo, a schoolgirl and aspiring photojournalist with dreams of going to the University of Hanoi. Though a cheerful young girl, doodling a rabbit as it rains in class, the film quickly conveys that Bo's home is one filled with a cold darkness, where grief fuels the room. Somsinh Thammachareun, as Bo's father, gives a stomach-churning performance as a widower cannibalised by grief and alcoholism.

Bo must make a decision: will things stay the same, or will she make a choice that changes everything?

Meanwhile, we see Satu as a child living in the temple with the other young monks. He is afraid of the water. Bombs are discovered on the Temple grounds, meaning that the monastery cannot plant food for the next harvest, putting the community at risk. At the heart of this story is an emotional journey, but at its margins, we see the lasting impact of war on rural Laos. Here, the head monk, Khuba Danay (Athit Silavong), invites her in. There, Bo and Satu become fast friends.

Satu's yearning for a mother is palpable. The camera lingers on his crestfallen face as he sees other children with their parents. Sonepho's expressions paint a story of Satu's deep sadness and desire to know more about his origins. Seeing Bo's friendship with Satu. Khuba Danay shows Satu a photo of his mother and the letter she left him. From there, Satu asks Bo to help him find his mother. They set off on her moped to find answers.

One of the film's strong points is its setting. Audiences are entreated with stunning visuals of rural Laos: wide shots of expansive forests, sweeping mountains, and gorgeous, picturesque rivers. Reading the synopsis, there's a fear that this film could exploit the pain and poverty in Laos. But it highlights suffering without revelling in it. We don't need to see that it's bad to know that it's bad—we understand this through breathtaking visuals of Laos and careful sound design.

Satu plays the delicate balancing act of a story of familial pain, acceptance, overcoming, and becoming through found family and friendship. It's a tale of childhood innocence at the intersection of harsher realities and hopeful futures.

So much of the film tonally is a reminder of Studio Ghibli movies, where children must deal with self-actualisation. Coming-of-age stories like *Spirited Away* and *Kiki's Delivery Service* come to mind.

Verdict

Satu – Year of the Rabbit takes you on an emotional journey that ultimately finds its footing in a resolution that is both hopeful and light.

Words by Ayomide

Support the Indiependent

We're trying to raise £200 a month to help cover our operational costs. This includes our 'Writer of the Month' awards, where we recognise the amazing work produced by our contributor team. If you've enjoyed reading our site, we'd really appreciate it if you could donate to The Indiependent. Whether you can give £1 or £10, you'd be making a huge difference to our small team.