



fish

*The Nightingale*  
(China/France 2013)

DIRECTOR : Philippe Muyl  
RUNNING TIME : 100mins  
RATING : PG

**Synopsis:**

Zhigen (Bao Tian Li), an old Chinese farmer, has lived alone in Beijing for over 20 years after moving to the city to allow his son Chongyi (Hao Qin) to attend university. He decides to make the long journey from Beijing to Yangshuo to honour the promise he made to his wife to bring back the bird that has been his only companion in the city. His daughter-in-law Qianing (Xiao Ren Li) a beautiful rich career woman, asks him to take along his granddaughter Renxing (Xin Yi Yang), an only child brought up in the lap of luxury. While grandfather and granddaughter set out on their journey - one travelling back in time, the other discovering her roots - Chongyi and Qianing, ponder the meaning of the life they have led in the sole pursuit of success and money.

**Review: Andrew L. Urban**

Simple but far from simplistic, *The Nightingale* sings its song with gentle power, telling a story that is both affecting and effective as cinema. The story threads gently bind together a small family's relationships and chart the important changes with a light touch. The central relationship, around which the story is built, concerns Zhigen (Bao Tian Li) and his young granddaughter Renxing (Xin Yi Yang), separated not only age but by the lifestyles with which they are familiar. He old school country, she spoilt brat on iPad. Fate puts them together in the road movie aspect of the film, while Renxing's parents are struggling with their marriage.

The third relationship is Zhigen's estrangement from his son Chongyi (Hao Qin), who is still angry with his father for losing the little girl in a bird market four years earlier. But the grandfather is not an irresponsible old fart - he had made a huge sacrifice to leave his village in order to provide the support for his son's university education, which is now paying off with a successful career in architecture.

Daughter in law Qianing (Xiao Ren Li) is also successful as a businesswoman, and the little girl's contrasting environments are well accented between the modern well-to-do couple and the rustic countryside. The latter provides some spectacular landscapes which add greatly to the film's texture and sense of place, while Armand Amar's sensitive, colour-rich score provides support to the visuals as well as the drama.

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**FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC**

10.00 am Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2017

8.15 pm Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017

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## Review: (Cont.)

The film begins predictably enough and falters here and there, but the complex themes and well observed characters deepen and enrich the work as it progresses to a moving resolution and a haunting resonance.

## Review: Louise Keller

Simple truths are contrasted by materialistic complexity in this charming tale in which the past, the present and the future intersect. French born writer and director Philippe Muyl (*The Butterfly*) has created a delightful film that explores the value of nurturing; a precocious child is shown a new direction; a couple whose relationship has withered re-evaluates; an old man searches for peace. It's a character-driven story set in the lush, verdant landscape of a remote Chinese province, where the lake is a mirror, the grass is soft and the trees are twisted art installations whose branches anchor their roots into the earth.

As we glimpse the privileged life of little Renxing (Yang Xinyi) being chauffeured, enjoying private ballet classes, art and piano lessons and extravagant birthday parties, we understand she has everything superficial but little of substance. She spends more time playing with high-tech items than bonding with friends of her own age. There's a hollow aspect to her life; her architect father Chongyi (Qin Hao) and executive mother Qianying (Li Xiaoran) pass each other in the night as they pursue their individual, successful careers.

On the other side of Beijing, Renxing's grandfather Li Baotian (Ju Dou) lives a simple life finding joy in creating things and listening to the song of the little caged bird that we learn has special significance. The fact that Chongyi is estranged from his father for reasons we later learn impacts on the dynamics of the road trip in which Li and Renxing partake.

It is desperation that makes Qianying ask Li to take the little girl with him to his rural hometown, accompanied by the little caged bird that sings. Renxing's initial brattish behaviour from the early scenes in the train as they leave Beijing slowly turns into curiosity as their shared adventures begin a bond. As the road trip begins, they get lost, walk along a dirt track, shelter from the rain in a cave and warm themselves by a fire at night. We watch the transition with satisfaction. The scene in which Li tells his granddaughter about her grandmother and the reason why he is returning to his home is one of the most moving, describing her beauty to that of water, mist, wind and a dream.

The way all the story strands come together is as natural as the wind that rustles the leaves in the trees. The performances are excellent and there is plenty of heart in this affecting film whose song sings sweetly as it finds its notes on the forest stage.

Source: [www.urbancinefile.com.au](http://www.urbancinefile.com.au) Accessed 11/6/15

## COMING UP:

March	<i>A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence</i> (Sweden)	Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 28 <sup>th</sup>
April	<i>Truman</i> (Spain/ Argentina)	Sunday 30 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday May 2 <sup>nd</sup>
May	<i>Macadam Stories</i> (France)	Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 30 <sup>th</sup>
June	<i>Labyrinth of Lies</i> (Germany)	Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 27 <sup>th</sup>

## Some Thoughts On: *Alex & Eve*

What a delightfully fun and light-hearted way to complete our 2016 FISH year. Despite knowing from the outset exactly where this film was headed, there was much joy to be derived from this Aussie 'conflict of cultures'. It was a confection in the school of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, but a confection even rivalling the accompanying Choc~Tops!! There was nothing here being presented as deep and meaningful, but below the humorous surface, very real and complex issues were dealt with on quite a few occasions.

Beautifully shot with a hilarious and well-paced screenplay, the director and his very proficient local cast created the perfect entry point for us into the festive season. A & E was really enjoyed by so many of our members, no doubt a pleasure reinforced for a lot by the contrast with our previous film, the somewhat dour 'Tehran Taxi'. A special mention for the fantastic musical score running behind the events on screen. It added so much colour and flavour to the overall success of this joyous multi-cultural celebration of life ~ so valued at this time of gathering red and blonde clouds on the horizon in the world today.

Finally, a great big thank you to Nick Papademitriou for his short film, *Swinger*, which screened prior to A & E. His quirky tribute to his Cypriot grandparents was such a delightfully appropriate lead-in to the main feature. Very much appreciated Nick. **Ross Armfield**

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## Phillippe Muyl : Writer/Director

Born in 1953 in Lille, France, Phillippe Muyl began his career in advertising. He produced and directed his first film in 1984 and his subsequent filmography notably includes *Tree Under the Sea* (1984), *Kitchen and Addictions* (1992), *Everything Must Go* (1996), *The Cow and the Boy* (2000), *The Butterfly* (2002), *Magic* (2007), *Stroller Bird* (2012). *The Nightingale* (2013) is Muyl's ninth feature film, making him the first non-Chinese director to shoot a completely Chinese film.

*The Nightingale* touches lightly on some contemporary Chinese social issues, including materialism, marriage problems and inter-generational tensions. In look and pacing however, the film feels European and shares some commonalities with Muyl's 2002 French film *The Butterfly*, which proved unexpectedly popular in China. That movie also told a story of a young girl spending time on the road with an elderly man, with a winged creature taking a title role. After showing several of his family-oriented films at festivals in China, Muyl was encouraged to consider doing a movie in China.

"I knew almost nothing about China, but I was looking at the calendar of my life, I saw my age, and I said, 'It's time to be crazy'," recalls Muyl, 62. The director spent about half of 2010 and most of 2011 in China, taking language lessons and travelling. He even shot a short pollution-themed film, *Red Apple*, as a sort of experiment to see if he could actually make a movie in Chinese.

The language barrier proved easier to overcome than the financial hurdles, says Muyl. "It's hard to find money in China if your movie is not an action film and not in 3-D," he says. "And in France you can find money – if you're making a film in French or a European language." In the end, 80 per cent of the US\$3.1-million production budget came from China and the rest from France, which qualified it as official Sino-French co-production, one of the first ever.

Sources: [www.wcff.us/2014/films/nightingale](http://www.wcff.us/2014/films/nightingale) & [www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment](http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment) - Julie Maiken in the Los Angeles Times 24/9/15: Edited extracts accessed 23/1/17

## Message from the President

Welcome back everyone to the second half of FISH season 16/17. First of all I would like to pass on an apology to our Sunday morning members from Nick Papademitriou (maker of the short film *Swinger*), and Zoe Carides (Nick's very good friend and the actor who played one of the mothers in *Alex & Eve*), for not being able to attend our first screening because of work commitments in Sydney on Sundays. Fortunately, they were able to attend on Tuesday night with both of them introducing their respective films and providing us with very interesting background details and an insightful context to both films. It was a pleasure to have their involvement.

**IMPORTANT:** At the moment FISH is full. Prospective members are currently on a waiting list. Caught on the hop a little last year by the flood of renewals, some current members missed out renewing because of being overseas at the time or just delaying renewing for too long. Neither of these scenarios had been a problem in the past because our overall numbers at the beginning of each season were usually much lower. This is no longer the case. To avoid disappointment, when we send out renewal forms this year, usually in May, all current members will be given first priority to rejoin ~ but, it will only be for a limited period, yet to be determined and announced. Once that period has elapsed applicants on the waiting list will be accommodated where possible. I mention this now so all can be prepared in plenty of time, particularly if you think you could be away at renewal time in May/June. If this applies to you, please line up a friend or fellow member to return your membership to us when the forms are sent out to you. Here's to a smooth renewal process later this year.

**Committee member Christine Ferguson is now the contact person for members wishing to bring a guest to a screening of their choice. Each member is entitled to bring ONE guest to ONE film per season. You can contact Christine on any of the following: 48616381 or 0410113213 or [ncferg@bigpond.com.au](mailto:ncferg@bigpond.com.au) . These contacts are preferred as they will provide faster feedback for you than the FISH gmail address.**

Many of you would have known, or known of, long term FISH members Kay and Keith McMenemy. Keith wrote reviews for our newsletter on quite a regular basis. Towards the end of 2015 Kay and Keith moved to Victoria to be closer to their children. Sadly, a few weeks back Kay died from an aggressive form of Leukaemia. On behalf of FISH I would like to pass on our heartfelt sympathies and very best wishes to Keith and his family. A sad, sad loss.

And so to China ~ our first visit there in years. I'm really looking forward to it and the other Fab Four in our run up to June. I hope you are too! Yours in film, Ross Armfield.



### FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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