

# Birthday Party

Press Kit



# **Birthday Party**

## **Press Kit**

**a film written & directed by Tony Lam**

## Film Synopsis

Birthday Party opens with a young woman preparing a meal for a birthday party. However, she soon begins to exhibit very strange behavior. Is the woman neurotic? Does she have an extreme case of social anxiety? Or is she responding to something terrible that has happened to the outside world?

Birthday Party is a puzzle. The opening shot is an image of a globe covered with a black veil, which then transitions to a young woman preparing ingredients to make dumplings. Everything appears normal, until all of a sudden, she utters a single word that tells us all is not well with her.

From this point forward, the young woman's behavior grows more and more perplexing. She looks outside her window and breaks down crying, but is what she sees outside real or imagined?

She folds an origami unicorn. Does the unicorn represent how she views herself in relation to others, or is she characterizing her newfound situation in light of apocalyptic circumstances?

She dances romantically with her plant. Is she trying to drown out the troubles of the world? Is she reminiscing the loss of a lover? Or is she a terribly shy woman fantasizing about a gentlemen caller?

These are the questions that form the conundrum that is Birthday Party.

## Director's Statement

I envisioned Birthday Party to be both a visual experience as well as an atmospheric mystery about a young woman's odd behavior.

I wanted to make a film that would require the audience to actively interpret what is happening in order to lend meaning to the story. Has the young woman flown the cuckoo's nest? Is she a social recluse? Why has she draped a black veil over a globe – is she mourning something that has happened to the world-at-large, or is she commenting on the state of her own personal world? As writer and director, I have a definite sense of what is actually occurring; however, different viewers may interpret the film in different ways.

In Birthday Party, I also wanted to pay homage to the films that have influenced me to pursue filmmaking. The nod to Citizen Kane is obvious and unmistakable. On a subtler note, the fact that the young woman is named Laura, collects a "paper menagerie," and folds a paper unicorn is an allusion to Tennessee William's The Glass Menagerie and the 1950 film adaptation of the play. In addition, the origami unicorn is meant to carry the enigmatic resonance that it does in Blade Runner.

The teasing Southern belle accent, which the young woman resorts to occasionally, is a suggestive take on Scarlet O'Hara in Gone With The Wind. At an emotionally poignant moment, the woman utters a romantic line, which fans of Casablanca will be intimately familiar. Also, the young woman's relationship to her plant is reminiscent of the relationship between Tom Hank's character and Wilson the Volleyball in Cast Away.

Finally, the montage sequence featuring the young woman and a boiling kettle is my small tribute to Sergei Eisenstein and his groundbreaking theory on montage (as famously illustrated in his pioneering film, Battleship Potemkin). Eisenstein posited that two dissimilar images intercut together can create a third meaning. In Birthday Party, the young woman looking outside her window intercut with a steaming kettle yields a dramatic new impression—a young woman screaming in turmoil.

In short, I made Birthday Party to show an imaginative story on screen that I have not personally seen before, while simultaneously paying homage to some of the great films and filmmakers that have inspired me.

## Director's Biography



**Tony Lam** is a filmmaker and screenwriter, who lives in Los Angeles, California. To date, he has written, directed, and produced two short films, DING DONG and Birthday Party. Birthday Party was an official selection at the VC FilmFest 2005: The Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival and received a Festival Staff Favorites Recommendation. He has completed one feature-length screenplay and three short screenplays, one of which won a Finalist Award at the 2005 Moondance International Film Festival, one of the top screenwriting festivals in the world.

Tony studied literature and history at Georgetown University, East Asian studies at Yale University, and Asian history at the University of Michigan, and has received over a dozen merit scholarships and awards. He has traveled to many countries around the world, including a three year residence in Hong Kong as a Fulbright Scholar.

In 1997, his life became the subject of a documentary called “New Gold Mountain,” produced by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), filmed in three countries, and broadcast primetime in Southern China and Hong Kong. Tony is also an entrepreneur, starting his own business in 2001.

As a child, Tony’s parents could not afford him the luxury of many toys, so Tony amused himself by writing short stories and plays, drawing comic books, and creating character-driven fantasy worlds with his brother that existed only in their shared imaginations. So though he grew up in a family of modest means, Tony never felt deprived, because his restless imagination kept him richly entertained. Moreover, his parents gave him gifts worth far more than toys. From his parents, Tony inherited a narrative universe.

Often at the evening dinner table, amidst steaming bowls of rice, Tony would listen to his father recite classical Chinese poems from memory or tell riveting stories that lasted past dessert. His father depicted episodes from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* so vividly Tony could see the heroic battles raging. At other times, his father recounted his own “Indiana Jones” adventures through the turbulent, war-torn decades of twentieth century China, such as the time when coastal pirates attacked the steamer he was on, and he stuffed his valuables into a banana to prevent them from being taken.

Tony’s mother had her own stories to tell. She would recollect her coming of age during the first Communist decade in China—the initial excitement, the endless campaigns, and the pain of watching her father forced to sweep the streets. This environment of constant storytelling formed the webwork of Tony’s life and fueled his imagination.

Tony hopes to bring all these diverse life experiences to bear on his work as a filmmaker.

## Cast Biography



**Wendy Wong** (Lead Actress) makes her brave acting debut in Birthday Party, single-handedly carrying the film from beginning to end. She met the Director, Tony Lam, on the set of a music video, Skin Trade, where she was the Costume Designer.

Wendy graduated from the University of South Carolina in 1997 with a degree in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry. She pursued graduate work and cancer research at MGH/Harvard Medical School upon graduation. After specializing in the study of yeast as a model organism for studying protein-protein interactions, she moved to the UCLA Medical School to lead a research study in HIV protein-protein interactions at the AIDS Institute.

Her career switched gears in 2001 when she joined Bain & Company, Los Angeles, a strategy management consulting firm, where she is now in Marketing. In 2003, she helped engineer and implement the launch of a company-wide rebranding effort by piloting the roll-out in the Los Angeles office. Wendy co-led the direction, production and casting for a global corporate identity video for the company brand launch.

In addition to brand marketing, Wendy's hobbies include jewelry and fashion design, which has sprung a recent line of custom jewelry, Mon Petit Chou™. Deeply rooted in her love of visual arts, Wendy also aspires to be a fashion designer and has plans to launch her own clothing line in the near future. She is currently a student of fashion design at Otis School of Art and Design in Los Angeles, when she is not working at her day job.

A person of many creative interests, she is always willing to go with what catches her eye and heart, including her film debut as Laura in Tony Lam's Birthday Party.

# Film Credits

## Cast

Wendy Wong .....Laura

## Crew

Tony Lam .....Director, Producer, Screenwriter, Editor, Director of Photography & Set Designer

Wendy Wong .....Costume Designer

Otto Yang .....Phonograph Music & Chef Advisor

Ming Lo .....Still Photographer

## Technical Specifications

**Running Time:** ..... 8:00

**Shooting Format:** ..... Mini-DV

**Shooting Color:** ..... Color

**Projection Format:** ..... Beta SP (NTSC)

**Projection Aspect Ratio:** ..... 1.33 (4x3)

**Projection Sound Format:** ..... Digital Stereo



## **Still Photos**

1. Laura and her plant. Photo credit: Tony Lam.
2. Laura looking reflective while preparing dumplings. Photo credit: Ming Lo.
3. The origami unicorn. Photo credit: Tony Lam.
4. Laura and the origami unicorn. Photo credit: Ming Lo.
5. Laura and a pork dumpling. Photo credit: Ming Lo.
6. Laura teasing her plant. Photo credit: Ming Lo.
7. Laura slow-dancing with her plant. Photo credit: Ming Lo.
8. Laura slow-dancing with her plant. Photo credit: Ming Lo.
9. Director Tony Lam with Actress Wendy Wong. Photo credit: Ming Lo.









