



Forever ★★★★★

(Singapore) Directed by Wee Li Lin. Stars Joanna Dong, Mo Tzu Yi and Sarah Ng Li-Wen. Continuing.

A Singaporean film can be one of two things: A mass-appeal comedy that tugs at the heartstrings or an esoteric art house piece that pleases a limited audience. Wee Li Lin's *Forever* (or *Wo Ai Ni Ai Ni Ai Ni Ai Ni* depending on your first language, which translates to "I Love You, Love You, Love You") strikes a balance, refreshingly so, delivering a Singapore-flavored study in quirkiness.

Joey (Joanna Dong) is a consultant at the Wedding Education Department (W.E.D), an organization that matches singles in Singapore through classes, tea dances and screenings of staged wedding videos. After Joey stars in a video with music teacher Gin (Mo Tzu Yi)—"Groomie" to her "Bridey"—she starts to lose her grip on reality, believing that she is Gin's fiancée. She pursues Gin, hilariously at first, and psychotically later, ignoring the fact the he's engaged to Cecilia (Sarah Ng Li-Wen).

As *Forever* skips along whimsically, it never gets predictable. When you think it's taking a turn for lovey-dovey fluff it throws you a scene of Joey inhaling helium before calling Gin from a blocked number to yell "I love you" repeatedly. Funny, but when the wackiness of Joey's pursuit becomes serious and worrying, the transition is seamless. *Forever* gives you the satisfaction of seeing it go where you want it to go and the result is *Napoleon Dynamite* meets *Black Swan*, in Mandarin.

It's easy to say we're just happy to see a new face, but Joanna Dong really owns the role of Joey, putting forward the right amount of crazy with a talent for subtle humor that is all too rare in this land. Her opposite number Mo Tzu Yi is a little too straight though. When his Gin stares at Joey in wide-eyed amazement, his confusion is beyond convincing.

Forever's art direction is distinctive and if you have suspicions that an artist is behind it, you'd be right—the Art Director is multiple Biennale veteran Charles Lim (and Wee Li Lin's hubby), whose pastel blue schemes form a striking contrast to the red normally linked with love. Backed by a score (and a theme song) which rotates romantic passages, confrontational flamenco riffs and ominous choral pieces, *Forever* is not just a great local film, it's a great film full stop. **Kurt Ganapathy**