

## Ga-eun Yoon about THE HOUSE OF US

### “My gift to all girls taking charge of their own lives”

Like her heart-melting feature debut *THE WORLD OF US*, Ga-eun Yoon's second film once again stands very close to her own reality. Again the universe she created is delicate, tender and restrained. In Ga-eun's films, it seems like the world is turning slower, the sky colours softer, and the most crucial words are spoken in a whispering tone. On the occasion of the film's presence in the Zlin Film Festival, we spoke with the director about *THE HOUSE OF US*.

This summer, Hana has but one wish: to go on a family trip, like in the good old days before mum and dad were fighting all the time. But the more she tries to keep the family together, the more they seem to fall apart. Until one day Hana makes new friends. Yoo-mi and her sister Yoo-jin are living on their own, their parents are always out of town. With the sisters struggling to secure their home from the landlord, Hana helps them to forget their worries, considerate as always.

**There is so much tenderness in this**

**movie, so much caring for others. Is that what life is all about for Hana?**

Ga-eun Yoon: Hana, carefully observing the world, has this special gift to be on standby at any time to lend everybody a helping hand. She takes up her family's problems as if it were her own, just like she takes care for her friends. That is one of life's crucial and noble abilities, although nowadays people might tend to judge it as “useless and meddlesome”. Of course we shouldn't mingle all the time in other people's business but I believe we would all be more relaxed and less lonely under the good, loving care of others. Some might pity Hana for carrying a too heavy weight upon her shoulders. But she shouldn't be pitied, she should be praised for her precious qualities. That kind of compliment is what I have been wishing for as a child. Such compliments can help Hana to become more confident as a person, and more balanced in her own life. That is the essence of what I wanted the audience to reflect upon.

**It is a disturbing thought that one**

**day Hana will grow up, as in your film all tenderness is with the children.**

Ga-eun: Maybe she will grow up to become an even softer and more adorable adult. But sometimes it makes me sad to realise how ‘growing up’ might mean giving up the flexibility, kindness and simple straightforward thinking you once had as a child. In my childhood days, I rarely thought about what it would be like to become an adult, I wasn't able to look that far into the future as I was so immersed by living every single moment. I vaguely assumed that “I'll be able to handle a lot more when I grow up”. Rather not, apparently, the older I get the more difficult it is to keep my focus and concentration, making me even more afraid of not being able to live every moment to the fullest.

**Hana's parents seem incapable to behave responsibly.**

Ga-eun: Children and adults are reacting totally differently to the film. Children are excited about Hana's adventures, while parents often feel



tortured or guilty. That surprises me, as throughout the making of the film I was only focussed on the children and how they are dealing with the situation.

**You were not aware that the audience would consider the parents behaviour as problematic?**

Ga-eun: Why should Hana's parents score so badly? I think they rather should be praised as “good parents struggling hard”, taking care of the children even in the toughest of times,

now that they are going through the most painful period in their life.

**Did recent Covid quarantines make your film even more compelling? We are all afraid of what might happen behind closed doors during lockdowns.**

Ga-eun: So many conditions in life are rapidly changing, making even adults feel confused. I hardly dare to imagine how much fear and anxiety this might cause among children. What about children having to bear all family problems by themselves? It makes me feel terribly sad. If it was like now, Hana could not even have gone outside, she would have felt even more lonesome.

**How is it to work with an actress that resembles so much your own personality? Is it like seeing the child you once were coming to live again?**

Ga-eun: In the project's early script-writing stage I looked back upon my childhood as profoundly as I could, embedding my feelings and worries from those days into the story. Simply recalling the past made me feel like reliving it. However, after meeting the actresses my focus shifted completely towards them. They are the ones now going through these phas-



es, they might understand the characters far better than I do. I questioned them about situations and emotions, and through improvisations and discussions we tried to find out how they would react. Through this process I could correct the mistakes in my adult perspective. It wasn't easy to include the actresses' visions while staying true to the intentional topics and storyline. Luckily their ideas mainly corresponded with mine, making the whole process much more fun. I felt so lucky!

**As we remember from THE WORLD OF US, you are a master in directing 'spontaneous acting'. Again in THE**



**HOUSE OF US all dialogues sound so natural. What is your secret?**

Ga-eun: There is none. I can only help them to fully understand the characters and situations, and stimulate

them to freely express their feelings. But even when they understand and feel a certain scene with their heart, this must become visible on their faces. There has to be this moment that I can feel an emotion coming to live, as true and clear as almost tangible. We also need the courage to throw away the parts that actresses can't fully understand. Preparing THE HOUSE OF US, for two months we did improv sessions. I simply described a scene and a context, and then the actresses spontaneously acted out and created

the scene. Then we talked, revised... Time-consuming as they are, these sessions for me are the best part of the entire filmmaking process. I often regret that I can't fully capture scenes

in the film as remarkable as they were in the first rehearsals.

**The girls go on a trip together. Is that based on another of your childhood memories?**

Ga-eun: I never ran away from home impulsively, nor have I ever been on a trip with friends. I craved it many times, but probably wasn't as brave as Hana. I wrote those scenes, sending Hana on a trip on my behalf, doing the things I desperately wished to do back then. The world is much more harsh for girls, there are so many things that we have learned to consider as risky or dangerous. I wanted to show that it is possible for girls to go on an expedition at their own conditions, it doesn't have to be dangerous and they can finish the trip safely, with some 'miraculous help'. This trip is my gift to all those girls trying hard – and succeeding – to take charge of their own lives.

**The film drags the audience into its own universe, with its own colour scale. I've seldom seen a film with such delicate, well-matching colours.**

Ga-eun: I always carefully choose a colour scale for my film. For grown-ups it might be painful to see the hardships these children are going

through, but when putting yourself in their shoes, life isn't a total tragedy. Every day again they give their very best to keep their lives going, which is the source of their sparkling vitality and energy. I wanted the colour palette of this film to convey a cinematic reality, which is somewhat different from the actual reality. That is why we picked pastel colours with a summery tone. Up to the post-production phase, my DoP Kim Ji-Hyun kept on working on colour details. Creating this special universe was the result of a true collaboration with the entire crew.

**Soft and tender music is another tool in shaping that world.**

Ga-eun: Ever since I started making short films, I have always been working with Yonrimog as music director. She is a great musician and a dear friend of mine. In fact, from all the films we did together, there is none that contains as much input from her as THE HOUSE OF US. Usually my films contain only a tiny bit of music, but this time it was like the entire film, and some scenes in particular, needed extra rhythm and vitality. This is how we worked: Yonrimog interpreted the scenes and made a score. I tried to feel the impact of the music and emailed her my feedback. Of



*Director Ga-eun Yoon*

course we could have met or called, but emailing helped us to organise our thoughts when explaining meticulously the transition of emotions from the characters to the score. It kept us broad-minded towards each other's interpretations.

**The title of your film seems like a variation to THE WORLD OF US. Is that part of a bigger plan?**

Ga-eun: Not at all! I made THE HOUSE OF US as a totally different movie. We shot both films in the same town and some actors from THE WORLD OF US made a cameo. But only after finishing THE HOUSE OF US I realised the

film could be perceived as a sequel in its broadest context. Actually, it seems like the Korean titles are gradually growing bigger, from "US" to "our HOME". Some said my next film should be about "our SCHOOL" or "our COUNTRY". On the other hand, the English titles seem to grow gradually smaller, from "THE WORLD" to "THE HOUSE". I imagine how then the next title should be "THE TWO OF US".

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Gert Hermans