

# ***Peppermint Candy***

A film by LEE Chang-Dong

**UniKorea & Dream Venture Capital Presents  
East Film Production, NHK Co-production  
Written & Directed by LEE Chang-Dong  
Producer MYUNG Kaynam & Makoto Ueda  
Starring SOL Kyung-Gu, Moon So-Ri, KIM Yeo-Jin**

## **Synopsis**

**Outdoor Excursion:** Spring 1999. A group of middle-aged working class friends meet for the 20<sup>th</sup> year reunion of their old factory worker's association. While they sing and dance up a storm, their long-lost friend Yongho shows up, disrupting the party. He climbs on top of a railroad track and refuses to budge despite the danger of an approaching train.

**The Camera: Three Days Ago, Spring 1999.** Three days earlier, Yongho picks up a gun and goes home to his makeshift home to end his life. He is met by a stranger as he opens the front door. The stranger is the husband of Sunim, Yongho's first love, who on her deathbed asks for Yongho. Yongho comes to the hospital with a jar of peppermint candy for Sunim, and reminisces about how Sunim had sent a peppermint with each letter she wrote to Yongho when he was in the military. As Yongho leaves, Sunim's husband presents him with a camera that Sunim had saved for him all these years. Yongho sells it later on.

**Life is Beautiful: Summer 1994.** Yongho is a 35-year-old man, successful in his business but hard and calloused with time. With seeming indifference, he catches his wife Hongja at a love hotel. But he is also involved in an affair. Later he goes on a date with his mistress, and spots a man from his past, Myungsik. He meets up with Myungsik in the restroom and says something mysteriously to him, "life is beautiful."

**Confession: Spring 1987.** Yongho is newly married and is a police detective. In the police station's interrogation room, Yongho questions Myungsik on the whereabouts of a student activist, an interrogation that escalates to cruel water torture. The fugitive student is hiding in Kunsan. There, Yongho picks up a bargirl who offers to be a surrogate for Sunim, the first love, who now lives in Kunsan. As Sunim comes to life in the bargirl, Yongho breaks down in tears.

**Prayer: Fall 1984.** Yongho is new to the police department and his first assignment is to crack a labor organization. This entails the brutal torture of a labor activist. After the interrogation, Sunim comes to find him. Yongho takes Sunim to eat at Hongja's restaurant and flirts with Hongja to push Sunim away.

## *Peppermint Candy*

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Sunim tries to give Yongho a camera that she's saved money up for, but he returns it to her. Later that night Yongho takes Hongja to a hotel, and Hongja recites a prayer before they sleep together.

**Military Visit: May 1980.** Sunim comes to visit Yongho in the military, but her visit is rejected because of the martial law that has suddenly been imposed. In the barracks, Yongho frantically puts together his combat gear, spilling a bag full of peppermint candy on the ground. As the truck drives away, a swell of hoots rises from the troops as they pass Sunim walking on the road. Unknown to the young soldiers, their destination is Kwangju Massacre. That night Yongho is severely injured, and while waiting for help, Sunim seems to appear in the dark. It is not Sunim, but a schoolgirl running to safety, who Yongho fatally shoots in a moment of confused panic.

**Picnic: Fall 1979.** Yongho is twenty years old and at the most beautiful moment in his life. A group of factory friends have gathered at the same riverbank below the railroad tracks, as at the beginning of the film. Yongho and Sunim are beginning to fall in love. Yongho confides that he'd like to be a photographer one day. He feels certain that he's been to this riverbank before, that maybe it's a dream. Sunim says she hopes it's a good dream.

## **Biographies**

### **Director: LEE Chang-Dong**

#### *Profile*

1954 Born in Taegu City, Korea.

1983 Made his debut as a novelist with <The Booty>.

1987 Published <Burning Papers>.

1992 Published <There's Lots of shits in Nokcheon>.

1993 Started his career on the screen with <To The Starry Island> as a scenario writer and assistant director

1995 Wrote the scenario for <A Single Spark>

1996 Made his debut as director through <Green Fish>.

1999 Directed <Peppermint Candy>.

#### *Filmography*

1997, <Green Fish>, 111mins. Color, Dolby SR, 1:1.85

    Took The Alkan Dragons & Tigers Award for Young Cinema on The 16th Vancouver International Film Festival.

1999, <Peppermint Candy>, 129mins. Color, Dolby SR, 1:1.85

    Opening film on '99 Pusan International Film Festival

    Directors' Fortnight on 2000' Cannes Film Festival

    Competition on 2000' Karlovy Vary International Film Festival

Lee Chang-Dong became a sensation both in Korea and abroad with his 1997 debut feature *Green Fish*. Lee Chang-Dong's first film *Green Fish* (1997) was a film about space in its depiction of the space of a planned city that replaced farming land. *Peppermint Candy* is a film about time in its portrayal of a person's life as seen through both the destructive and redemptive forces of time. *Peppermint Candy* is his second feature.

**Director's first film: GREEN FISH (1997)**

GREEN FISH preceded the main themes of PEPPERMINT CANDY in its depiction of the rapid rise to development in Korean society that leaves many individuals empty-handed in spirit. In addition to winning numerous domestic awards, GREEN FISH was invited to 30 international film festivals, and was awarded the The Alcan Dragons and Tigers Award for Young Cinema at the 16<sup>th</sup> Vancouver International Film Festival.

**Director's Note**

*Peppermint Candy* looks inside those individuals who have suffered loss, and who have forgotten what is important with the flow of time. This is about cutting open this buried loss, about waking up lost time.

Although we now face the new millennium, I may already be too old to dream of a new world. Rather than looking forward to the possibilities of the future, the time travel I take is back to the past. What is the nature of the times that have passed, and how have the lives of Koreans changed? In *Peppermint Candy*, we start in present day 1999, and then go back twenty years to 1979, when a twenty year dictatorship had finally ended. It was a time heaving with massacres, passion, resistance, suicides by self-immolation, political betrayals, wild abandonment, festivals, and ennui. Since then, life has greatly changed and living conditions have improved, but we Koreans have still not found happiness

Time is really the essence of film. The sense of time in *Peppermint Candy* is not an abstracted time nor the time of daily ordinary life for the individual. Political history did not leave personal history alone, but agitated it unrelentingly, bringing it onto the battleground of this disturbed time period in Korean history that the film takes us back to. I don't go back in time for nostalgic reasons, nor do I place importance on the past over the present. Rather, I see this as the chance for young people today to identify with the young of the past, and perhaps gain some wisdom from their predecessors. If there is no value in reclaiming certain ideals, then there is no reason to discuss the past.

**Festival**

*Directors' Fortnight at Cannes 2000*  
*Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2000*  
*– Special Jury, Netpac, Ficc Awards*  
*Montreal World Film Festival 2000 – Cinema of Tomorrow*  
*Vancouver International Film Festival 2000*  
*London Film Festival 2000*  
*Int'l Film Festival(Bratislava) 2000 - Best Director, Best Actor*  
*29th Belgrade IFF-Discovering New Talents section*  
*24th Portland IFF- competitive*  
*NAT Film Festival 2001*  
*San Francisco Int'l Film Festival 2001*  
*And many more...*

**Review**

**“Peppermint candy is a sweet-centered movie wrapped in a tart coating. An meditation on lost innocence paralleling South Korea’s evolution over the past 20 years... Film still works, however, on a human level, thanks to excellent playing by all the leads.”**

**----- Derek Elley, VARIETY**

**“Peppermint candy is a beautiful melodrama at the same time very sophisticated and almost unpolished...”**

**----- Jean-Marc Lalanne, Liberation (France)**

**“... a force of impact respectful of the declared game of the genre...”**

**----- Cristina Piccino, IL MANIFESTO(Italy)**

**“... the movie possesses all the exquisite qualities that made Korean art-house films such a hit on the festival circuit during the 1990s...”**

**----- Richard James Havis, MOVNING PICTURES**

**“... the longer you watch Peppermint Candy, the stronger it seems, helped along by excellent acting and musical score...”**

**----- Derek Malcolm, SCREEN INTERNATIONAL**

“...a small masterpiece of emotion and narrative virtuosity... “

----- Thierry Riviere, NICE-MATIN(France)

“Emotion wins over gradually until the moment when the main character arrives at the end to the same place and discovers the place where he will die 20 years later. A sublime ending for the film where the character cries at foreseeing his future...”

----- Vincent Ostria, L'HUMANITE (France)

## **The Cast**

### **SOL Kyung-Gu (as Youngho)**

For *PEPPERMINT CANDY*, SOL Kyung-Gu was chosen as the one actor who could play the complicated role of a character's life that spans twenty years. SOL Kyung-Gu has been widely expected to be Korea's next biggest star ever since he starred in his early films including *GIRLS' NIGHT OUT*(1998). By his brilliant acting in *PEPPERMINT CANDY*, the expectation is fully fulfilled, and SOL won many best actor awards both in Korea and in foreign film festivals such as Int'l Film Festival(Bratislava).

### *Filmography*

*GIRLS' NIGHT OUT*(1998)/ *RAINBOW OUT*(1999)/  
*PHANTOM SUBMARINE*(1999)/ *THE BIRD WHO STOPS IN THE AIR*(1999)/ •  
*The Ginko Bed 2*(2000)/ *I WISH I HAD A WIFE*(2001)

### **MOON So-Ri (as Sunim)**

In her portrayal of Sunim, MOON So-Ri takes on the difficult task of playing a character that is the most symbolic in the portrayal of Yongho's first love, a character that will remain in everybody's heart. *PEPPERMINT CANDY* is her film-acting debut.

### **KIM Yeo-Jin (as Hongja)**

KIM Yeo-Jin meets the challenge in playing the girlfriend, and later, the wife of the difficult character of Yongho, a character that many Korean women identify with. KIM Yeo-Jin won the award for best debut actress in 1998 for her role in *GIRLS' NIGHT OUT*.

## **Credits**

Written and directed by	LEE Chang-Dong
Producer	MYUNG Kaynam and Makoto Ueda
Co-Producer	JEON Jae-Young , Jay JEON, Keiko Lino
Cinematographer	KIM Hyung-Gu
Lighting Director	LEE Kang-San
Editor	PARK Il-Hyun
Sound Designer	LEE Seung-Chul
Art Director	PARK Il-Hyun
Music Director	LEE Jae-Jin

## **Information**

### **Technical Specifications**

Running Time: 129mins  
In colour/ Dolby SR  
Production Year: 1999  
First Releasing date: 01/01/2000  
Length: 11848 feet  
Number of Reels: 7  
Screen Ratio: 1: 1.85

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