

**Mongrel Media**

**Presents**

# MOTHER

**A film by BONG Joon-Ho**

**(SOUTH KOREA, 2009, 128 min.)**

2009 Film Independent Spirit Awards (Nominee – Best Foreign Film)

**Official Selection:**

2010 Palm Springs International Film Festival  
2009 Cannes Film Festival  
2009 Toronto Film Festival  
2009 Tribeca Film Festival  
2009 New York Film Festival  
2009 AFI FEST

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High res stills may be downloaded from <http://www.mongrelmedia.com/press.html>

## **SYNOPSIS**

Mother is a devoted single parent to her simple-minded twenty-seven-year-old son, Do-joon. Often a source of anxiety to his mother, Do-joon behaves in foolish or simply dangerous ways. One night, while walking home drunk, he encounters a school girl who he follows for a while before she disappears into a dark alley. The next morning, she is found dead in an abandoned building and Do-joon is accused of her murder. An inefficient lawyer and an apathetic police force result in a speedy conviction. His mother refuses to believe her beloved son is guilty and immediately undertakes her own investigation to find the girl's killer. In her obsessive quest to clear her son's name, Mother steps into a world of unimaginable chaos and shocking revelations.

## DIRECTOR'S COMMENT – BONG JOON-HO

Everyone has a mother, and everyone has a precise idea of what a mother is. This is the person that cherishes each of us most, who is the most gentle to us, and the most irritating. Many feelings collide on this issue. This is a person who is strong that we know well. The relationship between a son and his mother is the basis for all human relationships. Countless novels, films, and television programs have approached the mother figure, but I wanted to explore it for myself, and see where I could take it on a cinematic level; and push it to the extreme. I wanted to make a film that digs profoundly at what is extreme and powerful, like in the heart of a fireball. In this sense, **MOTHER** is a challenge for me because my preceding films were all stories that tended towards extension; if a murder allowed me to discuss the '80s in Korea (**MEMORIES OF MURDER**), and a monster (**THE HOST**) allowed me to speak about family and the United States, then **MOTHER** is quite the contrary. It is a film wherein all the forces converge at the heart of things. The figure of the mother has been seen before. It's very banal, but I see this as a new approach, and I hope it will be perceived that way. Like something that is familiar from home, but really came from abroad.

- BONG JOON-HO

## ABOUT THE FILM

### THE ORIGIN OF MOTHER

The project **MOTHER** began with actress Kim Hye-ja, an almost fifty-year veteran of the Korean film and television industry. For most Koreans, Kim Hye-ja is an icon of motherhood and its virtues, but Bong Joon-ho saw another facet to the actress. He conceived the story of **MOTHER** to capture Kim's little-recognized psychological intensity and emotional sensitivity, and to illuminate the unseen power in the destructive side of her personality.

### THE MOTHER FIGURE

Bong's films have intentionally subverted genre conventions while shrewdly manipulating them, and they have been welcomed by audiences because of, or in spite of it. **MOTHER** is no exception. Unlike his previous works, for which the history and social reality of Korea and epic-scale fantastical premises were important considerations, **MOTHER** has been distilled into two essential ingredients—a “mother” and her “life-and-death struggle.” Emphasizing her inner turmoil rather than outside events, the film forces viewers to participate in a mother's life-and-death struggle, and to follow the emotional contours of her terrible journey. As Bong describes it, **MOTHER** is like a magnifying glass that focuses warm sunlight to a burning point. It is a drama that unfolds with great intensity, a story rooted in the fundamental nature of motherhood.

### THE CREATIVE TEAM

**MOTHER**'s production team is the best and brightest working in Korean cinema today. Production company Barunson has worked on such unique films as the dark-fantasy reworking of *Hansel and Gretel*, and the so-called Asian spaghetti western *The Good, The Bad, The Weird*; production designer Ryu Seong-hie conceived beautiful, otherworldly environments for *A Bittersweet Life*, *Oldboy*, *The Host* and Park Chan-wook's, *Thirst*; composer Lee Byeong-woo contributed memorable scores to *A Tale of Two Sisters*, *The Host* and other visionary works of art; and the stunning anamorphic cinematography, simultaneously majestic and intimate, is the work of Hong Kyung-pyo (Alex Hong), whose previous films include *Il Mare*, *Save the Green Planet* and *Taegukgi*.

### LOCATIONS

There were few concerns regarding Bong's suggestion that the film rely primarily on location shooting to enhance naturalism. His conditions also appeared deceptively simple at the outset: that the locations look mundane and not strongly indicative of local colors; that the resulting village environment should not feel cobbled together from disparate elements; and that functionally differentiated zones should be allotted for various settings. When scouting began, however, the staff quickly realized that their job was much trickier than they had initially thought: South Korea is not a big country. In the end,

four teams spent close to twenty weeks traveling a total of 80,000 kilometers (49,709 miles) and collecting 40,000 photos. Eventually the production team constructed a “village map,” replete with meteorological and topographical details indicating the position of the sun in each season, the emotionally indicative landscapes, and convenience of transportation. Sadly, construction is so common in Korea that perfect locations often turned into construction sites seemingly overnight. Truly, the energy poured into location hunting for **MOTHER** rivaled that spent on casting. But the staff’s Herculean efforts have paid off brilliantly in a seamless composite of extraordinarily diverse locations.

### **CASTING**

One of the undisputed strengths of a Bong Joon-ho film is its naturalness. The core characters in **MOTHER** were custom written with specific actors in mind. For the supporting roles, actors with theatrical training who had the skills to quietly project the required themes were given priority, regardless of whether they had previous exposure in popular media or not. As a result, more than a few excellent actors and actresses can boast that **MOTHER** is their debut film. Thus, director Bong ensures his unique brand of ensemble drama, in which every performer’s distinct color harmoniously merges with every other’s to create a natural whole.

### **ART DIRECTION AND COSTUME DESIGN**

**MOTHER**’s art and costumes are devoted to the fundamental task of creating the fictional space in which the characters and viewers can breathe the same air, as it were. Glamorous costumes are nowhere to be seen. Production and costume designers had to keep their work close to lived reality, which ironically required more research and care than usual. Color variation was impeccably controlled, in order to avoid obstructing the emotional flow of the film. The sets built for the film—Mother’s apothecary, the photo studio constructed somewhere in Cholla Province, and an abandoned house set up in Busan, were so realistic and so organically “a part of landscape” that curious villagers would approach the production crew asking after who occupied the buildings. The production’s driving principle was that “Mother’s life-and-death struggle” was always the most important single element.

## ABOUT THE CREW

### **DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER – BONG JOON-HO**

After completing only three feature films, *Barking Dogs Never Bite*, *Memories of Murder* and *The Host*, writer and director Bong Joon-ho's undeniable talent pushed him to the forefront of the Korean film industry. *Memories of Murder* was a gripping thriller about a series of unsolved murders in the 1980s. *The Host* followed a family as they dealt with a monster that rose from the Han River in the middle of Seoul. The films of Bong Joon-ho regularly, and brilliantly, break with convention, thanks to an imagination that is not confined to the accepted parameters of humor, suspense, or horror. Bong Joon-ho remains a director of intimacy even as he puts himself in the public eye, and despite holding the Korean box office admissions record (with 13 million for *The Host*), he chose to examine the simple figure of the mother for his latest film. **MOTHER** dissolves Korean social realism and family drama in a vat of larger-than-life imagination. Bong turns his camera on a figure well known to all, once again exploring it through unexpected cinematic aspects.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

#### **2008 SHAKING TOKYO**- Short Film

(One segment of the omnibus film TOKYO!: co-directors Michel Gondry and Leos Carax) Cannes International Film Festival (Un Certain Regard)

#### **2006 THE HOST**

Cannes International Film Festival (Directors' Fortnight)  
Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival (The Golden Raven Award),  
Fantasporto Oporto International Film Festival (Best Director Prize)  
Sitges International Film Festival (Orient Express – Casa Asia Prize)

#### **2003 MEMORIES OF MURDER**

San Sebastian International Film Festival (Best Director, Best New Director Prize)  
Torino International Film Festival (Best Screenplay, Audience' Choice Award)  
Tokyo International Film Festival (Asian Film Award)  
Cognac International Thriller Film Festival (Grand Prix Cognac)

#### **2001 BARKING DOGS NEVER BITE**

Hong Kong International Film Festival (FIPRESCI Award)  
Munich International Film Festival (Best New Director Award)



## ABOUT THE CAST

### **MOTHER – KIM HYE-JA**

Kim Hye-ja plays the mother whose courage and resolution are tested after she is drawn into a fight to save her mentally challenged son from accusations of murder.

The star of *The Rustic Diary*, one of the longest running and most beloved television series in Korean history, Kim Hye-ja nonetheless struggled with the stereotypical image of an endlessly tolerant, boundlessly loving mother. With **MOTHER**, this grande dame of acting has completely subverted the almost sacred maternal image she helped construct over the last thirty years.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

TV:

2008 MOM'S DEAD UPSET

2006 GOONG (PRINCESS HOURS)

2004 CHIEF HONG'S AUTUMN

2002-1980

THE RUSTIC DIARY

1999 ROSE AND BEANSTALK

1997 YOU, AND ME

1995-1963

BRIDE DIARY, DEAR, I REGRET, SAND CASTLE, WHAT IS LOVE, WINTER MIST,

WHAT KEEPS A WOMAN ALIVE, MOTHER'S OCEAN, etc.

FEATURE FILMS:

1999 MAYONNAISE (dir. Yoon In-ho)

1982 LATE AUTUMN (dir. Kim Soo-yong) - Best Actress Prize, Manila Film Festival

## **INTERVIEW WITH KIM HYE-JA**

It was in 2004 when a young director came looking for me, wanting to make a film with me. That was how I met Bong Joon-ho. What really struck me then was that he remembered some dialogue and performances from my old TV dramas with great accuracy and fondness. I was taken aback that he could remember all that. I had been away from the film industry in recent years because, let's be honest, there weren't good new roles written for someone like me. What they were sending me was the same old stuff. But **MOTHER**... was quite different. Director Bong explained how he wanted to challenge the stereotype. Another difference was that in TV dramas, there was the attitude, "Ms. Kim, you are such a veteran; I think you know what to do." But I was determined to do something different this time, so I asked Bong to push me to the extreme. And he was only happy to oblige! On the first shoot we did eighteen takes, some kind of a record for me, and by the seventeenth take I was thinking, "Oh my God, I am ruining this movie!" And it was like that for five months. Bong knows exactly what he wants and he simply never gives up until he gets it. Very tough but very admirable. By the middle of the shoot I so thoroughly identified with Mother that just looking at Won Bin (Do-joon) would make me cry. I had to unwind quite a bit after the shooting wrapped. The whole experience was like a dream, and very hard to let go. Of course, I am wracked with a new anxiety, half anxious, half expectant, thinking about how the audience will respond to her.

## **DO-JOON – WON BIN**

Won Bin plays Do-joon, the naïve and simple son who gets mixed up in a murder. Mother's twenty-seven-year-old son Do-joon is a true innocent, but in reality his life is an endless series of hazards. An entirely dependent man-child ironically gifted with striking beauty, no one in the village takes him seriously as an adult. Seen merely as an extension of his mother, all in the village are stunned when the police arrest him for the murder of a teenager. Won Bin has consistently been cast as the ideal younger brother and son in Korean films. He left lasting impressions on audiences the world over for the Korean war epic *Taegukgi* and the powerful human drama *My Brother*. Won Bin returns to the big screen after a four-year hiatus, portraying a complex character belied by seemingly simplistic behavior.

## **INTERVIEW WITH WON BIN**

"When I read the screenplay for **MOTHER**, I had a strong sense that it would be a turning point in my acting career. Do-joon is not an easy role to play. He is, frankly, frustrating, due to the fact that he is a true innocent. The risk of audiences rejecting him is definitely there. Director Bong Joon-ho expressed strong dislike for an "acting-like" performance that would draw attention to itself and not to the character. But he is astonishingly caring as a director and very sensitive to actors' needs. I had to find a way to portray innocence itself and not just project an "innocent look." This whole task was overwhelmingly difficult but was also tremendously appealing. I had a ball discovering the parts of myself that I was not aware of. I learned so much from just observing Ms. Kim Hye-ja. I cannot think of a better role model for an actor. This was my first feature film project after four years away, but every day on the set was so joyful, full of

excitement and adventure. I really thank Mr. Bong for casting me in this role, one that any actor would have gone out on his limb to nab.”

**FILMOGRAPHY**

TV:

2002 FRIENDS

2000 AUTUMN FAIRY TALE

1999 READY GO

1997 A PROPOSAL/OUR STORY

FEATURE FILMS:

2004 MY BROTHER (dir. Ahn Gwon-tae) / TAEGUKGI (dir. Kang Jegyu)

2001 GUNS & TALKS (dir. Jang Jin)

## CAST

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>Mother</b>                             | KIM Hye-ja      |
| <b>YOON Do-joon</b>                       | WON Bin         |
| <b>Jin-tae</b>                            | JIN Goo         |
| <b>Je-mun</b>                             | YOON Jae-moon   |
| <b>Mi-sun</b>                             | JUN Mi-sun      |
| <b>Sepaktakraw detective</b>              | SONG Sae-beauk  |
| <b>Ragman</b>                             | LEE Young-suck  |
| <b>MOON Ah-jung</b>                       | MOON Hee-ra     |
| <b>Mina</b>                               | CHUN Woo-hee    |
| <b>Chief</b>                              | KIM Byoung-soon |
| <b>Mr. GONG Suk-ho (lawyer)</b>           | YU Mou-young    |
| <b>Thin high schooler</b>                 | JUNG Young-ki   |
| <b>Fat high schooler</b>                  | KO Kyu-phill    |
| <b>Girl with scar</b>                     | LEE Mi-do       |
| <b>Ah-jung's grandmother</b>              | KIM Gin-goo     |
| <b>Jong-pal</b>                           | KIM Hong-jip    |
| <b>Mr. Gong's assistant</b>               | MIN Kyung-jin   |
| <b>Mina's mother</b>                      | CHO Kyung-sook  |
| <b>Shop owner</b>                         | PARK Myung-shin |
| <b>Detective</b>                          | YOON Yeong-geol |
| <b>Golf-course dean</b>                   | KWON Byeong-gil |
| <b>Golf-course cart driving professor</b> | KWON Beom-tak   |
| <b>Golf-course runaway professor</b>      | HA Deok-sung    |
| <b>Golf-course fat professor</b>          | YUM Dong-hyun   |
| <b>Ah-jung's relative</b>                 | LEE Jung-eun    |
| <b>Ah-jung's relative</b>                 | YIM Geun-ah     |
| <b>Ah-jung's pregnant relative</b>        | HWANG Young-hee |
| <b>Hye-ja's customer</b>                  | KIM Mi-joon     |
| <b>Hye-ja's customer</b>                  | HONG Gyung-yeon |
| <b>Young Do-joon</b>                      | KIM Tae-wan     |
| <b>Prisoner</b>                           | YOO In-soo      |
| <b>Prisoner wearing glasses</b>           | CHO Moon-ui     |
| <b>Charcoal man</b>                       | KWACK Byung-gyu |
| <b>Pharmacist</b>                         | LEE Dae-hyun    |
| <b>Ah-jung's friend with scar</b>         | LIM Sung-mi     |
| <b>Prison guard Uncle Jong-do</b>         | SUNG Joon-seo   |
| <b>Journalist</b>                         | LIM Hyoung-guk  |
| <b>Policewoman</b>                        | HAN Jee-jee     |
| <b>Miss KIM</b>                           | KIM Min-jung    |
| <b>Middle schooler playing game</b>       | JANG Pil-gyung  |

**Middle schooler eating rice cake**  
**Middle schooler eating fish cake**  
**Middle schooler wearing glasses**  
**Waiter at Manhattan**  
**Employee at a supermarket**  
**Detective wearing leather jacket**  
**Barmaid**  
**Barmaid mixing drinks**  
**Barmaid clapping hands**  
**Caddie**  
**Mr. Park Jong-pyo (prosecutor)**  
**Dr Yoon Jong-gu**  
**Man watching spot investigation**  
**Man watching a car accident**  
**British boy**  
**British boy's dad**  
**Waiter at a karaoke**  
**Prison guard at a corridor**  
**Young woman at a coach station**  
**Detective**  
**Detective**  
**Taxi driver**  
**Laundress**  
**Cook-pot at grill house**  
**Taxi driver**

MOON Bock-dong  
KIM Tae-hwan  
LEE Seung-hyung  
NAM Sung-ho  
LEE Ok-joo  
KIM Jung-wook  
KIM Bo-gyung  
LEE Byeol-im  
LEE Hyun-joo  
HAN Mee  
CHOI Jae-won  
LEE Gyu-hyun  
KIM Gyu-nam  
JANG Yong-joo  
CHOI So-mang  
Christopher BRISCOE  
OH Won-sik  
PARK Tae-joon  
YOON Hye-jin  
JEONG Dong  
KWON Ki-hoon  
SHIN Young-sik  
SHIN-Jae-young  
PARK In-mok  
YOO Jong-hwan

## **CREW**

CJ Entertainment and Barunson present

A Barunson production

**Directed by:** BONG Joon-ho

**Story by:** BONG Joon-ho

**Screenplay by:** PARK Eun-kyo, BONG Joon-ho

**Executive Producer:** Miky LEE

**Co-executive Producers:** Katharine KIM, MOON Yang-kwon

**Co-associate Executive Producers:** Bob SUH, KIM Hak-beom, NAM Ki-moon, BAK Hyun-tae, SHIN Kang-young, PARK June-Tae, CHUNG Won-suk, CHO Il-hyung

**Produced by:** MOON Yang-kwon

**Producers:** SEO Woo-sik, PARK Tae-joon

**Associate Executive Producer:** Joon H. CHOI

**Investment Executive:** Sean LEE

**Co-investment Executive:** LEE Youngjoo

**Cinematography:** HONG Kyung-pyo

**Lighting:** CHOI Cheol-soo, PARK Dong-soon

**Production Design:** RYU Seong-hie

**Editor:** MOON Sae-kyoung

**Music:** LEE Byeong-woo

**Sound Recordist:** LEE Byeong-ha

**Sound Supervisor:** CHOI Tae-young

**Costume Designer:** CHOI Se-yeon

**Hair & Make-up:** HWANG Hyun-kyu

**Special Effects:** JUNG Do-ahn, YU Yeong-il

**VFX:** AZworks

**VFX Supervisor/Visual Effects:** YI Zeon-hyoung

**Martial Arts:** JUNG Doo-hong, HEO Myeong-haeng