



Presents

THE HANDMAIDEN

A film by Park Chan-wook
(144 min, 2016)
Language: Korean, Japanese

Distribution



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SYNOPSIS

From Park Chan-wook, the celebrated director of OLDBOY, LADY VENGEANCE and STOKER, comes a ravishing new crime drama. Park presents a gripping and sensual tale of two women - a young Japanese Lady living on a secluded estate, and a Korean woman who is hired to serve as her new handmaiden, but is secretly plotting with a conman to defraud her of a large inheritance. Inspired by the novel *Fingersmith* by British author Sarah Waters, **THE HANDMAIDEN** borrows the most dynamic elements of its source material and combines it with Park Chan-wook's singular vision to create an unforgettable viewing experience.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Director | Park Chan-wook

Born in Seoul, Korea, Aug. 23, 1963

Winner of the Cannes' Grand Prix for *OLDBOY* and the Jury Prize for *THIRST*, Park Chan-wook stands at the forefront of Korean cinema's modern-day renaissance. Renowned for his explosive visuals and dynamic storytelling, he is a director who continually challenges and defies expectations.

An ardent cinephile, Park juggled film directing and criticism in the 1990s before his commercial breakthrough *JOINT SECURITY AREA (JSA)* in 2000, which broke local box office records and screened in competition at Berlin. However it was with his critically acclaimed follow-up *SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE* in 2002 that he established the intense, relentless cinematic style for which he is now renowned. After the success and worldwide recognition of *OLDBOY* (2003), his follow-up features *LADY VENGEANCE* (2005, Venice competition), *I'M A CYBORG BUT THAT'S OK* (2006, Berlin competition) and *THIRST* (2009, Cannes competition), further demonstrated Park's cinematic and thematic range. He then went onto make his first English language feature *STOKER* (2013), a Fox Searchlight film starring Nicole Kidman, Mia Wasikowska and Matthew Goode, further cementing his status as an important global auteur.

In **THE HANDMAIDEN**, which is inspired by Sarah Waters' historical crime novel *Fingersmith* (2002), Park returns to Korea for one of his most ambitious productions yet. In this latest work he continues to display the bold and innovative approach to storytelling and visuals that has made him internationally famous.

Filmography

A Rose Reborn (2014) (short)
Bitter, Sweet, Seoul (2013) (documentary), co-directed with Park Chan-kyong
Stoker (2013)
Day Trip (2012) (short), co-directed with Park Chan-kyong
Night Fishing (2010) (short), co-directed with Park Chan-kyong
Thirst (2009)
I'm a Cyborg, but That's OK (2006)
Lady Vengeance (2005)
Cut (2004) (short, included in omnibus film *Three, Monster*)
N.E.P.A.L. (2003) (short, included in omnibus film *If You Were Me*)
Oldboy (2003)
Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (2002)
Joint Security Area (JSA) (2000)
Judgment (1999) (short)
Trio (1997)
The Moon is... the Sun's Dream (1992)

Q&A WITH DIRECTOR PARK CHAN-WOOK

Tell us about how you chose this project as your next film.

It was the same as what happened with *OLDBOY*. Producer Syd Lim came across the source material first, showed it to me and asked, “What do you think?” I’m sure it was the same with other readers, but when I read the novel, the end of Part One caught me completely by surprise, but not only that, I fell in love with the author’s very detailed and vivid writing. More than anything, I chose this story because the two women at the center of the story felt so alive. One is a person with a dark past, and one is a person living in a desperate present, but both exude a very strong sense of individuality and charm.

Why did you decide to move the setting from Victorian England to the Colonial Era of the 1930s, as opposed to another time in Korean history?

There were practical reasons. When thinking about such plot elements as a society where there’s still the separate class of the nobility, where the occupation of the handmaiden exists, where there’s a character who collects rare items, etc., it seemed the only reasonable option. That was an era in which some traditional elements remained, but modernity was just beginning to take hold.

All of your previous films have featured striking production design, but THE HANDMAIDEN in particular is outstanding in this regard. Can you explain your intention and concept in terms of the art direction?

The house is an important space. Kim Hae-sook says in the beginning, “Not even in Japan can you find a home that combines Western and Japanese styles. It reflects Master Kouzuki’s admiration for Japan and England.” So when characters enter the Japanese-style quarters they must take their shoes off, and when they walk through the Western-style wing they must put them back on again. The personality of the home is an important element. Hideko’s room is located in a Western-style wing, so she sleeps in a bed and lives the life of a Western lady. In contrast, the maid’s room next door is in the Japanese style, where Sookee lives in an ‘*oshiire*’ a kind of a closet for storing bedclothes.

The most important space in terms of production design is the library. The exterior is traditional Japanese architecture, and inside there is a Western-style library. Inside the library there is also a section with tatami mats, which during readings get made up like a Japanese garden with white pebbles, stones and water. Japanese gardens are meant to reproduce the world in miniature -- mountains and rivers, lakes and forests -- so Kouzuki’s act of moving it inside is akin to creating a new world inside his own kingdom.

Let me ask about the camera movement. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a film in which the camera moves through space like it does in THE HANDMAIDEN.

The house in this film is large, and there are only a few characters in this big, empty space. In addition, there are multiple scenes which we see from Sookee’s perspective in Part One, and then from Hideko’s perspective in Part Two. Throughout this, there is a sort of “game of glances” in which someone is looking at someone else, or ignoring someone, or suspecting another’s gaze. There were times when this dynamic was best expressed in close-ups, and other times when the moving camera was more effective.

Actually, at the beginning I planned to shoot this film in 3D. Usually it's science fiction or action films that use 3D, but I thought using it for this kind of quiet drama would be interesting. The 3D would have emphasized the perspective of each character in a more pronounced way. In the end we couldn't make it work financially, but I think the camera movement functions as a kind of replacement for the effect I wanted.

Can you tell us about your decision to use an anamorphic lens? I heard the production designer had to make the set wider to accommodate the lens.

Before shooting I spent a lot of time discussing the anamorphic lens with the cinematographer. It's one of the luxuries we could accommodate while shooting with a digital camera. I still feel that film is superior to digital, and if I could have my choice, I'd prefer to shoot on film. But one of the things we could do while shooting on digital was to afford the use of an anamorphic lens. I have a special affection for films shot with old anamorphic lenses, plus my cinematographer had an interest in combining an old-style lens with a new digital camera. The look that it creates is quite unique, and it seemed appropriate to the period setting of the film.

Before shooting, you gave music CDs to the cast and crew. What was your intention with that?

It wasn't that I planned to use the music in the film, but rather I wanted the actors and crew to be able to feel what the atmosphere of the completed film would be like as they made their preparations. There are the drawings in the storyboard, but since music is also effective in creating a mood, I prepared three CDs worth of music and gave it to them.

Tell us about the process of casting Kim Tae-ri.

I definitely wanted to use a new, unknown actress, so we prepared a large-scale audition. I met a lot of great young actresses with potential, after which process it became clear to us that Kim Tae-ri was our Sookee. She has a unique look about her, and when she speaks, she has real backbone. I had a very similar feeling when I first met Gang Hye-jung [the actress in *OLDBOY*]. She is a person who expresses her own strong point of view.

I'm curious if there were times on the set with actor Ha Jung-woo when, without any specific instruction, he produced some unexpected expression or gesture that impressed you.

In my films, what I want is always quite particular. I'm not the kind of director to just hand an actor the script and say, "You figure it out." Compared to some other directors, I give actors a very narrow space to work in, but there are times when very talented actors express themselves within that narrow space so well that it really surprises me. That's the kind of acting I hope for, and with Ha Jung-woo there were quite a few times that happened.

In a previous interview you commented that the films of yours that contained humor have all done well. What about for THE HANDMAIDEN?

The humor in this film comes from the fact that the characters are hiding their true identities and acting. There are many scenes where they're hiding their feelings, and thinking something different from what they're saying. Even if the audience doesn't burst out laughing in the theater, I think viewers will be able to enjoy this sort of humor throughout the film.

How would you describe THE HANDMAIDEN, in a few words?

It's a thriller movie, a story about swindlers, a dramatic story with several unexpected twists, and more than anything else, a romance.

ABOUT THE CAST

Kim Min-hee as Lady Hideko

Actress Kim Min-hee has been a familiar face in Korean film, TV and fashion circles for the past decade and a half, but her performance in Byun Young-joo's thriller *HELPLESS* in 2012 garnered widespread praise and captured the attention of many viewers, including Park Chan-wook. With her subsequent films, including a memorable leading role in Locarno Golden Leopard-winning *RIGHT NOW, WRONG THEN*, she has continued to redefine herself as an actor who exhibits considerable range, precision and force in her performances.

For her portrayal of Lady Hideko, a woman who has lived isolated from the rest of the world since the age of five, Kim gives a smooth, multilayered interpretation of a complicated woman with hidden depths of feeling.

Actor interview: *What kind of character is Hideko?*

"She seems to have been much affected by her upbringing. She thinks differently from other people, and she has a lot bottled up inside her. In the midst of all that oppression she hasn't been able to live like a normal person. Living in an environment where she felt no love or affection, she simply walled up all her emotions inside her."

Selected Filmography

Right Now, Wrong Then (2015), *No Tears for the Dead* (2014), *Very Ordinary Couple* (2012), *Helpless* (2012), *Moby Dick* (2011), *The Actresses* (2009), *Hellcats* (2007), *Surprise Party* (2002), *Asako in Ruby Shoes* (2000)

Kim Tae-ri as Sookee

For the role of the Korean maid Sookee, Park Chan-wook wanted to cast a completely unknown face. After auditioning no less than 1,500 actresses, he ultimately settled on this 26-year old journalism graduate with little acting experience beyond an independent short film and some high-profile advertisements for The Body Shop and other brands. Comparing her to *OLDBOY*'s Gang Hye-jung, Director Park has expressed strong confidence in her talent, and described her as a perfect match for the role.

Kim's portrayal of the pickpocket Sookee who poses as a maid, captures the rough edges of her character's lower-class upbringing and also her warm, vibrant personality. It's a performance that simultaneously expresses a crafty deceitfulness and a naive innocence.

Actor interview: *What is Park Chan-wook's style as a director?*

"Very theatrical. He really likes extreme actions and feelings, so there were many times that he told me, 'That's not enough.' He wanted more energy. More energy on the screen. He'd ask me to give a little bit more, and I'd think to myself, 'Isn't it a bit too much?' So that was a bit difficult for me... Eventually I learned to just trust him and go with it."

Filmography

Moon Young (2015, short film)

Ha Jung-woo as the Count

Over the past decade, Ha Jung-woo has established himself beyond doubt as one of Korea's most popular and widely praised actors. He has headlined smash commercial hit films like *ASSASSINATION* (12.6 million admissions), *THE TERROR LIVE* (5.6 million admissions), *THE BERLIN FILE* (7.2 million admissions), *TAKE OFF* (8.1 million admissions) and *THE CHASER* (5.1 million admissions), while simultaneously appearing in critically acclaimed smaller-scale films like *MY DEAR ENEMY*, US-South Korea co-production *NEVER FOREVER* and Kim Ki-duk's *TIME*. He has also recently taken up directing, with two feature films to his credit: novel adaptation *CHRONICLE OF A BLOOD MERCHANT* (2014) and comedy *FASTEN YOUR SEATBELT* (2013).

Nonetheless, **THE HANDMAIDEN** marks Ha's first-ever collaboration with Park Chan-wook, leading to widespread anticipation on the part of his fans to see what kind of performance results from the meeting of these two minds. As depicted by Ha, the Count is a scheming, untrustworthy character who sets the events of the plot in motion by recruiting Sookee as his accomplice. However as the film progresses, his character gradually becomes more rounded, and we get tantalizing glimpses into his true nature.

Actor Interview: *How were you cast for the film?*

"As the shoot for *ASSASSINATION* was about to start, I met Park Chan-wook at a production dinner and heard about this project for the first time. Production Designer Ryu Seong-hee was with him too. I'd always loved and respected his work, and felt that I'd like to work with him, so I felt quite excited. He told me he'd send me the script on October 15, and sure enough at nine that morning an email arrived. I read it through in one sitting, and found the character of the Count to be attractive, and the project as a whole to be just hugely intriguing."

Selected Filmography

The Tunnel (2016), *Assassination* (2015), *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* (2014), *KUNDO: Age of the Rampant* (2014), *The Terror Live* (2013), *The Berlin File* (2012), *Love Fiction* (2012), *Nameless Gangster: Rules of the Time* (2012), *The Client* (2011), *The Yellow Sea* (2010), *Take Off* (2009), *My Dear Enemy* (2008), *The Chaser* (2008), *Never Forever* (2007), *Breath* (2007), *Time* (2006), *The Unforgiven* (2005)

Cho Jin-woong as Kouzuki

Although he started his career as a character actor, Cho Jin-woong left such an impression with his varied performances in film and on TV that he now is regularly cast in leading roles, and ranks as one of the industry's hottest names. Originally attracting widespread attention in *NAMELESS GANGSTER: RULES OF THE TIME* (2012), he has continued to garner acclaim in *HWAYI: A MONSTER BOY* (2013), *A HARD DAY* (2014), *KUNDO: AGE OF THE RAMPANT* (2014), mega-hit *ROARING CURRENTS* (2014), and *ASSASSINATION* (2015).

In **THE HANDMAIDEN** Cho plays Kouzuki, Hideko's authoritative uncle who wields controls over her life and makes her take part in his unhealthy obsession for rare books. It marks Cho's first experience playing a much older character, for which he lost 18kg and spent three hours each shooting day in the make up room.

Actor Interview: *How was your experience shooting the film?*

"This shoot gave me a lot to think about, in terms of cinematic sensibility. The whole process took a lot of effort. But in the end it was more than just working in a functional sense, rather, in terms of the meaning behind each shot, the actors were able to contribute and collaborate as creators themselves with this production. Park Chan-wook is extremely capable, of course. But it's more than just him. You can feel it from the fine touches of the make up artists, to the placement of each bonsai plant on the set, to the expressions on the faces of the camera and lighting crew. So I never felt like I was acting alone. We were all working together."

Selected Filmography

Bluebeard (2016), *Assassination* (2015), *Salut D'Amour* (2015), *We Are Brothers* (2014), *Roaring Currents* (2014), *KUNDO: Age of the Rampant* (2014), *A Hard Day* (2014), *Hwayi: A Monster Boy* (2013), *An Ethics Lesson* (2013), *Perfect Number* (2012), *Nameless Gangster: Rules of the Time* (2012), *The Front Line* (2011), *G-Love* (2011), *Bestseller* (2010), *GP506* (2007), *Les Formidables* (2006)

Kim Hae-sook as Mrs. Sasaki

A veteran of the TV scene who has also left an unforgettable mark on Korean cinema, Kim Hae-sook had a major role in Park Chan-wook's *THIRST* (2009), and is also well remembered for playing Simon Yam's love interest in Choi Dong-hoon's *THE THIEVES* (2012). She brings not only experience to her roles, but also a hard-edged steeliness that directors have been keen to utilize. In **THE HANDMAIDEN** she plays Ms. Sasaki, an intimidating figure at the estate who maintains a rocky relationship with Lady Hideko and also Sookee.

Selected Filmography

The Throne (2015), *Assassination* (2015), *Hope* (2013), *The Thieves* (2012), *Thirst* (2009), *Viva! Love* (2008), *Open City* (2008), *Sunflower* (2006), *My Brother* (2004), *Oh! Happy Day* (2003), *The Scent of Love* (2003).

Moon So-ri as Hideko's Aunt

One of Korea's most acclaimed actresses, first brought to fame by Lee Chang-dong in *PEPPERMINT CANDY* (1999) and *OASIS* (2002) and then continuing to push boundaries in a diverse spectrum of roles from *A GOOD LAWYER'S WIFE* (2003) to *SA-KWA* (2005), *FAMILY TIES* (2006), *FOREVER THE MOMENT* (2008), *HAHAHA* (2009), *MANSHIN: TEN THOUSAND SPIRITS* (2014) and others. In recent years she has also directed several critically praised short films, including *THE BEST DIRECTOR* (2015) and *THE ACTRESS* (2014). In **THE HANDMAIDEN** she plays Hideko's aunt (Kouzuki's wife), who feeling oppressed by her domineering husband, ultimately chooses a desperate means of escape.

Selected Filmography

Love and... (2015), *Hill of Freedom* (2014), *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (2014), *Venus Talk* (2014), *The Spy: Undercover Operation* (2013), *An Ethics Lesson* (2013), *In Another Country* (2012), *Leafie, a Hen Into the Wild* (2011), *The Housemaid* (2010), *HaHaHa* (2009), *Fly Penguin* (2009), *Like You Know It All* (2009), *Forever the Moment* (2008), *Family Ties* (2006), *Bewitching Attraction* (2006), *Sa-Kwa*

(2005), *Bravo My Life* (2005), *The President's Barber* (2005), *A Good Lawyer's Wife* (2003), *Oasis* (2002), *Peppermint Candy* (1999)

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A MOHO FILM & YONG FILM PRODUCTION

DIRECTED BY PARK CHAN-WOOK

Starring:

KIM MIN-HEE
HA JUNG-WOO
CHO JIN-WOONG
KIM HAE-SOOK

AND MOON SO-RI

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KIM TAE-RI

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
MIKY LEE

CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
JEONG TAE-SUNG

CO-FINANCING
CHANG SUK WHAN • LEE DONG GEOL • KIM YONG BEOM
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SE YOUNG OH • LEE SEOK JOO • PARK YEONG SEOK

FINANCING EXECUTIVE
MICHELLE KWON

CO-FINANCING EXECUTIVE
BANG OK-KYUNG

INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL 'FINGERSMITH' BY SARAH WATERS

SCREENPLAY BY CHUNG SEO-KYUNG • PARK CHAN-WOOK

PRODUCED BY PARK CHAN-WOOK • SYD LIM

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TELDEX STUDIO BERLIN

JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU PIECES FOR HARPSICHORD; SUITE IN E MINOR
TAMBOURIN

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART CLARINET QUINTET IN A MAJOR, K581, 2ND
MOV. LARGHETTO

VISUAL EFFECTS BY
4th CREATIVE PARTY

SPECIAL THANKS TO

MARK GRAY · AYAKO FUJITANI · ADAM KALLER · MIKE SIMPSON · JEROME
DUBOZ · SARA BOTTFELD

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