Scott Foundas:
We're at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis for a dialogue with Bong Joon Ho. Tonight's program is titled "Bong Joon Ho, Beyond Boundaries" in which I'll talk to director Bong about his remarkable career from his debut feature, Barking Dogs Never Bite through to the Oscar winning, Parasite.

Scott Foundas:
Indeed, long before Parasite's Kim family burrowed their way into the hearts and minds of moviegoers, Bong Joon Ho had established himself as one of the leading lights of an exciting new wave of Korean filmmakers who emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including Old Boy director, Park Chan-wook and Burning director Lee Chang-dong. In his films, including Memories of Murder, The Host, Mother, and Snowpiercer, director Bong has shown himself to be an exuberant mix master of genre storytelling and acute social commentary. Whether leading us on the hunt for an elusive serial killer, hurdling us through the frozen landscape of a second ice age, or merely following one mother's tireless quest to prove her son's innocence. In each of those cases, director Bong's profound empathy for his characters, even when they're at their most morally compromised, sits in perfect balance with his critique of a society emerging from decades of authoritarian rule and deeply divided along socioeconomic lines.

Scott Foundas:
Such themes resonate far beyond the Korean peninsula. One explanation for why director Bong's films, and Parasite in particular, have been embraced so enthusiastically by audiences around the world, defeating what director Bong himself has called the one-inch barrier of subtitles.

Scott Foundas:
I'm Scott Foundas, Film Acquisitions and Development Executive with Amazon Studios, and we'll now begin our dialog with Bong Joon Ho.

Scott Foundas:
Well, I just want to start by saying congratulations, myself, because having known you from the start of your feature filmmaking career was a personal thrill to see the great success of Parasite, but also in many ways a great achievement for world cinema for many reasons, which we'll also talk about tonight. But, as I like to do in these talks, I think it's useful to kind of start at the beginning or maybe let's say the back of the train, as a Snowpiercer metaphor, and talk a little bit about just sort of your own early memories of cinema and realizing that that was something that you wanted to do, that it was more than just enjoyment of movies.

Translator:
He grew up in a very unique household, where they didn't play sports or go away for vacation. They just sat around and watched TV.

Bong Joon Ho:
During whole days I keep watching the TV show and movies in the ... Actually, when I was kid, TV was my cinematheque. But, funny thing is at the time ... I was born in 1969, so I grown up 1970s and 80s, South Korea is still under the military dictatorship. So, whole society was very conservative and all of the movies...

Translator:
So, a lot of stuff he saw on TV was censored and there were lots of cuts.

Translator:
So, when he was young he would see these shows and he felt that something was off between the cuts. He's like, "There's something missing. Oh," so, he realized it was cut out and he started to imagine what was removed from the actual edit.

Bong Joon Ho:
For example, the masterpiece like Dog Day Afternoon, to see DeNiro man. When I was ... When I watched that movie from the Korean television at the time, I couldn't understand the relationship between Al Pacino and John Cazale...

Translator:
Of course, they were gay lovers and so it was a very conservative culture at the time. So, they found a way to make it very smooth without people realizing something was missing.

Scott Foundas:
And at that time did you have much exposure at all to Korean films or in specifically Korean genre films? Because as a genre filmmaker yourself, I was very excited to discover in some of my initial visits to the Busan Film Festival, through their retrospective programming, this rich history of sort of Korean B-movies from the 60s by people like Lee Man-he and Kim Ki-young, that feel very close in some ways to your work. But did you know at the time as a young film buff that this cinema existed?

Bong Joon Ho:
At the time, when I was a little kid, I never experienced the Korean genre masters, the works at the time. So, is it quite...

Translator:
So, the order was sort of switched. He grew up watching American movies from the 70s and all the classics first.

Translator:
So, once he got to college and he joined the cinema club, that's when he started studying film and discovered the films that Kim Ki-young and other Asian masters.

Bong Joon Ho:
So, all those Asian masters film, I actually, I studied, analyzed those. But, those American genre movies, it's in my blood. I grown up with that. I literally overwhelmed when I watched the Alfred Hitchcock, Psycho when I was eight years old. A little bit of a censorship. But, I was [Korean], Sam Peckinpah, Brian De Palma...
Translator:
So shocking to him and Peckinpah and De Palma, those films.

Bong Joon Ho:
So, you know very well about my AFK and story, right?

Scott Foundas:
Yes.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah. So ...

Scott Foundas:
You want me to tell it?

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah.

Scott Foundas:
The, what is it? American Forces ...

Bong Joon Ho:
Forces Korea Network.

Scott Foundas:
... Korea Network, where you saw these films, basically. Movies shown for American service people in Korea, but with no subtitles.

Bong Joon Ho:
So, most subtitle, but no censorship. So, it was at Friday midnight, all my family members are sleeping. I can...

Translator:
Crawl out to the living room.

Translator:
Sex and violence, he was able to experience that in the movies.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah. At the time, I have no information about the film. So, who is the director?

Translator:
So, afterwards when he was studying film in the cinema club, then he would rediscover these films and go, "Oh, that was the De Palma film that I saw. That was Paul Schrader's film."

Bong Joon Ho:
He does John Carpenter. It is a Sam Peckinpah...

Translator:
So, he realized afterwards, much later.

Scott Foundas:
And did you have an awareness when you were watching those films, because I think it's as big of a triumph as Parasite winning the Oscar is for world cinema, is also a great triumph for genre cinema, which is often throughout history kind of been written off as B-movies or less than somehow. Even these masters that you're talking about, like John Carpenter and Brian De Palma, they've never been up on that stage at the Oscars.

Scott Foundas:
And even though all of those films were often vehicles for strong social and political commentary, if we think of a movie like They Live, for example, by Carpenter. So, when you were seeing those films, were you aware that there was something more going on in them? Did you pick up on some of those, let's say, hidden messages or social commentary that the genre was a kind of a messenger for?

Translator:
So ... yeah, when you, it wasn't planned necessarily, but when he saw these American films and these genre films, it didn't naturally, it didn't translate perfectly to the societal realities of South Korea. And so, as he was starting to develop his films, he found little gaps where leaks could happen and water can flow through it to try to figure out how to make it work for him and his stories.

Translator:
So, there's so many joys of genre, but then trying to put realism from Korean society into it, it sort of evolved and it's very strange to sort of self-analyze himself right now.

Scott Foundas:
Talk about how you first kind of translated this passion for films into actually making films. What were your first efforts at actually making movies?

Translator:
So, he was in the cinema club studying and then at a certain point he realized he had to start making films. It was around when he was age 22, they had a video camera and a Super 8 millimeter camera that he started working with.

Bong Joon Ho:
You remember the Super 8.

Scott Foundas:
I do. I made Super 8 films.

Bong Joon Ho:
Our generation maybe knows. That small camera and ...

Translator:
So, he did those sort of workshops in the cinema club and then he shot a proper short film on 16 millimeter. That was in 1993. It was a silly film-

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah. 27 years ago, but I remember very clearly the very first day of shooting. Oh, actually what happened was the whole day it was heavy raining, so we shoot nothing. Just waiting the whole day. The 20 crew members, just waiting for the ...

Translator:
He was waiting for the rain to stop, listening to the sound of the rain, and then they all went home.

Scott Foundas:
Well, some of those early shorts ended up having quite a lot of success in sort of the festival world and got you a certain reputation that you eventually could parlay into making your first feature, *Barking Dogs Never Bite*, which to me feels kind of like a Rosetta Stone in which you can kind of decode a lot of your obsessions and interests that resurface over the films of the subsequent two decades. But, at the time, the film was not a particular critical or commercial success in--

Bong Joon Ho:
It was box-office disaster. So, critically ...

Translator:
So, the critical response was also very lukewarm.

Translator:
So, thanks for your kind words, but it was definitely a big disappointment. And looking back on it he feels it's very amateurish and silly.

Bong Joon Ho:
I'm so happy that *Barking Dogs Never Bite* not included in the program of...Please don't watch that movie.

Scott Foundas:
I guess ... I am curious what did it feel like at the time to put all of that hard work into a film to have it meet with that kind of ambivalent reaction? And did that change in any way, the way you thought about your filmmaking going forward in terms of the kind of movie you would try to do next?

Translator:
Feb 12, 2020
So, there were a lot of personal details from his life that went into that film and he felt at the time that he had to sort of continue the ideas that he had started to develop in his shorts. But then on the second film, he thought of it as like, “This is my job. I'm a professional. This is what I do for a living.” And so he took a bigger real life story and approached a bigger story that way.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah, so it's a first movie was something from deep from my inside, but the second one, the Memories of Murder, is based on the true event that a serial killer case in South Korea ...

Translator:
So, it was a real life event, a true event, a big story, and it was him sort of going towards that. That was his approach.

Scott Foundas:
Well now, Memories of Murder is a film that is also not in this series, but which people should see, which is a masterpiece, and which definitely met with a different reaction than Barking Dogs, because it became one of the most successful films ever released in Korea. It traveled a lot internationally. You won best director at the San Sebastian Film Festival and it was also the start of one of your important professional collaborations with the great actor, Song Kang-ho, who of course appears in Parasite, as well as two other movies in between. Can you talk a little bit about discovering Song Kang-ho for that role and why he appealed to you?

Bong Joon Ho:
At that time that I was preparing Memories of Murder around 2000 and 2001, he was already huge star in South Korea, but that was not the major reason. I do think him as a major character ...

Translator:
So, from very early on it's a story about a country detective in the 1980s, a very dark period in Korean history. And it's about a guy who really wants so badly to catch the criminal, but he lacks the skills to be successful. And it's a very sort of complicated human character that he felt that only Song Kang-ho could play.

Bong Joon Ho:
So from the beginning, it was him in my mind. So, there was no alternative. If he rejected the script, maybe. Yeah. There, yeah. Yeah. The projector will be ...

Translator:
He would not made the movie.

Scott Foundas:
Well, we're glad he said yes. And I think that's a good opportunity to take a look at a scene from Memories of Murder. As you kind of set up, it's a true life, long unsolved murder case. A series of murders set in the 1980s and also very much dealing with the conflict between this country detective and the big city detective who comes to help these investigators work on the case, as we see in this scene.

[Clip from Memories of Murder]
Scott Foundas:
So, of course there’s a lot of humor in that scene, which people were reacting to and I think that’s sort of one of the distinctive qualities of your work, is that mixing of tones. And this is a pretty grim film in many ways, both in terms of the subject and in the way it depicts Korean society in the 1980s and the morally questionable behavior of the detectives, in many instances. And yet, we also can laugh at them, with them. Song Kang-ho’s character could be described as a corrupt cop, and yet he kind of has redemption by the end of the story. Can you talk a little bit about that playfulness of tones and mixing of tones, and also that ability to kind of empathize with characters who sometimes behave badly?

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah. More tonal ...

Translator:
He’s never deliberately tried to mix tones or try to play tricks by mixing different tones.

Translator:
So, in life and events and if you just take a crime scene for example, it depends on the distance you are from it. When you’re close in it, it can be sad and scary and terrifying, but you should take a step back perhaps, there are comic moments and it feels like a black comedy almost.

Translator:
So, Song sort of embodies these different contrasts and he just takes all these elements and it just melts into his body into one. He’s not trying to be comedic, but just to try to depict this real life situation there can be moments of humor that come out of it naturally.

Translator:
So, even when he’s trying to catch the criminal, he’s actually not a good detective. He uses violence and shady methods, but the fact that he’s trying so hard to do this, there are actually moments of humor that come out of it and it’s a real reflection of what really happened in those times.

Scott Foundas:
And something else that we see in the film is the first suspect that is very aggressively pursued by the detectives is a young man who has a mental disability or is differently-abled. And something that recurs in your work are characters who are somehow marginalized by society, because of their age, their socioeconomic status, or some sort of physical or mental different ability. And can you talk a little bit about where that sort of strain of inquiry in your work comes from?

Translator:
So, there’s like a whole scale of people in the film who carries a lot of power and those who have no power. And then there’s the people at the very bottom and that’s also true in Parasite, but there’s that spectrum of different types of characters, especially the first suspect in this film.
Translator:
So, when you look at the weakest character in a particular society and how they’re treated or treated badly, it’s a reflection, an overall reflection of that time period itself.

Translator:
So, in the 1980s, it was a very violent era. And when he was in high school, teachers routinely hit their students and it was just normal, they accepted it, but if that happened to his son right now in school, it couldn't exist.

Bong Joon Ho:
It's impossible ...

Translator:
Even if a teacher thinks hitting somebody, that goes on YouTube and it's over.

Translator:
Looking back now, it just feels so unbelievable, but the way they use violence on their first suspect, it was just such a normal thing.

Bong Joon Ho:
At that time in 1980s, but now it's totally different in the police, in the military, so nothing happens like that.

Scott Foundas:
A kind of interesting footnote to this movie is that in October of last year, an inmate in a Busan prison serving a life sentence for murder, confessed to all of the murders that are depicted in this movie.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yes.

Scott Foundas:
How did it feel to you, having made this film about this case that went unsolved for 30 years, for this belated closure to finally arrive?

Bong Joon Ho:
We found out him, the DNA matched, ...

Translator:
When he first learned that they caught him, all day he couldn't do anything, and he had mixed feelings thinking about...

Bong Joon Ho:
Because when I was writing the script of Memories of Murder...
Bong Joon Ho:
During the research I met some real detective who involved the investigation and also some people of the community town that relate to the victims. I met some journalist who...

Bong Joon Ho:
But the only one person I could not meet was the murderer...

Bong Joon Ho:
Yes, I really wanted to see his face...

Bong Joon Ho:
Just imagine that for example David Fincher’s Zodiac, so maybe tomorrow in the news article you guys find out that the murderer Zodiac, the killer, that kind of ...

Bong Joon Ho:
You mentioned that NEON who did such a wonderful job releasing Parasite in America are bringing Memories of Murder back to theaters later this year, so that you’ve got the chance to rediscover the film or to discover the film. You definitely made a fairly radical departure after this film, making a kind of a creature feature, a movie about a giant monster that rises out of the Han River as a result of chemicals dumped by the American military there, a true incident, not the monster, but the dumping. Talk a little bit about wanting to work in this genre, this genre of the monster movie.

Translator:
To start with, when you was young, there was seven mysteries of the world.
Bong Joon Ho: 
Seven wonders of the world, in kid magazine, my most favorite was the Nessie in the Loch Ness, so I nearly obsessively collected the photos and all those, the articles, and ...

Translator: 
From his apartment, he can see the Han River, there’s a big river that flows through Seoul and like here with the Mississippi river in Minnesota, he just thought one day suddenly what would happen if a Loch Ness monster type of creature came out of the river?

Scott Foundas: 
Although I don’t know that the Loch Ness monster is famous for eating people, but she’s a bit more benign, although it’s interesting to me, I think that in The Host you also kind of engender a strange sort of sympathy for this creature, which just seems to kind of be doing its thing and people get in the way, but it’s only there because people created it in the first place, through their harming of the environment.

Translator: 
It is a CGI character, but he thought, ”Well, what is the personality? It’s a very important main character to me.” He thought it was like a character who gets hurt a lot and is grouchy.

Bong Joon Ho: 
Also, we share some reference image, the reference of the character, me and creature designer share the photo of American actor, his name was Steve Buscemi. Finally, I met him in this award season, in SAG Award.

Scott Foundas: 
Did you tell him that he was the inspiration for The Host?

Translator: 
Too crowded room, he didn’t have a chance to talk to him about it.

Scott Foundas: 
Well, I think there’s a chance it’ll get out now.

Bong Joon Ho: 
He’s such a nice person, he’s so sweet and he came to our table, so we say hello and I introduced the great Parasite actors to him. Steve Buscemi, he is such a wonderful person, but he was the reference of the... In the Fargo, right? In the Fargo when ...

Translator: 
With the blood and putting the napkin on his face-

Bong Joon Ho: 
You remember that.
Translator:
It just felt so natural with the character.

Scott Foundas:
Well, without further ado, we'll take a look at The Host starring Song Kang-ho and Steve Buscemi.

[Clip from The Host]

Scott Foundas:
Of course, we get to see another couple of regular members of your ensemble company of actors there, Byun Hee-bong who's in many other films-

Bong Joon Ho:
Grandfather.

Scott Foundas:
As the grandfather and Go Ah-sung as the daughter of Song Kang-ho, she would play again in Snowpiercer. Can you talk a little bit, obviously there are many directors throughout history who sort of formed a kind of core group of actors that they've worked with over and over again, people like John Ford and the Cohen brothers and Christopher Nolan and many others. What appeals to you about using actors over and over, but in very different ways?

Translator:
He's only made seven films, so it's a little early to talk about that.

Scott Foundas:
But some people are in four of them.

Translator:
He's done four with Song, but even if he did 40, there's always different layers and it's a deep well, you can dig and dig and still find new things within.

Translator:
There are two different... If you write with an actor in mind and decide ahead of time that you're going to cast an actor and write the story with that person in mind, you could also just write the script first and look for actors afterwards. In the case of Parasite, besides Song who you wrote the part for, it was really discovering your actors after the fact.

Bong Joon Ho:
For example, Martin Scorsese's Irishman, Robert De Niro and Joe Pesci, it's already very beautiful, they work together again, but there is also Al Pacino, the very first time working with Martin Scorsese. Those kinds of combinations are so great, beautiful.

Scott Foundas:
This was obviously a big step up just in terms of the technical challenge of the film from your previous films. Can you talk a little bit about working with CGI creature, and just making a film of that scale, which was I think still a bit unusual to see a film like that. We tend to think of being a very American kind of film made outside the United States with that level of technical excellency.

Translator:
Really hard, he didn't have enough money to make it properly.

Bong Joon Ho:
But for example, when I watch the making of, documentary of the Jaws, it was quite impressive, that at the time Universal Studios ...

Translator:
There's that famous story of Universal Studios, they made the shark, but the shark didn't work and so Spielberg had to come up with different ideas and finally it's that iconic POV shot of the shark with John Williams' score. He feels like sometimes handicaps can breed new ideas and your imagination.

Bong Joon Ho:
At the time, the whole movie budget was at the time, the whole production budget was 11 million, the US dollar. The effects budget was just five million, so this is a joke. It means I could not work with WETA digital or ILM or the digital domain, they're so expensive, very expensive companies, so it was impossible. We found out some middle size VFX company called Orphanage located in San Francisco...

Translator:
He asked why they were called The Orphanage and they said that a lot of them left ILM and they're sort of the orphans of ILM, but they had a great energy and spirit.

Translator:
With the limited budget and these VFX crew members, he made the creature, but ahead of time, he knew that his VFX shots were limited. He had about 120 shots that he could use to show the creature, so for the two hour running time, he had that much to work with.

Bong Joon Ho:
Already the number is in my hand, so 120 I still remember that number. Only 120 shots, that's the chance I can show the creature on the screen...

Translator:
He really tried to squeeze different ideas out of that limit, and even if you didn't see the creature and the frame, how do you feel that the creature is there? He learned a lot from Jaws as well to try to tell the story.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yes, so all those handicaps makes me more creative...
Translator:
It's easy to talk about it now, but at the time when he was trying to actually pull it off, it was really difficult.

Scott Foundas:
But of course one of the great things about the film is that even though the creature is wonderful and we believe it's real and the illusion is totally sold, ultimately it's a movie about this dysfunctional family that sort of has to come together in this moment of crisis.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yes, it's a family movie.

Scott Foundas:
That is something that we could say about Parasite also and about Mother, they're all family films in a way. Even my Memories of Murder is a movie about a family of cops. Maybe you can say something about why you find yourself coming back to these family stories, like a kind of demented Walt Disney?

Translator:
You're right, they are all family stories, but not family stories that he can get financing from Disney.

Translator:
You have a creature, it's very Sci-Fi, or you think horror, but he wanted to contrast that with everyday life and just the normalcy of life, and of course that's the families, it's that unit.

Bong Joon Ho:
Normally, in the Sci-Fi horror movie, there is always the very smart scientist or the general, the military general or politician, but I didn't like those kinds of approaches. My functional family, I love so much, and so...

Translator:
It's something he knows a lot about, so it feels very close to him and it's easy for him to sort of explore these types of characters within the family unit.

Bong Joon Ho:
Something murky, quirky, I don't know the word, I don't know the nuance, but anyway, maybe you know.

Scott Foundas:
Well, I think beyond just being a family story, it's a movie about a father who is willing to go to any length to rescue his daughter, the way that Mother, your next film is a movie about a mother who will go to any length to prove her son innocent of a crime that he's accused of. Is there something particularly about that parent-child relationship and the extremes of it that interests you as a storyteller?

Translator:
In terms of human relationships, human to human, there's love and there's obsession, but there's nothing quite as extreme as the love and obsession that a parent feels towards their child, and he's a father and he knows firsthand of course.

Translator:
There's different family dynamics, father and son story, father-daughter story, mother-son, mother-daughter, and of course in The Host, it was father-daughter, in Parasite mainly father-son, but he felt that basically the relationship with the mother and a child, that was the most extreme and the most intense relationship you could try to depict.

Translator:
On the next film after The Host, he really wanted to do a deep dive into this character dynamic between mother and son.

Scott Foundas:
You were talking a little bit earlier about that sort of different ways that a script can come together. You sometimes write a part for a specific actor, or you may write the part and then cast it. Mother is so driven by this extraordinary lead performance by the actress Kim Hye-ja who went on to win the LA Film Critics Award for best actress for her performance. In this case, what came first, actress Kim or the character?

Bong Joon Ho:
Definitely the actress. She's very iconic figure...

Translator:
She's a very symbolic figure in Korean society, she was like sort of the nation's mother, she played that role of being the sacrificing parent and full of love for decades.

Translator:
He feels very strange sometimes, but he would see all of her films and TV shows and particularly the ones that weren't that popular, he would see this sort of dark potential, this unique side of her that didn't get depicted very often and he wanted to explore that more deeply.

Bong Joon Ho:
When I first met her and I presented my storyline, very briefly, that synopsis was already very dark and I was very nervous if she hate it, but fortunately she loves it so much and she almost ...

Translator:
She wanted to make it more bloody or darker. She just played the kind, loving mother so many times that she really wanted to try something different.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yes, it was so great, so she herself wants something extreme, so I was lucky ...

Translator:
If she had said no, there was just no alternative, she was the reason why he wanted to make this film, so he couldn't cast around then, if she said no.

Scott Foundas:
From 2009, this is Mother by Bong Joon Ho.

[Clip from Mother]

Scott Foundas:
I'm wondering if part of the inspiration for this movie was also some of the great sort of Hollywood women's melodramas from the fifties. Movies like Stella Dallas. Or movies by Douglas Sirk, that feature these kind of melodramatic star turns for the great actresses of that period. There seems to be kind of a strain of that running alongside the sort of murder investigation, police procedural strain in this movie. It's kind of a Memories of Murder meets Imitation of Life or something.

Translator:
Douglas Sirk made so many beautiful films. Where he got the inspiration with this one, he's not quite sure. But all he knows is that he was very obsessed with working with this actor and actress.

Translator:
He saw Mamma Roma afterwards, the De Sica film. And he felt maybe if he had seen it before when he was preparing the film, it would've been helpful.

Bong Joon Ho:
And did you during pre-production, in some moment, I recognize, this movie, this story is something underneath related to Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho. The relationship between Anthony Perkins and the Mother in the house...

Translator:
I thought like, you know, earlier in the story, if it was Anthony Perkins when he was younger, the relationship between the mom and the son, there's some similarities there.

Translator:
Before she goes to the basement.

Scott Foundas:
Well I think if we can also kind of see in that clip your style of the film is a bit different from the films that came before. The camera is looser. There's more handheld shots. And-

Bong Joon Ho:
Extreme closeups.

Scott Foundas:
Extreme closeups. What about the story dictated that you would shoot it in a different way than your previous films?
Bong Joon Ho:
And also, this is my very first working with the DP, Hong Kyung-pyo, who shot the *Parasite* and *Snowpiercer*. And also *Burning* and ... But *The Host* and *Memories of Murder*, was a different master than the Kim Hyung-koo. And through that ...

Translator:
So they're both giants and, and great cinematographers. But he wanted something uncomfortable or unhinged. And so we're talking about the handheld, but he felt that Hong was the right sort of approach.

Bong Joon Ho:
So yeah, the keyword we share between me and DP, cinematographer was anxiety. Yeah. So ...

Translator:
So whether it's the mom's anxiety or the son's, he just wanted to have that idea or concepts to permeate the entire frame.

Scott Foundas:
All these films we've been talking about, sort of came into the world at a moment when there were a number of new filmmakers coming from South Korea who were kind of making their mark on the international cinema circuit. Showing in Cannes and other major festivals. You alongside directors like Lee Chang-dong, Park Chan-wook, Im Sang-soo, Hong Sang-soo. Obviously critics always like to try to put some kind of a frame around movements like this, where you suddenly have an explosion of new exciting cinema coming from a particular region, whether it's Iran, China, Romania, they've all kind of had their moment in the critical sun. Having made these films and known these filmmakers, do you feel there was any sort of connective thread between all of you? Or that you were making films in reaction to something in the culture? The way that we think of Italian neorealism as a reaction to the Second World War. Or the French New Wave as a reaction to the influx of American films into France after the end of the war. This kind of sensibility.

Translator:
So it wasn't like a deliberate thing where they all got together and decided. You know? Like in Denmark with *Dogma* 95 or the French New wave. There was no sort of deliberate kind of idea behind their films.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah, you know very well Lee Chang-dong, Hong Sang-soo, they are more, how can I say...

Translator:
True auteur.

Bong Joon Ho:
True auteur. But me, Park Chan-wook, Kim Jee-woon, we are more genre driven. But maybe the generation, to me, Park Chan-wook, Kim Jee-woon, the generation is the very first generation in Korea, the cinefile generation. So ...
Translator:
So the previous generation to him, directors like Im Kwon-taek are more like John Ford, where they grew up working on crews and then became directors. His generation is more like the cinefile one. Guys who collected videos and watched movies at the cinematheque all day.

Scott Foundas:
And I have to imagine that by the time you had made, again, all the films we've seen up to this point, culminating with *Mother*, you probably were starting to have offers to make films outside of Korea. It's a very common thing. Filmmakers achieve a certain level of international renown and Hollywood comes calling. And you do then make two English language films in *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*. But very much on your own terms. And I think it's one of the great case studies of a director making movies in English with international stars, but without losing his own voice in the process. Which we can think of many examples of the opposite. And can you talk a little bit about your own concerns about starting to make these international English language films? And how you kind of protected yourself against falling victim to Hollywood?

Bong Joon Ho:
Actually, it was 2006. Just after the *Midnight Madness* screening in Toronto. The *Host* screening. One man came to me and he introduced himself. "I'm the agent from the CAA." It's the very first time I met the agent. Because in Korean industry system, there is no agency, or entertainment lawyer. We always can ...

Translator:
Just call up an actor, you have a meal together, and you talk about projects.

Scott Foundas:
Great system.

Bong Joon Ho:
Suddenly I became client. And I have my US agent after *The Host*. But he sent the many script, the Hollywood script. But at the time I already have a project. It was the *Mother*. And the *Snowpiercer* already ...

Translator:
2005, before he started shooting *The Host*, he discovered the comic book that became *Snowpiercer*. So in terms of receiving scripts from Hollywood, it didn't really mean that much at the time.

Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah. When I get the Hollywood script, I show the script to my friends. "Wow, this is a Hollywood script, you guys. Have you ever seen this?" And then I write this screenplay of *Mother*. And another script ...

Translator:
At the office, he showed them the script. And then he'd just write his own thing.
It wasn't like he set out to make a Hollywood film. Of course Snowpiercer is originally a French graphic novel. And he read it and he just got very interested in the subject.

Bong Joon Ho:
And the concept is the new ice age, the human survivors remains on the London train. So it's about the human survivors...

Translator:
So it would have been strange if all the people on the train were either from South or North Korea. So naturally it became an international cast. And by extension of that, the system in which the film was produced also became more of a Western style.

Bong Joon Ho:
But you know, actually the production company and financier, the old Korean company. But working with English language actors. So that's the structure.

Scott Foundas:
And it is like Parasite, another film that deals very explicitly with class stratification. And you did speak a little bit earlier about, sort of this idea of wanting to look at society through its weakest points. And I'm just wondering if in your own life, if you kind of remember moments when you sort of first became aware of these strata, and the way that certain people were ignored or pushed to the margins of society by the people in power. You know? That may have kind of informed wanting to make movies about that.

Bong Joon Ho:
When I was eight years old, the third grade, I live in the middle class town. So in the class, the rich kid and very poor kid, was all together in the class. And ...

Translator:
Sorry to say that. But there was a certain kid in his class where if you got close to that kid, he had a certain odor to him.

Translator:
And it turns out that he didn't actually have a home, and his family lived in like a greenhouse. A plastic covered home. So he came from very tough circumstances.

Translator:
So one day he took him to play with some other kids. And the other kids didn't like him, and thought he smelled, and didn't want to play with him. And so at an early age, it was kind of a bit of a trauma to him. And of course, to the boy it was much more intense. But he felt very bad about putting him in that kind of a situation.

Translator:
At the time he didn't realize it, but, "What is this?" It was just kids playing, but he wanted to think more about what kind of divides us.
Scott Foundas:
Well, that's a good segway. Looking at a scene from a very appropriate movie to be watching on a subzero night in Minneapolis. Snowpiercer.

[Clip from Snowpiercer]

Scott Foundas:
Oh, of course, the great Tilda Swinton who you would also go on to cast in Okja. And it's just interesting, I think, to look at the pattern of going from Memories of Murder to The Host, to Mother, to these films, to Parasite. This kind of alternation between, big fantasy, sci fi movies with lots of special effects and elaborate sets, to movies that are decidedly more contemporary. Or we could say, human-scaled. Or set in the quote unquote real world. And is that by design, that you seem to kind of go back and forth between these kinds of projects? Or is it simply random? Do see continuing to kind of keep a foot in both of those sort of worlds?

Translator:
Oh, there's, there's no sort of master plan looking down on himself going, this is the next thing to do.

Translator:
So it's really about the idea and the story. Something that he really wants to do in a movie that he follows.

Bong Joon Ho:
I'm very impulsive. Yeah...

Translator:
And that sort of has its own challenges during production. And Snowpiercer was no exception.

Translator:
He had to build the whole train as a set. There was 26 different train car sets.

Bong Joon Ho:
He spent very hard time in there.

Translator:
The producer.

Scott Foundas:
Who of course, I first met, when he came to New York to show me the film. When you were locked in an absurd battle with the movies American distributor, Harvey Weinstein, over the final cut of the film, which you eventually won. And to this day, the film has really not been as widely seen in the English speaking world as it should be. And[d] hopefully Parasite brings some more people to that as well. But you know, I deliberately not asked a lot about Parasite tonight, because you've been talking about it for the last nine months. But it is, I find, quite curious that for a couple of years I heard you talking about this small film that you had to go back to make Korea out of a contractual
obligation to the producers of Mother. And you, at least from my perspective, could not have made this film sound less significant when you were working on it than it eventually turned out to be.

Bong Joon Ho: Less significant.

Scott Foundas: Exactly. And I'm just wondering if you have been surprised by the extent to which this film, which is a small film, which is a movie made for a fraction of the budgets of Snowpiercer and Okja, in Korea, with a Korean cast, entirely spoken in Korean, has now become the movie that has been your biggest success all around the world.

Translator: So regardless of the outcome, his intent was always the same as with his other films. He was just very excited by this idea.

Bong Joon Ho: And the very first idea came to me in 2013, during my post production of Snowpiercer. And at the time, I already set the basic structure with the production company of Parasite. So it means we already set the next, next project. So before making Okja ...

Translator: So before Okja he had already planned on making a Parasite next. So it wasn't after these two big international films that he's wanted to return to Korea to make Parasite. It was always part of the plan to do it then.

Bong Joon Ho: But anyway, I was quite happy, and comfortable and feel safe. In that the production of the Parasite is relatively smaller. So very good focus. All the small detail and nuances with my, the native language ...

Translator: Oh, looking back at the results, of course there were elements of the production that was very enjoyable. Because it was back in Korea.

Scott Foundas: And something that many of your films have, but I think Parasite maybe has the most of them, are these kind of elaborate set pieces that almost feel like something that could have come out of a roadrunner, Looney Tunes cartoon. Where a series of events snowballs and escalates. You know, watching Parasite, my reaction to the now very famous peach shavings scene was that this movie cannot possibly surpass this scene. And we're only about halfway into the movie. And then you have about four other sequences after that, that are even more spectacular in terms of this kind of physical comedy combined with incredible choreography of the actors and the camera.

Scott Foundas: And it does make me wonder one thing we haven't talked about at all, as an influence on you, is slapstick comedy, silent comedy, comic strips. You know? Other art forms that kind of rely on this intensely visual and escalating kind of
series of complications. And I am wondering if you see in your own work, the influence of that. People like Chaplin, Keaton, Jacques Tati, and so forth.

Translator:
Of course the visual comedies of Jacques Tati or the sort of dynamic movement of the camera and the things in front of the camera by Akira Kurosawa. These are things that were very inspirational and important to him.

Bong Joon Ho:
I'm also a huge fan of 1970s Steven Spielberg. The Sugarland Express, and Duel, Something Evil. And Jaws, and Close Encounters. All those movie we can see such a beautiful the blocking lines, and choreograph, and camera movement, in a very graceful but simple and beautiful way. So very masterful ...

Translator:
So just seeing the frame and in my head, visualizing it. He just remembers it becoming an imprint in his mind in terms of, "Oh, this is where the camera moved this way. This is where the character walked this way." It was very powerfully ingrained in his mind.

Scott Foundas:
So before we turn it over to questions from the audience, let's take a brief look at one of these incredible scenes from Parasite. This is pure cinema poetry here. They don't even need to know anything about the film, although everyone's seen it, or even to understand the dialogue to understand the genius of this.

[Clip from Parasite]

Scott Foundas:
Just before we turn it over to audience, I just wonder if you could say...Because so much has been written in the last days about what it means that Parasite won Best Picture of the Oscars. There's a lot of think pieces about what it means for the Academy, what it means for world cinema. But what does it mean for you as the one who comes with four Oscars in his suitcase.

Bong Joon Ho:
It happened the four days ago. Frankly speaking and to be honest, I'm still thinking about it.

Scott Foundas:
Perfectly good answer.

Translator:
He doesn't know how this happened. It's definitely a great thing. He just needs a little more time to process and think about ...

Scott Foundas:
Questions for Bong Joon Ho. Please just remember to wait for the mic to come to you before you start speaking.
Audience Member:
Thank you so much. Thank you so much for coming and speaking this evening. We're all so grateful-

Bong Joon Ho:
Thank you.

Audience Member:
… for it. I do have a Parasite question to kick it off, but it bounces off something you said earlier when you're talking about not mixing tones in a film. You had a beautiful thing about how it melts inside of you, but this one definitely took a big mixing turn. We were all laughing through this rollicking scene, but very shortly, it turns into a whole other different experience. I'm wondering about the choreography of that, the intention behind that. Was it necessary to have the darker side in order to create a lasting gravitas?

Bong Joon Ho:
Actually, during screenwriting or doing shooting the production, actually me and cinematographer and all the actors never discussed about the tone or genre. We just shoot it. No actors ask to me, "From this page, from this moment, from this dialogue, maybe whole tone is changing. Right? Director Bong." There was no those kind of questions. We just shoot it.

Translator:
For him and the actors, they just imagine that this is really happening where it's a happy situation and something dark or bad happens, or it's a sad moment and there's laughter or something humorous that happens. It's just something that they imagined just happening in real life. As far as his influence of US genre films, he said that it's like the blood flowing in his veins. It's not like he's conscious of blood in his veins. He knows that it's there, and it's always flowing.

Bong Joon Ho:
We never discussed the tone on set. Me, cinematographer, and actors just keep shooting.

Audience Member:
Thank you so much for being here, Director Bong. I'm actually really interested just in your creative process, especially early on when you're starting to think about where these stories are going to go, or how you're going to develop the ideas with something like Mother, might be a good example of … What's it like for you in the early stages of a project when you're still conceiving of what the story's going to be, and those really early nuts and bolts process things when you're writing?

Bong Joon Ho:
Maybe you're a screenwriter, right? Anyway.

Translator:
Of course, every film is different and the approach.

Bong Joon Ho:
But in case of *Memories of Murder* and *Mother*, from the beginning, I already know the very end, the last part of the story. Especially the *Mother*, even in the very simple synopsis. Just two or two and half page, there was already the precise description of that first sequence. But in case of *Parasite*, it was very different. I already said it came to my mind 2013. During four years I developed it in my head. During that four years, only the first half of the story, just the infiltration of the poor family that infiltrate to the rich family. But there was no clear the structure of what happened after they complete the infiltration. There are many different ideas, more the grotesque and very ... Someone kill everyone or ...

Translator:
They bury them in the backyard.

Bong Joon Ho:
But the actual screen writing of *Parasite* was ...

Translator:
After the co-writer did his draft, he wrote a draft by himself in the last few months.

Bong Joon Ho:
During that last four and half months, all the basement thing and the second half of the structure, the husband hidden in the bunker is all suddenly came to me in that last three months.

Translator:
Are there any people here that haven't seen *Parasite*?

Scott Foundas:
Too late for that.

Bong Joon Ho:
Sorry. I spoiled my own movie. Anyway, that is very crucial idea to the whole movie.

Scott Foundas:
I know. It's all right.

Bong Joon Ho:
But it came to me in the very lately. And then also the very last ... It's almost feel like epilogue, right?

Scott Foundas:
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Bong Joon Ho:
After that the violent climactic sequence, after that, it's a little bit emotional. ...
Bong Joon Ho:
That idea came in the last month-

Audience Member:
Wow.

Bong Joon Ho:
... of the screenwriting. During my own screenwriting, it means I didn't know what happened in the very last page of the screenplay. Normally ...
Scott Foundas:
Three days ago.

Bong Joon Ho:
It was three days ago. Feels like three years ago.

Translator:
He was there at the Dolby Theater with his team, eight of the actors came from Korea. The producers, the production designer and editors were nominated so that they were there. His cinematographer, Hong Kyung-pyo, was there as well.

Bong Joon Ho:
Actually, very sorry to Pedro Almodovar. I really respect him. I'm a huge fan his works. Pain and Glory is such a beautiful movie. I was so touched by the film. Anyway, our team has the ...

Translator:
Of those six nominations, the one that he had the most potential to win was, of course, the International Film Academy awards.

Bong Joon Ho:
When I was on the stage for accepting the Best International Feature, I really tried my best because this is my last time on the stage. So, I called the every .... The name of the actors in very speedy way, and the introducing cinematographer, production designer, and producers. And then, "Stand up, stand up." And then as I completed mission and I just say, "Oh, I'm going to drink tonight. Bye-bye." And then I back to my seat and very relaxed, and just watching Brad Pitt and then Joaquin Phoenix, and wow, watching [inaudible 01:47:56]. I really relaxed and enjoying. Certainly, in the very late part of ceremony, you all know very well what happened and still hard to understand. At the moment, I was very, "What the 'bleep' is going on?" But when Spike Lee was on stage where he did that beautiful costume for Kobe Bryant. He was beautiful on the stage. He called my name. It was very surreal feeling. I walk up on the stage and ...

Translator:
When he first got on stage, he looked out and he made eye contact with Marty Scorsese.

Bong Joon Ho:
It was quite strange because I didn't know where he was. I didn't know his seat number. I didn't know his position. But when I walk up the stage, immediately, I found out Marty and the eye contact. Suddenly, I ...

Translator:
He just suddenly was reminded of the days when he was studying films and reading his books. All of that was unplanned. He had no idea he was going to win. He didn't expect it.
But I still don't know why I talk about Texas Chainsaw. It's very strange.

Audience Member:
I really admire what you do with music in the films, particularly with Mother and the juxtaposition of the moods of the music and the image. I was just curious, does that come to you all at once or does the music come later?

Bong Joon Ho:
In case of Mother?

Audience Member:
Yes.

Male:
Yeah.

Translator:
The composer of Mother is a very famous classical guitar player. He is also very stubborn in terms of the way he interprets the script.

Bong Joon Ho:
The composer Okja and Parasite, it's a different guy. The composer of Mother, he did also The Host.

Translator:
They're both incredible composers. Lee Byung-woo the composer ... Of course, it's the job of the composer to write the music. But in terms of where the music starts and where it ends and how loud it is, and where the dialogue fits in under or over the dialogue, that's the director's decision. But this composer, he wanted to control the way his music was perceived and experienced in the film. There was a lot of quarreling and fighting during Mother, but he feels that that's why the score is so beautiful. Of course, the music in Parasite is wonderful as well, but the score of Mother is one of his favorites. It's going back to the idea of anxiety or anxiousness. He used a lot of tension notes. It's something used in contemporary music, but he felt that it fit very well with the themes in Mother. Of course, this is an obvious thing to say, but it's all the mother's point of view in terms of what kinds of music is going through the head of the mother, and also the child's point of view, looking at the mom and thinking about the music that she might be interested in or listening to.

Scott Foundas:
I think we have time for one more before we segue into the reception. So, make it a good one.

Audience Member:
You mentioned from the stage that the after party was what you were looking forward to. I'm just curious. It's been such a whirlwind. Was it a good party? Also, is there some anecdote? Is there some moment from these last crazy three days? You've been through so much. Is there something that sticks with you that you can share with the audience about something that happened in these last few days? A moment.
Bong Joon Ho:
Yeah. There was crazy party.

Scott Foundas:
Which you didn't even arrive at until almost 1:00 in the morning.

Bong Joon Ho:
Unfortunately, just after the ceremony, me and my publicist had to do many things after some photo shoot or some additional press things. When I finally arrived at the party place, it looks quite ...

Translator:
Like the steam had run out or something.

Bong Joon Ho:
But anyway ...

Translator:
And then the next day, he rested for a bit. And the day after that, he got on a plane to come here.

Bong Joon Ho:
On the plane, I'm very ... How can I say? Very relaxed and finally I recognize, "Wow. It's over, from Telluride to Oscar, from August to the February, five and half months of the so called Oscar campaign, so called the race. I was very happy. It's over. The here ... The Minneapolis with wonderful people like of you and Scott, and Sheryl.

Translator:
It wasn't like this was lumped together as part of the campaign. He had decided to do this Walker Arts Dialogue before the campaign even started. He wanted to make sure that it was a separate thing from this Oscar race. He's just happy to talk with his old friend, Scott, and talk films.

Bong Joon Ho:
It was such a great time, watching my own films and then talking about ...

Translator:
It's a really great time just talking about cinema. It was all just about movies tonight.

Scott Foundas:
Thank you, Bong Joon Ho. Thank you very much, the great Sheryl Mousley for having us, who is retiring from the Walker after 21 years or service. Thank you, Sheryl.