

There is a Captain

When *we were Bengs* recently won several international awards in the short film category. We speak to Alaric Tay, the Singaporean actor, producer, and director of this film. Born in 1979 and the only child of divorced parents, Alaric has been in the acting business for 12 years now. With a strong Christian background, his mother, a primary school teacher, reared him with a strict legalistic upbringing. Ironically, he would later passionately pursue entertainment as the career of his choice.

Despite firm resistance from his family to embark on an acting career, Alaric began seeking out professional acting work at the age of sixteen. He received his first TV acting job on Channel 8, entitled *Kung fu master*—he appeared as the backside of a lion.

After a year of miscellaneous roles on Channel 5 (English medium), his big break came when he landed a supporting role in director Glen Goei's independent feature film, *Forever fever*, aka *That's the way I like it*.

Since then, Alaric has acted in numerous TV programmes, including directing and editing short films and documentaries from 2000. To date, he has five short films on his resumé.

PT: Could you give us some background about your latest offering, "*When we were Bengs*"?

AT: It's a 12-minute comedy about two mischievous brothers, a notorious gangster, a very sweet girl, and quite a bit of arcade dancing. It's really a fun piece that's centred on the themes of brotherhood and self-sacrifice.

PT: Where has the movie been screened so far?

AT: *Bengs* has had four local screenings in Singapore, and has travelled to film festivals in Toronto (ReelHeART International & Bridge Fest), Los Angeles (Hollyshorts), New York (Asian American International),

Cambodia (CamboFest), Norway (WT Os International), Germany (International Shorts Detmold), and even the widely publicised Comic-Con International Independent Film Festival, which was held in San Diego last July. We picked up three awards at ReelHeART for Best Film (Experimental Category), Best Sound, and Best Editing.

PT: How was the response to its screening?

AT: Feedback was positive, with lots of laughter at every screening, which is somewhat surprising because comedy (unlike the action or horror genres) doesn't have a universal formula. But, my brand of humour seems to work with audiences even in the US, Canada and Europe.

PT: What was your inspiration for the movie?

AT: I think there were several ideas, which finally came together. First, as a Christian I have always known the story of Jesus. It is one of sacrifice and love. His personal *sacrifice* for me is embedded in my heart, and it would only make sense to embed this part of myself into my work. After all, as an artiste, it's not my job to impress upon others that I am a Christian, but merely to *express* that I am. Second, when I was in secondary school, I had many classmates who were gangsters, or were associated with them. I have been on the receiving end of some of their acts of kindness and sacrifice. Their sense of loyalty towards their friends is inspirational. This was also the premise for my movie. It is set in a town inhabited by punks and gangsters.

PT: What led you into the entertainment field?



by
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AT: Interesting question. I can't say there was anything specific that influenced me, but I knew I didn't want the usual office-type job. Maybe it was simply the desire to make a difference by being different. And I felt acting was something I could be good at. So I gave it a shot. Once I took a step in, more opportunities opened up, including getting into film school and making short films... So here I am.

PT: You have different areas of involvement in the field of entertainment?

AT: I am mainly an actor, but I also host events from time to time. In addition, I have been writing, producing and directing my own short films.

PT: What are some of the documentaries you have produced? What was your inspiration?

AT: I have produced two documentaries, and both had to do with my church. The first, *Journey of change*, was a brief history and the struggles of the church when it took a leap away from legalistic traditions to mainstream Christianity. The second was called *Moving on: selling the journey*. It was about my adventures in Australia while trying to sell *Journey of change*. At the same time, I paralleled that journey with my journey as a second generation Christian in a church that had just gone through a great deal of turmoil.

I guess the inspiration were the stories themselves. There was a great deal of sacrifice that had to be made when the changes took place in the church, yet many remained faithful. That moved me.

PT: Your earlier documentary *Journey of change* was autobiographical in nature.

