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PRESENTS



A Film by Rik Zak and Jun Ren

Executive Producer Chuck Schroeder

Runtime: 67 minutes | (3840 x 2160) 29.97 fps

OFFICIAL SELECTION:

The Philadelphia Asian American Film Festival (PAAFF) 2019
Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival (GZDOC) 2019

SOCIALS:

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SYNOPSIS

Theme: the arts vs violence and hatred

DRAGONMASTERS is the untold story of the Chinese dragon in America. When this symbol of good fortune and benevolence first arrived, it found communities in trouble and was soon employed by their handlers to battle prejudice, violence, and exclusion.

Utilizing a mix of documentary interviews, archival material, vérité footage, and filmed in six locations in New York, California, Canada and China, this 67-minute “authored-documentary” film with multiple storylines, is the story of the evolution and cultural impact of the Chinese dragon and its Masters in America. The film features two dragons and their handlers. The first arrived in Marysville, California in 1890 and the second in New York City, introduced in the early 1970s. Both of these North American dragon teams were formed at a time and place in America where violence and exclusion were the order of the day.

Dragonmasters illuminates the origins and history of the dragon from its ancient beginnings in folklore and ceremony to the spectacular ceremonial event centered around the Puzhai Fire Dragon in Guangdong Province.

The 19th-century marked a period of open anti-Chinese rhetoric in America. Confronted with racism, prejudice, and violence, Chinese Americans reacted peacefully through legal and diplomatic channels. What is not well known is the Chinese also responded by sharing and showcasing their culture, participating in civic events and celebrations in a concerted effort to present their ancient traditions in an attractive light to the broader community. In 1890, the Chinese community in Marysville, California imported a remarkable Golden Dragon from China which was used extensively in non-Chinese festivals and parades across America from the West to the East Coasts.

The Chinese Dragon Team on the East Coast of the United States was founded in the early 1970s by Chia Meng Woo, an aging kung-fu master in the heart of a community that was one of the most violent ghetto neighborhoods in America: Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Woo developed the team from a mix of Hispanic, Black, Chinese, and other teenagers in his community. Via his role as a teacher and mentor Master Woo positively impacted the lives of many young men in Williamsburg. Dragonmasters focusses on these men, now grown, and tells their gripping stories.

The Marysville and New York Dragons tell stories of how the Chinese reached out with their traditions to project a positive image and engage the broader community with hopes of acceptance and unity. At its core, this story demonstrates the power of culture to overcome hostility and rejection.

A sequence in Dragonmasters highlights a contemporary Chinese artist working on an enormous piece covering Doyers Street in Manhattan. His artistic project, Song of Dragon and Flowers, brings a message of “Love and peace” to the broader community and a 21st Century view of the iconic Chinese Dragon.

The filmmakers hope to show that cultural differences are what keep the world rich and vibrant, and by sharing and accepting, they open doors to friendship and harmony towards a positive future.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I moved to New York in 1976 and lived in midtown Manhattan. My interest in kung-fu led me to Master Chai Meng Woo, an elderly retired man living in Williamsburg, which at the time was a gang-infested ghetto. For over three decades, I went there to train and practice under him both Chinese martial arts and Dragon Dancing. The neighborhood, composed mainly of Hispanic and African-Americans, but also increasingly Chinese because of its proximity to New York's Chinatown, was experiencing rising racial tensions in addition to being ravaged by drug dealing. A gang controlled almost every block, making it one of the most violent ghetto neighborhoods in America.

Chai Meng Woo taught his students from his subsidized apartment in the heart of gang territory. It was remarkable that, in spite of racial tensions, his team was made up of Chinese, Hispanic, and African American youth. They came to learn how to fight. However, they were also required to learn Dragon Dancing. The questions about this were always the same. What is the Dragon? What are we going to learn from Dragon Dancing? What does Dragon Dancing have to do with fighting? Master Woo never really told us directly. It's something we learned by being there, "the art of fighting without fighting".

It amazed me to see that an old man, an immigrant without financial resources, armed only with his culture, could be an agent of positive transformation in a community so profoundly buried in hostility and urban decay.

The Dragon and its dance are familiar and recognizable, even to non-Chinese. The image of the Dragon has stubbornly persisted through thousands of years, representing China and the Chinese in popular culture worldwide, often with contradictory meanings. Many aspects of cultural traditions and skills are not distinguishable from the people who practice them. Like music, rites, and dance, Dragon Dance is not a physical entity but embodies the people who have that ethos and skills. As filmmakers, our initial objective in making this film was to document Dragon Dancing in Brooklyn and the transformative power this Chinese cultural tradition had on the lives of at-risk young people living in a New York ghetto.

Our research led us to Marysville, California, where we discovered the very first Chinese Dragon arrived in the United States in the late 1800s. We were curious, and our odyssey took us there as well. To our amazement, we found that this Dragon Dance tradition continues to be practiced there as part of the longest continually held parade in California.

As filmmakers, our purpose is to document and celebrate the cultural contributions of the Chinese Dragon in America and how it won hearts with the "art of fighting without fighting."

We hope our film will inspire others to see their culture's potential as a way to address hostility.

FILMMAKERS BIOGRAPHIES



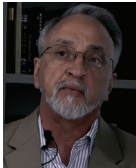
Rik Zak - Director/writer

Rik Zak is an award-winning creative director and Professor Emeritus at the Alberta University of the Arts (AUArts). Currently, he is a Creative Director at Schroeder Inc., a New York content and brand development agency with clients worldwide. Rik has practiced and researched Chinese dragon dancing in New York and its related traditions with Shifu Chia Meng Woo (胡介民師傅), 1913 -2010) for over 45 years. Shifu Woo was a Shaolin Master teacher who had studied and practiced traditional dragon dancing in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s then taught for 40 years in New York City.



Jun Ren - Co-director

Jun is an NYC-Shanghai creative director and film director. He has an undergraduate degree in design and a master's degree in film directing from the School of Visual Arts in New York. His mission is to build a bridge between progressive East and the West media creatives and connect next-gen audiences of all culture



Dr. A. Barber - Writer

Dr. Barber is the Director of Asian Studies at the University of Calgary. The publisher of three major works and 41 other scholarly publications, he is an internationally recognized scholar who has given 44 lectures in 13 countries. He has sat on the editorial board of various publications and been a member of the board of directors on scholarly associations and has done numerous interviews on TV, radio, magazines and newspapers. His areas of interest are Chinese culture/ religion, Indian culture/ religion, Japanese culture/religion and Korea, Tibet, Vietnam.



Chuck Schroeder - Executive Producer

Chuck Schroeder is Chairman of Schroeder, Inc. He started his career in New York as a copywriter at Doyle Dane Bernbach working on Alka-Seltzer, Volkswagen, Polaroid, Mobil, and other accounts. He was hired by McCann-Erickson to work as a Senior Copywriter on Miller Lite, Coca-Cola, Del Monte Foods and the KFC chain. Partnered with Rik Zak, he established Schroeder, Inc. in New York. The agency has worked for numerous clients including The New York Stock Exchange, Fiduciary Trust International, and American Airlines. Chuck has been a Creative Director and Senior Writer on a range of film projects and television commercials.



Peini Chen - Producer

Peini Chen is a film director and producer. She earned her Bachelor's of Architecture and attained Master's in film directing from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Her short film, "Exeunt," selected by New York Latino Film Festival, tells a story of a gifted but frustrated Latino Broadway dresser.

CREDITS

Directed by	Rik Zak
Co-directed by	Jun Ren
Written by	Rik Zak, A.W. Barber
Executive Producer	Chuck Schroeder
Producer	Peini Chen
Cast	Walter Van - New York, USA Anthony Bonilla - New York, USA Vincent McMaster - New York, USA Anthonio rodreguez - New York, USA Louise Rosenberg - New York, USA Reinaldo Perez - New York, USA Wai Eng - New York, USA Dr. Sun F. Pei - New York, USA David Lei - San Francisco, USA Chen Dongfan - New York, USA Dr. A. W. Barber - Calgary, Canada Stanley Yee - New York, USA Ken Leong - Calgary, Canada Zhang Shilin - Puzhai, China Richard V. Lim - Marysville, USA Heather Young - San Francisco Danny eng - Calgary, Canada
North American Crew	Gina Zak Rita Zak Lyn Schroeder Ron Poneck
China Crew	Yongkang Zhang Peini Chen Ansel Qing Wang
Audio/voice Mixer	Tyler Tober

CREDITS

Photographs provided by	<p>Honan Shaolin Association, New York, USA Canadian Honan Shaolin Cultural & Historical Association, Canada George Bennett, Oxnard, USA Camilo Jose Vergara Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas The Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library The Mactaggart Art Collection, The University of Alberta Museums Edmonton, Canada Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA Library of Congress, USA University of Bristol, Bristol, England Los Angeles Public Library Homestead Museum, City of INdustry, USA Museum of Chinese in America, New York, USA</p>
Filmed on Location	<p>New York Chinatown, New York, USA Marysville, California, USA Williamsburg, Brooklyn, USA San Francisco Chinatown, San Francisco, USA Calgary Chinatown, Calgary, Canada Edmonton, Alberta, Canada Puzai, Guangdong, China Beijing, China</p>
Special Thanks	<p>The Honan Shaolin Association, Golden Dragon Team, New York The Canadian Honan Shaolin Cultural and Historical Association The Bok Kai Temple The Marysville Chinese Community Jing Wo Cultural Association, Calgary Canada Richard V. Lim David Lei Heather Young Dr. Robert E. Lee, MD The Chinese Cultural Centre, Calgary, Canada The Town of Puzhai, Fengshun County, Guangdong Province, China The Puzhai Fire Dragon Team Danny Eng Chinese Consul General Wang Xinping Calgary Consulate Office of the People's Republic of China Jenny Yu Elias Shirgul Ryo Chen</p>