

# SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

Jeudi 29 mai 2010

## Bi, Don't Be Afraid!

(Bi, Dũng Sói)

REVIEWED BY LISA NESSELSON

Grounded in the authentic bustle of Hanoi and the uncomfortable interplay of familial relationships, *Bi, Don't Be Afraid!* is a thoughtful cinematic exploration of inchoate longing, the messy

consequences of physical decline and encroaching death, and confirmation that sex and youthful exuberance spring eternal. Frankly and overtly sensual with scant dialogue, this contemporary portrait of relatives living in close quarters while harbouring secrets is conveyed with impressive visual assurance.

Writer-director Phan Dang Di's leisurely debut feature, which formed part of the Cinéfondation's Aclier line-up in 2008, is a heat-soaked panorama of human desires that is probably more festival fare than arthouse material in most territories.



### CRITICS' WEEK

**Viet-Fest, 2010, 96mins**

**Director-screenplay** Phan

Dang Di

**Production companies**

Acrobates Films, Arte

France Cinema, Vietnam

Media Corp & Vietnam

Studio, T89 Film

**International sales**

Acrobates Films,

(33) 1 435 8999

**Producers** Claire

lajoumand, Nguyen

Bao Mai, Phan Dang Di,

Oliver Ropke

**Executive producers** Tran

Anh Hung, Henri Scriven,

Dominic Scriven

**Cinematography**

Pham Quang Minh

**Production designers** Bui

Minh Tuan, La Quy Tung,

Nghiem Quoc Cuong

**Editor** Julie Bezau

**Music** Vu Nhat Tan

**Main cast** Tran Tien,

Mar Chau, Nguyen Ha

Phong, Nguyen Thi Kieu

Trinh, Hoa Thuy, Phan

Thanh Minh

Nevertheless, it bodes very well for the directing future of Phan, who wrote the screenplay for Bui Thec Chuyn's 2009 Venice Horizons and Toronto title *Adrift* (*Choi Voi*).

Ice is a recurring motif, not surprising considering the film was shot when it was 35°C. It's so hot that six-year-old lad Bi's favourite place to play is among the various work stations at a nearby ice factory. Then, later on, Bi's attractive but strat-faced aunt is seen masturbating with a hunk of ice.

The boy's seriously ill paternal grandfather has recently returned from years abroad and uses ice to dull the painful cramps in his belly.

Bi's father's coping mechanism consists of getting sloppily drunk with cronies every night in a large outdoor café. Bi, his father and grandfather, while each distinct characters, seem to suggest three major phases in every man's life. Bi forms a bond with his ailing granddad.

Bi's mother, meanwhile, is frustrated by her husband's filial cowardice and unwillingness to have sex... at least with her. The family's cook is a not-always-silent witness to the proceedings.

It is Bi's spinster aunt who looks after him the most attentively of the household. Still, when do-gooders fix her up with a man they think might be a suitable mate, she struggles to take his advances in her stride. Indeed it is a much younger man that she encounters by chance who manages to rock her to the core.

Various couplings boast convincing raw energy. While there is not a lot of humour in *Bi, Don't Be Afraid!*, a scene in which two characters inhale helium from balloons and carry on a high-pitched conversation is as funny as it is incongruous.