

CRAZY DANCE OF DAY AND NIGHT

Written by: Jiming Lindal

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FADE IN:

EXT. AN-HUI VILLAGE - EVENING

A panoramic view of mountains, village houses dirty and poor crowd under the mountain, following the water of the valley.

A mine, SPREADS. WORKERS are going in and out of the mine. Black-dust-covered FACE, HANDS, ARMS of various workers, men and women.

Over the fence of the mine, light pole on a train track stands from afar, blinking by itself.

BLINK ONE, TWO. Silence.

Wooden tracks fill the eyes.

A EIGHT-YEAR-OLD GIRL's half-broken canvas shoe steps, skips, and hops on tracks, plank by plank.

GIRL  
(In Mandarin Chinese)  
1,2,3

The girl, holds a hand puppet up to the sun. The sunlight casts on the puppet, leaving a shadow on the train track.

Clouds and wind move in, the shadow of the puppet goes in and out of light, not knowing the night and day.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
(In Mandarin Chinese)  
Coco, it's getting late, let's go home.

A THIRTY-YEAR-OLD WOMAN'S enters, drags the girl out. Closely: A scar on the woman's hand.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

SUPER: YEAR 1967

A Female Hand, smearing heavy stage make up on her face.

MING, IN EARLY TWENTIES, glows, her shoulder moves a little, a moderate frame, strong bone structure, with somewhat melancholy movement.

BACKSTAGE ERRANDS are running in the background of the mirror.

BACKSTAGE ERRAND #1

Ten minutes to the start of the play! Hurry up!

Ming looks up to the clock. It reads six fifty, on a plain black and white clock.

BACKSTAGE ERRAND #2

Goodness heavens! The party leaders are here! I can't believe it!

GROUP of backstage people have a bit of commotion.

GROUP

Where? / Here, look. / Right there.

Ming's tenses up in the mirror.

ACTRESS (O.S.)

Good luck, or shall I say, break a leg?

A comb drops on Ming's dress table sarcastically. Ming's hand involuntarily shakes.

DIRECTOR LIN, a fifty-year-old man comes in the dressing room.

DIRECTOR LIN

It will be a good show tonight, Ming, are you ready?

Director Lin looks from his thick glasses, and his salt and pepper hair sticks out from the sides.

DIRECTOR LIN (CONT'D)

Are you nervous?

MING

A little.

INT. MUSIC ACADEMY - DAY

EXAMINER #1, A FORTY-YEAR-OLD MAN, and another two EXAMINERS, clearly the musicians of the time, are exchanging lazy glances. The revolutionary song, tune of "Learning from Lei-feng, Our Model" can be heard.

EXAMINER #1

...Sorry we need to interrupt here,  
do you have other songs you can  
play?

AH-SAN, a LEAN, YOUNG man in his early twenties, tightens the wind chamber of the accordion. He is BONE THIN, and his deep set eyes are obvious and DISRUPTIVE.

Wind chamber of the accordion opens up immediately. Speed picks up, a breath of freedom. Tango.

Examiners frown.

INT. BACKSTAGE - DAY

Director Lin takes the script from Ming, talking like a father.

DIRECTOR LIN

You are a great actress. Reach out  
to these emotions, and bring them  
out to your character.

Director Lin reminds himself of something and fishes out a few bills from his pocket.

DIRECTOR LIN (CONT'D)

Here is your stipend, treat  
yourself something nice.

Ming shovels the bills in a small pouch.

BACKSTAGE ERRAND #1

The play starts NOW!

Ming stands up.

DIRECTOR LIN

Ming,

As she disappears into it,

DIRECTOR LIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You'll be alright.

Curtain draws.

INT. CENTER STAGE - DAY

Two party leaders in a front row look up on the stage.

CAPTAIN WU, IN HIS FIFTIES, an ambitious figure, is in strict dress code. SECRETARY TIAN, A THIRTY-YEAR-OLD STAFF, self-seeking yet knowing how to play the game properly. The two are a pair, inseparable.

CAPTAIN WU  
Look at this play, it will help  
unite our youth, and that's  
important for our revolution.

SECRETARY TIAN  
You are absolutely right, Captain.  
Well said.

Director Lin nears Captain Wu.

DIRECTOR LIN  
Captain, do you like the play?

CAPTAIN WU  
Very good, congratulations... who's  
this actress?

Ming takes over the stage.

DIRECTOR LIN  
Yes, She's Ming. Ming of  
brightness, a rising star on stage.

Various actors, moves around the stage, putting up a good show. CAPTAIN WU nods, entertained.

CAPTAIN WU  
The central government has the word  
that we need to promote  
revolutionary plays. Have you seen  
the Red Lantern Tale recently?

DIRECTOR LIN  
That's not art.

SECRETARY TIAN cuts in.

SECRETARY TIAN  
Director Lin, be careful of your  
words. Our Chairman Mao says art is  
the mouth and tongue of the party.

Captain Wu glares at Secretary Tian for taking over.

EXT. THEATER CAMPUS - DAY

A continuous plain wall. A poster is slapped on the wall. Another poster is slapped on. A big LOUD SPEAKER screams on top of a building next.

LOUD SPEAKER

We need to follow our great leader  
Chairman Mao, he is our sun, our  
savior...

The speaker goes out of tune on "Mao." Yet another poster is slapped on. The poster reads: "Downcast Professor Liu"

EXT. SHANGHAI ALLEY - DAY

Dark alleys in French concession, small and narrow concrete buildings, crowded, racks of clothes hanging out of the windows.

INT./EXT. AH-SAN'S ROOM - DAY

One window of a second floor, opens into a chamber, compact, without a breathing room. One small bed pushes against the side of the wall, with a stained pillow throws on it. A table of a flat board leans into the wall, holding onto the chance of not falling apart. Two chairs, anchoring, barely survive the abuse of the time.

The room spells survival.

Ah-san puts down the accordion, moves a water basin out of a shelf, fills it with water, and dips his face. Water drips along his face, he is leaving the day behind. AH-SI, Ah-san's younger brother, A TEENAGER YOUTH, knocks into the room.

AH-SI

Meat, meat, the meat is in the  
butcher's shop! Go get it!

AH-SAN

Why don't you get it?

Ah-san punches towards Ah-si. Ah-si holds onto his STOMACH.

AH-SI

Bro'ther, that hurts!

AH-SAN

I am go'ing!

EXT. DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

LAO-QI (O.S.)  
Ah-san!

AH-SAN  
Now, who's calling?

Ah-san sticks his head out of the window. LAO-QI, TWENTY-YEAR-OLD YOUNGSTER, hair all sleeked up.

AH-SAN (CONT'D)  
Come upstairs, you bastard!

LAO-QI  
Don't you forget my sis' party!  
Bring your accordion -- we'll have  
a good time!

Lao-qi limps away, as if the floor isn't flat.

AH-SAN  
You got it, Buddy.

INT. MAY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

MAY, OVER FORTY, a socialite, once had her fine moment, buzzes in a narrow kitchen chopping up vegetables.

The apartment, though not entirely seen, feels cozy, and permeates flare of entertainment in every corner.

MAY  
Tell Auntie May, what you are doing  
now, you are a big star, aren't  
you? How many guys are chasing  
after you now? A dozen?

MING  
Auntie May!

Ming is washing a knife, the knife almost scrapes her finger. She is embarrassed, yet, couldn't be angry with May.

MAY  
Oh, what's the name of the play?

MING  
Song of Youth!

MAY  
Very proper, very proper indeed.

May splashes a handful of salt on a fish, and intentionally, inserts a question.

MAY (CONT'D)

Now, mind me asking you a question,  
when did you see your parents last?

The air freezes, if not forbidden.

MAY (CONT'D)

They are still your parents, if I  
may say. You are their daughter.

Ming wipes her hands off, and May knows when not to push. May hands Ming a bowl of dish and signals the dining room.

MAY (CONT'D)

Here, go, take these to the table.

Ming turns; with her mind full, she CRUSHES. The bowl almost tips over.

AH-SAN (O.S.)

Watch your step!

Ah-san stares at Ming, and SCANS: MAN'S BOOTS, pants, white shirt. BACK TO: MAN'S BOOTS.

AH-SAN (CONT'D)

What's up with the boots? I mean,  
they are man's boots.

MING

It's none of your business!

Agitated, both are moving out of the way quickly.

MAY

Ah-san, at this rate, you will  
scare all the girls away!

AH-SAN

Where is Lao-qi, I am looking for  
him.

MAY

He is in his room...

May pulls Ah-san over.

MAY (CONT'D)

...Playing with the recordings. His  
head is full of crazy ideas, but  
this time, it seems real...



INT. LAO-QI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A vinyl recording slip falls on the floor. Its cover shows the faces of the Beatle's band. The door opens, Lao-qi quickly tows the vinyl away.

AH-SAN  
Hanging out by yourself?

LAO-QI  
Close...close the door.

Lao-qi unveils the cover.

Red Fonts "Beatles '65" on the over. Band members John, Paul, George, Ringo sit on the chairs, holding umbrellas.

AH-SAN  
You got a copy of it?

Ah-san flips the recording cover back and forth in amusement.

LAO-QI  
Next week, I'll be in Hong Kong.  
Think about it -- I'll be FREE.  
Like you said, we all need to be  
there to be somebody.

AH-SAN  
You are kidding right? I'm just  
spitting out rubbish.

LAO-QI  
I am serious, I found someone to  
smuggle me in, we can go together.

Ah-san flies the cover over.

AH-SAN  
Do you know what's out there, so  
many guards and check points?! If  
you don't get killed in mainland,  
you WILL get killed crossing the  
river!

Lao-qi takes out a pendant hanging secretively around his neck. A rectangular, DELICATE and INTRICATE PATTERNED, JADE piece.

LAO-QI  
My mother's, it'll protect me.

AH-SAN

I can't believe you are so naive!  
You think this will protect you?

Ah-san weighs the pendant. Lao-qi feels insulted.

LAO-QI

You COWARD, you only talk, but do  
nothing about it.

Ah-san is triggered at the word "Coward."

AH-SAN

If you want to kill yourself, go  
ahead!

Ah-san slams the door and leaves the room.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

By the ROUND TABLE. Guests of seven or eight are sitting or  
standing around, chatting. May catches Ah-san.

MAY

Tell me, is he still so stubborn  
about his idea...?

Ah-san, flames within, doesn't answer. May switches to the  
guests.

MAY (CONT'D)

Ah-san, mind playing a European  
song for us? I have windows closed.

Ah-san picks up the accordion, puffs a cigarette and plays.  
Ming is taken, by the strange sensation of a FOREIGN tune.

MING

Is he from the conservatory?

MAY

Conservatory? His family  
background will never pass the  
test, too sad.

May walks to Ah-san and puts a few bills in his pocket.

MAY (CONT'D)

Come, and eat with us.

May takes time with Ah-san.

MAY (CONT'D)

Lao-qi is still a kid, only you can  
talk some sense out of him, he  
looks up to you.

Ah-san spoons some rice, avoiding the topic. May calls on  
Ming instead, taking a chopstick full of vegetable into her  
bowl.

MAY (CONT'D)

Eat some... I heard tomorrow is  
another show?

MING

A rehearsal.

MAY

They sound all the same to me!

May turns to Ah-san, quite proud.

MAY (CONT'D)

Ming is an actress, a rising star  
of our theater.

AH-SAN

Oh. No.

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Guests are leaving. May clears the tables, Ah-san packs up  
the accordion, and Ming is ready to take off. May puts a few  
apples in a plastic bag.

MAY

Take these to your school, don't  
always starve yourself, alright?  
It's getting late, I'll ask someone  
to take you home.

MING

Auntie May...

Ah-san listens in.

MAY

Auntie May is not your family, but  
I know your parents for many years,  
they are nice people.(Beat) Trust  
me, when you get down to only one  
family member to hold onto, you  
know how lonely and helpless you  
are in this world.

May shovels the apple bag into Ming's canvas bag.

MAY (CONT'D)

Ah-san, take her home, 547 Hua Ting  
Road.

EXT. SHANGHAI STREETS - NIGHT

Ah-san follows Ming with his bike, obviously for some time.  
Ming strides alone, ignoring it.

Ah-san searches for the words, looking randomly at the sky.

AH-SAN

Look, new moon.

Ming glances at the sky, not interested.

Bike hits the roadblock, but stabilizes fast enough not to  
tip over.

AH-SAN (CONT'D)

Get on here, we have a long way to  
go.

Ah-san pats the backseat, a signal for Ming to get on. Ming  
jumps at the back passenger seat, holding onto the bottom of  
the front seat, not sure if she can trust Ah-san.

Ah-san takes a turn. A few students are PAINTING on the wall  
of an alley.

AH-SAN (CONT'D)

Which play are you rehearsing?

Ming answers reluctantly.

MING

Song of Youth.

AH-SAN

Isn't that a good novel? Good movie  
too, didn't know they have a play  
for it!

MING

Didn't know you read.

A sarcastic note.

AH-SAN

I have books.

Ah-san is firm.

MING

I didn't mean... any favorite playwright?

AH-SAN

Me? I like Shakespeare, you?

MING

Ibsen. I like the women in his play, they seem to search for something, something of their own.

AH-SAN

Aren't these women too independent for their own good?

MING

Someone needs to break these social barriers, if not them, who will be?

Red traffic light blinks to green, a few Red Guards gather by the light post, stopping Ah-san's bike.

The light turns to red, and he is let go.

AH-SAN

I like Romeo and Juliet.

EXT. MING'S HOME - NIGHT

A little courtyard centers a quaint house and a cast iron gate, unusually spatial compared to the surrounding buildings. Ming knocks on the gate. MAID, FANG YI, IN HER SIXTIES, comes out of the gate.

FANG YI

Miss, you are home. Mr. and Mrs. Shao will be so happy to see you.

MR. SHAO, A MAN IN HIS MID FIFTIES, wears a velvet vest, approaches the gate with arrogance.

MR. SHAO

Fang Yi, what's going on THIS late?

FANG YI

It's Miss Ming. Mr. Shao.

Fang Yi, knowing her place at the house, leaves Mr. Shao to master.

MR. SHAO  
You still know you have a family?  
Act like someone who wasn't raised  
properly.

At the sound of "family," Ming's body shivers. Mr. Shao notices Ah-san.

MR. SHAO (CONT'D)  
Who is he?

Ming pulls Ah-san over in front of Mr. Shao.

MING  
My friend.

MR. SHAO  
Friend?!

Mr. Shao blocks Ah-san, sizes him, and is NOT impressed.

MR. SHAO (CONT'D)  
What's your name?

AH-SAN  
I'm "Ah-san."

MR. SHAO  
That's a street name, what do you  
do?

Tension builds within Ah-san.

AH-SAN  
I'm a musician.

Mr. Shao becomes interested.

MR. SHAO  
With the conservatory?

AH-SAN  
I'm a street musician.

Ah-san answers without shame. Ming touches Ah-san's hand, showing the sympathy.

MR. SHAO  
Please don't see my daughter again.

Ah-san doesn't budge. Mr. Shao commands Ming.

MR. SHAO (CONT'D)  
Go to the living room, I need to  
talk to you.

Ah-san is left standing at the gate. Mr. Shao ends with Ah-san, cold but polite.

MR. SHAO (CONT'D)  
Thank you for taking my daughter  
home, I will see you off.

AH-SAN  
No need to do that.

Ah-san rides his bike off.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ming sits by the desk in the living room, scanning a wall full of framed calligraphy, a symbol of culture and status. Mr. Shao closes the door behind.

MR. SHAO  
How dare you bring someone like  
this to our family? You don't want  
your future? To be with someone  
like that!

MING  
Of course, that's all you care.

MR. SHAO  
Don't see him again, that's all.  
Now let's talk about what matters,  
your brother is getting married.

MING  
How I never heard about it until  
now?

MR. SHAO  
You don't need to know until I tell  
you.  
(beat)  
He needs money.

MING  
I don't care.

MR. SHAO  
We are a big family, and you ought  
to care.

MING

I don't have any money.

MR. SHAO

You have stipends from your school!

MING

That's my blood money, do you know how hard I've worked?!

MR. SHAO

He's the first son.

MING

So he is allowed to suck all I have?! Everything here!

Ming points at her chest. Mr. Shao ignores.

MR. SHAO

I know the past makes you unhappy.

MING

Unhappy?

MR. SHAO

Maybe a little more than that. -- Your mom and I are serious about this wedding, it should match our family status.

Mr. Shao feels Ming's boiling anger.

MR. SHAO (CONT'D)

It's an order, not a request.

Ming knows her words don't matter.

MING

It's all yours,

A savings booklet is left on top of a chest, and Mr. Shao picks up the booklet. Ming leaves but makes sure she is heard.

MING (O.S.) (CONT'D)

But you lost me.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ming nods across room at MRS. SHAO, A FIFTY-YEAR-OLD PETITE WOMAN, whose energy outweighs her body.