

70 MM

NEWSLETTER

No. 29
DECEMBER 1993

SPECIAL EDITION " LITTLE BUDDHA "

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FRANCIS BOUYGUES and JEREMY THOMAS
present

A FILM BY BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI

LITTLE BUDDHA

KEANU REEVES YING RUOCHENG CHRIS ISAAK ALEX WIESENDANGER and BRIDGET FONDA
Production and Costume Design JAMES ACHESON Editor PIETRO SCALIA Cinematography VITTORIO STORARO
A.I.C.-A.S.C. music composed and conducted by RYUICHI SAKAMOTO Story by BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI Screenplay
by RUDY WURLITZER and MARK PEPLOR Producer JEREMY THOMAS Directed by BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI

BELGA FILMS © 1993 CIBY 2000 Serprocar Anstalt Développement et copie par

Successful European start of "Little Buddha"

Since 1 December "Little Buddha" is released in France with 176 copies. Four cinemas in Paris showed a 70mm (original version) print; Forum Horizon THX, UGC Biarritz, Gaumont Champs Elysees and Gaumont Grand Ecran Italie. The first five days the total number of visitors was 253 000. In the second week there will be released 235 copies.

In Belgium the film was released on December 8, also with four original 70mm copies. In the Netherlands the film will be released from 16 December in 35mm only.



**Gaumont
Grand Ecran Italie**
SUR 24 METRES DE LARGE,
VOUS N'EN CROIREZ PAS VOS YEUX

LITTLE BUDDHA VO 70 mm
LE NOUVEAU FILM DE BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI

AVANT-PREMIERE "LITTLE BUDDHA"



The Dalai-Lama of Tibet was invited as a special guest for the premiere of "Little Buddha" at the "Gaumont Grand Ecran Italy" Theatre in Paris on the fourth of November.

"Little Buddha":

A film with no violence ! No rough language !
No shooting ! A film like a fairy-tale book .



▲ Producer Jeremy Thomas, star Keanu Reeves and director Bernardo Bertolucci on the set of Little Buddha

Little Buddha

Once again producer Jeremy Thomas has led a major movie production into one of the world's most secret corners. In *The Last Emperor* it was the Forbidden City in Beijing. In *Little Buddha* it is the forbidden country of Bhutan. Oscar Moore reports from the set of an enigmatic epic in the making.

The car jolted, shuddered and stopped, leaving an old woman with a basket of green oranges jammed against the wall. On the other side of the wall two water buffaloes were having their backs scrubbed by a young boy, waist deep in the still waters of the town reservoir. Beyond, across the rice fields and rivulets of the

Kathmandu valley the Himalayan peaks stood white against the deep blue midday sky. It was already hot. At eight am Kathmandu was shrouded in thick mist, the daily residue of a freezing mountain night. By noon, in Baktapur the mist had evaporated and the November sun was severe. Hat

weather. Ray-Ban time.

The two guards who had barred our entry into the town didn't move but a young boy with brilliant white teeth was already busy at the window. Within seconds the name Bertolucci was being traded like a secret password.

Everywhere in Baktapur the

name Bertolucci was like an open sesame, to smiles, to welcomes, to instant popularity. After all *Little Buddha* (aka *Little Lama*, a name change designed to divert any unwanted politicking a la *The Last Temptation Of Christ*, but treated as a moot point on-set), had brought work to local craftsmen. The production had also brought Hollywood in the shapely form of Keanu Reeves to Baktapur's dazzling Durbar Square and had offered roles to hundreds of local boys and girls who even now were toiling and frothing among the Square's shrines and temples, draped in the blue, green and gold cloths Jane Clive had been printing for the past three or four months in her workshop in Kathmandu

(with only the companionship of an ageing cassette recorder and the neighbour's curious cow).

We were waved on. I had never doubted we would be. On the back of the badge that allowed me through the red cordons and onto the set ran an impressive introduction from His Majesty's Prime Minister:

"Mr Bernardo Bertolucci and Mr Jeremy Thomas are planning to shoot part of a large-scale feature film, "Little Buddha", in Nepal. His Majesty's Government of Nepal considers that this film will be of great value to Nepal and assures the party of full cooperation from all the concerned agencies of His Majesty's Government. It is hereby requested to all concerned ministries and relevant authorities to extend all possible help to the party to make the project a success."

We clambered out of the car in the unit lot behind the Durbar Square and, nodding to the unsmiling driver (who had been sulking ever since we switched his cassette for one of ours in his car stereo), followed the crowds of locals, tourists, crew members and extras flowing through the reconstructed gates to the Durbar Square.

Propped up from behind with timber struts like a backlot Main Street, from inside the square the fake wall blended seamlessly into the ancient stonework of shrines and temples. Only a quick rap with the knuckles on cold stone or hollow wood could reveal whether the two crimped and curled lions standing guard at the gate were part of Nepal's seventeenth-century renaissance or part of James Acheson's twentieth-century production design. Indeed, so impressed were the locals with the work of Acheson's Italian carpenters and plasterers that local restaurateurs had been squabbling over who would get first choice of which fake lion, dog or mythical beast.

Reeves, glorious in royal blue robe and golden pendants, stands apart, swinging his arms and miming his lines, while his handmaidens and courtiers natter and take pictures of each other and the crowds swell against the cordons, obediently falling (almost) silent for the next take. Vittorio Storaro, in perfectly pressed safari suit and Panama hat, is taking final light readings beside the priestess strumming on the steps of the shrine.

The set-up is ready. Silence is called. Then yelled. Roll cameras. Action. Siddhartha starts his slow walk round the shrine. The town falls quiet. Glitteringly arrayed palace retinues mill in the middle distance, the bustle of an ancient royal court. As he turns the corner of the temple Siddhartha encounters his princess, Yasodhara, and he takes up his by now familiar theme: "I must see the world with my own eyes."

It is impossible not to feel the echoes of *The Last Emperor* on both sides of the camera. The scion of a royal line imprisoned within his luxurious paradise and desperate to see and feel the realities of an outside world whose sounds the king cannot keep from drifting over the palace walls; a crew mingling English and Italian (thankfully the catering is Italian: fresh pasta and prime steak flown in from Rome as the dailies fly back) under the captaincy of an Oscar-laden quartet (Bertolucci, Thomas, Storaro and Acheson); and already the rumble of award-hunger.

Oliver Stone is shooting *Heaven And Earth* (and probably raising both) down in Thailand and Renny Harlin's Sylvester Stallone vehicle *Cliffhanger* has been scrambling up budget mountain in the Dolomites, but the crews on both shoots are despondent because they are sure that *Little Buddha* will clean up at the 1994 Academy Awards.

And once again Thomas has



▲ Little Buddha shot in locations as diverse as Bhutan and

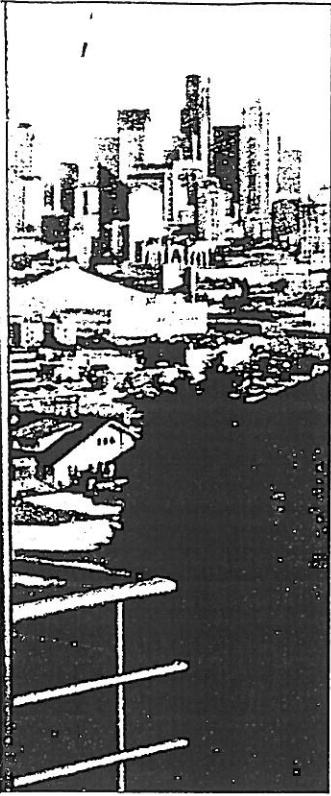
led his production into one of the world's most secret corners. He is clearly thrilled at this coup: the producer's dream come true, of cracking the code and gaining access to secret treasures of a hidden country, all of which will spill out on the screen. It is all the more satisfying in that the code was cracked not with money or muscle but with help from inside and with luck. One of the film's key advisors has been a leading lama and rinpoche (precious one), a reincarnation and teacher of teachers who wanted to spread the dharma through film and who had had special lessons from Colin Young at the National Film School.

"He is the personal teacher of the King and Queen of Bhutan," explains Thomas. "He is rather a special rinpoche. He is the reincarnation of a reincarnation, in fact the fifth in the line, and although in New York and Holland Park he wears civvies, everywhere else he wears robes. In Bhutan, the people lie on the ground and turn their faces away so their

breath doesn't touch him, cause he is so precious. In *Who's Who* of lamas he's among the top ones. But I didn't know that. When I found him it was just as if I'd found a lama who loved movies. I then we suddenly discovered who he was and that was how we got into Bhutan.

"They will only allow 2,000 tourists there this year and 1,500 next year. They really don't want westerners at all alone a film crew."

Talk to the crew about Bhutan and the stories fly. Not all of them were happy. Crews like their hotels and telephones and television. They relax with after a hard day in open. There is no television in Bhutan. There was only one phone in the entire hotel. Bhutan's king has shuttered his realm against the impending west and forced his court back into a feudal past where national costume is compulsory (the wearing of jeans an impermissible offence) and the monks and lamas rule. No question. However, while some c



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lained of bullying, arrogant monks discussing the stereo systems in their Range Rovers as peasants fall flat on their faces before supposed spiritual masters, all were clearly struck by the unseen beauty of this kingdom on the roof of the world. Struck and in some cases struck down. While the hazards of six months in Nepal include every variety of bacterial diarrhoea, in Bhutan respiratory diseases complicated stomach upsets to the extent that Hercules Belleville — Thomas' ever-present right hand — had to be flown back on an emergency light when bronchitis took a live into pleurisy.

However, the stories are like badges of honour among the elite corp of film crews, aware that they have been to monasteries and witnessed rituals no tourist has ever seen. They have managed to film inside a country the BBC have spent four years applying to permission to visit in order to film the swans.

Storaro — a man who speaks more in sutras than sentences — talks of Bhutan as “a very magic

place, so far away, so high, so difficult to reach. It is a land that produces monks. There are lands that produce petrol or iron and Bhutan produces monks. And I can understand why. In a symbolic way you are so high in the mountains that you can touch the sky with your finger. The country is beautiful and you really have time to think. There is no pressure like the modern world. You can develop your spiritual element. So probably that is why we had a very magical moment in Bhutan. The best moment up to now, because it was the highest moment.

“It was the perfect place to do the ending of our picture because the magic of the atmosphere was unique. It will remain in our minds for some time.”

It is the typical logic of film shoots that the ending shoots before the beginning and the middle shoots all over the place. Bhutan represents the film's climax, in which Chris Isaak and his young son Jesse, who have flown — bemused and intrigued — all the way from

Seattle, discover through a series of tests whether Jesse or one of two Nepali children is the real reincarnation of a famous and much-travelled lama. This is Bertolucci's McGuffin: his device, through which he can retell the story of Siddhartha to an audience that is as new to him as the story will be to many of them.

It is Thomas who talks in terms of fables (and PG certificates and, perhaps most critically, an international audience of 600 million Buddhists). As one watches the filming unfold and visits the workshops round the production office in Kathmandu — where Martin Adams is packing 35 boxes of assorted beads, chains and pendants and Jane Clive completes her last tie dyes — one senses the slow and painstaking embellishment of an ancient illuminated manuscript or Book of Hours, framed by its modern context in twentieth-century Seattle.

“The main idea up to now is really how to present this story,” explains Storaro, whose collaboration with Bertolucci stretches back to 1969 and Spider's Stratagem, and whose affinity with the director has become like that of two brothers (or in Storaro's language, like that of two rivers flowing in and out of each other).

“Bernardo had a wonderful idea of the lama telling the story of Siddhartha to children of eight or nine years old. How can you tell such an important story to children? Only if you use symbols and pictures and language that children can understand. So the way this lama is telling the story to the children is our guide for how to tell the story to the audience.

“This is very important stuff for Bernardo. All the movies we have done together have been mainly about the political, sexual, intellectual side of people, the dark unconscious side of the human being. In Little Buddha, we are really trying to present the mysterious side, and trying

Gaumont
CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES
LITTLE BUDDHA
VO 70 mm LE NOUVEAU FILM DE BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI



▲ Vittorio Storaro spoke of Bhutan producing monks 'like other countries produce petrol'

to use image language that the kid of seven or nine or 10 years old can understand.

"So we shoot with 70mm film. We need a larger size screen to see the epic picture. With this way of making cinema there is no doubt it has to be 70mm. For the modern part of the picture we use Cinemascope, but for the Siddhartha pieces we use 70mm in order to give the eyes of the children the most beautiful way to see this wonderful legendary fairytale."

We walk away from the fifth century BC to the catering tent where taglierini al pesto is being served up. Bertolucci has taken his table at the back of the tent with a bottle of wine and the ever-smiling company of an adoring small boy, one of the director's posse of adoptive sons. As he walks back through the tent he stops to greet visitors to the set. This has been a popular stop-off for the curious, the

helpful, the wise and the purely social. Diana Vreeland's son, a former photographer and now a Buddhist monk in southern India, called in. Frere Mathieu, a former DNA scientist from France who has been living in Kathmandu for 10 years frequents the set. One of the last great Dharma bums (now of course running his own trekking company) has been helping set up scenes. Melissa Chassay was here, Sandy Lieberson has just returned from the mountains, and Koo Stark could well have been in my Tamul hotel room in the bustling chaos of downtown Kathmandu, where hippies still hang out on the roof of the Tom and Jerry Bar, listening to top-quality reggae, smoking top-quality herb.

"We had a visit from Koo," grins Thomas. "She has been having teachings from the Dalai Lama and had been to a crema-

tion in Bhutan of a very famous rinpochet. She came and showed us a picture of herself with the Dalai Lama. She was wearing her white prayer shawl draped round the back like a negligee with her arm around the Dalai Lama. It was an incredible picture. Style is everything. But emptiness is form."

The epigrammatic quality of Buddhist philosophy is clearly permeating the set, as is a feeling of calm among chaos. There is no doubt that Martin Adams is pleased to be packing and leaving the land of jelly belly behind after six months of casting each bead from scratch in improvised workshops. There is no denying the relief in Jane Clive's voice as she realises "I only have the poor to do now". But they know, once safe and snug in England's drizzle, minds will wander back to Kathmandu's pink diesel smog and the twin chorus of hacking

cough-and-spit; the daily battles between the cycle and motorbike rickshaws; the luxurious Dynasty room of the Yak and Yeti hotel where an impromptu screening room for dailies has been established amid the Raj victoriana (in Bhutan it was a plywood booth filled with light-crazed insects dive-bombing through the beam); and the inherent benevolence of a host country where two religions — Hinduism and Buddhism — live in an almost unreal harmony, intermingling gods and rituals, their shrines nestling side by side under the rule of a king descended directly from Vishnu.

"This is a very simple place," says Thomas. "There is nothing here that people want from other countries except tourism. Here religions live together and side by side. There is even a small Muslim presence.

"The only thing about Nepal, though, is that it is newly democratic. They have only had two years of democracy here and they are really taking it to the nth degree. Everything has got to be democratically decided by committee." Democracy is, of course a good thing. Unless you are trying to organise the dressing of 1,100 extras.

"Compared with *The Last Emperor* that is nothing. Imagine then, having to dress 6,000 extras for six-o'clock in the morning. But then in China it is easy, because if the Chinese army say they will have 3,000 soldiers dressed and ready for you, they will be there, quiet and standing to attention. It is a little bit different in a democratic country."

■ *Little Buddha* is a CiBy 2000/Recorded Picture Company production, fully financed by CiBy 2000 and represented for international sales by CiBy Sales. Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci and produced by Jeremy Thomas, the film stars Keanu Reeves, Chris Isaak and Bridget Fonda. European release is expected in spring 1994.

Vittorio Storaro was born in Rome in 1940. He was encouraged by his father to develop interest in photography and attended the Duca D'Aosta photography school from an early age. He subsequently studied at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. After spending a period as an apprentice at a photographic studio he became assistant to photographer Aldo Scarvada and Marco Scarpelli.

Storaro has known Bertolucci since 1964 when he worked as a camera assistant on the director's second film BEFORE THE REVOLUTION. Thus began a creative partnership that has endured for over a quarter of a century and a further seven films: THE CONFORMIST; LAST TANGO IN PARIS; 1900; LA LUNA; THE LAST EMPEROR; THE SHELTERING SKY and LITTLE BUDDHA.

In 1979 Francis Coppola's APOCALYPSE NOW brought Storaro his first Academy Award for 'Best Photography'. Two other Academy Awards followed, in 1981 for Warren Beatty's REDS, and in 1988 for Bertolucci's THE LAST EMPEROR. Other film credits include Coppola's segment of NEW YORK STORIES; ONE FROM THE HEART; TUCKER; and Warren Beatty's DICK TRACY. For the past two and a half years Storaro has worked on IMAGO URBIS, a 15-part series on Roman Culture of which 11 episodes are finished and the remaining 4 will be shot on completion of LITTLE BUDDHA. Before embarking on this long-term project Storaro ensured that he would be available to work with Bertolucci on LITTLE BUDDHA.

For Storaro, cinema is a language of images. "In order to really do my job, I have to use all the elements that are in my hands, like light and shadows, and what Leonardo (da Vinci) called their children -colours- to tell the stories. That's why I think of myself as a writer with light rather than a painter." He sees a clear division in his collaboration with Bertolucci, "He thinks about space and I think about light. So the camera is his pen and light is my pen. Very clear. He doesn't interfere in my field and I don't interfere in his. But we have to listen to each other, absolutely."

The story of LITTLE BUDDHA is divided into four parts: Modern Seattle, Kathmandu and Bhutan and Ancient India. Each of the locations have their own special atmosphere and light. To emphasize the difference between them and maximise the psychological impact of moving between time-frames, Storaro used a combination of 35mm, Cinemascope, Vista Vision and 65mm.

Storaro describes LITTLE BUDDHA as an important human experience. "Any movie is part of our life, some more than others, and there is no doubt that everything I have done up to now was with me on LITTLE BUDDHA. My pre-production for LITTLE BUDDHA was fifty three years."

BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI FILMOGRAPHY

- 1990 THE SHELTERING SKY
- 1987 THE LAST EMPEROR
- 1981 TRAGEDY OF A RIDICULOUS MAN
- 1979 LA LUNA
- 1976 1900
- 1972 LAST TANGO IN PARIS
- 1971 LA SALUTE E MALATA (or I POVERI MUOIONO PRIMA) (Doc.)
- 1970 THE SPIDER'S STRATAGEM
- 1968 PARTNER
- 1967 AGONIA (Episode of LOVE AND HATRED)
- 1966 LA VIA DEL PETROLIO (Documentary TV)
- IL CANALE (Short documentary)
- 1964 BEFORE THE REVOLUTION
- 1961 THE GRIM REAPER (LA COMMARE SECCA)



Technicolor Ltd

FACSIMILE COVER LETTER

Dear Sir,

Re "Little Buddha" 70mm prints.

The only information I have to date is as follows:

4 copies for France for 1st December

4 copies for Belgium for 8th December

3 copies for Italy for 10 December (dubbed Italian)

Regards,

James Winterbon.

PRODUCTION LOGISTICS

Preparing a production on the scale of LITTLE BUDDHA is a monumental task for the creative team whose work is there on the screen for everyone to see. But working in parallel to the creative team are the unsung heroes and heroines of this adventure - the production team. Under any circumstances the logistics of a large film production are challenging. In distant and remote countries like Nepal and Bhutan all the potential difficulties multiply rapidly. A skilled, efficient and imaginative production team is necessary to deal not only with accommodation, transport, communications, personnel, technical facilities and power supplies but also with the needs and sensitivities of the host community.

Production supervisor Mario Cotone was responsible for co-ordinating on the ground production activities and the considerable workforce. In addition to the crew of 120 Europeans and 100 Nepalis and Indians working in Kathmandu, a further 100 people were employed in Bhutan as drivers, labourers, interpreters, security, office staff and catering. Like so many other members of the LITTLE BUDDHA crew, Cotone had already worked with Bertolucci on THE LAST EMPEROR in China. There were of course many areas of logistical considerations common to both productions but a major difference lay in the fact that China has an indigenous film industry, a more highly developed infra-structure, and more existing facilities.

One of the most vital jobs to be done was interpreting. Although English was the common language for the crew as a whole, it was by no means universal between the Europeans let alone everyone else. In Kathmandu a small number of English/Italian/Hindi and Nepali speakers were found who immediately became indispensable, especially in the construction workshops. Quadrilingual interpreters were harder to find in Bhutan, but it was often remarked that a very high standard of English was spoken in many sections of society.

With years of experience, and having worked with Bertolucci in China and the Sahara, LITTLE BUDDHA Producer Jeremy Thomas is calm and philosophical. "There was an idea to film in Bhutan, to find the spirit of Buddhism. Bhutan is a difficult place to get to for a tourist let alone a large troupe of people and tons of equipment. There were known difficulties just to come and visit. Only two thousand tourists a year are given entry visas and no feature film has ever been filmed here. Access to monasteries is restricted. It was difficult to organise and to arrange. It took a long time to get all the permissions to film here and we had many meetings with representatives of His Majesty's Government, with community leaders and Monastery officials. It seemed impossible but bit by bit it became possible."

Thomas goes on to explain that once the exceptionally difficult circumstances Bhutan had been overcome it was still not plain sailing: "You still have problems that you have anywhere where you make a movie - transportation, accommodation and of course the more remote the place the difficulties are. You have to explain what you are doing and pre-arrange it."

Large crowds feature in both the modern-day and ancient sequences of LITTLE BUDDHA. The cosmopolitan nature of Kathmandu is reflected in the casting of Tibetans, Nepalis, Indians, Americans and Europeans for the modern Prince Siddhartha's court, the production enjoyed the co-operation of the Nepali Army and Cavalry who provided over two hundred men to play the soldiers of Lord Mara's army -- the army of evil which Prince Siddhartha faced before attaining enlightenment. In Paro Dzong, Bhutan, hundred of boys, most of whom lived in the monastery, participated in the filming. All within a matter of hours hundreds of men, women and children who featured as extras in the film.

Feeding the cast, crew and extras was a major exercise in itself. With hundreds of people on set some days, army style tents were set up to provide shade from the overhead sun and a place of rest for extras. Three location caterers had been brought in from Italy to take care of the cast and crew on set and in the workshops. Rice, pasta and over two thousand tins of tomatoes were among the major provisions that were sent out to Nepal and Bhutan. Differing religious dietary requirements had to be provided for as well as the range of preferences to be expected from English, French, Indian, Nepali and Bhutanese people sit down to eat together.

The final logistical element needed to bring such a large production to life was air transportation. In early September 1992, a fleet of large trucks began their long mountain journey from Calcutta to Kathmandu and Bhutan, transporting generators, sets, generators and large quantities of pasta for the part-Italian crew. Within a matter of weeks per week from Kathmandu to Bhutan's mountain airstrip, the only jet service was a Short Take-Off and Landing (STOL) belonging to Bhutan's Drukair, which had been stripped of its seating and converted to cargo use to fly in the equipment needed for the Bhutanese section of the shoot.

On September 20th 1992 the cameras turned over as smoothly as if they had been mounted in a studio in London or Rome. But such a studio could not have been built in the medieval monastic world of Bhutan: the ancient Sanskrit kingdom of the Himalayas, the romantic allure of locations set at 8,000 feet under the gleaming peaks of the land once immortalised as Shangri-La.

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