



Francia

Stéphane Ly-Cuong • Regista di *Dans la cuisine des Nguyen***"È tempo di raccontare altre storie"**di [Fabien Lemerrier](#)

05/03/2025 - Il cineasta ci parla del suo primo lungometraggio, della doppia cultura, della diversità nel cinema, della cucina come mezzo di condivisione e delle gioie della commedia musicale

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French director **Stéphane Ly-Cuong's** very pleasant first film *In the Nguyen Kitchen* [\[+\]](#) is released today in French cinemas by *Jour2Fête*. We met with the filmmaker to hear all about it.

Cineuropa: Where did the idea for this very original film come from?

Stéphane Ly-Cuong: For a long time, I've enjoyed exploring issues relating to dual culture and the search for identity. The character of Yvonne Nguyen already existed in a show entitled *Cabaret jaune citron* which I'd created twelve or so years ago. I was looking to reconnect with the kind of cinema I'd started studying before branching off into theatre, and that character allowed me to carry on exploring the themes which are dear to me: how we position ourselves between two cultures and two countries, and how we find our place.

What about the character of Yvonne who wants a career in musicals and whose mother runs a Vietnamese restaurant, continually reminding her daughter of a culture which is hers but which she's not really familiar with?

I wanted to push these contradictions and obstacles as far as I could. Her family and her mother in particular impose an image of her which she can't identify with. As for the professionals working in the musical world, and primarily the director played by **Thomas Jolly**, they also trap her in other clichés. I wanted my character to follow a path of emancipation and affirmation: to find her own truth among these many different facets, some of which are no doubt authentic but which she's not really aware of, in the beginning, especially those related to her origins and real roots. It's a journey in search of her identity, exploring all those aspects and stereotypes people want to attach to her.

Your actors, especially Clotilde Chevalier in the lead role, all have rather unusual appearances for a French film. Was that deliberate?

Aside from talent, obviously, I also wanted to showcase different people on screen, whether in terms of their bodies, their origins, their ages or their sexual orientation. I didn't want an approach which was at odds with my own approach; in other words, I wanted to see the world I move around in, with a real variety of people, on screen. In terms of diversity in French cinema, things are changing a little bit, and it's about time. But French people of Asian origin are practically non-existent, and this category deserved to be foregrounded a little more, in my opinion, because that's the environment I come from and in which I'm evolving. As Yvonne says in the film: "it's time we told other stories."

What kind of tone were you looking to strike with this film?

I wanted it to be a joyful comedy. But I also wanted there to be bittersweet moments, and melancholy ones sometimes, as well as contrasts: for people to be able to laugh and cry. I worked on all of those aspects, but I also tried to ensure a certain light-heartedness; I didn't want the film to focus solely on pathos when exploring everyday racism, exile or rootlessness. I think we can talk about these things with a certain sense of light-heartedness even when we're exploring them in depth or adopting more melancholy tones.

How did you approach the musical theatre sequences?

My starting point, as the character in one of the songs says, was "I prefer to see life as a musical" because life is more wonderful as a musical. I wanted to start with a character whom we could imagine would have found her childhood and adolescence a little gloomy, in her little apartment in the suburbs with a pretty hardgoing mother, who saw musicals as a window onto beauty, poetry, everything that's wonderful, magical, a universe where anything is possible. So I was looking for musical numbers which were anchored to real life (a rehearsal, a show, an audition), but which could also become dreamlike at certain moments in time. So I adapted my *mise en scène* in line with this, so that the musical numbers were more sophisticated, so that they were larger in terms of camera movements, lights and editing, in order to create a contrast with a more traditional, banal, real kind of life, using shots-reverse-shots, static shots or a hand-held camera. But, little by little, things end up all mixing together.