



Gyalsey
**THE LEGACY OF A PRINCE:
 A BEACON OF HOPE**

by Jessica Vernon

Gyalsey is a story about choosing love.

Like every great story, *Gyalsey* evolved over many years; inspired decades ago in a 5th grade classroom, when Jamyang Wangchuck heard the story of the Bodhisattva Prince for the very first time. In his directorial debut film, Jamyang weaves these ancient lessons into a modern tale of unconditional love. Three years after its original release in 2012, *Gyalsey: Legacy of a Prince* is back on the film scene, reborn through a creative collaboration with the Bhutan Culture Company.

The re-edited feature film premiered to audiences nationwide on December 12th, 2015. A distinguished crowd of 200 guests, including Prime Minister, Tshering Tobgay, screened the movie at a private showing at City Mall Theater, followed by a swanky cocktail and press reception at Le Meridien Hotel. At the exact same time, thanks to enthusiastic collaborations with BBS, the movie also aired on every television, in every household of Bhutan.

"Art brings people together," and the

overwhelming success of this first-of-its-kind event proved just that. The *Gyalsey* premiere was an experiment in "integrated collaboration," says Bhutan Culture Company's founder, Aine Carey. The event's success was the direct result of dynamic partnerships with DOIM, Kuensel, BBS, Central Café, Coffee Culture, Gangsey palace Hotel, Le Meridian Hotel, CHIMMI House of Design, Happy Clips, Yewong Magazine, and The Baby Boomers. Collaboration, Aine says, "is a revolution in a different way; it's the opposite. It's saying let's all come together, we're all nation builders."

BHUTAN CULTURE COMPANY

Over the last eight years, Aine, an award winning producer/director, has been working closely with local artists and the DOIM to build up and systemize the local film industry, creating a responsible space for eager artists to thrive. Her latest endeavor to re-edit and promote *Gyalsey* represents a commitment to the preservation of both art and the artist, and underscores their vital roles in a holistic society.

Inspired by local artists, guided by Aine's

As much as the event was a celebration of the film, it was also the celebration of the emerging generation of innovators and pioneers in Bhutan. "An integrated collaboration," says Aine Carey. "It is a revolution in a different way; it's the opposite. It's saying let's all come together, we're all nation builders."

experience, and strengthened through creative relationships, the Bhutan Culture Company empowers Bhutanese storytellers to share their ideas with the world. By providing access to training, developing infrastructure and creating opportunities for collaboration, the Company seeks to connect emerging artists to the tools they need to make their dreams a reality. "Our vision is not only about sustaining contemporary artistic expression in Bhutan but about the preservation of a culture who's wisdom, we believe, is of paramount importance to the wellbeing of the world community."

While Aine and Jamyang have financial goals for the film, their sights are focused on long term gains: "The point is to use this film to talk about the others...If this film can break the barrier and get distribution, then hopefully Dechen's [Roder] film can too, and all future filmmakers... That barrier has to be broken. Everyone is a part of it." If *Gyalsey* succeeds in gaining international distribution, it will be the second Bhutanese film ever to do so, (currently) Khyentse Norbu's *Traveler's and Magicians* is the only Bhutanese film to receive international recognition).



A NATION OF STORYTELLERS

Bhutan has a "very strong oral tradition and we have wonderful stories." It is this treasure chest of folktales that has the potential to set Bhutanese artists apart from the rest. Jamyang believes "film is the most powerful medium" through which we can share these stories—and their lessons—with the world. As Bhutan is morphing, evolving, and growing, the film industry can reflect that: "These are time capsules. This is history. The nation has to understand why that is important to them."

"As artists, we are representing Bhutan as ambassadors of the country" Aine explains. The artist, therefore, plays a fundamental role in creating, defining and perpetuating his/her cultural identity. By embodying the Bodhisattva code and the Buddhist tenets of impermanence and compassion, *Gyalsey* is the perfect film to represent Bhutan on the global stage.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Apart from his experience playing the young Dalai Lama in the Hollywood movie, *Seven Years in Tibet* when he was fourteen, Jamyang says he "had no idea what I was doing" when it came to filming. When he started shooting for *Gyalsey* in 2011, he was "learning on set, everything was experimental...I didn't know what camera to use, which angles, lighting, I just wanted to go experience and see it for myself." As writer/producer/director/lead actor, Jamyang had a lot of self-imposed pressure on his shoulders; "I was nervous. I gave up on the second day of shooting. I took the first day off to recollect, to tell myself why I wanted to do this in the first place. But the first two days were so overwhelming. But after that we had so much fun."

Jamyang drew a lot of inspiration for the characters from his real life. All the actors used their

own names, and Wangel is an old college buddy; "we were partners in crime," which explains the actors' easy camaraderie on camera. And the old lady Jamyang helps who keeps talking about her son; "I kind of based her on my grandmother. She's just like the actress—she will go on and on whether or not you know who she's talking about." He also says the awkward moments between Jamyang and Sangay were natural; "I used to be a very shy boy...I would like a lot of girls but never had the courage to ask. So basically I was playing my earlier self."

At its core, *Gyalsey*'s story is simple. And it is through this simplicity that the characters become real, and the universal essence of human connection shines through. By trimming away excesses of sing-a-long and dance, Jamyang's film proves that a strong story can stand on its own.

By breaking the traditional Bhutanese movie mold, Jamyang knew he was taking a risk. "I was advised against [making the film] by almost everybody I sought advice from...There are some elements [the local film industry] there are necessary for a film to be successful [in Bhutan]. Mine didn't have any of those." Rather than breaking up the flow with musical pieces, Jamyang focused on plot and character development. The connection, he says, is forged through the simplest portrayals of human emotion. "I'm a sensitive person, so when I watch a film that touches me, that stays with me...those are the films that inspire me."

Jamyang is humble in his aspirations for *Gyalsey*'s re-release. When asked if he sees himself as a role model for future filmmakers he says, "If I can share my story, my experiences, I'm happy to do that. But being a role model... that seems very overwhelming. I'm overwhelmed just think-

ing about it. It's a big responsibility." Jamyang, who wrote, produced, directed and starred in the film, sees *Gyalsey* as a catalyst for things to come: "Maybe people will see that if I can do it, anyone can."

A BEACON OF HOPE

In the end, *Gyalsey* is a story about hope. And in this way, *Gyalsey* represents a cause that reaches far beyond the closing credits.

A true artist's work, like that of the Bodhisattva, is for the benefit and enjoyment of all. If the future of our artists is to flourish, business owners, media outlets, consumers and the arts community must come together to show these artists that they are respected and supported. The best way to show your support is by investing in the arts through whatever means are most accessible to you; be it time, money, or personal connections. These acts, however small, send the message that this type of work is important and that you understand your role in keeping these art forms alive.

As the Le Meridien party came to a close, the proud smiles of a job well done shone brightly on the faces of Jamyang and Aine. "Success," Aine insists, "is the best way we can give back to our community." And while success is the one thing that inspires people the most, she says: "You have to create hope...The real hope comes when [*Gyalsey*] succeeds."

Jamyang is optimistic about the future of Bhutanese cinema and is already working on ideas for his next projects. In a culture steeped in rich traditions of storytelling and dripping in colorful folklore, inspiration is as limitless as the landscape; one need only to look around them and listen to the stories of the people they meet.

