

Podtalk: Director Lulu Wang on ‘The Farewell,’ 2020 Independent Spirit Best Picture

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 8, 2020 - 7:44pm

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CHICAGO – One of the hottest films from the first half 2019 festival season was an emotional story about family, and scored the Best Picture at the 2020 Film Independent Spirit Awards on February 8th. “The Farewell” is a breakout for both the lead actor Awkwafina (“Crazy Rich Asians”), Zhao Shuzhen (who won the Indie Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actress) and their director Lulu Wang. Wang’s story of her grandmother became a universal spirit about our relative connections.

Awkwafina portrays Billi, a fictional realization of Lulu Wang’s screenplay, a Chinese American who grew up in Western culture and lives in New York City. But she does have one connection back in China, her beloved grandmother Nai Nai (Zhao Shuzhen). When her parents find out that Nai Nai has terminal cancer, the whole clan throws a fake wedding for her cousins to get together and visit her, and Billi goes along for the ride. Although she is uncomfortable with the white lie, the re-connection with her family changes her perspective.



Writer/Director Lulu Wang in Chicago for "The Farewell"

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Lulu Wang, like Billi, grew up in America and was close to her grandmother. She was born in Beijing, and emigrated to Miami at six years old. After graduating from Boston College with a double major in literature and music, she moved to Los Angeles to study filmmaking. After a series of short films, her first feature "Posthumous" received notice in the indie film world, and Wang received the Chaz and Roger Ebert Directing Fellowship at the Film Independent Spirit Awards. It was a story she told about her grandmother on NPR's "This American Life" that was the catalyst for "The Farewell."

In Part One of a Podtalk with Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, Director Lulu Wang of "The Farewell" talks about working with Awkwafina, straddling two cultures her whole life and what she did differently for her second feature film.

In Part Two, Wang reflects on the conversion of actress Zhao Shuzhen into her grandmother and the universality of "The Farewell."

"The Farewell" is available on digital platforms and DVD. Featuring Awkwafina, Zhao Shuzhen, Tzi Ma, Diana Lin and Lu Hong. Written and directed by Lulu Wang. Rated "PG"



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