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Kung Fu Thrives in the Kingdom of Fairy Tales: Xian Gao Ushers Danish Kung Fu Craze

By Rose Saint-Stephen and Angela Gao

AICHA (working title) is Denmark's first independently-produced martial arts film. Master Xian Gao is the martial arts choreographer. Many remember Gao as "Bo" in the Oscar-winning film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. In *Aicha*, Gao is chief martial arts choreographer, supervisor of special wire effects and stunt coordinator. Gao is also a primary actor as the sifu of the main character, a woman named Aicha. In the film, Gao's character uses his own name, as well as the real name of his New York school "Gao's Kung Fu Academy."

Master Gao went to Denmark two months prior to shooting in order to train all the actors. He prides himself on being able to achieve results in a short period and cites his work with Chow Yun-Fat, Michelle Yeoh and Zhang Ziyi during preproduction of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. Many of the *Aicha* crewmembers were curious about the nuts and bolts of action filmmaking, so Gao gave them a special workshop on this. He stressed the history and culture of kung fu, emphasizing that it requires a moral basis. During his stay in Denmark, Gao was invited to give an exclusive seminar on his experiences at a famous upscale luxury resort gym, Charlottehaven. During Gao's stay in Europe, visitors from Sweden, Finland, Holland, Britain, Germany, France, Poland, Iran, Turkey, Russia, and even Japan and Korea, came to meet him during filming.

Master Gao brought his outstanding students from all over the world to Copenhagen. Producer Johnny Anderson and Director Natasha Arthy organized a special welcoming party just for Gao and his crew. Gao brought wire specialists Qiang Long, Qiang Hu and Jiang Tao, professional stunt woman Song Ying, and consultant tai chi master Qiuzhi Gao from China. He also brought some of his students: Rieko from Japan, Yue Ma from Great Britain and Peter, Omar, Ann and Pai from America. His personal assistant and interpreter Angela Gao was there too. Angela even acted as a fighter in the finale fight against



Aicha and assisted with some of the costume design (Angela has a background in fashion design).

"Many people call me Master Gao, Gao Sifu, and Mr. Gao," comments Gao, "but I like it more when they just call me Xian Gao. I started learning kung fu at age seven. I have devoted all my life to martial arts. I deeply love my work, and career. As time passes, I have discovered more in-depth knowledge and understanding in martial arts; it's certainly not something you could describe in just few words. Kung fu embodies a culture. It has a profound background of ethnic traditions and a mass infrastructure of extensive population. It perfectly integrates one's physical ability with intellectual awareness. Yet at the same time it's a form of art, an art of motion, and an art of action. Kung fu is a major component in Chinese culture. It is a creation that inherits wisdoms from thousands of years of Chinese civilization. Kung fu originates from China, but it doesn't mean it will only belong to China. I will, in my living years, use all my abilities to promote Chinese kung fu. I hope people all over the world will recognize, accept, and appreciate Chinese kung fu, and enjoy its prolonged beauty."

Aicha is scheduled to premiere in Copenhagen, Denmark this Christmas, with an international release to follow. It is a production of Nimbus Films. ©

