

## Document Citation

Title	<b>The puppetmaster</b>
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Source	<i>Wellington Film Festival</i>
Date	1994 Jul 17
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	101
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Hsimeng rensheng (The puppetmaster), Hou Hsiao-Hsien,, 1993



## The Puppetmaster

Hsimeng Rensheng, Taiwan, 1993

*Director:* Hou Hsiao-hsien  
*Production Co.* City Films Ltd  
*Producer:* Chiu Fu Sheng  
*Screenplay:* Wu Nien-jen, Chu Tien-wen  
*Photography:* Lee Pin-bing (colour)  
*Editor:* Liao Ching-sung  
*Art directors:* Chang Hung, Lu Ming-jin  
*Sound:* Du Du-jih, Meng Chi-liang  
*Music:* Chen Ming-chang

142 minutes/35mm

### Cast

*Li Tien Lu, as an adult:* Lin Chung  
*Li Tien Lu, as a teenager:* Cheng Kuei-chung  
*Li Tien Lu, as a child:* Cho Ju-wei  
*Li Hei:* Hung Liu  
*Ong Hsiu:* Bai Ming-hwa  
*Ko Meng Dang:* Tsai Chen-nan  
*Li Nee:* Kao Tung-hsiu  
*Lai Hwat:* Yang Li-yin  
*Tan Dei:* Hwang Ching-ru  
*Tan Shing:* Wu La-yun  
*Tan Ah Lai:* Li Chuan-Tsain

Festivals: Cannes (Jury Prize), Toronto, New York, 1993. Melbourne, Sydney, 1994.

There are those amongst us who consider 46-year-old Hou Hsiao-hsien the foremost poet of contemporary cinema. Concerned with expressing the long suppressed history of his native Taiwan and exploring related questions of family and Chinese identity, he often seems to contemplate rather than relate the action in his films. Complex life ebbs and flows in and out of his exquisitely simple, motionless compositions. He seems to frame events in his compassionate gaze as if staging were simply a matter of perfect camera placement. You are likely to remember the weather in a Hou Hsiao-hsien movie; the wind in the trees or the shifting weight of a pan of water. The passing beauty and vigour of the physical world inspire his histories with a stirring melancholy. This latest film is his simplest. Narrated by an accomplished, extremely engaging raconteur in 84-year-old Li Tien Lu, it is also his most accessible to a non-Taiwanese audience. Li, who has acted in every one of Hou's films, is Taiwan's most famous master of hand-puppet theatre. The film tells the turbulent story of a life and career which all but encompass the story of Taiwan in the twentieth century. Largely dramatised in long, elaborately unfolding tableaux, it also showcases several wonderful hand-puppet shows and is at its most directly engaging when the debonair Mr. Li addresses his tall tales and true to the camera. Enter quietly, permit a great filmmaker to take his time, and you may well find this the most richly rewarding experience of this year's Festival. – B.G. The single, most hopeful sign I saw for world cinema last year. – J. Hoberman, *Village Voice*, 11/1/93

**Feature only**