



SORA空

Written and Directed by April Xiong
Produced by Claudia Murdoch and April Xiong



This project was completed with the support of
Women Make Movies's Production Assistance Program.



Sora was made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts
with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



With support from: The NYC Women's Fund for Media, Music and Theatre
by the City of New York Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment
in association with The New York Foundation for the Arts.



Supported by the



LOGLINE AND SYNOPSIS

LOGLINE

Following her girlfriend's suicide, a young Asian woman is haunted by grief. As the seasons pass from summer to spring, she reinvents her life through Brazilian zouk dance and chance encounters with diverse New Yorkers.



SYNOPSIS

Five years after the suicide of her girlfriend Sora, Maria Elena is still haunted by grief. Ghostly visions intrude on her present, while she works at an office job she dislikes, going through the motions of existence. When she discovers Brazilian zouk dance, and its warm and welcoming community, a new chapter of her life begins. As the seasons pass from summer to spring, Maria Elena takes notice of the dynamic city around her, and the diverse people who cross her path, with their own joys and their own sorrows. After she adopts a cat, and reunites with the friends and family she pushed away after Sora's death, Maria Elena decides to go back to medical school. She learns how to connect with herself and others through dance, strengthening both old and new relationships. In the last scene, after journeying into the forest to lay Sora's spirit to rest, Maria Elena dances alone—poised, alive, and free.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My childhood friend Victor was born on February 29 in a leap year, one month to the day before I was born. He ended his life when he was a leap year 6, and I was 24. When the news reached me, for the first time I felt the inevitability of death. When you are young, you think you will live forever. Growing up means losing that sense of invincibility, and you realize how fleeting life truly is.

During my youth, I watched many films in which death is regarded as the epitome of cool. Cowboys, samurai, and gangsters kill and die with ease. In the movies, it's epic to go out in a blaze of glory. In the real world, things aren't wrapped up quite so easily—death is never the end of the story for those who are still alive. How do you go on when you're the one left behind? If death is senseless, then what is life?

I want to reckon with these questions through my work as a writer and filmmaker, especially using music and dance, since I believe we are most aware of our life force when we are deeply rooted in our physical bodies. Also, as an avid dancer myself, I want to express the beauty of people connecting and creating community through social dance and music.

Wynton Marsalis once said: "Central to the Blues is what we call antagonistic cooperation. And this means that you identify what is wrong and you find within yourself the heroism to combat it. The Blues says, 'I feel bad. I feel like I'm almost dead. But tomorrow is gonna come and I'm gonna get up off this bed.' So it's always heroism, optimistic, it's always optimistic, but it recognizes sorrow."

I was inspired by this duality to create *Sora*, a narrative feature film, set in New York City over four seasons, from summer to spring. *Sora* is a love letter to braving the vicissitudes of life, as well as a celebration of community and diversity.

Sora is also a love letter to NYC, which overflows with energy, vitality, and color. Our film utilizes a 'story within a story' narrative structure, reflecting life in the most diverse city in the world. As our main character moves through the city, she has chance encounters with people in the midst of their own unfolding stories. These glimpses into other worlds not only inspire her to take action in her own life, but they show how vibrant the city around her is. *Sora* represents the authentic diversity of NYC, where myriad groups of people are able to thrive in community together, no matter their race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Sora also presents Asian, Black, Latin, and queer characters as complex human beings, with their own rich inner lives. Particularly with the recent rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, and as an Asian-American female filmmaker, I want to create more nuanced, multifaceted stories that explore our full humanity, instead of relying on stereotypes or one-dimensional depictions. In that vein, as a response to the life and work of Qiu Miaojin, a Taiwanese lesbian novelist who took her life at the age of 26, *Sora* is about a young Asian lesbian woman who has lost her love to suicide. By showing how she is able to transform her grief and regret into positive action, I want to uplift and encourage people, and inspire them to persevere, with the aid of hope, beauty and human connection.

Now, more than ever, is the right time to share this story with the people who most need that sense of hope—those who feel lost and in despair, those who feel unseen and unheard, and those who feel othered simply because of who they are. *Sora* presents a much-needed vision of the world, one that "recognizes sorrow" but is "always optimistic."

April Xiong, Writer and Director

DIRECTOR'S BIO AND FILMOGRAPHY

APRIL XIONG

April Xiong is a Chinese-American writer and director based in New York. *Sora* is her first narrative feature film as writer and director. In addition to being awarded a grant by the New York State Council on the Arts in 2022, *Sora* was one of only four fiction feature films to receive funding through the 2022 NYC Women's Fund. April was one of ten finalists for the 2022 PictureStart x Ghetto Film School Discover Your Voice fellowship. She is a member of Filmshop, a nonprofit collective of independent filmmakers. Her short film *Drive* screened at the 2018 NYC Poetry Festival and was featured on Shondaland.com through the Visible Poetry Project. April directed the short film *Superhero Betty* for the inaugural Women's Weekend Film Challenge in NYC. Previously, she wrote and directed the short film *Aisha*, which was a finalist at the 2015 Fusion Film Festival. April was one of 141 students from 49 countries in the inaugural class of NYU Abu Dhabi. She is devoted to creating art in order to inspire people, and bring them together, through diverse cultures, languages, and stories.





FILMOGRAPHY

Sora, narrative feature film (in post-production), 2023, USA, 4K Digital, Color, 93', prod. Tiger Striped Cat LLC, Cup of Joe Film, Inc.

Nii & Adriana, three dance videos, 2022, USA, HD, Color, 3'-4' each.

A Cinematic Self-Portrait, short film, 2022, USA, HD, Color, 2'.

Drive, poetry short film, co-directed with Adam Pivrotto, 2018, USA, HD, Color, 5', prod. Visible Poetry Project.

Superhero Betty, narrative short film, 2018, USA, HD, Color, 5', prod. Women's Weekend Film Challenge.

創咖啡 *Trust Café*, documentary short film, 2016, Taiwan, HD, Color, 5', prod. 創咖啡 Trust Café.

Aisha, narrative short film, 2015, UAE, HD, Color, 13', prod. New York University Abu Dhabi.

Wish Tree, narrative short film, 2013, USA, HD, Color, 9', prod. New York University.

Captive, Marooned, documentary short film, 2012, UAE, HD, Color, 6', prod. New York University Abu Dhabi.

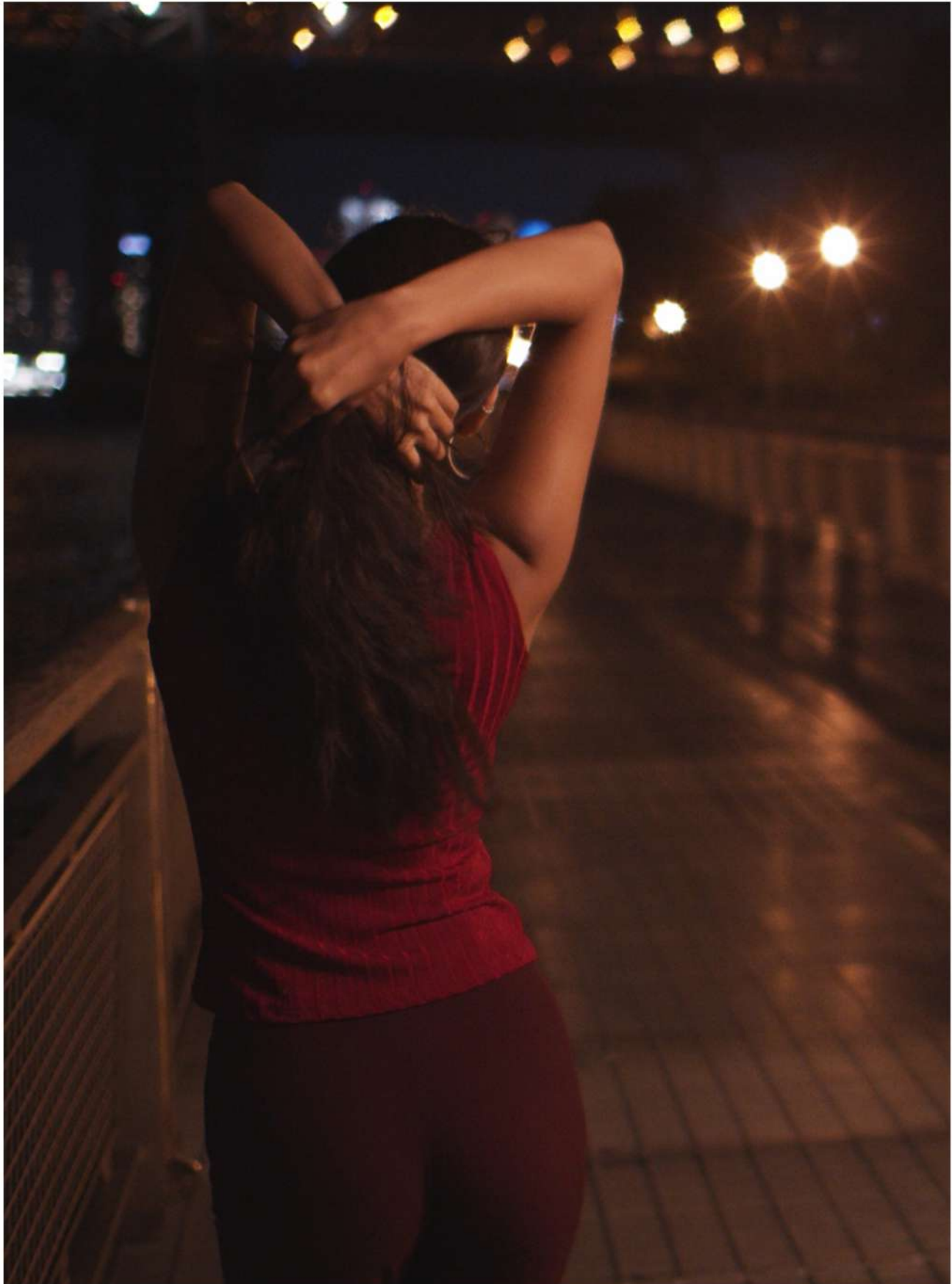
The Dance of Death, narrative short film, 2011, UAE, HD, Color, 4', prod. New York University Abu Dhabi.

NYUAD Hackathon 2011, documentary short film, co-directed with Nolan Funk, 2011, UAE, HD, Color, 4', prod. New York University Abu Dhabi.

Reflections of Shorn Sheets, self-portrait short film, 2011, UAE, HD, Color, 5', prod. New York University Abu Dhabi.

All's Bear in Love and War, narrative short film, 2011, UAE, HD, B&W, 3', prod. New York University Abu Dhabi.

A Journey Through CHAOS, documentary short film, co-directed with Amani Alsaied, 2011, UAE, HD, Color, 15', prod. New York University Abu Dhabi.



CAST AND CREW

CAST

VIVECA CHOW	Maria Elena
TENZING KALDEN	Sora
JENNY LIN	Grace
LUMI NAÍ AZHA	Aya
FANNY LAWREN	Maria Elena's Mother
JUSTEN CHU	Kevin
MINGJIE LI	Crocodile
IAN TOULLEC	Bunny
TAKUMI MITOBE	Japanese Samurai
CARL ELLIS GRANT.....	Black Cowboy
ANTHONY GOSS	Matt
JACQUELINE NWABUEZE	Angela
VINCENT LEONG	Lester
JASON LEE	Chang
ROB CHEN	Lai
JEREMY XIA	Paulo
NII ASHIKWEI TETTEH	William
MASUMI KAT	Vanessa
HARA ZI	Sara
SHAN Y. CHUANG	Julie
KUI-FANG TSENG	Abby
IVANHOE AURELIO	Theo
ANDREW CLARKE	Wynton
SARAH LOUISE KANE	Morgan
JOHN SQUIRES	Mario
YÊN SEN	Catherine
KATHLEEN PIZZO	Dana
ZEN DOT	Faye

CAST AND CREW

CREW

APRIL XIONG	Writer and Director
CLAUDIA MURDOCH	Producer
TINE DILUCIA	Cinematographer
ADAM PIVIROTTO	First Assistant Director
LEONHARD LIERZER	Editor
FRANK LOPEZ	Sound Recordist, Editor, and Mixer
DAN HOLODAK.....	Sound Recordist
XIREN WANG	Sound Designer/Foley Artist
JONATHAN BINGHAM	Composer, Original Score
RYAN JANTZ.....	Music Supervisor
LOU DAUMAS.....	Colorist
SUSAN KINEKE	Poster Designer



KEY FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

CLAUDIA MURDOCH (PRODUCER)

Having grown up in Post-World War II Germany with the legacy of the Holocaust, Claudia has always been particularly interested in working with directors from diverse backgrounds, highlighting stories from a variety of cultures, and celebrating inclusiveness. As a co-founder of Cup of Joe Film, she produced Peter Azen's first feature film, *Cacaya*, an Official Selection of the Montreal World Film Festival 2017 and Rio de Janeiro's Festival Ecrã 2018, and she was an Executive Producer on Natasha Kermani's sci-fi feature film, *Imitation Girl*, which premiered at Cinequest 2017, before screening at Dances With Films in West Hollywood, and Fright Fest London, and being nominated by the Leonardo Da Vinci Society for Best Film and Best Acting Performance Female at the Milan International Film Festival in the same year. Claudia also produced Bryan Powers's LGBTQ short film, *Time is the Longest Distance*, and Mateo Marquez's anti-islamophobia horror short film, *The Invaders*, which together screened at over 55 film festivals in nine countries, including the prestigious British Film Institute's London Film Festival, Fantasia International Film Festival, March on Washington Film Festival, Woods Hole Film Festival, and NewFest New York. Both *Imitation Girl* and *The Invaders* were nominated for the Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Awards 2019. She is currently in development with the narrative feature film *Bird Woman* with Ambarien Alqadar as a writer and director, with which Claudia has most recently been selected for the gotham's Women Owning It Pitch-Deck Accountability Challenge. She works as a Senior Human Resources Associate at the Jacob Burns Film Center (JBFC) in Pleasantville, NY, where she also supports artist development programs, and she volunteers for BAFTA North America, Dances With Films LA and NY, Woodstock Film Festival, and Atlanta Film Festival as a screener.

TINE DILUCIA (CINEMATOGRAPHER)

Tine is a highly versatile Norwegian cinematographer based in New York City, who is just as comfortable leading a full crew on a large set as she is in run and gun environments with smaller crews. Among others, her narrative work has screened on HBO, and at BAM, Palm Springs Shortfest, Outfest, as well as New Orleans Film Festival. Her commercial clients include Google, Nike, Pampers, Spotify, Tidal, and Poland Spring. With degrees in both Journalism from Oslo University College and in Film Production with a concentration in Cinematography from CUNY Brooklyn College, Tine has collected a decade of experience in the camera department as an assistant and operator, with apprenticeships under renowned cinematographers Ed Lachman, ASC, and Reed Morano, ASC. She is a proud member of CinematographersXX and The International Collective of Female Cinematographers.

KEY FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

LEONHARD LIERZER (EDITOR)

Leonhard is a video and film editor with more than 15 years of experience in commercial, documentary, and narrative editing. Originally from Germany and now living in New York, he has worked on international projects in the UK, Indonesia, and Morocco. He has edited award-winning documentaries for Arte, ARD, and ZDF, and worked on narrative features and short films which screened at festivals worldwide, including CPH:DOX Copenhagen, HOF International Film Festival, Chennai International, Palm Springs International Film Festival, and Zürich Filmfest, and celebrated theatrical releases as well as tv debuts in Germany, Japan, France, Switzerland, and South Korea. Leonard was the lead editor on the hybrid documentary feature *Easy Love*, which premiered as the opening film at Berlinale 2019 in the Perspektive Deutsches Kino section. He studied documentary and feature film editing at the International Film School Cologne 2005-2006 under Eric Zumbrunnen, Andrew Bird, and Barbara Hennings.

FRANCISCO LOPEZ (SOUND RECORDIST, EDITOR, AND MIXER)

Frank Lopez is a Brooklyn-born writer, creator, and audio engineer who has recorded, mixed, composed original score and sound design in work for Youtube Red, ABC, Lexus, Condé Nast, Spotify, Pineapple Street Media, Gimlet, and many more. He has worked with some of the biggest recording studios in New York, including Electric Lady, with clients such as Sonic Youth, The Mars Volta, and Kings of Leon. As Head Engineer for Symphony Space in Manhattan, Frank has mixed live orchestras and broadcasts. Frank founded F + K media in Australia with his partner, the award-winning Journalist Kaitlyn Sawrey, and is the head writer and senior producer of the Spotify documentary series *Who is Daniel Johns?*, which was the #1 podcast in Australia, #3 in Canada, #11 in the U.K. and #23 in the USA, and he was the head writer and original composer on the Impact Studios series *The Last Outlaws*. Most recently, F + K media has swept the Australian Podcast Awards 2022: in addition to the Spotlight Award for *Who is Daniel Johns?*, and the Best History Podcast and the iHeart Podcast of the Year Awards for *The Last Outlaws*, Frank has received the iHeart Rising Star Award.

KEY FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

JONATHAN BINGHAM (COMPOSER, ORIGINAL SCORE)

Over the last decade, composer Jonathan Bingham has been recognized for his use of electronic and acoustic instrumentation. He has composed music for film, advertisements, and was commissioned to write for numerous ensembles. Jonathan received the Vincent C. LaGuardia Award in composition leading to a residency with the Arapahoe Philharmonic in 2016. Over the following years, he premiered five orchestral works and obtained a subsequent residency with the Boulder Symphony. Jonathan is a winner of the Emerging Black Composer Project, and he has joined the Technology and San Francisco Conservatory of Music Applied Composition faculty. Through his collaborations with filmmakers, dancers, and painters, his work premiered internationally in concert halls, cinemas, galleries, and playhouses. Recent commissions include *SOLOS* for the Carpe Diem String Quartet and *DEIFIED* for the National Brass Ensemble. In addition, he has created original scores for over a dozen films which have premiered in festivals such as New York Film Festival, Fantasia International Film Festival, and BFI London Film Festival, among others. Recently, Jonathan has been invited to lecture on concert and film music at Fayetteville State University, the School of Visual Arts, and the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. Holding degrees in composition from Howard University and New York University, Jonathan studied with Anthony Randolph and Justin Dello Joio respectively. His latest project is *Cool Story*, a record label he has founded to research scores and produce recordings of lesser known music.



KEY CAST BIOGRAPHY



VIVECA CHOW (MARIA ELENA)

Viveca was the first born and raised Hong Konger to make a debut in a musical on Broadway. She appeared in the 2017 revival of *Miss Saigon*, and performed at the 71st Annual Tony Awards. Viveca has played the role of Mary-Anne in the feature film, *The Country Club*, and has made her Netflix debut in *Crime Scene: The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel*, directed by Joe Berlinger. Her selected on-camera commercial work includes: Macy's, BMW, Tiffany & Co., BuzzFeed, Visa, Ferragamo, Bayer, and more. Viveca is a lifestyle social-media influencer with more than 95,000 followers. Most recently, Viveca has joined the 2022 Disney Television Discovers Talent Showcase, an ongoing effort by the Disney/ABC Domestic Television Group to discover and develop select artists from coast to coast, who perform for notable casting directors, talent agents, managers and exclusive industry professionals. Showcase artists are paired with executives from ABC Entertainment Casting and other creative departments for the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and receive continued support throughout their experience through on-camera workshops, and other program resources.

KEY CAST BIOGRAPHY

TENZING KALDEN (SORA)

Tenzing is a Tibetan American actor, singer, and model. She grew up in India and moved to Queens, New York with her family when she was 8 years old. Watching countless episodes of *Lizzie McGuire* and *Arthur* on PBS Kids television as a child taught her English and inspired her dream of becoming an actor and singer. She trained at the prestigious Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music, Art, and the Performing Arts, and she has appeared in shows such as *Succession*, *Gossip Girl*, Ed Burns's *Bridge and Tunnel*, and *Ramy*.



JENNY LIN (GRACE)

Jenny is a New York-based actor, born and raised in Brooklyn, and with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts in Fashion Design from the Fashion Institute of Technology. She completed a two-year acting conservatory at The Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute, before making her Off-Broadway debut in 2018 in the show *Flying Tigers Flying Away*. She appeared in several acclaimed independent films, including *Lucky Fish*, *Exposed*, and *Mother Tongue*. Since 2019, she has been involved with the New York Asian Film Festival (NYAFF) as a programmer, after she spearheaded the Asian American Narrative Shorts Showcase initiative and formed NYAFF's Asian American Filmmaker Forum group, aiming to connect the Eastern and Western filmmaking industries. With her work, Jenny strives to empower diverse voices and perspectives, in particular those of, but not limited to, Asian Americans and Asians.



MINGJIE LI

Mingjie was born in Kunming, China. She is a New York-based actor, casting director, and director. She played lead roles in NYC Women's Fund-winning films *My Heavenly City* and *Yu Under Water*, and a supporting role in *Same Old* (Cannes 2022 Short Films Competition). Her directorial debut short film *Swans Of Hudson River* is currently in post-production. Before starting her acting career, Mingjie was a researcher at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. Mingjie has a Master's degree in Public Health from Columbia University and a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Wuhan University.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

PRODUCTION COUNTRY

USA

SOUND

Stereo

YEAR OF COMPLETION

2023

IMAGES

Color

LANGUAGES

English
Mandarin
Cantonese
Japanese
French

ASPECT RATIO

Summer: 1.50:1
Fall: 1.56:1
Winter: 1.67:1
Spring: 1.78:1

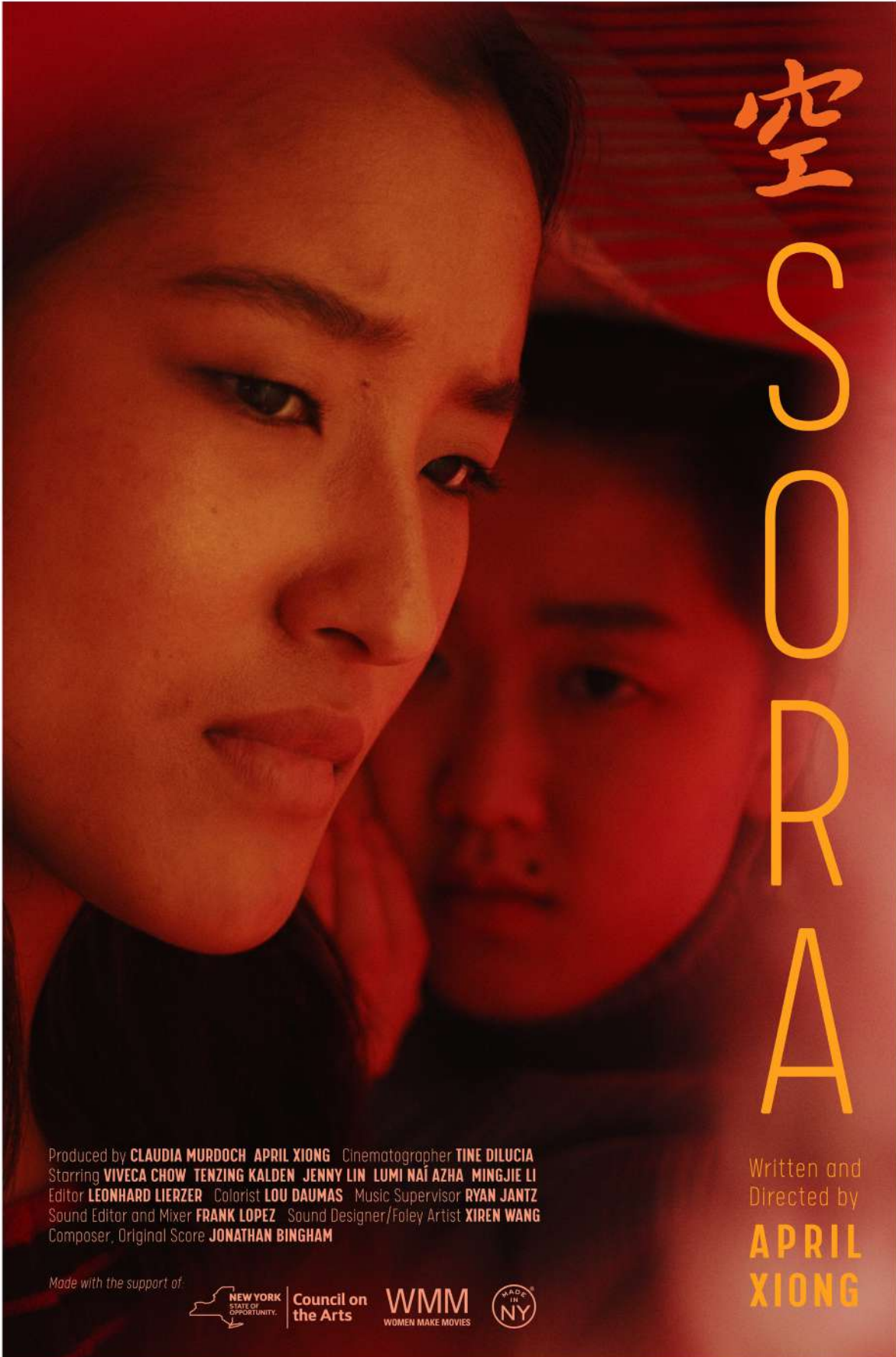
RUNNING TIME

93 minutes

CAMERA

Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 4K





空
S
O
O
R
R
A

Produced by **CLAUDIA MURDOCH** **APRIL XIONG** Cinematographer **TINE DILUCIA**
Starring **VIVECA CHOW** **TENZING KALDEN** **JENNY LIN** **LUMI NAI AZHA** **MINGJIE LI**
Editor **LEONHARD LIERZER** Colorist **LOU DAUMAS** Music Supervisor **RYAN JANTZ**
Sound Editor and Mixer **FRANK LOPEZ** Sound Designer/Foley Artist **XIREN WANG**
Composer, Original Score **JONATHAN BINGHAM**

Written and
Directed by

**APRIL
XIONG**

Made with the support of:



Council on
the Arts

WMM
WOMEN MAKE MOVIES



CONTACT INFORMATION



TIGER STRIPED CAT LLC

April Xiong, Writer/Director
(516) 348-3016
april.xiong@gmail.com

sorathefilm@gmail.com
sorathefilm.com
www.facebook.com/sorathefilm
www.instagram.com/sorathefilm

Claudia Murdoch, Producer
Cup of Joe Film, Inc.
(347) 204-8294
claudia@cupofjoefilm.com

cupofjoefilm.com
www.facebook.com/cupofjoefilm
www.instagram.com/cupofjoefilm