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## Getting Home

### ***Luo Ye Gui Gen***

(Hong Kong-China) A Filmko Entertainment (Hong Kong)/Beijing Jinqianshengshi Culture Media (China) production, in association with Fortissimo Films. (International sales: Fortissimo, Amsterdam.) Produced by Stanley Tong, Er Yong, Zhang Yang. Executive producers, Harvey Wong, Liu Qiang. Co-producers, Michael J. Werner, Wouter Barendrecht. Directed by Zhang Yang. Screenplay, Zhang, Wang Yao.

**With:** Zhao Benshan, Hong Qiwen, Song Dandan, Guo Degang, Hu Jun, Sun Haiying, Xia Yu, Wu Ma, Liu Jinshan, Guo Tao, Chen Ying, Liu Yuanyuan, Na Yisha, Liu Bo, Zhang Linxiong, Wu Dongming, Li Changguo, Yang Chao, Shang Xia.  
(Mandarin dialogue)

By **DEREK ELLEY**

**A debt of friendship turns into a life-changing experience for a Chinese working-class stiff in Zhang Yang's "Getting Home," a road movie-cum-gentle comedy of manners that packs an emotional punch in its final reels. Topped by a finely calibrated, strait-faced perf by Mainland stage comedian Zhao Benshan, and marbled with en-route cameos by some of China's best character actors, pic is a feast of acting as well as an on-the-nose portrait of modern Chinese provincial life in all its absurdities. Though much smaller than Zhang's previous "Sunflower," this should bounce from the fest circuit into specialist distribution and given critical support.**

With no set-up at all -- as we get to know the main character well enough thereafter -- film plunges straight into the main story as 50-something Zhao (Zhao) is seen drinking with his longtime workmate, Liu Quanyou (Hong Qiwen), and suddenly realises Liu has died. Next thing, Zhao and the corpse are on a bus in deepest southern China, where some robbers stage a holdup and Zhao saves the day by eliciting the sympathy of the gang leader (Guo Degang).

He doesn't get much thanks for it. Spooked out, the other passengers throw Zhao and the cadaver off

the bus and Zhao is forced to carry his dead friend on his back. After being robbed in an overnight doss house, Zhao finally gets a ride from a truck driver (Hu Jun, from "Lan Yu") who, in the movie's weakest scene, suddenly has an emotional meltdown while chatting en route.

Film settles into the standard pattern of any road movie, as Zhao finds inventive ways to transport his friend's corpse through the countryside (in a cart, inside a giant tire) and meets various characters -- both good and bad -- along the way.

On the good side -- and contributing two of the film's best scenes -- there's a lonely rich man (Hong Kong vet Wu Ma), who's rehearsing his own funeral, and a family of beekeepers (Guo Tao, Chen Ying) who've chosen to live away from the hustle and backbiting of society. In one of the pic's few young characters, there's also a breezy, upbeat cyclist (Xia Yu, from "Cala, My Dog!"), who's ambition is to reach 5,000 meters in Tibet.

On the bad side, there's a thuggish roadside restaurateur (Liu Jinshan) and various people who just stand by and watch Zhao determinedly cart his dead friend along on his back.

Episodes meld fairly smoothly into each other, and each encounter either enriches Zhao's emotional journey or affects his physical trek in some way. When Zhao finally gets near his destination, a meeting with a bag lady (Song Dandan, excellent), who lives off selling her blood, opens up a potential new life for him in the future.

There's no shortage of Mainland movies that turn on the traditional Chinese peasant attribute of "keep on going," but in "Getting Home" it's not the main theme of the picture. Original title is a well-known proverb meaning "a falling leaf returns to its roots" and, as the viewer gradually learns, Zhao is actually repaying, in his own way, a promise the dead Liu once made to him.

Dou Peng's discreet score adds warmth at key points, and underscores the pic's growing emotional arc, encapsulated in Zhao's likable, reined-back perf. Film takes a couple of reels to start working its magic, and could be fractionally trimmed in the early going, but thereafter helmer Zhang ("Spicy Love Soup," "Shower") keeps the tone sustained between the lightly absurdist and deeply humanistic.

Zhao's journey is actually northwest from Shenzhen (near Hong Kong) to Chongqing (on the Yangtze), though virtually the whole pic was shot in the scenic southwestern province of Yunnan, recognizable to anyone who knows the region and from vehicles' license plates en route.

Camera (color), Yu Lik-wai, Lai Yiu-fai; editor, Yang Hongyu; music, Dou Peng; production designer, An Bin; art director, Tong Tong; costumes, He Chongnan; sound (Dolby Digital), Wang Danrong, Wen Boxi; assistant director, Wu Xiguo, Gong Chun. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Panorama), Feb. 12, 2007. Running time: 101 MIN.

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