



ON SOONG

for Berjaya Youth Short Film top prize

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Soong (second left) said his winning piece 'Sam Sir' is based on his pastor's life.

ASPIRING filmmaker 23-year-old Soong Ka Fui emerged victorious at the recent Berjaya Youth Short Film Competition with self-directed movie *Sam Sir*.

Soong, a church youth minister, won over the judges with a tale of two former school friends who go onto lead alternate lifestyles. Inspired by his church pastor and mentor, Soong's narrative questions the meaning of 'success' in life for Sam and Mike as the former becomes a popular tuition teacher while the latter bemoans the loneliness of a rich entrepreneur.

Conquering a total 190 entries, Soong said of his own success: "I feel grateful and thank God – it took me by surprise."

"Before *Sam Sir* I've written quite a number of scripts for this competition but those didn't touch me. I asked myself – 'what's the must-tell story for the audience, most importantly, the young generation?'"

"This story just popped into my head, a real-life story about my pastor. The message touched me and I felt I should pay it forward," Soong said.

The runners-up – second place went to *A Gift of Gab* by Sidney Chan, 25, and third was *Superman* by Ling Kah Yong, 24 – similarly produced pieces emanating feel-good messages of inspiration rather than any particular genre.

For Chan, a runner-up spot was a culminating result after four years persistence at the BYSFC.

"It's surreal just being here. I've been joining BYSFC since 2011 but as this was my last eligible year for entry I became a lot more serious. Whatever it is, first, second or third, being in the top ten was already a huge step for me."

Ling's captivating *Superman*, which also won the public-voted People's Choice award, portrayed the real-life story of Michael Soosai from Malacca, a paralysed man



A still from 'Sam Sir' — the worthy winner.

who overcame burdens of his disability from childhood to become a beloved family man and newspaper deliverer.

"This is an unexpected result — I'd like to say thank you to my supportive friends and family."

"I'll certainly be returning to Malacca to share some of the prize money with Michael," said Ling.

It was an interesting morning in the Manhattan III ballroom at Berjaya Times Square hotel.

The spotlights whisked around as the ten finalists entered the red carpet and took their seats up front.

As the 10 screenings progressed, the judges grew increasingly aggravated with this year's apparent top 10. Despite glowing reviews for the winning three contestants after the ceremony, it became evident the five adjudicators were unimpressed this time around, not least because all of the finalists were male.

Subsequently there was a common critique of female perceptions in the boys' scripts that women were depicted as frail mothers or complaining wives inferior to the male leads.

Sound production was panned in terms of poor quality and too much music while

there were suggestions the screenplays were too fluent in issues of right and wrong, rather than exploring closer, in-depth problems. One judge even commented many of the guys "were stuck in a Hong Kong drama".

Each short was prescribed to be written in the context of an optional theme – either #yolo (you only live once), #lol (laugh out loud), #tbt (turn back time) or #abc (always be creative).

Unsurprisingly, the majority went for #yolo in an overreaching manner with a few exceptions. Out of the winning three only Chan went for #abc.

As far as themes stretched, Ling produced an enticing thriller/horror with *1/52* though suffered with a friend's acting only to earn his self a tied fifth place.

Mohamed Yazeir's *Kejang* (Chase) was cinematographically laudable though the judges thought otherwise, placing him eighth.

Primarily it is understood judges were marking on 60 per cent for content, 40 per cent technical, taking into account execution and creative direction.

Quizzed about challenges during production, the three winners, all of whom walked away with cash prizes and gifts, cited quandaries with human resources, especially financial constraints and time.