

JUNE PICTURES

*Presents*

# **JOSHUA: TEENAGER VS. SUPERPOWER**

A Film by Joe Piscatella

WORLD PREMIERE  
WORLD CINEMA DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION  
SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL 2017

## **Public Screenings**

Friday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 3:00pm // Temple Theatre, Park City  
Saturday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 7:00pm // Redstone Cinema 2, Park City  
Sunday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 12 noon // Salt Lake City Library Theatre,  
Salt Lake City  
Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 8:30am // Egyptian Theatre, Park City  
Friday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 4:00pm // Holiday Village Cinema 4, Park City

## **Press & Industry Screening**

Saturday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 10:00am // Holiday Village Cinema 4, Park City

Running Time: 78 minutes

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## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

When the Chinese Communist Party backtracks on its promise of autonomy to Hong Kong, teenager Joshua Wong decides to save his city. Rallying thousands of kids to skip school and occupy the streets, Joshua becomes an unlikely leader in Hong Kong and one of China's most notorious dissidents.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS**

When Hong Kong was handed back to China in 1997 after more than 150 years of British rule, citizens were fearful of losing many of their personal freedoms. When Beijing announces in 2012 plans to impose a pro-China "National Education" program in schools, Hong Kongers are resigned to China's encroaching reach until bespectacled 13-year-old Joshua Wong takes action. Refusing to accept Communist Party teachings, Joshua founds the Scholarism movement and shows up at a press conference to confront Hong Kong's leader, CY Leung, with some hardball questions. Unsatisfied with the leader's answers, Joshua and a handful of fellow students take to the street with a bullhorn and leaflets. Their movement gains momentum on May 13 after one of his anti-Beijing interviews goes viral on YouTube. The campaign escalates in August 2012, when Joshua leads a takeover of Civic Square outside government headquarters. After 9 days more than 120,000 people show up to support Citizen Square. It's a stunning victory for Joshua as Hong Kong's leader is forced to announce that Hong Kong schools will no longer be forced to adopt the Chinese Communist Party curriculum. "We did it! We got the Communist Party to step backwards. We are now part of the Hong Kong history," says Joshua of his unlikely victory.

Joshua continues fighting for Hong Kong autonomy when in 2014 he joins "Occupy Central" activist Benny Tai to champion the right for Hong Kong citizens to elect their own leaders instead of relying on Beijing-appointed bureaucrats to run local affairs. After 800,000 citizens approve the 2014 referendum (more than two times expected voter turnout), the Chinese government proclaims that Hong Kong voters will now be able to elect their own leaders, but from a slate of candidates pre-selected by the Communist Party. Furious at this injustice, Benny Tai organizes "Occupy Central," a protest where he hopes more than 10,000 citizens will help shut down Hong Kong's financial district. To help promote Occupy Central,

Joshua along with fellow students Nathan Law, Derek Lam and Agnes Chow rallies more than 13,000 students to skip school. On September 26, 2014, Wong gives an impassioned speech and leads the charge over the wall back into government headquarters. After his dramatic arrest, more people take to the streets.

Police respond with tear gas, pepper spray and a brand of police brutality that has never been seen before in Hong Kong. But the students hold their ground and hundreds of thousands more people join them in the streets in support.

Over the next eleven weeks, Hong Kong activists camp out in Hong Kong's Central District and effectively shut down banking and businesses. On Day 61, police forcibly evacuate the settlement and arrest 150 dissidents, including Joshua, again.

As friends worry about their young leader's frail physical condition, Joshua goes on a hunger strike in a desperate bid to instigate change. Facing up to five years in prison on a variety of charges and fearing that the Chinese government could "disappear him" as they have done to other dissidents, Joshua disbands Scholarism and forms the Demosisto political party with Nathan Law, Agnes Chow and Derek Lam.

Even though Joshua is not old enough to run for office, he and his fellow students campaign for Nathan Law, taking to the streets to campaign with the same vigor as they did for protest. In September 2016, Joshua watches with pride as Law wins election to Hong Kong's Legislative Council, one of the only democratically elected positions in the Hong Kong government.

A remarkable portrait of courage, resilience and youthful idealism, ***Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*** demonstrates how one young man mortgages his own future to try and save his city.

***Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*** is directed by Joe Piscatella (*#chicagoGirl: The Social Network Takes on a Dictator*). Directors of Photography are Jeycob Carlson and Andy Schocken (U.S.); Jonathan Young (Hong Kong); and Darryl Smith (UK). Music composed by Bennett Barbakow and Rob Amjarv. The film is produced by Andrew Duncan, Matthew Torne and Mark Rinehart.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The seeds of ***Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*** were planted in late 2011 when British filmmaker and producer Matthew Torne discovered a 13-year-old Joshua Wong in a Hong Kong

park giving an impassioned speech to a crowd of adults. One of Joshua's friends described his oratory skills, "He was calm and relaxed, like he'd been doing this for 20 years." Curious about the unlikely activist's story, Torne and a crew began filming Wong to document his campaign against National Education in Hong Kong.

After his victory against National Education, most people expected that Joshua would disappear back into teenage life. Instead, Joshua turned his sights to the next battle in Hong Kong: democracy.

As Hong Kong's anti-Beijing resistance movement escalated in 2014, New York-based producer Andrew Duncan began paying close attention to Joshua's grassroots crusade. During the "Umbrella Revolution" in 2014, as Joshua and thousands of other students occupied the streets of Hong Kong to protest Beijing's interference in local elections, Duncan, a human rights activist, began organizing support for the precocious activist. "I was so impressed with Joshua's work. I mean how can you not be blown away by this kid's passion? So I threw a fund-raising party in New York and a lot of people turned up," recalls Duncan.

Duncan has previously championed the causes of Chinese dissidents including Chen Guangcheng and the "Beijing Five" as well as American citizen Sandy Phan-Gillis, who has been imprisoned in Beijing without charge for 18 months. Through his company, June Pictures, Duncan had been looking for a story that would make an impact and Joshua Wong's crusade had a particularly dramatic scale: a teenager taking on China. At that point Duncan realized he wanted to make a documentary about Joshua's life.

Duncan connected producer Matthew Torne with Los Angeles-based filmmaker Joe Piscatella to bring Joshua's story to life.

"I'm attracted to stories about ordinary people who do extraordinary things in the face of great adversity," says Piscatella, who made the award-winning documentary *#chicagoGirl: The Social Network Takes on a Dictator*. "In Joshua Wong, you've got this unlikely hero, this kid who's the last guy you'd expect to lead the charge over the wall to government headquarters, and yet he does it."

### **The Challenges of Documenting a Teenager**

During production, Piscatella and producers Mark Rinehart and Matthew Torne discovered that following a teenager for a documentary film was challenging. Joshua keeps a teenager's schedule – long hours at night. Production often had to work around Joshua's schooling and exams. Another challenge for Piscatella and his team was getting Joshua to open

up emotionally. “Joshua was challenging because he’s done hundreds if not thousands of interviews,” Piscatella explains. “He’s been asked every question a hundred times so he can rely on stock answers.” But Piscatella didn’t give up. “I kept pressing. I kept changing the questions so that he had to think rather than reply with an answer by rote. One day I got Joshua to admit that when police began using violence against him and his fellow students he was worried that it was going to be Tiananmen Square all over again and that he was the one responsible for lighting the fuse. That’s the moment when I realized we could really make a great film here.”

### **Three-Act Thriller**

Piscatella, who alternates documentary making with Hollywood screenwriting projects including the 2007 Disney feature *Underdog*, conceived ***Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*** as a nonfiction thriller in three acts. “I approach documentary the same way I approach a feature script,” he says. “It wasn’t enough to have sexy footage of tear gas and pepper spray and police brutality. The film’s got to have a beginning, a middle and an end. We worked really hard to build this three-act structure while staying true to the timeline of the events as they happened.”

While cameras had been following Joshua for more than five years there were still gaps in the footage, especially during events when the production team didn’t have their own cameras on the ground. So Piscatella, Torne and editor Matthew Sultan tapped into a network of citizen journalists in Hong Kong. “You’re talking about kids in Hong Kong so everybody has a cell phone,” Piscatella says. “If it happened, someone, somewhere recorded it. We found citizen journalists who had captured some incredible moments in our story.”

During post-production back in Los Angeles, Piscatella and Sultan wove together all their footage along with interviews that also included commentary from scholars, politicians and journalists including social revolution expert Clay Shirky, Hong Kong democracy heavyweight Martin Lee and Occupation Central co-founder Benny Tai.

While in editing, Joshua’s story remained fluid so Piscatella and his team kept a camera crew on call to film the ongoing travails. “If Joshua went to court, they followed him; If Joshua held a rally, the team followed him; and when he and Nathan formed the Demosisto political party, our team was on the ground capturing it,” Piscatella explains.

## **A Moment of Triumph**

Finding the ending for the film quickly became the *Joshua* team's biggest challenge. Would Joshua get jail time? Would pressure finally get to Nathan, Agnes or Derek where they would drop out of the story? "One of the big things for me was that I didn't want to go out on a down note where these kids made a political run but then got crushed," Piscatella says. "I wanted the ending to offer a glimmer of hope in what is a very bleak situation."

Piscatella and his team found their ending when, with Joshua's help, Joshua's friend and Demosisto co-founder Nathan Law was elected in September 2016 to Hong Kong's Legislative Council. "One of my favorite moments in the film happens after Nathan wins the election and we see Joshua wipe a tear from his eye," says Piscatella. "You realize these kids really accomplished something, even though the odds were so stacked against them."

Producer Duncan is happy the film is able to shine a light on human-rights issues through the adventures of one remarkable citizen. "There are very few people who, like Nelson Mandela, start out as dissidents and then become reformers. The extraordinary thing about Joshua is he's now attempting to work for reform within the institutional structure. For that, he deserves the support of the rest of the world."

Ultimately, the filmmakers simply wanted to do justice to the remarkable figure at the heart of the story. "When your subject is Joshua Wong, it's almost like being handed a great script where you just don't want to screw up the movie," Duncan says. "We were able to execute and I could not be more proud."

## **Epilogue: The Struggle Continues**

Since the completion of *Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*, the Chinese Communist party has intensified its campaign to undermine Joshua Wong, Nathan Law and their Demosisto party. In the months since Law was elected to Hong Kong's Legislative Council, Beijing has attempted to unseat him and bankrupt the party. Furthermore, at Beijing's behest, Thailand and Malaysia have blacklisted Wong, curtailing his freedom to travel. And on January 9, 2017, pro-Chinese minions attacked Law and Wong at the Hong Kong airport on their way home from a pro-democracy forum in Taiwan.

Undeterred, Joshua Wong continues to fight for human rights.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

**JOE PISCATELLA (Director)** has, since graduating from the graduate writing program at USC, written for a host of television, film, radio and print projects. His first feature documentary, *#ChicagoGirl*, has been seen in more than 60 countries. He was also an executive producer on the documentary *Finders Keepers*, which premiered at Sundance in 2015.

In addition to his directing work, Piscatella has written numerous feature scripts and television pilots for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Spyglass and Touchstone Television. His credits include Disney's *Underdog*, Warner Bros.' "Ozzy & Drix" and NBC's "Stark Raving Mad."

The filmmaker graduated from Georgetown University. After a tryout as a punter in the Canadian Football League, he began his writing career as a speechwriter in Washington, D.C., where he wrote jokes for clients such as executives at Johns Hopkins Medical Center and high-ranking personnel in the U.S. Air Force. In addition, he interned for Ted Koppel on ABC's "Nightline."

**ANDREW DUNCAN (Producer)** is Chairman of June Pictures, a filmmaker-driven independent production company which he co-founded in 2016 with CEO Alex Saks to produce and finance feature-length narrative and documentary films. He is a producer on all three of the feature films June Pictures will debut at Sundance 2017: the psychological thriller *Thoroughbred*, written and directed by Cory Finley, starring Olivia Cooke, Anya Taylor-Joy, and Anton Yelchin; *Fun Mom Dinner*, directed by Alethea Jones, starring Toni Collette, Bridget Everett, Katie Aselton, and Molly Shannon; and the feature length documentary ***Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*** about Hong Kong student activist and politician, Joshua Wong.

The LA-based June Pictures is currently in post-production several films, for which Mr. Duncan serves as producer: Paul Dano's directorial debut, *Wildlife*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Carey Mulligan; *The Florida Project*, written and directed Sean Baker (*Tangerine*) starring Willem Dafoe; and the dramatic comedy *Dude*, written and directed by Olivia Milch, starring Lucy Hale, Kathryn Prescott, Alexandra Shipp and Awkwafina.

**MATTHEW TORNE (Producer)** divides his time between Hong Kong and Oxford, UK. He was previously the Associate Producer on *Enemies of the People* (2010) a feature length documentary on the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia, which won a Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival (2010), an Emmy for Best Investigative Documentary and was shortlisted for an Academy Award (2011). He has since produced and directed the feature length

documentary *Lessons in Dissent* (2014), which premiered at the 38th Hong Kong International Film Festival and has been broadcast on public television across Asia. He recently finished producing ***Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*** feature length documentary that will have its world premiere at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Matthew is currently completing *Lion Rock*, a creative documentary about Hong Kong's existential identity crisis. He holds a Master's degree in Modern Chinese Studies from Oxford University, a diploma from the Hong Kong Film Academy and a First Class Honours degree in Film Studies and History from the University of Kent.

**MARK RINEHART (Producer)** is an Emmy-nominated director and producer whose network credits include programming for Discovery, National Geographic, Travel Channel, Oprah Winfrey Network, and Current Television. He has also created digital content campaigns for a wide range of brands including Intel, Toyota, Ford, Chevy, Starbucks, HP, and Pepsi.

Mark produced *Decoding Deepak*, a theatrically released film on Deepak Chopra, and *#chicagoGirl*, a feature-length film about a young woman who manages the Syrian revolution from her laptop in suburban Chicago. While at Current Television, Mark developed and executive produced the critically acclaimed "Embedded" music series. In-depth profiles of artists ranging from Common to Ben Harper earned the show positive reviews in Rolling Stone and Billboard magazine. He directed the premiere episode that featured Mos Def's tour of Japan. Mark also executive produced and directed *TV Free Burningman* a flagship series that earned a national Emmy nomination. Prior to his tenure at Current, he directed multiple segments for the award-winning PBS series *Spark*. His short film "Jumpers" premiered at SXSW and screened in multiple festivals including San Francisco International and Silverdocs. He received an MA in film from Stanford University.

**ALEX SAKS (Executive Producer)** is CEO of June Pictures, a filmmaker-driven independent production company which she co-founded in 2016 with Chairman Andrew Duncan to produce and finance feature-length narrative and documentary films.

Ms. Saks is a producer on all of June Pictures' slate of feature films. The LA-based company has three debuting at Sundance 2017 including the psychological thriller *Thoroughbred*, written and directed by Cory Finley, starring Olivia Cooke, Anya Taylor-Joy, and Anton Yelchin; *Fun Mom Dinner*, directed by Alethea Jones, starring Toni Collette, Bridget Everett, Katie Aselton, and Molly Shannon; and a feature length documentary ***Joshua: Teenager vs.***



**Superpower** about Hong Kong student activist and politician, Joshua Wong. June Pictures is currently in post-production on Paul Dano's directorial debut, *Wildlife*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Carey Mulligan; *The Florida Project*, written and directed Sean Baker ("Tangerine") starring Willem Dafoe; and the dramatic comedy *Dude*, written and directed by Olivia Milch, starring Lucy Hale, Kathryn Prescott, Alexandra Shipp and Awkwafina.

Prior to June Pictures, Alex Saks served as an agent at ICM where her work in the independent and international group revolved around the packaging, financing and selling of independent films including: *Tallulah*, *Results*, *The Intervention*, *Time out of Mind*, *Sandcastle*, *The Overnight*, *Skeleton Twins*, *The One I Love*, *Infinitely Polar Bear*, *Stockholm*, *Pennsylvania*, and *People, Places, Things*.

Ms. Saks began her career at The Mark Gordon Company, where she worked as Mark's assistant and on several film and television productions including: *Source Code*, *The Messenger*, *The Details*, *2012*, *Criminal Minds*, *Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Army Wives*, *Private Practice* and *Ray Donovan*. Following her time at The Mark Gordon Company, she went to work at Automatik and IM Global under Brian Kavanaugh-Jones as a creative and production executive. While there she worked on the following films in varying stages of development, production, post-production and release: *Insidious*, *A Haunted House*, *Sinister*, *Take Shelter*, *Lords of Salem*, *Welcome to the Punch*, *Grace*, *Dark Skies*, *The Babymakers*, *Bullet to the Head*, *The Signal*, *Dead Man Down*, *Insidious 2* and *The Bay*.

Ms. Saks is a graduate of Wake Forest University where she received her degree in History.

**MATTHEW SULTAN (Editor)** Before pursuing his love for documentary editing, Matthew held jobs as a primate researcher, veterinary technician, bindery worker, and noodle house dishwasher. He is a filmmaking multi-hyphenate dedicated to the art and craft of storytelling. In 2008, he earned an Emmy nomination while working as a Supervising Producer / Editor at Current Television.

He enjoys teaching others and has led workshops on the topics of media literacy and citizen journalism. From the jungles of Colombia to the playa at Burning Man, he feels lucky for all of the adventures his career has afforded him. He is always interested in meaningful projects and doubly interested if the project involves travel.

This is his second film with director Joe Piscatella. He lives in Los Angeles where he is a husband, father, and partner in the content creation studio OFFICIAL.

FUN FACT: His sixth-grade soprano voice can be heard on several tracks in the film *Home Alone* which may be one of his biggest accomplishments...ever.

## **CREDITS**

### **DIRECTED, WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY**

Joe Piscatella

### **PRODUCED BY**

Andrew Duncan

Matthew Torne

Mark Rinehart

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY**

Alex Saks

### **US BASED PRODUCTION:**

Jeycob Carlson – DP

Erik Clabeaux – Sound

Team Basset – Gaffer

Andy Schocken – DP

Liam Miller – Camera Operator

### **HONG KONG BASED PRODUCTION:**

Jonathan Young – Director of Photography

Ng Ka Yin Twinsen – Cameras

Felix Leong Chin Ho – Cameras

Ho Yan Pun – Cameras

Desmond Chan – Cameras

Victor Lam – Sound

Amos Ho – Sound

Lee Kwan Wai – Electrician

Cheung Chung Fai – Electrician

Chan Hok-Lun – Electrician

Tang Ka-Hei – Electrician

Sean Lee – Production Assistant

Karkiu Tang – Production Assistant

Rex Lee – Associate Producer

### **UK DIVISION:**

Darryl Smith – Director of Photography

James Gillett – Camera Operator

Marc Spector – Sound

### **POST PRODUCTION:**

Matt Sultan – Editor

Anthony Ferraro – Assistant Editor

Geoffrey Boyton – Assistant Editor

Rob Amjarv – Composer

Bennett Barbakow – Composer

Luke Cahill – Colorists

Gabe Serrano – Sound Mix

Motion Graphics – Arian Tibbs

**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:**

AP News  
Al Jazeera News Al Jazeera  
Tiananmen Square Reports – CNN  
Tiananmen Square Reports – ABC News  
Time Magazine  
Newsweek Magazine  
HK Government News  
BBC News  
CNBC  
CCTV News  
HK Apple Daily  
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Fortune Magazine  
The Guardian  
Russian Television Network

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