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Mumbai is like home, says Taka of Queen

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British actor Jeffrey Ho who dons the role of Taka in the Hindi movie, Queen

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After watching Vikas Bahl's *Queen*, it is impossible to get the face of Taka, the endearing Japanese boy, whom Kangana Ranaut befriends on her solo honeymoon, out of your mind. Played to near perfection by London-based actor Jeffrey Ho, Taka struck a chord with his wild child antics and his emotional backstory. In Mumbai to promote his debut film, Ho shares with **THE WEEK** his experience on board a Bollywood vehicle.

Excerpts:

Tell us about your background.

I am originally from Malaysia, born to Malay-Chinese parents. But I moved to London in 2008. I graduated from the London School of Dramatic Arts in 2011, after which I have been active in theatre.

And how did *Queen* happen?

I got to know about *Queen* from a casting agency in London, which Vikas had hired to cast the foreigners in the film. I was called for several rounds of audition, first with only the casting directors, and later with Vikas and my co-stars. Finally, Vikas decided to go with me for the role of Taka.

What were the auditions like?

The initial audition was done by a casting assistant. There is a scene in the film in which Kangana's character is challenged to a cooking contest by an Italian chef. That was the scene which we auditioned for first. They also asked me to do a couple of dance steps, which were recorded and sent to Vikas. The next round had Vikas, too, and we did a very important scene where Taka and Rani [Kangana's character] connect emotionally. It was a challenging scene because we had to bring out the fact that two people, who belong to two completely different cultures, who do not even understand each other's language, connect over their losses in life. We had to do the scene again and again. Another fun scene we auditioned for was one in a sex-toy shop.

How was the experience on the sets?

We shot in Amsterdam and Mumbai. We were a small team and we covered 150 locations in very little time. Since we got limited permission to shoot in certain places, mostly we had to go for single takes. So it was like we were always on the go. Just like in the film, all the actors were meeting for the first time while shooting and we did not know each other. As the shooting progressed, the friendship between us also grew. So most of the time we were not acting, we were just being ourselves and that was what Vikas wanted. He wanted the film to look real, and I

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think we all have done justice to it.

Considering the tight schedules, were there any workshops/rehearsals before the shoot?

Rehearsals... not really. We knew our lines and we were told what the scenes were. During the takes, though, someone would improvise. So it was all quite spontaneous. Mostly, we were reacting to each other as Vikas was a very flexible director.

Your character in the film speaks Japanese. Did you undergo any language training?

Yes, I had to learn Japanese. Instead of attending a formal class, I sought help from a Japanese friend, who tutored me for a month. We translated the dialogues into Mandarin and English and I tried to understand the meaning of each word while saying the dialogues. I understand that the Indian audience do not follow Japanese, but I did not want to lose out on the authenticity of my character.

Which is your favourite scene from the film?

It has to be the scene just before we leave our hostel room. Everyone had to stick something on the wall collage before leaving. It was like leaving a piece of ourselves in that room, be it a sweet or a sad memory. When we shot for that scene, all of us felt really emotional and without any cues, all of us hugged each other and we had tears in our eyes. It happened so naturally and that was an unforgettable moment in the film. I think the hug was edited out.

How has the response to your performance been?

Overwhelming and humbling. At the premiere, everybody congratulated all of us, and told us that they have never seen anything like this in Bollywood before. So we are all happy as a team.

Have you watched any Indian films before?

Not really. I have not seen much, though Bollywood films are released in Malaysia, and Indian films are shown on TV, too. After working on *Queen*, I saw Kangana's *Tanu Weds Manu* and *Gangster*, and Vikas's *Chillar Party*. I liked all of them.

How is Mumbai treating you?

Mumbai has always been good to me that I cannot explain how happy I feel when I am here. The people here are so warm. I have many Indian friends in Malaysia. So, it does not feel like I am away from home because of the weather and the food. I am quite used to it. I feel happy and at home in Mumbai.

Future projects?

Am not doing any film at the moment. I will be leaving for London soon to prepare for my next theatre production.

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I feel at home in Mumbai, says Taka of Queen

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