



'Linsanity' lets director score

James Robinson

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Jeremy Lin - shown in a scene from "Linsanity." Photo: Jeffrey Kim



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When "Linsanity" premiered in January to a packed 500-plus-seat theater at the Sundance Film Festival, the already much-hyped triumphs of NBA phenom **Jeremy Lin** were met with new cheers and arms thrust into the air at key moments.

Sitting in the audience, director **Evan Jackson Leong** was hoping that people would get on board with his feel-good documentary of the triumph and

struggles of Lin's journey from obscurity to seemingly instant superstardom on the court. But even Leong didn't expect such an enthusiastic response.

"It was wonderful. I never knew that would happen," he said two days after the premiere, at a restaurant in the Park City Marriott in Utah.

Two months after this first taste of festival success, "Linsanity" is set for its local premiere as the opening-night film at CAAMfest 2013 (formerly the San Francisco

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Leong, 34, a sixth-generation Chinese American, grew up in the Richmond District. He graduated from [Lowell High School](#), from where he moved on to UCLA and a bachelor's degree in Asian American studies. For him, Los Angeles represented a big change.

"I didn't know I was a minority until I went to [college](#)," he said.

Asian stories

Telling Asian stories has been a focus of Leong's work. He became involved in documentary while at college. His previous documentaries, which sit alongside production work on music videos and Hollywood films, have covered the local Asian Law Caucus and the explosion of Christianity in Asia.

"As a filmmaker, you tell the stories you know," Leong said.

Leong began making a documentary about Lin when the [Houston Rockets](#) point guard was still at Harvard. "Linsanity" started out as a movie about the struggles and successes of a Chinese American college basketball star trying to make his name in a predominantly black sport.

Lin was reluctant to be the subject of a movie, but Leong said that he slowly won the trust of both Lin and his family. "Linsanity" has an intimate mood. The finished cut has as many home movies as it does NBA-licensed highlight footage of Lin, who grew up in Palo Alto and played a season with the [Golden State Warriors](#).

At the start of February last year, in the now well-known "Linsanity" tale, Lin, days away from being cut from the team, stepped on court for the injury-depleted [New York Knicks](#) and proceeded to reel off nearly a month of improbable stat lines and high-octane moments, to the fascination of, it seemed, the planet. It changed the trajectory and narrative of Leong's movie.

"No one was getting from Jeremy what we were getting," Leong said.

Taking a chance

Subsequently, the narrative of "Linsanity" and the story of its making echo each other closely. Leong was an unknown documentary filmmaker who had spent years taking a chance on a story about an unknown Asian American basketball player. When Lin blew up, Leong's documentary became a much more anticipated commodity. Following Sundance and opening-night duty at CAAMfest, "Linsanity" has sold to [Fortissimo Films](#), a leading global distributor, and is being represented for domestic release by CAA in Los Angeles.

"I can relate directly to it," Leong said, reflecting on that month of Linsanity. "The last 12 years, I've been struggling, I've been poor. I didn't get paid nothing - and now I get this. All of that was for this moment." {sbox}

Linsanity (not rated) opens CAAMfest at 7 p.m. Thursday at the [Castro Theatre](#).

To see a trailer, go to www.linsanitythemovie.com.

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