

F I L M R E V I E W



Set in Inquisition-era Spain, 'Goya's Ghosts' is a send-up of the 21st-century US war on terror

BY MATT ZOLLER SEITZ
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

Goya's Ghosts, the feature from director Milos Forman (*Amadeus*, *Man on the Moon*), is an unwieldy mix of political satire and lavish period soap opera. Set in 18th-century Spain, and covering the last phase of the Inquisition and Napoleon's occupation, it resembles the Oscar-baiting epics that Miramax used to release: white elephants like *Chocolat* and *The Cider House Rules* that mixed art-house swagger, Hollywood glitz and shout-outs to liberal common wisdom.

The tale begins with Spanish church elders condemning etchings by Goya that depict the

torture of dissidents and heretics. "These images show us the true face of our country," frets Brother Lorenzo (Javier Bardem), a quasiliberal monk who has asked Goya (Stellan Skarsgard) to paint his portrait, but also exhorts the Roman Catholic Church to fortify the Inquisition and purify the country.

Forman and his co-writer, Jean-Claude Carriere (once a frequent collaborator with Luis Bunuel), depict Goya as an artist trying to balance the need to make a living against the obligation to document atrocities committed in the name of God and war. (When Napoleon invades Spain in the film's second half, Goya again becomes a witness to history.)

But Goya's presence in the film recedes after he asks Brother Lorenzo to investigate the disappearance of one of his models, Ines, (Natalie Portman, likable but bland), the daughter of a rich merchant.

Ines is being held incommunicado for the crime of having a Jewish ancestor. The sequence depicting church

interrogators grilling her about a recent supper (she's said to have refused pork) balances satire and terror with precision. (The hard cut from Ines politely asking questioners what she can do to prove her honesty to a naked, screaming Ines hanging upside-down from a rack was an early candidate for transition of that year, 2006.)

Equally bracing is a sequence in which Lorenzo, after forcing himself on Ines in prison, has dinner with her family and lamely tries to reassure them that if Ines truly loved God, no amount of pain would make her sign a false confession. Ines' family disproves Lorenzo's claim with a panache that Charles Bronson would have appreciated.

By recreating Inquisition brutality, *Goya's Ghosts* aims to denounce the West's bludgeoning response to terrorism. But its rhetorical tactics are jejune; its comparison of 21st-century America and Inquisition-era Spain doesn't track; and its second half abandons satire for half-baked historical melodrama.



The Inquisition is no laughing matter, except in *Goya's Ghost* that is. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CINEPLEX

Bardem's portrayal of the newly enlightened Lorenzo — who tries to help Ines find the daughter they had together when she was a captive — is filled with fine brush strokes that make the character compelling, if not quite comprehensible. But the sight of Portman playing both Ines and her daughter, Alicia — a grimy prostitute — is alternately distracting and laughable.

Randy Quaid's supporting turn as the dimwit thug King Carlos IV is an inferior rehash of Jeffrey Jones's peerless work as Emperor Joseph II in *Amadeus*. And the film's stumblebum attempts to transform the opportunistic hypocrite-rapist Lorenzo into yet another of the director's martyred rebel heroes — each noble gesture backed by an "Applaud now!" score — is autism run amok.

OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

The Bank Job

Jason Statham gets around as a leading man. In this heist flick he's back on home territory in 1970s London, leading a raid on a bank at the behest of the British secret service, which wants a file from the vault that incriminates an allegedly randy royal. Not all of those involved know, however, as the theft of cash and other items attracts the attention of another criminal who has a very good reason to hunt down the gang. Based on a real incident, and directed by Kiwi/Aussie veteran Roger Donaldson (*Dante's Peak*).



Gabriel's Voice

Barely released outside Spain, *Gabriel's Voice* is about a psychologically stunted, virtually mute young man with considerable musical ability whose mother died and whose father was imprisoned when he was very young. His preoccupation as an adult is playing with wooden toys, but this changes after he meets a feisty (and attractive, of course) female violinist who uses music to reach him. Then Gabriel's father complicates the picture after getting out of prison. Fine, emotional fare for young musicians who may be wondering what all the practice is for.



Detective Conan: Full Score of Fear

This is entry No. 12 in the *Case Closed* series of animated features from Japan sourced from the popular manga about a young super sleuth transformed into a child by criminals. The shrinkage luckily doesn't take away Conan Edogawa's ability to crack cases that no one else can. As with *Gabriel's Voice*, music is key in this episode, but for more sinister reasons: Conan must investigate a series of mysterious deaths at a music academy, a case made even stranger by the presence of flutes at the crime scene.



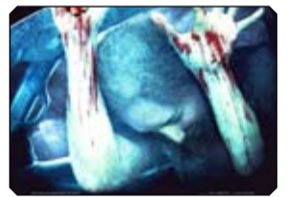
Sands' Chronicle

More manga-sourced Japanese melodrama as Ann, an energetic schoolgirl, moves to the country and attracts the attention of the local boys, only for her divorced mother to kill herself, eventually forcing the unhappy girl back to Tokyo with her father. The threads of romance and guilt culminate in what the *Japan Times* calls a radical break from the standard structure of such dramas: It frequently jumps to the suffering of the adult Ann who can't deal with her trauma. Japanese title: *Suna Dokei*.



Five Across the Eyes

Taiwanese cinema patrons are frequently fed straight-to-DVD junk from the US, but occasionally experimental and low budget films of merit slip through as well. *Five Across the Eyes* is a no-budget horror flick that played a few specialist festivals before going to rental stateside. Even so, it picked up a few encouraging reviews, and may impress fans of the shakycam school of filmmaking. Five young women on the way home one night from a football game in Tennessee get lost in countryside known as "The Eyes" before being set upon by one thoroughly nasty individual. It's the kind of film that a young, passionate Sam Raimi might have made before getting bogged down in the overblown *Spider-Man* trilogy. Starts tomorrow.



Film Notes

GOYA'S GHOSTS

DIRECTED BY: MILOS FORMAN

STARRING: JAVIER BARDEM (BROTHER LORENZO), NATALIE PORTMAN (INES/ALICIA), STELLAN SKARSGARD (GOYA), RANDY QUAID (KING CARLOS), MICHAEL LONSDALE (GRAND INQUISITOR), JOSE LUIS GOMEZ (BILBATUA), MABEL RIVERA (MARIA ISABEL BILBATUA)

RUNNING TIME: 113 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

TAIPEI'S TOP FIVE

City cinema weekend box office takings

(July 5 and July 6)

Source: Group Power Entertainment Corp



■ Hancock (全民超人) NT\$19,477,737



■ Kung Fu Panda (功夫熊貓) NT\$8,127,635



■ Get Smart (特務行不行) NT\$2,350,194



■ Sex and the City (慾望城市) NT\$2,291,354



■ Missing (謎屍) NT\$1,255,740

REEL NEWS

The central Asian republic of Kazakhstan plans to fight back against the damage done to its reputation by the box-office smash *Borat* by holding an international film festival.

The capital Astana will host the Eurasia film festival from Sept. 7 to Sept. 13.

Hollywood star Jack Nicholson has agreed to attend, festival director Gulnara Sarsenowa said, while Sean Penn, John Malkovich and Tommy Lee Jones have also been invited.

Films from Kazakhstan and the other central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan will be competing for prizes. Around 50 films exhibited at the Cannes and Berlin film festivals will also be shown.

In the 2006 hit British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen played Borat, a boorish Kazakh television reporter, a depiction that angered Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic which is five times the size of France and has vast oil and gas reserves.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit on Wednesday



Kazakhstan is hoping to cash in on its most famous would-be journalist, Borat. PHOTO: AP

strongly condemned an Iranian documentary about the 1981 assassination of former president Anwar Sadat, calling such works "irresponsible."

"We condemn this film in the strongest possible terms," Abul Gheit told reporters in Cairo, two days after Egypt summoned Tehran's envoy in Cairo to lodge a formal protest over the airing of the film.

"We tell our brothers in Iran they must stop producing these

works which reflect a lack of responsibility," the foreign minister said.

The Iranian film, entitled *Assassination of a Pharaoh*, says Sadat was killed for signing the 1978 Camp David Accords that led to a 1979 peace treaty with Israel, the first by an Arab country.

On Sunday, a Cairo daily reported that Sadat's family was considering legal action against the Iranian producers of the documentary which has already been shown on Iranian television.

Al-Masry al-Youm said then that the film, broadcast "in honor of the martyrs of the Islamic renaissance," deals with "the revolutionary assassination of the treacherous Egyptian president at the hands of the martyr Khaled Islambouli."

Islamic militant Islambouli was one of the soldiers who shot Sadat dead at a military parade in Cairo on October 6, 1981. He was hanged for the killing in 1982 and subsequently had a Tehran road named after him.

"The producers should have asked for the family's

authorization before making the film," said Sadat's daughter, Roqeya. "Such slander will receive a strong response."

Diplomatic ties between Egypt and Iran were severed in 1980, a year after the Islamic revolution, in protest at Egypt's recognition of Israel, its hosting of the deposed shah and its support for Iraq during its 1980 to 1988 war with Iran.

Relations have recently warmed, with both countries signaling a willingness to restore ties.

Everybody knows Juliette Binoche the actor. Some may even know Binoche the painter, or the poet. But now, after about two years learning a new art form, we are to get Binoche the dancer.

"It's not easy you know. You try releasing the hips," she encouraged journalists last Friday. The actor was in London to talk about what promises to be a Binoche fall on London's South Bank arts complex with the premiere of her collaborative work

Juliette Binoche has added another artistic string to her bow. PHOTO: AP

In-I at the National Theatre, a retrospective of her films — from *The English Patient* to *Chocolat* to *Hidden* — at the BFI (British Film Institute), and an accompanying exhibition of her paintings and poems.

In-I is a collaboration with choreographer Akram Khan which also features sets by



artist Anish Kapoor and music by composer Philip Sheppard, who is writing and producing the music for the Olympic handover ceremony in Beijing.

What the work is and what audiences will see is still something of a mystery and one that the four artists were yesterday keen to continue. It is not just a piece of dance, or just a piece of theatre, it is both of those and more, they said.

Binoche said they began with the question what is love, but said they may not be giving any answers. "You have to be patient, we're still on the road searching," she said

Learning to dance was all about breaking out of comfort zones, Binoche said. "If we get too much into habits, too much into doing what we know we can do, then there is no life."

While she has learned dance, Khan learned to play the guitar, something he may or may not do in *In-I*. He may also act and sing.

—AGENCIES