

AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, JULY 18, 2008

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Experimental oldies

The Golden Harvest Awards has quietly incubated local film talents since its inception in 1978

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

The Golden Harvest Awards (金穗獎) was where Taiwanese New Wave auteur Ke Yi-cheng (柯一正) was discovered and embarked on his directing career. It was where documentary filmmaker Yang Li-chou (楊力州) found the courage to go on when nobody believed in him, including himself. And it was where director Zero Chou (周美玲) earned three months of living expenses.

This year, Golden Harvest celebrates its 30th anniversary as Taiwan's oldest film festival dedicated to supporting experimental filmmaking. Organized by the Chinese Taipei Film Archive (國家電影資料館), the annual event may not be as popular or well known as the Golden Horse (金馬獎) or Taipei (台北電影節) film festivals, but it is looked upon as a highly regarded platform for film students and young filmmakers.

A look at past lineups shows why the event is said to be the cradle of Taiwanese cinema: luminaries such as Tsai Ming-liang (蔡明亮), Ang Lee (李安) and Wan Jen (萬仁), as well as younger talents Lin Jing-jie (林靖傑), Wei Te-sheng (魏德聖) and Tom Shu-Yu Lin (林書宇), all found early recognition here.

To mark the anniversary, 48 films have been selected from among the festival's archive collection of nearly 500 past nominations for a retrospective program that may include the only public screenings of many of these works for years to come.

As the winner of the first Golden Harvest Award, legendary director Wang Chu-chin's (王菊金) experimental film *Years of Wind* (風車, 1978) begins the journey down memory lane with its mix of a male train passenger's flashbacks and black-and-white dream sequences. Best known for his *The Legend of the Six Dynasties* (六朝怪談, 1979) and *On the Society File of Shanghai* (上海社會檔案, 1981) that catapulted Lu Hsiao-fen (陸小芬) to stardom, Wang is an influential figure in Taiwanese cinema because of his unique blend of social realism with genre cinema.

Ang Lee's student film *I Wish I Was by That Dim Lake* won the future Oscar-winner his first gong in 1982. The film is a story about a down-and-out actor torn between his dreams and real life, which was, perhaps, a prescient choice of subject given the director's six years spent as a house-husband before his feature debut *Pushing Hands* (推手, 1991).

The Golden Harvest was the only Taiwanese festival to encourage filmmakers to use the 8mm format, and this year's retrospective includes Tsai Ming-liang's experimental 8mm short *UFO Rhapsody* (飛碟狂想, 1981), which will be screened along with Mai Da-jie's (麥大傑) single-frame 8mm animation short, *Check* (將軍, 1982). Another notable screening is seven-time Golden Harvest Award winner and elusive contemporary artist Kao Chung-li's (高重黎) 1984 work *That Photograph* (那張照片), an examination of photographer Josef Koudelka's work.

Six Golden Harvest Award recipients were invited to make short films about their thoughts and reflections on Taiwanese cinema, society and culture.

Among the films showing at this year's Golden Harvest Awards are, clockwise from top left: *Herstory* by Angelika Wang; Ke Yi-cheng's *Popcorn*; *Father's Finger*, a strong contender in the 35mm-film category; *Suicide Pact*, another contender in the 35mm-film category; and *Women* by Shih Hsiao-yun.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHINESE TAIPEI FILM ARCHIVE

The results include *Popcorn* (爆米花) directed by Ke Yi-cheng (柯一正) who in the film searches for his mentor, Wang Chu-chin, and makes humorous observations on how a film's popularity can be measured by the rate of popcorn consumption at movie theaters and how the Golden Harvest trophy can be put to good use in the kitchen.

Zero Chou's *The Wheat Doesn't Die* (麥子不死), follows the tradition of corny romance and is a hilarious story about a gangster who mistakenly thinks that Taiwanese cinema is about to take off again and so orders that a director be kidnapped and held for ransom.

Diva Viva (宇宙歌女) is Wu Mi-sen's (吳米森) whimsical translation of the country's social and political chaos into a sci-fi comedy about a war between a singing alien and a hysterical mother played by musician Ma Nien-hsien (馬念先) in drag.

As for works by the up-and-coming generation of filmmakers, 36 films selected from among 115 entries will compete for NT\$3 million in prize money. The biggest surprise this year is the animation program, which offers more diversity in style and more maturity in technique and storytelling than ever. Experimental cinema, on the other hand, seems to have hit a slump in Taiwan, and there is an ongoing debate as to whether or not the experimental film award should be discontinued or expanded to include video art and multimedia.

Experimental director Lin Tay-jou (林泰州), Kao Chung-li and veteran filmmaker and festival curator Angelika Wang (王耿瑜) will examine this issue at the Eslite Bookstore Dunnan branch on July 26, while directors Ke Yi-cheng, Angelika Wang, Yang Li-chou and Wu Mi-sen, along with other past winners, will share their Golden Harvest Festival stories at the Eslite Bookstore Dunnan branch on July 27.

The festival will then tour the rest of the country next month and September.

FESTIVAL NOTES:

WHAT: The 30th Golden Harvest Awards for Outstanding Short Films (金穗獎)

WHEN: Today to July 31

WHERE: Chinese Taipei Film Archive (國家電影資料館), 4F, 7 Qingdao E Rd, Taipei City (台北市青島東路7號4樓); screening room at Eslite Bookstore Dunnan branch (誠品敦南店), B2, 245, Dunhua 5 Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段245號B2); screening room at Eslite Bookstore Xinyi branch (誠品信義店), 11 Songgao Rd, Taipei City (台北市松高路11號6樓)

TICKETS: Admission to all screenings and lectures is free
ON THE NET: www.ctfa.org.tw/30GH



Hostages to history in a time of troubles



La Fura dels Baus' version of 'Boris Godunov' probes terrorism and immerses audience members in an extreme experience

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Firing shots into the air, a group of Chechen rebels storm a theater in Moscow and take roughly 700 theatergoers hostage. Terrorists blow up commuter trains in Madrid. Two planes plow into the World Trade Center's twin towers in New York, killing nearly 3,000 people.

Terrorism, whether directly experienced by the few or seen on television by the many, is a fact of contemporary life. It is also the central theme of La Fura dels Baus docu-drama *Boris Godunov*, which begins next Friday at Taipei's National Theater.

"The show is a reflection on global terrorism, [with] archetypal characters," said director Alex Olle in a recent interview with the Spanish-language newspaper *Barceloca*.

Boris Godunov fuses a true-life event, the attack on the Moscow's Dubrovka Theater in October of 2002, with Alexander Pushkin's

play, which takes its title from the Czar of the same name, who gradually sinks into madness after murdering the Czarevich Dimitri to usurp the throne.

By blending the historical with the contemporary, the real with the fictive, La Fura creates a tragic parable about the quandary between means and ends and how corruption often breeds violence.

"Many times violence is used to gain power, not only through terrorism but also through states," Olle said.

But the play doesn't so much analyze the causes of terrorism as it shows how terrorism radically alters the people who perpetrate it, and the consequent effect on how we perceive the world.

The troupe's objective with *Boris Godunov* is to immerse the audience in an extreme experience and, in the process, return theater

to its cathartic roots.

The play opens with Godunov brooding over the prince's murder. Preoccupied with bad omens, the Czar fails to notice the balaclava-clad figures sneaking through the room and filling it with explosives. Gradually, the terrorists begin to move out into the audience, shifting the action from the Czar's lodgings to the Dubrovka Theater.

From this point on the audience experiences a simulation of the horrors suffered by the hostages in the Moscow theater: the appearance of the militants, the planting of bombs, the tension of the kidnapping and the arguments among the terrorists.

"[W]e give the terrorists some motives ... from the most mercenary terrorist — who could be on either side, to the widowed terrorist — acting more out of vengeance, or hate, or the person who [is doing it]

for some ideals," Olle said.

Though the spotlight shines squarely on the individual motives and internal disputes of the terrorists, La Fura's *Boris Godunov* suggests that the rationale for acts of terrorism have their roots in the foreign and domestic agendas of nation-states. As such, terrorism and its opponents are simply two different sides of the same tarnished coin.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Boris Godunov
WHERE: National Theater, Taipei City
WHEN: July 25 to July 27
TICKETS: NT\$500 to NT\$3,000 tickets, available through NTCH ticketing

Audiences come face-to-face with terrorism in La Fura dels Baus' updated performance of *Boris Godunov*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI ARTS INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

