

FILM REVIEW

From East Germany with love

Catherine Tate makes the best out of a bad situation when her family trades 1960s Yorkshire for life behind the Iron Curtain

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER



Catherine Tate's spirited performance is one of the few bright spots in a film that from almost every other perspective is just so totally wrong. The story of a teacher from Bingley, West Yorkshire, who transports his family to the German Democratic Republic (better known as East Germany) to live in a communist utopia, only to discover that the worker's paradise is nothing of the sort, seems hopelessly dated from the get-go, not simply because of the topic, but because the producers seem to be willfully ignorant of the last 20 years of European history.

There is nothing immoral about making a comedy about life under intolerable political regimes — after all, one only has to recall Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's 2006 *The Lives of Others* to realize the darkly comic potential that films set in such societies can provide. Unfortunately the makers of *Mrs. Ratcliffe's Revolution* are not only ignorant of history, both political and cinematic, but also seem to be uncertain exactly what sort of movie they are trying to make. If the whole thing had been

made as off-the-wall broad comedy, the film might just have passed muster, but attempts to give the situation a moral dimension make the film utterly unacceptable.

As for the performances, they are all solid if relatively uninspired. The one exception is Catherine Tate, whose Mrs. Ratcliffe, a sensible type of woman whose British grit is brought out by the absurd situations created by a world dominated by secret police and communist ideology, is quite well realized. Unfortunately the producers gave the film a big injection of arch humor that seems to have come directly from the *Carry On* movies of the early 1970s. At any moment you expect Kenneth Williams to come on wearing a garter strap and going "Ooooooh!" He doesn't, and more's the pity, as this might just provide some relief from this ham-fisted mess of a movie.

Instead, the moments of comedy are inter-cut with awful attempts at drama. The performers struggle manfully with the terrible material, but the days that you can make light of escaping over the Berlin wall by balloon or turning children into spies against their parents have well and truly gone. Audiences know too much about the horrors of totalitarian regimes and their efforts to keep their people in a state of terror to find this sort of thing even remotely funny.

Enough talent has been wasted in this mess of movie, don't waste your time as well.

A British communist, his wife and two daughters get more than they bargained for when they relocate to East Germany in search of a worker's paradise.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZEUS INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS



Film Notes

MRS RATCLIFFE'S REVOLUTION

DIRECTED BY: BILLE ELTRINGHAM

STARRING: CATHERINE TATE (DOROTHY RATCLIFFE), IAIN GLEN (FRANK RATCLIFFE), BRITTANY ASHWORTH (ALEX RATCLIFFE), HEIKE MAKATSCH (FRAU UNGER), JESSICA BARDEN (MARY RATCLIFFE)

RUNNING TIME: 102 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS



■ **The Dark Knight**
(黑暗騎士)
NT\$17,570,327



■ **Red Cliff**
(赤壁)
NT\$9,694,174

TAIPEI'S TOP FIVE

City cinema weekend box office takings
(July 19 and July 20)

Source: Group Power Entertainment Corp



■ **Journey to the Center of the Earth**
(地心冒險)
NT\$5,024,634



■ **Hancock**
(全民超人)
NT\$2,710,731



■ **Kung Fu Panda**
(功夫熊貓)
NT\$2,030,247

Sung Chun-so retrospective

Retrospectives of Taiwan's filmmakers are rare, so this collection of films from the Chinese Taipei Film Archive by director Sung Chun-so (宋存壽) is a welcome change. The Jiangsu-born, Hong Kong-trained colleague of famed directors King Hu (胡金銓) and Li Han-hsiang (李翰祥) only died two months ago aged 77, and the films to be screened in his honor largely span the earlier part of his directorial career, which ran from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. There are 14 full-length features and other activities, including an exhibition of scripts, posters and lobby cards and two discussions. Screenings are at the Spot theater in Taipei until next Wednesday. Full details at www.ctfa.org.tw/programming/pro_show.php?proID=98.



Will Smith, Johnny Depp and Eddie Murphy were the best paid Hollywood actors in the past year, according to *Forbes* magazine's special issue Entertainment All Stars.

Smith, 39, made US\$80 million between June 1, 2007 and June 1, 2008, thanks to blockbusters like *I Am Legend*, *Hancock* and *The Pursuit of Happyness*, for which he was nominated for best actor in the 2007 Oscars.

Depp, 45, who straddles both commercial movies — including the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series — and more challenging, independent roles, earned US\$72 million in the same period. Director **Tim Burton's** favorite actor, Depp was also

Rapper-turned-actor Will Smith topped a *Forbes* magazine list of Hollywood's moneymakers.

PHOTO: EPA

nominated to the 2007 Oscars for his starring role in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

Murphy, 47, despite his often criticized aggressive style of humor, is still highly marketable, earning US\$55 million in the past 12 months, mostly from the films he starred in, but above all for being Donkey's voice in the animated *Shrek* series of films.

Shrek the Third also made Canadian actor **Mike Myers** — the third top Hollywood moneymaker, along with Murphy at US\$55 million, despite his recent comedic flop *The Love Guru*.

And also thanks to *Shrek* and the voice of princess Fiona, **Cameron Diaz** was not far behind in earnings, with US\$50 million. She was followed by **Leonardo DiCaprio** with US\$45 million, **Bruce Willis** with US\$41 million, comedian **Ben Stiller** with US\$40 million and **Nicolas Cage** with US\$38 million, according to *Forbes*.

Sacha Baron Cohen, better known as Borat, has sold Fox film studios a comedy, *Accidenters*, about an ambulance-chaser-

turned-hero, which he will produce and possibly star in, *Variety* said on Tuesday.

The film is about a personal injury lawyer who becomes a hero among Los Angeles Hispanics for successfully defending a worker against a wealthy employer, but who in the process becomes the enemy of the city's elite.

Cohen, 36, last appeared on the big screen alongside **Johnny Depp** in *Sweeney Todd*.

He became a household name as the hilarious journalist in *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, which earned him the 2007 Golden Globe's best actor award.

Roger Ebert is leaving the balcony — but hinting that he's not finished with television.

The famed film critic announced Monday that he is cutting ties with the US program he and the late critic **Gene Siskel** made famous, a day after **Richard Roeper** said he was quitting the show.

In an e-mail to the Associated Press, Ebert said Disney-ABC Domestic Television, which owns

At the Movies With Ebert and Roeper, has decided to take the program in a new direction.

"I will no longer be associated with it," Ebert said.

Ebert started the show 33 years ago with co-host Gene Siskel, who was replaced by Roeper after his death.

He didn't immediately elaborate, but it was clear the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Chicago Sun-Times* critic wanted the show to remain as it was when he and Siskel, a fellow Chicago newspaper film critic, first hit the airwaves on PBS in 1975.

"Gene and I felt the formula was simplicity itself: Two film critics, sitting across the aisle from each other in a movie balcony, debating the new films of the week," Ebert wrote. "We developed an entirely new concept for TV." Ebert is a trademark holder on the signature "thumbs up-thumbs down" judgment that he and Siskel made part of each film review.

Roeper, a columnist at the *Chicago Sun-Times*, will leave the show this month after eight years,



Roger Ebert: The thumb will rise again.

PHOTO: REUTERS

according to a separate statement posted July 20 on the newspaper's Web site. Disney offered to extend his contract several months ago, but an agreement was never reached, he said in the statement.

Last year, as he negotiated a new contract with Disney-ABC Domestic Television, Ebert, according to the Walt Disney-owned company, had "exercised his right to withhold use of the 'thumbs' until" he had a new contract. Ebert subsequently has said the show could continue to use the "thumbs" during negotiations and that he never

withheld their use.

On Monday, he said he has plans for those famous digits.

"The trademark still belongs to me and Marlene Iglitz, Gene's widow, and the thumbs will return," he wrote. "We are discussing possibilities, and plan to continue the show's tradition. Disney cannot use the 'thumbs.'"

Ebert didn't elaborate on future possibilities. Nor did he say what — if any — role Roeper, whose work he praised, will have.

But Roeper, in his own announcement that he was leaving the program, hinted that perhaps his partnership with Ebert may not be over.

Ebert's announcement brings to a close a chapter in one of the longest running shows in television history. In 1975, Siskel and Ebert, two competing Chicago newspaper film reviewers, launched a program on Chicago's public broadcasting's WTTW. The two jumped to commercial television through the Tribune Co's TV syndication wing in 1982, switching to Disney in 1986.

—AGENCIES