

F I L M R E V I E W

Loud and proud

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Zero Chou delivers a realist portrait of lesbian life in Taiwan with the latest installation of her ongoing Rainbow Colors project, which comprises six films about homosexuality

After her 2007 movie *Spider Lilies* (刺青), which won last year's Berlinale Teddy Award for Best Feature Film, Zero Chou (周美玲) returns to the big screen with *Drifting Flowers* (漂浪青春).

In contrast to the surrealistic and metaphorical tones of *Spider Lilies*, Chou's latest work is a realistic and earnest portrait of lesbian life in Taiwan, told through three loosely connected stories.

The first story opens with two deeply attached sisters, 8-year-old Meigo (Pai Chih-ying, 白芝穎) and the beautiful, blind Jing (Serena Fang, 房思瑜), who works as a nightclub singer, struggling to make ends meet.

When the butch accordionist Diego (Chao Yi-lan, 趙逸嵐) comes into their lives, Meigo experiences her first lesbian crush. But as Jing embarks on a lesbian relationship with Diego, Meigo's affections quickly turn into jealousy, which leads to the sisters' painful separation.

Chapter two belongs to Lily (Lu Yi-ching, 陸奕靜), an Alzheimer's patient who struggles to cope with her disintegrating memory. When Yen (Sam Wang, 王學仁), her husband of convenience, comes



Film Notes

DRIFTING FLOWERS (漂浪青春)

DIRECTED BY: ZERO CHOU (周美玲)

STARRING: CHAO YI-LAN (趙逸嵐) AS DIEGO, SERENA FANG (房思瑜) AS JING, PAI CHIH-YING (白芝穎) AS MEIGO, LU YI-CHING (陸奕靜) AS LILY, SAM WANG (王學仁) AS YEN, HERB HSU (徐麗雯) AS YOUNG LILY

RUNNING TIME: 97 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN AND TAIWANESE WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

to visit, Lily mistakes him for her deceased lover Ocean.

Yen, who is living with AIDS, has given up on life after leaving his unfaithful boyfriend. Little by little, the two wounded friends form a companionship and

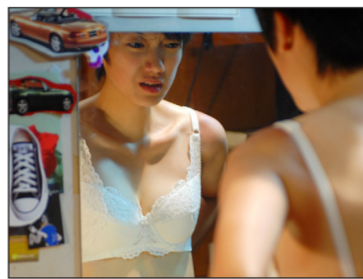
rediscover the will to live.

The final segment follows a younger Diego, who is confused, binds her breasts and struggles to accept her changing body and homosexuality. An encounter with a young Lily, who is a self-assured

lesbian showgirl, prompts Diego to embark on her life journey with courage and a sense of hope.

In terms of storytelling, *Drifting Flowers* sees a significant improvement over *Splendid Float* (豔光四射歌舞團, 2004) and *Spider Lilies* and is Chou's strongest feature film to date. Though melodramatic clichés sometimes dominate the first segment, the film's overall pace is smooth, and the garbled narrative construction of the director's previous works has morphed into a focused and concise approach.

The film touches on various aspects of homosexual life in Taiwan and ingeniously weaves them together in a fluent narrative flow. In the second segment, issues such as gay marriage, welfare provision for elderly gay



While all actors are fittingly cast, Chao Yi-lan is *Drifting Flowers*' most striking presence as an attractive young tomboy.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE 3RD VISION FILMS

couples, discrimination and AIDS are addressed with sincerity and empathy. Both veteran actress Lu Yi-ching and the talented amateur Sam Wang, a regular cast member in Chou's films, turn in affecting performances that make audiences laugh and move them to tears at the same time.

Diego's story articulates the life of a tomboy, a term used for butch lesbians, through tracking the panic and confusion that an alternative sexuality and identity and consequent familial and societal pressures can cause.

The plot may sound like an overused coming-of-age formula, but here it is part of the lesbian community's collective memory that is rarely, if ever, given a realistic cinematic representation.

A student at Taipei National University of the Arts' (國立台北藝術大學) theater department, newcomer Chao Yi-lan (趙逸嵐) is the film's most striking presence and creates a believable portrait of tomboys for Taiwanese queer cinema.

Chou uses a plebeian language to tell her protagonists' stories, which belong to the pasts, presents and futures of countless male and female homosexuals in Taiwan. The inhabitants of *Drifting Flowers* are not rootless abstractions, but real people who have hometowns and histories.

OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Meet Dave

Eddie Murphy has struggled a little of late. Missing out on a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *Dreamgirls*, some say, because of the immense crudity of his characters in *Norbit*, Murphy has chosen a better vehicle in *Meet Dave*. This is entirely appropriate because "Dave," a strangely dressed man who turns up in New York one day, is a vehicle, too — a spaceship, in fact, containing tiny aliens. This is a fun movie for all ages that makes much better use of Murphy's prodigious talent and without the flautent humor and rubber suits that have marked his films over the last decade or so.



The Violin

An unusual mixture of black-and-white photography, music and radicalism, *The Violin* stars a real-life violinist, the 81-year-old Don Angel Tavira, as a farmer and wandering musician who gets involved in the movement that attempted to oust a Mexican government 30 years ago. Scenes of brutality mix with a subtle tale of cunning as the old violinist and his family attempt to turn the tables on the military.



Memory

In this Thai thriller, an overworked psychiatrist at a Chiang Mai hospital is referred a case of a little girl who appears to have been abused. When he investigates, he discovers things are more sinister than even that, with something supernatural possibly preying on the child. There may be something even more sinister in store, too, given that the shrink fails to stop himself from getting it on with the little girl's mother. Some viewers may sense *The Sixth Sense* in all of this, but at least Bruce Willis didn't seduce anyone (even if he was a ghost).



The Room

A struggling family goes from bad to worse when a strange room appears in their house in this Belgian flick from 2006. With a failed composer father, his mistreated wife, a handicapped son and an unhappy pregnant daughter vying for the most-dysfunctional-family-member title, audiences will wonder if the mysterious room of the title is doing one victim a favor when he disappears through its door. This film made appearances at various genre film festivals but has failed to stir up much interest since then. Starts tomorrow.



Keroro the Movie 3

Keroro, better known to English-speaking manga/anime fans as "Sgt Frog," is one of the more bizarre Japanese animated characters to gain a following. The slovenly leader of a failed invasion force from a faraway planet, Sergeant Keroro makes do with wasting his time in between errands for a nice, ordinary Japanese family, despite having a team of crack soldiers at his call. In Part 3, Keroro and the gang end up at the Incan ruins of Machu Picchu on holiday, only to encounter strange forces that produce an "evil" Keroro who also wants to conquer Earth and kidnaps the "good" Keroro's hosts. Now there's a dilemma for the "good" Keroro. Screens with a *Keroro* short entitled *Warrior Keroro's Announcement! The Battle of the Warring State Pekopon*.



TAIPEI'S TOP FIVE

City cinema weekend box office takings

(Aug. 9 and Aug. 10)

Source: Group Power Entertainment Corp



■ **The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor** (神鬼傳奇3)
NT\$31,174,348



■ **The Dark Knight** (黑暗騎士)
NT\$4,591,730



■ **WALL-E** (瓦力)
NT\$2,383,288



■ **Wanted** (刺客聯盟)
NT\$1,731,163



■ **Made of Honor** (新郎不是我)
NT\$867,680

REEL NEWS



A coalition of disability groups blasted **Ben Stiller's** latest movie *Tropic Thunder* on Tuesday, slamming the spoof war film's repeated use of the word "retard" as "disgusting and appalling."

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) said in a statement it had rallied disability groups urging a boycott of the film, which is released in North America theaters later this week.

Protesters demonstrated at the Los Angeles premiere of the film on Monday, which was attended by *Meet the Parents*, *Night at the Museum* and *Zoolander* actor-director Stiller.

The associated has taken aim at *Tropic Thunder* for depicting a caricature of an intellectually disabled person — Simple Jack — played by Stiller's character, an egotistical Hollywood star seeking awards.

Although Stiller has said the sub-plot is intended as a satire on Hollywood, the associated described it as a

Ben Stiller is drawing flak for his new film's repeated use of the word "retard."

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG NEWS

"continuation of the horrifying portrayal of disabled characters in entertainment."

"AAPD is also disgusted at the use of the word 'retard' numerous times in the movie and promotional items for the film," the group said.

AAPD president Andrew Imparato, who met with studio backers Dreamworks last week to discuss the movie, slammed the film after viewing it on Monday. "Both the use of this word and the appalling portrayal of an intellectually disabled character in this movie are incredibly damaging to people with intellectual disabilities," Imparato said.

"Although the movie is considered satire, this depiction of a person with intellectual disabilities is far from funny."

Dreamworks has defended the film, insisting the humor is intended to lampoon actors rather than people with disabilities.

Tropic Thunder, which also stars **Jack Black** and **Robert Downey Jr.**, follows the fortunes of a group of actors who are sent to make a war film only to find themselves in the middle of a real-life conflict.

Two-time Oscar winner **Hilary Swank** has bought the rights for a film version of the best-selling book *French Women Don't Get Fat*, entertainment press reported



George Clooney has bought the book rights for a film about the detention and trial of Salim Ahmed Hamdan, above, a former driver for Osama bin Laden.

PHOTO: AP

on Wednesday.

Swank, an Academy Award winner for *Boys Don't Cry* and *Million Dollar Baby* could star in a screen adaptation of Mireille Guiliano's hit 2004 lifestyle tome, *Daily Variety* reported.

Guiliano, a former executive with champagne company Veuve Clicquot, scored a hit with her book, subtitled *The Secret of Eating for Pleasure* which offered insights into how French women manage to stay slim despite enjoying calorie-rich staples such as pastries and wine.

The book reached top spot on the *New York Times* non-fiction bestseller list and has sold more than two million copies worldwide to date.

Variety reported that the film version would be a romantic comedy about the boss of a champagne company.

George Clooney has snapped up the film rights for a book based on the detention and trial of **Osama bin Laden's** driver, it was reported on Wednesday.

Daily Variety said it was not clear what role Oscar-winning actor-director Clooney would take in the project, which will be based on **Jonathan Mahler's** book *The Challenge*.

The story spotlights the efforts of US Navy lawyer **Charles Swift** and Georgetown law professor **Neal Katyal** to secure a fair trial for **Salim Hamdan**, who was last week sentenced to less than five years in prison.

The sentence was later described by Swift as a "stunning rebuke" to the government's case against Hamdan. Prosecutors had demanded the Yemeni be jailed for 30 years, portraying him as a cunning al-Qaeda warrior.

According to *Variety*, Clooney could direct, write and star in the film. The report said Clooney was considered a perfect choice to play the role of the idealistic lawyer Swift.

Clint Eastwood's *Changeling*, starring **Angelina Jolie** as the mother of a missing boy, and

Darren Aronofsky's *The Wrestler*, featuring **Mickey Rourke** as a washed-up pro wrestler, are among the highlights at this year's New York Film Festival.

The festival announced its 28-film lineup on Wednesday, including a restored print of **Max Ophüls'** 1955 classic *Lola Montes*. The 46th annual event, run by the Film Society of Lincoln Center, will be held Sept. 26 to Oct. 12.

The opening-night film is *The Class*, **Laurent Cantet's** documentary-like drama about a year at a rough French high school. It won the top prize at this year's Cannes Film Festival.

The New York festival closes with *The Wrestler*, in which Rourke plays a former wrestling star now relegated to the bush leagues of his sport.

Changeling, based on a true story, is about a single mother whose 9-year-old son disappears in Los Angeles in 1928. Months later, police bring her a boy who claims to be her son, but she doesn't believe him and sets out to unravel the mystery with the help of a local minister played by **John Malkovich**.

Other prominent directors at the festival include **Steven Soderbergh**, **Mike Leigh** and **Wong Kar Wai** (王家衛).

—AGENCIES