

FILM REVIEW



Girls as sweet as candy

'Candy Rain' is as breezy, charming and empty as an extended music video

BY **HO YI**
STAFF REPORTER

Pretty-faced stars and idols-in-waiting, catchy tunes by indie musicians and bands plus slick MTV imagery. These are the elements you can expect in *Candy Rain* (花吃了那女孩), the feature debut by Taiwan's prolific commercial and music-video director Chen Hung-i (陳宏一). Constructed from four vignettes, the film is a breezy and lightweight lesbian flick that explores the relationship among eight young women in Taipei.

Based on the experiences of some of director Chen's lesbian friends, the film starts off with the burgeoning romance between Jessie (Belle Hsin), a small-town girl moving to Taipei, and Pon (Grace Chen), who had a secret crush on Jessie in high school. The puppy-love tale is sweetened with a clean, innocent look, though the helter-skelter sequences of everyday trifles may test audiences' patience.

The visual tone shifts to a more voguish,

MTV-aesthetic as story two introduces the 25-year-old U (Sandrine Pinna), an OCD-suffering chef seeking possible partners online in a room painted in black and white and decked out with a snowy-white bed that turns fluorescent at night. She meets a glamorous and assertive magazine editor named Lin (Waa Wei), but the two soon realize they would be better off apart.

The third and strongest segment of the quartet portraits lovers Spencer (Niki Wu) and Summer (Kao Yi-ling), who agree to separate for 10 years while the latter fulfills her societal responsibility: namely to get married and have babies. The intimate camera closely follows the couple and eloquently captures their doomed love.

Rounding out the lesbian love ballad is Ricky (Hong Kong's Kareena Lam). The butch lesbian and her seemingly endless succession of abusive relationships are tackled in an anime-informed manner, overdone in a way that is more irritating than witty.

Director Chen calls on a multitude of storytelling styles to put together a well-executed ballad on love accompanied by the music of indie luminaries such as Sandy Chen (陳珊妮), Deserts Chang (張懸) and Ciacia (何欣穗), as well as off-screen narrator Cheer Chen (陳綺貞). With its hip MTV sensibilities and faux Wong Kar-wai (王家衛) look, the film,

however, has all the faults one can detect in works of a commercial director building up his artistic career in an ivory-towered entertainment industry. The film is pretty and enjoyable to look at, but after a while, it gets tiring with erratic and strained scenes that are easily excisable and its too obvious metaphors: most notably the box of candy for delivery to a person named Candy Rain that loosely connects the segments.

Chen's ambitious exploration of the relationship between China and Taiwan, which he works into the story of these four lesbian couples, is little more than a hollow pitch line.

While the performances range between passable and engaging, Kao Yi-ling and Niki Wu grab most of the attention as a couple torn between love and society's demands and expectations. Despite a few strained moments, this segment has the melodramatic heft that allows it to be moving and amusing at the same time.

Hong Kong sweetheart Kareena Lam's butch lesbian character may seem grotesquely miscast to some, but the actress does come off as a comical tomboy whose over-the-top antics, annoying at times, are of a piece with the overly elaborate finale.

True to its name, *Candy Rain* is a pop-art confection that melts on the tongue and is immediately forgotten.

Film Notes

CANDY RAIN (花吃了那女孩)

DIRECTED BY: CHEN HUNG-I (陳宏一)

STARRING: GRACE CHEN (陳映蓉) AS PON, BELLE HSIN (辛佳穎) AS JESSIE, SANDRINE PINNA (張榕容) AS U, WAA WEI (魏如薔) AS LIN, KAO YI-LING (高伊玲) AS SUMMER, NIKI WU (吳立琪) AS SPANCER, KARENA LAM (林嘉欣) AS RICKY, CYNDI WANG (王心凌) AS RICKY'S GIRLFRIEND

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

RUNNING TIME: 102 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

Candy Rain marks commercial and music-video director Chen Hung-i's debut as a feature film director.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF A RED SOCIETY FILMS PRODUCTION

OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Cyborg She

Picture a Japanese romantic comedy based on the premise of *The Terminator* and you have *Cyborg She*. An inventor sends a "female" robot back in time to save himself from being killed, only for the younger version of the man to fall in love with the oddly familiar 'borg. But can she love him in return? It's a question put to the test when utter calamity strikes Tokyo. Warm humor, an accessible love story, a generous helping of reheated ideas from Western and Asian films alike and remarkable special effects brought plaudits for this film, which, in keeping with its eclectic frame of mind, is directed by a South Korean.



10 Promises to My Dog

This is also a Japanese love story between species, as it were, but of the canine variety. A girl adopts a stray dog on conditions laid down by her mother that she care for it properly. Eventually the mother dies, the girl grows up and leaves home to study, start relationships and everything else an adult does, placing pressure on her desire to care for the poor creature. It's a simple premise but one rarely covered in cute animal movies: Where should responsibility for pets end? Older kids will love this film, though the message is just as much for adults. The 10 promises, by the way, are on the film's Chinese-language Web site.



The Fox and the Child

Here's another cute animal movie, this time from France, though the animal is decidedly not a pet. A fox captivates the heroine of the title (perhaps it's because they have the same hair color) and they make friends after the girl gets lost one night. But friendship with a wild animal only goes so far, as she will find out all too soon. From the director of *March of the Penguins*, some critics were not taken with the mix of strange human behavior and sanitizing of Mother Nature, even in a children's film.



Inside

Taiwanese advertising for this short but sharp French bloodbath warns that pregnant women will not be admitted. That's a pity; it's not often the heroine of any movie, horror or otherwise, is fat bellied and on the verge of a quick trip to the hospital. For this homebound heroine, recently bereaved in a car accident, the challenge is to stay out of the morgue as a fetus-coveting psycho (Beatrice Dalle, who famously played an erotic psycho in *Betty Blue* two decades ago) closes in with scissors poised. Apparently Taiwan's censors resisted the temptation of using theirs.



Sorry If I Love You

In this Italian romantic comedy, viewers are invited to feel sorry for a bunch of male friends approaching middle age who are beginning to feel a little lost in the carnality department. One of the group has an accident with a motorscooter, whose owner is a sexy and adventurous 17-year-old. "Though almost adults," says the promo, "[she and her friends] can still get up to the most incredible mischief." A-ha! Color by numbers from this point; the only challenge is guessing whether there will be a moral sting in the tail. Heartthrob Raoul Bova (*Alien vs Predator*, *Under the Tuscan Sun*) stars as the smitten older man.



TAIPEI'S TOP FIVE

City cinema weekend box office takings

(Sept. 6 and Sept. 7)

Source: Group Power Entertainment Corp



■ **Cape No. 7**
(海角七號)
NT\$6,037,381



■ **You Don't Mess With the Zohan**
(特勤沙龍)
NT\$3,165,153



■ **Mamma Mia!**
(媽媽咪呀！)
NT\$2,644,853

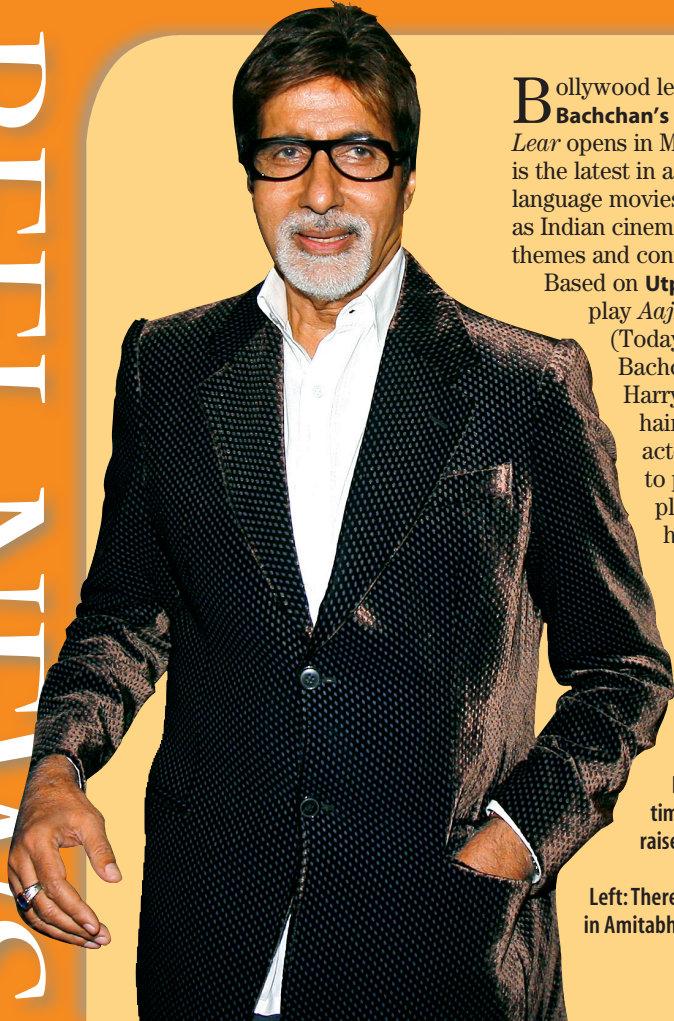


■ **Orz Boyz**
(囧男孩)
NT\$1,317,283



■ **The Dark Knight**
(黑暗騎士)
NT\$924,286

REEL NEWS



Bollywood legend **Amitabh Bachchan's** new film *The Last Lear* opens in Mumbai today. It is the latest in a string of English-language movies to hit the screens as Indian cinema explores new themes and content.

Based on **Utpal Dutt's** Bengali play *Aajker Shahjahan* (Today's Shahjahan), Bachchan, 66, plays Harry, a retired, silver-haired Shakespearean actor who yearns to play the English playwright's tragic hero King Lear.

The film, first shown to critical acclaim at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival, is a far cry from

Right: Jet Li is taking time off from acting to raise money for his charity.

PHOTO: AP

Left: There's no singing or dancing in Amitabh Bachchan's latest film.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Bollywood's usual formula of lavish, set-piece Hindi song and dance routines.

It is Bachchan's first full-length feature film in English in his glittering four-decade-long career.

Even though the popularity here of song, dance and romance "masala" movies is unlikely to fade anytime soon, Bollywood watchers believe that Bachchan's involvement could prompt more filmmakers to follow suit.

This year's Toronto film festival features a documentary about the celebrity we all hear far too much about. It's not easy being **Paris Hilton**, always being photographed by the paparazzi doing things as mundane as ordering a hamburger at a drive-in.

Paris, Not France, a documentary about the life and business of being Paris Hilton, debuted on Tuesday at the Toronto International Film Festival. From one perspective, it doesn't seem like much fun being a 27-year-old global celebrity.

The movie from director **Adria Petty**, daughter of rocker **Tom Petty**, shows Hilton at work on red carpets and at home with her

family and friends. Petty spent a year documenting Hilton's life and came away with an insider's view.

Hilton, derided by some as a spoiled rich kid with little real talent but adored by her fans, is given largely sympathetic treatment.

Petty said the documentary is designed not to sway Hilton doubters but to entertain. Petty wanted to make this generation's *Truth or Dare*, referring to **Madonna's** behind-the-scenes look at her 1990 *Blond Ambition* Tour.

Hilton discusses her infamous sex tape, growing up in the media glare and her critics and fans. Petty follows Hilton as she promotes products that bear her name such as perfume, television shows, a book and album.

The business of being Hilton seems to carry on non-stop. In one scene, a makeup artist prepares Hilton for a public appearance — while she's asleep.

In other Toronto Film Festival news, **Steven Soderbergh's** *Che* Guevara film biography *Che* has found a US distributor that will release it in theaters this December

to qualify for the Academy Awards.

IFC Films announced on Wednesday that it acquired US rights to the two-part, four-and-a-half hour saga, which stars **Benicio Del Toro** as the Argentine doctor who became a hero of Fidel Castro's Cuban revolution and a global icon.

The film will play a one-week qualifying run in Los Angeles and New York in December for Oscar consideration.

Che earned Del Toro the best-actor prize in May at the Cannes Film Festival, where the film premiered. The acquisition was announced at the Toronto International Film Festival, where *Che* also screened.

"*Che* is nothing less than the film event of the year," said Jonathan Sehring, IFC Films president. "By giving us the rise and fall of one of the great icons of history, Steven Soderbergh and Benicio Del Toro ... have humanized him and given audiences around the world something that will be discussed for years to come."

Chinese action star **Jet Li** (李



連杰) said on Wednesday he wants to cultivate the spirit of philanthropy among Asians and has taken this year off from making movies to focus on his One Foundation charity.

"I don't need to wait till I am retired to help the world," Li said at the Forbes Global CEO Conference, an international gathering of top corporate executives in Singapore.

Li founded One Foundation in 2007, which at the moment is focused mainly on aiding charitable causes in China. Li said he plans to eventually set up branches in the rest of Asia.

The foundation has raised about US\$14.6 million to help with rebuilding efforts following the devastating earthquake in China's Sichuan province in May, Li said.

—AGENCIES