

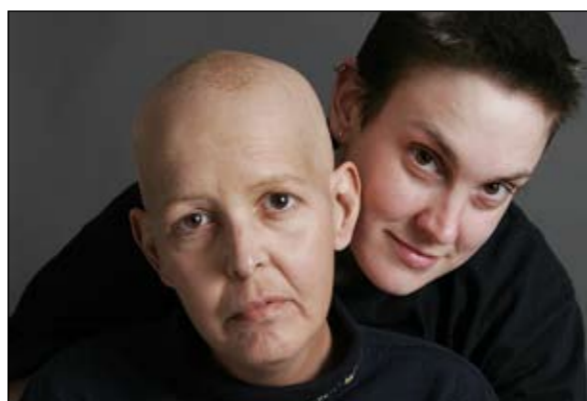


She's a Boy I Knew, by Canadian director Gwen Haworth.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WMW

The annual Women Make Waves Film Festival continues to explore feminism and issues related to sexuality, with a special focus this year on South Korean filmmakers

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



Freeheld, the Oscar-winning documentary short by Cynthia Wade.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WMW

OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

The House Bunny

This Anna Faris vehicle looks like junk judging from the trailer, but early reviews are very affectionate. Faris is an uber-dumb Playboy Bunny who gets ejected from Hugh Hefner's digs and responds by teaching a sorority full of gormless young ladies to triumph over their apparent sexlessness. In turn, she learns that making yourself smarter has its advantages. Sounds like *Revenge of the Nerds* meets *Legally Blonde*, which, come to think of it, might be a good thing. And it's no accident: The latter film and this one share the same screenwriters.



20th Century Boys

Nobody quite embraces the apocalypse and loss of innocence like the Japanese, and here's another movie sourced from a classic manga to prove it. Childhood friends create a fantasy world — complete with an unsettling symbol — that imagines dreadful events befalling the planet. After reuniting as adults, they discover that their youthful fantasies are becoming reality and that the world faces annihilation at the hands of a cult leader/terrorist called Friend who has accessed their past. The film concludes with spectacular and disturbing scenes of destruction and mayhem, but hope remains: Part 2 is on the way.



City of Ember

An intricate underground city not unlike the one envisioned by the Artilleryman in the book of *The War of the Worlds* is the setting for this futuristic, family-ish movie. On the surface of the Earth some kind of apocalyptic event has forced humans underground and to accept the challenges that go with it. How else could the city tolerate Bill Murray as its eventual mayor? Two hundred years on, two precocious children find clues that suggest things are looking very bad for the community, not helped by collapsing infrastructure and predatory creatures roaming the outskirts. Also stars Martin Landau and Tim Robbins (who, by the way, played the Artilleryman redux in Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*).



Max Payne

No, this videogame-cum-movie is not directed by Uwe Boll. Mark Wahlberg is the title character, out for his own brand of justice after his wife and baby are murdered. Like *City of Ember*, this movie privileges style and heat over content and light and may delight budding production designers as Max pursues crooks at an evil company that produces a terrifying, unpredictable drug for military purposes. Lots of action for the faithful, but it seems we'll have to wait until Gaspar Noe directs *Grand Theft Auto IV* for a truly envelope-pushing movie based on a format that always lent itself to addiction and robotic violence, not real emotion.



Planet B-Boy

A revelatory, wide-ranging documentary on breakdancing, this might be the best release of the week. Those put off breakdancing for life after watching fluff like the Cannon studio's *Breakin'* and *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo* in the mid-1980s might find themselves converted, despite themselves, after watching this. Superb dancers from around the world strive to reach the finals of the world competition in Germany, with the viewer intimately following five of the crews, including Japanese and South Koreans. *Variety* points out that the director opted for the dancers to show their moves without the hype of excessive editing or close-ups, which should please dance aficionados.



Dorothy Mills

A French production set in Ireland supposedly based on an incident in the US, the title refers to a creepy-looking girl who is seemingly possessed, while the story has a psychologist attempting to reach her through her *Sybil*-like battery of sinister multiple identities — but not necessarily to the delight of the *Wicker Man*-like locals, who may have a vested interest in keeping some nasty secrets buried within her. Not a favorite among the folks at Tourism Ireland, this movie was also released as *Dorothy*.



Different movies, but the same wavelength

Steve Haworth, a filmmaker in Vancouver, turned the camera on himself and his family when he decided to undergo a long process that saw him become Gwen.

Kyle, a 15-year-old girl living near Austin, Texas, reveals the everyday discrimination she has to deal with as one of the more than 10 million children with gay or lesbian parents in the US.

These are two of the stories moviegoers will see at the Women Make Waves Film Festival (WMW, 女性影展), now in its 15th year. In addition to its annual highlighting of a wide breadth of issues related to gender and sexuality, this year's event also turns the spotlight on female filmmakers in South Korea noted for their diverse styles and polished productions.

Selected films in the festival's Body, Family and Desire section reflect and reexamine how the traditional familial structure and legal and social systems have been either fundamentally changed or challenged in the face of diverse sexual landscapes. *Queer Spawn* takes an intimate and revealing look at the lives of teenagers who have lesbian or gay parents in the US. Oscar-winning documentary *Freeheld* chronicles Detective Lieutenant Laurel Hester's struggle to transfer her pension to her lesbian partner after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. The most moving moments in the film take place in the courtroom, where straight male police officers all come out to fight for their dying colleague.

Through one-on-one interviews, archival family footage and animation, *She's a Boy I Knew* goes far beyond a mere account of director Gwen Haworth's biological transition from male to female. The emotionally charged film candidly shows the frustrations, fears, angers, understanding and support experienced by Haworth and her parents, sisters and wife. It allows audiences to come close to a transsexual's life and to question our underlying assumptions about gender identity.

Two women directors take a road trip across the US in *Bi the Way*, trying to seek answers to the question of whether bisexuality is just a passing fad. One of the witnesses they locate believes that for the younger generation, choosing to be bi, gay or straight is like deciding to have Chinese or Italian food for dinner.

Feminism and other women-related subjects are explored in films such as *We Want Rose Too*, a visually striking documentary that mixes animation, historical footage and television commercials to examine the changes brought by the sexual revolution and feminist movement in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s. *Over the Hill*, meanwhile, shows how the beauty industry in Los Angeles sets standards not only for women's faces and figures but for more intimate parts of their bodies as well.



Lionesses is an award-winning short by South Korean director Hong Jae-hee.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WMW

On the fictional side, multiple award-winning *Mermaid* by Russian director and writer Anna Melikian is a whimsical and dreamlike tale about the journey of Alisa, a girl with magic powers, from her seashore shack to Moscow. The story is entertainingly well-scripted and enriched by an imaginative visual sensibility.

Artemisia (艾草), by Taiwan's young filmmaker Chiang Hsiu-chiung (姜秀瓊), is a well-executed drama on Ai-tsau, a representative of the first generation of career women in Taiwan, who strives to adapt to an ever-changing society and make peace with her

children who have been raised with values and world views different from her own.

The main attraction this year is productions by South Korean female directors who create new faces and roles for women rather than complying with the archetypes used by mainstream media. Based on a true story, *Forever the Moment* is a touching drama about three former athletes-turned-housewives returning to the field to lead the women's handball team to the 2004 Athens Olympics.

Both *The Wonder Years* and *Before the Summer Passes Away* exemplify a common

FESTIVAL NOTES:

WHAT: The 15th Women Make Waves Film Festival 2008 (2008第十五屆女性影展)

WHEN: Today to Oct. 26

WHERE: Shin Kong Cineplex, Taipei (台北新光影城), 4F and 5F, 36 Xining S Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧南路36號4-5樓)

TICKETS: NT\$150 for weekday matinee screenings; NT\$200 for weekday evening and weekend screenings, available through NTCH ticket outlets or at www.artstick.com.tw

ON THE NET: www.wmw.com.tw

feature in the works of contemporary South Korean women filmmakers who reject the genres of melodrama or romantic comedy and choose to portray the lives of women through more realistic approaches.

Among the selected South Korean shorts, surrealist animation *Things She Can't Avoid in the City* pictures a woman who can only afford to rent a house that's on the verge of being demolished and whose relationship with her cat boyfriend is about to collapse. Award-winning *Lionesses* is a thrilling drama about a housewife who uses cannibalism to fight back against her violent husband.

Women Make Waves will tour the country from Oct. 27 to Dec. 31. For more information, go to the event's bilingual Web site at www.wmw.com.tw.

Lights, camera, choreography

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

Dancing With 37 Arts (37ARTS 舞者紀事), a documentary by Lee Chien-chang (李建常) and Blook Tseng (曾薇竹), is a riveting look at one of the best dancers Taiwan has ever produced, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and Martha Graham Dance Company alumnus Sheu Fang-yi (許芳宜), as she embarks upon the next stage of her career.

The camera follows Sheu and her partner, choreographer Bulareyaung Pagarlava (布拉瑞瑪), to New York City in the summer of 2007 to take up a two-month residency at the Baryshnikov Arts Center on 37th Street in Manhattan, and then back to Taiwan as they rehearse for the production that will launch their revived company, LAFA & Artists, in January this year.

Sheu was the first Asian artist, and the first dancer, to be awarded a residency at the Baryshnikov center. She invited Bula, theater director Lee, gymnast Huang Ming-cheng (黃明正) and dancer Chiang Pau-shu (江保樹) to join her. For Sheu and Bula, the New York sojourn was a chance to work on pieces for the

company's debut. But it was also two months of almost 24-hour togetherness that would strain their personal and professional relationship.

The film mixes segments of the January performances — including a lovely shot in the opening montage of Sheu perched like a butterfly on the edge of a table in Bula's *The Single Room*, arms and legs gently moving in the air — with rehearsals and private moments in New York and in Taipei. Most of the scenes center around the production of Bula's new piece, *37 Arts*.

Lee and Tseng provide a first-hand look at the struggles of a small company: the star who has to be dancer, mother hen, publicist and fund-raiser all in one; the hard-pushing choreographer who pitches in backstage to sew a costume onto a dancer; young performers striving to meet professional standards; dancers who perform despite illness and injuries; and the last-minute crises that threaten to derail the opening night.

Dancing With 37 Arts offers a rare glimpse into the world of dancers, and into the life of a woman whose dedication and drive are legendary, a woman who says she only feels

relaxed and at home on stage. It's a film that should be in the library of every performing arts and dance school in the world.

The film will be shown tonight at 7pm and on Oct. 25 at 10pm.

Dancing With 37 Arts is a documentary about Taiwan's renowned dancer Sheu Fang-yi.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WMW



It's sink or swim in the race to sexual maturity

'Water Lilies,' French director Celine Sciamma's debut movie, looks coldly at the journeys of sexual exploration undertaken by a group of synchronized swimmers

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

A debut effort by director Celine Sciamma, *Water Lilies* (Naissance des Pieuvres) is an impressive little film about the hell that is the slow and confused process of sexual discovery.

Set against the background of a synchronized swimming program for schoolchildren, the film opens to scenes of writhing bodies and the bright, grease painted and utterly artificial smiles that seem to be the peculiar motif of this bizarre sport.

Beneath the paint and the smiles are the girls who are about to become women, inhabiting a locker-room world as harsh as, and certainly more poisonous than, the male equivalent. This



is not a French version of *Mean Girls*, and Pauline Acquart (as Marie) is vastly more interesting to watch than Lindsay Lohan, as she

struggles to come to terms with a crush on synchronized swim team captain Floriane and her friendship with the sexually precocious but

Film Notes

WATER LILIES

DIRECTED BY: CELINE SCIAMMA

STARRING: PAULINE ACQUART (MARIE), LOUISE BLACHERE (ANNE), ADELE HAENEL (FLORIANE)

RUNNING TIME: 85 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN FRENCH WITH CHINESE SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY



Water Lilies' characters inhabit a locker-room world as harsh as, and certainly more poisonous than, the male equivalent.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CIMAGE

already has the body of a woman, and is learning to manipulate the weapons of her sexuality. Floriane knows the power of her body over both men and women and uses it mercilessly to get what she wants, developing a cruel hold over Marie that forms the core of the picture.

Marie, thoughtful and sensitive, is looking for love, and makes herself a willing victim.

Anne, eager for sexual experience, finds herself betrayed by her own lusts and looks for solace in her friendship with Marie. They are nibbling at the edges of adult sexual relationships and every tentative step requires a merciless determination that is likely to wound both themselves and their closest friends. And in the pool, the girls dance, their perfectly poised bodies held up by the violent agitation of their limbs beneath the surface.

Marie, Floriane and Anne seem to inhabit a world without adults and are left to sort out their own problems in the insulated

environment of the locker room and the occasional house party. But it is the very narrowness of this focus that provides the appeal of Sciamma's film, as it allows many small and telling details of the emotional maelstrom that is adolescent sexuality to be shown, unobstructed by the distractions of a wider social milieu.

There is a strong lesbian undercurrent in *Water Lilies*, but the film manages to reach beyond this narrow category and is a contemplative exploration of adolescence, cramming many thoughtful observations into its 85 minutes. The story does not arrive at any particular conclusions, but as with sexual discovery, it is the process that is most interesting.