





# Love

## changes nothing

*Music video director Leading Lee's debut feature, a forced tale about a woman's search for love, is a failed attempt to attract a young urban demographic*

BY **HO YI**  
STAFF REPORTER

**With** heavyweight producer Hsu Li-kong (徐立功) and seasoned television commercial and music video director Leading Lee (李鼎) at the helm, this debut feature should have been a winner — a pop-idol-encrusted cast acting out the familiar plotline of a woman's search for self-discovery and true love. Unfortunately, the film's unfocused script, empty visuals and stiff performances mean *My So Called Love* is likely to be regarded as a regrettable offering in Hsu's otherwise successful producing career, which includes such titles as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (臥虎藏龍) and *The River* (河流).

This film follows Kitty (Barbie Hsu, 徐熙媛), the pop star and actress better known as Big S (大S), and her 10-year journey to find love. First up is high-school sweetheart Liang (Eddie Peng, 彭于晏). Unlike many hormone-charged teenagers, the delectably tanned Liang is a well-mannered gentleman who loves Kitty — but in a platonic way.

Guo is Kitty's second amour, whom she first encounters when she is forced to prostitute herself over the Internet to make ends meet while Liang is away on military service. Experienced in the game of romance and desire, the older Guo is a charming yuppie who treasures lust over love.

Fast-forward a decade and Kitty has grown into a successful businesswoman, but still finds herself unable to escape her love-hate relationship with Guo. Last but not least in the succession of paramours is the younger Sunshine (Tung Ming-hsiang, 東明相), a girl who gives Kitty hope again. Tung, who's hearing-impaired both on and off screen, is warm, loving and seems to embody everything Kitty seeks in life — a home and unconditional love.

Based on the novel by pop music composer and lyricist Hsu Wei-ching (許華晴), which is in turn based on a true story, the film is ambitious in its attempt to portray women in a contemporary light by touching upon quasi-feminist issues such as sexuality and the changing concept of what constitutes a family and home. But despite the film's technical polish, the aimless story soon begins to gnaw away at its watchability, which is eroded even further by forced plotlines and dialogue that is both lifeless and somewhat pretentious. As an example, just imagine the following scene: a Don Giovanni-type piles tomes of literature onto the backseat of his luxury vehicle to impress the ladies. The young woman he is courting picks up one of the books and, as if on cue, asks innocently, "What is love?"

In terms of acting the cast is incapable of rescuing the flat, formulaic characters from disaster. Chang looks ridiculous in his portrayal of a bad-boy torn between love and desire. Promising actor Peng is dealt another career setback after his turn in last year's disastrous rom-com *My DNA Says I Love You* (基因決定我愛你). Judging from her unintentionally amusing yet still dreadful portrayal of Kitty's 18-year-old self, Barbie Hsu shows that her years of soap opera experience have yet to qualify her as a serious actress.

Audiences sometimes assume that when a music video director turns his eye to the big screen, the end product will be all looks and no content. *My So Called Love* will not dispel that notion.

**The lifeless characters in *My So Called Love* are poorly played by a cast of pop idols.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZOOM HUNT INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS

Film Notes

MY SO CALLED LOVE (愛的發聲練習)

DIRECTED BY: LEADING LEE (李鼎)

STARRING:

BARBIE HSU (徐熙媛) AS KITTY, EDDIE PENG (彭于晏) AS LIANG, CHANG HSIAO-CHUAN (張孝全) AS GUO, TUNG MING-HSIANG (東明相) AS SUNSHINE

RUNNING TIME: 120 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

## The horror, the horror

Thai/Taiwanese joint effort 'The Fatality' seeks to ride on the global reputation of Thailand's ghost cinema

BY **HO YI**

STAFF REPORTER

Touted as Asian horror's first Thai/Taiwanese collaboration, *The Fatality* (絕魂印) aims to tap the international reputation of Thailand's renowned ghost cinema. But the film turned out a rudderless befuddling mess, perhaps because of the curiously large number of directors involved.

The film begins with He Zhi-rong (Wu Ke-qun (吳克群), a grubby-looking man who has lost the will to live and drifts aimlessly through the streets of Taipei. After attempting suicide He mysteriously wakes up in a hospital in Thailand as a man named Asanee. Assisted by Stanley (Matt Wu (吳中天), a doctor who initially seems unconcerned about his patient's welfare, He gradually settles into the life of Asanee and soon has everything that he didn't in his previous life: a beautiful wife, Nakun (Pichanart Sakhakorn), and a stable job as a public servant.

Life is good until Asanee starts seeing ghosts and other supernatural sights. He realizes that by the power invested in a birthmark on his arm, he is fated to seal death certificates for the soon-to-be deceased in an office-like space within the ghost world, which he can access because of his supernatural powers.

It doesn't take long before Asanee, who has become the bureaucratic incarnation of the Grim Reaper, begins abusing his power by taking the lives of terminally ill patients who beg for his help to end their suffering. Meanwhile, Nakun secretly plots against her husband with her lover

while the omniscient Stanley waits to come to He's rescue.

Audiences are likely to start fidgeting in their seats 10 minutes into this film, filled with the unsettling feeling that they are watching a movie made up of nothing more than far-fetched plot twists and dull images that barely support

the narrative. The viewer begins to question whether even one of *The Fatality's* oversized ensemble of directors had any sense of how to construct a story.

Looking either sullen or bewildered throughout the film, the performances from Mando-pop singer Wu Ke-qun (吳克群),

Taiwanese actor Matt Wu (吳中天) and Sakhakorn of Thailand are consistently dull.

A word of advice to aspiring directors in the music video and television commercial business such as Kuang Shen (鄺盛): before venturing into cinema, think twice about your goals and, at the very least, develop a directing methodology that suits feature films.

Film Notes

THE FATALITY (絕魂印)

DIRECTED BY:

KUANG SHEN (鄺盛), LIN TZU-LIANG (林子亮), LIANG HUNG-CHIH (梁宏志) AND TIWA MOETHAISONG

STARRING:

WU KE-QUN (吳克群) AS HE ZHI-RONG AND ASANEE, PICHANART SAKHAKORN AS NAKUN, MATT WU (吳中天) AS STANLEY

LANGUAGE:

IN MANDARIN AND THAI WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

RUNNING TIME: 97 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY



The acting is too ghostly to watch in *The Fatality*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SKY FILMS

## OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

### Beverly Hills Chihuahua

This is the latest in a lengthening line of live-action "talking animal" movies that started with *Babe*. The plot starts with the title: a prissy, pampered but charming Chihuahua (Drew Barrymore) is taken south of the border by her owner's niece, where she gets lost and runs into all sorts of trouble, not unlike the misadventure depicted in *Babe: Pig in the City*. There are stars galore in this canine caper, but the biggest question is why celebrated Hispanic actor/director/activist Edward James Olmos would contribute his voice to Disney fluff that paints Mexico as a place gone to the dogs.



### Wushu 武術

The title and promotional literature scream "Hong Kong action flick" but this one is a little out of the ordinary and rates a wider audience. Described as a coming of age drama in martial clothing, *Wushu* charts friendships among students who eventually use their fighting skills and sense of righteousness to tackle a sinister organization targeting children. Stars the incomparable Sammo Hung (洪金寶) as the father of brothers who get in the thick of the action, as well as several young, real-life martial arts champions. Directed by one-time Australian stuntman and wushu practitioner Antony Szeto and executive produced by Jackie Chan (成龍).



### Tokyo!

A French production, *Tokyo!* offers three off-kilter portraits of the city by directors Michel Gondry (*Be Kind Rewind*), Leos Carax (*Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*) and Bong Joon-ho (*The Host*). Gondry's segment has a Japanese couple arriving in the city and finding the going quite tough — before a surreal change takes place. The Carax short is anarchic and confrontational: a grisly creature emerges from nowhere to insult and cajole Tokyosiders. Bong finishes the trilogy with a love story whose hero is agoraphobic but who still tries to get the girl (his Cupid turns out to be an earthquake). Don't be put off by the bland, congenial poster and ads in the newspapers; this is a quality urban ode with attitude and real teeth.



### The Good, the Bad, the Weird

A top earner at home and billed as South Korea's most expensive production, this hybrid of Sergio Leone and Korean quirkiness reimagines the spaghetti western in Chinese desert locales and serves up grand entertainment. The three titular characters get caught up in a race for ancient loot in prewar Manchuria as the Japanese tighten their grip on the area, a contest that triggers elaborate fights and stunts. Critically acclaimed, this is a film that deserves to be seen in a big theater. Directed by Kim Jee-woon, who made the formidable psychological thriller *A Tale of Two Sisters*.



## Restless hearts, tortured lives

BY **IAN BARTHOLOMEW**  
STAFF REPORTER

*Beyond the Years* (Chun Nyun Hack), the 100th film by prolific South Korean director Im Kwon Taek, takes as its theme the lives of traveling performers specializing in the traditional Korean musical art form of *pansori*. It is an assured work by a master craftsman, and a return to the themes that Im looked at in his most critically acclaimed film, *Sopyonje* (1993). But its leisurely pace and the almost documentary detail with which it depicts *pansori* makes this film one mainly for the art-house crowd.

Im is clearly very much at home with his subject matter and feels little need, or inclination, to rush his story, which is filled with a mood of nostalgia for beauty unattained and the cruel effects of time. It tells a story of Dong-ho (Jo Jae Hyeon), the son of an itinerant *pansori* master Yoo Bong (Im Jin-taek), and his adoptive sister Song-hwa (Oh Jung-hae), who their father hopes will become a great *pansori* singer in her own right. The pressure of his father's ambition and unhealthy infatuation with his daughter drives Dong-ho away, and in a drunken evening with an old rival for his sister's affections, he learns of his sister's blindness, her failure to achieve stardom and the destruction of the idyllic location of his youthful travels. The tale of brother and sister has the grand, sweeping lines of an epic, and the drunken narrative provides moments of bitter humor. Nothing is made explicit, with Im's camera content to linger over images that seem inspired by the formal beauty of traditional ink-wash painting, and in extended takes of the formal and demanding rendition of *pansori* classics, many telling the stories taken from Chinese epics such as *The Three Kingdoms* (三國演義). These long takes, though culturally edifying, lack a dramatic interest that might integrate them more intimately into the narrative. Im seems content to use this footage simply to enrich the mood of nostalgia and to sound a despairing note as to the high price that

a love of the past can exact on the present. When the story returns to the present, Dong-ho, while revisiting the once-idyllic places of his youth, sees the depredations that progress has wrought on the landscape.

*Beyond the Years* is very much an old man's film — Im is after all 72 — and while it longs for a past even as it acknowledges its cruelties, it holds out little hope for the future. Yet all this sorrow is made into something quite beautiful in Im's assured hands.



Jo Jae Hyeon, left, and Oh Jung-hae star in director Im Kwon Taek's *Beyond the Years*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CINEPLEX