

F I L M R E V I E W

# A love song from Kaohsiung

'Sumimasen, Love' is a youthful romance in the vein of 'Serendipity' and 'Before Sunrise'

BY HO YI  
STAFF REPORTER



Sumimasen, Love stars relative newcomer Wu Huai-chung alongside Japanese actress Tanaka Chie, now a household in Taiwan name after her role in the summer box office sensation Cape No. 7.

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After his messy genre-fusing feature debut *Exit No. 6* (六號出口), young Taiwanese director Lin Yu-hsien (林育賢) returns with a romance, *Sumimasen, Love* (對不起，我愛你). As one of eight projects being subsidized by the Kaohsiung City Government to promote tourism in the harbor city, this lighthearted sketch about young love is pleasant enough to look but thin in content and emotion.

The film has a rather minimalist plot. Tanaka Chie moves to Taipei to study Mandarin and is unexpectedly cast as the leading actress in a movie. Wu Huai-chung wants to be a filmmaker but works as a part-time film projectionist in Kaohsiung. Chie yearns for a break from gloomy Taipei and visits the sunny southern city. She loses her purse and meets Wu, who offers to give her a NT\$500 bill, on which he asks her to write her name and phone number. The two roam the city, sharing secrets and feelings, and a budding romance develops. By the end of the day, the two young lovebirds believe they will meet again when destiny finds a way to return the NT\$500 bill to Wu.

*Sumimasen, Love* feels like a pastiche of the 2001 romantic comedy *Serendipity* — which employed the bill with the name and phone number device and the theme of predestined love — and Richard Linklater's 1995 *Before Sunrise*. Like Linklater's romantic drama, nothing much happens in *Sumimasen, Love*. Chie and Wu walk and talk while wandering through beautifully shot landscapes, although without the snappy dialogue and interesting conversations between the characters played by Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy.

In the technical department, the editing is smooth and the visuals are pleasant, aided by what some might find to be an excessive use of hand-held shots that produce an intimate, documentary feel. Yet the film suffers from a lack of genuine emotions. The conversations strike one as lifeless and stiff, as if they were copied from a sentimental teenager's diary. The two leads are often seen struggling with gestures of affection seen not in real life but in television commercials. Such flaws are likely to make it hard for most viewers to become engaged in the story and cause many of them to fidget in their seats or fall asleep.

Lin established himself as a promising talent with his popular drama-driven documentary *Jump! Boys* (翻滾吧！男孩) in 2005. A more mature director may emerge when he masters the ability to transfer the right amount of real-life emotions into a fictional story — not as much as in *Exit No. 6*, and not as little as in *Sumimasen, Love*.

Film Notes

SUMIMASEN, LOVE (對不起，我愛你)

DIRECTED BY: LIN YU-HSIEN (林育賢)

STARRING: TANAKA CHIE AS TANAKA CHIE, WU HUAI-CHUNG (吳懷中) AS WU HUAI-CHUNG

RUNNING TIME: 75 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN, JAPANESE AND TAIWANESE WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

## Politics as theater

Laurence Lau mines the assassination attempt on former president Chen Shui-bian for his latest crime thriller

BY HO YI  
STAFF REPORTER

President Xiong is losing ground to his opponent in the upcoming presidential election. "How do we win this time?" the president and his subordinates wonder. The solution: a faked attempt on his and the vice president's lives that will make the opposition look bad and win Xiong sympathy votes.

Xiong and Vice President Hsia are shot during a campaign parade one day before the election and are rushed to a hospital. Neither is seriously wounded. The following day they win the election by a narrow margin.

Sound familiar?

Beating Taiwanese filmmakers to the chase, Hong Kong director Laurence Lau (劉國昌) has made a film inspired by the 2004 assassination attempt on then-President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and Vice President Annette Lu (呂秀蓮), which many of their political opponents allege was staged. But *Ballistic* (彈道) is not a film in the vein of Oliver Stone's *JFK*. Lau merely uses this conspiracy theory as the setting for a crime thriller that offers a comfortably simple view of the world, one where it's easy to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys and righteousness from corruption.

Taiwan's Joseph Chang (張孝全) plays the incorruptible young cop Yuchang. Veteran actor-turned-politician (Ko Chun-hsiung, 柯俊雄) makes a rare return to the silver screen as crime leader Pang, who hires hitman Jinshui (林家棟) to shoot at President Xiong

and Vice President Hsia.

Yuchang and his crew vow to catch the perpetrator. Little do they know just how deep the corruption goes — all the way to the Presidential Office, which conspired with the gangsters to stage the assassination attempt.

The good cop tracks down Ertong (Liu Kai-chi, 廖啓智), a bum and a convenient scapegoat who has fled to Hong Kong, and convinces him to return home and tell the truth. Upon arriving in Taiwan, Yuchang finds out that his supervisor, Sun (Simon Yam, 任達華), has also been bought off by evil senior government official Zhengbei (Chang Kuo-chu, 張國柱). But it's too late. Sun guns down Ertong in — yes — a fish farm.

The film ends on a hopeful note when Yuchang meets Ertong's daughter during a street demonstration where thousands of — you guessed it — red-clad protestors call for the corrupt president's resignation. Shot mostly in Taiwan, *Ballistic* might seem like a movie produced by the propaganda department of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) as part of its campaign against former president Chen, who a government task force determined was the victim of a real assassination attempt but who now languishes in a detention center while prosecutors investigate him and his family for corruption. The story has undoubtedly been sensationalized, but it only skims the surface of events without exploring to

deeply the intrigue and betrayals.

It is exactly this lack of depth — along with fine performances by veteran actors Chang Kuo-chu, Ko Chun-hsiung and an arresting cameo by Leon Dai (戴立忍) — that makes the film entertaining.

*Ballistic* succeeds as a lighthearted commentary on politics as theater, and local audiences will enjoy a good laugh as they watch Taiwan's political soap operas brought back to life for the big screen. By incorporating footage of the "dao Bian (倒扁)" protests in 2006, director Lau adds a realistic feel that's reminiscent of Taiwan's infamous political talk shows, which are designed to stoke a similar kind of dramatic tension with their melodramatic coverage of political issues.

Film Notes

BALLISTIC (彈道)

DIRECTED BY: LAURENCE LAU (劉國昌)

STARRING: JOSEPH CHANG (張孝全) AS YUCHANG, SIMON YAM (任達華) AS SUN, CHANG KUO-CHU (張國柱) AS ZHENGBEI, KO CHUN-HSIUNG (柯俊雄) AS PANG, LAM KA-TUNG (林家棟) AS JINSHUI

RUNNING TIME: 95 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN WITH ENGLISH AND CHINESE SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY



Ballistic features a refreshing cast that includes veteran actors Chang Kuo-chu and Ko Chun-hsiung.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DEEPIJOY PICTURE

### OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

#### Eden Lake

Just in time for the global economic morass comes a pitiless British horror thriller that pits a well-to-do middle-class couple on holiday against nasty kids from the local working-class community who don't limit themselves to throwing rocks and abusive language. Distressing images of fear and brutalization on the film's posters should keep most adults away, but for anyone into horror or British cinema, this is the pick of the week. Comparisons have been drawn with Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left*, a notoriously vicious horror milestone from 1972 that was never released in Taiwan. *House's* inspiration, Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* (1960), screened here a few weeks ago, however, and that title's similarity to *Eden Lake* can't be a coincidence.



#### The Midnight Meat Train

Clive Barker hit his bankable peak in the late 1980s when a number of his grim horror tales were turned into films, most famously *Hellraiser*, which Barker also directed. *The Midnight Meat Train* is a short story from his *Books of Blood* that started it all, and stars ex-soccer star Vinnie Jones as a beefy killer prowling an American subway late at night as a photographer tries to track him down. Like *Eden Lake*, this film has higher ambitions and attention to style (including an excellent poster), possibly thanks to the presence of Japanese director Ryuhei Kitamura (*Azumi*, *Versus*). Also stars Brooke Shields.



#### Orochi - Blood

The week's third horror outing is a more stately, elegant and restrained affair from Japan. Based on a work by horror manga specialist Kazuo Umezu, this film explores the sinister underpinnings of beauty as an actress mother takes a strange young female visitor into her home with a curse. Japanese gothic horror or baroque horror might be too crude a description, but the visuals are lush and detailed, and the satirical message of female physical decay from age 30 has resonance in Taiwan in particular. This Umezu adaptation comes courtesy of Hiroshi Takahashi, the writer responsible for the *Ringu* films, and horror director Norio Tsuruta.



#### Two-Legged Horse

Not quite horror, but close. A parable of political servitude sees a legless Afghan child from a comfortable family use a poverty-stricken child in the neighborhood as the "horse" of the title for a daily pittance. As time goes on, the brutalities mount and the "horse" ... becomes one. Robert Koehler, reviewing the film for *Variety*, lent the film some notoriety of his own when he wrote "anger is likely to be directed at [award-winning director Samira Makhmalbaf] herself rather than at her subject, totalitarianism. Pic will raise festival howls and walkouts, with distributors certain to consider it untouchable," because of the apparent suffering of the actors. Aha, but not in Taiwan, Mr Koehler.



#### The Chaser

Not quite horror, but very close. A cop-turned-pimp searches for one of his hookers after she is tortured and left for dead by a hitherto reliable client. Problem is, everyone who is supposed to do this rescue work for a living is corrupt, incompetent or ill-willed. This is a serial killer thriller with horrific elements (and a restricted rating) from South Korea that treats the audience with keen intelligence and the establishment with utter contempt. It was a monstrous hit at home.



#### The Code

Morgan Freeman, who rejoins director Mimi Leder after their work together in *Deep Impact*, stars as an aging thief who returns from retirement for, all together now, one ... last ... heist. Antonio Banderas is his younger partner and foil who is attracted to Freeman's goddaughter (Aussie actress Radha Mitchell) in addition to some almost priceless Faberge Eggs. The rest of the story writes itself. Also known as *Thick as Thieves*, this one is struggling to secure a US release date.



#### To Life

A troubled Mexican photographer reunites with her estranged father in Chile in this chirpy, warm drama about healing and renewal. While there, she falls in love with one of her father's closest friends, a rabbi, who has a few problems of his own. It goes without saying that the backdrop is all gorgeous mountains, vineyards, lakes, rustic villages and quaint villagers. Spanish title: *El Brindis* ("The Toast"), and shot in 2006.



#### No Regret

Purportedly the first feature to be directed by an openly gay Korean director, this film from 2006 covers a lot of ground. A grown orphan moves to Seoul in search of work and a future but circumstances conspire against him and he ends up working at a gay bar. While there he falls in love with a smitten boss from a former workplace and their relationship blossoms. Seedy settings and intense sex scenes rarely engender happy endings, however, and in this case, as the *Village Voice* states, "Korean melodrama hell" and the underworld sting wait in the wings.

