



Director Boris Quercia's 'Sex With Love' is rough around the edges, but with so much sex, in so many different ways, and so much laughter, it's hard to dislike

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER



Chilean spice

Almodovar

meets the Carry On gang gives some idea as to the character of this rough diamond of a Chilean flick that was first released in 2003 and which has found its way circuitously through several minor film festivals to Taiwan.

Lovely young schoolteacher Luisa is eager to introduce sex education into her classes of youngsters and so brings parents together to discuss this project. It turns out that the adults are in need of sex education as much

as the children. The couples who meet in the class discussion group all have their own romantic and sexual problems, not least Luisa herself, who is two-timing her artist boyfriend with the much older Jorge, a prominent sexologist and the father of one of her students.

The set up is obviously absurd from the get go, but the rumbustious and raunchy delight that director Boris Quercia dives into the project carries the audience along. And quite apart from the sex, and there is a lot of it, *Sex With Love* (Sexo con Amor)



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ONEPLUS

has heart. On the fringes of the sexual comedy are the children (Luisa's students), who stand as a constant reminder of what may happen when adult lust gets out of hand.

Quercia doesn't try to make any big points, but is happy to explore sex as something that can be both wonderful, especially when mixed with a modicum of love, or hilarious, when lust appears as a ridiculous bug-eyed and salivating monster. There is a refreshing frankness in dealing both with the beauty and ugliness of the human body, as Quercia allows his camera

to linger lovingly (and lustfully) over buttocks, crotches and cleavages of an absolutely gorgeous cast of women, but never airbrushes away the imperfections, from moles, to body hair, to pubic crabs.

Both men and woman are observed with a cool eye for comedy, and the director puts himself right in the firing line playing Emilio, a grumpy butcher whose frantic lovemaking has all but made his wife frigid. A scene involving a spin-dryer was one of many that had the audience at the press screening almost falling out of their seats with laughter.

Although the cinematography is a little rough and ready and the narrative almost falls apart under the strain of so many couples have so much sex in so many different ways, *Sexo With Love* has more than its share of laugh-out-loud moments, and it is this raucous comedy, though neither subtle or even particularly original, but full of joy, that drives the film forward.

A brilliant soundtrack, a strangely evocative coupling of disco and grunge by the Alvaro Henriquez-fronted Chilean rock band Pettinellis, works particularly well and is an additional pleasure.

OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Detroit Metal City

We've all heard stories of professional musicians who pay their dues performing music they can't stand. This manga adaptation from Japan takes this predicament to the wackiest level, as a good-natured rural boy with a thing for easy listening finds himself forced to retain the identity of a death metal icon caked with gothic makeup after his titular band DMC hits pay dirt. This feverish metal revisiting of the *Mrs Doubtfire* theme has had audiences in stitches on both sides of the Pacific. And yes, if the title weren't already a giveaway, Gene Simmons makes a late appearance.



Suite Dreams

The release of director Koki Mitani's *The Magic Hour* two weeks ago allows this handsome, impressive Japanese comedy from three years ago to hit Taiwanese theaters. The scene is a large hotel, the time is New Year's Eve, and the players are a bunch of powerful and/or eccentric guests and staff. Mitani respects his characters and how they interact, and the result is a wide and detailed canvas of hilarity and drama that has delighted critics and audiences.



700 Days of Battle: Us vs the Police

Another Japanese release, but a polar opposite in terms of sophistication. Based on part of a "hit" blog serial (as measured by Web site hits, presumably), *700 Days* proceeds through a litany of comical clashes between some high school friends and a cop. Broad and family-friendly, this is recommended for anyone who thinks youthful rebellion only ends with a pie in the face of authority rather than drug addiction or a debilitating police record.



Memory

With Billy Zane, Dennis Hopper and Ann-Margret in a movie, there should be something for everyone, but the reaction to this little-seen chiller from 2006 was less than generous. Zane is afflicted with "memories" that may or may not have been his own. One would hope not, seeing as they included abducting and killing kids. The response to this potentially horrifying scenario seems to have largely focused on the viability of Zane's hair and why the market forgot to send it straight to DVD. That forgetfulness now extends to the Taiwanese market.



The Gig

Another promotion for TiVo product makes its way to Taipei's Baixue theater in Ximending. The shadow of *Porky's* looms large as a bunch of Thai college friends set about capturing the girls of their wet dreams by forming a group called "The Gig." The first rule in associating with women, so the newspaper ad sagely tells us, is "don't fall in love with the girl you're banging." Got that straight? This 2006 release made enough money to get a sequel filmed the following year. Starts tomorrow.



Film Notes

SEX WITH LOVE (SEXO CON AMOR)

DIRECTED BY: BORIS QUERCIA

STARRING: SIGRID ALEGRIA (LUIA), ALVARO RUDOLPHY (ALVARO), PATRICIO CONTRERAS (JORGE), MARIA IZQUIERDO (MACA), BORIS QUERCIA (EMILIO)

LANGUAGE: IN SPANISH WITH CHINESE SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

And the rest, as they say, is history

With 'Red Cliff 2,' John Woo solidifies his position as one of Chinese-language cinema's most successful directors

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Six months after the Asian release of the first segment of his epic diptych, John Woo (吳宇森) returns to the big screen with *Red Cliff 2* (赤壁: 決戰天下). Featuring moments of high drama, exciting action sequences and an arresting story about brotherhood, bravery and romance, the blockbuster further cements Woo's triumphant return to Chinese-language cinema after a long hiatus in Hollywood where the director never managed to live up to the promise of his Hong Kong oeuvre.

After a brief recap of what took place in the previous installment, the audience is thrown back into the battlefield action where Cao Cao's (Zhang Fengyi, 張豐毅) troops play a game of *cujū* (蹴鞠), an ancient Asian kind of football, as they wait for the battle of Red Cliff to start. In an inconspicuous corner, warlord Sun Quan's (Chang Chen, 張震) spirited sister Sun Shangxiang (Zhao Wei, 趙薇), disguised as an enemy soldier, sends information about the enemy's position by carrier pigeon to Zhuge Liang (Takeshi Kaneshiro, 金城武).

The news encourages Sun Quan's coalition forces, which are formulating plans to defeat Cao Cao's vastly superior force across the bay. Typhoid has broken out in Cao Cao's camp, causing heavy casualties. But it doesn't take long before the shrewd prime minister and strategist turns the disease



For director John Woo, the two superb installments of *Red Cliff* are enough to overcome a disappointing stint in Hollywood.

PHOTO COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY FOX, TAIWAN

to his advantage by rafting the infected corpses over to Sun's camp.

A battle of wits ensues. Zhou Yu (Tony Leung Chiu-wai, 梁朝偉) successfully spreads fear and confusion among the enemy forces by false information. In the meantime, Zhuge Liang draws on his familiarity with the local weather and tactical expertise to steal weapons supplies from Cao Cao's troops.

As a strong wind blows, both sides ready for a battle to the death. Meanwhile, Zhou Yu's beautiful wife Xiao Qiao (Lin Chi-ling, 林志玲) ventures into Cao Cao's camp alone in an attempt to use her diplomatic skills to prevent further carnage.

Needless to say, the good guys win, thus ensuring the survival

of Sun Quan and Liu Bei and heralding the beginning of China's Three Kingdoms period and, ultimately, the reunification of the country under the Jin Dynasty.

It is never easy to tackle a legend that has long been popularized and romanticized in countless textbooks, television series, video games and comic books, not to mention the 120-chapter *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義), one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature (四大名著). Audiences already have their own ideas about the events and characters. But though *Red Cliff* is not immune to criticism, the screenwriters have successfully condensed the richness of history and legend into an easy-to-follow structure that balances action

Film Notes

RED CLIFF 2

(赤壁: 決戰天下)

DIRECTED BY: JOHN WOO (吳宇森)

STARRING: TONY LEUNG CHIU-WAI (梁朝偉) AS ZHOU YU, TAKESHI KANESHIRO (金城武) AS ZHUGE LIANG, ZHANG FENGYI (張豐毅) AS CAO CAO, CHANG CHEN (張震) AS SUN QUAN, LIN CHI-LING (林志玲) AS XIAO QIAO, ZHAO WEI (趙薇) AS SUN SHANGXIANG, HU JUN (胡軍) AS ZHAO YUN, NAKAMURA SHIDO AS GAN XING

RUNNING TIME: 113 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: CURRENTLY SHOWING

and drama with Woo-esque romanticism.

Maintaining the fast pace of the first installment of *Red Cliff* — Parts 1 and 2 are being shown in a single, condensed version outside East Asia — the second installment smoothly shifts between action sequences, battle planning and anecdotes that flesh out the main characters, adding extra layers to what might otherwise have been a cumbersome epic. Everything is packed into a well-scripted narrative that will not overwhelm

viewers. Woo defines and develops the characters, especially the two female roles played by China's Zhao Wei and Taiwan's Lin Chi-ling, who are accorded significant narrative weight, in contrast to their more decorative function in the first part.

Woo's interpretation of the legendary figures is unconventional but works well within the director's focus on loyalty and brotherhood. The vernacular language spoken by Woo's characters may lack gravitas, but it gives the film a distinct charm and vitality.

The final battle scenes are grandiose, but the denouement is a tad flabby as military pageantry, martial arts sequences and close-ups of the heroes and villains' grimacing faces grow stale after several reprises.

China's Zhang Fengyi is the surprise star of the film. More than simply the power-hungry villain as depicted in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, his Cao Cao is an emotionally complex and charismatic leader who blushes before the woman he loves. Tony Leung Chiu-wai is as dependable as ever in his role as the composed Zhou Yu, while Takeshi Kaneshiro engages attention as the slightly effete strategist.

Given more to do this time around than in the first part, supermodel-turned-actress Lin exhibits sufficient gumption to carry off her part as Xiao Qiao. Taiwan's Chang Chen, however, underwhelms in the supporting role as the indecisive Sun.