



Film Notes

COLORFUL MIND
(新魯冰花：孩子的天空)

DIRECTED BY: CHEN KUN-HO (陳坤厚)

STARRING: WU CHUN-KAI (吳俊偉) AS GU ANING, SHOWN CHEN (陳至愷) AS GUO YUN-TIEN, CHOU YU-TING (周幼婷) AS LIN HSUAN-FEN

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN AND TAIWANESE WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

RUNNING TIME: 95 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

A founding figure of Taiwan New Wave cinema, director-cinematographer Chen Kun-ho (陳坤厚) begins his distinguished career by collaborating with Li Hsing (李行) and later Hou Hsiao-hsien (侯孝賢) in films such as *The Story of a Small Town* (小城故事, 1979), *The Boys From Fengkuei* (風櫃來的人, 1983) and *A Summer at Grandpa's* (冬冬的假期, 1984). He started directing his own features in 1979 and made several important films including *Growing Up* (小華的故事, 1983), *His Matrimony* (結婚, 1985) and *Osmanthus Alley* (桂花巷, 1987), before shifting to television production toward the end of 1980s.

Twenty years later, Chen returns to the director's chair with *Colorful Mind* (孩子的天空), a sober story about the short life of a talented child and the latest big-screen adaptation of Hakka literary heavyweight Chung Chao-cheng's (鍾肇政) 1960 novel *Lupinghua* (魯冰花).

Set during the 1970s, the film begins with art teacher Guo Yun-tien (Shown Chen, 陳至愷) arriving at an elementary school in the mountains. There, he meets Gu Aning (Wu Chun-kai, 吳俊偉), a fourth-grader in his class, and is immediately drawn to the boy's unrestrained imagination and creativity.

Born into a poor family of tea growers, Gu loves to draw but often has to skip school to help his parents with their work. He never paints according to the lifelike color-scheme and proportions he has been taught, which for Guo is the mark of a truly talented artist.

The two quickly become friends, and the young art teacher promises to send Gu to a county painting contest. But the powers-that-be have other ideas, and Gu is replaced by an honor student from an influential family. Deeply frustrated with the establishment, Guo, who is leaving the school, asks another teacher, Lin Hsuan-fen (Chou Yu-ting, 周幼婷), to help enter Gu's work in an international competition.

The news of Gu winning the top prize at the competition reaches the village. Sadly, the boy has contracted pneumonia and can't even hear his friends cheering as he lies dying on a hospital bed.

For many older members of the audience, director Yang Li-kao's (楊立國) 1989 adaptation *Dull Ice Flower* (魯冰花) is the definitive cinematic version of the tale and will forever be remembered for its heart-rending plot. In *Colorful Mind*, director Chen spares contemporary audiences the tear-jerking moments, though he remains faithful to novelist Chung's acute social commentary on the lives and

hardships of the area's farmers. The world in the story is divided into two parts. In one, the landowners and local government have wealth and power to spare but are reluctant to help those in need. In the other, the poor tea farmers toil relentlessly to earn a meager living and cannot even afford to pay their children's medical bills.

Stepping beyond Chung's two worlds, Chen updates the former's simple, straightforward tale with an emphasis on art education for children, and incorporates the real-life story of art teacher Wu Hung-tsang (吳鴻蒼), who promoted art education in an elementary school in rural Tainan County.

Child actor Wu Chun-kai catches most of the attention with his natural onscreen manner and heartfelt laughter. But Shown Chen and Chou Yu-ting flounder in their roles as the two adults leads, and the villain, the director of the school, is a poorly designed character whose Beijing accent comes across as more confusing than anything else.

Colorful Mind is solid effort by a director after a 20-year-long hiatus from the cinema, but it fails to live up to the standard set by Chen's 1980s oeuvre.

An old tale learns new tricks

Talent and perseverance vie with power and privilege in Chen Kun-ho's return to the cinema

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SKY FILMS



OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

There's a new IMAX theater in town: the Vieshow Sun multiplex in Wuchang Street, Ximending. With luck, IMAX moviegoers will get to enjoy varied programming instead of month-long block bookings, but for now, it seems, we will have tandem schedules with the Miramar IMAX. And the first film to be screened? It's:

Monsters vs Aliens

This animated 3D film will be a smash hit with the kids. A luckless bride grows very large after contact with an extraterrestrial object and gets locked up with various monsters in a secret government facility. But when some aggressive aliens ignore immigration procedures and start causing havoc, the monsters are let out to save the world. Well, America, anyway. It's a real spectacle, this film, but the plot is for the birds. Screening in English or Mandarin at IMAX and regular theaters.



Knowing

Back in 2D movieland, Nicolas Cage continues his series of hernia-inducing roles in this apocalyptic tale from Aussie director Alex Proyas (*I, Robot*, *Dark City*). An elementary school time capsule from the 1950s is dug up to reveal a strange sheet of paper with nothing but numbers, which a bereaved professor (Cage) learns is a code of catastrophe for the past, the present and the future. This film has divided critics more sharply than any other in recent memory, but Cage's fans should be satisfied.

New in Town

Renee Zellweger is the star of the show here. She's a ruthless executive who travels to Minnesota to axe local jobs, but gets more than she bargained for professionally and romantically. As a romantic comedy, this change of pace might impress Zellweger devotees, but anyone who has seen *Local Hero* will hear the machine of Hollywood color-by-number filmmaking start up at the opening credits. Instead of Scottish wile, Zellweger must deal with locals as pure as snow — and who reminded critics of the cast of *Fargo*.



Fireflies in the Garden

A big cast (Julia Roberts, Willem Dafoe, Emily Watson, Carrie-Ann Moss) star in a small movie about family troubles in sub-suburban America. Roberts is the mother and Dafoe seems to have used his evil genius character in *Spider-Man* as a template for his cruel husband and father. As so often happens in these types of dysfunctional family dramas — even if they're autobiographical — an accident is the trigger for much fighting, fraying of nerves and gnashing of teeth.

Claustrophobia (親密)

In probing relationships within constrained social circumstances, this drama from first-time writer-director Ivy Ho (何西) turns to the office setting, with all of the barriers and quiet communication that this implies. An apparently unconsummated attraction between Karena Lam (林嘉欣) and her married boss Ekin Cheng (鄭伊健) is gently probed, but like Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, the story is told backwards, challenging the viewer to look for hidden clues. Warm reviews greeted this Hong Kong production.



Anpanman: The Secret of Fairy Rin-Rin

Here comes the 20th feature starring the much-loved, bun-and-bean-paste children's hero Anpanman ("Bread Superman") from Japan. In this entry, the secret ingredient that gives Anpanman his courage is discovered and damaged, leading to an odyssey in search of the flower from which it derives, but the evil Baikinman ("Germ Man") has other ideas. As always, the program starts with an *Anpanman* short.



Lump of Sugar

The next South Korean release at Ximending's Baixue theater is an unusual family film from 2006. Up-and-coming actress Lim Su-jeong (*A Tale of Two Sisters*, *Happiness*) plays a horse lover with a tragic past. Horse racing and effective scenes of human-horse bonding punctuate this drama.

Life, death, love and the family

Japanese filmmaker Hirokazu Kore-eda crafts a beautiful story of a family brought together by the memory of a deceased son

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

Family reunions are fruitful material for meditations on life, death and love, and *Still Walking* (Arutemo Arutemo) follows in this long and well-worn tradition.

A simple story of a family reunion to commemorate the death of an older brother, the narrative brings together two aging parents and a brother and a sister, each with their own families. The action takes place in the family home. The setup could not be simpler, but from these simple ingredients, director Hirokazu Kore-eda has created a work of such nuance and depth that the first thing you want to do on leaving the cinema is to walk right back in and watch it all over again.

The film opens with a scene of Chinami (You) helping her mother Toshiko (Kirin Kiki) in the kitchen grating radishes for a family meal. Their inconsequential chatter opens up a window that

overlooks a precipice separating the two generations. As we get to know the Yokoyama family, we find each of them inhabiting an isolated outpost on the shifting sands of their own memories and expectations, unable, except for the briefest moments, to cross over. When contact is made, the principals don't always realize it.

The themes of memory and abandonment, explored in Kore-eda's earlier and more experimental work, are all there, but they have been subsumed into a conventional form that serves to reduce the background noise to a minimum, allowing his beautifully crafted yet naturalistic screenplay to shine. The family eat and talk, the undercurrents of their thoughts occasionally bubble up to the surface, revealed by a word or gesture, then sink back down again. The beauty of the film is that everything is revealed through everyday actions, from grating radishes to eating sushi.



The setup is simple, but the feelings in *Still Walking* are complex and run deep.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATOM CINEMA

Nobody shouts, nobody cries, yet there is a pervasive sadness about the simple fact that life goes on, whatever else may happen.

The single set piece within the drama is the arrival of an awkward young man to pay his respects to Junpei, the Yokoyama's eldest son.

In saving this young man, Junpei lost his life, and Toshiko never wants him to forget it. He sits uncomfortably as he is served with tea and cakes, each courtesy an indictment against his physical and living presence. Toshiko, brilliantly played by Kiki Kirin, admits that

Film Notes

STILL WALKING
(ARUTEMO ARUTEMO)

DIRECTED BY: HIROKAZU KORE-EDA

STARRING: YOU (CHINAMI KATAOKA), HIROSHI ABE (RYOTA YOKOYAMA), YOSHIO HARADA (KYOHEI YOKOYAMA), RYOGA HAYASHI (MUTSU KATAOKA), KIRIN KIKI (TOSHIKO YOKOYAMA), YUI NATSUKAWA (YUKARI YOKOYAMA), HOTARU NOMOTO (SATSUMI KATAOKA)

LANGUAGE: IN JAPANESE WITH CHINESE SUBTITLES

RUNNING TIME: 114 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

she feels obliged to put him through this ordeal every year, as some small compensation for her loss. Her bitterness is spine-tingling, for a brief second opening up a peephole

into the darkness behind her smirking smiles and the elaborate courties of a Japanese matron.

Toshiko's second son, Ryota, visits with his new wife, Yukari (Yui Natsukawa), a widow with a young son. Ryota is prepared for a day of bickering with his father about his career and his marriage. Yukari puts her best face on, not helped by her husband's sullen refusal to engage with his parents. Ryota's father (played by Yoshio Harada), a retired doctor missing the professional heyday of his past and endlessly comparing the son he still has with the one he lost, is too real a person to completely lose the viewer's sympathy.

There is a pervasive humor that is both muted and rather dark in *Still Walking*, but Kore-eda steers clear of comedy just as assiduously as he keeps away from melodrama. The director's view of life is one filled with what might be described as a life-affirming sorrow. He delights in the imperfect goodness

of his characters and acknowledges their frailties without ever laughing at them. Each small step toward understanding one another is a major triumph, though these victories are transitory, quickly overtaken by life's onward flow.

Kore-eda's previous work in the highly acclaimed *Nobody Knows* (Dare mo Shiranai, 2004), about four children who survive in a Tokyo apartment for six months after being abandoned by their mother, revealed his enormous skill at coaxing natural performances from his actors. In stepping away from the overtly dramatic situation and documentary-style treatment in favor of a highly crafted script (also written by Kore-eda) and conventional dramatic structure, the director is proving his credentials and is either consciously or unconsciously staking a claim to the inheritance of Yasujiro Ozu, the acknowledged master of the Japanese domestic drama.