



Money isn't everything

But for one extended family it comes pretty close. Closer, even, than the ties that bind

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Ten years after *Money No Enough*, Singapore's most domestically successful movie of all time, director, actor and entertainer Jack Neo (梁智強) and his team return with the sequel *Money Not Enough 2*, which replaces the original's comedy with tear-jerking melodrama.

The film revolves around three brothers who live in the materialistic city-state. Yang Bao-hui (Henry Thia, 程旭輝) is the eldest, an uncomplaining husband, father and a deliveryman who wants to live a good life after years of working a lowly job. A puffed-up salesman type, youngest brother Yang Bao-huang (Mark Lee, 李國煌) talks the older sibling into joining his lucrative business that sells health supplements derived from pollen. Neo plays the middle brother, Yang Bao-qiang, a well-heeled businessman who shows no interest in anything but money and leaves his overbearing, wealth-flaunting wife Ling Ling (Zhu Lin Lin, 朱玲玲) to deal with everything else.

However, the three brothers' businesses don't perform as well as planned and a series of mishaps lead to financial ruin. Domestic disputes and bickering break out when their mother, Mrs Yang (Lai Ming, 黎明), begins to show signs of dementia and needs the full attention of her sons.

The film opens with a punchy set piece that ridicules Singaporeans' ambivalence toward the government with all its regulations and restrictions that, some say, safeguard high living standards for its citizens. The partially animated sequence ends with a crowd throwing a tollgate into the

harbor. Amusing and tackily done, the cartoon-like fantasy echoes the youngest brother's opening remarks: "Singaporeans complain, but they never act to change the status quo."

Reality sets in as the Yang brothers sit at the dining table discussing their addictions to

From left: Henry Thia, Mark Lee and Jack Neo star in *Money Not Enough 2*, directed by Jack Neo. PHOTOS COURTESY OF FUNG FILM INTERNATIONAL



Film Notes

MONEY NOT ENOUGH 2 (錢不夠用2)

DIRECTED BY: JACK NEO (梁智強)

STARRING: JACK NEO (梁智強) AS YANG BAO-QIANG, MARK LEE (李國煌) AS YANG BAO-HUANG, HENRY THIA (程旭輝) AS YANG BAO-HUI, LAI MING (黎明) AS MRS YANG

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN, HOKKIEN AND ENGLISH WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

RUNNING TIME: 125 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

status and wealth. Kudos goes to Neo for making an effective and sometimes hilarious caricature of this money-hungry gang.

Then comedy gives way to lachrymose melodrama as the mother's physical and mental health deteriorates and she becomes a burden to the three Yang households.

Money Not Enough 2 neatly plays on the tension between the nuclear-family lifestyle and the fulfillment of filial piety in Chinese-speaking regions, though the film ends up annoying audiences by expounding a doctrine about family values and loving your mother. This is a well-timed message, though, as the film is released in Taiwan on Mother's Day weekend.

Eighty-two-year-old Malaysian actress Lai was nominated for the Best Supporting Actress for her performance at last year's Golden Horse Awards (金馬獎).

Bringing the world together

Gerardo Olivares' film 'The Great Match' shows how the beautiful game is a common thread found throughout the globe, even in the most remote places

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

Some people take enormous efforts to make sure they are able to watch a big match. For the soccer fans in *The Great Match* (La Gran Final), who are all eager to catch what will turn out to be the final between Germany and Brazil in the 2002 World Cup, it is not about booking airline tickets and confirming hotel reservations, or even about picking a sports bar at which to watch the big event. Their issues reach another level altogether. They need to find electricity and some means, in their very remote locations, to receive television signals.

The Great Match is a bizarre little film sporting a low-budget docu-drama format that somehow manages to leave plenty of room for comedy. The title might mislead you into thinking this is a soccer film, and certainly, the force that drives virtually every character in the film is the desire to watch the final game on television, but soccer madness is nothing more than a premise to take a humorous peek into the lives of people in some of the most remote regions on the planet.

The film opens with panoramic shots of the Mongolian steppe and tribesmen hunting foxes with eagles on their wrist. They ride their shaggy ponies through the vast barren landscape, and engage in banter about the hunt. It could be the opening for an anthropological study of nomads seen on the Discovery



They brake for nobody.

Channel. But of course, it is not. "Do you think we'll have time to get back for the game," one of the nomads shouts. The others answer by picking up the pace. They have to get back in time to move camp to a location where they can (illegally) tap into the government electricity supply to power their ancient color television.

There is no place too remote for the beautiful game and a sense of international rivalry. But the community solidarity that it generates does not always permeate. The nomads are met by a military patrol and the lieutenant in charge wants to slap them with a fine for stealing electricity. The situation improves, though, when the patrol sits down to watch the game with the nomads and helps settle a dispute

about the relative quality of the two teams. Whether they get to watch the final minutes of the game all depends on an uncertain supply of electricity from Russia.

Cut to the Sahara desert and the sand-blown and waterless wastes of Niger. A caravan of Tuareg tribesmen are pushing their camels hard to reach a place called "the tree," a single steel pylon standing in the desert. It is the only location where they might be able to get reception for their television.

They worry that they'll not make it in time and persuade a passing truck, filled with passengers, into taking them there. The owner of the television insists that no one support Brazil, threatening to turn it off if anybody does.

The film then takes viewers to the Amazon jungle and focuses on Zama, a tribesman who proudly sports a yellow soccer jersey with Ronaldo's number nine on it. He gives a running soccer commentary as he and his companions, unsuccessfully, hunt monkeys in the forest canopy. They are waiting for the big match too, but discover that an elderly member of the tribe has taken the antenna cable to use as a hair ornament. In the end, the tribesmen resort to watching the game through the window of a logger's hut.

All three strands of the story feature wonderful scenery, especially the sections in Mongolia, which also use throat singing for a stupendous soundtrack.

There's lots of lowbrow humor, some delightfully observed

moments, and a little gentle satire. The jokes can be a little corny at times, but the general good nature of the film solicits our tolerance. In celebration of Brazil's victory, the loggers are even willing to associate with the Amazonian tribesmen. "The 2006 World Cup will be in Germany," the logger tells Zama. "I'm going, even if I have to rip up the whole jungle, because I'm not missing it." Zama says he wants to go too.

That's as far as director Gerardo Olivares takes his social commentary, allowing *The Great Match* to remain fundamentally a delightful bit of fluff, that ponders, in a light and almost off-hand fashion, the many strange things that happen when different parts of our human world come into contact with one another.

Film Notes

THE GREAT MATCH (LA GRAN FINAL)

DIRECTED BY: GERARDO OLIVARES

STARRING: A NON-PROFESSIONAL CAST OF AMAZONIAN, MONGOLIAN AND TUAREG TRIBESMEN

RUNNING TIME: 88 MINUTES

LANGUAGES: TUPI, TAMASHEK AND MONGOLIAN, WITH CHINESE SUBTITLES

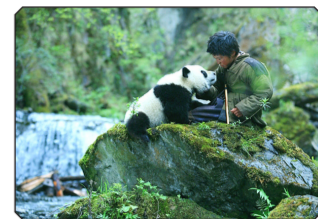
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OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

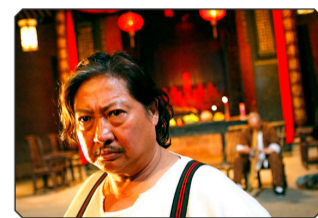
Trail of the Panda (貓熊團圓路)

Here's another panda movie, this time from China. An orphan (naturally) finds that a cute panda cub is his only true friend, and this leads to the pair traipsing alone through the lovely, but dangerous, Sichuan countryside. For the Taiwan release, distributor Buena Vista International, a Disney company, has changed the Chinese title from "panda on the road home" to "panda on the road to reunion" in a pun on the names of the Taipei Zoo pandas. Walt Disney, who was famously anti-communist, would surely have been aghast. Also known as *Touch of the Panda* — and perhaps *Curse of the Panda* to independence activists.



Kung Fu Chefs (功夫廚神)

Legendary Hong Kong writer-director-actor-martial artist Sammo Hung (洪金寶) provides desperately needed backbone to this otherwise derivative action comedy from China. Hung's disgraced chef takes on a young pup (Vanness Wu, 吳建豪) as an apprentice and the pair battle thugs and rival chefs before a cooking competition brings the episode to a close. Hung may acquit himself in this retreat, but fans would really be better off watching an old copy of *Pedicab Driver*.



The Accidental Husband

Agony aunt of the New York airwaves Uma Thurman is married — not so happily — to publisher Colin Firth. Enter working class love interest Jeffrey Dean Morgan and we have a problem on our hands. This received rotten reviews on its British release early last year, which presumably had Firth's name to recommend it, but Thurman's star power has not been enough to secure screen bookings in the US. Directed by actor Griffin Dunne.



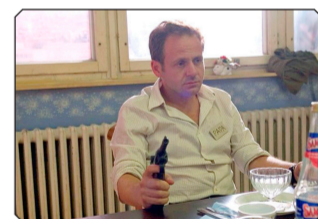
Beloved Clara

The strange relationship between composers Clara Schumann, Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms is the focus of this German-language film. Like the Beethoven yarn *Immortal Beloved*, this biopic prefers to treat its gifted subjects with the utmost respect, which is why it can't be as entertaining as *Amadeus* or any of Ken Russell's composer movies. Still, the story is compelling enough, there's plenty of music and audiences may be inspired to seek the DVD of the stage production of the same name, which contains readings from actual letters between Brahms and the Schumanns.



Family Rules

A German black comedy from 2007 introduces us to Oliver, whose orphaned upbringing did not lead him to pandas in the wild, sadly. As an adult, he tries to make up for his lack of family by abducting several suitable-looking individuals (and a dog) and confining them in a derelict building. Now happily "married" and with kids and grandparents in tow, Oliver discovers that families aren't as ideal as they sound. This won a few minor awards in Germany, though it had little impact elsewhere. Original title: *Wir Sagen Du! Schatz*.



Grave of the Fireflies

This is the latest, live-action version of the book by Akiyuki Nosaka about two Japanese siblings coping with the US bombing of Kobe at the end of World War II and the disorder that followed. There hasn't been much attention paid to this release outside Japan; it may disappoint those enraptured by the celebrated animated version from 1988 (which Roger Ebert called one of the greatest war films).



Running the Sahara

Taiwanese ultra-marathon star Kevin Lin (林義傑) has been in the news a fair bit lately. This welcome documentary covers his attempt with two colleagues to cross the Sahara in a journey of nearly 7,000km. Along the way the men gain insight into themselves and the African predicament, not least desertification. Narrated by Matt Damon and directed by Oscar winner James Moll (*The Last Days*).



Love N' Dancing

The good news about this, the latest American dance movie to hit Taipei, is that it's in the mold of Japan's *Shall We Dance?* rather than *Flashdance*. Amy Smart has a nice boyfriend in the shape of Billy Zane, but she can only fulfill her ambitions with another nice chappie (writer-producer-dancer Tom Malloy) on the Swing Dance floor. Screening at the Baixue theater in Ximending.

