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The odd couple

'If You are the One' raked in roughly US\$50 million at the end of last year in China, making it the country's biggest box-office hit ever

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Which director is capable of making a record-breaking blockbuster out of a tale about a balding, middle-aged man's search for true love? The answer is Feng Xiaogang (馮小剛). After his lavish period saga *The Banquet* (夜宴) and war drama *Assembly* (集结号), the genre-crossing wizard has made a confident return to what he was originally known for — ironic comedies set in contemporary China — with *If You Are the One* (非誠勿擾).

Co-starring Feng's long-time collaborator, Chinese actor Ge You (葛優), with Taiwanese actress Shu Qi (舒淇), the romantic comedy revolves around an unlikely couple whose relationship begins with a blind date, endures much sparring and ultimately leads to deeply felt affections. Its huge box-office success — the movie earned roughly US\$50 million — cements Feng's reputation as China's foremost purveyor of popular comedies.

In the opening scene, which delivers a good laugh at the expense of China's nouveau riche, onetime inventor Qin Fen (Ge) sells his Conflict Resolution Terminal, basically a plastic tube, to a foolish venture capitalist (played by Chinese comic Fan Wei (范偉)). With his newfound wealth, Qin focuses his attention on finding a wife to make his life complete.

As he goes from one blind date to another, Qin encounters plenty of unsuitable matches who include a

gay man, an erotic-phobic widow and a woman who tries to sell graveyard plots during the date. Eventually, he meets Liang Xiaoxiao (Shu), a flight attendant languishing in a love affair with a married man (played by Hong Kong's Alex Fong (方中信)).

Qin immediately realizes the beautiful Xiaoxiao is out of his league. Nevertheless, the two end up having a drink and confiding painful pasts to each other, assuming they will never see each other again.

But fate draws them back together and Qin tries to win Xiaoxiao's heart with tactics he takes care to stage in an effortless fashion. It seems to work and Xiaoxiao, softened by his persistence, invites Qin on a trip to Japan's picturesque Hokkaido.

Director Feng once again proves his mastery of satire and humor when it comes to observing Chinese society in the midst of changing times. The script is smartly written, filled with snappy dialogue, enjoyable sarcasm and dry wit. Though the blind dates provide much comedy in the first half of the film, Feng pokes fun at modern-day notions of dating, romance and marriage. A few caricatures that stand out include a pregnant young woman (played by Taiwan's Vivian Hsu (徐若瑣)) desperately seeking a husband and a businesswoman who habitually compares men to stocks.

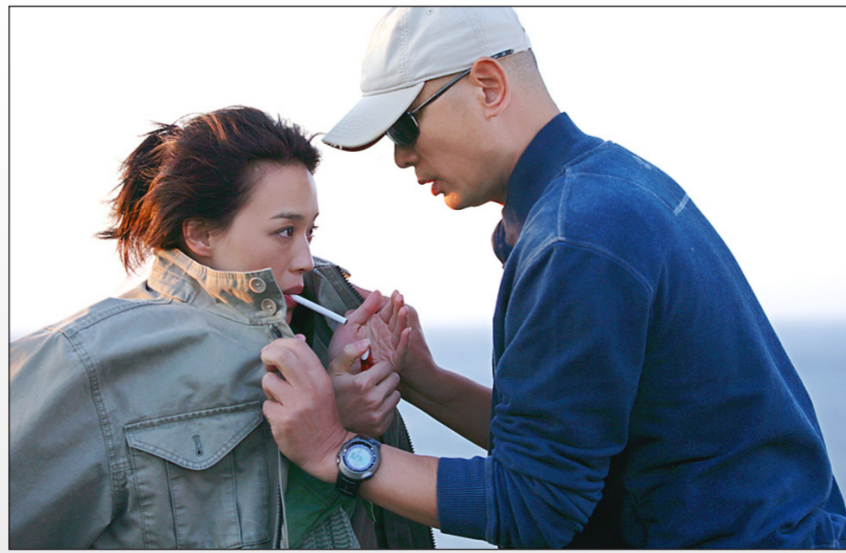
The narrative becomes a bit too discursive in the second half of the film when the two leads build on their mutual affections during their trip to Hokkaido. It feels

disappointing, at times, to see that Ge's charming antics alone are not enough to produce the emotional weight the journey demands. An offbeat coda, which makes meta-references to the global economic crisis, feels at odds with the rest of the movie.

The film wouldn't be as successful if the main roles had been played by lesser actors. A charismatic leading man, Ge is admirably adept at mixing sincerity with cynicism, conceit with self-disapproval. Shu proves herself an able match for her veteran costar, and the two share a terrific chemistry that is delivered throughout the film.

Below: Ge You, right, and Shu Qi star in *If You Are the One*, directed by Feng Xiaogang.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHOWTIME ENTERTAINMENT



Film Notes

IF YOU ARE THE ONE (非誠勿擾)

DIRECTED BY: FENG XIAOGANG (馮小剛)

STARRING: GE YOU (葛優) AS QIN FEN, SHU QI (舒淇) AS LIANG XIAOXIAO

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN WITH ENGLISH AND CHINESE SUBTITLES

RUNNING TIME: 128 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TUESDAY



OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

2009 Cross-Strait Films Exhibition

Here's something different. A film festival where Taiwanese audiences watch Chinese product and vice versa. For one week, Taipei and Taichung will feature the premiere screenings of *If You Are the One* (非誠勿擾, see adjacent review), as well as *Crazy Racer* (瘋狂的賽車), *Invisible Wings* (隱形的翅膀), *Life Today* (江北好人), *Postman in Shangri-la* (香巴拉信使), *Ta Pu* (塔舖) and *The Attack* (致命追擊). Later this month Beijing and Tianjin will host six Taiwanese features. But you have to pity the Chinese audience: Any programming that includes *Attitude* (態度), a spectacularly awful documentary on the Taiwan Beer basketball team, can't be taken very seriously. The festival could also have done with some entertaining commentary on the cross-strait relationship itself; sadly, Hong Kong's *God of Gamblers 2* (賭神2) didn't make the cut.



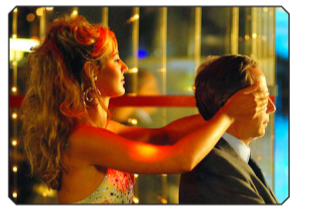
Walled In

Straight to DVD in almost all territories, this thriller-cum-horror flick is getting a theatrical run in Taiwan. An up-and-coming demolition professional gets cracking on a very strange apartment building but runs into difficulties: Not only are people still living there, but there's a whole lotta dead people in there, too. Like the *House of Wax* and *Thirteen Ghosts* remakes, this genre item is more likely to impress students of set design and architecture than horror fans.



The Girl from Monaco

The "girl" is a weather host who tries to seduce a hotshot lawyer defending a murder suspect. Meanwhile, the lawyer's young, committed bodyguard has his work cut out ensuring that his client is safe from Russian killers. A hit in France, this film hit pay dirt with Louise Bourgois's ambitious, vivacious weather girl character in a way that will remind some of Nicole Kidman's spectacular (if more sinister) showcase role in *To Die For*.



Cover Boy

A young Romanian immigrant hits Italy with a pal but soon has to fend for himself when the authorities take his friend away. He finds support in two locals whose ulterior motives take a time to emerge; the first is the Romanian's much older flatmate who wants to bed him, and the other a professional photographer who wants to make him a model. This film was made two years ago and has struggled to find a home outside Italy and European festivals. Still, it has won a few awards and the ads claim it received a 15-minute standing ovation in Rotterdam. The original Italian title translates as *Cover Boy ... The Last Revolution*.



O'Horten

A railway engineer in Norway by the name of Odd Horten retires, but unlike Jack Nicholson's character in *About Schmidt*, this agreeable fellow comes to terms with his sudden change in timetable and personal limitations without quiet trauma. Instead, the door is opened to the strangeness of his surroundings as the old man bemusedly takes in his new life and new acquaintances. Very good reviews met this light (but not lightweight) comedy-drama stateside.



One Million Yen Girl

Japanese actress Yu Aoi has a legion of fans and this unusual film — a somewhat existential Japanese road movie — will likely add to their number. Yu plays a young woman with little to show for herself who gets in trouble with the law over a minor incident and moves on to the next town — and the next, and the next — as she comes to terms with her life and what she needs to become. Funny and wry, this is also known as *One Million Yen and the Nigamushi Woman*.



Crayon Shin-Chan: The Legend Called: The Singing Buttocks Bomb

Every year our favorite Japanese kindergarten tyke Crayon Shin-chan gets up to mischief on the big screen, though readers not familiar with Japanese manga should still recognize this character by the minimalist face artwork and the guffaws that come from kids who delight in his naughty wordplay and other hijinks. And besides, any movie with a title like this deserves a wider audience. In this effort, Shin-Chan's dog Shiro has a world-threatening munition attached to his butt by an alien while visiting Okinawa. Unmissable.



Mr. Housewife

This broad South Korean comedy starts out as an imitation of *Mr. Mom* with Michael Keaton, but then shoots off in a different direction as unemployed hubby Han Suk-gyu finds his niche as a fish-out-of-water game show contestant. Also starring the wonderful Kim Soo-mi and Shin Eun-kyung as Han's wife. Screening at Ximending's Baixue theater, where gender politics is rarely of interest.



6D Movie Garden

The Living Mall in Taipei is holding an interesting activity aimed at youngsters: a smorgasbord of movies on the theme of the animal kingdom in which you change topics by moving from one theater to the next. The experience is meant to be educational as well as fun, and it's the closest thing locals will get to the Disneyland experience without applying for a US visa. Screened in the late morning and midday, ticket prices are NT\$390 for adults and NT\$300 for children with discounts available.