



OTHER RELEASES

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Lee Hsing Retrospective

Veteran award-winning director Lee Hsing (李行), who is 80 this year, is being honored by the Chinese Taipei Film Archive with screenings of 12 of his most notable films until Tuesday next week at the Spot theater in Taipei; many have English subtitles. Other films are being screened at the archive, together with a symposium. Further details are at www.ctfa.org.tw and www.spot.org.tw.



Festival of City Tours 2009: The Wedding Season

This cumbersome festival title brings together a number of intriguing wedding-related films from around the world that deserve wider attention. *Brides* is a Martin Scorsese production set in the 1920s in which hundreds of European mail-order brides head to the US to discover their fate. *Tulpan*, set in Kazakhstan, is the name of a would-be bride of the protagonist; the film has astonished reviewers everywhere with its texture and sense of whimsy. *Silent Wedding*, from Russia, is a humorous account of a wedding that takes place on the sly during an enforced mourning period for an autocrat. Algeria-set *Masquerades* is a comedy of errors and misunderstandings, while *Vacation* from Japan mixes marital longing with the ugly reality of capital punishment. The films are screening exclusively at Taipei's Changchun theater until Aug. 6



All Around Us

A Japanese film that prefers idiosyncrasy to histrionics in developing its characters? This might be worth seeing. A husband and wife come under the microscope in this feature, but the threat to their relationship is far removed from what the average melodrama contains, with the possible exception of the fate of their offspring. Mixed reviews followed, as might be expected for a film that violates narrative conventions, but there has been praise from all corners for lead actor Lily Franky (an eclectic artist and author in real life) as the husband.



The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner

Variety considered "theatrical release outside the Balkans is unlikely" for this film mostly out of Bulgaria, but no one should underestimate the tenacity of Taiwan's smaller distributors, who rely on obscure European product as much as the Japanese and Thai stuff. A man loses his memory in a car accident that kills his parents, so his grandfather shows up to take him on a two-wheeled road trip back to Bulgaria as therapy — the same place the young man's parents fled when it was a repressive regime. With bicycles all the rage now, this amiable movie couldn't be better timed for release here.



The Sniper (神槍手)

Lots of blood is spilled in this Hong Kong action flick, but the biggest victim was the film itself, which was shelved after star Edison Chen (陳冠希) got embroiled in the starlet home movie scandal. For some reason, this tale of hotshot professional snipers has taken even longer to get released in Taiwan, which was fascinated — but not scandalized — by Chen's digital romps. Dante Lam's (林超賢) film of style but little substance brings to mind the halcyon days of John Woo (吳宇森): excellent action set pieces but emotional holes as big as exit wounds.



Detective Conan: The Raven Chaser

Body-of-a-child, mind-of-an-adult sleuth Conan is back for the 13th *Case Closed* manga feature, this time in more peril than usual as the organization responsible for his bodily predicament, the Black Organization, returns to wreak havoc, culminating in a violent showdown.



Gao Xing (高興)

This is an unusual film from China, based on the book by the celebrated Jia Pingwa (賈平凹). Gao Xing is a jolly fellow from the country who wants to fly — and sets out to build his own aircraft to that end. Along the way there are songs to be sung and dance moves to be made in this lightly satirical musical comedy. Starts tomorrow.



About a boy

'Boy A' is a heartrending melodrama that sympathizes with its protagonist, a former convict handed a second chance

BY STEPHEN HOLDEN

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK



Katie Lyons, far left, and Andrew Garfield, left and above, star in *Boy A*, directed by John Crowley.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STARSWORK

who has a son around Jack's age. The movie pointedly compares Terry's alienation from his biological son with his devotion to his surrogate one.

Under no circumstances, Terry emphasizes, is Jack to reveal his former identity or discuss his imprisonment. The only information that his new employer at the delivery company that hires him has is that he served time and has paid his debt to society.

In some ways *Boy A* is a throwback to the sooty kitchen-sink realism of early-1960s British films by Tony Richardson, Lindsay Anderson and John Schlesinger, that portrayed a depressed, alienated working class teetering between rage and hopelessness in a stagnant economy.

In *Boy A*, Manchester looks much the same now as it did in movies back then. The identical brick buildings and narrow streets through which Jack furtively scuttles evoke time-honored film images of Britain's northern industrial cities as forbidding, prison-like environments. Although shot in color, *Boy A* leaves a black-and-white impression.

Garfield's performance makes Jack so endearing and vulnerable that as he takes his first wobbly steps, like a baby bird shoved from its nest, your instincts are protective. When he goes out drinking with his co-workers, and swallows a tab of Ecstasy without knowing what it is, you worry that disaster is imminent. Later, when he comes to the rescue of Chris (Shaun Evans), his closest friend at work, in a drunken rooftop brawl, the movie portrays his violent intervention as brave and not as a scary reversion to previous behavior.

Most important is Jack's developing relationship with Michelle (Katie Lyons), the grounded, no-nonsense secretary at his job.

Every step of that courtship, from gathering the courage to ask her out to sharing their first kiss, is a major personal leap forward. But as Jack's heart opens, he longs to tell Michelle about his past and clear the slate.

One day when he and Chris are driving the company van, Jack spots a car that has spun off the road into the woods and saves the life of a young girl trapped in the vehicle. He becomes a local hero. But heroes — even genuine ones — are resented. So is the media attention that heroism brings. Society doesn't forget violent crimes, even those committed by children. As flashbacks reveal Jack's past, *Boy A* asks us to weigh issues of forgiveness, justice and human nature.

If the movie has already made up its mind that Jack is a good guy worthy of salvation, it implies that for the majority of people some crimes are unforgivable; once a monster, always a monster. The pill we are asked to swallow is a very bitter one.

Film Notes

BOY A

DIRECTED BY: JOHN CROWLEY

STARRING: ANDREW GARFIELD (JACK BURRIDGE), PETER MULLAN (TERRY), KATIE LYONS (MICHELLE), SHAUN EVANS (CHRIS), TAYLOR DOHERTY (PHILIP CRAIG)

RUNNING TIME: 100 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: CURRENTLY SHOWING

Lights, camera, lots of action. And a script?

The days of storytelling in porn a la 'Deep Throat' are long gone as viewers' attention spans shorten and studios tailor content to be uploaded to the Net

BY MATT RICHTER

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

The actress known as Savanna Samson once relished preparing for a role. "I couldn't wait to get my next script," she said.

There's no reason to look at them anymore, she said, because her movies now call almost exclusively for action. Specifically, sex.

The pornographic movie industry has long had only a casual interest in plot and dialogue. But moviemakers are focusing even less on narrative arcs these days. Instead, they are filming more short scenes that can be easily uploaded to Web sites and sold in several-minute chunks.

"On the Internet, the average attention span is three to five minutes. We have to cater to that," said Steven Hirsch, co-chairman of Vivid Entertainment.

Vivid, one of the most prominent pornography studios, makes 60

films a year. Three years ago, almost all of them were feature-length films with story lines. Today, more than half are a series of sex scenes, loosely connected by some thread — "vignettes" in the industry vernacular — that can be presented separately online. Other major studios are making similar shifts.

The industry's interest in scripted scenes has waxed and waned in recent decades because of changes in technology. In the early 1970s, movies with loose story lines, like *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door*, won a mainstream audience, and others tried to copy their success, selling plot-centric movies to couples watching at home with the VCR technology introduced in 1975.

The falling cost of hand-held video cameras gave birth to a generation of pornographers with little interest in drama beyond a clichéd plot involving a pizza delivery boy, said Paul

Fishbein, president of the AVN Media Network, an industry trade publication.

Fishbein said plot came into vogue again in the late 1990s with the boom of the DVD. Big studios, he said, figured plots would make their films more appealing to women and encourage couples to bring them into their homes — whether on disc or pay-per-view.

Plot-centrism was in full bloom in 2005 with the release of *Pirates*, about a ragtag group of sailors who go after a band of evil pirates. That movie, with a budget of more than US\$1 million, had special effects (pirates materializing from the mist), and, yes, lots of sex. Two years later, the movie's studio, Digital Playground, spent US\$8 million on a sequel — a remarkable sum in an industry where the average movie costs US\$25,000, according to the director of the two movies, Ali Joone.

But interest in DVDs has fallen



Adult film actress Savanna Samson says she favors scripts with more dialogue.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

sharply, Fishbein said, because the Internet has made it easy to watch snippets of video.

Fishbein estimated that pornographic DVD sales and rentals in the US generated US\$3.62 billion in 2006 but had fallen as much as 50 percent since then. He notes that the slump has

made some companies reluctant to share sales figures, so his estimates are getting rougher.

The big studios, like Vivid and Digital Playground, have turned to a subscription model, charging monthly fees for access to their Web sites and advertising the frequency with which they add

new clips.

Joone said that of Digital Playground's 60 productions this year, roughly 30 had little or no plot, up from about 10 two years ago. At Wicked Pictures, which averages one production a week, one-third are essentially just sex, twice as many as a few years ago, said the company's president, Steve Orenstein.

"The feature is not as big a part of the industry today," Orenstein said. But he says he still plans two to three bigger-budget releases each year, including the recently shot *2040*, which is about the pornography business of the future. Orenstein described the movie as "an almost Romeo-and-Juliet story between an aging porn star and a cyborg."

In lieu of plot, there are themes. Among the new releases from New Sensations, a studio that makes 24 movies a month, is *Girls 'N Glasses*, made up

of scenes of women having sex while wearing glasses. "It's almost like we're back to the late '70s or early '80s when the average movie was eight minutes and just a sex scene," Hirsch said, sounding wistful.

Some in the industry would prefer their sex with a little more character development.

Samson, for example, said she took her acting seriously and used to prepare studiously for her roles, like the character she played in the 2006 movie *Flasher*.

She said she played a psychotic who, because of the way her mother treated her, "had an obsession with flashing and doing things in public."

"I used to have dialogue," said Samson, whose given name is Natalie Oliveros, and who is one of the industry's biggest stars.

"Getting it on in one hardcore scene after another just isn't as much fun," she added.