

‘Cinema was the other church to me’

In town for the Taipei Film Festival, German director Helma Sanders-Brahms talks about her fondness for Taiwan, her frustrating experiences with filmmaking in Germany and how she finally came around to liking Johannes Brahms' music

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



After days of jury duty for the Taipei Film Festival (台北電影節), which ended on Sunday, Helma Sanders-Brahms showed up promptly to our interview on Friday morning of last week, elegantly dressed, and looking bright and lively. The 69-year-old German director jokingly called her visit to Taipei the last stop, after Shanghai and Tokyo, of her Asian tour to promote her new film *Beloved Clara*, about the love triangle between Clara Schumann, her husband Robert Schumann and the much younger composer Johannes Brahms, whom Sanders-Brahms is distantly related to on her mother's side.

A key figure of the New German Cinema movement in the 1970s, Sanders-Brahms has built a career of making films reflective of contemporary Germany that give voice to the exploited and deprived.

Her most notable works include *The Beach Under the Pavement* (1974), a story of two Berliners wrestling with the aftermath of the 1968 student movement; *Shirin's Wedding* (1976), which addresses the problems faced by *Gastarbeiter*, foreign migrant workers in Germany, through the experiences of a young Turkish woman; and *No Mercy, No Future* (1981), about the schizophrenic daughter of a wealthy family who sees the essence of Christ in the people she meets while wandering the streets. One of her most renowned pieces, *Germany, Pale Mother* (1980) was lauded as the best film about the devastation of wartime and postwar Germany ever made.

Sanders-Brahms' relationship with Taiwan began when the Women Make Waves Film Festival (女性影展) organized a retrospective program of her works in 2003, which she attended. She made a television documentary, *Black Butterfly* (黑蝴蝶), about Taiwanese dancer Chuang Shih-hsien (莊士賢) in 2005, partially in cooperation with the Public Television Service (公共電視).

Taipei Times: What was your earliest experience with cinema?

Helma Sanders-Brahms: I had an outstanding experience when I was 10. My parents used to send me to see fairy-tale films on Sunday mornings because they wanted to be alone [laughs]. I didn't want to go to church. Cinema was the other church to me.

I didn't like the fairy-tale films. But one day I saw one so beautiful that I went to the box office and demanded my money back for all the bad films I saw [laughs]. I told them that I didn't want to pay for bad films anymore and I wanted all films to be like that one.

It was a famous film by Jean Cocteau, *Beauty and the Beast*, one of the greatest films in the history of cinema.

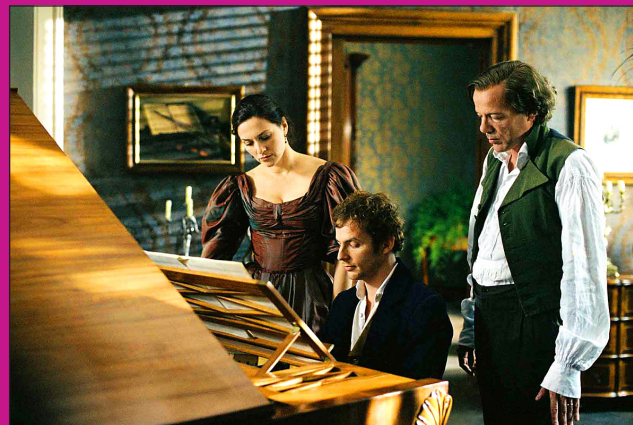
TT: When did you decide to become a filmmaker?

HS: It was right at that moment, more or less. I thought if there were so few films that I liked, I need to make some [laughs]. I was 12 when I went to work at a film club so that I could see all these special screenings of movies for film buffs.

After finishing my bachelor degree [in German and English literature at the University of Cologne], I went to study acting. My professors told me that I would become a director, not [an] actress. They encouraged me to make further study. They said to me: "As a woman, you have to be especially qualified in order to be accepted, to be taken seriously."

I was later asked to take up a job as a television announcer for a film program. I became a celebrity, you know, the kind that smiled and looked pretty. But I used the chance to learn more about cinema.

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Scenes from *Germany, Pale Mother* (1980), left, and *Beloved Clara* (2008), above, directed by Helma Sanders-Brahms, far left.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI FILM FESTIVAL

[TECHNOLOGY REVIEWS]

FLUENT NEWSREADING ON A CELL PHONE

The ability to check news at any time is one of the joys of the mobile phone, but trying to read tiny type and busy layouts on a 2-inch screen isn't.

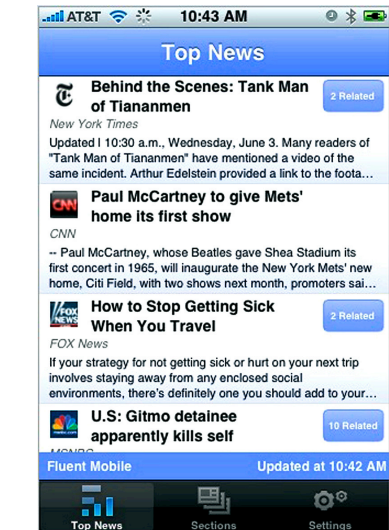
A new free iPhone app called Fluent News addresses that problem (a mobile Web version is available to any phone with a browser at fluentnews.com). It aggregates news, collecting only stories that are formatted for the mobile phone, then recasts them into its easy-to-use news browser.

No account is required; you just fire Fluent up, and the screen shows a list of headlines and a summary. Tap the headline to read the full story. Fluent cuts clutter by showing only one story on any particular topic. For other accounts, press the "related stories" button. If you want to delve more into a particular category of news, there are 12 sections, including Business, Tech and Entertainment.

It may not replace your favorite single news app, or even your highly programmable news feeds, but for a fast and easy overview of the day's headlines, Fluent is just the thing.

A STUDY'S SIDELONG VIEW OF LCDs FINDS THEM LACKING

According to a new study by DisplayMate Technologies and supported by Insight Media, LCD



televisions continue to come up short when compared with their competitors.

DisplayMate tested LCD sets from Samsung, Sharp and Sony, and a plasma display from Panasonic. The company's aim was not to single out specific models but to look for issues common across the technologies.

Most striking was the inability of LCD TVs to maintain picture quality when the sets were viewed from an angle. The tests showed that LCD picture quality deteriorated as soon as someone sat just 10 degrees off center.

"The significance of this is enormous, because it means that the 'sweet spot' for seeing an accurate picture on an LCD HDTV is only one person wide,



From left to right: The Fluent News iPhone app aggregates news formatted to fit cell phones; A new report casts doubt on LCD TV manufacturers' specification claims; Sony's soon-to-be-released PSP Go is a small gadget with a big job to do; Microsoft aims to take the sting out of Google Docs with its own version of a free Web-based program.

PHOTOS: AGENCIES

even for these top-of-the-line models," said DisplayMate's founder and chief executive, Raymond Soneira.

DisplayMate also had some harsh words for some of the specifications promoted by TV manufacturers. Speaking of quoted contrast and brightness levels, the report said that "the values published by most manufacturers are now so outrageous that they are close to absolute nonsense."

A SMALLER PSP WITH A BIGGER JOB

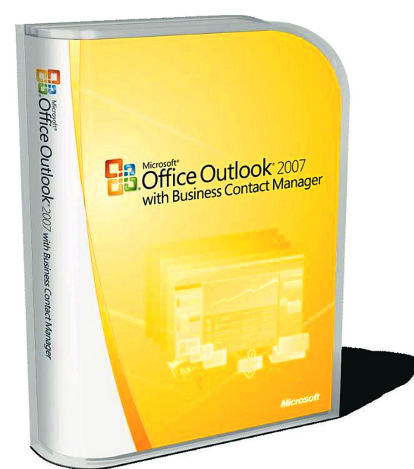
If you want to quickly understand Sony's PSP Go (US\$250, coming Oct. 1), just think of the rule of two. Compared



with the regular PSP, it is 50 percent smaller, but it costs twice as much as Nintendo's DS, which is outselling it by 100 percent.

At the center of Sony's PSP thinking is Media Go, Sony's iTunes-like content manager. You can drag and drop movies, songs and videos onto the Go's 16GB of memory, and archive your big files on your Windows computer's hard drive.

Gone is the tiny Universal Media Disk, the optical disk format that Sony developed for use in the PlayStation Portable. Sony says it will try to make older UMD titles available as downloads, and starting Oct. 1, most UMD titles will have a



downloadable equivalent.

Reading between the lines, the UMD was a battery-burning dud that Sony had to dump.

Can the PSP Go stand up to the cheaper Nintendo DSI, Apple's iPhone and iPod Touch and a growing swarm of smartphones? Stay tuned. Safe to say, this is a little gadget with a big job.

MICROSOFT READIES ONLINE OFFICE

Microsoft this week unveiled new details of its Office 2010 productivity tools, which will feature a free online program to counter similar programs already available from Google and

other competitors.

The online features of Office Web, as the new service will be called, will allow workers to access an online word processor, spreadsheet, presentation software and a note-taking program, and store their documents on Microsoft's servers.

Because the documents will be stored online, they will be much easier for people to share and collaborate on, Microsoft said.

Microsoft said the ad-supported Web suite will be available to more than 400 million Windows Live consumers at no cost.

"Office Web Applications, the online companion to Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote applications, allow you to access documents from anywhere. You can even simultaneously share and work on documents with others online," Microsoft said on its Office 2010 Technical Preview site.

"View documents across PCs, mobile phones and the web without compromising document fidelity. Create new documents and do basic editing using the familiar Office interface."

Sales of Office software are a mainstay of Microsoft, the world's largest software company. The Office division has earned profits of over US\$9 billion in the first three quarters of fiscal year 2009, on sales of US\$14.3 billion.

—NY TIMES NEWS AND AFP