

FILM REVIEW



Seven years after his 2002 debut feature *Twenty Something Taipei* (台北晚九朝五), seasoned actor Leon Dai (戴立忍) returns to the director's chair with *No Puedo Vivir Sin Ti* (不能沒有你). The film, the title of which means "I can't live without you" in Spanish, is based on a true story. Shot in black-and-white, *No Puedo Vivir Sin Ti* centers on a blue-collar, single father's struggle to raise his daughter while engaged in a fierce battle against an unyielding bureaucracy.

Blessed with a masterful control of cinematography and flair for a sober aesthetic, Dai succeeds in weaving an accessible and compelling melodrama. The story evokes acute emotions, the effects of which linger long after the movie ends.

The film opens with Li Wu-hsiung (Chen Wen-pin, 陳文彬) holding his young daughter, Mei (Chao Yu-hsuan, 趙祐萱), and threatening to jump off a bridge. As the police attempt to intervene, TV news cameras focus on the two figures, with reporters hastily speculating about the motives of the suicidal father. Throughout the scene, Li shouts, "society is not fair!"

Rewind to two months earlier. Li lives as a tramp near Kaohsiung harbor earning a meager living working odd jobs, such as diving for a sly boat captain. Mei observes this particular dangerous endeavor, concerned that the worn equipment might break and her father die.

Though Mei's mother abandoned the family years ago, Li and his daughter, who live together in an empty warehouse on the docks, share a ramshackle but affectionate existence. Life is manageable until the authorities discover that Li is not Mei's legal guardian.

Following the advice of his old friend A-tsay (Lin Chih-ju, 林志儒), Li, hoping to resolve the problem, travels to Taipei to track down a former classmate, now a legislator. What follows is a Kafkaesque nightmare, as the bureaucracy rules that removing Mei from her father's care is in her best interest.

Driven to despair, Li resorts to drastic measures, which eventually culminate in the opening standoff.

Shot with precise mise en scene, the unassuming film is energized by natural performances and unobtrusive camerawork, a technique that produces authenticity. The austere black-and-white cinematography leads to a simple, focused style, transforming the family's grimy hovel into a safe haven for Li and his daughter. Without the distracting

A life worth living

Leon Dai's second feature, 'No Puedo Vivir Sin Ti,' having won four prizes at this year's Taipei Film Festival, including best film, best actor and best supporting actor, has been selected to compete in next year's Best Foreign-Language Film Oscar category

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



Experienced filmmakers but first-time actors, both Chen Wen-pin and Lin Chih-ju win top honors for their roles in *No Puedo Vivir Sin Ti* at this year's Taipei Film Festival. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATOM CINEMA

Film Notes

NO PUEDO VIVIR SIN TI
不能沒有你

DIRECTED BY:
LEON DAI (戴立忍)

STARRING:
CHEN WEN-PIN (陳文彬) AS LI WU-HSIUNG,
CHAO YU-HSUAN (趙祐萱) AS MEI,
LIN CHIH-JU (林志儒) AS A-TSAY

RUNNING TIME:
92 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
IN MANDARIN, TAIWANESE AND
HAKKA WITH CHINESE AND
ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY

visual chaos of a film shot in color, audiences are able to focus on the relationship between the two, mesmerized by their struggle to remain a family.

Though the story offers Dai numerous opportunities to examine the failings of impersonal bureaucracy, the director fails to fully explore these resonant themes. He instead depicts government figures as stereotypically lifeless drones. This simplistic conception of the Establishment prevents what could have been a sophisticated commentary on the problems posed by living in such an environment.

Social analysis aside, the film is, at its heart, a story about a father's fear of losing his daughter, not an existential critique.

First-time actor Chen delivers a touching performance as an underprivileged man who, down on his luck, refuses to relinquish his fatherhood. The film adopts a nuanced approach towards the relationship between Li and his daughter, establishing their affection through tender silence and wisely eschewing mawkish outbursts of emotion. One such subtle moment occurs during a diving expedition. As Li plunges into the deep blue sea, alone but free, safeguarded from the hostile world above, he looks up and catches sight of the faint image of Mei, quietly awaiting his return.

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

Orphan

A family with too many problems adopts Esther — a Russian-accented nine-year-old girl — who becomes a much, much bigger problem than any nightmare could have predicted.



This is a graphic thriller-cum-horror flick that will offend those who wish to be offended and entertain those who wish to be entertained — and contains a plot revelation that has world-weary critics searching for superlatives. Not suitable for children, and probably unsuitable for a lot of grown-ups as well (the *San Francisco Chronicle* approvingly called it a "two-hour nervous breakdown," while the sniffy *Washington Post* called it "depraved ... filth"). From the director of the *House of Wax* remake and co-produced by Leonardo DiCaprio.

My Sister's Keeper

The plot for this one is so outlandish and histrionic at first glance that you could be forgiven for staying well clear: A pre-teen discovers that she was conceived to help her sister survive a would-be genetic death sentence, and sues her family to gain distance from the medicos who need bits of her body. But the cast (Cameron Diaz as the mother, Jason Patric as the father, Alec Baldwin as the lawyer) and the director (Nick Cassavetes, *John Q*) treat the audience with respect and the end result is a tearjerker with a nod to the dilemmas of modern science.



Spread

Poor prospects for this sex-laced drama about a Los Angeles gigolo and the women who stomp up cash for his services. Any such sleaze requires strong characters and a clever script, but neither is on display if you believe early notices from Europe. Worse, there's no sign of Richard Gere; audiences instead must entertain the thought of Ashton Kutcher (*That '70s Show*, *The Butterfly Effect*) being the main man and Anne Heche his leading customer. Vulgarities abound, starting with the title.



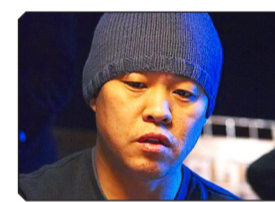
Handsome Suits

An unattractive loser finds himself the center of much-appreciated attention when a bloated white outfit transforms him into a hunk — but will he find or lose wisdom along the way? This Japanese comedy may sound like a cross between *Shallow Hal* and that awful Jackie Chan (成龍) movie *The Tuxedo*, but reviewers in Japan and Hong Kong think some might get a kick out of it. Those not in the mood to be reminded of the superficiality of physical beauty are better off seeing *Orphan*.



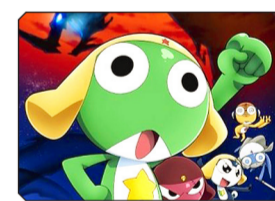
Dream

One of the clever ideas in the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* was having petrified teenagers force themselves to stay awake to avoid the razor talons of Freddy Kreuger. In this South Korean fantasy from niche director Kim Ki-duk, a similar situation emerges when a man (who only speaks Japanese) concludes that a sleepwalking woman is acting out his dream world in the real world — with sinister consequences. As with most of Kim's films, this will leave you exhilarated or in a stony cold funk, which might just allow us to call him the Korean David Lynch.



Keroro The Movie 4

Failed interstellar conqueror Keroro, aka Sgt. Frog, is back in the fourth feature-length anime based on the popular Japanese manga. This time around, the impossibly lazy Keroro travels across the world with his host Earth family to combat a sinister dragon whose massive tail, in the visual tradition of *Independence Day*, has draped itself across the skylines of cities that boast the world's most recognizable monuments. Loosely subtitled "Crushing Invasion! Dragon Warriors," this film should deliver the goods for young fans of this most unusual anti-hero. Screens with a *Keroro* short, as usual.



FILM REVIEW

More about the boys than the game

Shen Ko-shang and Liao Ching-yao's documentary about young baseball players is told in poetic fragments, unencumbered by commentary from its directors

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

"What is this?" a teacher asks a class of elementary school students. "An elephant," some boys snicker. "They are testicles, and they are never at the same level. One is always higher than the other," the teacher explains. Class is dismissed, and the boys rush out the door, humming a tune using the anatomical terms they just learned.

This is the opening scene of *Baseball Boys* (野球孩子), a documentary about a baseball team consisting of fifth and sixth graders, mostly Aboriginal boys, from Fuyuan Elementary School (富源國小) in Hualien County.

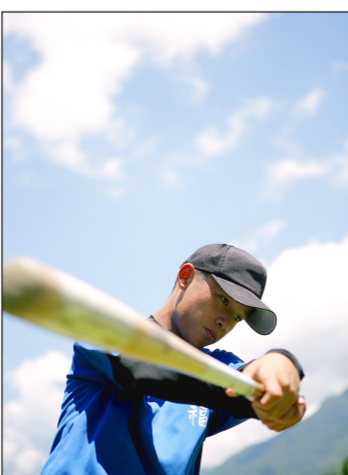
In terms of subject matter, the film is akin to *My Football Summer* (奇蹟的夏天). Both follow a group of young athletes undergoing rigorous training for an upcoming national championship. But the two differ



in their approach to the genre. If *My Football Summer* is a novel filled with dramatic moments and a narrative climax, *Baseball Boys* is a prose poem composed of fragments of everyday life.

Winner of the top prize at the biannual Taiwan International

Documentary Festival (台灣國際紀錄片雙年展) last year, this documentary by experienced filmmakers Shen Ko-shang (沈可尚) and Liao Ching-yao (廖歌堯) dispenses with the voice-over and keeps interviews to a minimum. The pace is leisurely and the film



dwells on the little things: the silly games two brothers play before bedtime, a girl smacking the back of a boy's head because she thinks he's cute, young baseball players turning the school's playground into a concert hall at night.

Film Notes

BASEBALL BOYS
野球孩子

DIRECTED BY:
SHEN KO-SHANG (沈可尚)
AND LIAO CHING-YAO (廖歌堯)

STARRING:
COACH CHANG MAO-SAN (張茂三)
AND BASEBALL PLAYERS AS
THEMSELVES

RUNNING TIME:
86 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
IN MANDARIN WITH CHINESE
AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY



Baseball Boys, directed by Shen Ko-shang and Liao Ching-yao. PHOTOS COURTESY OF FLASH FORWARD ENTERTAINMENT

Liao and Shen play the role of quiet observers, gazing intimately into the boys' lives and resisting the temptation to comment. We see a father with serious burn scars on his face, a boy calling his grandmother rather than his parents after the team's first

victory, and a student dreaming of becoming either an athlete or a singer when he grows up. But the camera stops there, leaving members of the audience to formulate their own ideas using their imaginations.

Unlike many sports documentaries, with their high emotion and enthusiasm in the run-up to the big game, *Baseball Boys* paints a realistic portrait of a group of students on the cusp of adolescence. Because many of the young players will graduate from elementary school after the game, it is a time to bid farewell to childhood and prepare for the trials and tribulations of their teenage years.

The film ends with a new academic year after summer vacation. New faces show up on the baseball team. Boys and girls banter and practice street-dance moves as life goes on in the village.