And they're under starter's orders

STAFF REPORTER

For local cineastes, the highlight of the year is just around the corner as the 2009 Golden Horse Film Festival (2009台北金馬影展) gets set to show more than 200 feature, documentary, short and animation films from around the world starting Thursday evening.

The lineup includes the festival's popular LGBT program, films about Joy Division, Patti Smith, Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols as well as a section featuring digitally restored masterpieces including Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 Pierrot le Fou and 1948's The Red Shoes.

This year's directors in focus are Japan's Jun Ichikawa, who passed away last year, and American director John Cassavetes, whose films are relatively unknown in Taiwan.

This edition of the Golden Horse turns the spotlight on various film professionals this year, screening films made by cinematographer Mark Ping-bing Lee (李屛賓) and starring French actress Isabelle Huppert. Both

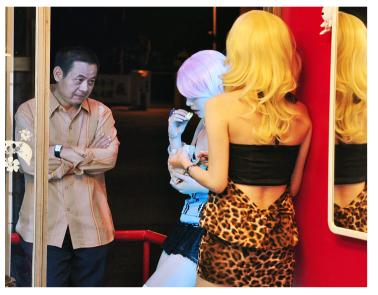
will attend the event. Award-winning works from this year's Cannes, Venice and Berlin film festivals are on the bill, as are the latest flicks by world renowned directors

including Michael Haneke's The White Ribbon, Jane Campion's Bright Star, Sweet Rush by Andrzej Wajda and The Dust of Time by Theodoros Angelopoulos.

The three-week long festival runs from Thursday through Nov. 26 at Shin Kong Cineplex (新光影 城), 36 Xining S Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧南路36號) and Vie Show Cinema, Xinyi district (信義威秀影 城), 18 Songshou Rd, Taipei City (台北市松壽路18號).

Individual tickets cost NT\$230 per screening (NT\$200 for students with ID and people with disabilities). A booklet of tickets costs NT\$2,900 for 15 screenings, available through ERA ticket outlets or at www.ticket.com.tw.

For more information, visit the festival's bilingual Web site at www.goldenhorse.org.tw



Cheng Wen-tang's Tears will open the 2009 Golden Horse Film Festival next Thursday



Film Notes

PRINCE OF TEARS

YONFAN (楊凡)

WING FAN (范植偉) AS DING KE-CHIANG, JOSEPH CHANG (張孝全) AS SUN HAN-SUN, TERRI KWAN (關穎) AS MADAME OU-YANG LIU, ZHU XUAN (朱璇) AS PING, LIN YO-WEI (林佑威) AS MASTER QIU

122 MINUTES

IN MANDARIN WITH CHINESE AND **ENGLISH SUBTITLES**

History repeats itself as farce

Yonfan's overly self-conscious 'Prince of Tears' treats the White Terror period with a glib sentimentality that can best be described as political terror as soap opera

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW STAFF REPORTER

he White Terror is one of the most fraught and controversial episodes in Taiwanese history, and the fact that it has been picked as the setting for Hong Kong-based Taiwanese director Yonfan's (楊凡) lushly romantic period drama *Prince of Tears* (淚王子) is arguably in rather dubious taste, an offense the director aggravates with a glib sentimentality that can best be described as political terror as soap opera.

Putting aside this fundamental issue, which may well be sufficient to put some people off the film, it is only fair to say that the visual aesthetic is not uninteresting (relying heavily on supersaturated colors and airbrush effects that Taiwan's wedding photographers are likely to appreciate), though so selfconsciously artistic that it often loses touch with any sense of reality and at times verges on self-parody.

The story centers on Sun (Joseph Chang, 張孝全), a handsome and loyal Air Force officer who lives with his second wife Ping (Zhu Xuan, 朱璇) in what must be one of the neatest little veterans' villages, or *juan cun* (眷村), ever to have been built. They have two daughters, one by his previous wife. A close family friend Ding (Wing Fan, 范植 偉) has a bit of a yen for Ping, but spends most of the movie with a sour look and a Phantom of the Opera facial disfigurement that is so profoundly fake that one expects him to take it off at any time.

The idyllic life of Sun and his wife begins to unwind when they fall under suspicion of being Communist sympathizers. Sun is taken off and shot, while Ping secures her safety by marrying Ding, who is implicated in her husband's death. In this harsh world, compromises need to be made.

Sun's youngest daughter is close friends with the daughter of Madame Ou-Yang Liu (Terri Kwan, 關穎), a former girlfriend of Sun's, and possibly a former



lover of Ping's. She is now married to a general, but has dark secrets hidden in her past. And this is just the tip of a very large and murky iceberg. It is remarkable that although *Prince of Tears* is supposedly based on, or at least inspired, by a real story, every transition seems contrived, and the emotional responses of the characters are often rather bewildering.

A narrated voiceover by the director keeps the plot on track, and also relieves the cast from the painful necessity of acting out the story. Ou-Yang looks

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an absolute dish in her lavish period

costumes, and Joseph Chang is also likely to find an appreciative audience, but this is all pop idol glam-infused camera work without even a hint of depth.

Yonfan tries for a mood of tragedy, but what he ends up with is a sort of high camp period drama that cares more about recreating a mythology and wallowing in nostalgia than it does about looking at the past. In an interview quoted in the publicity materials, Yonfan said that he did not re-create the period. "I create with my memories of the past and make something that you have never seen before," he said.

If that was his goal, then Prince of Tears may be accounted a success of sorts, but for the most part it is turgid stuff made worse by its artistic and historical pretensions. Some of the most interesting footage is the documentary material — recordings, film and photos — that plays at the opening of the film and accompanies the credits at the end. This at least seems to be about something more than Yonfan's own fevered imaginings.

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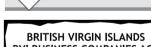
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