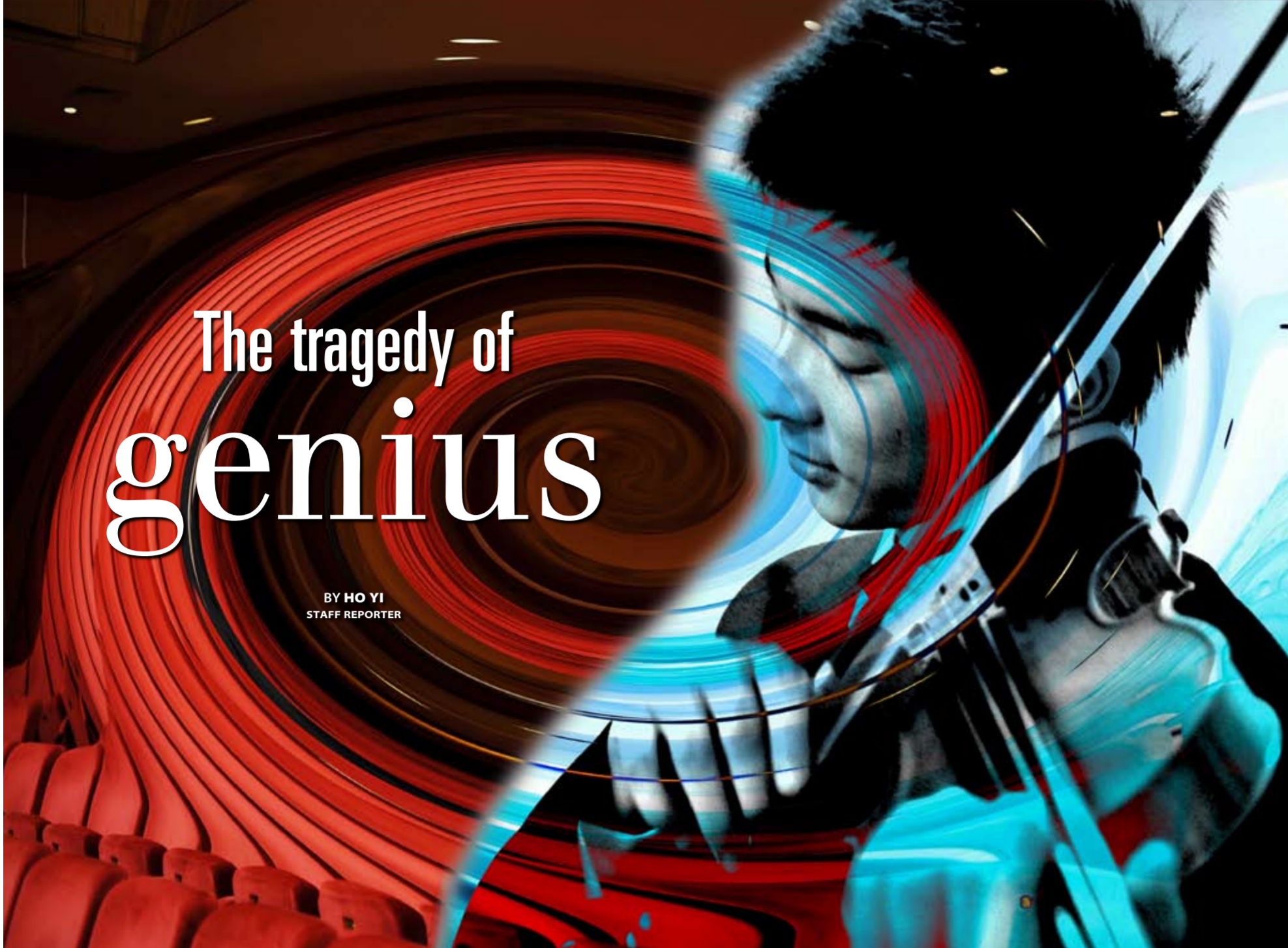


FILM REVIEW



The tragedy of genius

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

'KJ: Music and Life' takes a sensitive look at the mind of a child prodigy struggling with the demands of his own talent

A young musician from a well-to-do family studying at a private school hardly makes for a fascinating documentary, unless the subject is Wong Ka-jeng (黃家正), the music prodigy and tormented protagonist in *KJ: Music and Life* (音樂人生), a Hong Kong production that won top honors in three categories including Best Documentary, Best Editing and Best Sound Effects at this year's Golden Horse Awards (金馬獎).

KJ is the stuff of genius. At the tender age of 11, he is playing in a professional orchestra in the Czech Republic. Six years later, he is conducting his own orchestra at a prestigious private school.

KJ is also a complex 17-year-



old. He behaves arrogantly in front of friends, peers and family members, and cares little about competitions and awards. But he is also a sensitive soul, one who longs for recognition from the people he cares about and broods over existential questions.

With KJ's compelling personality and the sense of closeness he shares with director Cheung King-wai (張經緯) in front of the camera, one immediately feels absorbed into his life story. We learn to understand KJ's musical talent

from multiple angles as Cheung aims to show KJ's relationships with his mentor, his friends, his siblings and his father. The extensive interviews shot at two different periods of KJ's career (ages 11 and 17) are deployed in an effective and coherent manner, as the film goes back and forth between the two time frames to paint an affecting portrait of a young, tormented mind.

Though KJ's philosophical questioning about life and music may sound like the empty blather of your average melancholy



Wong Ka-jeng struggles with the big questions. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CNEY

adolescent, the sense of urgency and the candor in his voice will remind viewers of their own forgotten youthful passions.

With KJ's mother curiously missing from the documentary, the father-son relationship is featured predominantly as a key factor in the young man's music career. One of the most powerful moments of the film occurs when KJ explains the breakdown of his relationship with his father, which is intercut with a scene where the then-11-year-old boy weeps as his doctor father affectionately pats his head.

Ultimately, *KJ: Music and Life* paints a tragic figure whose far-

Film Notes

KJ: MUSIC AND LIFE
音樂人生

DIRECTED BY:
CHEUNG KING-WAI (張經緯)

STARRING:
WONG KA-JENG (黃家正) AS HIMSELF,
NANCY LOO (羅乃新) AS HERSELF

RUNNING TIME:
90 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
IN CANTONESE AND ENGLISH WITH
CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY

too-early success and talent make him a vulnerable and sad outcast who desperately seeks what he cannot find in those close to him.

The film will screen at Vie Show Cinema, Xinyi District (信義威秀影城) in Taipei for a limited period of two weeks with only one screening per day. For show times, go to tw.myblog.yahoo.com/kjmusiclife.

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

The Private Lives of Pippa Lee

Robin Wright Penn is Pippa Lee, a housewife in Connecticut whose psychological history and social milieu makes it to the big screen courtesy of Rebecca Miller (daughter of Arthur Miller), who adapted her own work and directed. Pippa is married to publisher Alan Arkin and has an interesting network of friends, family and associates, but there's no shortage of dissatisfaction in her life. Flashbacks to Pippa as a young woman (played by Blake Lively from TV's *Gossip Girl*) help explain why. Big cast includes Winona Ryder, Julianne Moore, Keanu Reeves, Monica Bellucci and Maria Bello, but critics were divided on this one.



Couples Retreat

Vince Vaughn and wife travel to lovely Bora Bora for therapy along with three other couples, but the program on offer by the local resort chief (Jean Reno) is not quite what they expect. American critics liked the actors but retreated from the rest of the production, which — as with many mainstream US comedies these days — injects surprisingly crude material throughout in the hope of appearing lively, if not funny.



Om Shanti Om

Bollywood films never took off in Taiwan, and while this week's release (under the mini-festival title "Bling! Bling! Bollywood!") of two big-budget odes to the movie industry won't change that, it will surely remind adventurous local audiences of the dynamism of India's filmmakers. In *Om Shanti Om*, Shahrukh Khan (*Slumdog Millionaire*) plays the two "Oms" in segments set decades apart, but possibly connected through reincarnation, while Deepika Padukone is his love interest, Shanti. Packed with musical numbers, action, romance, color and dance, India's trade office couldn't have asked for a more majestic advertisement for Indian tourism.



Billu Barber

In this accompanying Bollywood release made last year, the wildly popular Shahrukh Khan is back as a movie star whose struggling barber friend, Billu, enjoys a new lease of life when the village Khan is shooting in learns of their connection. This is not, however, a standard happy tale, even though it is laced with Bollywood exuberance: Billu's newfound popularity is mostly based on the opportunism and insincerity of his neighbors.



Noriben: The Recipe of Fortune

A woman in her early thirties leaves her husband and returns to her family home and community with child in tow to find that her calling is making and selling bento, and noriben (seaweed, soy sauce and rice) in particular. This is another in a selection of Japanese films of late that have older women striking out on their own. Oddly enough, this is also a manga adaptation, and it's hard not to think of the first Sonny Chiba-Uma Thurman scene in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* when our plucky heroine asks to be an apprentice chef.



FILM REVIEW

Treasure hunting is a dreary affair

The second Chu Yen-ping-Jay Chou collaboration makes 'Kung Fu Dunk,' their first joint effort, look like a masterpiece

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Kung fu mixes with Indiana Jones, and Jay Chou (周杰倫) and Lin Chi-ling (林志玲) are in the lead roles. *The Treasure Hunter* sounds like a film that can't go wrong. That is until old-time slapstick comedy whiz Chu Yen-ping (朱延平) manages to spoil the Chinese version of this ancient civilization adventure with an utterly nonsensical story plagued with stale humor and dull, silly dialogue.

In a role tailor-made for the Mando-pop king to show off his aloof charm, Chou plays Ciao Fei, a treasure hunter and kung fu master. The hero is in search of a map that will lead

him to a lost city brimming with riches. His companions on the journey include city gal-cum love interest Lan Ting (played by Lin), Chinese thespian Chen Daoming's (陳道明) deadpan archaeologist, and comic sidekick Pork Rib played by Eric Tsang (曾志偉).

Chou's real-life pal Will Liu (劉畊宏) plays the mummy-man villain. There is also the group of thugs termed the Sandstorm Legion who never make it back to the screen after pulling down a dingy bar at the beginning of the movie.

Even more puzzling is the laughable Eagle of the Desert, who is supposed to be a mysterious guardian of all things in the arid region, who suddenly

and inexplicably exits the movie with the girl he loves.

The film possesses no plot other than a mad scrambling to grab the treasure map. The romance between Chou and Lin doesn't work either. The onscreen love is killed prematurely by a plethora of coy, mushy dialogue and feeble flirting. The good news is that despite the poorly written script, baby-voiced Lin manages to play her babe-to-ogle-at role with dignity. Chou is his usual self as a one-expression hero looking good with the aid of an over-the-top wire-fu show.

The final verdict: It is best to avoid *The Treasure Hunter* unless you want to have a good laugh at the movie.



PHOTOS COURTESY VIE SHOW CINEMA

Film Notes

THE TREASURE HUNTER
刺陵

DIRECTED BY:
CHU YEN-PING (朱延平)

STARRING:
JAY CHOU (周杰倫) AS CIAO FEI, LIN CHI-LING (林志玲) AS LAN TING, ERIC TSANG (曾志偉) AS PORK RIB, CHEN DAOMING (陳道明) AS MASTER HUA

RUNNING TIME:
106 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
IN MANDARIN AND CANTONESE WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
NOW SHOWING

