

FILM REVIEW

Fine directing and a talented cast help 'Youth in Revolt' avoid the pitfalls that undermine other edgy comedies about hormonally challenged adolescents and clueless parents

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER



Film Notes

YOUTH IN REVOLT

DIRECTED BY:
MIGUEL ARETA

STARRING:
MICHAEL CERA (NICK TWISP AND FRANCOIS DILLINGER),
PORTIA DOUBLEDAY (SHEEN SAUNDERS), JEAN SMART
(ESTELLE TWISP), ZACH GALIFIANAKIS (JERRY), ERIK
KNUDSEN (LEFTY), ADHIR KALYAN (VIJAY JOSHI), STEVE
BUSCEMI (GEORGE TWISP), FRED WILLARD (MR FERGUSON),
M. EMMET WALSH (MR SAUNDERS)

RUNNING TIME:
89 MINUTES

PHOTOS COURTESY OF APRILUSE

Smells like teen spirit

Michael Cera takes comedy seriously. He has made a specialty of socially awkward young men, usually on the cusp of sexual discovery, a type that can very quickly get caught in the rut of graphic sexual humor. With *Superbad*, it looked like that's just where he was going, but with *Youth in Revolt*, Cera has brilliantly shifted gears, and brings some of the sexually explicit material into what is essentially a romantic comedy, straddling romantic yearning and physical desire.

Cera's character is Nick Twisp, a geeky guy who finds sexual release in a *Penthouse* magazine and a box of tissues. During a holiday — made necessary after his mother's boyfriend is targeted by a bunch of tough sailors for selling them a dud car — he meets Sheeni Saunders (Portia Doubleday), who is slightly more adept at hiding her adolescent unease, but is equally willing to engage in the cultural posing, lamenting the death of vinyl records and creating a romantic figure of Gallic sophistication out of her current jock boyfriend, whose existence she uses to tease Nick.

The whole feeling of adolescent posturing, looking for an identity that fits, yearnings for another that are both romantic and at the same time clearly rooted in rampant sexual desire, is wonderfully portrayed here. Like all good humor, it is rooted in real experience, and the fact that Nick feels that he has found a soul mate in Sheeni, as well as a potential sexual partner, lifts *Youth in Revolt* above *Superbad* and its many predecessors.

One of the bolder moves of this film is the creation by Nick of an alter ego, Francois Dillinger, a super-cool character who is his bad angel, urging him on to get what, deep down, he really wants. It is a device that harks back to Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), and could easily come off as overly contrived; instead, Dillinger fits seamlessly into the story, as Cera alternates between extremes of diffidence and assurance.

In order to win Sheeni, Nick needs to get away from his mother and her various ill-suited boyfriends, and also get Sheeni expelled from an elite school. To do this he has to do bad



things. His alter ego comes into his own, and many humorous incidents, and some delightful minor characters, including Vijay Joshi (Adhir Kalyan), a classmate of Nick's who comes along in the hope of catching some action, and Paul, Sheeni's brother, who helps the story along with the aid of some magic mushrooms, appear all too briefly. Sheeni's father, played by M. Emmert Walsh, is also terrifically funny.

There are plenty of laughs, and while there is a good deal of fairly graphic sexual humor — Nick and his friend Lefty spend time exploring some of the more exotic moves in a sexual manual — *Youth in Revolt* never becomes raunchy in the manner of *American Pie*.

Cera's breadth of talent is more fully showcased in *Youth in Revolt* than in other recent feature films, and newcomer Portia Doubleday is excellently cast as Sheeni, managing to provide a strong female lead in what otherwise might be just a guy movie.

RESTAURANTS

BY DAVID CHEN

BY NOAH BUCHAN

Tenya (Ten 屋)

Address: B2, 300, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路三段300號B2)
Telephone: (02) 8772-6001 Average meal: NT\$300 to NT\$500 per person
Hours: 11am to 9pm Details: Credit cards accepted
On the Net: www.tenya.com.tw

In the always-bustling basement food court of the Sogo Department Store on Fuxing South Road (復興南路), a few restaurant spots are constantly changing hands.

The eateries that seem to disappear fastest are the sit-down Japanese establishments serving mid-priced sashimi set meals, curries and fried pork cutlets.

Perhaps those businesses could learn a thing or two from Tenya (Ten 屋), which has been at the Fuxing Sogo for more than a year and maintained a steady flow of diners who queue for its Japanese soul food: okonomiyaki.

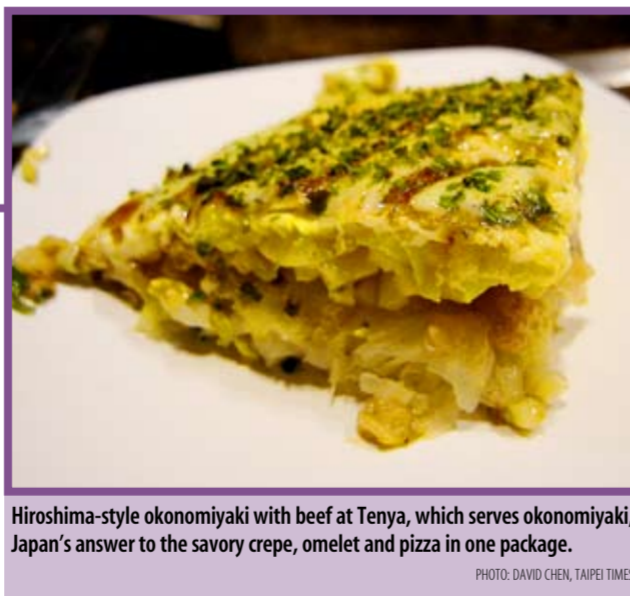
A cross between a savory crepe, omelet and pizza, okonomiyaki is a messy-looking but tasty combination of fried egg, cabbage and thinly sliced meat or seafood. At Tenya, the waiters cook the food at your table, which is equipped with a teppan grill (tables typically seat four to six people each). It's not a place for diners in a hurry — a serving of okonomiyaki takes around 15 minutes to prepare. Prices depend on the toppings, and range from NT\$190 for pork or beef to

NT\$290 for fresh seafood. Tenya serves several regional variations of okonomiyaki. For first-timers, waiters recommend the original Osaka style, for which egg and finely chopped cabbage are mixed together in a batter and cooked as one pie-shaped blob, with the meat added on top. The inside is mushy and the outside crispy.

The pancake is topped with a Worcestershire-type sauce, bonito flakes and a choice of five types of mayonnaise: plain, spicy, garlic, mustard or wasabi.

The Osaka-style okonomiyaki with shrimp and pork (NT\$220) is a decent introduction, but I preferred the Hiroshima version, dubbed "Hiroshimayaki" on the menu. The base ingredients are the same, but they're layered on top of each other instead of being mixed together as a single batter. It's more like a stuffed crepe.

There were no surprises from the beef Hiroshimayaki (牛肉廣島焼, NT\$210) with its fatty slices of meat — just the comfort one would expect from fried eggs, cabbage and noodles stacked on top of a thin flour pancake. For garnish, Hiroshimayaki also



Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki with beef at Tenya, which serves okonomiyaki, Japan's answer to the savory crepe, omelet and pizza in one package.
PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

gets the Worcestershire and mayonnaise treatment. If that's not enough, add cheese, corn or kimchi for NT\$20.

Despite the cooker-cutter Japanese minimalist interior, Tenya still manages a cheery, youthful vibe, thanks in part to the J-pop and techno playing on the stereo.

Tenya's teppanyaki menu comprises more than 20 items, including Korean-style barbecue beef (NT\$220), beef and cheese quesadilla (NT\$280), fried potatoes topped with bacon and cheese (NT\$180) and Hokkaido-style scallops in lemon and butter sauce (NT\$300). These sides are cooked at the kitchen at the back and then brought out to warm on the table grills.

Numb the guilt from a

Sogo spending spree with a sour cocktail (from NT\$90) or bottled beer (NT\$140 for Taiwan Beer, NT\$160 for Asahi). There's also a selection of ice cream floats, but don't expect too much. The matcha tea float (NT\$130) was not as sinful as it should have been, with its mediocre vanilla ice cream.

Other branches of Tenya in Taipei are located at B1, 14 Nanjing W Rd, Taipei City (台北市南京西路14號B1) and 12F, 55, Zhongcheng Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市忠誠路二段55號). There is also a branch in Kaohsiung, at B3, 266-1, Chenggong 1st Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市成功路266-1號B3), and in Taichung, at 15F, 299, Jhonggang Rd Sec 1, Taichung City (台中市中港路一段299號15F).

An enormous glass vase containing roughly one hundred wine corks tastefully adorns the entrance of J.W. Teres, the recently opened upscale Bulgarian restaurant located in an alley across the street from the Far Eastern Plaza Hotel. For Krastyu Nedyalkov, who said he drank the contents of every bottle, it is a testament to his love of wine and a trophy indicating his tolerance for the tippie.

"My grandfather gave me my first drink at age 2," Nedyalkov, whose family has been making wine for 400 years, announced with beguiling Balkan swagger. "I like to drink ... and I can drink a lot."

The manager, chef and all-around spinner of yarns constantly reminded me that Bulgarians invented wine (of which the restaurant stocks 84 varieties) as well as yogurt — the latter, a hard-to-find ingredient that goes into many of his homemade dishes.

For all his Dionysian posturing, Nedyalkov has created a dining space that is Apollonian in its attention to detail. From the custom-made leather booth in the semi-private room and old-world chic of its sturdy tables and plush chairs, to the crystal wine glasses below the marble-topped bar that stocks a selection of whisky and Bulgarian liqueurs, this lounge bar cum bistro

with its cornice finishing and handsomely framed modernist prints is poetically arranged to transport diners to Sofia, if only for a few hours. The only thing missing was flowers.

"This morning's market didn't have anything fresh," Nedyalkov said, somewhat sheepishly.

Nedyalkov's fastidious approach to detail translates to the food. There were three Bulgarian standards that I wanted to try: tarator (NT\$180), a cold soup made with yogurt, cucumber, garlic and dill; kiopoolu (NT\$280), an eggplant dip; and zucchini with garlic yogurt (NT\$250). I ended up going with the latter two, but substituted lentil soup (NT\$160) for the tarator.

Every bite of the kiopoolu made me pause. Eggplant, roast pepper, garlic, olive oil and herbs were mulched together and formed into a fragrant mound that was topped with five cubes of feta cheese, one for each of the tomato wedges that accompanied it.

Nedyalkov says he makes the yogurt served at Teres, and the blanket of

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

Frozen River

This outstanding debut film by director Courtney Hunt has finally made it to these shores (originally released in 2008) and should be seen by anyone who enjoys high-quality independent filmmaking. Hunt's movie follows the story of a small-time human trafficking operation that smuggles people from Canada to upstate New York, yet studiously rejects the many opportunities to become a mainstream thriller or a sentimental drama, focusing instead on an uneasy relationship between two mothers driven by emotional and economic need. For them to survive, they must cross an uneasy divide much more dangerous than the frozen river of the title. Fantastic performances by actress Melissa Leo and Misty Upham.



Ex (前度)

The second feature film helmed by Heiward Mak (麥曦茵) mixes up mainstream TV-idol casting and melodramatic romantic setups with a distinctly art house sensibility and deliberately fragmented story line. *Ex* was selected as the closing film for the 34th Hong Kong International Film Festival and boasts the presence of singers Gillian Chung (鍾欣桐) and William Chan (陳偉霆). A clunky and hugely implausible plot and self-consciously kinetic camerawork aspire to avant-garde credentials, but to little effect.



Sister Smile (Soeur Sourire)

A musical biopic of the Belgian nun Jeanine Deckers, who rose to fame as the singing nun following her 1963 hit song *Dominique*. The title role is played by Cecile de France, who puts in a stunning performance in what is otherwise an ordinary musical biopic full of the cliches of sudden success, fame and self-destruction. The sexual revolution of the 1960s, which provides the background to Deckers' career, is given little attention, with the film focusing resolutely on the emotional conflict between Deckers' religion and her desire to be free.



Dear Doctor

This Japanese-language film written and directed by Miwa Mishikawa and starring TV personality Tsurube Shofukutei was nominated by film magazine *Kinema Junpo* as one of the best Japanese films of last year. It is the story of a con artist posing as a country doctor who finds himself torn between carrying on deceiving his glibly rustic patients or doing the right thing by a woman dying of a fatal illness. *Dear Doctor* has won plaudits for its subtle characterization, strong acting and the depth with which it explores truth and its unintended consequences.



Musashi: The Dream of the Last Samurai

An animated biography of the famous Japanese swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, who authored the *The Book of Five Rings* and was a respected commentator on the virtues of Bushido. Written by Mamoru Oshii, the film, which examines the roots of Musashi's philosophy, is short on story and long on theory. A motley mix of animation styles and excessive digressions on minor aspects of the way of the warrior are likely to make this film hard going for all but the most ardent fans of Japanese military history.



Toy Story 3

The saga continues with Andy all grown up and the toys of his childhood in danger of finding their way into the landfill. All the old characters are back, and there are also a few new additions. In the hands of director Lee Unkrich, the film maintains a certain freshness and also explores some slightly darker issues. While 3D is being used to market the film, *Hollywood Reporter* suggests that there is nothing cheap or showy about the effects, and that the new technology is effectively used to heighten and enrich the animation.



J.W. Teres is a triumph of Bulgarian fare, served in a fine-dining atmosphere.
PHOTO: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

the viscous substance that covered the baked zucchini slices was distinctive for its tanginess and subtle garlic flavor. The soup, a mixture of green lentils, carrot and onion in a light tomato broth, arrived with warm grain bread. It didn't make a deep impression and I somewhat regretted not going with my earlier choice.

I had also originally planned to order either the caprese salad (NT\$250) or the shopska salad (NT\$270),

of tomato, cucumber, pepper and onion topped with grated feta and dill pesto. I decided against both after noticing that the grilled lamb (NT\$520) is served on a plate with sliced cucumber and tomato and topped with feta. Cooked to perfection (medium rare), the lamb possessed a slightly mesquite aroma and was lean and juicy, the strong and salty cheese balancing nicely with the delicate flavor of the meat.

J.W. Teres is a dining experience that requires time to enjoy. As the majority of the dishes are made from scratch, expect to spend 90 minutes for dinner. Meanwhile, Nedyalkov will draw on his considerable experience to patiently explain which wine best accompanies each dish.

J. W. Teres

Address: 4, Ln 208, Siwei Rd, Taipei City (台北市四維路208巷4號)
Telephone: (02) 2755-0660
Average meal: NT\$1,000 for two (not including drinks)
Open: Mondays to Fridays 12pm to 2:30pm and 5:30pm to 10pm, Saturdays 5:30pm to 10pm
Details: Credit cards accepted, 10 percent service charge