

## LEE CHI-YUAN

finds poetry in motion

With *Beautiful Crazy* (亂青春), director Lee Chi-yuan (李啟源) breaks from the conventional approach to storytelling in an attempt to capture the fluidity of time, love and memory. The result is a cinematic poem about three teenage girls and their friendship, desires and betrayals, in which the time in a linear sense collapses and non-chronological montages drive the story. Fragments of the characters' lives from the past, present and future intertwine, and the past is juxtaposed with and thrust into the present in the same way that one's memory is constantly filtered, transformed and re-interpreted.

Angel (Angel Yao, 姚安琪) and Xiao-Bu (Amiya Lee, 李律) are best friends. They like to ride on a swing and play together in their secret hide-out. Like her alcoholic father, Angel doesn't talk much, but she feels her heart pounding the day when Xiao-Bu makes her burn a love letter a boy had given her.

Years later, Xiao-Bu, her boyfriend, and Ah-mi (Liao Chien-hui, 廖千慧) enjoy a summer day at an amusement park. "We will always be like this. Always," says Ah-mi.

The three hold hands as the sun sets, and, for a moment, Xiao-Bu remembers Angel, the field with sunflowers where they played, and how they once fought over a cigarette in the pouring rain.

As the film moves back and forth in time, audiences are able to piece together the girls' stories and their relationships to each other, even though initial perceptions often change as new perspectives, anecdotes and scenes are

An artful combination of improvisational acting, non-linear storytelling, long takes and handheld camerawork make *Beautiful Crazy* a beautiful movie

BY HO YI  
STAFF REPORTER

brought into play.

Lee would not have been able to pull off this kind of lyrical cinema if not for the mesmerizing camerawork of Dutch/Indonesian documentary filmmaker Leonard Retel Helmrich, whose 2004 *Shape of the Moon* won top prizes at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and the Sundance Film Festival. Helmrich, who makes his debut as a cinematographer for a fictional film with *Beautiful Crazy*, is known for his long takes which he produces using a mount that frees the camera from conventional movements for a method he calls "single shot cinema."

Moving freely around the characters and spaces, Helmrich's improvisational, handheld camera focuses on the intimate and immediate rather than the narrative, capturing shifts in mood and the fluidity of emotions.

The acting is also improvised. Rather than reciting lines from a script, the three leads appear to spontaneously react and interact with each other and to

their surroundings.

More often than not, the film's landscapes and settings assume a poetic significance. A scene where Xiao-Bu and Angel fight in a junkyard next to a lotus pond represents Lee's idea of youth, which is simultaneously tender and rough, beautiful and ugly.

In *Beautiful Crazy*, Lee has created a unique cinematic vocabulary that invites us as the audience to actively experience rather than passively watch what the characters experience and feel, giving us a glimpse of old but familiar feelings and images that belonged to our own youth.



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## OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

## Race to Witch Mountain

The always magnetic Dwayne Johnson stars in an updating of the fondly remembered 1975 Disney film *Escape to Witch Mountain*. Two aliens in the guise of children appear in ex-con Johnson's cab and ask for help to locate their spaceship, which the puzzled cabbie is shortly compelled to provide as government goons close in. More action-oriented than the original, but harmless and fun for the kids and undemanding oldies. Fans of the original will be delighted to hear that child actors Ike Eisenmann and Kim Richards have cameos in the 2009 version.



## Last Chance Harvey

Dustin Hoffman is Harvey, a man whose professional and personal life is at low ebb. Visiting London to attend his daughter's wedding, he receives news that he has been fired and, worse, his daughter would rather someone else give her away at the ceremony. But then he meets Emma Thompson in a pub, and everything changes. Fans of the stars might enjoy this serio-romantic comedy, though critics were lukewarm and box office in the US was hardly better.



## My Bloody Valentine

The Hollywood horror movie remake machine grinds out another re-tread of the late 1970s/early 1980s, a time when horror films were served straight and with precious few Freddy Krueger-style one-liners. Augmented by gruesome effects (and full female nudity) in 3D, the story has the owner of a disused mine return to the nearby town to sell it; inconveniently, he's back on Valentine's Day, the 10th anniversary of a killing spree, and the bodies are set to pile up again. Director Patrick Lussier was editor for most of horror icon Wes Craven's later films, so he has real pedigree. But the remake of Craven's most infamous and brutal film, *Last House on the Left*, was offered to someone else; expect that in theaters later this year.



## Tokyo Sonata

A salaryman hides the fact that he is unemployed from his wife and two sons, and things only get worse as family tensions accumulate. In a *Lonely Guy*-style development, our anti-hero meets a friend in similarly dire circumstances — and who has become something of a specialist in keeping the illusion of dignity intact — before fate deals a series of low blows. Veteran director Kiyoshi Kurosawa's comeback movie was praised by the *Japan Times* and was a triumphant winner of the Jury Prize at last year's Cannes film festival.



## 252: Signal of Life

Apocalyptic special effects are the star of this show as Tokyo once again succumbs to an overwhelming disaster — a storm system this time, with a tsunami thrown in for good measure. The human side of the plot is like Sylvester Stallone's *Daylight*: a bunch of survivors are in subterranean peril and need rescuing, but in this case the hero of the day is on the outside looking for a way in — and needing to tell lies to do so.



## 7 Days to Leave My Wife

This Thai comedy expects audiences to believe that a dull and unattractive (and married) salesman would be incredibly attractive to a femme fatale-type colleague who dresses to kill. Naturally, his wife soon catches on and the hijinks start. Imagine *The Woman in Red* with infantile sight gags and without the charm of Gene Wilder and Gilda Radner (or the ultimate come hither look from Kelly LeBrock) and you're on your way. Starts tomorrow at the Baixue theater in Ximending.



## This little piggy went to school

A young primary school teacher forces his students to confront the messy nature of life when he brings a pig into the curriculum

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

*School Days With a Pig* (Buta ga Ita Kyoshitsu) is a simple little picture about children faced with a life and death issue — the future of a pig they have been raising as a pet during the final year of primary school. There is plenty of cuteness, but the film has a serious issue at its heart, and in documenting the response of the cast of young children, director Tetsu Maeda manages to create a very appealing entertainment. It has won hearts, if not critical acclaim, garnering the audience choice award at the Tokyo International Film Festival in October of last year.

The story begins with rookie teacher Mr Hoshi (Satoshi Tsumabuki) deciding that he will confront his students with some real issues of life by bringing a pig into the curriculum. He states

clearly at the beginning that when the class graduates, the pig will be sent to the slaughterhouse.

The premise is a departure from Disney, and the story is in fact based on an actual event in a primary school in Osaka. The teacher's idea is that by rearing a pig for slaughter, students will be forced to confront the idea that their life owes much to the sacrifice of other living things. It's a big topic, but Mr Hoshi has no idea how big it will get. Mr Hoshi's objections to naming the pig are soon overruled by his class, and the pig rapidly assumes the status of class mascot.

The kids are initially horrified by the realities of rearing a pig, not least from the need to clean copious amounts of excrement from the super cute pig pen that they build in the school's playground. Parents object when children come home smelling of

the sty. Other teachers are less than supportive, and indulge in some "told you so" schadenfreude when Mr Hoshi has to deal with issues like feeding the pig during the summer holidays and the passionate objection of some of his class to dealing with the pig as originally arranged.

While the pig, P-chan, is presented in a cute way, Maeda does not avoid issues of the animal's bodily functions and its disruption to the orderly conduct of the school. In fact, that's really the point. *School Days With a Pig* emphasizes that life is a messy business.

Maeda proves particularly adept at handling his cast of children and their various ways of responding to the question of what will happen to P-chan. The arguments become passionate, but the debate about life and death never becomes improbable, and offers an insight

into a child's way of looking at the world, the ways they try to grapple with responsibility for another living thing. The children's characters are allowed to emerge gradually through their different relations to the pig and their ideas about its future. It is a fine ensemble performance and a child star is notably absent.

The adult cast also puts in a strong performance, with Mieko Harada particularly attractive as the sympathetic principal who supports Mr Hoshi in his unconventional educational experiment. Parents are very much on the fringe, but there are some good cameos, not least from one father, a pork butcher, who tries a matter-of-fact approach with his son about P-chan's fate. Then there is the regular pork chop in the children's bento boxes every lunchtime, a mundane object that becomes



P-chan the pig's life hangs in the balance when teacher and pupils vacillate over its fate.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATOPLAY

endowed with huge significance as the children think about where it comes from.

The documentary style in which the film is shot suits the material, and the children shine, giving real passion to their attachment to an animal, which though slightly romanticized, remains quite

definitely a true-to-life pig. As to what happens in the end, it turns out that Mr Hoshi can't leave it all up to his students, a fact that gives him a few difficult moments as well. Voting on the local distributor's site pig.catchplay.com shows people are in favor of keeping P-chan from the chopping block.

## Film Notes

## SCHOOL DAYS WITH A PIG (BUTA GA ITA KYOSHITSU)

DIRECTED BY: TETSU MAEDA

STARRING: SATOSHI TSUMABUKI (MR HOSHI), REN OSUGI (VICE PRINCIPAL NISHINA), TOMOKO TABATA (MS IKEZAWA), SEIJI IKEDA (MR KOWASI), MIEKO HARADA (PRINCIPAL TAKAHARA)

RUNNING TIME:

109 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:

IN JAPANESE WITH CHINESE SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY