



BARROCO

Anyone who has seen Paul Leduc's beautiful *Frida* (SFIFF 1986) knows his narrative's impetus flows not from a rigorous allegiance to plot, but rather to mood, a sensual evocation of time and place. In *Barroco* Leduc luxuriates in images inspired by the "magic realism" Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier championed in *Concierto Barroco*, the film's source. This latest work is a gloriously orchestrated homage to the rich and complex history of Latin America as refracted through its music. A question—*Where do the songs come from?*—launches the odyssey, which begins just moments before Pre-Columbian history found itself enmeshed in the New World vision. Native Indians, Spanish conquistadores, African slaves all

shaped the history, musical and otherwise, of the continent. Born out of conflict, violence, and passion, their legacy has been subsequently honored and altered across six centuries by revolutionary partisans, jazz proponents, and more recent performers, such as Silvio Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés and Van Van. Leduc jetsons dialogue, allowing us to revel in the spectacle of his pure musical. A feast for the eyes and ears, *Barroco* differs from its Hollywood counterpart—it never lets us forget the tumultuous history that spawned the melody. —*Laura Thelen*

SPAIN/CUBA, 1989 115 min.

DIRECTOR: Paul Leduc. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: J.A. Pérez Giner. SCREENPLAY: José Joaquín Barón, Jesús Díaz, Leduc. CAMERA: Angel Goded. ART DIRECTOR: Julio Esteban. EDITOR: Rafael Castellano. CAST: Francisco Rabal, Angélica Molina, Ernesto Gómez Cruz. PRINT SOURCE: RTVE



BEGOTTEN

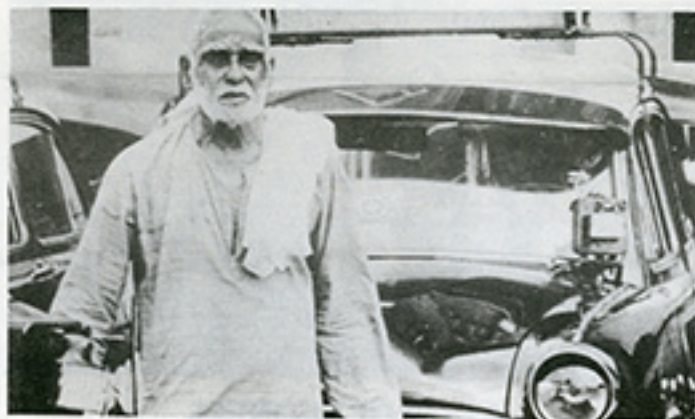
The title *Begotten* evokes the Old Testament and the tracing of man's lineage back to Adam and Eve, back to the Biblical original man and woman. Similarly, the extraordinary images of Edmund Elias Merhige's experimental film have been repeatedly rephotographed and are generations away from the original scenes (film begotten from film). They flicker hallucinatorily, decomposing and recombining into disturbing primal scenes—God's death, mother and son, victims and aggressors. The surreal, shadowy images of light and darkness, black and white, are accompanied by an evocative sound track, but without dialogue. Instead, we must decipher their language, as we are in the territory of the psyche, an unknown begotten of man, not God. Using barren land-

scapes and rag-clothed figures, Merhige and the THEATRE OF MATERIAL evoke a time that is both pre- and post-civilization. In the dream-like narrative, we follow Mother Earth and her child, "flesh without bone," through a series of physically, often sexually, violent encounters in which people act from impulses, without the mediation of language, seemingly without rules. But with the destruction is also regeneration. The film's chronicle is cyclical, tracing birth, death and rebirth in a manner which seems to speak equally of historical and personal processes.

—*Kathy Gerits*

USA, 1989 70 min.

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/SCREENPLAY/CAMERA/BAW: Edmund Elias Merhige. ART DIRECTOR: Harry Duggins, Celia Bryant. SOUND: Evan Albain. CAST: Donna Dempsey, Stephen Charles Barry, Brian Selberg. PRINT SOURCE: THEATRE OF MATERIAL



BIRTH

Piravi

Over the past few years, first features by Indian directors have been capturing the attention and accolades of the international film community. A strong contender for last year's Camera d'Or (Cannes) and top winner at the Hawaii International Film Festival, *Birth* is the latest in the trend inaugurated by *Salaam Bombay!*. "The first feature from Shaji, Aravindan's talented cinematographer, plays like an Indian Tarkovsky. Based on a true story, it's a dense, somewhat lyrical tale that speculates on the fate of a student who vanished in the late 70s after singing a protest song. It's a difficult, extremely demanding work but if you allow its unforced, fluent rhythms a chance to breathe, they'll knock you out. The breathtaking green cliffs and tropics of Kerala and the often haunting use of weather, water and hills are seamlessly

integrated into the narrative. When a young student fails to show up for the holidays, his father begins to investigate the disappearance. The story is naturally simple, and when the boy's sister ultimately discovers his fate, it's devastating. This film could never make it commercially (even on the art-house circuit); it's not driven by plot or narrative, but by symbolism and ritual. Aravindan's spare, provocative music obscures the weaker points and establishes a tone and mood completely its own. *Birth* announces a bold, fresh perspective in Indian cinema."

—*Patrick Z. McGavin, Chicago Reader*

INDIA, 1988 110 min. In Malayalam with English subtitles

DIRECTOR: Shaji. SCREENPLAY: S. Jayachandran Nair, Raghunath-Palari, Shaji. CAMERA: Sunny Joseph. EDITOR: Venugopal. MUSIC: G. Aravindan. CAST: Premji, Archana, C.V. Sreeraman. PRINT SOURCE: NFOC



BLACK ROSE, SYMBOL OF SORROW; RED ROSE, SYMBOL OF LOVE

Chernaya rozsa—emblem pechaly, krasnaya rozsa—emblem ljubvi

A breathtakingly irreverent and playful attempt to depict, in its director's words, "Sorrow, Love, Kitsch and Perestroika," *Black Rose* demonstrates more sheer love of filmmaking than anything to come along in ages. And it's certainly the first film from the USSR whose high spirits embody a total rejection of ideology. (Although paradoxically it manages to convey, just as powerfully as Kira Muratova's *Asthenic Syndrome* (pg. 26), the sense of weakness and aggression, somehow never distant from farce, that pervades so much of Russian life today.) As in all the films of director Sergei Soloviov (*100 Days After Childhood*, SFIFF 1975), the central character of this "melodramatic comedy" is a youngster. But there

simply aren't any precedents anywhere in Soviet cinema for *Black Rose*'s protagonist Mirya (Mikhail Rosanov), a 14-year-old who winds up a millionaire with a beautiful wife six years his senior, and the father of a rosy-cheeked baby. With so much contemporary Soviet filmmaking mired in producing excruciatingly dull rip-offs of Tarkovsky or scheming about how to out-Hollywood Hollywood, Soloviov's tonic absurdism may point out a healthier path. It certainly makes for very bracing viewing. —*Peter Starlet*

USSR, 1990 126 min. In Russian with English subtitles

DIRECTOR/SCREENPLAY: Sergei Soloviov. CAMERA: Yuri Klimenko. ART DIRECTOR: Markian Galkin. MUSIC: Boris Grebenchikov. CAST: Tatiana Drubich, Alexander Abdulov, Ilya Ikonov, Alexander Bashkov. PRINT SOURCE: Alfabeta Enterprises



CHINA, MY SORROW

Niu peng
China, ma desoleur

Dai Sijie's first feature film could never have been filmed in China; the authorities there would not permit it. *Niu peng*, translated literally means bull sheds, but during the cultural revolution the expression meant re-education center. It was a place where individuals who did not prescribe to the accepted social pattern would be forcibly sent for "re-education." Thirteen year-old Tian Ben is caught listening to a recorded love song of pre-revolutionary vintage, something considered "decadent." For this serious offense, he is banished to a "bull shed", joining the ranks of other cultural outcasts from all walks of life who share an existence marked by their social stigma as "enemies of the people." His life there is occupied by the chore of emptying pails full of excrement, a life where survival and comradeship

count most in the face of poverty, deprivation, and abuse. Dai Sijie built his sets in the French countryside and his actors, all non-professionals, were found among immigrants, some of them with stories that rivaled the one told in the film. The film neither condemns the torturers nor indicts the powers that be. Instead, it tells a story of human compassion, of people supporting each other, hand in hand, all moved by their unflinching determination to survive. Dai Sijie's sensitive treatment of this obviously autobiographical theme adds to the film's impact, making *China, My Sorrow* an unforgettable directing debut. — *Dimitri Epides, Festival of Festivals*

FRANCE/FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, 1989
86 min. in Cantonese and Mandarin with English subtitles
DIRECTOR: Dai Sijie PRODUCER: Jean-Luc Omlieux SCREENPLAY: Dai Sijie
Yuan Zhu TEORITICALCONSULTANT: Jean Rouch CAMERA: Jean Michel
Humeau EDITOR: Chantal Delattre CAST: Guo Liang Yi, Tieu Quan Nghien,
Mung Han Lai, Chi-Yi Sam. PRINT SOURCE: Helix International Inc.



CHUN TAO

This has been an appalling year for the Chinese film industry, and events in Beijing have stopped the "New Chinese Cinema" in its tracks, at least for the moment. In these unhappy circumstances, it's not surprising that the best Chinese movie of the year was made outside the normal structures of the film industry (it was actually set up as a China-Hong Kong co-production) and shot as a labor of love by one of the country's most distinguished veteran directors. Ling Zi-feng has loved *Chun Tao* ever since he read Xu Dishan's original story in the 1930s, and his film of it stands alongside his earlier *Rickshaw Boy* and *Border Town* as a heartfelt tribute to the literature of his youth. It tells the story

of a remarkable *message à trois*. Chun Tao, a proud and self-possessed young woman, scrapes a living as a rag-picker in Beijing; she cohabits with a man named Liu, but refuses to marry him, despite local objections to the arrangement. We find out why when a legless beggar recognizes her on the street one day... Ling's direction has a warmth and candor worthy of Renoir, and his vision of Beijing's past is keen as ever. His film is a delight. — *Tony Rayne, Vancouver Film Festival*

CHINA/HONG KONG, 1989 95 min. in Mandarin with English subtitles
DIRECTOR: Ling Zi-feng PRODUCERS: Chen Guanghong, A Zhong
SCREENPLAY: Han Lanlang CAMERA: Liang Zhen EDITOR: Zhou Tingmei,
Zhang Min CAST: Liu Xiaoping, Jiang Wen, Cao Qianming
PRINT SOURCE: Nanhai (USA) Company Ltd.



CIRCUS BOYS

Nijuseiki shonen dokuson

Everybody loves a circus, perhaps filmmakers most of all. The circus was a pre-cinema world of innocence and illusion, a place where magic happened, and filmmakers from George Méliès to Fellini and Bergman to Wim Wenders have recognized the natural affinity between circus sleight-of-hand and the dream-making machinery of the cinema. Perhaps its original Japanese title, *The Boy's Own Book of the 20th Century*, best reveals *Circus Boys'* affinity with the wonder-filled worlds of children's stories of decades ago, as it spins a fairy tale about two young brothers in a not-so-great traveling troupe of clowns, acrobats...and one wonderful elephant. The two brothers, Jinta and the younger Wataru, grow up with big-top visions of becoming trapeze and tight-rope stars. Fate, of course, intervenes and Jinta, now a

young man, strikes out on his own, leaving behind his brother and the warmth of his adopted family. *Circus Boys* then becomes two stories, one of the struggling small-time circus, the other of Jinta's journeys as a con man, a "master of lies" who swindles poor villagers with fake "miracle" products. Between the two stories, writer-director Kazuo Hayashi perfectly evokes the way, though hopes get replaced by real life, some dreams never die. Shot in sparkling black-and-white, *Circus Boys* is a haunting, magical film, and it ends on a note of sheer poetry. — *Tid Booth*

JAPAN, 1989 106 min. in Japanese with English subtitles
DIRECTOR/SCREENPLAY: Kazuo Hayashi EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:
Hiromitsu Hida, Yûchi Sakurai CAMERA (SAW): Yûchi Nagata
EDITOR: Osamu Tanaka CAST: Hiroshi Mikami, Shu Ken, Miki Kamura,
Michiru Akiyoshi. PRINT SOURCE: Shibata Organization Inc.



A CITY OF SADNESS

Beiqing chengshi

The hypnotic rhythms and family themes of Hou Hsiao-hsien's deeply personal work were first introduced to SFIFF audiences in 1985 with *The Boys from Fengkai*. With each successive film, this Taiwanese director has refined and reaffirmed his stature as one of today's most exciting talents. Winner of the Golden Lion at Venice last fall, *A City of Sadness* is Hou's biggest film, and in many ways his bravest. It focuses on one family (old Lin Ah-Lu and his four sons), but rhymes their affairs with the fate of Taiwan at a crucial turning point in its modern history. The action spans the years from 1945 (the end of the Japanese colonial period) to 1949 (the Communist takeover of Mainland China and the establishment of Chiang Kai-Shek's government-in-exile in Taiwan). The opposite poles of the Lin family are the eldest son, a gangster, nightclub owner and black marketer, and the youngest son (played

by Tony Leung), who runs a small photo studio and befriends students of the movement campaigning for Taiwanese independence and self-government. At the heart of the film is Chiang Kai-Shek's annihilation of the Independence Movement. The mere mention of these events has long been taboo in Taiwan, and Hou is courting controversy by bringing them to light. But the insistence on facing up to an outrage from the past doesn't obscure Hou's characteristic sensitivity to human drama. The film measures crimes in the gangster world against the undercover struggles of the resistance, and finds both milieux bursting with stories and incidents to break the heart. — *Tony Rayne, Vancouver Film Festival*

TAIWAN, R.O.C., 1989 125 min. in Mandarin, Cantonese, Taiwanese, Japanese and Shanghaiese with English and Chinese subtitles
DIRECTOR: Hou Hsiao-hsien EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: H.T. Jan, Michael Yang
SCREENPLAY: Wu Nien-jen, Chu Tien-wei CAMERA: Chen Hsueh-an EDITOR:
Liu Cheng-soon MUSIC: Natski Tachibana CAST: Tony Leung, Hsin Shu Fen,
Chen Soan-yung, Kao Jai, Li Tien Lu. PRINT SOURCE: Creative Workshop