

MICROFILMS

Reviews of selected films from the SF International Film Festival

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Shanghai Blues

Described in the program notes as "a 'funny' love story," Tsui Hark's movie is set in Shanghai. It begins in 1937 with young soldier Kenny Bee meeting Sylvia Chung under a bridge where they take shelter from the Japanese bombing of the city. Attracted to each other, they vow to meet again when the war is over. Then the film leaps forward to 1947, and now the young lovers are searching for each other. At the same time Sally Yeh enters the action, which turns the story into a comedy of errors filled in with Feydeau farce and acted in Keystone Kop style, none of which worked, for this reviewer at least. To be fair, however, the two Asian ladies seated in front of me never stopped laughing. Could it be the movie has lost something in translation? (9:30 pm, Fri/21, Palace of Fine Arts, SF; 9:15 pm, Wed/26, Pacific Film Archive, Berk.)

Half Life

After seeing Dennis O'Rourke's Australian documentary, those tropical atolls in the Pacific with their palm-fringed beaches and azure seas may not seem quite so idyllic. It was the Marshall Islands that were chosen by the American military in the 1940s as testing sites for nuclear weaponry, and in 1954 when America rushed to answer Russia's 1953 testing of the H-bomb with its own, three of those islands played a major part. O'Rourke uses a shocking mixture of stock footage, de-classified government propaganda films and recently filmed interviews with today's survivors of those tests to make a very convincing case against the military's method of using these people as guinea pigs in an ultra-cynical case of catch-up with the Soviets. Not only is the film frightening in its revelation of the horrible on-going physical and mental results of this apparently deliberately designed destruction, but, and most terrible of all, in its intimation of the genetic damage still to come. (5 pm, Sat/22, Palace of Fine Arts, SF; 7 pm, Wed/26, Pacific Film Archive, Berk.)

False as Water

Well-to-do Swedish publisher Sverre Anker Ousdal may indulge in an occasional extra-marital fling, but the mere suspicion that wife of 20 years, Marie Granzon, may be doing the same, sends him climbing up his crumbling marital walls. So when gifted poetess Malin Ek enters his life and he sees business partner Orjan Ramberg in bed with, he mistakenly thinks, his wife, he installs Ek in a sium-area apartment and says his marriage is over. But don't think for a moment this is merely another movie about a man's mid-life crisis. Far from it. Under Hans Alfred-

son's meticulously detailed direction, it takes on deeply psychological elements of horror, terror and murder that keep us perpetually guessing as he constantly and expertly switches suspicion from one character to another. Nothing is what it seems, and even when the solution's revealed, it brings additional intricacies to confound. A first-rate thriller with nary a false note that's eminently thicker than water. (9:30 pm, Sat/22, Palace of Fine Arts, SF.)

The Blue Mountains

Hilarity from the Soviet Union? Certainly from the Georgian Republic and director Eldar Shengelaya, as a delightfully playful score introduces the main mise-en-scene, a publishing house. A young man arrives with multiple copies of his new manuscript, *The Blue Mountains*. But as he goes from office to office of the antiquated building in search of the right person to read it, his pile of copies turns out to be woefully inadequate. Whether it's the too-busy-with-social-life publisher, who blames the building's falling down condition on the constant motor-bike game next door; the 26-year veteran afraid of being crushed by the huge, inadequately hung painting above his head; the handyman who's the only one to read manuscripts; the tottering elderly female bookkeeper or the perpetually

absent executive, everyone's a star and the action's always hilarious. It bogs down in the middle, but rallies to a literally crashing finale that's everything you never thought a Russian movie could be. (4 pm, Sun/23, Opera Plaza, SF; 6 pm, Thurs/27, Pacific Film Archive, Berk.)

Beauty and the Beast

This film should be required viewing for every actor in soap opera today. In fewer than five minutes, Danish actor Jesper Klein will prove what light years away from real acting they really are. He's the devoted father of 16-year-old Line Arlen Soborg, and the deceptively ordinary story's about his reluctance to accept her gradual change from Daddy's little girl to incipient womanhood. But under Nils Malmros' direction and script, Klein gives a performance in which no movement's wasted and no emotion untouched as he is by turns charming, understanding, loving, dryly humorous, courteous, desperately uncertain, only vaguely aware of his own darker side and almost insanely over-protective. It's not her current innocent romance he objects to, but an older, handsome young studio photographer who's obviously bewitched her, and whom Klein despises as a know-it-all. The theme may be small, but Klein is larger than life. (8 pm, Sun/23, Pacific Film Archive, Berk; 7:30 pm, Thurs/27,

Opera Plaza, SF; 1 pm, Fri/28, Wood Theater, SF)

Frida

When a woman such as famed Mexican artist Frida Kahlo has a personal life that's even more vivid than her extraordinary paintings, one expects a film about her to be equally colorful. In the literal sense, Paul Leduc's film is full of moments of beauty, but his fragmented approach, in which the past and present, the personal and political, memories and dreams are non-sequentially intertwined, presupposes a fuller knowledge of the artist's life than is presented here. Moments, some of them hideous, only hint at her physical tragedies, the infidelities of her famous husband, muralist Diego Rivera, her lesbianism and her involvement with the exiled Leon Trotsky. That said, what is shown is strikingly posed and dramatically shot, and Ofelia Medina, outstanding both in her performance and her uncanny physical resemblance to Kahlo. For the rest, however, the film's appeal will be mostly to the initiated whose fore-knowledge will fill in the gaps. (8:30 pm, Thurs/27, York, 7 pm, Sat/29, Pacific Film Archive, Berk.)

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