

Double Happiness

The issue of ethnicity would seem to be inescapable in any assessment of Mina Shum's first feature-length film, *Double Happiness* - ethnicity crossed with culture, gender, sexuality and generational difference. While the "doubleness" in the title extends to the life of its protagonist, 22-year-old Jade Li (a Chinese-Canadian woman aspiring to an acting career), it derives, ultimately, from the experience of its Chinese-Canadian director. The hyphenated adjectives are telling, but also misleading and in a sense, unavoidable: in the film's opening direct address monologue, Jade (played by the magnetic Sandra Oh) asks us to think of her family as being like "any family," because she doesn't want "to make a big deal about being Chinese." Despite its irony, this is in a sense true: every Canadian family is potentially unique and different from every other, but in so far as it is a "family," it is subject to the same *kinds* of problems and crises as every other.

But what of "happiness?" "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Tolstoy's words could be interpreted in light of "Double Happiness" to say that all happy families are alike in that they are, in fact, unhappy and different in the degree to which they are conscious of it. In Jade's family's case, as with "any family," both states are the result of a love at times too strong to allow for understanding and tolerance. In Shum's words, it's a question of "I love you so much I have to leave, I love you so much I can't leave" — those are very big questions, and it breaks Jade's heart." And Jade's self is indeed split: between her family's traditional Chinese values and her own independence. The generational and cultural tensions between Jade and her parents are evenly balanced by her internal struggle.

Double Happiness is a comedy that ends sadly, but hopefully, presenting an exploration of Jade's divisive identity - the peculiar contradictions experienced by a young Chinese-Canadian woman "coming of age" in 90s Vancouver. Shum has said that she has no intention of representing the prototypical Chinese-Canadian family, however. More than one reviewer has stated that her film represents a major step towards a post-multiculturally self-conscious Canadian cinema,

whose success is not dependent on the exploitation of its maker's own background. Even so, the two determinate aspects of Jade's identity - "Chinese" and "Canadian" - remain distinct in the irreducibility of the hyphen.

-Russ Kilbourn

Fun

While you're waiting for *Kids*, the mall rat sex movie with a Lou Barlow soundtrack, check out this absorbing flick, easily the most thoughtful movie I've seen this year. Renée Humphrey and Alicia Witt are Hillary and Bonnie, 14-year-olds who meet one aimless, beautiful SoCal day and bond in that instant way we all remember. Except smart Hillary is smarting from her abusive father, and hyperkinetic Bonnie really needs someone to wannabe like. Shoplifting leads to the murder of a sweet granny, and then it's all downhill in the depression of juvvie hall and adults, well-intentioned or not. *Fun* is amazing because it refuses to moralize about the two girls, instead setting up two narratives: the girls' day is filmed in glorious colour - and they're made up and dressed up like only teenagers can be - while their incarceration in a juvenile detention centre, where they tell their stories in fits and starts to a caseworker and a sleazoid journalist, is shot in a grainy video-mockumentary. As a study of the violence kids suffer and give out, its causes and consequences (and a rare movie that doesn't condescend to teenaged girls), *Fun* is right on.

-Clint Burnham

Toronto Worldwide Short Film Festival

Pssst. Wanna know a secret? Everyone, but everyone, in this media-saturated, cynical, consumption-overdriven, detritus-strewn, decaying, late capitalist culture of ours wants to...lead a revolution? Nah. They want to make a short film. And why? Because the world will grind to a halt while all admire their genius? Nah. Because they want to be discovered and funded so they can proceed to shatter the world with their (loosely autobiographical) first feature.

The first ever Toronto Worldwide Short Film Festival, which ran from May 31 to June 4, at the

Rings, in which renowned piercer, Mette Hintze, gives viewers a look into the processes and lore of "body art," and features more strange holes in weird places than a Dark Brothers porno flick. In fact, if you enjoyed the graphic sex change scenes in that terrific early '80s mondo flick, *Shocking Asia*, then this film should provide an equal amount of perverse and stomach-churning giggles.

Compared to *Mistress*, the second film on the tape, *Dominans*, is a slower and somewhat more lyrical film, if one can say that about a movie that deals with torture, spanking, being tied up and having intercourse in what looks to me like an extremely uncomfortable position.

While *Euro Fetish* may not exactly be a "first date" kinda flick - at least not if you want a second date - I guess the important thing to remember is that while things look distressing, everybody involved is having a good time, in their own warped little way, and nobody is doing anything they didn't want to.

Copies of *Euro Fetish* are available by sending off \$29.95 (US) to Film Threat Video at 2805 W. Magnolia Blvd., Burbank, CA 91505. Along with your cashola, be sure to include a statement of age letter.

-Hell Kelly

Il Postino (The Postman)

Il Postino (The Postman), Michael Radford's new film, is a compellingly sentimental dramatization of what is as much the collusion as the collision of politics and poetry. Both spheres are embodied in the person of Pablo Neruda (Phillippe Noiret, with someone else's voice), an exiled communist, who, in 1952, has come from Chile to live on a southern Italian island. A cinema newsreel makes much of Neruda's attraction to women and his being a writer of love poetry (glossing over the incendiary effects of his political poetry - one of the principal reasons for his flight); consequently, the poet begins to receive bags of mail from women. Mario

(Massimo Troisi), a softspoken misfit who catches cold whenever he goes out on his father's fishing boat, takes the post of Neruda's private postman, having all the prerequisites for the job: the ability to read, an appealingly unreflective romanticism, and a bicycle. Gradually they become friends, Mario hopes that as a result Neruda's luck with women will rub off. In the process, he learns two lessons that change his life, the first of which is a slow coming into political consciousness: his eyes open to his fellow islander's meager and exploited lives. The second lesson, far more significant for Mario, is one in the power of language and its ability to create beauty and to seduce. Mario has fallen for the island innkeeper's ravishing daughter, aptly named Beatrice, but he lacks the ability to express his love. Neruda then plays Virgil to Mario's pilgrim, giving him the confidence to woo Beatrice with words: metaphors of his own invention and at least one poem of Neruda's ("Poetry doesn't belong to those who write it, but those who need it," says Mario in self-defense).

In a symmetry recalling Dante, Mario's love for Beatrice is balanced by Neruda's devotion to Chile, to which he eventually returns, leaving Mario transformed: happily married, politically enlightened and a budding poet. But in Neruda's absence, Mario comes to doubt himself, believing that he has misjudged his own significance in their friendship. At the same time, though, his eyes are opened to the island's simple, yet formidable beauty, turning his new and bitter self-knowledge to acceptance and equanimity. It is only in *Il Postino's* deftly edited closing scenes, when the clash of the poetic and the political is literalized, that the film's overriding lyricism turns to tragedy, leaving metaphors trod underfoot.

-Russ Kilbourn