

Recovery means being objective about experience



BARBARA SCHIFF

Message from voice mail: Barbara Schiff

This is in response to Lois' comments about incest in your May 3 column. I've been in recovery for six years and there is hope.

It starts just about the time Lois is at now. I didn't feel any recovery until the fifth year and then suddenly I started feeling better.

So it is scary, and it is terrible, and it is awful, but it is part of our reality. That's all I have to say.

recognizes the abuse occurred, feels the pain, and then can think about it without feeling overwhelmed by emotion.

This seems contradictory because, often, abuse victims have used various forms of dissociation (which is sometimes misunderstood as an extreme form of objectivity) in order to cope with their painful feelings and memories. It is this denial or dissociation that makes them sick.

While they may seem alike, dissociation and objectivity are different. Dissociation means disconnectedness while objectivity means treating the fact without distortion.

Recovery begins through the process of owning up to these feelings and memories that one has dissociated. One becomes connected to them and then unafraid of them. This is a painful experience.

However, through honestly facing them and making them your own again, strength is gained.

Congratulations to you and to others who have succeeded.

Barbara

If you have a question or comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send to Street Sense, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. You can also leave a message by calling 953-2047, mailbox 1877, on a Touch-Tone phone.

'Ju' depicts complex Chinese life

By JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

Watching paint dry may seem preferable to watching a peasant woman trudge from town to town vainly in search of justice. For some, this will pretty much sum up "The Story of Qiu Ju," the intentionally slow-moving Chinese film playing for a second weekend at the Detroit Film Theatre.

Patient viewers, however, will find a film completely uncompromising in style and focus. It's also controversial.

Zhang Yimou, the acclaimed director of "Ju Dou" and "Raise the Red Lantern," knew full well that a movie that looks honestly at the nature of justice and bureaucracy in contemporary China would undoubtedly meet with opposition.

So it's not surprising that Yimou's films are banned in his native country. Chinese movie audiences instead see government-sponsored films that are safe and politically correct.

Yimou's previous films, with their lush pageantry and symbolism, took place comfortably in the past. With "Qiu Ju," reminiscent of 1940s Italian Neo-realist films, he comes crashing down to earth. The effect, while at first startling, proves equally satisfying.

MOVIES

As the film opens, an extremely pregnant Qiu Ju (Gong Li) literally carts her husband (Lu Fei Qiu) to the doctor. The chief (Lao Lao Sheng), or village head, got angry with the husband and kicked him square in the crotch. Although he will probably be fine with rest, the wife demands an explanation from the chief.

She takes her case to the local policeman, Mr. Li (Ge Zhi Jun) and he rules that the chief must pay medical expenses and compensation for time missed from work. Qiu Ju, still not satisfied, takes the case to the larger town and finally to the big city. The answer comes out invariably the same.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about "The Story of Qiu Ju" is the way it shows every facet of life in China. When you see the conditions that the protagonist and her family live in, you may think you're looking back at the turn of the century.

Quite a contrast to the teeming modern city, where Qiu Ju and her sister-in-law (Yang Liu Chun) stay up at the tall buildings. A kindly hotel owner advises them to get different clothes because



City-bound: Qiu Ju (Gong Li) and her sister-in-law (Yang Liu Chun) head for the city in search of justice in "The Story of Qiu Ju."

they make themselves such a target for unscrupulous taxi drivers and street vendors.

Gong Li, the beautiful star of Zhang's previous films, looks like she's going to bust the seams of her thick winter coat. We watch her grow in more ways than one and admire her grim-faced fortitude even when we sometimes think she should just leave well enough alone.

The judgment, after all, may appear fair, since her husband was partially at fault. Ambiguity remains one of the film's many assets. Just as Qiu Ju breaks the stereotype of the passive Chinese woman, the chief and bureaucrats

are far from one-dimensional bad guys.

The movie bills itself as a "vengeance comedy," but the story is ultimately very sad and contemplative. The funniest thing for me was somehow picturing an American version of the story with Roseanne Arnold in the title role.

The movie tells us that in China (or anywhere for that matter) justice doesn't always turn out the way we plan. This is brilliant, if shown in the film's final image, a frozen frame as in "400 Blows," that answers any question at all about why we've been watching this laborious but ultimately masterful story.

SCREEN SCENE

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE
Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-2323 for information. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"The Story of Qiu Ju" (China — 1992), 7 and 9:30 p.m. May 28-29, 1, 4 and 7 p.m. May 30. When a rural woman's husband is wronged by a neighbor, the wife decides to tackle a sea of bureaucratic red tape in her quest for justice. This latest work from Zhang Yimou, the director of "Raise the Red Lantern" and "Ju Dou."

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY
13671 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (Free)

"Victory at Sea" (USA — 1954), 7 p.m. May 24. The popular television series is edited into a feature-length film about America's navy operations during World War II. Richard Rodgers provided the rousing musical score.

MAPLE THEATER
4135 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield Hills. Call 855-9090 for show times. (\$5.75 evenings; \$2.95 twilight)

"Like Water for Chocolate" (Mexico — 1992). A lonely woman puts all her energies into creating

unforgettable meals in this blend of fantasy and drama. As with the Danish hit "Babette's Feast," you won't want to catch this on an empty stomach.

"The Living End" (USA — 1993). A darkly comic look at the relationship between a pair of young, HIV-positive outcasts with nothing to lose, on the run from the law. Written, directed, shot and edited by Gregg Araki.

MICHIGAN THEATER
603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information and show times. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"Lolo" (Canada — 1992), through May 27. This disturbing new film from across the border finds a confused boy trying to escape from his eccentric family. We know we're in for weirdness when the boy, convinced that his father was actually a sperm-laden tomato, is the relatively sane one in the bunch.

"Volere Volare" (Italy — 1991), May 29-31. The director of "The Icicle Thief" also stars as a shy voice artist for cartoon shows who finds himself slowly turning into a cartoon.

"Reservoir Dogs" (USA — 1992), 11:30 p.m. May 28, 11:40 p.m. May 29. Harvey Keitel, Steve Buscemi and Tim Roth play color-coded crooks whose simple jewelry heist goes haywire. A bloody, stylized first feature from Quentin Tarantino remains the most visceral film of last year.

Improv from page 8A

Perhaps one of those people on the stage could be the next Bill Murray. Or Gilda Radner. Or John Candy. Dreams of such stardom are not so far-fetched for Second City cast members. At least one from the group dominated "Saturday Night Live," many top-rated sitcoms and blockbuster feature films.

On the first day auditions were held, groups of 15 to 20 filed into the theater and took their places on the stage, opposite a table where the three judges were seated. Among the things they were asked to do by Anne Libera, director of training for The Second City and another of the judges were to line up in various lines — alphabetically by their first name, in order of their birthday month and day (without speaking) and from tallest to shortest (with their eyes closed). These tasks proved to be quite amusing to watch.

Once each person introduced themselves the real fun began. Libera laid out the ground rules for a "conducted story," an improv exercise in which the entire group takes a basic premise and each hopeful molds the story by building on the previous person's idea.

That was followed by another common improv game known as "scene tag." Pairs of actors built a story from a basic premise until the director yelled freeze. The actors remained in their positions until being replaced by the next pair who continue the story.

The whole audition cycle took about 25 minutes to complete. The judges then huddled, choosing three or four people who merited a second look.

"You're looking for basic stage-worthiness," Libera said. "Do they have stage presence? Can you hear them? Are they creative? Do they provide support to the other players? Those are the real basics."

"Second City is an ensemble; we all have worked together as a team," said Lynn Okkerse, also co-executive producer of the Second City-Detroit and the third judge. "You're looking for people who listen to the directions being given to them. Listening is the key to improvising."

As the judges huddled, those who finished their tryout breathed a sigh of relief and waited to hear if they have made the cut.

"It's like going to the playoffs," said Jim McLean, a comic from Fox Westland. "You don't know what to expect until you get there."

"I was fairly confident going in. I'm not as nervous as I was when I got married," said Tim Pryor of Farmington Hills, who has performed in improv groups and comedy clubs for about six years. "This is living life to the fullest."

'You're looking for basic stage worthiness. Do they have stage presence? Can you hear them? Are they creative?'

Anne Libera

It's rewarding in itself just to be here. We always hold out to make it big, though."

Both McLean and Pryor moved on to the next stage, which featured more advanced improvisational exercises. Knowledge of current events was paramount, as the auditions were asked to perform sketches on topics as diverse as gays in the military and AIDS to Bosnia.

It was quite a long day for both the judges and auditionees alike. "By the time we were called in for the last time, I was too tired to be nervous," said Ken Brown of Lathrup Village, a former General Motors Corp. engineer who now is a professional comic.

"The caliber of the talent has been much higher than we expected," Libera said.

"I'm encouraged, but to make any conclusions right now would be premature," said Ilitch, admitting a couple of native Detroiters elsewhere in the Second City talent pipeline may also be brought in for the cast.

The original 700 were pared down to 45 after the two days of tryouts were over. Then, those on the list met at the Fox again for yet another round — the most intense yet. Brown, McLean and Pryor were all there.

Divided into four groups, the remaining auditionees were given 30 minutes to read over some old Second City scripts, which they would read through once called on stage.

"People were scattered around the Fox lobby, intensely reading their scripts," Pryor said with a laugh. "I had done the same thing when I auditioned for Second City in Chicago two years ago."

"They had some old Mike Myers sketches," McLean said, mentioning a recent alumnae of the Toronto and Chicago Second City stages who has a weekly TV gig and had some success on the big scene with a little film called "Wayne's World."

By now, all those who have straddled the Fox have learned their fate. A small group of 15 will now begin the intense improv training required to make Second City happen in Detroit in less than four months. Not all of them will grab the limelight on that opening night, but they sure will do a lot of laughing in the meantime.

Stay tuned.

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