

'Banquet' filling; 'Friends' doesn't last

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

Wei Wei, a Chinese artist living in New York, needs a green card. Wai Tung, her landlord, wrestles with a more sensitive problem.

He's gay but doesn't want his parents in Taiwan to know about it. His companion Simon proposes the perfect plan: marry Wei Wei, get the folks off your back, and take a major tax write-off.

Of course, without complications there wouldn't be "The Wedding Banquet," a very funny, very wise international comedy currently at the Maple Theatre.

The movie, with Chinese and English dialogue, is both about communication and how the ancient bonds of tradition translate to modern times. Not surprisingly, Wai Tung's parents are outraged by the impersonal civil ceremony that the bride and groom insist upon.

At dinner, the family runs into an old friend, who insists that he throw a proper wedding banquet in respect for the groom's father, a retired general. The resulting celebration mixes the best and worst

MOVIES

of both Asian and American reception rituals.

The performances are gems. Winston Chao's Wai Tung is a likable but slightly greedy real estate entrepreneur, perfect straight man playing out a situation that quickly spins out of his control.

We're relieved when Mitchell Lichtenstein's Simon actually blows his top because he's so perfect and patient during most of the film. Even the staunchest homophobe will want to marry this guy.

May Chin's Wei Wei has some of the goofiest bits, especially when she has too much to drink and tries to "liberate" her hand on their wedding night. More than just funny, she's also sympathetic when she receives traditional wedding gifts from Wai Tung's mother.

As directed by Ang Lee, "The Wedding Banquet" overcomes its penchant for staginess with large helpings of honesty and good-na-

tured humor. You can't help but leave the theater in a great mood.

"Amongst Friends," also joining the Maple lineup this weekend, delivers yet another twist on the gangster genre: the wise guys aren't underprivileged, uneducated hoods from the inner city. They're upper-middle class kids from the mean streets of Long Island.

Although pumped full of style, the low-budget film that won accolades at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year has surprisingly little staying power.

Andy, Trevor and Billy graduate from high school and, instead of heading off to college or real jobs, continue careers in crime. Trevor, busted during a drug deal, gets sent to prison for two years but doesn't return home for another two.

It was just a matter of time before James Dean met Seattle Grunge and here it is in Patrick McGraw's Trevor, riding back to town on a Harley, outfitted in plaid shirt and bandana. He's on his way to the West Coast, but reluctantly hooks up with his bud-

dies for one final score.

There's plenty going for "Amongst Friends." It marks the directorial debut of 26-year-old Rob Weiss, who mixes family stories with the best parts of every gangster movie he's ever seen.

It also offers able performances from unknowns, especially Joseph Lindsey as the dark-eyed Billy, the most ruthless of the trio. Steve Parlavacchio's rapid-fire voice-overs force you to miss some of the insights, but they capture Andy's nervous energy perfectly.

"Amongst Friends" should have some impact, especially on teenage viewers who will gladly overlook the simple-minded relationships and storyline. Others will recognize it for what it is: a bunch of kids playing gangster games. "Goodfellas" remake by the Beastie Boys.

If you have a comment for John Monaghan, call him at 953-2047, mailbox number 1856, or a touch-tone phone, or write him care of Street Sense, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

Get guidelines from therapist before change



BARBARA SCHIFF

Insecure about switching to someone new at this point. This therapist does not seem to say enough that is meaningful. I leave the appointments as confused as I was when I came in. I am not getting the answers that I need.

Dear Jim,
This is an excellent question because what you describe occurs so frequently in psychotherapy.

It helps when client and therapist match up. In your example, if the client is the type who doesn't want the therapist to say anything, or is afraid to hear what the therapist might say, he might continue comfortably with your therapist.

If he wrote a letter about an

active therapist, he would say, "My therapist talks too much and doesn't let me say what I want to say because he's so busy making interpretations, which I can't understand anyhow."

In your letter, you are saying you want a therapist who talks to you and gives you more guidelines. Before you make any switch to someone new, explain this to your therapist and see how he handles it. It may be that he could give you what you want. If he can't, then you might change to a therapist who has a reputation for active psychotherapy and so would suit you better.

However, let the reader beware, there are clients who will complain about any therapist. I remember a story told to me by an older, experienced therapist. A client came to him and complained that she had had eight previous therapists and that none of them knew what they were doing. His response was: "This time, you won't have that excuse."

Good luck in your therapy. A good experience can make a huge difference in one's ability to feel good about oneself.

Barbara

SCREEN SCENE

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

■ DETROIT FILM THEATRE

Detroit Institute of Arts, 6200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-2323 for information. (\$5; \$4 students)

"The Music of Chance" (USA — 1993), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Sept. 3-4; 4 and 7 p.m. Sept. 6. Drifter Mandy Patinkin and obsessive gambler James Spader risk more than they realize when they strike a deal with millionaire Charles Durning and Joel Grey. Based on a 1990 novel by Paul Auster, this

marks the directorial debut of Philip Haas.

■ HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY

13671 Michigan, Dearborn. Call 943-2333 for information. (Free) W.C. Fields Night — 7 p.m. Aug. 30. "The Pharmacist" and

"Hurry Hurry" are among the short films starring the irreverent movie comedian.

■ MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE

22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$3)

Atomic noir — "Kiss Me Deadly" (USA — 1955) and "City of Fear" (USA — 1959), 8 p.m. Sept. 2. In the first feature, a private eye's relentless search for a mysterious box may end the world as we know it. The second finds an escaped convict carrying around a suitcase he thinks is filled with heroin. Actually, it contains deadly radioactive material.

■ MAPLE THEATRE

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

"The Wedding Banquet" (Taiwan/USA — 1993). In this international hit filmed in New York, a simple wedding of convenience turns into an epic deception when the groom's parents arrive from Taiwan.

"Amongst Friends" (USA — 1993), starts Sept. 3. Rob Weiss directed his first feature about bored kids on Long Island who become gangsters and drug dealers instead of heading to college. The movie has style, but ultimately you're left with a Beastie Boys version of "Goodfellas."

■ STATE

2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 961-5450 for information. (\$1)

"Rocky Horror Picture Show"

(Britain — 1975), 9 p.m. Aug. 30. Doing the time warp again has become a staple at the State as Tim Curry and friends return in this audience-participation classic.



Tormentor: Dennis Hopper is Isabella Rossellini's evil tormentor in David Lynch's cult classic, "Blue Velvet," at the State Theater Aug. 30.

Second City from page 5B

needed practice before a live audience at one of The Second City's stages in suburban Chicago and two weeks ago to the day performed at the main stage as part of the usual Monday "Best of The Second City" show.

"We feel great because things went really well in Chicago," Pryor said. "That gave us a lot of confidence. We're really enthusiastic that we're finally going to be in our own space."

The "space" Pryor speaks of is rapidly moving toward completion at the corner of Woodward and Montcalm, next to The Fox Theatre — another jewel in the Ilitch crown. The actual building will house the 350-seat theater where The Second City will hang its mantle, plus a 350-seat multi-level restaurant with a rooftop terrace, a 50-seat bar and a retail shop for Second City merchandise. The speed of the building's construction is reminiscent

of the recent Tiger Plaza project at Michigan and Trumbull.

Pryor would not elaborate greatly on what exactly audiences will see when The Second City premieres in Detroit. Sketches have been taken from the best material gathered in the more than 30 years of The Second City existence. It is premature to expect material with a metro Detroit angle at this stage of the troupe's existence, Pryor said, because they need additional improvisational performances to develop sketches for future performances.

"We're learning a lot of music; people will be surprised at the number of production pieces," Pryor said. "There's also some real acting."

But all in all, the cast is concentrating on having a good time and making sure the audience follows.

"It's just great being paid to do

this stuff," Pryor said.

For ticket information, call The Second City-Detroit at 965-2222.

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Superman is about to be reminded of the boomerang he tossed some fifteen years earlier.

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