

Pacific gravity

The Asian American Showcase features promising talents **By Hank Sartin**

Here's a little pop quiz: Name three Asian-American filmmakers. Having a hard time? Okay, let's make it easier: Name three Asian-American actors working in Hollywood today, other than Lucy Liu. If you judged only by what we see on multiplex screens and television, you could be forgiven for thinking there are barely any Asian-Americans at all. In fact, there is a thriving Asian-American arts community. If you need proof, check out the 11th annual Asian American Showcase at the Gene Siskel Film Center



Americanese

before his wedding who asks his shady pal to kill him. The premise may sound a bit hackneyed, but Oda and Chin show admirable control of their material.

On the documentary side, **What's Wrong With Frank Chin?** is a solid portrait of author and firebrand activist Frank Chin,

Now playing

★=Recommended

The Achievers

See Indie & revival, Gene Siskel Film Center.

Adam & Steve

See Reviews.

African Traveling Film Festival: Short Film Program

See Indie & revival, Facets Cinematheque.

American Fusion

See Indie & revival, Gene Siskel Film Center.

Americanese

See Indie & revival, Gene Siskel Film Center.

Anatomy of a Relationship

See Indie & revival, Gene Siskel Film Center.

Andy Warhol's Early Films

See Indie & revival, Museum of Contemporary Art.

Aquamarine

Dir. Elizabeth Allen. 2006. PG. 109mins. Emma Roberts, Joanna "JoJo" Levesque, Sara Paxton, Jake McDorman. For the target audience of tweener girls, this tale of two BFF girls who befriend a mermaid and help her to win the hunky lifeguard of her dreams has all the right elements: nonthreatening hunks, some music montages of shopping at the mall and reading magazines, and stuck-up rich girls who breathe easy. —Hank Sartin

★Asian Stories (Book III)

See Indie & revival, Gene Siskel Film Center.

Ask the Dust

Dir. Robert Towne. 2006. R. 117mins. Colin Farrell, Salma Hayek. Farrell plays Arturo Bandini, a young man who falls in love with a woman who is taken down a peg. The messages are wholesome enough that parents can breathe easy. —Hank Sartin

★Capote

Dir. Bennett Miller. 2005. R. 98mins. Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener. Truman Capote eschewed first-person reportage in writing his true-crime masterpiece *In Cold Blood*, but it's practically impossible to read that book without mentally factoring him back into the picture. How did the tiny, fey, lispng socialite seduce all those straitlaced Kansas farm folk, buttoned-down lawmen and death-row desperadoes into cooperating? This must-see drama explores how he did it and at what cost—to himself and others. The redoubtable Hoffman positively morphs into the lead role. Keener is likewise superb as Capote's surrogate conscience, Harper Lee. —CD

Cheaper by the Dozen 2

Dir. Adam Shankman. 2005. PG. 100mins. Steve Martin, Eugene Levy, Bonnie Hunt, Carmen Electra. This sequel to the 2003 remake of the 1950 film (whew!) features more of the same: more oft-crass slapstick, more heart-warming lessons and even more kids. Martin returns as Tom Baker, father of 12 mischievous children. Afraid of letting his kids grow up too fast, Tom brings the brood up to an idyllic Wisconsin lake to relive the good ol' days of summers past. Soon, the Bakers are going toe-to-toe (and lips-to-lips) with the ten members of the Murtaugh clan, led by Tom's old foe Jimmy (Levy). The kids are just cute enough and the comic veterans just sharp enough to keep this afloat. —Andy Marchesseault

★Conventioneers

See Indie & revival, Gene Siskel Film Center.

Counsellor at Law

See Indie & revival, Doc Films University of Chicago.

Curious George

Dir. Matthew O'Callaghan. 2006. G. 86mins. Will Ferrell, Drew Bar-

TIME OUT CHICAGO - RECOMMENDS

CAPOTE, BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

AND

ASIAN STORIES (Book 3)!!!

www.AsianStoriesMovie.com

from Shawn Wong's acclaimed novel *American Knees*, director Eric Byler (*Charlotte Sometimes*) shows a sharp eye for the telling moments when our real selves are bared to each other. The big mysteries around this film is why it doesn't have a large commercial release, and why Tashima and Sie aren't familiar faces—they're both excellent actors.

The showcase also presents features by younger, less accomplished filmmakers, and sometimes the work feels a bit stuck in film-school mannerisms.

The Achievers, about a group of roommates fresh out of college, has been getting a lot of hype, but it's got pacing problems and throws in a lot of tricks. Filmmakers have lifted from other movies. Far more effective is Ron Oda and Kris Chin's **Asian Stories (Book III)**, a comedy about a depressed guy dumped just weeks

Stephens's cast is all white. We can only hope that won't distract audiences from the fact that this is a really accomplished film. Stephens creates a raw vérité feeling reminiscent of Cassavetes: The conversations between two reluctant lovers are full of stops and starts, hesitations and interruptions.

The first week also offers an array of other programming, from a war film about the all-Japanese-American 100th Battalion (**Only the Brave**) to several solid programs of short films. Judging from the first week's offerings, the showcase is once again a well-curated sampling of work by, for and about Asian-Americans.

The Asian American Showcase begins Friday 31 and runs through April 13. For complete schedule listings, see Indie & revival.

See Reviews.

★Baby Face

See Indie & revival, Doc Films University of Chicago.

Basic Instinct 2

See Also opening.

Big Momma's House 2

Dir. John Whitesell. 2006. PG-13. 104mins. Martin Lawrence, Mark Moses. Martin Lawrence returns as former FBI agent Malcolm Turner, who goes undercover as a sassy, chunky granny to investigate a computer scam. Turner poses as nanny to the family of that creepy guy from *Desperate Housewives* (Moses), and hilarity ensues with hyperactive children and tequila-swiggling Chihuahuas. The filmmakers can dress it up as they please, but this movie is still one *Big Momma* for a mess. —Chad Frade

★Brokeback Mountain

Dir. Ang Lee. 2005. R. 134mins. Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal. In 1963 Wyoming, cowpokes Ennis Del Mar (Ledger) and Jack Twist (Gyllenhaal) are hired to tend a flock of sheep for the summer. Ennis is laconic; Jack is more gregarious. Slowly, tentatively, they move from indifference to friendship to lust to love. (The sex scenes, by the way, are pretty chaste, but make clear that sex is, you know, physical.) This pastoral idyll begins a 20-year-long affair as they settle down, marry and embody Thoreau's line about lives of quiet desperation. The sorrow is almost unbearable, and it will stay with you long after the lights go up. —HS

Brooklyn Lobster

See Indie & revival, Facets Cinematheque.

Griffin. To find the silver lining in this miserable attempt at romantic-comedy/reality-show parody, let's list three reasons to see this Z-grade mess: (1) There were only four other people in the theater and half of them left before the ending. It was something of a sight. (2) The dynamic trailer for the futuristic political-thriller *V for Vendetta* was the highlight. (3) *Date Movie* is the new perfect date movie—for that one memorable night that you break up with that loathsome significant other you've been trying to drop. Yes, it's that bad. —Matt Keppel

Dave Chappelle's Block Party

Dir. Michel Gondry. 2005. R. 100mins. Documentary. Comedian Chappelle organizes a giant hip-hop concert on a Brooklyn street; ace auteur Gondry (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*) steps in to capture performances by Erykah Badu, Mos Def, Kanye West, Wyclef Jean, Big Daddy Kane, Common and Cody Chestnut for posterity. We're not terribly well qualified to pass judgment on hip-hop, but the racially mixed audience onscreen was loudly appreciative despite intermittent rain showers. Our best guess, therefore, is that (ahem) "that shit was off the chain." —CD

★Deep Sea 3D

Dir. Howard Hall. 2006. G. 40mins. Documentary. This latest documentary from noted underwater cinematographer Hall exploits the huge screen 3-D format to awe-some effect. From the very first shot of pounding surf to the penultimate image of a baby whale inspecting divers, the illusion of proximity the film engenders helps inspire