

'Tempress' displays complex beauty

Do you miss great stylistic moviemaking? Do you enjoy foreign language films? If so you should probably check out "Tempress Moon," a small, beautiful Chinese film playing at the Chelsea Theater. Director Chen Kaige has made an

MICHAEL ARAMAN
Movie Review
 "Tempress Moon"
B

earthy, cerebral film about sex, opium, corruption and decadence in Shanghai in the early 1920's. As the film opens, a sequence explains the Chinese history after 1911 when the Qing Dynasty fell. Opium is being smuggled into China from the British. We are quickly shown the country estate of the Pang family where there are three characters, first shown as children and later as adults. The story centers on Zhongliang

(Leslie Cheung), who was raised on the wealthy Pang estate, with Ruyi (Gong Li), his childhood friend. In 1911 Old Master Pang headed the household. His son, Zhengda (Zhou Yemang) is married to Xiuyi (He Saifei), who incidentally is Zhongliang's sister.

Years later we find Zhongliang in Shanghai as a gigolo, someone who kisses women and steals their pearls. Meanwhile, Old Master Pang has died and his sickly, drug-addicted son Zhengda is too weak and brain-dead to head the family. Thus, Ruyi is given control of the estate. With this new information, Zhongliang's crime bosses order him back to seduce her and make off with the family fortune.

Ruyin and the whole household are now constrained under opium addiction. Ruyi, no longer a subservient, motherly caretaker, wields control with an iron fist. All her father's concubines are banished quickly and her close servant/confidant Duanwu (Kevin Lin) is left with the difficult decision of siding with her or the other powerful men on that decision. He is loyal to Ruyi and thus is cursed and scorned by the elders.

The plot is so convoluted and complex that even many Asian critics more familiar with the Chinese language and culture found it difficult to deconstruct the film. It is better to sit back and enjoy the amazing visual settings and landscapes, courtesy of cinematographer Christopher Doyle.

Notable to the film, however, are Leslie Cheung and Gong Li, who have great onscreen chemistry having collaborated together with Kaige on "Farewell My Concubine." This film was banned in China due to many unnerving historical suggestions. And, although the story is slow-moving and complicated, it is a provocative glimpse into the corruption of pre-Mao China.

Men bare all in revealing British comedy

They're baring it all in the new British comedy, "The Full Monty." A very revealing movie, the comedy follows six unemployed men who decide to strip down to their knickers to make a livelihood.

Coming off his performance as the notorious Begbie in "Trainspotting," Robert Carlyle flashes as Gaz, the lead role. Gaz' motivation for stripping is to obtain enough cash to help keep dual custody of his young son, Nathan, played by newcomer William Snape. Gaz' friend Dave, played by the impressive Mark Addy, has low self esteem.

JIM MARTIN
Movie Review
 "The Full Monty"
B

Because many of the steel warehouses in the once thriving town of Sheffield are closed, the town's Job Club is packed. In this down-and-out place, Gaz and Dave get bored with the low life and search for ideas. While passing a Chippendale club, they notice it is packed with women. Gaz thinks, "Hey, what do they have that I don't got?"

At times, it seems as if director Peter Cattaneo tried to make a heartfelt drama with a great deal of comic relief.

Gaz really suffers when removed from his only joy in life, his son, Nathan. Dave's hatred for his belly and his bout with impotence is sad because he doesn't feel right with his wife.

These dramatic pulls help to define the characters, but at the same time, they detract from the genuinely funny scenes. However, at the film's conclusion, when the dancers go for "the full Monty," the comic nature of the film is redeemed. The dance scenes with Donna Summer, Tom Jones and Sister Sledge are precious.

Gaz and Dave recruit Gerald, played by Tom Wilkinson ("Smilla's Sense of Snow") to help choreograph. After a failed attempt at suicide, Lomper (Steve Huison) joins the stripping troupe. Guy, played by Hugo Speer, joins the group for no reason other than he is well-endowed. A retired dancer, Horse,



Gaz, played by Robert Carlyle, begins his provocative strip scene in the British comedy, "The Full Monty," where six unemployed men strip to make cash.

played by Paul Barber ("Priest") joins the group to feel young again.

Horse has balding gray hair; Lomper is a pale-skinned lightweight, and Gerald is an uptight career man with no career. The only attractive man is the toned and built guy named Guy.

A comedy of errors of sorts which

retains its human side. Through bouts of struggles, the comedy saves the day with both physical comedy and witty dialogue, are two staples of British comedy.

With both heartfelt character building scenes and riotous comedic outings, the movie does end up being "The Full Monty."

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