

Movie reviews

'Blues' sings new tune; Spike & Mike up to old tricks

MOVIES

Genghis Blues

Starring Paul Pena. Directed by Roco Belic. Wadi Rum Productions.

★★★★☆

■ 'Throatsinging' brings cultures together in an Oscar-nominated movie

The camera zooms in on a white-tipped cane rapidly skimming the surface of a lonely concrete sidewalk. The frame widens to reveal a man blindly navigating the streets of San Francisco. Traditional harmonic sounds of The Autonomous Republic of Tuva linger in the background.

Even from the opening scene of "Genghis Blues" it becomes apparent that this movie's Oscar nomination for best documentary is well-founded. Such a profile rarely delivers the depth of information as "Genghis Blues" does in such an entertaining and artistic fashion.

The story focuses on a blind musician who finds peace in the land of Tuva, a country nestled between the Soviet Union and Mongolia. He bonds with the indigenous people who live in this nirvana through the art of "throatsinging."

Paul Pena, an American blues player who played with T-Bone Walker, B.B. King and The Steve Miller Band to name a few, first heard throatsinging on a shortwave

program on Radio Moscow 12 years ago. This form of singing is the isolation of the higher frequencies that are heard when regular notes are sung. Somehow, the Tuvans found a way to withdraw these overtones, the movie explains.

After Pena figures out how to reproduce these sounds by listening to a tape, he attends the first Tuvan throatsinging concert tour in the United States. This is where he meets Kongar-ol Ondar, a throatsinging champion from Tuva, who changes Pena's life.

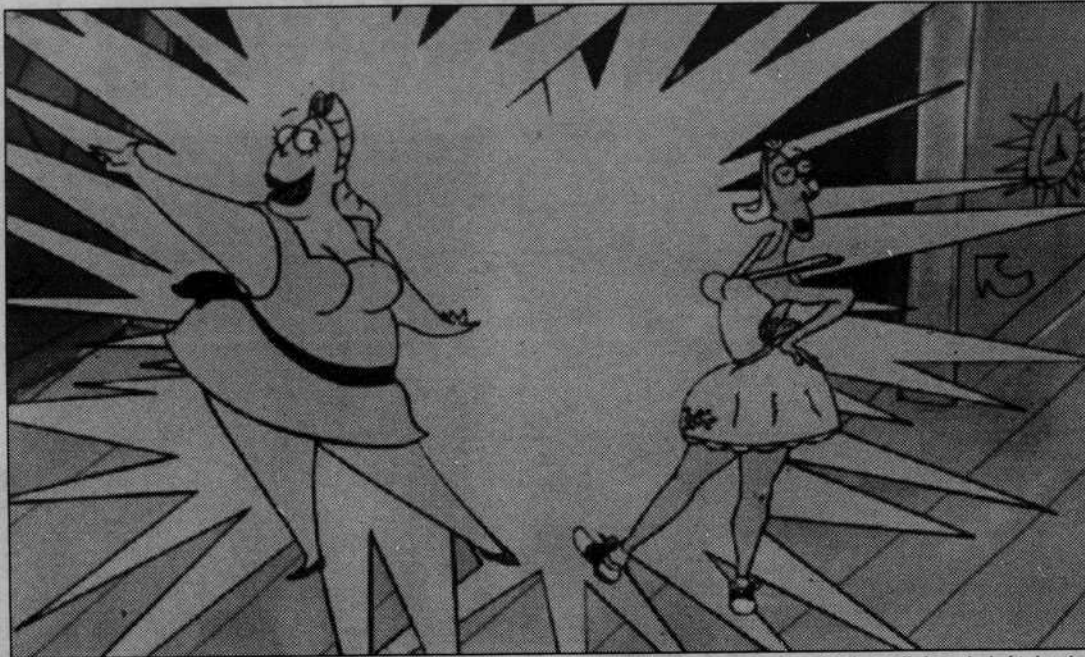
Upon hearing Pena's throatsinging, Ondar convinces him to travel to Tuva and enter the triennial Throatsinging Symposium. Here, Pena is nicknamed "earthquake" because the ground shakes when he sings. In 1995, he becomes the first American to be named the throatsinging champion in the style of kargyraa. He's also voted as the audience favorite. The people of Tuva embrace Pena, not only for mastering their song, but their language as well.

Though Pena creates an amazing friendship with Ondar and achieves a solace he doesn't find at home, a string of bad luck forces the crew back to the U.S.

Back in San Francisco, Pena reflects on harnessing the power within himself to overcome life's obstacles. "Genghis Blues" is an inspiration to us all.

"Genghis Blues" is now playing at the Bijou Art Cinemas, 492 E. 13th Ave.

By Sara Jarrett



Courtesy of Spike & Mike's Festival of Animation

A scene from 'Swing Sluts,' an animated short, shows Summer and Tiffany trying to get hip to the swing scene.

Spike & Mike's 1999 Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation
Various animators. Produced by Spike Decker. Mellow Manor Productions.

★★★★☆

■ Animations range from truly perverted and sick to the hilariously funny

There's nothing quite like cartoon blood, silliness and, ahem, misguided gerbils — think Richard Gere — to get the weekend off to a roaring start.

The 11th annual Festival of Animation launches itself into movie house crowds with as much furious action as ever. If you've never seen a previous screening, leave your political correctness at home.

The 2000 festival's highlights include: babysitting balloons getting a sort of revenge on their toddling charges; a thrilling tale of action starring Radioactive Crotch Man; a spoof on Beatlemania called "Beat the Meatles"; and "Home, Honey, I'm High II: What You Should Know About Drugs."

Not all of the 20-odd vignettes

are funny, which doesn't matter because the longest piece is six minutes long. "Bowlin' Fer Souls," featuring Satan searching for stray souls to send to hell, is arguably the best of the bunch.

The festival opens Friday at the Bijou, with shows each night of its run at 8:50 and 10:45 p.m. The first eight people in the door for Friday's and Sunday's 8:50 showing receive a barf bag kit with poster; other prizes and goodies will be given away, as well.

By Jack Clifford

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