

don't see them in any of the shots. Either way, it's a royal pain in the ass.

As for plot: Intelligent gay teen-ager Dean Page (Matthew Leitch) wants to go to college, but his severely abusive, working-class father won't have any son of his becoming a learned snob. Dean's mother, who is portrayed with great affection by British TV actress Lindsey Coulson, finds it better to lock Dean out of the house than be at the mercy of her rat-bastard husband.

Dean manages to eke a job out of local society dame Lady Francine Gryffoyn. He integrates himself into the Gryffoyn home, although there are complications—particularly in her nasty son Alexander. Dean eventually flees to Paris, posing as Alexander—à la Matt Damon in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (albeit with far less psychosis)—and holding a mirror up to the cruelty of class distinctions.

It's the experiment in filmmaking, really, that makes *A.K.A.* worth recommending. Because, although the story does take on an added passion knowing it's reflecting the director's truth, most of its full two hours are passionless for viewers. Notably, portions of the film before Dean leaves home and after his climactic return are dramatic and intense; it's all that hour and a half in the middle that will leave viewers bored and restless.

Although Dean's hapless bumping around from place to place at the whim of his privileged acquaintances seems normal considering his age and situation, it also does nothing to elicit a feeling of sympathy. And all the quirky characters he meets, frankly, seem a bit too quirky.

Still, *A.K.A.* is visually beautiful, ultimately powerful and adept at skewering the rich. If this is the first attempt at feature filmmaking, we should look with great anticipation for more from Duncan Roy.

—LB

Merci Docteur Rey

Or, rather, merci Andrew Litvack for making this amusing vehicle for the limitless talents of Dianne Wiest and French singer/actress Jane Birkin.

Litvack was born and raised in New York but has lived in Paris for the past 16 years, working as a subtitler and on Merchant-Ivory sets before directing this first feature. His cross-cultural consciousness is in full play in this black comedy in which achingly cute expat Thomas (French actor Stanislas Merhar) must endure an extended visit from his American opera singer mother (Wiest), to whom he has never come out.

Wiest and her lesbian comrade are too hilarious to hate as the Big Divas on Campus, but Thomas does his best. When he inadvertently becomes a witness to murder after answering a kinky personal ad, he finds it harder to keep secrets from Mom—and she has a few skeletons in the family closet to unleash, too.

Understandably, Thomas visits a therapist, the elusive Docteur Rey, to help sort out his quickly crumbling young life. There, he finds and befriends nervous patient Penelope (Birkin), a film dubber plagued by an unhealthy obsession with Vanessa Redgrave.

Showcasing one of the best ensemble casts of the festival and set against a Paris perfectly balanced between sordid lust and glimmering beauty, *Merci Docteur Rey* pays homage to classic film, opera and the divine histrionics of divas, even when a critical eye is cast (“Divas make me puke, literally!” exclaims Penelope).

Although one might argue that at the end of the film this loony family of sorts is no closer

to proving its theme—“To learn to love is to divest oneself of one's narcissism”—as they are at the beginning, it's still a rollicking good time watching them try.

—LB

Blue Gate Crossing

In *Blue Gate Crossing*, Taipei classmates Ke-rou and Yueh-chen share the kind of friendship that requires only one bicycle to get both of them around town until a dare posed by one to the other comes to unexpected fruition and one boy suddenly changes everything.

Crushes abound in this cinematic breath of fresh air, but the problem is that there are three instead of two: While Ke-rou has her eye on Yueh-chen, Yueh-chen has her eye on Shi-hao, the school's swim star. After a few secret notes passed and a few tricks played, Shi-hao develops his own special liking for Ke-rou, who, in fierce loyalty to her beloved Yueh-chen, signed on as only a messenger in the game.

Director Yee Chin-yen reveals both the innocence and chaos of the changes of youth with symbolism as subtle as

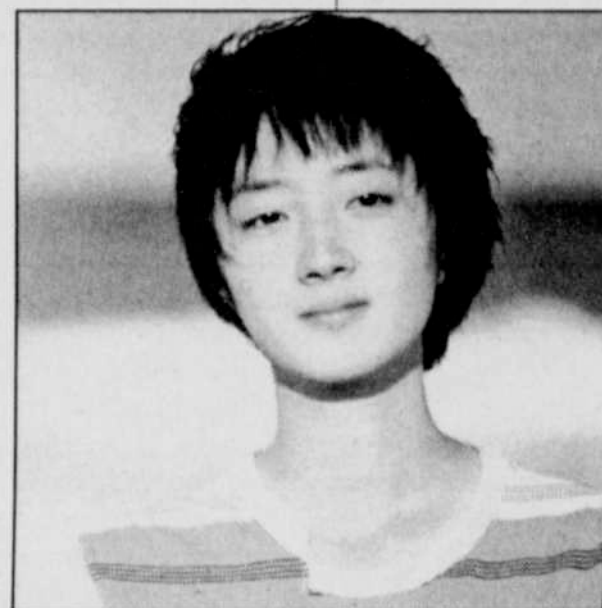
a bicycle ride through heavy traffic; schoolyard scenes of students eerily turning in unison to pay tribute to the amplified Chinese national anthem; Ke-rou admitting to Shi-hao that she doesn't know how to swim just before confiding what she considers to be her other short-coming—liking girls.

As young Ke-rou, Chen Bo-Lin gives her absolute best on all counts—from her touching depiction of a tomboy learning the full human capacity for love, to her facing the daunting confusion of both a taboo love in modern-day China and a love triangle of teen proportions. Ke-rou is able to transform from a moody, wistful young girl with an unrequited and heartbreaking crush to a multifaceted, exploratory young woman. She is able to simultaneously battle what she has been taught and revel in what she has learned about love. The character develop-

ment in the film is revolutionary in that the most typical character is the straight girl who maintains her illusions about ideal relationships while the dynamic characters flow through conversations about sexuality and possibility as gently as a stream.

Blue Gate Crossing is a stunning debut from this new director and a prime example of how very little is lost in translation when it is said accurately and beautifully in its mother tongue.

—Marie Fleischmann



Blue Gate Crossing captures the delicate relationship of a girl who likes a boy who likes a girl who likes girls

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