

# film

## Christmas in the Clouds

Billed as the first Native American screwball comedy, *Christmas in the Clouds* impresses with wonderful nature shots (filmed on Robert Redford's Sundance Resort in Utah), a great soundtrack and cameos by a who's who of Native American cinema (Graham Greene, Wes Studi and remarkable newcomer Timothy Vahle). The story—a mistaken identity romance involving a critic who comes to a Native American resort—is not necessarily new, but rookie director Kate Montgomery makes it both beautiful and funny. Opens Dec. 23 at Hollywood Theatre. **A**

—Yvonne P. Bebens

## The Family Stone

Every year has one "home for the holidays" movie. Some find it schmaltzy and predictable, while hopeless romantics wait for it. Gay filmmaker Thomas Bezucha (*Big Eden*) wrote and directed this dramedy about a favorite eldest son (Dermot Mulroney) who introduces his uptight New Yorker girlfriend (Sarah Jessica Parker) to his free-spirited family (including a deaf gay brother who's in the process of adopting a baby with his black partner) before proposing to her. The family greets her with awkwardness, confusion and hostility, so she begs her sister (Claire Danes) to join her for emotional support, triggering further complications. It is a story about relationships, bonds and one family coming together through its extraordinary capacity for love. **A-**

—YPB

## King Kong

Size queens rejoice! The biggest ape daddy ever is

back in Peter Jackson's three-hour remake of the classic interspecies love story. After the hokey and interminable first act, the film gets its groove on with relentless action sequences and the most disgusting insect scenes since *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Naomi Watts and Adrien Brody are fine in the human roles, but the film will be remembered for Kong, the most majestic and heartbreaking computer-generated movie character to date. For all its technical wizardry, this version pales in comparison to Merian C. Cooper's 1933 original, which packs a far bigger wallop in half the time. **B**

—Stephen Blair

## Memoirs of a Geisha

After young Chiyo is sold to a geisha house in 1929 Japan, her sad blue eyes mark her as a servant. But fate eventually smiles on the girl and she is trained in the honored traditions of the geisha—not a prostitute, as most think, but an artist who uses her manners, clothing, movements and looks to portray a porcelain-perfect unattainable woman. Adapted from the best-selling book, *Memoirs* is gorgeously filmed and stunningly acted, with only a slight drag toward the end marring it. Viewers will be treated to a culture almost forgotten to uplift their hearts and minds, and a visual and auditory buffet for their eyes and ears. Opens Dec. 23. **A**

—Andy Mangels



*Geisha* is another stunning achievement from gay director Rob Marshall (*Chicago*).

ice is trod upon as Johnny Knoxville plays an able-bodied workaday schmo who plans to "fix" the Special Olympics to win betting money (for a stupidly good reason). Along the way, he falls in love, but the girl thinks he's mentally challenged and... well, you can pretty much write the script from there. Utterly predictable from the half-

way point, *The Ringer* struggles to attain a fleetingly winsome charm and is much more harmless than anyone probably anticipated. Opens Dec. 23. **C+**

—AM

## Mrs. Henderson Presents

Does Dame Judy Dench ever disappoint me? No! Brilliantly directed by Stephen Frears (*My Beautiful Laundrette*), this film is inspired by actual events from pre-World War II London: The title character was an eccentric society figure who decided after her husband's death to buy the now historic Windmill Theatre and reopen it with a nude revue musical extravaganza, which was revolutionary at the time. Everything works—the story, the cast, the music. A humorous behind-the-scenes look at a time and world that is forgotten. Opens Dec. 25. **A**

—YPB

## The Ringer

Those apt to be offended by humor at the expense of the handicapped may do well to note that this film was approved by the Special Olympics. That said, thin

## Tony Takitani

The title character (Ossei Ogata) spent most of his childhood on his own because his mother died young and his father traveled a lot. His self-sufficient life is not filled with a lot of emotions until he meets Eiko (Rie Miyazawa). After they get married, he finds out that his wife is a shopaholic of designer clothes. He soon feels overwhelmed and worries about their finances. Asking her to stop shopping has fatal consequences. This quiet film isn't a feel-good story, but it perfectly portrays the feeling of loneliness. Opens Dec. 16 at Hollywood Theatre. **B-**

—YPB

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