

True Value Hardware

The real John Woo in Rob Elder's new book

JOHN WOO: INTERVIEWS. Edited by Robert K. Elder. University Press of Mississippi, 2005. Hardcover, \$50. Paperback, \$20. Conversations with Filmmakers series.

Journalist, movie critic, film teacher and UO graduate (2000) Rob Elder returns to his alma mater this week to promote his new book of interviews with the great Chinese filmmaker John Woo. Invited by UO Associate Professor of English Kathleen Rowe Karlyn to speak to her film students, Elder also will be the UO's guest for a free, two-night film series open to the public in 110 Willamette. At 7 pm on April 3 Woo's classic early film *The Killer*, starring Chow Yun-Fat, will be shown. A 6 pm reception and book signing on April 4 precedes the 7 pm screening of Woo's action masterpiece, *Hard Boiled*, followed by a Q&A.

I caught up with Elder on his way home from the *Chicago Tribune*, where he writes daily arts profiles and commentary and also reviews films. As least senior writer "I get all the teen horror flicks," he said, laughing. Elder's voice conveys good humor, a bright outlook and the confidence of a man who has set and met a number of professional goals, recently celebrated getting married and turned 30. Currently watching all of Fassbinder's films on DVD, Elder confessed

his bride has a separate NetFlix account.

When he still lived in his native Montana, Elder interviewed Ken Kesey, who sold him on Oregon's beauty and the quality of education at the university, where Kesey was teaching at the time. "He said, 'If you want to do journalism or be a writer, start now,'" Elder said, because learning to be a writer is an incremental process. "That was galvanizing advice for me at 17." In addition to graduating with a degree in journalism and taking many film classes, Elder interned at excellent newspapers and magazines — the *San Jose Mercury News*, *The Oregonian*, *Premiere* magazine, *The New York Times* — before coming to the *Chicago Tribune*, where he was hired as staff.

Elder explained the unprecedented access he had to John Woo and how editing the book of interviews came about, revealing the web of connections leading to such projects. Elder is a big fan of jazz master John Coltrane, and through a story he wrote for the *Tribune* he became acquainted with an editor working on the book series, *Conversations with Filmmakers*, as well as with Woo. "I asked John [Woo] if he would be willing to be interviewed for the book," Elder said. "But he said, 'There's so much out there that's wrong,' so I promised him I'd correct the story of his life and career." The new book



John Woo

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his first film with Chow Yun-Fat in almost a decade.

We're now approaching the heart of Elder's book: The real John Woo, cinema's master of the super violent, is actually a peaceful family man, a deeply religious man with strong ethics and values. His heroes may be blood-soaked, but they are honorable. They do not kill for pleasure but to right wrongs. It's an old Chinese literary and cinematic tradition that's being invigorated by contemporary Asian filmmakers influenced by Woo, such as Ang Lee (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*), Zhang Yimou (*Hero*; *House of Flying Daggers*) and Stephen Chow (*Kung Fu Hustle*).

In addition to Elder's in-depth interview with Woo, the book also includes Hong Kong Film Archive interviews translated from Cantonese, commentary excerpts from out-of-print versions of films and other interviews in which the director talks about his family and relationships with Tsui Hark and mentor Chang Cheh. Go to www.johnwoointerviews.com for more information. **EW**

contains a 36-page interview with Woo that sets the record straight on his early work in Hong Kong films, 1968-1990.

Woo made his name in Hong Kong comedies until they went sour, Elder said, but he's best known in the West for his hyper-violent gangster "bullet ballets" of the early 1990s, which influenced filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino and Sam Raimi. Lured to the U.S., Woo made the popular and critical successes *Broken Arrow*, *Face/Off* and *Mission Impossible II*, but Hollywood didn't allow Woo to do what he does best. With the help of his friend, Vietnam-born Chinese filmmaker Tsui Hark, Woo is now "fighting hard to make his kind of movies," Elder said, returning to China to film *Battle of Red Cliff*,



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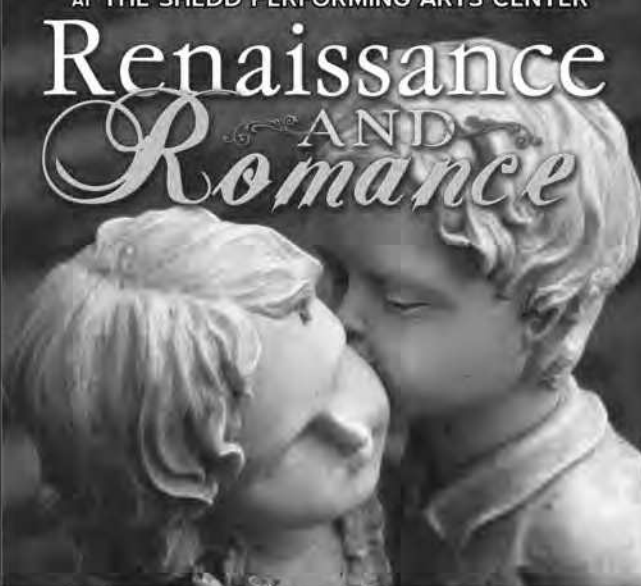
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