By Allen Huang

Stephen Chow, who wrote, directed, produced and starred in Shaolin Soccer, returns with yet another exceptional movie. Kung Fu Hustle is an odd combination of kung fu comedy and fantasy that had my friends and myself cackling with laughter.

The story is quite simple. During the 1940s, the movie takes place in Shanghai. One day, it bullied the town of Pig-Sey Alley. But things turned from good to worse when masters of various martial arts, disguised as ordinary townpeople, fought back. Forced to retreat, the Aus Gang prepared to battle into another corner to secure the town.

Chow’s character, Sing, is a wanna-be looking to join the Aus Gang. With a sidekick, the two get mixed up in the situation and become interwoven in the plot. Surprisingly, Chow plays a minor role in the movie. He’s not introduced until about 10 minutes in and is rarely shown on screen. However, as small as Sing’s role is, it’s still an integral part of the story. The audience will enjoy when Chow is on screen, and hunger for more when he isn’t. At any rate, Sing is also the most in-depth character. By the end of the movie, one can appreciate the sense of character in Chow’s character that is not found in the other roles.

With a collection of eccentric and peculiar characters, such as a drunken landlord and his overbearing wife, one can easily chuckle from time to time. Other than the amazing characters, the action will definitely keep the audience at the edge of their seats. Similar to Shaolin Soccer, the film often explodes with over-the-top martial arts without warning.

Unlike most Hollywood films where action sequences are often fodder with Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI), Kung Fu Hustle is visually effective for humor. As the movie progresses, it moves further away from reality and utilizes CGI to exaggerate the martial arts. With the help of CGI, Chow creates a superhuman hero to the martial arts masters. CGI is also applied to create a cartoon-like look to slick smiles and jiggly kicks.

One complaint from a fan of genuine kung fu movies is the film’s preference of having minimal, if any, CGI during a fight scene. Fight sequences in these films should use the special effect, “wax-to-film,” which was made popular in old movies such as “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.” “Wax-to-film” refers to martial arts filmed by wax and pullouts to create a superhuman effect. Inspired by this special technique, Chow uses the combination of CGI and “wax-to-film” to mixfight.

Heavily influenced by classic kung fu movies, Chow readily borrowed from an arsenal of martial arts moves, style such as, Twin-Kick, Iron Fist and Hexagon Staff. Each style introduced is a great simple on screen to display its individual skill and splendor.

Chow pays tribute to Chinese classics, in addition to referencing recent films such as Quentin Tarantino’s Kill Bill Vol. 1 & 2 and Wachowski brothers’ Matrix trilogy. Also thrown into the bunch, Chow borrows from The Matrix’s canine claw sequences and Spider-Man’s famous quote, “With great power, comes great responsibility.” Occasionally, one can even notice some Shaolin Soccer poking through.

Chow experiments with blending moments of seriousness with random spurts of humor in between. For example, the opening sequence of the movie is a contrast of dramatic background music and the camera following a butterfly flying aimlessly in front of mountains. The audience follows until the butterfly soars high above to watch the mountains become the role of the film. Immediately, Chow throws the audience into a police station. Following that scene, we watch as a group of men are mowed down by machine guns and a man is mugged by an axe, which leads directly to a dance sequence performed by the Aus Gang. By this point, the audience is left in this ambiguous void, not knowing whether to laugh or to be serious. This anomaly is the overall tone throughout Kung Fu Hustle.

While I wouldn’t recommend less usage of CGI, Kung Fu Hustle is another top-notch production by Chow that has me drooling in anticipation for more. With this film, Stephen Chow will be an everyday, household name. Soon to be released nationwide, I highly recommend watching them as you can be the first to laugh about this in-your-face film.

By Charlie Olsen

Many performers consider their craft to be a calling, but 27-year-old Westminster student Diassla Larudottir has brought an added dimension to his art. Ashes of the Wake is supposed to be an album of songs that have a healthy dose of violence and a bit of gore and there are pieces of metal craftsmanship but more like the Lamb of God release is good light five years ago."

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