

doc films

PRESENTS

THEN THERE'S THE MILKYWAY: THE FILMS OF JOHNNIE TO & WAI KA-FAI

This series is a celebration of the films of Milkyway Image, a Hong-Kong based studio that has regularly put out some of the best genre films in the world since it was founded in the mid-90s. Directors and co-founders Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai have gained international recognition for their action films. Few fans in North America, however, are aware of their equally excellent romantic comedies, which are enormously popular in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China. Like their action movies, these rom-coms deftly upend generic conventions, articulate spatial confusion in the modern metropolis, and craft elaborate sleights-of-hand to surprise audiences. In showing these films alongside each other, there is an aim to draw out the similarities between these apparently very different films.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
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ALL FILMS SCREENED AT IDA NOYES HALL, MAX PALEVSKY CINEMA



Expect the Unexpected (1998)
October 2, 2018 @ 7 pm

Two groups of criminals (one comically incompetent, the other brutally efficient) keep criss-crossing each other unexpectedly, and a special police team is called in to untangle the mess. Overlapping romantic intrigues among the members of the team, and with a key witness, add to the confusion. To deftly uses generic conventions to lull audiences into a false sense of security. Can they stop both gangs? Who will end up with whom? Heed the title.



The Mission (1999)
October 30, 2018 @ 7 pm

A Triad boss hires five men to serve as his bodyguards after an assassination attempt. However, when he finds that one of the five has been carrying on an affair with his wife, it raises the question of whether their loyalty is to each other or to their boss. Shot in just 18 days, *The Mission* marks a departure from previous Hong Kong action films by marrying its brilliantly choreographed action to an unsettlingly distant filmmaking style.



Breaking News (2004)
November 13 @ 7 pm

A botched standoff with a group of thieves (filmed in a virtuosic six-and-a-half minute long take) embarrasses the police, so Captain Fong (Kelly Chen) orchestrates a capture operation for the media to restore public trust in the police. When thief Yuen (Richie Jen) discovers her plan, he battles wits and uses her need for good press against her. To weds a brilliantly realized sense of space and place to a biting satire of government and media.



Needing You... (2000)
October 9, 2018 @ 7 pm

Kinki (Cantopop star Sammi Cheng) is transferred into Andy's (matinee idol Andy Lau) department, and despite their initial difficulties getting along, they enlist each other in elaborate schemes to reunite with (and get revenge against) their exes, without realizing that they're really destined for each other. The first rom-com from To and Wai, *Needing You...* repurposes many conventions from their action films with hilarious and unexpected results.



Life Without Principle (2011)
November 20, 2018 @ 7 pm

A botched standoff with a group of thieves (filmed in a virtuosic six-and-a-half minute long take) embarrasses the police, so Captain Fong (Kelly Chen) orchestrates a capture operation for the media to restore public trust in the police. When thief Yuen (Richie Jen) discovers her plan, he battles wits and uses her need for good press against her. To weds a brilliantly realized sense of space and place to a biting satire of government and media.



A Hero Never Dies (1998)
October 16, 2018 @ 7 pm

Martin (Lau Ching-wan) and Jack (Leon Lai) are rival hitmen who share a begrudging admiration of each other. When they are betrayed by their bosses and left for dead, they decide to team up to take revenge. *A Hero Never Dies* takes the (already extreme) conventions of John Woo's heroic bloodshed films to even further extremes not previously thought possible. In the process, To produces some exceptional action set pieces both small and large.



Help!!! (2000)
November 6, 2018 @ 7 pm

This rom-com satirizes the bureaucratic administration and the indifference it produces in contemporary Hong Kong. Yan (Cecilia Cheung), an idealistic doctor, enters a hospital and tries to restore its staff's long lost medical competence and sense of purpose. A more manic comedy than *Needing You...*, *Help!!!* is filled with farcically overdrawn caricatures and includes a talking car scene that Leos Carax must have seen before making *Holy Motors*.



Vengeance (2009)
November 27, 2018 @ 7 pm

Two great Johnnies (To and Hallyday) meet at last! A French chef (Hallyday) seeks revenge in Macau, even as a head injury is making him forget why and against whom. It twists and turns between variations on plot arcs from older Milkyway films, and the dancing tumbleweeds and postage stamps in its set pieces suggest the influence of Jacques Demy as much as Sergio Leone, making *Vengeance* a free-for-all play with narrative and stylistic convention.



Where a Good Man Goes (1999)
October 23, 2018 @ 7 pm

An ex-con (Lau Ching-wan) is released from prison and sets out to find a missing \$2 million and his ex-wife. He gets diverted, however, when he and his innkeeper (Ruby Wong), a lonely single mother, find themselves drawn to each other. A rare dramatic romance from Milkyway, *Where a Good Man Goes* breathes new life into hackneyed narrative devices on the strength of its leads and To's excellently realized sense of urban space in its Macau setting.



Fat Choi Spirit
December 4, 2018 @ 7 pm

In perhaps To & Wai's greatest New Year Comedy, a ne'er-do-well son (Andy Lau) is called upon to use his mahjong skills to fend off his mother's Alzheimer's disease. In the process, he runs afoul of a gang of mahjong sharps led by the self-proclaimed "Mahjong Master" (Lau Ching-wan in an exceptionally outrageous performance) in a series of mahjong matches filmed like Leone shootouts, and calls on his impulsive ex-girlfriend (Gigi Leung) for help