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Posted: Tue., Mar. 7, 2006, 1:58pm PT

King and the Clown

Wangeui Namja (South Korea)

A Cinema Service release and presentation, in association with CJ Entertainment, of an Eagle Pictures production, in association with Cineworld. (International sales: CJ, Seoul.) Produced, directed by Lee Jun-ik. Screenplay, Choi Seok-hwan, based on the play "Yi" (Generosity).

With: Kam Woo-seong, Jeong Jin-yeong, Gang Seong-yeon, Lee Jun-gi, Jang Hang-seon, Yu Hae-jin, Jeong Seok-yong, Lee Seung-hun, Woo Hyeon.

By [DEREK ELLEY](#)

A B.O. sensation in South Korea, 16th-century costumer "King and the Clown" is a well acted but extremely talky dramedy about amorous jealousies between a king, his lady and two male traveling performers. On March 5, pic became the country's all-time highest grosser, with 11.75 million admissions (\$72 million) -- and counting -- some two months after its Dec. 29 release. Homosexual angle will propel the film into gay situations, but uninteresting direction, two-hour running time and dialogue that's difficult to do justice to in subtitles will severely limit offshore chances.

Gong-gil (Lee Jun-gi), who specializes in female roles, and Jang-seng (Kam Woo-seong) are arrested in Seoul for a street act satirizing the ruthless King Yonsan (Jeong Jin-yeong) and his ambitious consort, Nok-su (Gang Seong-yeon). Thesps win their freedom, and stay on at the palace; but the king becomes obsessed with beautiful Gong-gil, to the consternation of Jang-seng and the fury of Nok-su, who plots against Gong-gil's life. Film is pleasingly, though not lavishly, designed, and boasts strong perfs by both Kam and Jeong. Gay elements are largely unexplicit. A fresh translation, as "The Court Jester," is reportedly under way.

Camera (color), Ji Gil-ung; editors, Kim Sang-beom, Kim Jae-beom; music, Lee Byeong-woo; art director, Gang Seung-yong. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (market), Feb. 9, 2006. Running time: 120 MIN.

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