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## IN THEATERS

12/08/2006

By Philip Brasor, Contributing Writer

(★★★ good, ★★ average, ★ bad, No star:  
Unrated)

Opening Saturday

Combien tu m'aimes? (How Much Do You Love Me?): Bertrand Blier's latest high-minded curiosity is about an office worker (Bernard Campan) who, saying he has won the lottery, hires a gorgeous prostitute (Monica Bellucci) to live with him until the money runs out.

One wonders what Billy Wilder could have done with such a premise. Blier uses it to explore matters where sex, love and money come together. Composed of wordy, absurd sketches set to pieces of grand opera, the movie repeatedly builds up to punchlines that never arrive. Gerard Depardieu, however, manages to be amusing as the prostitute's lover/pimp. In French. ★★

Maps: Ginza (13), Shibuya (14)

A Scanner Darkly: In Richard Linklater's version of Philip K. Dick's novel, Keanu Reeves plays a narc posing as a drug dealer. As he did in "Waking Life" (2001), Linklater shot the movie on video and then "painted" over the footage with a computer. The advantage of this cartoon-like technique in a drug movie is obvious, but Linklater does more with it. The narc spends his non-undercover work time dressed in a "scramble suit," which places his speech and appearance in constant flux--he's never even sure of his own reality.

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Robert Downey Jr. and Woody Harrelson play two motor-mouthed druggies, and Winona Ryder is the narc's neurotic girlfriend. Because the plot is pushed to the background, some people may get to the end and realize they weren't paying enough attention, but it's a lively and provocative movie.

★★★

Map: Shibuya (10)

La tigre e la neve (The Tiger and the Snow): As he did with his 1998 Holocaust comedy "La vita e bella" (Life is Beautiful), Roberto Benigni sets his latest movie in hell. Benigni plays a famous poet who follows a beautiful journalist (Nicoletta Braschi) to Baghdad right after the U.S. invasion when he learns she's been injured.

The movie makes sweeping statements about the pointlessness of war without commenting specifically on the reasons for the invasion or the suffering of the Iraqis. The comedy is hermetic-- there's a slapstick scene with a camel followed by a tear-sodden soliloquy about a dead Arab writer. Benigni seems to be the only person who knows what any of this means. In Italian and English. ★

Map: Ginza (7)

Wang-ui Namja (King and the Clown): During the Chosun Dynasty, a group of street performers puts on plays making fun of the tyrannical king's sexual habits. After they're arrested, the leader insists they perform for the king and have him decide their fate. The monarch loves it and installs the troupe in the palace, much to the chagrin of his ministers. Moreover, the prettiest member of the troupe, a young man, ends up replacing the head concubine as the main object of the king's attentions.

Although occasionally crude and sentimental, "King and the Clown" is ace entertainment that has important things to say about free speech, not to mention free love. In Korean. See related story on Page 31. ★★★

Maps: Ginza (11), Ebisu (1), Shinjuku (8), Ikebukuro (6), Yokohama (2), Umeda (7)

Still playing

**Abduction: The Megumi Yokota Story:** As everyone in Japan knows, Megumi Yokota was 13 when she was abducted in 1977 from Niigata Prefecture by North Korean spies. This documentary by U.S.-based Patty Kim and Chris Sheridan is aimed at people who know nothing about the kidnapping campaign, which claimed other Japanese.

Using news footage and artful re-enactments, the film indicts the Japanese media and government for sidestepping the abduction question for more than 20 years until Kim Jong Il's admission in 2002. It's a well-made primer on the subject, though it lacks the historical context of Japan's relationship to the Korean Peninsula that would make it truly indispensable. In Japanese. ★★★

Maps: Ginza (12), Shibuya (5), Yokohama (2)

**Bushi no Ichibun:** Heartthrob Takuya Kimura plays Mimura, a samurai assigned to his lord's squad of food tasters. After ingesting some bad shellfish, he goes blind, rendering him worthless as an employee. His wife, Kayo (Rei Dan), visits a nobleman (Mitsugoro Bando) and asks him to put in a word with the lord so that Mimura does not lose his ranking and, more importantly, his income. However, the nobleman takes advantage of Kayo, and when the news gets back to Mimura, the insult is too much.

The story is simple and perfect, but except for a late confrontation between Mimura and the nobleman, there is no action. Director Yoji Yamada orchestrates the visual and aural information for maximum emotional release, which is particularly impressive since the story is as much about economics as it is about honor. In Japanese. ★★★

Maps: Ginza (2), Shibuya (4), Shinjuku (5), Ikebukuro (5), Kannai (1), Yokohama (1, 2), Umeda (5), Nanba (2)

**Gajok (A Family):** Jeong Eun (Su Ae) is released from prison after serving three years for stabbing a man during a robbery. She gets a job at a hair salon and moves back home, but relations with her father (Joo Hyun) are cold. She blames him for the death of her mother, and he can't forgive her for her crime.

In actuality, she took the rap for a hoodlum (Park Hee Son) who has since moved up in the world. Rather than be grateful for Jeong Eun's sacrifice, the hoodlum accuses her of taking the robbery money and demands compensation. Despite Su's admirable restraint, most of the other actors succumb to timeworn histrionics. In Korean. ★★

Map: Shinjuku (2)

Reel Time cinema listings appear twice a month-- in Movies In Sight and Cinema & Arts In Sight. (IHT/Asahi: December 8,2006)

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