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Hong Kong Confidential Directed by Maris Martinsons

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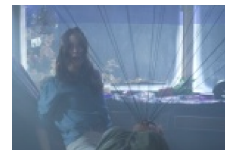
By Scott A. Gray

2 Latvian director Maris Martinsons has cracked the elusive formula for thoughtful dross. It's not as though *Hong Kong Confidential*, renamed from its original title of *Amaya* (because putting "confidential" after a city name is supposed to evoke Curtis Hanson's popular James Ellroy adaptation?), is phoning in any aspects of its production. Martinsons's awkward little romantic dramedy is very deliberately constructed. However, the problem is the writer/director's vision is laughably saccharine and pretentious. Coming across like an uncomfortable mix of harlequin romance, a workplace sitcom, shampoo commercial and late-night spiritualist infomercial, the tone is inconsistent at best. Moreover, the greeting card earnestness of it all renders the few of Martinsons's observations about life and love that aren't extraordinarily obvious or cheesy as impossible to take seriously as the rest of the film. This cloying romance about loneliness and healing the woes of a communication breakdown is composed of a number of narratives connected by the thread of coincidence. Embarking upon a global walkabout following the dissolution of his marriage, a cocky foreigner named Paul (Lithuanian pop star Andrius Mamontovas) winds up taking massage lessons in Hong Kong from the parlour where a lonely, middle-aged Chinese woman works. At home, the woman, named Amaya, and her husband have become stuck in a static loop of familiarity and are no longer able to provide comfort or camaraderie for each other. To drive home the wide-eyed message of "everything is connected," their misfiring communication is mirrored by the flirtatious language barrier fencing between Paul and a young Chinese woman employed as a translator at the parlour, and the emotional neglect that destroyed Paul's marriage, which is shown in jarring flashbacks. In case the metaphor isn't clear, Amaya's husband doles out scraps of Zen philosophy while tinkering with the gears of his sad wife's rusty old bike. For a film with so many sloppy components — amateurish cross bike fades, completely out of synch ADR, a slew of other subtle technical audio issues, disjointed music placement and very unsubtle use of pathetic fallacy, to name a few — and such an atrocious lead performance (Mamontovas wouldn't even be able to handle soap opera acting), it's impossible to fully discount *Hong Kong Confidential* due to some decent cinematography and the acting talents of Kaori Momoi as Amaya. It's almost like she's acting in a different movie; Mamontovas might as well be a tennis ball on a stick for all the dynamic give and take his presence lends to their scenes. The only bonus content is a music video for the bleach bond pop star's nauseatingly syrupy "World is Full of Love." However, the world is full of crap as well.

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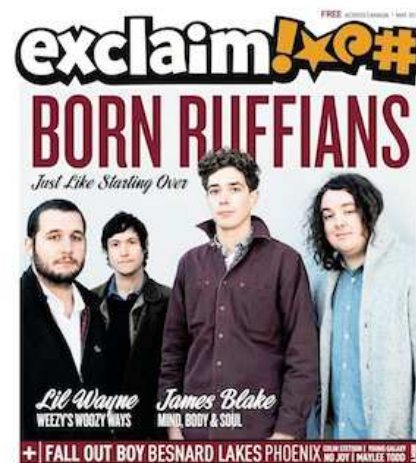
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