



Hayashi, Wang and Moy: the Chinese have never been integrated into U.S. society

## FILMS

# Chinese translations

### CHAN IS MISSING

Directed by Wayne Wang

The sudden disappearance of a Taiwan immigrant named Chan Hung in *Chan Is Missing* is one whopper of a red herring. He vanishes with \$4,000 given to him by Jo (Wood Moy) and Steve (Marc Hayashi) for a taxi licence, and, in the effort to find him, the pair comes up with sweet nothing. But in his investigations Jo discovers a great deal about his friend Chan Hung's past. The real mystery of *Chan Is Missing* is the mystery of human behavior.

Shot in black and white for \$20,000 in San Francisco's Chinatown and Manilatown, *Chan Is Missing* shows what you can have with a small amount of money and plenty of conviction. At the same time, it shows what you cannot have: good lighting, sharp film stock and the audio sophistication that we have come to expect from modern movies. Despite its earthy humor and witty observations on the immigrant Chinese personality, the movie is often pretty ragged and lacks a narrative density. It keeps running out of fuel, and some parts of the puzzle behind Chan's disappearance (a mystery woman, a traffic accident and a flag-waving incident during a parade) get to be fairly tiresome after a while. As the narrator, Jo, says: "If this was a TV mystery, an important clue would pop up and clarify everything." This is true, but it is also an excuse.

What *Chan Is Missing* does have going for it is insight into the Chinese

character. Jo and Steve never get straight answers from anybody: the Chinese respect the mystery of Chan's disappearance and have no desire to probe into it. After all, they say, a man walking down a street looking for answers can only find them from a man in a puddle of water: himself. It drives Steve crazy—he has lost most of his Chinese legacy, and all the doubletalk makes him hop around with impatience. Though born in the United States, Jo still has some connection with his racial roots and pursues Chan's disappearance with fascination and determination.

Given the messiness of the movie (it is too often wingy in the wrong way), its kooky vignettes hold the attention. There is a funny sequence in which Jo and Steve listen to a goody-two-shoes lawyer (Judy Nihei) explain the difference in "modes of speech" when a policeman and a Chinese tangle over a traffic accident. A chain-smoking restaurant cook, wearing a T-shirt with SAMURAI NIGHT FEVER on it, sings *Fly Me To The Moon* while he does orders of pork chow mein. However, things are never quite what they seem to be in the Chinese character: the cook later shows up in a suit and talks convincingly about why the Chinese have never really been integrated into U.S. society.

*Chan is Missing* has plenty of those switches, and it is a good thing. Director Wayne Wang has a lot to learn about cutting, pacing, composition and telling a story. What saves him, and his movie, is his ability to tell good anecdotes.

—LAWRENCE O'TOOLE

## THE ARTS

# Cheers from the Old World

As the cries of "Bis! Bis!" rose from the boisterous Italian audience, singer Christopher Cameron was preparing for the worst. "I thought they were booing us," said Cameron. "I was waiting for the tomatoes." The fears of the basso from Toronto proved to be unfounded: the chant was the Italian version of "encore." The audience in the 13th-century Basilica of Santa Maria de Collemaggio in the medieval city of L'Aquila was simply going wild with enthusiasm over the performance of Handel's *Messiah* by the Ottawa Choral Society, Orchestra London and four Canadian soloists.

This Aug. 21 performance celebrated the opening of *Musicarchitetettura Canada 1982*, a major festival of Canadian music, dance and architecture taking place in L'Aquila (about 100 km north of Rome) until Sept. 12. For the first time, the 36-year-old festival is devoting itself wholly to the arts of another country. It is also the first time that so many Canadian artists have appeared in a foreign showcase without funding from the department of external affairs. Apart from financial assistance from the Alberta and Ontario arts councils, the Italian government is footing the bill. The eclectic roster of Canadian talent includes the Danny Grossman Dance Company, the Lamppoon Puppettheatre, the Orford String Quartet, mime Claude St. Denis, mezzo-

*The Basilica of Santa Maria de Collemaggio: a musical Venus from the waves*



soprano Janice Taylor, pianists Robert Silverman and Gloria Saarinen, cellist Shauna Rolston, members of the National Ballet—including prima ballerina Veronica Tennant—and a group of leading Canadian architects.

Importing musicians, especially singers, to Italy may appear to be a classic case of shipping olive oil to Sicily, but the large number of Italian immigrants in Canada has forged strong family and economic links between the two countries. When those left in the old country became curious about the culture of the new country, they were pleasantly surprised. "Musically, Canada is like Venus emerging from the waves," enthuses Nino Carloni, artistic director of the festival.

The emergence from the waves, however, was not entirely graceful. Torontonian Ann Summers, the festival's artistic consultant, was shocked at the reception she was given in 1973 when she tried to book an Italian tour for the National Arts Centre (NAC) Orchestra. "The artistic director of La Scala actually expressed amazement that orchestras existed in Canada at all," recalls Summers. Toronto architect Rocco Maragna, a major instigator of the architectural portion of the festival, had encountered similar disdain for Canada on a 1976 visit to Friuli. An Italian journalist who had put forward the notion that the country's cuisine reflected its culture turned to Maragna and said, "You come from a culture of fish and chips."

Summers and Maragna met insult with industry. When Summers finally managed to book five concerts for the NAC Orchestra in Italy, they kindled an interest in Canadian musicians among Italian critics. In 1981 Carloni visited Toronto on Summers' urging, and the plans for Canada's participation in the festival started to gel. At the same time, Maragna began rounding up Canadian architects who were eager to exchange views with their Italian counterparts.

Indeed, exchanging has become the primary activity of the festival. While Canadian architects sigh over romantic castles, cathedrals and palazzos, their Italian colleagues look with envy at an exhibition featuring photographs of Canada's performing arts centres. Nothing has been built for that purpose in Italy since the 18th century. On the performance side, the musicians were grateful for the European exposure. "People back home take stock of you after this," enthused soprano Frances Ginzer after her turn in *The Messiah*. In return, the major newspapers in Rome were doling out rave reviews to the Canadian musicians. Canada, it seems, can deliver not only fish and chips, but truffles as well.

—AVIVA LAYTON in L'Aquila.



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