

The Banquet starts slow but it's worth the wait

by Mark Farmer

The Wedding Banquet is director Ang Lee's latest offering, winning top honours in 1993 at the Berlin and Seattle International film festivals.

Banquet is one captivating film, but you have to give it about 30 minutes before you see why. The film never really lags, but it's slow-going for the first half-hour. During this time we're introduced to Wai-Tung (Winston Chao), a successful, gay real estate broker, his live-in lover Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein), his comfortable brownstone apartment and comfortable lifestyle.

Why so comfortable? Wai lives half-way around the world from the scrutiny of his traditional Taiwanese parents, and their attempts to get him married.

Unfortunately mom and dad want a daughter-in-law and a grandchild ASAP. They keep sending Wai forms for computer dating services in Taiwan, which he dutifully sabotages by requesting a multilingual opera singer with two PhDs. But dad

is persistent, and Wai feels a sense of duty to his parents, while trying to hide his homosexuality. Eventually Simon hits upon the solution: a marriage of convenience between Wai and his illegal immigrant tenant Wei-Wei (May Chin).

She toils away as an artist, living in a decrepit apartment building Wai owns, churning out paintings without any real hope of paying the rent. She gets a green card and nice digs out of the marriage. Wai realizes not only can he get his parents off his back, he can also get a tax break out of it.

As the wedding approaches the real story begins and the intrigue starts unfolding. Simon becomes jealous, even while coaching Wei-Wei about her fiancée for the inevitable immigration interviews (he wears boxers to bed, but jockeys during the day). After a depressing attempt at a civil service wedding, the newlyweds get hooked into a colossal, traditional Taiwanese banquet. We see through the newlyweds' eyes how humiliating wedding ceremonies really can be for the bride and groom: glasses tinkle and they have

to drink. Glasses tinkle and they have to kiss. Glasses tinkle and off comes the bride's garter belt. Even worse ceremonies await them in their hotel room! These Taiwanese aren't the "weak, quiet math whizzes" one guest expected, and food plays a twisted part in their ceremonies.

Things really start going awry when Wei-Wei seduces Wai on their wedding night, and she gets pregnant.

Simon has an affair, Dad has a stroke, Wai comes out of the closet and the feces really hits the fan.

Wei-Wei has to decide whether

to keep the baby the grandparents so dearly want, and we see how desperate mom really is to have a grandchild.

The performances in *Banquet* are all solid, especially from Lichtenstein, but some of the funniest come from minor characters during the banquet as Wai and Wei-Wei try to navigate intact through a haze of drinking and humiliating wedding games.

I can see a lot of heart strings being tugged by this flick — it's sensitive, funny, and the longer you watch the further involved you get in this weird, wonderful story. It's interest-

ing to see a not-exactly-open country like Taiwan back a movie about a homosexual love triangle. It's also rare to see a film switch languages so effortlessly, moving from English to subtitled Chinese without a hitch. Lee produces great tension in the love triangle between Simon, Wai and Wei-Wei and just about every other relationship in the film, and that tension drives the film. You may have to wait a bit to see why, but this flick's well worth seeing.

The Wedding Banquet is at *Wormwood's Dog & Monkey Cinema* on *Gottingen St.*, February 4 - 10.

Superbowl an ad orgy

by Leslie J Furlong

I'm sitting on the sofa at my friend's place, my thumb and forefinger ringed around the neck of a cold one. I'm surrounded by several men and women who are discussing/arguing about the health of Emmitt Smith, Jim Kelly's arm, and the quality of NFC versus AFC ball. It's Superbowl talk, a kind of "My dad can beat up your dad" dialogue that kills time leading up to the game, separating the real armchair quarterbacks from the wannabes.

For me, whoever wins or loses isn't a big deal. I'm here for the trimmings, all those things that transform the Superbowl from a mere championship game into a bloated media spectacle that draws a billion people to it. That means the National Anthem, the half-time show, and reams of commercials, and at almost a million dollars a pop, I'll bet I'm not the only one who doesn't care about the score.

Watching as Natalie Cole sang the anthem backed by a gospel choir, I

noted the irony that outside the stadium people were protesting against the display of the Georgia state flag, which incorporates the Confederate Stars and Bars into its design. As soon as she made it to "twilight's last gleaming" I gave up hope that her dad would get up on stage with her.

Now the game begins and the living room divides cleanly into two camps, each in possession of a separate sofa. I'm on the Buffalo sofa by default, so I start to take a passing interest in the progress of the Bills. Thankfully, my mind is saved from total domination by frequent commercials, a notion that must make the people at *Adbusters* completely splenic.

A lot of commercials premiere tonight, crafted to sell a bunch of things no one really needs but everybody seems to want. Beer, cola, cars, and (of course) sneakers are all being put on the block by Really Rich People who are paid for being who they are rather than for what they know. But the products aren't even the point

of the exercise anymore. The commercials are just parts of the whole self-indulgent experience.

It's half time now and the Buffalo fans are doing their version of the touchdown dance in the middle of the floor while Dallas supporters throw beer caps at them. I avoid taking sides and settle in for the half time show, a country music extravaganza I'm sure was designed to demoralize the Yankees from Buffalo. Yee haw. I guess after all that Michael Jackson business, the show's producers wanted to get as far away from him as possible.

Now, almost two hours later, the game is over and the energy has shifted from one sofa to the other. The whole business of the Superbowl XXVIII has come to an end and Cowboy's coach Jimmy Johnson is drenched in Gatorade. It's time for me to go. After all I've seen this evening, I can't help wondering if this ritual constitutes a commercial for that brand of sugar water.

Gabrielle in the rough

Gabrielle
Find Your Way
Go! Discs

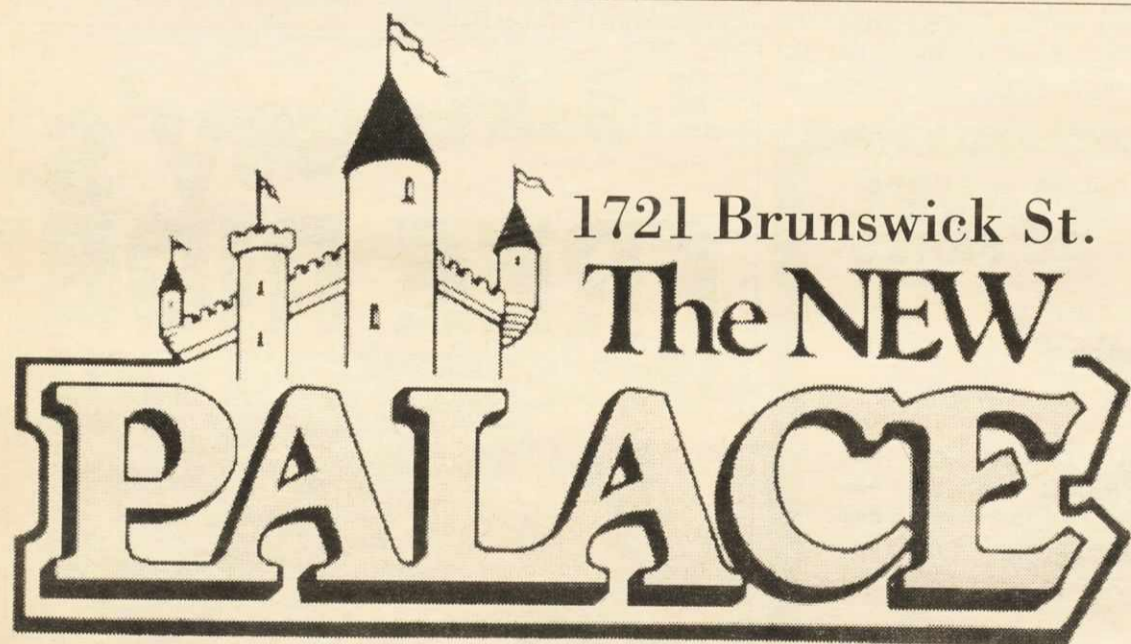
You've probably heard the dance version of "Dreams" making its way around the dance floors. Or maybe you've seen Gabrielle on *MuchMusic* performing the slower, album version

of the same song - she's got short, close-cropped black hair and an eyepatch. Ah, I knew you'd remember the eyepatch.

If you want to hear more of her, be warned. What you've heard in the bars is a remix, Gabrielle's album is not nine more tracks of drum machines. She passed a crucial litmus test: My dance music-hating roommate didn't say, "What's this crap?" when I put on *Find Your Way*.

Besides "Dreams" and "Find Your Way", there are no killer singles on Gabrielle's album, but neither are there any weak tunes. Her voice has an intriguing quality which keeps the songs distinct and interesting. She is both and sharp, kind of like a rougher Sade, and her songs all have a lightly energetic rhythm section which allows for easy conversion to a dance track. This album could take her far, and deservedly so.

Richard Lim



Mon - Sun: Dance to the warm rhythms of
31 - 6th Tropical Waves

next week: Keith Andrew's Band

LOONIES NIGHT!

It Pays to be at the Palace
7pm - midnight

Check it out!

