

FROM <http://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2002-08-23/100709/>

In *Grit and Polish*, documentarian Birgit Rathsmann profiles Hong Kong's high-flying action divas. Female superstars like Michelle Yeoh, Jade Leung, and Shaw Brothers heroine Cheng Pei Pei hold their own against male matinee idols, challenging traditional notions about what women can do, onscreen and off. -- *Marrit Ingman*

Austin Chronicle: *Chang Pei Pei looks like she was a trip.*

Birgit Rathsmann: *She was awesome.*

AC: *I think it's great that she's working again.*

BR: Well, she's done having children now, and she's divorced.

AC: *That seems to be kind of a common thread.*

BR: Yeah. Well, I tried to interview Brigitte Lin, and I couldn't because she had just retired from acting because she had gone to marry a very wealthy Chinese-American businessman ... And his family basically had told her that if she was going to get married to him and have his children, she would have to be out of the spotlight. So it's very prevalent.

AC: *I think that we in the West are so eager to embrace this strong, fighting woman. Asian society seems more ambivalent about her.*

BR: I haven't quite gotten to the bottom of that. I think it's just a very ingrained, traditional attitude toward acting as a profession. I think that's really what underlies it all.

AC: *What inspired you to make Grit & Polish?*

BR: [When] I went to film school in Chicago ... I was looking for someone who made films with characters that I would like to portray. Strong women who were confident that they could do anything they wanted to do. I started looking at films, and I couldn't find any ... [Barbara Scharres, of the Chicago Film Center] is very passionate about Hong Kong films, and she programmed two months a year of these films, and I started going to see them, and I said, "Oh, that's where they are! Look at them!" So I felt like I should go talk to the people who made the films, and see why they made them -- why they are coming from such an unexpected place, in a way. We think of Asian society as more traditional in some ways.

AC: *Of course, there's the tension between those traditions that are patriarchal and the liberated heroines of the Hong Kong films.*

BR: Yeah. A lot of the films were made by men, and I would ask, "Why are you making these films?" [A]nd they would say, traditionally, women were so disadvantaged and disenfranchised that it's in some way easier to express social criticism through their position.

AC: *So they're more symbolic?*

BR: For some of the directors, they are. Some other directors are trying to express parts of their personality. I talked to Stanley Kwan, who is not in the film. ... He's a gay man, and he always felt like this was an easier way to portray a part of his personality. ... He's since gone public with his sexuality, and now he's making a film about a gay man. But it was sort of a long journey for him, I think.

AC: *It seems that in the West, women have been more associated with*

melodrama. When talking about emotions, it makes more sense to have that discussion located within a female character.

BR: In some sense, that's what [these directors] are doing. Except, of course, their form of melodrama is --

AC: *Action-packed?*

BR: [laughs] Well, it's a potpourri. There's comedy, and there's action, and there's everything.

(Grit and Polish plays as part of the "Girls With Gusto" program on Sunday, Aug. 25, 2:30pm.)

"She was born in a wagon of a travelin' show, her mama used to dance for the money they'd throw ..." Yes, it's pre-nose-job Cher in her absolutely wretched 1969 dramatic debut, *Chastity*, which screens at 11:45pm on Friday, Aug. 23 -- the night before Cher will be singing her heart out at the Frank Erwin Center. Cher plays a sullen and surly hitchhiking runaway with a heart of pressed tin, and though what she does with her grating voice and punk-ass demeanor might be misconstrued as acting, do not be fooled -- she is simply a marionette in the hands of producer Sonny "Svengali" Bono (whom many suspect was also the never-heard-of-before and never-heard-from-again director Alessio de Paola). *Chastity* is a disturbed young woman who hits the road to escape her dreary, unhappy life, and finds more dreariness and unhappiness. In the turgid and lugubrious script, she takes her anger out on men by picking them up, leading them on, and then "not letting them get anything." She works as a prostitute without ever having to give up "the goods," and winds up in a Mexican whorehouse for a lesbian madam who would like *Chastity* to be something more than an employee.

With a creepy introspective/philosophical voiceover narrative by Cher, *Chastity* is hippie-age BS, and you can definitely see the chanteuse's *Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves* period looming on the horizon. There are some who will dig deeply to find some merit to this film, but it should strictly be taken as what it is: pure camp -- meaning, of course, that it's hysterically funny while it tries desperately to be serious. Would *you* name *your* child after this? "Chastity ... pick her up if you dare." Indeed. -- *Stephen MacMillan Moser*

Chastity screens at 11:45pm, Aug. 23, at the Regal Metropolitan.

All screenings take place at Regal's Metropolitan Theatre (I-35 at Stassney) unless noted (**). Shorts programs are denoted by one asterisk (*).

Opening night film *Britney Baby*, screens at the Paramount Theatre (713 N. Congress); Mr. Sinus Theater's *Xanadu* screens at the Alamo Drafthouse Downtown (409 Colorado).

Evening tickets cost \$6.50/aGLIFF members; \$7.50/general admission. Matinees before 6pm: \$4.50/aGLIFF; \$5.50/general. Mr. Sinus tickets: \$7.50/aGLIFF; \$9.50/general.

Day-of-show tickets may be purchased at the Metropolitan box office. For more information, call 512/796-2862 or 512/796-3852, or visit

www.agliff.org.