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Chansonettes Begin Rehearsal for 60th

WESTFIELD - The Chansonettes of Westfield have begun rehearsing for the upcoming holiday season, entitled "Celebrate the Season."

The program will feature songs celebrating the holidays and the choral group's 60th anniversary, including "Celebrate This Day Together," "A Jingle Bell Christmas," "Lights of

Hanukah" and "A Simple Song of Peace."

The tour is currently scheduled to visit Westfield Senior Housing, The Chelsea at Fanwood, Spring Meadows in Summit and Runnells Specialized Hospital in December.

The Chansonettes is an all women's choral group, which began 60 years ago meeting and singing in various group members' houses.

Currently the group, which performs a holiday and spring concert series each year, rehearses once a week at the Presbyterian Church on Mountain Avenue in Westfield under the direction of Jean Schork and accompanied by Mel Freda.

The group is always looking for new members who enjoy singing and gathering with friends. Anyone needing more information regarding upcoming concerts, interested in joining the group or booking a future concert may call vice president Jackie Costello at (908) 789-5819.

Synagogue to Debut Tot Shabbat Service

SCOTCH PLAINS - Congregation Beth Israel, located at 18 Shalom Way in Scotch Plains, will host its first monthly Tot Shabbat Service on Friday, September 26, from 7 to 8 p.m.

An interactive service open to the community for families with children ages 3 to 6, it will feature joyous song, dance, prayer and a storytelling program. For more information, call Betty Lynn Golub, education director, at (908) 889-1830, extension no. 207.



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Bangkok Dangerous: See at Your Own Risk

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By MICHAEL GOLDBERGER
1 and 1/2 popcorns

Bangkok Dangerous is so brazen a cliché that, as with the scalawag student who owns up to a transgression - "It was I, Mrs. Green, who stole the UNICEF collection can" - you must at least note the honesty. Ripping off their 1999 Thai version by the same name, twin brother-directors Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang keep it simple...and cheap.

At least that's the way it looks...no offense to the producers if it cost more than the Hollywood equivalent of \$1.98 to make. And that's the lower-rung cachet this tale about an American hitman (Nicolas Cage) in Bangkok seeks to cash in on, shamelessly. Even when its plot evolves into perfunctory moralisms, it knows not to be too convincing.

In the same vein that auto insurers forgive good clients one accident, we don't question Nicolas Cage's otherwise curious presence here. Winking to Nick knowingly, we sit back and admire how surprisingly little he harms his reputation as this stereotypical assassin. Just call him Joe. Narrating, he opens things up with his four commandments of killing.

They are, don't get close to anyone, don't ask questions, know when to get out and don't fall asleep with bubblegum in your mouth. Just kidding about that last one. No, no, I'll tell you. It's don't leave any traces. I couldn't have it on my conscience if you saw the film just to learn that.

Anyway, we know what happens to rules, especially if one is trying to apply them at a pivotal time in their life. Sure, cold-blooded murderer Joe is only exercising good business sense in hiring Bangkok pickpocket Kong, obsequiously portrayed by Shakrit Yamnarm. He needs a local conduit. But you think maybe he kind of likes the kid?

Well, shucks if life isn't just one big ambiguity. It turns out the paid killer, after conducting an entire career of anonymity and detachment, suddenly needs to leave a legacy...to tutor a prodigy. Kong gets the nod because, in a novel twist on the genre, he reminds the veteran of himself. Huh...Cage was Thai when he was younger?

No matter. But be aware that epiphanies in the movies are usually multipronged in nature, especially if a romantic interest is needed. Having also decided he no longer wishes to live in a world without love, Joe takes a fancy to antithetical pharmacist Fon, played by Charlie Yeung. Dig the symbolism. Not only is she innocent, she's mute.

Yep, once you start breaking those maxims, man, it's like falling off a diet. First it's just a handful of Fritos from the cupboard, grabbed quickly because then they don't amount to any calories. Next thing you know, it's an amuse bouche of fettuccine Alfredo followed by a quart of General Tso's chicken. In short, Joe is mixing meat with dairy.

But, because it is so beyond triteness to be pretentious, we again grant *Bangkok Dangerous* dispensation and

settle in to glean its few good action sequences.

Yet even then, the celluloid quality itself is questionable. And the prevalence of darkness and shadows, whether for atmosphere or to bamboozle, makes it difficult to discern matters.

Wading in such shallow waters, the movie sets up its own Catch 22. Any attempt to legitimize the proceedings might seem an embarrassing stretch. Yet, there's no denying Mr. Cage's Joe is a hitman, a torpedo, a cleaner. And a little background into this previously soulless dude might've proved interesting.

Likewise as regards to the other principals. Sidekick Kong never rises above the savvy. No. 1 street stooge that's been a politically incorrect staple since Hollywood first opened for business. Indeed, to tell his story properly would be way too much Third World sociology for this film's purposes. Fon is a variation on an ideal.

Invariably dressed in white, she is virtue. A repository of her culture's etiquette and grace, pure despite the squalor and gangsterism around her, Fon is seen as Joe's one chance in a million for redemption. It just wouldn't do if he simply picked some fat little jovial gal to guide his way out of sin.

Nope, it's always all or nothing, like Roy "Mad Dog" Earle's (Humphrey Bogart) tragic obsession with club-footed wallflower Velma (Joan Leslie) in *High Sierra* (1941). Sure, Roy could have kept it uncomplicated. Ida Lupino's Marie loved him like crazy. They might of just faded to black...slipped away into some holler and lived happily ever after.

It's the acting out of that two-sided syndrome, perfection vs. depression. You can't get it one hundred percent right, so no sense in bothering. Psychiatrists reading this review might corroborate that. And while they're at it, perhaps explain why any filmmaker in their right mind would want to hazard nine dollars American on *Bangkok Dangerous*.

Bangkok Dangerous, rated R, is a Lionsgate release directed by Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang and stars Nicolas Cage, Shakrit Yamnarm and Charlie Yeung. Running time: 99 minutes.

NAMI to Spotlight Basic Brain Science

AREA - NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) will offer a free program on Monday, September 22, at 7:30 p.m. at the Osceola Presbyterian Church, located at 1689 Raritan Road in Clark. Guest speaker John Fossella will discuss "Mental Health and Recovery: Introduction to Basic Brain Science." Ample time will be allotted for questions and discussion.

Mr. Fossella is assistant professor of molecular imaging genetics in the Department of Psychiatry at Mount Sinai School of Medicine. For more information, call (908) 233-1628 or visit nami-nj-uc.org.



Courtesy of Norman Deshong

SHEER MADNESS...Area residents, including Michael Tennenbaum from Westfield, pictured above in bow tie, will appear in New York City, performing *Midnight Madness*. The play, written by Westfield resident Cynthia Meryl, was selected as a "partner event" in this year's New York Musical Theatre Festival and will make its New York premiere tonight. To read about the effort, see page 22.

Union County Awards 45 'HEART' Grants

AREA - The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders has announced that 45 local groups and artists will receive a total funding of \$75,000 through the 2008 Union County HEART Grant Program (History, Education, Arts Reaching Thousands).

Recognizing the importance of culture and the arts to the economy and quality of life, the Union County Freeholders established the HEART Grant Program in 1998. This program supports projects related to history, the arts and humanities, and demonstrates a commitment to the artists and community organizations of Union County.

Freeholder Chairman Angel Estrada said, "The response to the HEART Grant Program has been exciting since

its inception. The recipients are a wonderful mix of creative individuals - composers and writers, historians, painters, photographers, musicians and dancers - plus arts, history and other cultural organizations and civic groups. These cultural assets are a vital part of community life, well being, economic development and cultural heritage tourism in Union County."

Artists, educators and organizations that want information about next year's HEART Grant Program can contact the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs at 633 Pearl Street, Elizabeth, New Jersey 07202 by calling (908) 558-2550. NJ Relay users dial 711 or e-mail culturalinfo@ucnj.org.

WF's Town Book Store Welcomes Mystery Writer

WESTFIELD - The Town Book Store in Westfield will host a meet and greet for New Jersey resident Dave White, author of "The Evil That Men Do," on September 20 from 2 to 4 p.m.

New Jersey private investigator Jackson Donne, after being stripped of his private investigator's license and now slums it as a night security guard at a Jersey storage facility, thinks he has finally hit rock bottom.

Then the bottom really falls out: The sister he has not seen in years shows up, needing help. It turns out Donne's Alzheimer's-stricken mother has begun hunting at long-buried family secrets from her hospital bed, suggesting a sinister - even murderous - past.

Meanwhile, Donne's relatives are suddenly being greeted by blackmail, car bombs, and bullets to the back of the skull. All Donne wants is to disappear, but realizes that his only chance at saving his family, and himself, is by solving a mystery more than 60 years old.

Mr. White is among the youngest winners of the Derringer Award. He has contributed to many anthologies and collections, including *The Adventure of the Missing Detective* and *Damn Near Dead*. His first novel, "When One Man Dies," was pub-

lished in 2007 and earned him a starred review in *Publishers Weekly*. Mr. White lives in New Jersey, where he teaches middle-school English.

Readers can meet Mr. White at The Town Book Store, located at 270 East Broad Street in Westfield (corner of East Broad and Elmer Streets). For more information, call (908) 233-3535.

Artist Performs 'Alla Prima' Demonstration

WESTFIELD - Tracy Carrera, a former art professor and figurative painter who now lives in Cranford, will perform an "alla prima" (translated in English: "at once"/ "in one session") painting demonstration at Evalyn Dunn's Gallery in Westfield on Saturday, September 20, from 1 to 4 p.m.

A career artist and former painting professor at The Art Academy of Cincinnati, Ms. Carrera is known internationally among collectors for painting fine restaurants in America and abroad.

The artist credits her "provocative" friends in helping her "capture the social energy of a restaurant" as they serve as models and creative muses during the dinner/photo shoot.

The gallery is located at 549 South Avenue, West.

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