

it escapes such a fate shows how Maddin's art has grown from his earlier, unfunnier movies, which risked the alienating and hermetically "quirky" or wore out their running times in a parade of static beauty. Here, his style and humor aren't the point but base elements, what helps him think about stuff. The secret is personal feeling, as Maddin explains in an excellent making-of, "97 Percent True" (50m 38s). "It might even be just a hundred percent true. I think there's a few surface details that have been changed. I didn't grow up in a lighthouse," he deadpans, before asserting that the film is "emotionally and melodramatically true, psychologically true, poetically true." We can hardly ask more.

But first, there is that surface: gorgeous soft "aged" black-and-white, sometimes tinted or with subliminal bursts of color, shot entirely in 8mm, usually with more than one camera simultaneously and usually by Maddin himself with assistance from freshman cinematographer Benjamin Kasulke. Equally crucial is John Gurdabeke's editing and a process Maddin calls "scrolling" that they discovered on his previous film, **COWARDS BEND THE KNEE**. Using FinalCut Pro, Maddin noticed that when they forwarded or reversed the rushes with the mouse, the frames skipped like a stone over water. His revelation is worth quoting, as he's more articulate than many an *auteur*:

"I really liked the way this process of speeding up and slowing down, and then stopping, seemed to fetishize, seemed to skittishly move ahead and backwards and forwards. And it reminded me of the way I remember my favorite erotic or just favorite wistful memories—that I'm eager to get to the money-moment of the memory

and I will rush ahead perhaps too fast, skipping over too much, and maybe even go to the great moment too soon to really enjoy it properly. It needs a proper buildup, so I would go back and approach it a little more slowly, but even then find I hadn't quite gotten the right speed of approach yet. And so I would go at it again and then finally arrive at it, and then since this was the moment I was really having this whole reverie over, I would really slow things down and cherish that memory."

That perfectly describes the film's skittering motions—neither a pastiche of the herky-jerkiness of silents at the wrong speed nor the skipping of missed frames but a modern kind of nervous jitter, a phenomenon of thought expressed through cutting-edge tools and applied to seemingly quaint conventions. Maddin not only understands the sophistication and subtlety of silent techniques but re-energizes them.

The soundtrack, of course, proves the film isn't quite silent, but then silent films never were. And sometimes they had narration, so narration (written by Louis Negin) is provided along with the music and foley work. This is how the film became a performance piece, for it was screened many times with live music, effects and narration, and the DVD preserves a sense of that by offering seven soundtracks. There are studio readings by Isabella Rossellini, Maddin and Negin, and live readings by Rossellini, Laurie Anderson, John Ashbery, Crispin Glover and Eli Wallach. The mood of the film is fascinatingly altered by their approaches, although they read the same material. Alas, there are no options for the performances of two others glimpsed tantalizingly in the making-of, Udo Kier and Barbara Steele!

Aside from a deleted scene (6m 10s) and the trailer (1m 34s), there are two bonus films by Maddin in the same style as the feature. "It's My Mother's Birthday Today" (5m 29s), a music video of that maudlin old recording by Arthur Tracy, stars Dov Houle, the Manitoba Meadowlark, a "castrato" who was in live performances. It begins with visual puns on eggs and becomes creepy and threatening. (Research indicates that, as you may suspect, Mr. Houle isn't a castrato and isn't even a Mr. Houle but an actor involved in a stunt or hoax.) "Footsteps" (9m 12s), named after a Toronto foley troupe, brilliantly illustrates and celebrates their work, although as with the alleged castrato, the information it provides isn't always to be trusted. We doubt that foley artists ever actually drop their pants for an effect, except of course for a laugh. All material, feature and extras, are in the 1.85:1 ratio and meet the standard Criterion criteria.

CHALLENGE OF THE MASTERS

Wong Fei-hung yu Luk Ah-choi
(Cantonese)

Huang Feihong yu Lu Yatsai
(Mandarin)

"Wong Fei-hung and Luk Ah Choi" or "Huang Feihong and Lu Yatsai" 1976, *Media Blasters, DD-5.1 & 2.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+*, \$19.99, 95m 59s, DVD-1

By John Charles

Director Lau Kar-leung presents the story of Huang Feihong (or Wong Fei-hung, in Cantonese), starting from his days as a belligerent youngster with no kung fu skills, in this pleasing Shaw Brothers production. The energetic but brash Feihong (Gordon Liu Chia-hui) repeatedly tries to ingratiate himself with