



# CITY LIGHTS THIS WEEK'S BEST

Contemporary Chinese cinema's finest colorist, Zhang Yimou has lately alternated between eye-popping-but-thematically-inert spectacles and intimate dramas that pack more emotion. His earlier work, however, combines the two, usually to depict the low status of women in pre-revolutionary China. The best example is *Raise the Red Lantern*, the tale of 19-year-old Songlian, who becomes a local potentate's fourth wife. The elegantly composed 1991 film is keyed, like most of Zhang's early work, to the contrast between natural hues and man-made colors—in this case, the red lantern that indicates which wife is keeping company with the master for the night. Yet the movie's appeal is not merely formal. Songlian's struggle for status illustrates how the powerless battle among themselves rather than unite against their oppressor. If that sounds like an exemplary Communist lesson, Chinese authorities found it so threatening that they banned the film. THE FILM SHOWS AT 7 P.M. AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS' PICKFORD THEATER, 101 INDEPENDENCE AVE. SE. FREE. (202) 707-5677.

—Mark Jenkins

There's a clear parallel between Francesca Jandasek Acayan's multimedia dance piece, *Ellesmere*, and Helmut Newton's semicontroversial 1995 fashion shoot for *Vogue*: Both works feature women bound to orthopedic devices and crackle with a transgressive sexual energy. According to Acayan, *Ellesmere* "explores the evolution of a community dealing with and reacting to change," but, like the best of Newton's work, it also provides potent commentary on how we interpret beauty and the sometimes ridiculous lengths we go to attain it. Acayan's choreography—particularly when it pertains to the movements of the dancers with stilts and arm braces—offers a collision of raw physicality and subtle footwork. And the physical handicaps Acayan has mapped out for her troupe are a total mind-bender. Expect a direct reprisal of the work that premiered on the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage in October 2006; though most choreographers actively avoid repeating themselves, this delightfully off-kilter piece demands a return engagement. THE PERFORMANCES BEGIN AT 8 P.M. SATURDAY, SEPT. 22, AND

7 P.M. SUNDAY, SEPT. 23, AT DANCE PLACE, 3225 8TH ST. NE. \$22. (202) 269-1600.

—Nick Green

Formed in Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, **17 Hippies** draw influences from Eastern European sounds that flooded the region at the time. Singing in German and English, the group plays original compositions, traditional songs, and pop covers. On the first disc released in the United States, *Heimlich*, the collective takes on instrumental moments and rock-inflected songs; the title track, an original written by accordionist Kiki (apparently, the band members were born without last names), features African thumb pianos for accompaniment. During live performances, however, 17 Hippies takes ownership of its sound. "Our audience in Berlin learned about these new, old sounds by listening to us," Kiki said in an interview. "The 'traddies' hated us. Now in other parts of Europe they call it 'Berlin style.'" 17 HIPPIES PERFORM AT 6 P.M. AT THE KENNEDY CENTER'S MILLENNIUM STAGE, 2700 F ST. NW. FREE. (202) 467-4600. —Ernest Barteldes

