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'New Directors/New Films' Looks at the World Family

By NAN ROBERTSON

THE 1984 "New Directors/ New Films" series could just as well be titled "All in the Family." From Hong Kong to Hungary, from Southern California to East Germany, family relationships seem to be obsessing film makers. At least two-thirds of the 18 feature-length films from 14 countries in the series this year focus on this topic. "We didn't plan it — it just happened," said Joanne Koch, executive director of the Film Society of Lincoln Center. "Sometimes common themes seem to surface spontaneously, everywhere at once." This is one of those years.

This 13th annual showcase for fresh film talent from outside the United States or outside the commercial American mainstream is sponsored by the Film Society and the Museum of Modern Art's film department. The series begins tonight and runs for two weeks, through April 12, at the 57th Street Playhouse, 110 West 57th Street. Each movie will be shown twice.

The stories depict young against old, technology against tradition, village versus city, suffocating ma-

terialism side by side with grinding poverty and, the world over, rebels who are often without a cause.

"They are not rebelling in a political way, as they were in the 1960's," Adrienne Mancina, curator of film exhibitions at the Modern, said. "Their struggle and their alienation seem individual." These movies, about blacks, whites or Orientals, often show sullen teen-agers and bewildered parents — people of the same blood, living under the same roof who simply cannot understand each other anymore.

"It's interesting to see how, from country to country, they work it out, or don't," Wendy Keys, the Film Society's associate director, said. The endings include flight, murder, accommodation and mayhem.

Since its start in 1972, the "New Directors" series has put an impressive number of unknowns into orbit; they later became famous or at the very least, respected. The biggest name by far is Steven Spielberg, who made his debut at the series in 1974 with "Sugarland Express," starring Goldie Hawn. Mr. Spielberg then went on to such blockbuster successes as "Jaws," "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Raiders of the

Lost Ark" and "E. T."

Beginning with the Cannes Film Festival last May, the selection committee — five film experts from the Modern and the Film Society — wandered the world or watched the movies streaming into New York. The number of entries was "incredible but not unbelievable" — close to 400. To be seen for the first time in this year's festival are films from Papua New Guinea, East Germany, Martinique and Hong Kong.

"New Directors" begins tonight at 6 with Allen Fong's "Ah Ying" (reviewed on page 20), a tale of Hong Kong, its tensions, contrasts and bursting energy. The opening scene, set in a teeming outdoor food market, shows the young heroine, Ah Ying, selling fish with her parents at their stall. It then moves on to the family's home, where 10 people are packed sardine-fashion into two tiny adjoining apartments. Generational conflict is immediately evident: Ah Ying is the only one of the children who will lend a hand at the fish stall, albeit reluctantly.

Based substantially on the life story of Hui So-ying, who stars as Ah Ying, it is the story of how she strug-

gles toward independence as an actress. Most of the actors in the film are the friends and family of Hui So-ying, basically playing themselves. Peter Wang, in the role of Ah Ying's mentor and acting teacher, is one of the few professionals in the cast; he was memorable as the singing cook in "Chan Is Missing," a hit of the 1982 "New Directors" series. "Ah Ying" will be shown again tomorrow at 3:30 P.M.

The other film on tonight's calendar is "My Brother's Wedding" (reviewed on page 20) at 8:30. Again, there are clashes between and within the generations. Written and directed by Charles Burnett, it takes place in black, south-central Los Angeles, where he grew up. The parents are hymn singing, hard working and warm, running a mom and pop dry cleaners' shop. Their sons include the "ghettoized" Pierce Mundy, whose friends all seem to be dead or in jail, and his older, upwardly mobile, lawyer brother, about to marry a doctor's daughter. The snooty bride-to-be and her family, ever-so-conspicuous consumers, drive

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Pierce into outrageous behavior. Will Pierce be pallbearer at his best friend's funeral or best man at his brother's wedding? The ending is a cliff-hanger.

Mr. Burnett called Pierce "a young man who hasn't made much of his life as of yet, and at a crucial point in his life, he is unable to make the proper decision, a sober decision, a moral decision."

"This is a consequence of his not having developed beyond the embryonic stage, socially," he said. The director saw Pierce, played by Everett Silas, as having a "romantic notion about life in the ghetto," with a limited capacity for "judging things off in the distance." Mr. Burnett's first feature film, "Killer of Sheep," in 1981, won prizes on the film circuit from Berlin to Toronto, as well as in the Black American Film Festival. "My Brother's Wedding," his second film, will be shown again tomorrow at P.M.

"The Princess," directed by Hungary's Pal Erdoss, is about a teenager, abandoned by her mother when she was 2 years old, who has had to grow up much too quickly. Her foster parents having died, she comes from the country to Budapest for a long-awaited meeting with her real mother. She takes a job in the big city, yearning for love and friendship. Her best friend, pregnant, asks the heroine to take her baby. This first Erdoss film won the Grand Prix at the 1983 Locarno Film Festival. "The Princess" will be shown at 6 P.M. tomorrow and 3:30 P.M. Sunday.

The next young rebel, alienated by the system in "The Family Game," is Japanese. Directed by Yoshimitsu Morita, the movie tells the tale of parents' determination to get their bright but stubbornly lazy younger son into a good high school, played out against a spectacular urban landscape. The battle is first between a tutor and the

fiendishly resistant teen-ager, and finally between tutor and parents, ending in surrealistic carnage at the dinner table. The film, the director and the actor playing the tutor, Yusaku Matsuda, all won the Japanese equivalent of Oscars. "The Family Game" will be shown at 8:30 P.M. tomorrow and 1 P.M. on Sunday.

In "Kukurantumi," a Ghanaian-West German production subtitled "The Road to Accra," a man bent on having his own jitney, the key to mobility and freedom, leaves his wife in the country and heads for the Ghanaian capital. There, his daughter, seeking her own fortune, has become a prostitute. This breezy first feature, directed by King Ampaw, will be shown at 6 P.M. on Sunday and 8:30 P.M. on Monday.

The committee that picked "Straight Through the Heart," directed by West Germany's Doris Dörrie, believes it may be "the most provocative work" in the 1984 "New Directors" series. The heroine, very young and very cynical about almost everything, is so lonely that she writes letters to herself and dyes her hair blue as her sign of protest. She strikes a strange bargain with a wealthy and enigmatic older man, moves in with him and is irrevocably locked into a course that leads to horror. The camera is riveted almost exclusively on the fascinating Beate Jensen as Anna and on Sepp Bierbichler as Armin, her father figure and tantalizing lover. The film will be shown at 8:30 P.M. Sunday and 6 P.M. Wednesday.

Tickets may be bought on the day of performance at the 57th Street Playhouse. Advance tickets may be bought at the Museum of Modern Art's information desk, 18 West 54th Street, from 11 A.M. to 6 P.M. daily. Tickets are \$4 (\$3.50 for members of the Museum of Modern Art and the Film Society, the elderly and students). The number to call for program information is 877-1800, extension 489.