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# Stepping Out

## *Shall We Dance?*

Written and directed by Masayuki Suo  
A Miramax release  
Opens July 11

## *Brilliant Lies*

Directed by Richard Franklin  
Written by Franklin and Peter Fitzpatrick  
A Castle Hill release  
Opens July 11

## BY AMY TAUBIN

**A**lthough he hasn't admitted it to himself, Shohei, a Japanese salaryman, is bored silly with his job, his suburban domesticity, and the daily two-hour railroad commute between them. Leaving work one evening, he sees a tall, slender, sad-eyed young woman looking out the neon-framed window of a ballroom dancing school. In Japan, where it's considered unseemly—even for married couples—to touch in public, social dancing is beyond the pale. For Shohei, the dancing school is not very different from a pre-Disney Times Square massage parlor. The shock of seeing a vulnerable and virginal beauty in such sordid surroundings is enough to make him fall instantly in love.

In the course of Masayuki Suo's irresistible *Shall We Dance?*, Shohei (Koji Yakusho) learns how to love not the dancer but the dance, thereby solving his midlife crisis while keeping his marriage intact. Combining conservative sexual politics with a liberating vision of self-expression through the mastery of a form, *Shall We Dance?* is an art-house *Saturday Night Fever*.

When Shohei works up the courage to enter the dancing school, he

finds a kind of secret society of middle-class men and women just like himself—although not nearly so handsome. Each student has to find his or her own way to overcome inhibitions or delusions of grandeur so that their dancing can be, as Martha Graham used to say, the landscape of their souls.

Though Suo's filmmaking style is undistinguished, he gets wonderfully subtle, understated performances from Yakusho and Tamiyo Kusakari as the sad-eyed lady who's in the midst of a life crisis herself. *Shall We Dance?* is charming enough to overcome American resistance to subtitles. Dance, after all, has a language of its own.

**ADAPTED FROM DAVID Williamson's play, Australian director Richard Franklin's *Brilliant Lies* is something like early David Mamet but without the misogyny—if such a dissection can be imagined. And, inevitably, it will be compared to Neil LaBute's more complicated *In the Company of Men* (opening next month). Both films make the connection between sexual harassment and a Darwinian corporate culture. But where LaBute foregrounds rogue male egos, Franklin focuses on women's not**

necessarily admirable responses to the male power structure that keeps them bent out of shape.

Self-styled bad girl Susy Connor (Gia Carides) accuses her boss (An-

thony La Paglia) of sexual harassment and demands \$40,000 in compensation. Her sister (Zoe Carides) begins to doubt Susy's story when she recognizes a phrase Susy puts in her boss's

mouth as something she heard their own father say. It turns out that the sisters were both sexually abused by Dad, who refuses to admit that copping a feel was any big deal, and, furthermore, expects Susy to turn over most of the settlement, should she win, to pay for his bypass surgery.

Franklin imposes a rigorous, basically comic structure on material that otherwise might have seemed as clichéd as talk TV. The film is constructed as a series of blackout sketches; each scene reveals the mixture of lie and truth in the scene that preceded it and adds some new ugly detail that will be partially supported and contradicted in the next. The method is compelling from beginning to end, but the aftertaste is gimmicky. Sexual power struggles lose their primal element when they're so elegantly contained. **V**



A salaryman practices his moves.