

# ARE YOU GAME?

Emmy and Cable Ace Award winning director Jessica Yu (BREATHING LESSONS: THE LIFE AND WORK OF MARK O'BRIEN and award winning HBO documentary "THE LIVING MUSEUM") returns with her latest film and first narrative feature debut "PING PONG PLAYA". BY DENNIS A. AMITH



Jimmy Tsai as Christopher "C-dub" Wang in "PING PONG PLAYA". Images courtesy of Cherry Sky Films

**C**hristopher "C-dub" Wang has dreamed of a career as an NBA pro basketball player but due to family circumstances, has to trade positions with his love for basketball to coach the family's ping pong class and defend the Wang family's ping pong dynasty for an upcoming tournament in "PING PONG PLAYA", the latest film by award winning director Jessica Yu and presented by Cherry Sky Films.

Christopher "C-dub" Wang

(played by Jimmy Tsai) blames genetics for his failure to make the NBA and his personal life revolves living at home, playing video games, working a dead-end job and being in the shadows of his older brother, Michael (played by Roger Fan, "Finishing the Game" and "BETTER LUCK TOMORROW"), a doctor and a ping pong champion.

And for his family, their lives revolve around the sport of ping pong.

His father, Mr. Wang (played by Jim Lau, "ACES GO PLACES III"), runs the family store devoted to ping pong and his mother, Mrs. Wang (played by Elizabeth Sung, "JOY LUCK CLUB") teaches ping pong at the local Chinese Community Center.

But for C-dub, he just wants to spend his free time playing video games, dreaming about get-rich quick schemes with his buddy JP Money (played by Khary Payton, known for his voice acting role as



Jimmy Tsai as NBA Pro hopeful Christopher "C-dub" Wang in "PING PONG PLAYA". Images courtesy of Cherry Sky Films

Cyborg on the Cartoon Network animated series "TEEN TITANS").

The carefree life of C-dub comes to a halt when his mother and brother get into an accident and thus, C-dub is forced to take over his mother's ping pong class and teach a group of misfits.

But of course, for C-dub, every situation has an opportunity when he finds a way to make some money and also befriend one of the kid's beautiful older sister, Jennifer (played by Smith Cho, ABC's "The Hill").

But when a rival ping pong player tries to lure away the kids, C-dub takes things seriously and with his brother Michael unable

to defend his ping pong title at the National Golden Cock Tournament, C-dub steps in to defend his family's ping pong dynasty.

As the film starts to gain momentum through the grass roots marketing and promotion, many may wonder how this film came to be?

According to director Jessica Yu, the idea for "Ping Pong Playa" came as inspiration from Justin Lin's film "BETTER LUCK TOMORROW" (which was supported by Cherry Sky Films producer Joan Huang who co-produced the film and also Lin's film "FINISHING THE GAME").

Joan approached Jessica to collaborate on a comedy that would

capture something of the Asian American experience in a fun and subversively mainstream way.

The interesting story about this collaboration is how Jimmy Tsai, the accountant for Cherry Sky Films, became the top choice to play the main character of Christopher "C-DUB" Wang.

At a screening several years ago, Tsai was showing Jessica mock commercials for Venom (Tsai's fledgling sportswear company).

In the commercials was an NBA wannabe named C-dub. A character according to Jessica Yu was "smart, profane, buffoonish and hilarious" and on those mock commercials was Jimmy Tsai playing the character.



Jimmy Tsai as Christopher "C-dub" Wang with actress Smith Cho as "Jennifer" in "PING PONG PLAYA". Images courtesy of Cherry Sky Films

So, with the idea of combining C-dub's character from the commercials and the Joan Huang's idea of wanting to do an Asian American comedy, Jessica Yu felt that it would be great to merge the two together.

Jessica immediately had Tsai in mind for the main role and after little convincing, the accountant for Cherry Sky Films would be balancing his day job as the main actor for their next feature film.

For Tsai, this included months of ping pong training, office work, designing props and handling payroll and cost reports at the same time.

Jessica Yu explained, "Jimmy and I both saw in C-dub the

chance for some healthy self-mockery in our generation's navigation of the ethnic American experience. The oversensitivity of the politicized to perceived racist slights.

"The impulse to dismiss ethnic stereotyping, while simultaneously mocking those who fit the stereotypes. The resentment of non-"model minority" Chinese Americans, especially those who have older brothers who are doctors.

"We flavored the script with details from our own lives: the dad who sings Chinese opera while frying the breakfast Spam (mine), the grown man taking lessons at a Chinese school class of kids (Jimmy), the parent who insists everything was invented by the Chinese (all of

us).

"At the same time we were happy to celebrate our pride in being Asian American and our awareness of our roots – in a way that hopefully doesn't hit everyone over the head. From the start, we have wanted this to be purely fun."

"PING PONG PLAYA" comes to theaters in New York, California, Texas and Washington in Sept. 2008.

For more information on "Ping Pong Playa", ticket and screening information, please visit the official website at:

<http://www.pingpongplaya.com>

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