

Arts & Entertainment



POPCORN™ The Grudge: You'll Get Over It

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 1/2 POPCORN

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

Just in case current events, gasoline prices and the generally bad behavior of practically everyone you know aren't enough to send you into a nervous tizzy, there's *The Grudge*. Now playing at your local movie house, filmmaker Takashi Shimizu's Americanization of his Japanese scare tactic, "Ju-On," is just what the doctor ordered for nudging you over the edge.

But read the fine print, herein contained, before taking this prescription for fear. This is not an especially fancy bit of cinema. Grainy in parts, purposely reminiscent of the genre's cheaper offerings, it's even a tad cheesy. There is no homage to any of the horror classics. Yet its utilitarian determination to scare is disturbing in and of itself.

It's the tale of a curse that just won't die. And part of Shimizu's success is in keeping information from us. Like a new and fatal disease, the cause of which remains a mystery, *The Grudge* spreads its virulent germs. Fear of the unknown takes us in its devastating grip.

The second part of the director's one-two punch is his eerily instinctive, precise sense of timing. One second, either way and a sudden trumpet blast or shrieking background violin wouldn't catapult us out of our seats. Yet we are inevitably caught off guard no matter how much preparatory cringing or defensive laughter we try to stuff between the screen and ourselves.

Perhaps more magician's trick than filmmaker's craft, nevertheless, like it or not, Shimizu is going to get you. Matching his visuals to just the right auditory cues, his moviemaking can be likened to the madman playing his giant pipe organ, pressing just the right keys, pushing exactly the correct buttons, all in an effort to envelop you in his insane world. It's almost subliminal.

On the surface, the tale of *The Grudge* is pretty simple and rather schlocky at that. Set in Tokyo, but unfortunately not taking advantage of the great travelogue potential that a fuller effort might have incorporated, director Shimizu's movie introduces us to exchange student Karen Davis (Sarah Michelle Gellar) and her beau Doug (Jason Behr). But first there's a nasty little prologue.

Bill Pullman's Peter, a teacher at the university, gives his wife a pained look and then tosses himself off the balcony of their hi-rise. Splat. Welcome to the movie. Don't worry, though. The professor will return in flashbacks and in other forms. You see, he's part of the curse.

We find that the bad blood in question is centered in a particular house. And in typical, low-budget, 1970s style horror movie fashion, it just so happens to be where nursing student Karen gains her first field assignment. She's to look after a catatonic older woman (Grace Zabriskie), which is spooky enough. Naturally, or more appropriately, unnaturally, Karen gets the nod when co-worker Yoko fails to show up for her assignment, or so the nursing service thinks, ha, ha, ha.

Before you know it, all those entering the house or somehow connected with the dastardly doings that there took place begin dropping like flies. But not before first being traumatized by any of several apparitions that played a part in the original horror.

Most upsetting of these is a little boy, Toshio (Yuya Ozeki), who looks like a wan, haunting version of a Keane painting moppet. Watch out. He may take you into his confidence for a second or two, tantalizing you with the notion that you might get to the bottom of all this creepiness. But when he suddenly opens wide his mouth, extending it over the entire screen...zap! That's the last we see of you. That is, unless you

are then somehow rolled into the curse and become one of the zappers. The rules are a little sketchy on this, allowing the director-writer to shock at will.

The chronology may get a little confusing. Sometimes flashbacks and the present tense seem to overlap. But this doesn't deter Karen. Aided for a while by Tokyo's Detective Nakagawa (Ryo Isibashi), she makes like Nancy Drew and slowly peels away the layers of dastardly deeds that comprise the curse.

Luckily, she's the protagonist. This allows the intrepid nightingale to persevere not through any particular skill of her own, but perhaps only because filmmaking requires that at least one person remains alive in front of the cameras. And then she has help, too. It has to do with the title rancor maybe being a bit of an egotist. Because at any given moment, reenactments of that heinous episode of ill will that has begotten us all this trouble take place in the haunted house. Played out by the originals, serving as docents of horror, this also gives Shimizu yet more opportunities to get us.

But as the tale unravels, it reveals a curse of its own. There is a built-in flaw. On the one hand, you have to have some sort of plot. Yet, by eventually ascribing rhyme and reason to the ghastly and atrocious, the terror wanes. Not completely, mind you. It's just that with a morality angle attached, informing that this has all come about because something very, very bad happened here, at least now we know what side of the aisle we're dealing with.

Yep, it's good old retribution we're up against, and certainly working in mysterious ways. Granted, it's still no walk in the park. But from a horror fan's point of view, it makes a difference. It's not half as terrifying as it was when we hadn't a clue, knew not the motive of this menace, and could only assume it was the random work of that most demoralizing of oxymora, pure evil.

It follows that with fear of the unknown extracted from the ghoulish goings-on, Shimizu's Yank version loses some of its fangs. And thus when reduced to its bare bones, shown for the efficient but soulless, well-engineered startle machine that it is, we immediately know what's missing.

Passion is what separates an effective yet all the same synthetic scare like *The Grudge* from a real humdinger like *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) or *The Exorcist* (1973).

Sure, Shimizu's manipulative mischief leaves its mark, but only for a while. You snicker at yourself in the movie theater parking lot when you check to see if there's a monster crouching in the backseat. How about that shady guy with the strange hat in the car next to you? Does he have eyeballs in his sockets? Why is he just sitting there? And now, after driving away and making several turns, isn't there a car following you?

Arriving home, the creaking screen door gives you a little chill. You hustle in and try to pull down a window shade that you don't remember leaving up. Par for the course, it snaps, noisily rolls upward, and a screeching cat, even if you don't have one, jumps from the sill. But that's OK. Because the guy with the *Phantom of the Opera* fedora isn't there peering in...or at least you don't think so.

But remember, you're well adjusted. So by the time you make your lunch for tomorrow, catch the evening news and don your jammies, you've practically forgotten all about "The Grudge." Showering the next morning, it isn't even on your mind. Problem is, that's because you're too consumed with thoughts of *Psycho* (1960). Now, that's a grudge.

The Grudge, rated PG-13, is a Sony Pictures Entertainment release directed by Takashi Shimizu and stars Sarah Michelle Gellar, Bill Pullman and Yuya Ozeki. Running time: 96 minutes.

Buckland: 'They Made America'

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presented on that website. By following that hyperlink, visitors will learn more about the innovators, who are broken down into categories such as "revolutionaries," "newcomers," "gamblers" and "rebels."

The website also features "The Innovators Tournament," which challenges participants to answer the question: "Which American innovator has been the most influential?" This NCAA-style tournament game presents 32 innovators in head-to-head match-ups. Players can read about each innovator and make their selection.

The teachers guide on the website offers activities related to a high-school grade level, touching on issues of economics, geography, history, language arts, social studies and technology.

A busy mother of two, Buckland's expertise is constantly in demand. She has taught at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, N.Y., Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, Columbia College in Chicago and was a guest lecturer at the British Broadcasting Corporation.

She has been a guest curator for the

New York Historical Society, Clarence Kennedy Gallery, Polaroid Corporation in Massachusetts, Smithsonian Institution Travelling Exhibition Service, Art Institute of Chicago and Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain.

Buckland has also written articles for *Connoisseur*, *The New Criterion*, *American Photographer*, *Exposure*, *Vogue*, and other publications. She has also lectured at New York University, College de France in Paris, the Baltimore Museum of Art, St. Louis Art Museum and the Goethe House in New York City.

An Adjunct Associate Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences and teacher of photography at The Cooper Union in New York City since 1979, she has been asked to pen a book about the famous modern dancer Martha Graham.

For more information about "They Made America: From the Steam Engine to the Search Engine: Two Centuries of Innovators," please visit the website listed above. To purchase the book, please visit any local or online bookseller, or log onto the publisher's website: www.twbookmark.com.

Neuhaus Will Unveil New Picture Book

FANWOOD - Fanwood resident and Clark native David Neuhaus, an illustrator of over 20 books for children, will present a new children's picture book, "His Finest Hour," at an area bookstore and bicycle shop this month.

Published by Velo Press of Boulder, Colo., the book tells the tale of two friends, Ralph and Dudley, and one particular adventurous bicycle race.

Neuhaus will read and sign copies of his books at Barnes & Noble, 1180 Raritan Road in Clark on Tuesday, November 9, at 7 p.m., and at The Bike Stand, 1778 East Second Street in Scotch Plains on Saturday, November 13, at noon.



WHIMSY ABOUND... "Whimsical" best describes many of the items to be featured at the Silver Snowflake on Saturday, November 13, at the Presbyterian Church in Westfield. Pictured above, the bright chicken stool, hand-carved "fat cat" table, splashy toy bag and amusing marionette are new samplings in the gift sale. Ever-popular individually crafted "Clantas," the large decorative Christmas dolls that take their name from the clan tartans of the Scottish settlers of the Canadian Maritime Provinces, will return. Other classics like rocking horses and "Whig Rose" hand-woven place mats and runners from Appalachia will appeal to the more classic taste. The sale, to be held in the Assembly Hall of the church at 140 Mountain Avenue from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., has no admission charge; and free ample parking is available. Visa and MasterCard are accepted. All items are fair trade with monies raised going to mission projects.

'Underpainting' Style Developed By Landscape Artist, Susan Savad

By CAROL F. DAVIS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - From her technique to her subject matter and the type of paints she uses, and even her lifestyle, there is a distinctive flair to the work of award-winning Westfield landscape painter Susan Savad.

Because she is employed as a full-time commercial artist, Savad paints on weekends in her basement studio, complete with a drawing table, chair and a television for background sound.

"Murder She Wrote" and "Colombo" are particularly good shows for Savad, as she works so diligently in the one spot in her home that she can leave without having to put anything away.

Her "suburban landscapes" provide glimpses of familiar scenes, such as the front porch of a house across the street, a local park, or a neighbor's clematis winding up a trellis.

"Many of my paintings are very close to where I live. I could walk to the sites," she told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

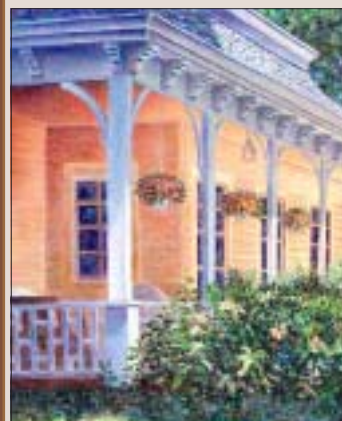
Savad captures the scenes that interest her with her digital camera, and goes to work producing about four paintings a year.

With an avid interest in color, she described her technique, underpainting, as "sculpting with color." She developed this style while at school in duCret School of the Arts in Plainfield, and by reading

a lot of art books. Underpainting enables her to use her alkyds, which are fade-proof, fast drying paints, to make her colors "vibrate."

Savad's Gallery

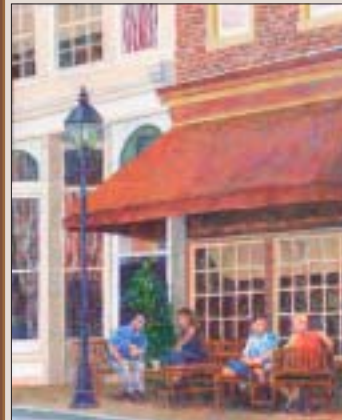
All Photos Courtesy of www.susansavad.com



"Veranda"



"Green"



"Corner"



ARTIST AT WORK... Clark resident and Westfield Art Association member Dorothy Wilkinson, pictured, above, finds inspiration in spots like Belford. Pictured, below, is one of the artist's floral pieces, as well as the banner designed by Wilkinson for St. Agnes Roman Catholic Church in Clark.

There's Nothing Like Painting From the Real Thing, Says Wilkinson

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - She's traveled the world and seen many sites, but Westfield Art Association (WAA) member Dorothy Wilkinson prefers to create her paintings from the still-life settings she finds close to home.

Although she brings back photographs and sketches that she creates on her trips, she still would rather paint the real thing.

"I prefer to paint from life," Wilkinson, a Clark resident, told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*. "It's the only way to get all the detail."

She was always inclined towards art, but it wasn't until after her third child was born that she actively pursued her interest by enrolling in the duCret School of the Arts in Plainfield. "Those days were kind of hectic," she explained, adding that while she studied, she continued to keep house and her children happy. "I started going to duCret at night, then went a few days a week."

"I learned a lot at duCret because it was very 'hands-on' oriented. We were doing art all day long. I learned illustration, fine art, water-color and even how to make my own paints by grinding pigment and adding oil," she said.

Wilkinson, who eventually graduated cum laude and earned a three-year certificate from duCret, paints in both watercolors and oils. She completed studio studies with Charles Miller and Joseph Dawley in oil painting, sculpture with Wayland Gregory, advanced portraiture with Dr. Furman Finck and printmaking with Michael Pellettieri.

Prior to her studies in art, Wilkinson attended Union County College in Cranford and Rutgers University in New Brunswick as an engineering major.

Her work has been exhibited at the

Spanish Tavern on Route 22, the Clark Library and the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn. She also exhibits at the Plainfield Arts Show every July.

In addition to painting, Wilkinson enjoys gardening and is a certified Master Gardener. She often finds subjects for her painting in the garden.

"I have a pleasant garden and arbor," she said. "There is a definite correlation between gardening and art."

Occasionally, Wilkinson travels to nearby Pennsylvania for fresh inspiration of still-life subjects. She also recently has begun to study the process of etching as an art form.

A recipient of the Grumbacher Award, Lixitex Award, and Winsor & Newton Award, among others, she is always eager to share her talent. For example, she has taught art to senior citizens at the Clark Library, as well as oil painting and portraiture. She has been a lecturer and demonstrator of matting and framing, tinsel painting and collograph printmaking. Wilkinson was also employed as a draftsman at Amon & Knopf, Consulting Engineers in New York City.

In addition to the WAA, she is a charter member of the Clark Art Association, where she served as President. She is also a member of the Millburn-Short Hills Art Center and the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts in Summit.

Wilkinson designed the logo for Clark's 125th Anniversary Celebration, as well as the township's Celebration Committee logo. She also created and led a group to paint a banner of Saint Agnes for her church, St. Agnes Church in Clark.

Wilkinson and her husband, Thomas, a retired maintenance supervisor who worked at American Cyanamid, are the parents of four, the grandparents of 20 and the great-grandparents of six.



Get Outta The House

By CAROL F. DAVIS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

A glimpse at the future? Perhaps, in the four tales of *Robot Stories*, a film by Korean director Greg Pak at the New Jersey Film Festival this weekend. The stories revolve around the common themes of love, death, and family, but in a futuristic setting involving robots. Screenings will be held on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday at 7 p.m. in Scott Hall at the College Avenue Campus of Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Admission is \$6 for the general public, and will be sold at the door. The director will be making an appearance.

On Sunday, November 7, from 2 to 5 p.m., Westfield's Miller-Cory House Museum will sponsor an **Antiques Appraisal Affair**. Bring your prized possessions (only those that you are able to carry) to local experts in areas like jewelry, glass, silver, china, toys, dolls and more. The cost is \$4 for one item, or \$10 for three items. No weapons please. The museum is located at 614 Mountain Avenue. Call them if you have any questions about your items, at (908) 232-1776.

The **Stanislavsky Opera Gala** is coming to the State Theatre in New Brunswick on Friday, November 5, at 8 p.m. The program consists of arias and ensembles from the operatic canon, including highlights from *La Traviata*, *La Boheme*, *Tosca*, and many more. Tickets range from \$25 to \$50. The theater is located at 15 Livingston Avenue. Call for information: (877) STATE 11 (782-8311).

A concert featuring **Olympia's Daughters**, the nationally acclaimed women's cappella vocal ensemble, will be held at the First Unitarian Society of Plainfield on Saturday, November 6, at 8 p.m. Through song, this spiritually driven group strives to foster healing and unite communities. This seems to be a good time for it. Tickets for the evening are \$15. The society is located at 724 Park Avenue. Call (908) 756-0750 for directions and information.

The **Colonial Symphony** will present guest conductor Alfred Savia, along with violinist Jennifer Koh on Saturday, November 6, at Morristown's Community Theatre, 100 South Street, at 8 p.m. The program will include Mozart, Copland and Schubert, with a pre-concert lecture at 7 p.m. Tickets run from \$22 to \$42. Call (973) 539-8008 or log onto: www.colonialsymphony.org. HELPING A HOPEFUL... Tyler Haas, an eight-year-old from Coles Elementary School in Scotch Plains, donates to Mariana Banic's fund for the 2006 Olympics as a bobsled brakeman.

Tammam to Perform At SMS Concert

WESTFIELD - Westfield pianist Sondra Tammam will be a featured performer at the Suburban Music Study Club's (SMS) on Thursday, November 11, at 10:30 p.m. in the Chase Auditorium Madison Library, 39 Keep Street in Madison.

Tammam has performed in Europe, Asia, North Africa, Israel and the United



Sondra Tammam

States. She has played in Weill Hall and for the Harvard Musical Association.

She is actively engaged with chamber music groups, including members of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

The winner of the Paderewski Foundation Award and other honors, Tammam received her bachelor's degree from The Manhattan School of Music. She also earned a master's degree from Juilliard.

Tammam will play *Trois Mouvements de Petrouchkaby Igor Stravins*. The theme of the concert is "Avant Garde Musique."

The SMS holds its concerts on the second Thursday of each month at 10:30 a.m. Admission is free and the public is invited.

For more information, please call Richard Schmitter at (973) 635-1435.