



J-HORROR WEEKENDER

Cure (Kyua)

Impressive box-office returns for Hollywood game-changers *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Se7en* (1995) created the commercial context for Kiyoshi Kurosawa to deliver this theatrical serial-killer policier, which marked his international breakthrough. From today's vantage point, it's not only one of the key titles in his filmography, but an unarguable landmark offering, clearly ahead of the J-horror curve. Perhaps it was too far ahead, since it was never theatrically released in the UK. Perhaps unfortunately, what was pioneering back then has been somewhat overworked in the meantime, though in Kurosawa's hands the soundtrack drone, the shadowy figures creeping in the depths of the frame, and the modern city as locus of festering unease are not just there for superficial effect, but suggest a questioning peek behind the façades of social convention.

Kurosawa's signature leading man, the versatile Kôji Yakusho, is the cop on the case trying to find connections between a series of seemingly random slayings across Tokyo, gradually realising that the bloodshed has as much to do with the explosion of repressed quotidian yearnings and the disintegration of moral coherence as the handiwork of some evil-genius bogeyman. Certainly, the expert direction gets great mileage from the insidiously unsettling framing and murk-tastic art direction, but it's the bone-deep anomie on view – material usually the stuff of Euro arthouse kingpins like Haneke or Antonioni – that gives the film genuine substance to go with its highly effective frissons.

Trevor Johnston, *Sight & Sound*, July 2018

While highly regarded in cineaste circles in his homeland, Kiyoshi Kurosawa's individual approach to genre seems to have proved a little too abstruse for him to have ridden the international waves of the post-millennial J-horror boom that followed Hideo Nakata's *Ring* (1998). His narratives unravel steadily according to their own logic, introducing scenes and characters whose relevance isn't immediately apparent while meandering off on unexpected tangents and skipping the conventional plot beats of Hollywood storytelling.

For a director who forged his reputation on genre pieces, it may seem somewhat perverse that Kurosawa's first two films to see the light in the UK – *Bright Future* (2002; released on DVD in 2007) and *Tokyo Sonata* (2008) – might best be described as 'arthouse', a catch-all category to which so much Japanese cinema is consigned overseas. What links these works with Kurosawa's horror films is the discomfiting articulation of the schism between the material reality of the modern city and the abstract forces that exert their influence over its inhabitants. An all-pervading aura of social entropy suffuses much of Kurosawa's oeuvre. Scenes often unfold against the anonymous backdrops of once thriving areas, the decaying husks of abandoned buildings awaiting demolition, having outlived their original utilitarian function, fixed on film to present a bleak vision of a future foreshadowed by the depersonalised purgatory of the present.

The very idea of genre is constantly interrogated and reformulated throughout Kurosawa's work, stripped down to its most basic components to be rebuilt from scratch. It's a process best epitomised by one of his most oblique films, *Charisma* (1999), a perplexing eco-fable detailing the conflicts around a tree that may or may not be killing off the rest of the forest in which it stands. As Kurosawa explained to Tom Mes in an interview for the website *Midnight Eye* in 2001, 'It certainly is a detective story, but it's also a sort of American-style Indiana Jones/two-teams-vying-for-a-treasure film. That's how I started it. But instead of a box of treasure I decided to make the treasure a tree that's in a forest. Then you start to imagine "what value does the tree have" and "what is the condition of the forest it's growing in?" Then you start to realise that you're not making an Indiana Jones movie at all, but a much more complex film. The reason I take this approach to filmmaking is, although film needs a fictional story element, it also is a medium that allows you to record the reality around you. You're filming real forests and real people. Film for me is a medium point between a fictional story and reality. You start with the genre, which is fiction, and gradually move towards reality. Somewhere in between you find film.'

Produced by the newly resuscitated Daiei Studios, a former major that had filed for bankruptcy in 1971, *Cure* presented an elliptical portrait of a detective haunted by his inner demons as he investigates a spree of random homicides. It was bolstered by an award-winning performance by Kôji Yakusho, then riding high following his lead roles in Daiei's major hit from the previous year, *Shall We Dance?* (Masayuki Suo, 1996), and Shohei Imamura's Palme d'Or winner *The Eel* (1997). He would go on to appear in a number of Kurosawa's films, including *Doppelganger*, *Retribution* (2006) and *Tokyo Sonata*. Voted fifth-best domestic title of the year by critics from the prestigious *Kinema Junpo* magazine and released in a number of overseas territories, *Cure* saw Kurosawa hailed as a luminary in the field of horror, a status reinforced by his theoretical writing and the publication in Japan of such books as *Kiyoshi Kurosawa's History of Horror Films* (2003), co-authored with his filmmaker-critic friend Makoto Shinozaki, and novelisations of *Cure* and *Pulse*.

Despite a clear love of the genre, however, pigeonholing Kurosawa purely as a horror director would be misleading, as his immediate follows-ups to *Cure* – *License to Live* (1999), about a young man attempting to piece together his life after waking from a ten-year coma, and *Charisma* – were rather less easy to categorise, as was *Barren Illusion* (1999), an experimental portrait of urban youth made in conjunction with students from the Film School of Tokyo. But then Kurosawa's brand of shivers lies in the horror of alienation, of the loss of identity and control, of staring into the face of a loved one and seeing a complete stranger, not in short sharp shocks or the threat of physical harm.

Jasper Sharp, *Sight & Sound*, December 2016

CURE (KYUA)

Director: Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Production Company: Daiei
Executive Producer: Hiroyuki Kato
Producers: Tsutomu Tsuchikawa, Junyuki Shimoba
Assistant Director: Tatsuya Yoshimura
Screenplay: Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Director of Photography: Tokusho Kikumura
Editor: Kan Suzuki
Art Director: Tomoyuki Maruo
Sound: Hiromichi Gun

Cast

Kôji Yakusho (Kenichi Takabe)
Tsuyoshi Ujiki (Shin Sakuma)
Anna Nakagawa (Fumie Takabe)
Masato Hagiwara (Kunihiko Mamiya)

Japan 1998
115 mins

J-HORROR WEEKENDER

Ring (Ringu)

Fri 29 Oct 18:10

Dark Water (Honogurai mizu no soko kara)

Fri 29 Oct 20:30

Cure (Kyua)

Sat 30 Oct 18:00

Pulse (Kairo)

Sat 30 Oct 20:40

Audition (Ôdishon)

Sun 31 Oct 15:20

Ichi the Killer (Koroshiya 1)

Sun 31 Oct 18:00

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