



JAPAN 2021 100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA

Pale Flower (Kawaita Hana)

Fresh out of a stretch in prison, ageing yakuza Muraki (Ryo Ikebe) returns to an underworld he barely recognises. He becomes romantically entangled with the mysterious, beautiful Saeko (Mariko Kaga) at a gambling den, but will she save him or lead him further down a dangerous path? Aching with stylish, existential cool, Shinoda's *noir* breakthrough is a vital film of the New Wave.

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A super-cool black orchid of a Japanese noir, Shinoda's seminal yakuza saga is now a revered classic among Nipponophiles but is far less known in the west, where the historical milieu of Shinoda's fatalistic *Double Suicide* (1969) more suited the middle-class appetite. *Pale Flower* also initiated a new genre – the *bakuto-eiga*, or gambling film – but every fibre of the movie, thematic and visual, delivers an existential blast of modern doom, as rich and pure as a Coltrane saxophone wail. Right here, it seems, Japan inherited the authentic *noir* gene from US films, as if its culture demanded it like none other. (But, at the same time, 1964 may have been the nation's new wave golden year, with landmark work coming from Teshigahara, Imamura, Shindo, Kobayashi, Masumura etc.)

Muraki (Ikebe Ryo) is a hitman who, returning to Tokyo and its gambling dens after doing time for a mob killing, immediately lays eyes on Saeko (Kaga Mariko), a doll-faced waif addicted to cards and generally pining for mindless thrills. Shinoda's story (co-written with Baba Ataru) is the duo's slow dance through losses and wins and yakuza politics towards each other, conjoining in a dangerous *pas de deux* mediated by suicidal risk and mutual nihilism.

Shinoda's achievement, though, is less psychological than cultural – the film seems to intend its own iconic thrust, and every extraordinary Shochiku Grandscope shot is a vision of post-war Japan as a dark underworld corridor seething with secrets and moral emptiness. It's a movie of rash, savage contrasts – within the images and between them, dialectic-style and the details are haunting, from the rattle of the shuffling *hanafuda* cards to the ticking clocks filling the flat of Muraki's ex-girlfriend to Saeko's unfashionably fashionable 1960s accoutrements, the moneyed accessories of a bruised, death-seeking femme who remains as much a mystery to us as she does to Muraki. (He has killed, he explains, 'to survive', without realising that survival is exactly what interests Saeko least.) Mention should be made too of Toru Takemitsu's wild score, which bubbles under the action like a crankjagged jazz orchestra playing from hell.

As the movie rolls inexorably towards its date with hopelessness and death, which is another mob hit performed in a crowded room with a huge knife and scored to an opera aria (the composition of this scene, Chuck Stephens maintains in his essay, explicitly recalls the 1960 assassination of socialist politician Asanuma Inejiro, caught on television during a rally), *Pale Flower* becomes a film that crystallises a generational moment, without excess or irony.

Michael Atkinson, *Sight and Sound*, July 2011

PALE FLOWER (KAWAITA HANA)

Director: Masahiro Shinoda

Production Companies: Ninjin Club, Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Producers: Masao Shirai, Shigeru Wakatsuki

Screenplay: Ataru Baba, Masahiro Shinoda

Based on the short story by: Shintaro Ishihara

Director of Photography: Masao Kosugi

Art Director: Jusho Toda

Music: Toru Takemitsu

Cast

Ryo Ikebe (*Muraki, the yakuza*)

Mariko Kaga (*the girl*)

Takashi Fujiki (*the killer*)

Chisako Hara (*the yakuza's lover*)

Seiji Miyaguchi, Eijirō Tono (*gang leaders*)

Shinichiro Mikami

Naoki Sugiura

Isao Sasaki

Kyu Sazanka

Muga Takewaki

Japan 1964

96 mins

JAPAN 2021

100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA

After Life (Wandafuru raifu)

Wed 1 Dec 18:10; Fri 10 Dec 20:40; Mon 13 Dec 20:40; Wed 29 Dec 14:20

In the Realm of the Senses (Ai no corrida)

Wed 1 Dec 20:50; Sat 11 Dec 20:45; Wed 22 Dec 18:20

Funeral Parade of Roses (Bara no sôretsu)

Thu 2 Dec 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Professor Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, Kyoto University); Tue 14 Dec 14:30; Mon 27 Dec 15:50

Woman of the Dunes (Suna no Onna)

Fri 3 Dec 18:00 (+ intro by Espen Bale, BFI National Archive); Sat 18 Dec 17:30

Tokyo Drifter (Tôkyô nagaremono)

Fri 3 Dec 20:50; Thu 23 Dec 18:30

Black Rain (Kuroi ame)

Sat 4 Dec 17:50; Tue 28 Dec 18:15

Straits of Hunger (aka A Fugitive from the Past) (Kiga kaikyô)

Sun 5 Dec 16:30; Sat 18 Dec 14:30

Woman of the Lake (Onna no mizûmi)

Mon 6 Dec 18:00; Wed 15 Dec 20:50

Silence Has No Wings (Tobenai chinmoku)

Mon 6 Dec 20:55; Wed 15 Dec 18:00

The Long Darkness (Shinobugawa)

Wed 8 Dec 20:40; Sun 19 Dec 12:40

Pale Flower (Kawaita hana)

Thu 9 Dec 18:00; Sun 19 Dec 18:20

Death By Hanging (Kôshikei)

Fri 10 Dec 17:50; Fri 17 Dec 18:00

Muddy River (Doro no kawa)

Sun 12 Dec 11:50 (+ intro by season co-programmer Alexander Jacoby); Thu 23 Dec 20:40

The Demon (Kichiku)

Sun 12 Dec 14:50 (+ intro by season co-programmer Alexander Jacoby); Sun 19 Dec 16:00

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With special thanks to:



The Man Who Stole the Sun (Taiyô wo nusunda otoko)

Sun 12 Dec 18:00; Thu 16 Dec 20:10

Tampopo

Mon 13 Dec 18:00 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, King's College London); Fri 17 Dec 20:45; Tue 28 Dec 15:10

Philosophical Screens: Tampopo

Mon 13 Dec 20:15 Blue Room

The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On (Yuki Yukite, Shingun)

Sat 18 Dec 11:40; Mon 27 Dec 18:20

Moving (Ohikkoshi)

Sat 18 Dec 20:35; Wed 29 Dec 20:30

Fire Festival (Himatsuri)

Mon 20 Dec 17:50; Mon 27 Dec 13:20

Suzaku (Moe No Suzaku)

Tue 21 Dec 17:45; Thu 30 Dec 21:00

Shall We Dance? (Shall we dansu?)

Tue 21 Dec 20:30; Thu 30 Dec 17:40

Love Letter

Wed 22 Dec 20:50; Tue 28 Dec 12:10

JAPAN 2021 AT THE BFI IMAX

Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)

Thu 9 Dec 13:30

Akira

Thu 9 Dec 18:00

Battle Royale (Batoru rowaiaru)

Thu 9 Dec 20:45

JAPAN 2021: ANOTHER GAZE

Naomi Kawase: Sky, Wind, Fire, Water, Earth (Kya ka ra ba a) +

Birth/Mother (Tarachime)

Wed 1 Dec 18:15; Wed 15 Dec 20:45

0.5mm (0.5 miri)

Sat 4 Dec 18:30; Mon 27 Dec 16:30

Dear Pyongyang

Sat 11 Dec 20:40 (+ pre-recorded intro by director Yang Yong-hi); Thu 23 Dec 18:10

Restoration Premiere: The Far Road (Toi ippon no michi) + intro

Tue 14 Dec 20:40 (+ intro); Tue 28 Dec 15:00

Experimenta presents: A selection of video and film works by experimental filmmaker Mako Idemitsu

Wed 15 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by Another Gaze's Daniella Shreir); Wed 29 Dec 20:40

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