



JAPAN 2021 100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA

Shall We Dance?

(Shall We Dansu?)

Despite having a wife, a daughter and a successful career, Shohei Sugiyama (Yakusho) is depressed. But the sight of a beautiful woman through a window inspires him to embrace a new hobby: ballroom dancing. This delightful comedy proved a huge international hit, and ultimately spawned a Hollywood remake starring Richard Gere. The charm and flair of the original, however, remain unsurpassed.

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References to *Shall We Dance?* as ‘a Japanese *Strictly Ballroom*’ are misleading – all the two films really have in common is their fascination with the arcane conventions of ballroom dancing. Where Baz Luhrmann’s *tour de force* was all Cuban heels, embroidered bolero jackets and brash Aussie extroversion, Masayuki Suo’s comedy – which has become the highest-grossing Japanese film ever in the US – is sober suits and acute social embarrassment. As the introductory voice-over (in English) explains, in a country ‘where married couples don’t go out arm in arm, much less say “I love you” in public’, ballroom dancing has taken on the allure of a secret vice. What to most British – or indeed Australians – seems absurdly old-fashioned in its formality looks daring in a society where public physical contact is taboo.

In some ways *Shall We Dance?* has more in common with Fridrik Thor Fridriksson’s *Cold Fever*, where a bemused Japanese visitor encounters alien mores in Iceland. As with *Cold Fever*, much of the humour in Suo’s film derives from the anomalies of culture clash, the attempt by members of one highly coded society to lock on to patterns laid down by another, one no less coded but by quite different assumptions. ‘It’s a British sport, after all,’ muses the watching detective when a stylish but inconsiderate pair of contestants are marked down for ‘ungentlemanly attitude’. Part of the perilous attraction of culture clash is the chance it offers to switch personalities under cover of the alien culture: not so much a fish out of water as a much more colourful fish in different water. The film is all but stolen by Naoto Takenaka’s bravura performance as Aoki, transmuting himself from shy, despised office drudge into Danny Aoki the Latin American dance demon, launching into a ferocious rumba with flashing teeth and black shag-pile wig.

Aoki’s extravagant double act serves as a burlesque variant of the transformation experienced by Shohei – drawn out of himself, learning to let go, but only fully liberated once he’s renounced his hopeless passion for the graceful Mai and begun to love dance for its own sake. Though even then he’s too embarrassed to tell his wife what he’s doing, let alone invite her to join him at the classes, while she in turn is too embarrassed to ask questions, and assumes he’s having an affair. (As indeed he is, but with dance.) For all

the genuine affection between them, they spend most of the film hopelessly out of step. It takes their daughter, more forthright and less inhibited than her parents, to persuade them to make the obvious move and dance together. The responsiveness to one’s partner Shohei has learnt on the dancefloor can at last be applied to his marriage.

As well as two previous features, Suo has directed documentaries on Juzo Itami (director of *Death Japanese Style* and *Tampopo*). The affinity is evident: Suo shares Itami’s fascination with the Japanese concern for social ritual, the fear of becoming conspicuous by failing to do the right thing. He also shares Itami’s generosity towards his characters. There are no villains in *Shall We Dance?*, and its sense of the ridiculous never precludes sympathy. This is a warm, immensely likeable film. And besides, how can you resist a movie where the ultimate in exoticism and sophistication is represented by Blackpool?

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, May 1998

SHALL WE DANCE? (SHALL WE DANSU?)

Director: Masayuki Suo
Production Companies: Daiei, Nippon Television Network Corporation, Hakuhodo, Nippon Shuppan, Altamira Pictures
Executive Producers: Hiroyuki Kato, Seiji Urushido, Shigeru Ôno, Kazuhiro Igarashi
Producer: Yasuyoshi Tokuma
Line Producer: Tetsuya Ikeda
Associate Producer: Shoji Masui, Yuji Ogata
Production Manager: Yoshino Sasaki
Production Consultants: Kazuhiko Seta, Tatsuya Osada
Production Accountant: Teisuke Shimizu
1st Assistant Director: Gen Yamakawa
Script Supervisor: Tetsuko Kai
Casting: Tetsu Maeda
Screenplay: Masayuki Suo
Director of Photography: Naoki Kayano
Lighting: Tatsuya Osada
Editor: Junichi Kikuchi
Assistant Editor: Masahiro Onaga
Production Designer: Kyoko Heya
Set Decorators: Yoshihito Akatsuka, Noboru Ishida, Yoichi Kitamura
Property Master: Junko Nakajima
Competition Dress Designers: Kazushi Yamaguchi, Hiroko Yamaguchi, Masahiro Yanagida
Costume Supervisor: Kunio Nakayama
Hair/Make-up: Mikiko Hayama
Music: Yoshikazu Suo
Dance Director: Toshio Watari
Sound Recordist: Kiyoshi Yoneyama

Cast

Koji Yakusho (*Shohei Sugiyama*)
Tamiyo Kusakari (*Mai Kishikawa*)
Naoto Takenaka (*Tomio Aoki*)
Eriko Watanabe (*Toyoko Takahashi*)
Akira Emoto (*Toru Miwa, private detective*)
Yu Tokui (*Tokichi Hattori*)
Hiromasa Taguchi (*Masahiro Tanaka*)
Reiko Kusamura (*Tamako Tamura*)
Hideko Hara (*Masako, Sugiyama’s wife*)
Hiroshi Miyasaka (*Maccho*)

Kunihiko Ida (*Teiji Kaneko*)
Amie Tojo (*Hisako Honda*)
Ayano Nakamura (*Chikage, Sugiyama’s daughter*)
Katsunari Mineno (*Shinichi Hirayama*)
Tomiko Ishii (*Haruko*)
Maki Kawamura (*Eiko*)
Takako Matsuzaka (*Fusako Hattori*)
Koichi Ueda (*Torakichi*)
Mari Nishino (*Wakako, Toyoko’s daughter*)
Yuri Kawachi (*Marika*)
Emiko Hara (*Akiko Hattori*)
Rie Misawa (*Suzune*)
Mizue Kihara (*Nami Suzuki*)
Taro Ikemura (*Yutaka Kawai*)
Kenji Nakagawa (*visitor at dance hall*)
Katsuhisa Shirota (*Chu*)
Kaoru Shinoda (*Shinji*)
Yoko Noma (*Fumiko*)
Kie Sugata (*Mai, as a child*)
Hanako Onuki (*student*)
Akiko Hatakeyama (*Aya Komatsu*)
Shuichiro Moriyama (*Ryo Kishikawa*)
Kyoko Kagawa (*Keiko Kishikawa*)
Takashi Takemura (*announcer at dance competition*)
Mika Takanishi (*pro dancer at dance hall*)
Kazunari Hashimoto (*Tetsu Mambo*)
Masaaki Takarai (*student*)
Robert Hoffman, Naena Hoffman, Angelique Roehm (*Blackpool dancers*)
Paradise Yamamoto (*band leader*)
Tokyo Latin Mood Deluxe, Ruriko Sonoda, Maiko Ito (*bands*)
Hidekazu Tanaka (*Tokihiko Okada*)
Yoko Tanaka (*Naoko*)
Goro Kataoka (*Jo Blues*)
Ren Osugi (*Sugiura*)
Yudai Ishiyama (*Hama Jitterbug*)
Hirotaro Honda (*MC at Mai’s farewell party*)
Masahiro Motoki (*Hiromasa Kimoto*)
Misa Shimizu (*Natsuko*)

Japan 1995
119 mins

JAPAN 2021
100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA
Shall We Dance? (Shall we dansu?)
Tue 21 Dec 20:30; Thu 30 Dec 17:40
In the Realm of the Senses (Ai no corrida)
Wed 22 Dec 18:20
Love Letter
Wed 22 Dec 20:50; Tue 28 Dec 12:10
Tokyo Drifter (Tôkyô nagaremono)
Thu 23 Dec 18:30
Muddy River (Doro no kawa)
Thu 23 Dec 20:40
Fire Festival (Himatsuri)
Mon 27 Dec 13:20
Funeral Parade of Roses (Bara no sôretsu)
Mon 27 Dec 15:50
The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On (Yuki Yukite, Shingun)
Mon 27 Dec 18:20
Tampopo
Tue 28 Dec 15:10
Black Rain (Kuroi ame)
Tue 28 Dec 18:15
After Life (Wandafuru raifu)
Wed 29 Dec 14:20
Moving (Ohikkoshi)
Wed 29 Dec 20:30
Suzaku (Moe No Suzaku)
Thu 30 Dec 21:00



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