



**KUROSAWA**

# **Mâdadayo**

Just as the camera had panned down in the opening moments of *Sanshiro Sugata* [Akira Kurosawa's first film], so it pans back up at the conclusion of *Madadayo* as a small boy raises his head to a swirling sky of pinks and yellows. Under this surrealist sunset, it's as if the camera is too captivated by the beauty and mystery of life to consider leaving it.

Kurosawa had not intended the film to be his last. Despite his declining health, he continued to work on new ideas. Yet *Madadayo* nevertheless presents the perfect closing statement on a life and career; a poignant meditation on mortality as the narrow road nears its inevitable end.

Those swirling skies are a hallmark of a new phase in Kurosawa's filmmaking, which had begun with the release of his first colour film, *Dodes'ka-den*, in 1970. After the success of *Sanshiro Sugata*, Kurosawa produced a series of world-renowned masterpieces, but his career began to flounder in the mid-1960s, in part because his increasingly strained relationship with his regular star Toshiro Mifune, which finally reached breaking point after the release of *Red Beard* in 1965. Kurosawa's contract with Toho, where he'd spent the majority of his career, came to an end the following year, while the Japanese studio system had entered a terminal decline in the face of competition from television.

After a project in the US failed to take off, Kurosawa was invited to work on the Japanese side of the US-Japan co-production *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) only to be humiliatingly fired after coming into conflict with the American producers. *Dodes'ka-den* was intended as a kind of comeback, announcing a new beginning in Kurosawa's career with its bold use of colour and absurdist storytelling. But the film failed at the box office and its lack of success is said to have contributed to Kurosawa's attempt to take his own life a year later.

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, Kurosawa sought funding abroad, but *Madadayo* in many ways brings things full circle. Aimed more squarely at a domestic audience, the film was financed largely in Japan and distributed by Kurosawa's former home studio Toho. Like *Sanshiro Sugata* it focuses on mentor-pupil relationships – but this time Kurosawa projected himself on to the role of the ageing professor, lovingly cared for by his former students, who insist that he has taught them 'something more than German' in the course of their studies.

Inspired by the life and writings of Hyakken Uchida, *Madadayo* is in some ways a final departure in its broadly comic overtones, which heavily rely on complicated linguistic puns almost impossible to effectively convey within the confines of a subtitle. The untranslated title means 'not yet' and seems to echo Kurosawa's own unwillingness to leave filmmaking behind, much as Uchida greets his impending mortality with good humour and resignation. A group of former students holds an annual celebration of Uchida's life they term the 'Not Yet Fest', in which they rather insensitively enact his funeral as performance art. Or else they hold a giant silver plate behind his head, which is intended to symbolise the moon but also – to Uchida's amusement – makes him look like the Buddha achieving enlightenment.

As with many of Kurosawa’s heroes, Uchida’s chief asset, and the reason he is so loved, isn’t his wittiness and eccentricity but his childlike heart, which has a kind of purity often at odds with the world around him. A return to the more optimistic humanism of his earlier career, *Madadayo*’s relatively straightforward visual style, save for that dreamy final sunset sequence, lends it an elegiac quality, especially in the brief sequence of the passing seasons in which Uchida’s wife (Kyoko Kagawa) gently sweeps the autumn leaves from their tiny shack.

A bittersweet meditation on mortality, legacy, human warmth and the joy of being alive, it’s a fitting swan song for the ageing master – no longer the hot-headed boy but the wise old professor imparting the lessons of his life to those he’ll leave behind.

**Hayley Scanlon, [bfi.org.uk](https://www.bfi.org.uk), 17 February 2023**

**MÂDADAYO**

*Director:* Akira Kurosawa  
*Production Companies:* Daiei, Dentsu, Kurosawa Productions  
*Executive Producers:* Yo Yamamoto, Yuzo Irie  
*Producer:* Hisao Kurosawa  
*General Producers:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Gohei Kogure  
*Associate Producer:* Seikichi Iizumi  
*Production Manager:* Teruyo Nogami  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Izuhiko Suehiro  
*Directorial Advisor:* Ishiro Honda  
*Assistant Director:* Takashi Koizumi  
*Screenplay:* Akira Kurosawa  
*Based on the Works of:* Hyakken Uchida  
*Directors of Photography:* Takao Saito, Masaharu Ueda  
*Lighting:* Takeharu Sano  
*Editor:* Akira Kurosawa  
*Art Director:* Yoshiro Muraki  
*Costumes:* Kazuko Kurosawa  
*Music:* Shinichiro Ikebe, Shinichiro Ikebe  
*Sound:* Hideo Nishizaki

**Cast**

Tatsuo Matsumura (*Professor Hyakken Uchida*)  
Kyoko Kagawa (*Professor’s wife*)  
Hisashi Igawa (*Takayama*)  
George Tokoro (*Amaki*)  
Masayuki Yui (*Kiriyama*)  
Akira Terao (*Sawamura/Narrator*)  
Takeshi Kusaka (*Kobayashi*)  
Asei Kobayashi (*Kameyama*)  
Hidetaka Yoshioka (*student*)  
Yoshitaka Zushi (*neighbour*)  
Mitsuru Hirata, Nobuto Okamoto, Tetsu Watanabe, Mikihiro Hiaizumi, Norio Matsui, Murohide Sugizaki, Ken Takemura, Hiroyoshi Takenouchi, Motohiro Shimaki, Masaaki Sasaki, Nobuyoshi Masuda, Masayoshi Nagasawa, Shu Nakahan, Yoshimitsu Shindo, Ryujiro Shin, Tatsuya Ito, Naoto Shigemizu, Masuo Amada, Minoru Hirano, Kozo Nomura, Kazuhiko Sasai, Toshi Sasaki, Norimasa Nattori, Fumihiko Tsuburaya, Hiroshi Nagatsubaki, Tatsuya Sakaguchi, Yoshio Nakahira, Sensaburo Makimura, Yasuji Mita, Katsumi Cho, Norinobu Kodama, Yomaru Yokichi, Mikuni Toyama, Sumimaru Yoshimi, Junichi Tsubota, Makoto Dainenji, Shinji Bando, Kojiro Hayasaka, Masahiko Tanimura, Toshihiko Nakano

Japan 1993  
134 mins

**KUROSAWA**

**Mâdadayo**

Mon 20 Feb 20:20; Tue 28 Feb 18:00

**Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-jô)**

Tue 21 Feb 18:10

**Philosophical Screens: Throne of Blood**

Tue 21 Feb 20:10

**A.K.**

Wed 22 Feb 20:50; Sat 25 Feb 20:45

**Yojimbo (Yôjinbô)**

Thu 23 Feb 20:15 (+ intro by Asif Kapadia, season co-curator)

**Rhapsody in August (Hachigatsu no Kyoshikoku)**

Sat 25 Feb 12:40

**Ran**

Sat 25 Feb 17:20

**Dreams (Yume)**

Sun 26 Feb 15:30

**Red Beard (Akahige)**

Sun 26 Feb 17:25

**Dersu Uzala**

Mon 27 Feb 20:10 (+ intro by Doug Weir, BFI Technical Delivery Manager)

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