



MEMBER PICKS

Lost in Translation

Lost in Translation

Director: Sofia Coppola

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Production Companies: American Zoetrope, Elemental Films

Presented by: Focus Features

Presented in association with:

Tohokushinsha Film Corporation

Executive Producers: Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Roos

Produced by: Ross Katz, Sofia Coppola

Co-producer: Stephen Schible

Line Producer: Callum Greene

Associate Producer: Mitch Glazer

Production Supervisor: Anthony G. Katagas

Kyoto Production: Eizo Kyoto Film Company, Kansai Location Service Co.

Unit/Key Location Manager: Keizo Shukuzaki

Kyoto Location Manager: Kiyoshi Kurokawa

Production Consultant: Hiroko Kawasaki

Researcher: Shari Chertok

Additional Japanese Unit: Roman Coppola

1st Assistant Director: Takahide Kawakami

Script Supervisor: Eva Z. Cabrera

Japanese Casting: Ryoichi Kondo

Screenplay: Sofia Coppola

Director of Photography: Lance Acord

Camera Operator: Lance Acord

Editor: Sarah Flack

Production Designers: Anne Ross, K.K. Barrett

Art Director: Mayumi Tomita

Set Decorators: Towako Kuwajima, Tomomi Nishio

Property Master: Keisuke Sakurai

Costume Designer: Nancy Steiner

Key Make-up Artist/Key Hair: Morag Ross

Title Design: Miles Murray Sorrell, FUEL

Opticals: Title House Digital, Gray Matter FX

[Colour] Timer: Bob Fredrickson

Original Music by: Kevin Shields

Additional Music by: Brian Reitzell,

Roger Joseph Manning Jr, William Storkson

Music Supervisor: Brian Reitzell

Music Producer: Brian Reitzell

Music Editor: Richard Beggs

Sound Designer: Richard Beggs

Production Sound Mixer: Drew Kunin

Boom Operator: Kira Smith

Re-recording Mixers: Richard Beggs,

Kent Sparling

Re-recording Supervisor: Robert Knox

Supervising Sound Editor: Michael Kirchberger

Dialogue Editor: David Cohen

[Sound] Effects Editor: Julia Shirar

ADR Editor: David Cohen

Foley Artist: Marnie Moore

Foley Recordist: Jory K. Prum

Stunt Co-ordination: Hirofumi Nakase

Bilingual Co-ordinator: Brian Kobo

Cast:

Bill Murray (*Bob Harris*)

Scarlett Johansson (*Charlotte*)

Giovanni Ribisi (*John*)

Anna Faris (*Kelly*)

Fumihiko Hayashi (*Charlie*)

Akiko Takeshita (*Ms Kawasaki*)

Kazuyoshi Minamimagoe, Kazuko Shibata, Take

(*press agents*)

Ryuichiro Baba (*concierge*)

Akira Yamaguchi (*bellboy*)

Catherine Lambert (*jazz singer*)

François Du Bois (*Sausalito piano*)

Tim Leffman (*Sausalito guitar*)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

In the opening sequence of Sofia Coppola's off-beat romantic comedy *Lost in Translation*, Bill Murray's Bob Harris, a washed-up movie star, dozes fitfully as his limo makes its way to his hotel through Tokyo at night. The neon signs stretch endlessly and the hypnotic soundtrack encourages us to wonder with him at the exotic spectacle. Suddenly he peers out more closely and we see, from his point of view, his own image moodily drinking whisky on a huge poster framed by enigmatic Japanese characters. The jet-lagged Bob rubs his eyes, as if unsure whether to believe what he sees. It's a prescient scene in this cross-cultural comedy. When an American star is put on a Japanese billboard, who knows where the translation might take us?

Bob has come to Tokyo to make a commercial for Suntory whisky. But the very first shot before the credits is not of him: it's a creamy close-up of a young woman's behind, barely covered by translucent pink knickers. The body, we soon learn, belongs to Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), who is also exiled in the luxurious Park Hyatt Tokyo. Neglected by her self-obsessed photographer husband (Giovanni Ribisi), Charlotte is as lost as Bob. She posts herself at her high-rise window, keeping watch like an angel over the featureless urban landscape below. By juxtaposing the two shots (female knickers/male taxi ride), Coppola hints at the romance to follow. But she develops that romance so delicately we hardly notice it. In one shot Bob towers comically over the Japanese in the hotel lift; in the next, also in the lift, Charlotte shyly returns his smile. It takes half an hour before eloquent looks and knowing smirks lead to a conversation between them.

Coppola, as screenwriter as well as director, deftly avoids the clichés of a May-September romance. For all her youth, Charlotte is ironic and self-aware. A failed photographer, she says that 'Every girl goes through a photography phase – it's like horses.' And Johansson, a fitting muse to Vermeer in Peter Webber's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, shows that beyond her beauty (and pink pants) she can convincingly pass for a philosophy graduate, a role few Hollywood starlets could carry off. Johansson was surely born to listen on screen, her features reacting instantly to Murray's quirky anecdotes. After an exhausting night on the town (clubs, chases and karaoke), Bob carries Charlotte back to bed as if she were a child and she smiles sleepily as he tucks her in. But thankfully she's no Lolita. Just as Coppola knows that less is more (a romance can be more moving with barely a kiss exchanged), so Bob knows that a hard-won middle-aged marriage is worth more than a fling with a girl half his age. It's a moral few movies today are likely to give us. As he walks the hotel corridor back to his room, Murray's battered face registers desire, disappointment and resignation all at once.

Charlotte decorates her room with pink paper cut-outs of traditional cherry blossom, and it's mainly through her eyes that we see Japan. From her voyeuristic viewpoint at the window she scans the skyline. But soon she descends to the street to fight her way through the crowds. First she takes the crowded subway, all grey and blue. Suddenly she's in a Buddhist temple, red and gold, with chanting priests. If the Americans are lost in a foreign culture, then that culture itself is dislocated, made up of fragments (ancient and modern, eastern and western) that cannot be joined.

Gregory Pekar (*American businessman 1*)
 Richard Allen (*American businessman 2*)
 Yutaka Tadokoro (*commercial director*)
 Jun Maki (*Suntory client*)
 Nao Asuka (*premium fantasy woman*)
 Tetsuro Naka (*stills photographer*)
 Kanako Nakazato (*make-up person*)
 Hiroko Kawasaki (*Hiroko*)
 Daikon (*Bambie*)
 Asuka Shimuzu (*Kelly's translator*)
 Ikuko Takahashi (*ikebana instructor*)
 Koichi Tanaka (*bartender, NY bar*)
 Hugo Codaro (*aerobics instructor*)
 Akiko Monou (*P Chan*)
 Akimitsu Naruyama
 (*French Japanese club patron*)
 Hiroshi Kawashima (*nightclub bartender*)
 Hiromix (*Hiromix*)
 Nobuhiko Kitamura (*Nobu*)
 Nao Kitman (*Nao*)
 Akira (*Hans*)
 Kunichi Nomura (*Kun*)
 Yasuhiko Hattori (*Charlie's friend*)
 Shigekazu Aida (*Mr Valentine*)
 Kazuo Yamada (*hospital receptionist*)
 Akira Motomura (*old man*)
 Osamu Shigematu (*doctor*)
 Mathew Minami (*TV host*)
 Kei Takyo (*TV translator*)
 Ryo Kondo (*politician*)
 Yumi Ikeda, Yumika Saki, Yuji Okabe
 (*politician's aides*)
 Diedrich Bollman, Georg O.P. Eschert
 (*German hotel guests*)
 Mark Willms (*Carl West*)
 Lisle Wilkerson (*sexy businesswoman*)
 USA/Japan 2003©
 101 mins

MEMBER EXCLUSIVES

Member Salon: Le Mépris

Tue 6 Jun 20:10 Blue Room

Member Picks: Lost in Translation

Thu 15 Jun 18:30

Members Library Lates – Collection Focus: Film on Film

Mon 19 Jun 18:00-20:00 BFI Reuben Library

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Seniors' Free Archive Matinee: Being Blacker + intro and Q&A with Molly Dineen and Blacker Dread

Mon 19 Jun 14:00

Projecting the Archive: The Return of the Frog + introduction by film historian Jonathan Rigby

Tue 20 Jun 18:30

Experimenta Mixtape S02E03 curated by Mark Leckey + Mark Leckey in conversation with novelist Sheena Patel, author *I'm A Fan*

Thu 22 Jun 18:20

African Odysseys: A Charmed Life + panel with directors and special guests

Sat 24 Jun 14:00

Relaxed Screening: Under the Skin + intro and discussion

Mon 26 Jun 18:15

Black Self-Building On Screen + discussion

Tue 27 Jun 18:30

The hotel, huge and hermetic, is the clearest example of this in-between space. In the guestrooms extreme luxury is combined with extreme inconvenience. Curtains open automatically at unpredictable times. Fax machines spew noisily at 4.20am. Short beds, low showerheads and tiny razors pose problems for western visitors. The resident jazz group is called Sausalito (after the small town in Northern California) and plays an incongruous version of 'Scarborough Fair'. The hotel facilities seem perilously suspended above the city: Coppola shoots with the city lights visible far below as Bob has a frenzied encounter with an exercise machine in the gym or attempts a length of the pool while middle-aged matrons perform aquatic gymnastics.

But if the hotel is strangely anaesthetic, the labyrinthine city outside is vibrant. The giddiest sequence is when Charlotte and Bob skip across town from one nightclub and karaoke bar to another, climaxing with a Japanese-sung version of the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen'. But while the megalopolis may be alienating (Charlotte is repeatedly shot alone in the crowd, a blonde head in a sea of brunettes), it is never threatening. Like Fellini's Rome in *La dolce vita* (1960, glimpsed on television in the hotel), Coppola's Tokyo is a place of pure pleasure, at least for those like the director who know and love it well. During the couple's night on the town Coppola replays the opening sequence in the cab. But this time it is Charlotte whose face is delicately traced with nocturnal neon. And, unlike Bob at the start of the film, she is no longer a lone passenger. She turns tenderly to watch him doze.

The role of Bob was, it appears, underwritten: in interviews Murray has said that the script was only 75 pages long and that Coppola limited her direction to repeating the character's name over and over to him. One wonders, therefore, how much of Murray's expert comic rifling is improvised, especially as the character draws on the actor's rich back catalogue of indie eccentrics. Bob shares the fragile dignity (not to mention the mascara) of transsexual Bunny in *Ed Wood* (1994) and the hopeless yearning for a younger woman of Herman in *Rushmore* (1998). But perhaps the closest parallel is with Phil in *Groundhog Day* (1993). Both characters are impotent and bewildered outsiders in a strange world, a world to which they finally adapt when they learn their lessons. But while Phil learns to care for others besides himself, Bob learns to care more deeply for those he already loves: his absent wife and children, whom we hear only on the phone. It is surely the long, unbroken take when Bob tells Charlotte about the perils of middle age that fuelled the talk of an Oscar for the hugely versatile Murray.

The tagline for the film is 'Sometimes you have to go halfway round the world to come full circle.' But the conclusion to *Lost in Translation* is unexpected. We learn that home can be as unfamiliar as abroad, especially when it arrives by fax at 4.20am, or in the form of FedEx-ed carpet samples. Phone calls to the family may need some deft interpreting, too, if we are to get at their true meaning (Charlotte's friend puts her on call waiting; wife hangs up just before he says he loves her). It's no accident that Coppola's characters so often inspect themselves in the mirror or are reflected in windows haloed by city lights. As the two friends, chaste but intimate, kiss one another goodbye, we glimpse the final moral of this terrific film: that the strangest thing we might meet in a foreign country is quite likely to be ourselves.

Paul Julian Smith, *Sight and Sound*, January 2004