



A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

Tokyo-Ga

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Director: Wim Wenders

Production Companies:

Wim Wenders Filmproduktion, Gray City, Chris Sievernich Filmproduktion, Westdeutscher Rundfunk

Producer: Chris Sievernich

Production Assistants: Lilyan Sievernich, Ulla Zwicker

Cinematographer: Ed Lachman

Editor: Jon Neuberger

Music by: Dick Tracy [Lorie Petitgand, Meche Mamecier, Chico Rojo Ortega]

With:

Chishu Ryu

Yuharu Atsuta

Werner Herzog

Chris Marker [uncredited]

West Germany/USA 1985

92 mins

Digital (restoration)

A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)

From Fri 1 Sep

I Flunked, But... (Rakudai wa shitakeredo)

Sat 2 Sep 16:15; Wed 13 Sep 20:35

Tokyo Chorus (Tōkyō no kōrasu)

Sat 2 Sep 18:30; Sun 17 Sep 16:00

An Autumn Evening with Yasujirō Ozu

Mon 4 Sep 18:15

I Was Born, But... (Umarete wa mita keredo)

Mon 4 Sep 20:30 (+ intro by Jinhee Choi, King's College London); Fri 15 Sep 18:30

Tokyo Twilight (Tōkyō boshoku)

Thu 7 Sep 18:00; Wed 27 Sep 20:15

The Only Son (Hitori musuko)

Fri 8 Sep 20:40; Sat 16 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

A Story of Floating Weeds (Ukigusa monogatari)

Sat 9 Sep 11:50; Sat 23 Sep 16:00

Good Morning (Ohayō)

Sat 9 Sep 18:10; Sat 30 Sep 20:40

Floating Weeds (Ukigusa)

Sat 9 Sep 20:30; Sun 1 Oct 11:30 BFI IMAX; Mon 2 Oct 18:00

Late Spring (Banshun)

Sun 10 Sep 12:15 (+ intro by season curator, Ian Haydn Smith); Fri 22 Sep 20:50

Early Summer (Bakushu)

Sun 10 Sep 15:00; Wed 13 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 20:35

Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family (Todake no kyōdai)

Mon 11 Sep 18:00; Sat 30 Sep 18:20

There Was a Father (Chichi ariki)

Mon 11 Sep 20:40; Thu 28 Sep 18:20

City Lit at BFI: Ozu: Cinema of Everyday Life

Tue 12 Sep – 3 Oct 18:30-20:30

Record of a Tenement Gentleman (Nagaya Shinshiroku)

Tue 12 Sep 20:30; Wed 20 Sep 21:00; Sat 23 Sep 18:30

Early Spring (Sōshun)

Thu 14 Sep 20:10; Sun 1 Oct 18:00

Spiritually and chronologically located somewhere between America and Europe, begun before Wenders had completed *Paris, Texas* (1984), *Tokyo-Ga* (1983-85) can be seen as an important port of call in the director's transatlantic odyssey. Over the years, he has produced a series of these 'film diaries', in which he outlines his own aesthetic of cinema. (*Tokyo-Ga*, a 92-minute subjective documentary, was preceded by *Reverse Angle* and *Room 666*, two shorts from 1982.) 'If anything is holy in the world of cinema,' Wenders remarks at the beginning of *Tokyo-Ga*, 'it must be the work of Ozu'; and the film documents not a pilgrimage, as he hastens to add, but a search for the Tokyo of the Japanese master who died in 1963.

Ironically perhaps, Wenders, the prodigal son of German film, who returned home from the USA after years of disappointment in search of his American dream, found in Tokyo a world of neon lights and Disneyland, of Coca-Cola and Kentucky Fried Chicken, baseball-playing, rock 'n' rolling teenagers, a surrogate neo-America that is almost a parody of the original. In the filmed studies of the pachinko pin-table saloons or the rooftop golf ranges, the essence of sport – the idea of play exposed to the vagaries of nature and the elements – is reduced to a meaningless, conveyor-belt activity in a confined space. Here one is confronted with frightening pictures of the ultimate absurdity and isolation of our mass-consumption, animated leisure world as the mirror image of the world of mass production. The Tokyo Wenders discovers is a world of fascinating veneers and imitations, from the simulated games and the re-enactment of American symbols, to the wax display models of the delicacies offered in a Japanese restaurant.

Nothing is real; nor indeed is there any outward sign of the 'places' of Ozu's world, which Wenders professes to seek; at least, not in the images the camera captures. A parallel presentation of the same locations – then and now – might have been more revealing and would have eliminated the suspicion that Wenders' fascination with the images he found diverted him from seeking any further.

The physical changes to which Tokyo has been exposed over the last thirty years or so, although perhaps more extreme than elsewhere, are essentially the same as those that have overtaken most western cities. The decline of family and nation that Wenders identifies in Ozu's films goes hand in hand with the bursting metropolis and the rowing depersonalisation with which we are all familiar, and over which a series of glittering facades, of neon lights, high-speed communications and coldly smiling commercialism have been drawn.

More likely, however, Ozu's world is not to be found so much in places as in time, and Wenders' search was more in the nature of a *recherche du temps perdu*. It was a world Ozu created himself and, with his aversion to working in locations open to public view, one he created largely in the studio. In that respect it was also a world that died with him, as the interviews with his

The Flavour of Green Tea Over Rice (Ochazuke no aji)

Fri 15 Sep 20:45; Sat 30 Sep 15:30

The Anatomy of Ozu

Sat 16 Sep 12:00-17:00

Late Autumn (Akibiyori)

Sun 17 Sep 18:20; Sat 30 Sep 12:30

Equinox Flower (Higanbana)

Thu 21 Sep 18:00; Sun 1 Oct 15:10

An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji)

Sun 24 Sep 18:25 (+ intro); Tue 3 Oct 20:45

Influence and Inspiration

Make Way for Tomorrow

Sat 2 Sep 12:40; Sun 24 Sep 15:50 (+ intro by season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Tokyo-Ga

Sun 3 Sep 14:00; Mon 2 Oct 20:45

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colleagues Chishu Ryu and Yuharu Atsuta reveal. Both men spent most of their working lives with Ozu, Chishu Ryu impersonating often similar roles in more than 50 films, Yuharu Atsuta providing the same camera technique, at Ozu's request, in all his later works – the camera in a fixed position close to the ground, not travelling, panning or even zooming, the lens and focal length unchanging. Both men identified with Ozu to the point of seeming self-effacement. Yet both found a sense of fulfilment in their collaboration with him that they were never to achieve subsequently. On the verge of tears, Atsuta describes how the director brought out the best in him: Ozu was 'more than a director; he was like a king.'

Werner Herzog's claim, made during his brief appearance in *Tokyo-Ga*, that there are 'no pictures' in this city, that it is necessary to go to the remote corners of the earth or into space to find them, is of course disproved by the film itself. The inaccessible landscapes of Wenders' films are the asphalt jungles and the conurbations of our modern civilisation. Wenders himself speaks of 'an inflation of pictures' in the world today, describing how the camera sometimes stands in the way of observation. Ideally, one should be able to make films simply by opening one's eyes and seeing. But the images have grown hollow, and in the seductive shots of moving trains and cityscapes in *Tokyo-Ga* he is at times in danger of succumbing himself to the fascination of the world he describes.

Is *Tokyo-Ga* a search for pictures, in Herzog's understanding of cinema, a search for places, or for time lost? Wenders takes up two themes – Tokyo yesterday and today, and the world of Yasujiro Ozu – without quite managing to fuse them into a single whole. With the exception of old black and white photographs and quotations from the Japanese director's films, Ozu's Tokyo never really emerges; although Ozu himself is never far away. But it would be a pity if the personal, documentary form of *Tokyo-Ga* were to stand in the way of its showing. It is an absorbing essay on the subject of cinema and essential viewing for anyone interested in the films of Ozu and the work of Wenders.

Peter Green, *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1988