



Au revoir l'été (Hotori no Sakuko)

Director: Kōji Fukada

©: Sakuko Film Partners

Production Companies:

Wa Entertainment, Letre, Atom-X

Executive Producers: Kousuke Ono,

Makoto Adachi, Mikio Miyata

Producer: Kiki Sugino

Co-producer: Kōji Fukada

Line Producer: Yasuhiro Miyoshi

Production Manager: Ippei Ito

Assistant Director: Ippei Ito

Writer: Kōji Fukada

Director of Photography: Kenichi Negishi

Editor: Kōji Fukada

Costume: Satoe Araki

Make-up: Miwa Itagaki, Miho Shimizu

Film Score: Jo Keita

Sound Director: Jo Keita

Sound Recorders: Son Chinso, Junji Yoshikata

Sound Editor: Edison Gan

Cast:

Fumi Nikaido (*Sakuko*)

Mayu Tsuruta (*Mikie*)

Taiga (*Takashi*)

Kanji Furutachi (*Ukichi*)

Tadashi Ohtake (*Nishida*)

Ena Koshino (*Chika*)

Makiko Watanabe (*Mizuho*)

Hiroko Matsuda (*Toshie*)

Japan 2013

126 mins

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KOJI FUKADA

Au revoir l'été (Hotori no Sakuko)

Kōji Fukada on 'Au revoir l'été'

The export release title might conjure up a Rohmeresque world of holiday-time ennui, but the light, bright, summery images in Kōji Fukada's third feature, *Au revoir l'été*, merely serve to lure the viewer into a film with much to say about the ills of Japanese society. Here the small seaside town, where Fumi Nikaido's teenager Sakuko finds herself staying with her spinster aunt, gradually reveals a window on the country's hidden class tensions, hypocritical attitudes to sexual equality, and the failings of democracy after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The approach is discursive rather than hectoring, though it's still relatively rare for a contemporary Japanese film to manifest a genuine sense of social engagement while still delivering an attractive and engaging drama.

Fukada's previous work, including 2010's social comedy *Hospitalité*, has been acclaimed on the festival circuit, but this will be the first chance for UK cinemagoers to experience the work of a Japanese writer-director-editor whose work runs stealthily against the grain – not least for the fact that he honed his craft in the theatre with Oriza Hirata's famed Seinendan company, responsible for a new strain of naturalism on the Japanese stage.

The original Japanese title, Hotori no Sakuko, roughly translates as 'Sakuko on the margin', yet presumably creating her character was the key to the story?

Yes, I was actually inspired by meeting the actress Fumi Nikaido, who manages to combine a real youthfulness with a professional maturity, having been in the business for a number of years. So Sakuko is someone between childhood and the adult world. She's failed her university entrance exam so has to take a year out, so it's an ambivalent, unbalanced time in her life, which makes her the person to take the audience on the journey into the labyrinth.

And what are the component parts of this labyrinth?

Well, for instance, there's a sort of fake hotel. It looks normal, but it's actually operating as a love hotel, where we see the local politician and a suggestion of teenage prostitution. It's illegal, but it goes on, and for me that's a way of exploring women's sexual roles. Contrast that with Mikie, Sakuko's aunt, someone who's made a very strong decision not to have children, which really runs against the common perception in Japan that women are there to have babies.

Sakuko also strikes up a friendship with a refugee from Fukushima, which presumably was a way of approaching this thorny subject?

Absolutely. It would not have been possible for me to make a film without tackling the nuclear power issue in some way, but I didn't want to do it directly, because in Japan we've become pretty much inured to images of the suffering in Tohoku [the region surrounding Fukushima]. What you have to realise is that the nuclear power issue is actually fundamental to the question of democracy in Japan. The explosion and the aftermath are one thing, but then we elected politicians who are continuing the policy of nuclear power. There are antinuclear demonstrations almost every day, yet that doesn't in any way affect the power base of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

KOJI FUKADA

Hospitalité (Kantai)

Fri 1 Sep 18:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:40

Au revoir l'été (Hotori no Sakuko)

Mon 4 Sep 20:35; Mon 2 Oct 17:55

Harmonium (Fuchi ni Tatsu)

Wed 6 Sep 20:30; Sun 1 Oct 18:20

Love Life (Rabu raifu)

From Fri 15 Sep

NEW RELEASES

Passages

From Fri 1 Sep

Past Lives

From Thu 7 Sep

The Old Oak

From Fri 29 Sep

RE-RELEASES

Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)

From Fri 1 Sep

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You can sense a sort of simmering discontent as the story progresses, but the film never becomes overtly angry.

For me the cinema is really bound up with the history of propaganda – not so much in subject matter, but in the process, the notion of just how easy it is for us to be made to change our minds, to be manipulated. So when it comes to my own films, I'm really very wary of creating emotional propaganda. Instead I want to create a sort of unresolved space, something that's discursive, so the audience has to fill in the gaps for themselves.

There's a certain hint of Rohmer in the subject matter, but do I also detect a Naruse influence in the combination of everyday drama and underlying social comment?

You spotted it. When I was growing up, I really watched a lot of pre-1960 films, and Naruse was the one who made the strongest impression. I see a strong kinship between Naruse and Rohmer because there's always a clear relationship between the characters and the camera. They create a very simple, almost a pure environment for the story. And I've tried to capture something of that by always shooting the action from the front, by keeping a certain distance, and never distorting the relationship between the characters and the viewer by using low camera angles.

Yes, it's certainly unfashionably classical in that regard, so does that explain your choice of Academy ratio?

What I'm trying to do with film is shoot human beings and show their relationships. 4:3 is definitely the most suitable ratio for the human face, though something that I learned from my work in the theatre was that when we really look at people we realise they never really say what they're actually thinking. I don't know if that's typically Japanese, but it's something Sakuko discovers for herself in the course of the story.

Interview by Trevor Johnston, *Sight and Sound*, May 2015