



Bye Bye Love (Baibai rabu)

Director/Producer/Writer: Isao Fujisawa

Cast:

Ren Tamura (*Utamaro*)

Miyabi Ichijō (*Giko*)

Satomi Oki (*prostitute*)

Enver Tenpai (*Nixon*)

Japan 1974

85 mins

Digital



queereast.org.uk

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QUEER EAST FESTIVAL: CLOSING NIGHT 50TH ANNIVERSARY SCREENING

Bye Bye Love (Baibai rabu)

+ recorded intro by director Isao Fujisawa

The young man who calls himself Utamaro (after the painter) is on the street, phoning the girlfriend he's been living with, when he's dumped. His reactions are nihilistic, macho and misogynistic. Moments later, across the street, he literally bumps into a young woman in a hurry, clutching a Doors LP, who says she's being harassed by a pervert. Utamaro deliberately trips up the man pursuing her and is promptly arrested for abetting a shoplifter. But he overpowers the cop escorting him into custody and makes off with the man's gun...

This opening scene is the prelude to a broadly generic road movie in which a police dragnet slowly closes in on a doomed romantic couple as they steal, swindle and murder their way up the east coast of Honshu towards their date with destiny in Aomori. Broadly generic, but also very singular: *Bye Bye Love* is an independent feature made at a time when they were thin on the ground in Japan, entirely outside the mainstream film industry, cast with unknowns and directed, written and produced by a man whose only previous credits were as assistant to the arthouse director Hiroshi Teshigahara and the action-crime thriller director Yasuo Furuhata.

Even more singular: Utamaro's partner in his quest for 'freedom' presents as female (he nicknames her 'Giko'), but he soon discovers that she's gender-fluid and has male genitals. The director Isao Fujisawa's depiction of their platonic but close and emotional relationship had no precedent in Japanese cinema. He even writes a scene in which Utamaro muses that he could turn gay to consummate the relationship.

Films in Japan were slow to register the country's extensive queer subculture. Tai Kato's *Cruel Story of the Shogunate's Downfall* (1964) had referenced homosexuality in the ranks of the Shinsengumi, a 19th-century samurai militia, an open secret later explored much more explicitly by Nagisa Oshima in his last feature *Gohatto* (1999). In 1969 the avant-garde intellectual Toshio Matsumoto made his debut feature *Funeral Parade of Roses*, a clever parody of the Oedipus story in which the protagonist, a young drag-queen, kills his mother and sleeps with his father. But it was not until nearly 10 years after *Bye Bye Love* that the porn industry began producing gay features, and the rise of openly gay indie filmmakers like Hiroyuki Oki, Koichi Imaizumi and Ryosuke Hashiguchi didn't begin until the 1990s. More recently, such directors as Takeshi Kitano and the late Takashi Ishii began including queer scenes and characters in their movies.

There's no immediately available information about how or where *Bye Bye Love* was screened in the mid-70s, but the film was last year rescued from oblivion by another key player in Japan's modern queer cinema, the producer and sometimes director Akihiro Suzuki, who unearthed the negative, made a new print and re-premiered the film in an online forum. The current screenings in festivals like Queer East are a direct result of Suzuki's determination to retrieve the film.

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Mark Kermode in 3D at BFI IMAX
Mon 29 Apr 18:30; Mon 27 May 18:30
Preview: Hoard + Q&A
Fri 3 May 18:00

Billy Connolly: Big Banana Feet + Q&A with Douglas Weir and director Murray Grigor
Mon 20 May 18:10

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Families: The Boy and the Heron

Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka
Sun 5 May 12:30; Sun 12 May 12:00;
Sun 26 May 12:30

Projecting the Archive: For Them That Trespass + intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator

Thu 9 May 18:10

African Odysseys: Restored: Bushman + intro with Journey Mercies director Tomisin Adepeju
Sat 11 May 14:00

Experimenta: Cinema Is Evil: Welcome to the World of Legendary, Queer Occult Filmmaker Kenneth Anger

Sat 11 May 17:50

Seniors: Shakespeare Wallah + intro
Wed 15 May 14:30

Families: Wonka

Sun 19 May 12:50 (Funday)

Silent Cinema: Vagabond Queen + intro by BFI curator Bryony Dixon

Sun 19 May 15:40

Relaxed Screening: The Magic Flute Trollflöjten + intro & discussion

Mon 20 May 18:00

Restored: The Small Back Room + intro by the BFI Conservation team

Tue 28 May 18:10

No one with previous experience of low-budget indie features by first-time directors will be surprised to learn that *Bye Bye Love* is a somewhat rickety piece of work. Weirdly, it draws on both sides of director Fujisawa's training. His time with Teshigahara, working on two adaptations from the novels of modernist writer Kobo Abe (*Woman of the Dunes*, 1964, and *The Face of Another*, 1966), seemingly led him to frame his own film as a psychedelic odyssey with a dream-logic narrative, an intense sexual episode and hyper-vivid lyrical interludes. And his time with Furuhashi at the Toei company clearly fed into the dragnet aspects of the story, from the audio snippets of police reports to scenes of gunplay almost worthy of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). So *Bye Bye Love* occupies a liminal space between genre-movie conventions and psycho-sexual drama quite unlike any Japanese film before it. Obviously its picture of a macho chancer who's changed by his close encounter with intersexuality gives it a very particular edge.

There are suggestions, especially in the early scenes, that Fujisawa also wanted to give the film social and political resonances. Soon after their chance meeting on the street, Utamaro discovers that Giko is the kept partner of an American man, apparently an officer from the US Embassy, rather unsubtly named 'Nixon'. The couple's flight from justice is precipitated by Utamaro's furious attack on Nixon and his property, starting with wrecking his apartment – which is decorated with American iconography and imitations of classical statues. But the anti-Americanism feels quite shallow, since the couple's odyssey echoes those of so many US criminals on the run, right up to Terrence Malick's *Badlands*, made just one year earlier in 1973.

Ultimately, it's the film's challenging sexual dimension which makes it notable – and of lasting interest. That, and the fiercely committed performances of its two lead actors, Ren Tamura as Utamaro and Miyabi Ichijō as Giko.

Tony Rayns, bfi.org.uk, 16 April 2024