

Tears and Laughter: Women in Japanese Melodrama



BFI Southbank, 16 Oct – 29 Nov 2017

Monday 25 September 2017, London.

Running at BFI Southbank from **Monday 16 October – Wednesday 29 November**, **TEARS AND LAUGHTER: WOMEN IN JAPANESE MELODRAMA** will be an opportunity for audiences to explore the cinema of Japan's 'Golden Age', with a distinctly female focus. This *Sight & Sound Deep Focus* season includes several titles rarely screened in the UK, such as *The Mistress* (Shirō Toyoda, 1953), *An Inlet of Muddy Water* (Imai Tadashi, 1953) and *The Blue Sky Maiden* (Yasuzo Masumura, 1957), and spotlights the magnificent female actors who starred in them. These include figures such as **Setsuko Hara**, one of Ozu's key collaborators, **Kinuyo Tanaka**, the actor who became one of Japan's first female directors and who was hailed in the West as 'Japan's Bette Davis', and **Machiko Kyō**, best known as the star of Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950). All of these stars endure as beloved icons of Japanese cinema, and their performances shine just as brightly as they did over fifty years ago.

The 'Golden Age' spanned the years following WWII to the early 1960s, an era when each year brought new masterpieces from directors such as Yasujiro Ozu, Kenji Mizoguchi and Mikio Naruse. It was a time of great social change for women in Japan, and what distinguished many of the films being screened in the season was the attention they gave to issues concerning women – frequently contained in heart-rending melodrama that rivalled Douglas Sirk for emotional impact. There will be a season introduction on **Tuesday 17 October – Women in Japanese Melodrama** – during which experts including Alexander Jacoby and Alejandra Armendáriz will share their insights and reflect upon the work of powerful female icons at the heart of mid-century Japanese cinema.

The season opens with a double bill of films by the great Kenji Mizoguchi: *Osaka Elegy* (1936) is a tragic tale of entrapment and compromise that established his reputation as the greatest director of the plight of women in Japanese society, while *Women of the Night* (1948) is his rawest and most despairing film, shot with a stark, neorealist immediacy in the now-devastated Osaka in the wake of WWII. 'Japan's Bette Davis,' Kinuyo Tanaka was one of Japanese cinema's best-loved stars and finest actors and in *Women of the Night* she gives a performance of animalistic ferocity as a woman whose life is torn apart by the conflict, and in desperation turns to prostitution. Tanaka also stars in

Wedding Ring (Keisuke Kinoshita, 1950) as a woman who falls for the dashing, strapping doctor who is treating her bed-bound husband. Not only one of Japan's greatest actresses, Tanaka was one of Japan's first female directors, making six features, including **The Eternal Breasts** (1955) a powerful, frank film about the poet Fumiko Nakajō, who died of breast cancer aged 31 in 1954. Tanaka brings an unmistakably female perspective to recounting Nakajō's life – from divorce through single motherhood, illness and her growing independence in life and love as her literary reputation grows.

Glamorous and sensual, Machiko Kyō was a new kind of female star in the 1950s. Shortly after starring in Akira Kurosawa's **Rashomon** (1950), she gave a superb performance in Kōzaburō Yoshimura's **Clothes of Deception** (1951), a story of the contrasting fate of two sisters in a post-war Japan caught between the old and the new. Hideko Takamine was capable of registering the deepest emotion in merely a glance – a quality vividly displayed in Shirō Toyoda's heart-breaking **The Mistress** (1953) as well as the searing tale of *amour fou* **Floating Clouds** (Mikio Naruse, 1955). The influence of Douglas Sirk's contemporary melodramas is unmistakable in **The Blue Sky Maiden** (Yasuzo Masumura, 1957) and **The Shape of Night** (Noboru Nakamura, 1964). The former is a fresh, colourful and sharply satirical *Cinderella* story, the first in a string of collaborations with Ayako Wakao. The latter is an intoxicating rediscovery following a woman, played by Miyuki Kuwano, who is pushed into prostitution by her violent yakuza boyfriend. Gorgeously shot in widescreen, with bold compositions and editing, Nakamura's revelatory film absorbs Sirk's expressive use of colour, while pointing forward to the lyrical modernism of Wong Kar Wai.

Yoshiko Kuga gives a performance of great sensitivity in **Elegy of the North** (Heinosuke Gosho, 1957), an exquisitely shot melodrama. Mariko Okada's career bridged both the Golden Age and the New Wave she helped to define in the films she made with her director husband Yoshishige Yoshida. One of the first films they made together was **An Affair at Akitsu** (1962), a hauntingly intense melodrama of unrequited love and post-war disillusion, shot in lush widescreen colour. Completing the season is **Tokyo Twilight** (Yasujirō Ozu, 1957) starring Japan's 'eternal virgin' Setsuko Hara, who here shows another side to her acting, in Ozu's unusually downcast and melodramatic masterwork, which spans teenage pregnancy, abortion and maternal abandonment.



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SEASON LISTINGS:

Season Introduction: Women in Japanese Melodrama

Join us for a fascinating and informative introduction to the extraordinary Japanese artists we are celebrating in our women in Japanese melodrama season. Experts (including Alexander Jacoby and Alejandra Armendáriz) will share their insights and reflect upon the work of powerful female creatives such as Setsuko Hara, one of Ozu's key collaborators, and Kinuyo Tanaka, the megastar who became one of Japan's first female directors. This will be a compelling introduction to the compelling female icons at the heart of mid-century Japanese cinema.

Tickets £6.50

TUE 17 OCT 18:15 NFT3

Osaka Elegy Naniwa ereji

Japan 1936. Dir Kenji Mizoguchi. With Isuzu Yamada, Yoko Umemura, Chiyako Okura, Kensaku Hara. 71min. 16mm. EST. PG

A tragic tale of entrapment and compromise that established Mizoguchi's reputation as the greatest director of the plight of women in Japanese society. Isuzu Yamada is superb as a switchboard operator who sees her own dreams fade after she agrees to a scandalous relationship with her boss in order to pay off her wastrel father's gambling debts.

+ Women of the Night Yoru no onnatachi

Japan 1948. Dir Kenji Mizoguchi. With Kinuyo Tanaka, Sanae Takasugi, Tomie Tsunoda, Mitsuo Nagata. 75min. 35mm. EST. PG

Returning to film in the now-devastated Osaka in the wake of World War Two, Mizoguchi made his rawest and most despairing film, shot with a stark, neorealist immediacy. Kinuyo Tanaka gives a performance of animalistic ferocity as a woman whose life is torn apart by the conflict, and in desperation turns to prostitution on the chaotic, rubble-strewn streets to survive.

MON 16 OCT 20:10 NFT2 / SAT 21 OCT 17:10 NFT2

Wedding Ring Konyaku yubiwa

Japan 1950. Dir Keisuke Kinoshita. With Kinuyo Tanaka, Toshiro Mifune, Jukichi Uno, Nobuko Otowa. 96min. 35mm. EST. PG

Hailed in the West as 'Japan's Bette Davis,' Kinuyo Tanaka was one of Japanese cinema's best-loved stars and finest actors. The chemistry is electric in this yearning tale of forbidden physical attraction, in which Tanaka gives a playful, exuberant performance as a woman who falls for the dashing, strapping doctor (Mifune) who's treating her sickly and bed-bound husband.

TUE 17 OCT 20:45 NFT2 / THU 19 OCT 18:20 NFT2

Clothes of Deception Itsuwareru seiso

Japan 1951. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Machiko Kyo, Yasuko Fujita, Keiju Kobayashi. 103min. 35mm. EST
Glamorous and sensual, Machiko Kyo was a new kind of female star in the 1950s. Shortly after starring in Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, she gave a superb performance in Yoshimura's story of the contrasting fate of two sisters in a post-war Japan caught between the old and the new; one a geisha in Kyoto's Gion district (Kyo), the other (Fujita) employed by the tourist board.

WED 18 OCT 20:40 NFT2 / SUN 22 OCT 15:00 NFT2

The Mistress (aka Wild Geese) Gan

Japan 1953. Dir Shiro Toyoda. With Hideko Takamine, Hiroshi Akutagawa, Choko Lida, Eijiro Tono. 104min. 35mm. EST

Hideko Takamine's peerlessly expressive face was capable of registering the deepest emotion in merely a glance – qualities vividly displayed in Toyoda's heartbreaking film. Takamine plays a lowly divorcee who is tricked into becoming mistress to a despised moneylender, but she dares to dream of love and escape from the confines of her position when she falls for a kind-hearted student.

SUN 22 OCT 20:10 NFT2 / THU 26 OCT 18:20 NFT2

An Inlet of Muddy Water Nigorie

Japan 1953. Dir Imai Tadashi. With Chikage Awashima, Haruko Sugimura, Yoshiko Kuga, Nobuo Nakamura, Natsuko Kahara. 130min. 35mm. EST. Part of the collection of National Film Center, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

Based on stories by the great 19th-century female writer Ichiyo Higuchi, Tadashi's sensitive, beautifully observed anthology beat even Ozu's *Tokyo Story* to be named best film of 1953 by the Japanese film magazine *Kinema Jumpo*. It presents three devastating portraits of women trapped by injustice and circumstance, with outstanding performances by some of the finest actors of the time.

MON 23 OCT 18:00 NFT2 / SAT 4 NOV 14:50 NFT3

The Eternal Breasts Chibusa yo eien nare

Japan 1955. Dir Kinuyo Tanaka. With Yumeji Tsukioka, Ryoji Hayama, Yuko Sugi, Junkichi Orimoto, Choko Lida, Masayuki Mori, Hiroko Kawasaki. 110min. 35mm. EST. Part of the collection of National Film Center, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

Not only one of Japan's greatest actresses, Kinuyo Tanaka was also the director of six features, including this powerful, frank film about the poet Fumiko Nakajo, who died of breast cancer aged 31 in 1954. Tanaka brings an unmistakably female perspective to recounting Nakajo's life – from divorce through single motherhood, illness and her growing independence in life and love as her literary reputation grows.

SUN 29 OCT 15:45 NFT2 / FRI 3 NOV 18:15 NFT2

Floating Clouds Ukigumo

Japan 1955. Dir Mikio Naruse. With Hideko Takamine, Masayuji Mori, Mariko Okada, Isao Yamagata. 118min. 35mm. EST. 12A

Hideko Takamine was Naruse's great muse as Setsuko Hara was Ozu's and Kinuyo Tanaka was Mizoguchi's, and this searing tale of *amour fou* is their most famous collaboration. Shifting back and forth in time, the film reveals the tumultuous love affair between Yukiko (Takamine) and married Kengo (Mori), who meet during the war, but find they can live neither with nor without one another in peacetime.

THU 2 NOV 18:05 NFT2 / SUN 5 NOV 14:30 NFT2

Elegy of the North Banka

Japan 1957. Dir Heinosuke Gosho. With Yoshiko Kuga, Mieko Takamine, Masayuki Mori, Fumio Watanabe. 130min. 16mm. EST

An actress who worked with many of the greatest directors of Japanese cinema's Golden Age, Yoshiko Kuga gives a performance of great sensitivity in Gosho's exquisitely shot melodrama. Swooning romance meets Modernist alienation as handicapped Reiko (Kuga) becomes infatuated with an architect (Mori) whose marriage has grown cold, and whose wife (Takamine) is having an illicit affair with a student.

SUN 5 NOV 20:00 NFT2 / WED 8 NOV 18:15 NFT2

Tokyo Twilight Tokyo boshoku

Japan 1957. Dir Yasujiro Ozu. With Setsuko Hara, Ineko Arima, Isuzu Yamada, Chishu Ryu, Haruko Sugimura, So Yamamura. 140min. 35mm. EST.PG

Long immortalised as Japan's 'eternal virgin,' Setsuko Hara shows another side to her acting in Ozu's unusually downcast and melodramatic masterwork, which spans teenage pregnancy, abortion and maternal abandonment. Hara plays Takako, the elder of two sisters abandoned by their mother (Yamada) as children. As she deals with her faltering marriage, her younger sister Akiko (Arima) falls into serious trouble.

TUE 7 NOV 20:20 NFT2 / FRI 10 NOV 18:00 NFT2

The Blue Sky Maiden (aka The Cheerful Girl) Ao-Zora Musume

Japan 1957. Dir Yasuzo Masumura. With Ayako Wakao, Keizo Kawasaki, Kenji Sugawara, Ryuji Shinagawa. 88min. 35mm. EST

The influence of Douglas Sirk's contemporary melodramas is unmistakable on Masumura's fresh, colourful and sharply satirical *Cinderella* story, the first in a string of collaborations with the beautiful Ayako Wakao. Here Wakao embodies Japan's new youth, playing an illegitimate daughter who travels to Tokyo to live with her father, only to find his house a seething nest of suspicion and resentment.

MON 13 NOV 18:30 NFT2 / FRI 17 NOV 20:40 NFT2

An Affair at Akitsu (aka Akitsu Springs) Akitsu Onsen

Japan 1962. Dir Yoshishige Yoshida. With Mariko Okada, So Yamamura, Hiroyuki Nagato, Jukichi Uno. 112min. 35mm. EST

Mariko Okada's career bridged both the Golden Age and the New Wave she helped to define in the films she made with her director husband Yoshishige Yoshida. But first came this full-bodied, hauntingly intense melodrama of unrequited love and post-war disillusion, shot in lush widescreen colour, which observes the faltering relationship between a sickly soldier and an innkeeper.

SUN 19 NOV 14:45 NFT2 / TUE 21 NOV 20:45 NFT2

The Shape of Night Yoru no henrin

Japan 1964. Dir Noboru Nakamura. With Miyuki Kuwano, Mikijiro Hira, Keisuke Sonoi. Masuyo Iwamoto. 109min. 35mm. EST

This intoxicating rediscovery follows Yoshie (Kuwano), a woman pushed into prostitution by her violent yakuza boyfriend, in a mode that filters the emotion of Naruse through the daring of Imamura. Gorgeously shot in widescreen, with bold compositions and editing, Nakamura's revelatory film absorbs Douglas Sirk's expressive use of colour, while pointing forward to the lyrical modernism of Wong Kar Wai.

THU 23 NOV 18:10 NFT3 / WED 29 NOV 20:40 NFT2

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- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

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