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Electric Button: Moon & Cherry

When the brightest practitioners of emerging cinemas begin to rest on their laurels and resist courting controversy, you can count on upstart Japanese filmmakers to ratchet up the craziness and set new standards for gratuitous sex and violence. I say that with all due respect for artists whose only concession to good taste – and the peculiarities of Japanese censors — is avoiding pubic hair and genitalia. Released in 2004, but ignored in markets where sex is treated with the same sanctity as brain surgery and prayer vigils, Yuki Tanada's debut feature "**Electric Button: Moon & Cherry**" is an extension of two time-honored Japanese sub-genres, pinku eiga and roman porno. That Tanada is a filmmaker of the female persuasion only added to the potential for a fresh take on conventions dictated by the male-dominated profession. In "Electric Button," the protagonist and first-person narrator is a timid university freshman, Tadokoro, who's been encouraged to join a literary club dedicated to erotic writing. With the exception of one brash and hyperactive young woman, the members of Electric Button are an odd lot of pervs and misfits, some of whom already are on to Mayama's game. The fun begins when Mayama discovers the new kid in class and calls his bluff on some mild sexual braggadocio. Their sexual encounters, which are dictated on her terms, help her overcome a persistent writer's block. Mayama is the rare woman in Japanese genre flicks allowed to have more fun in the sack than a man, and, at first, Takokoro doesn't mind being manipulated and exploited by his classmate. It's when she starts hiring hookers and S&M specialists for him, as research, that the poor sap begins to feel exploited. "Electric Button" is a lot of fun, but no one should confuse it for a Rock Hudson/Doris Day rom-com.

- Gary Dretzka

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