The Bourne Cinema Conspiracy

News, reviews, and eclectic film commentary.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2012

DVD Review: Atsushi Ogata's "Cast Me If You Can"



Cast Me If You Can (Wakiyaku monogatari). 2010. Directed by Atsushi Ogata. Written by Atsushi Ogata and Akane Shiratori. Produced by Atsushi Ogata, Eric Nyari and Eriko Miyagawa. Cinematography by Yuichi Nagata. Edited by Masahiro Onaga. Music

About Me

Author: Christopher Bourne I am a writer on film based NYC, whose work has appea Senses of Cinema, Offscree other film journals. This blo forum for news and comme on world cinema. Asian cine especially Korean, Japanese Chinese, and Hong Kong cin are a major focus. However site will also frequently cov other notable happenings a trends across the globe. Als site will serve as a chronicle my personal exploration of cinema.

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by **Jessica de Rooij**. Art direction by **Kazumi Kobayashi**. Sound design by **Yasushi Eguchi**.

Cast: Toru Masuoka (Hiroshi Matsuzaki), Hiromi Nagasaku (Aya), Masahiko Tsugawa (Kenta Matsuzaki), Keiko Matsuzaka (Toshiko Kuroiwa), Tasuku Emoto (Masaru), Edith Hanson (Jane), Ai Maeda (Sakura), Atsushi Ogata (Convenience Store Manager), Akira Emoto (Homeless).

(Note: this review has been cross-posted on <u>Twitch</u>.)

The Japanese title of Atsushi Ogata's romantic comedy Cast Me If you Can is "Wakiyaku Monogatari," which translates as "Tale of the Supporting Actor." The supporting actor in this particular tale, and the main character in this story, is Hiroshi Matsuzaki (Toru Masuoka), a long-time bit player currently playing a cop on a TV drama. He harbors dreams of finally becoming a leading man, and seems close to that opportunity, having been cast as the lead in a Woody Allen remake. He is very good at disappearing into his roles; in fact, he is so good at this that this ability bleeds into his real life, to the point that he is continually mistaken for other people, a running gag that this film makes potent and funny use of. His struggle to assert his own identity is made even more difficult by having to live under the shadow of his father Kenta (Masahiko Tsugawa), a famous playwright. One case of mistaken identity gets Hiroshi embroiled in a tabloid scandal that threatens his big role, and with the help his friend and wannabe spy Masaru (Tasuku Emoto), he sets out to clear his name. In the midst of this chaos, Hiroshi meets Aya (Hiromi Nagasaku), an aspiring actress; while they begin a tentative courtship, Hiroshi's identity issues and many other distractions threaten their budding relationship.

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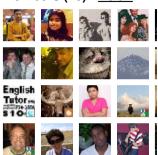
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: 10

With Cast Me If You Can, Ogata attempts a mode of filmmaking which is quite unusual in a Japanese context: an American-style romantic comedy. He employs much more subtle humor than the typical zany, variety-show style slapstick which is more common in Japanese comedies. Instead, Ogata grounds his humor in dialog and situations in which he both honors and tweaks romantic comedy formula, which make the humor that much more potent. One great example is late in the film, in which Hiroshi delivers his passionate confession to Aya in the convenience store where she works; while fulfilling its normal function in this sort of film, the location of the scene, as well as its priceless punchline, also cleverly parodies this often clichéd convention. The films of Woody Allen are an explicitly acknowledged influence, not only in the narrative but in several walk-and-talk camera setups. But similarly to the way Ogata handles the romantic comedy genre, this doesn't at all feel derivative, but is instead nicely woven into the rich fabric of this film. Also remarkable is how exportable and cross-cultural the comedy is here (consciously so; Ogata originally wrote his script in English and translated it to Japanese), and the generosity with which all the characters are treated, which filters down into the smallest roles. The main characters are all surrounded with vivid supporting ones, all of whom make memorable impressions, from Hiroshi's dwarf-like agent and a flirtatious female arresting officer, to a parallel romance involving a café waitress that plays out in pantomime in the background.

As with any romantic comedy, the success of such an endeavor rises and falls on the chemistry between its leads, and *Cast Me If You Can* certainly scores here. Toru Masuoka is nicely understated as the hapless victim of mistaken identity, and effectively renders his

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Cast Me If You Can is now available on DVD from Seminal Films, and can be purchased at Amazon.

Also, if you're in the L.A. area, there will be a screening and Q&A with director Atsushi Ogata and producer Eriko Miyagawa on March 1, hosted by USC and the Japan Film Society. Click here for screening info.



Posted by Author: Christopher Bourne at 5:44 PM



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> World Film Festivals
> It's all about the looks

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A.I. Bezzerides (1)

Aaron Woolfolk (1) Abel Ferrara (1) Aditya Assarat (2) Adolfo Alix Jr. (2) African Diaspora Film Fe: Agnes Varda (1) Alain Resnais (1) Alberto Lattuada (1) Allan King (1) Andrea Arnold (1) Andrew Bujalski (1) Animation (1) Anne Sewitsky (1) Articles (1) Arvin Chen (2) Asian-American Internati Film Festival (4) Athina Rachel Tsangari (* Atsushi Ogata (1) Avant-Garde/Experiment Cinema (1) Awards (4) Bae Youn Suk (1) BAMcinemaFEST (1) **Barry Jenkins** (1) Bela Tarr (1) Best Japanese Films of tl (4) Best Korean Films of the Bradley Rust Gray (1) Brian De Palma (1) **Brigitte Rouan** (1) Bruno Dumont (2) **Buichi Saito** (1) Byun Young-joo (1) Canadian Cinema (1)

Cannes Film Festival (11) Carlos Reygadas (1) Carlos Saura (1) Celina Murga (2) Chadi Zeneddine (1) Charles Burnett (1) Chen Kuo-fu (1) Chen Yu-hsun (1) Cheng Yu-chieh (1) Cherien Dabis (1) Chinese Cinema (5) <u>Cho Li</u> (1) Chris Martinez (1) Christian Petzold (1) <u>Christophe Farnarier</u> (1) Christopher Nolan (1) Chung Mong-hong (1) Claire Denis (2) Claude Chabrol (1) Claudia Llosa (1) Conrad Clark (1) ContemporAsian (1) Courtney Hunt (1) Daggers (1) Daniel Day-Lewis (1) Danielle Arbid (1) Danish Cinema (1) David Kaplan (1) Dee Rees (1) Denis Cote (1) <u>Denis Villeneuve</u> (1) Director's Fortnight (3) **Documentaries** (9) Dominique Cabrera (1) **Duane Hopkins** (1) **DVD New Releases** (7)

DVD Reviews (29) E J-yong (1) Edwin (1) Enrique Rivero (1) Eric Rohmer (1) Eriko Kitagawa (1) Etgar Keret and Shira Ge Fernando Eimbcke (1) Filipino Cinema (2) Film Comment Selects (6 Film Festivals (79) Film Series/Retrospectiv Frances-Anne Solomon (1 Frederick Wiseman (1) French Cinema (4) Gen Takahashi (1) Giancarlo Esposito (1) Gianni Di Gregorio (1) Gina Kim (1) Greg Mottola (1) Gregg Araki (1) Ha Kil-chong (1) Hajime Kadoi (1) Hakon Liu (1) Helene Lee (1) Herman Yau (1) Hideo Sakaki (1) Hirokazu Kore-eda (1) Hisayasu Sato (1) Hitoshi Matsumoto (2) Hitoshi Yazaki (1) Hong Kong Cinema (5) Hong Sang-soo (3) Hou Chi-jan (1) Huh In-moon (1) Hungarian Cinema (1)

Hwang Dong-hyuk (1) Im Kwon-taek (1) Interviews (3) Irish Cinema (1) <u>Isao Yukisada</u> (1) Italian Cinema (1) James Gray (1) James Lee (1) James Toback (1) Jang Hun (1) Jang In-hak (1) Japan Cuts Festival (17) Japanese Cinema (44) Japanese Cinema Classic Jarreth Merz (1) Jason Eisener (1) Jason Reitman (1) Jean-Claude Brisseau (1) Jean-Luc Godard (1) Jean-Paul Lilienfeld (1) Jeff Mizushima (1) Jeon Do-yeon (1) Jeong Yong-gi (1) Jessica Oreck (1) Jia Zhang-ke (4) Jo Kyong-sun (1) Joe Swanberg (1) Joel Coen and Ethan Coe John Carney (1) John Kani (1) Johnnie To (1) Jonathan King (1) <u>Julian Schnabel</u> (2) Julie Delpy (1) Jun Tsugita (1) Jung Bum-sik and Jung S

Justin Lin (1) Kaneto Shindo (1) Kaori Momoi (1) Kathryn Bigelow (1) Kazuo Kuroki (1) Khaled Youssef (1) Kim Han-min (1) Kim Hong-joon (1) Kim Ji-hoon (1) Kim Jin-won (1) Kim Ki-duk (2) Kim Ki-young (1) Kim Kil-in (1) Kim Myung-joon (1) Kim Sung-woo (1) Kim Yong-hwa (1) Kira Muratova (1) Kiyoshi Kurosawa (2) Koji Fukada (1) Koji Yakusho (1) Koki Mitani (1) Kon Ichikawa (1) Kondej Jaturanrasmee (1 Korean American Film Fe New York (1) Korean Cinema (46) Korean Cinema Blogatho Korean Cinema Classics (Koreyoshi Kurahara (1) Kwak Ji-kyun (1) Lars von Trier (1) Laurel Nakadate (1) Lee Chang-jae (1) Lee Chung-ryoul (2) Lee Isaac Chung (2) Lee Joon-ik (3)

Lee Kwang-mo (1) Lee Man-hee (1) Lee Myung-se (2) Lee Sang-il (1) Lee Seo-goon (1) Lee Seung-han (1) Lee Song Hee-il (1) Lee Yong-min (1) Lee Yoon-ki (2) Leslie Cockburn (1) Li Ying (2) Liew Seng Tat (2) Lin Tay-jou (1) Lisandro Alonso (1) Lixin Fan (1) Lynn Shelton (1) Malaysian Cinema (3) Martin Scorsese (1) Masahiro Kobayashi (2) Masayuki Suo (1) Matt Tyrnauer (1) Menelik Shabazz (1) Mikio Naruse (1) Miwa Nishikawa (1) Moon Geun-yeong (1) Morakot Kaewthanee (1) Nadia Hallgren (1) Naomi Kawase (1) Navot Papsushado (1) New Directors/New Film: New Releases (34) New York Asian Film Fest New York Film Festival (New York Korean Film Fe News (10) Nobuhiro Yamashita (1)

North Korean Cinema (2) Norwegian Cinema (1) Oliver Stone (1) Olivier Assayas (1) Online Viewing (1) Osamu Sato (1) Oscar Micheaux (1) Ounie Lecomte (1) Panna Rittikrai (1) Park Chan-wook (2) Park Chul-soo (1) Park Jin-pyo (1) Park Kwang-su (1) Patrick Tam (1) Paul Schrader (2) Paul Thomas Anderson (1 Pen-ek Ratanaruang (4) Peter Greenaway (2) Philippe Diaz (1) Pierre Vinour (1) Pierre-Yves Borgeaud (1) Pink Film (2) Piraphan Laoyont (1) Press Conferences (1) Pusan International Film (4) Quentin Tarantino (1) Ra Hee-chan (1) Ramin Bahrani (1) Rebecca Zlotowski (1) Review Archive (3) Reviews (162) Rinako Hirasawa (1) Risa Morimoto (1) Rodrigo Pla (1) Roh Gyeong-tae (1)

Ronald Bronstein (1) Roy Andersson (1) Ruben Fleischer (1) Ryoo Seung-wan (1) Ryosuke Hashiguchi (1) <u>Sabu</u> (2) Sacha Baron Cohen (1) Sam Raimi (1) Scott Frank (1) Screenings (9) Sean Baker (1) Sebastian Silva (1) Sergey Dvortsevoy (1) Shane Meadows (1) Shen Ko-shang (2) Shin Han-sol (1) Shin Sang-ok (2) Shin Su-won (1) Shinya Tsukamoto (2) Shohei Imamura (3) Shuji Kataoka (1) Sidney Lumet (2) So Sang-min (1) So Yong Kim (3) Song Il-gon (1) Sophie Fiennes (1) Spike Jonze (1) Sterlin Harjo (1) Steve McQueen (2) Steven Soderbergh (1) Taiwanese Cinema (12) Takashi Miike (1) Tan Chui Mui (1) Tatsuya Nakadai (1) Terence Davies (1)

Tetsuya Nakashima (1)

Thai Cinema (6)
The Bourne Cinema Film
(16)
Thospol Siriwiwat (1)
Tia Lessin and Carl Deal
<u>Top 40 Films of 2009</u> (7)
Toshio Masuda (1)
Tribeca Film Festival (2)
Tsai Ming-liang (3)
<u>UK Cinema</u> (3)
<u>Ulrich Seidl</u> (1)
<u>Ursula Meier</u> (1)
<u>US Cinema</u> (24)
<u>Vladimir Kott</u> (1)
Wai Ka-fai (1)
Wayne Wang (1)
Wes Anderson (3)
Wilson Yip (1)
Wisit Sasanatieng (3)
Wong Kar-wai (1)
Yang Heng (1)
Yang Ik-june (1)
Yang Joo-nam (1)
<u>Yau Nai-hoi</u> (1)
Ye Daying (1)
Yim Soon-rye (3)
<u>Yoji Yamada</u> (3)
<u>Yojiro Takita</u> (1)
Yonghi Yang (1)
Yoon Je-kyun (1)
Yoshihiro Nishimura (1)
Youssef Chahine (1)
Yu Irie (1)
Yuki Tanada (1)
Zero Chou (1)
Zhang Chi (1)

Zhang Lu (1)

Blog Archive

- **▼** 2012 (5)
 - ► March (3)
 - ► February (1)
 - ▼ January (1)

DVD Review: Atsushi ("Cast Me If You Can

- **2011** (28)
- **▶** 2010 (20)
- **2009 (71)**
- **2008** (36)
- **2007** (56)

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