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'Cast me if you can': A comedy of oddballs

A pantie thief, a poker-faced jailer and a dwarf-like agent are just three of the strange characters that clash in Japanese director Atsushi Ogata's new film

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By [Melinda Joe](#) (author/melinda-joe) 18 November, 2010

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Toru Masuoka's impression of Woody Allen is pretty convincing -- and it's not all about the glasses.

A delightful sense of randomness pervades "[Cast Me if You Can](http://wakiyakuthemovie.com/) (<http://wakiyakuthemovie.com/>)," the quirky new romantic comedy by up-and-coming Japanese writer and director Atsushi Ogata.

When a concerned neighbor stumbles upon the film's lovesick protagonist Hiroshi, drunk and dressed in a police uniform, the man mistakenly identifies Hiroshi as the pervert who's been stealing lingerie from the ladies in the area.

Hiroshi denies the accusation and adds, "Go away, or I'll charge you with obstruction of justice."

It's a witty remark made even funnier by actor Toru Masuoka's delivery and the reaction of the pajama-clad neighbor, who swiftly removes his slipper, hits Hiroshi with it, and demands the return of his wife's underwear.

You don't have to be Japanese to appreciate the movie's offbeat sense of humor. In fact, you don't even have to speak Japanese to laugh at the jokes: The film is being screened in Tokyo in Japanese with English subtitles.



Ogata's emotionally closed protagonist Hiroshi is a cross between Jack Nicholson in "As Good as It Gets" and Bill Murray in "Groundhog Day."

International humor influence

"We were told that Japanese audiences wouldn't want to see a movie with subtitles," says Ogata. "But the script was initially written in English, and the post-production was done in Los Angeles and Holland."

Ogata, who has lived and worked in Japan, the United States, Germany and The Netherlands, collaborated with an international crew to create the film.

In both theme and execution, "Cast Me if You Can" reflects Ogata's own unique, cross-cultural background. The Japanese native speaks rapid-fire

English tinged with a slight New York accent and cites Woody Allen as one of his biggest influences.

"As an artist, I'm trying to take advantage of the fact that my peculiar way of living is neither Japanese nor American, but universal," he explains.

He spent the majority of his adolescent years in the United States. After graduating from Harvard University, he

repatriated to Japan to work as a software developer for the computer firm Fujitsu.

"That was the first time I experienced culture shock," he recalls.



Hula lessons in Japan are just like this, minus the guy in funky glasses.

Escaping the salaryman life

Dissatisfied with life as a salaryman, he pursued photography and experimented with Super 8 film in his spare time. He later heeded the advice of a friend and applied to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he studied video art before attending acting school in New York City.

Ogata hadn't intended to go into comedy. For years, he traveled through Europe making somber, meditative videos featuring landscapes and natural scenes. He also started writing scripts for dramas and thrillers, but, somehow,

all of his projects evolved into comedies.

"It must have been something about my delivery -- or maybe lack of awareness -- that made people think it was funny, even when it was something serious," he says.

His first big acting break came in 2005 when he landed the part of a zany scorekeeper on a weekly Dutch quiz show. The role mainly consisted of translating segments of the program into Japanese while wearing elaborate, outlandish outfits, but Ogata had the audience in stitches every time.

In both "Cast Me if You Can" and his critically acclaimed short film "Eternally Yours" (2006), Ogata has tried to focus on common themes that people of all cultures can relate to.



Ogata focuses on the comedy, but he hasn't forgotten the romance.

Mistaken identity

"Cast Me if You Can" explores issues of societal expectations and family relationships in a lighthearted way.

The film stars Toru Masuoka ("Chiesu: Kokuzei Sasatsukan," "Yokohama Hideo Sasupensu") as a supporting actor named Hiroshi struggling in the shadow of his famous father. After a case of mistaken identity costs him the lead in the movie of his dreams, Hiroshi meets Aya, played by the plucky young actress Hiromi Nagasaku ("Sukida," "Hito no Sekkusu o Warauna"), the one person who sees him for who he truly is.

Through his relationship with Aya, Hiroshi learns to step into the leading role of his own life.

The film is full of oddball characters -- a deadpan female jailer, Hiroshi's dwarf-like agent, the cheating wife of an MP -- and wacky situations. Hiroshi gets mistaken for everyone from a salesclerk to a kidnapper, and his schemes usually end up going awry.

While most Japanese comedies are derivations of variety shows that rely heavily on straightforward slapstick, Ogata attempts to create more situation-based, dialog-driven comedy in "Cast Me if You Can."

A lot of Japanese comedy is about making fun of the dumb guy," says Ogata. "But I find so many things funny about life."

For his next project, Ogata plans to work on an English-language con caper. "Cast Me if You Can" is showing at Human Trust Cinema in Yurakucho.

Human Trust Cinema, 2-7-1 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku, tel. +81 (3) 6259 8608, <http://meturl.com/human> (<http://meturl.com/human>)



/author/melinda-joe

Hi, I'm Melinda Joe. Originally from Louisiana, I'd only planned to stay in Japan for a year when I fell in love with Japanese food and sake. The rest, as they say, is history.

Read more about **Melinda Joe** (/author/melinda-joe)

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