

企業のエンドポイントセキュリティはESET(イーセット)で解決!! セキュリティ・ウイルス対策ソフトならESET(イーセット)

ESET Smart Security 4
 ESET NOD32 Antivirus 4

実績 ESET SECURITY
 企業・教育機関での導入実績多数あり!!

Canon
 キヤノン IT ソリューションズ株式会社

詳しくはこちら

PRINT E-MAIL

Like

0

Share

Friday, Oct. 29, 2010



Shooting stars: Masahiko Tsugawa, Hiromi Nagasaki and Toru Masuoka enact a scene from "Wakiyaku Monogatari (Cast Me if You Can)," the feature film debut by Atsushi Ogata. © DREAM ON PRODUCTIONS

ENTERTAINMENT SPOTLIGHT

Playing it for laughs the understated way

New director forges a fresh direction in Japanese comedy

By **YUNG-HSIANG KAO**

Staff writer

It is 3 p.m. in a quiet, residential neighborhood in Tokyo. A lady in a red dress stands by the side of a narrow street in front of a house, her hair held back and her face shielded from the sun by a woman holding a parasol.

A man wearing a baseball cap says, "Honban desu!"

The call is repeated by some of the 40 or so people gathered outside the house and a hush falls upon the crowd.

Suddenly, a strong gust of wind blows, causing another man to call for a delay. After half a minute, the wind grows calm, and the man with the baseball cap reminds everyone that what follows is the next take, the real thing: "Honban desu!"

Another voice speaks, in English: "Rolling . . . action!"

The voice is that of Atsushi Ogata, directing his first feature-length film, "Wakiyaku Monogatari" (literally, the tale of the supporting actor), known

playup
 WHERE SPORT GETS SOCIAL
 Download App Now

100
 Next-Era
 CEOs
 IN ASIA 2011

weekend scene Snap your way into The Japan Times

Keep an eye on the PULSE of JAPAN

Ready to expand your horizons and study in Japan? A GUIDE TO Japanese Colleges AND Universities
 Here's your resource for locating the educational institutions and curriculum best suited to you and your goals.

Seigakuin University

Where students, faculty and staff join in the pursuit of truth and service to others.



internationally as "Cast Me if You Can."

Ogata is slightly built, ponytailed and talks quickly with a New York accent peppered by a self-conscious chuckle. He also wrote the script for and has a small acting role in the film, which he describes as a "socially conscious comedy." It tells the story of Hiroshi, a supporting actor in a TV police drama who finally lands a leading role in a movie.



Atsushi Ogata MANAKO YAMAGUCHI PHOTO

The film, in Japanese with English subtitles at all showings in Tokyo and at select venues elsewhere, started its theatrical run in Japan on Oct. 23. During that first visit to the set on a windy day in July 2009, I found that, whatever the film's box office success will be, "Wakiyaku Monogatari" may well be remembered in the future for pioneering a new way of making Japanese cinema.

Though made by a Japanese director with a mainly Japanese cast and crew, the sensibilities and style are unlike contemporary Japanese films. "Recent films are just too slow and depressing, and I don't really see the point of them," Ogata says, adding that there is a dearth of witty comedies in Japanese cinema, which are "usually kind of more slapstick."

Masahiko Tsugawa, 70, the most famous star involved in "Wakiyaku Monogatari," has acted in more than 150 films and has also directed, following in the footsteps of his famous cinematic family, including his grandfather Shozo Makino, known as the "father of Japanese film."

"Though Atsushi is a new director, he is able to direct actors, to tell them not to overact," Tsugawa says. In Japan, "actors are usually told to act more. When you're told to hold back, it's very refreshing."

Tsugawa portrays a famous playwright whose success towers over his son, Hiroshi, played by Toru Masuoka. Masuoka, 54, in his first-ever leading role in a feature-length film, was the first choice to play Hiroshi, having worked with Ogata while having had a productive career as a supporting actor.

"Working on this film gave me the opportunity to think about how film can be and should be," Masuoka says. "This film has no particular accident or big incident, nobody has an illness — it's a comedy that very carefully follows the inside shifts in each character. Maybe this is what cinema should be."

"It reminded me that a big budget doesn't necessarily make a good film. It's all about the idea the director has and the crew he works with that can make a good film. That's the meaning of independent filmmaking."

How it all came together starts with Ogata's background.

Born in Japan, Ogata and his sister moved to New York when Ogata was 13 because of their parents' work. His mother, Sadako, is a former diplomat to the United Nations who later became the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and is the president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency. His father, Shijuro, is a former deputy governor for international relations of the Bank of Japan. However, Ogata would rather not be recognized for being the son of famous parents but for being an artist, something with which the protagonist of "Wakiyaku Monogatari" also struggles.

After graduating from Harvard University, Ogata attended the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Later, working in Europe, mostly in Holland, creating videos and writing scripts, he

Recommendations

Sign Up

Create an account or [log in](#) to see what your friends are recommending.



Japanese must tap their 'inner Israeli' | The Japan Times Online

203 people recommend this.



Rice takes prized, symbolic yearend form | The Japan Times Online

161 people recommend this.



Mothers first to shed food-safety complacency | The Japan Times Online

41 people recommend this.



Taiji officials: Dolphin meat 'toxic waste' | The Japan Times Online

157 people recommend this.



Year of the dragon — it'll be a hot one | The Japan Times Online

54 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

Poll Most read stories Editors' picks

A piece of your mind

Death of Kim Jong Il

The recent death of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Il could [potentially create a political crisis for various nations](#). What's your take on the situation?

- I'm definitely worried about the power vacuum.**
- It's too early to say which way things will swing.**
- I hope his successor will be able to change his country for the better.**
- The U.S., Japan and South Korea should be aggressive about opening up the**
- I doubt the party line will change much.**

VOTE

Total Votes : 3652

[View past polls](#)

started acting on TV, in his own performance videos and in other people's works.

However, it was the release in 2006 of the 15-minute short film "Furochoju," known internationally as "Eternally Yours," which he wrote and directed, that allowed Ogata to make "Wakiyaku Monogatari." Family circumstances meant Ogata was spending more time in Japan, so he made the film, about a con man and an elderly woman, using Japanese actors for the first time — including Masuoka.

After writing the English subtitles himself, Ogata entered "Furochoju" in festivals overseas. The first to accept it was the prestigious New Directors/New Films festival in March 2007 in New York. It was the only Japanese entry that year, gaining attention from local Japanese-language media.

"(Then) I started writing (a feature-length script) and I had this image of Masuoka-san in a police uniform," Ogata says. "So I was writing it quite organically. The father-son relationship is a little like my own relationship with my father."

However, the first drafts "were all over the place," Ogata says.

With a slimmed-down script, New York film restoration company Cineric came on board as producers, via father-son team Balazs and Eric Nyari. Eriko Miyagawa, who had worked on "Kill Bill: Vol. 1" and "Lost in Translation," also became a producer. Ogata then tried to get a Japanese production company to join them.

"But in Japan, most of the main studios have not (recently) taken original scripts from new filmmakers. They take existing popular novels and existing popular manga and try to market it, combine it with TV celebrities who are not particularly good actors — it's just so commercial," Ogata says.

So Ogata and the producers raised the money to make and publicize "Wakiyaku Monogatari" by holding fundraising screenings of "Furochoju" (some jointly sponsored by the Yale Club of Japan and the Harvard Club of Japan, Ogata's alma mater), and applying to the Agency for Cultural Affairs for assistance, ultimately raising a budget of around \$1 million.

In the meantime, work continued on polishing the script. "Initially, I was writing the script in English," Ogata says, so he had to translate it. Then there was the problem that the characters had to sound like real Japanese people talking, but Ogata's translations sounded more like New Yorkers.

Ogata found help in Akane Shiratori, a board member of the Japan Screenwriters Association whom he met at a screening of "Furochoju." Ogata says that Shiratori got more interested and involved in the project, going from script editor to co-scriptwriter to casting director.

"We had Masuoka-san, but we couldn't find anyone who would fit Aya," Ogata says, referring to the lady in red, the lead female role. "Most Japanese pop idol-type actresses, in their early 20s, who are very popular, they're really not good actresses. They look too much like girls, and we really wanted somebody for Aya who's somewhere between a girl and a woman. So, Shiratori-san had this great idea to cast Hiromi Nagasaki."

Shiratori also suggested that Tsugawa might be willing to play the father character. "She had worked with him since he was 16. So basically through her contacts we got those (roles filled)."

The film's veteran makeup artist, Nana Kozakai, also took the script to three-time Japanese Academy Best Actress winner Keiko Matsuzaka. Ten days later, she joined the cast.

After completing the film in late 2009, Ogata took it to several festivals, with its world premiere in June at the Shanghai International Film Festival, where it was in competition for the Asia New Talent Award.

"Wakiyaku Monogatari" contains comic elements and touching moments while subtly grappling with societal issues in families and in society at large.

"You try to have (a film) that says something about the society," Ogata says. "Also, one of the themes in this film is that we have three generations of people. To make a film that gives hope to people, that shows them connecting with each other, this is one of the things that I'm trying to do with the film, something that hopefully gives encouragement and hope to society as well.

"It might also make people laugh about their own life — in Japan, there are so many people committing suicide each day; the society's so fixed, it's not mobile; everybody's so age-conscious; the expectations. (But) you can actually have, like, a fun life; you can actually laugh at yourself, laugh at your misery.

"Most people are not playing leading roles: They're marginalized," Ogata adds. "It's your life: You have to take charge and make it better."

"*Wakiyaku Monogatari (Cast Me if You Can)*" is now playing with English subtitles at Human Trust Cinema Yurakucho in Tokyo and other cities. See www.wakiyakuthemovie.com for detailed listings.

Other films this week



When You're Strange
Reality is stranger than fiction
 By GIOVANNI FAZIO



All God's Children Can Dance
Dancing in sync with the original
 By KAORI SHOJI



Raiou (The Lightning Tree)
Feudal romance avoids cliches
 By MARK SCHILLING



Interview
DICillo opens the doors
 By GIOVANNI FAZIO

PRINT E-MAIL

Like

0

Share

[Beautiful Moldovan Women](#)

Find True Love with a Moldova Woman
 Dynamic Response. Fast & Secure.

Anastasia-Date.com

[Nuclear disaster in Japan](#)

Current situation in Fukushima. Read the
 latest news on RT.com

rt.com

[Brides from Cuba](#)

1000s Women from Cuba and Latin
 America to Date & Marry.

AmoLatina.com

AdChoices



We welcome your opinions. Click to send a message to the editor.

The Japan Times
 (C) All rights reserved

[Back to top](#)

[About us](#) | [Work for us](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Link policy](#) | [Registration FAQ](#)

Advertise in japantimes.co.jp.

This site has been optimized for modern browsers. Please make sure that Javascript is enabled in your browser's preferences.

The Japan Times Ltd. All rights reserved.