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## DVD Review: CAST ME IF YOU CAN, Romantic Comedy From Atsushi Ogata



by [Christopher Bourne](#), January 27, 2012 1:59 PM

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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 Nagasaki), an aspiring actress; while they begin a tentative courtship, Hiroshi's identity issues and many other distractions threaten their budding relationship.

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 character's transformation as love is introduced into his life. But the major standout is Hiromi Nagasaku, who is terrific as a plucky and energetic young woman who is relentless in the pursuit of her dreams, and who lights up every scene she is in with her warm and irresistibly sunny persona.

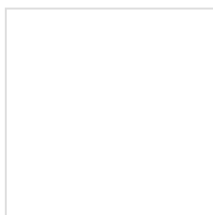
**Special Screening:** If you live in or near Los Angeles, please note a special screening and Q&A with director Atsushi Ogata and producer Eriko Miyagawa will be held on March 1, hosted by USC and the Japan Film Society. [Screening information.](#)

*Cast Me If You Can* is now available on DVD from Seminal Films.

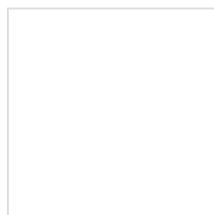
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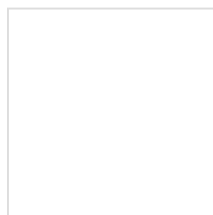
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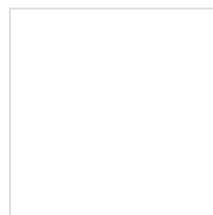
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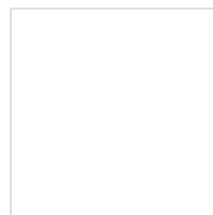
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by [Kurt Halfyard](#), March 23, 2012 7:53 AM

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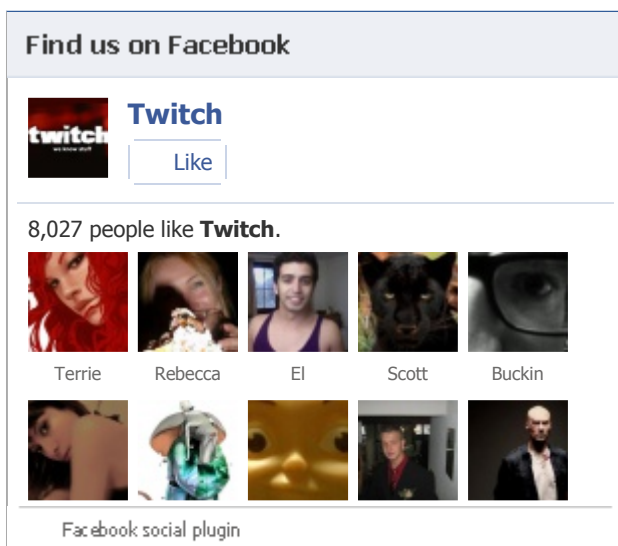
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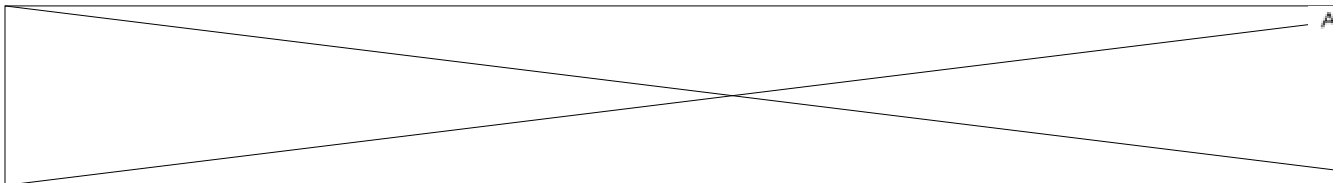
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