



Bondi Tsunami, the cult Japanese Surfing Road Movie, shot in Australia, challenges conventional film making on a multitude of levels. Bedroom film maker Rachael Lucas tells LIND how she derived a new style of film making from the zen nature of pop music videos.

The film follows the surfing adventures of four punked-up manga-inspired characters; Shark (Taki Abe), Yuto (Keita Abe), Kimiko (Miki Sasaki) and the mysterious Gunja Man (Nobu-Hisa Ikeda) as they travel up the east coast of Oz in a vintage 1961 EK Holden stationwagon.

Bondi Tsunami is widely considered to be the first internationally recognised Australian film to be finished on Final Cut Pro to DVD. The growing global cult popularity of Bondi Tsunami will inevitably open the doors for other low budget film makers to make commercially viable movies with DV cameras and home based computer set ups.

However the success of Bondi Tsunami still rests on the merit of its idea. The Japanese surfing subculture is one of the biggest in the world (a \$5 billion a year industry) and no one has made a cult Japanese surfing movie yet. Also, the Japanese surfer is perhaps the ultimate pop archetype of the now, symbolic of the globe trotting 20 somethings of today; the non-communicative, commitment free generation that drift between work, study and travel. The Japanese working holiday experience is a metaphor for this phenomena of soul searching self centered youth.

Bondi Tsunami was originally designed for the Macdonalds generation (born in the 70's) and the Nintendo generation (born in the 80's); a demographic raised by television that is commonly perceived to have the attention span of a goldfish. The film works within the premise that its audience is not governed by the narrative form, but rather the mesmerising, escapist stimuli of the mass media; computer games, amusement parlours, the bright lights of shopping malls and the fast food chains.

Bondi Tsunami is a stylish chill-out movie that can be viewed as ephemeral eye candy in the same dream-like escapist way that people flick through magazines, or television stations, without having to understand or engage with them. The film is basically a series of slick music video sequences that are held together by a basic story and soundtrack that includes Japanese style pop, dub, soundscape, dance, country and Hawaiian. The film transgresses all language barriers as feelings of the characters are expressed by the sonic cues in the music. There is a viewer controlled level intellectual engagement and aesthetic content can be absorbed on a highly sophisticated or subconscious level depending on the perceptive skills of the viewer.



ZEN AND THE ART OF THE MUSIC VIDEO

Making films is no easy task, especially when you're working in a foreign language with no conventional script, no experienced actors, no rehearsals, a crew of three, a micro budget and you've never made a feature film before - but the flip side of this is, whatever you do will inevitably be quite cutting edge.

Bondi Tsunami is the first Japanese surfing road movie in the world. This shoe-string budget feature film is highly visual, surreal, sensual and dreamlike - a guerrilla style DV-feature that is essentially a by product of the 'do it yourself' digital film making revolution. The film is a unique juxtaposition of Japanese and Australian iconography, a conceptual work born of the MTV world, where the nothingness of zen, surfing, landscape, fashion and music video meet.



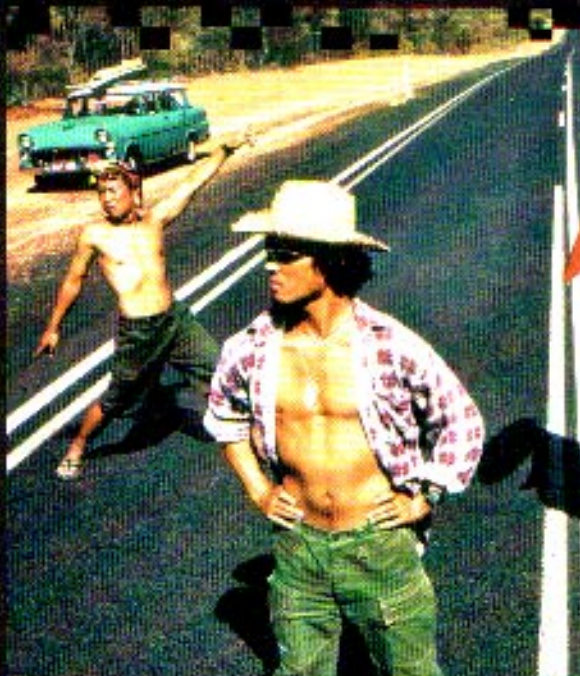
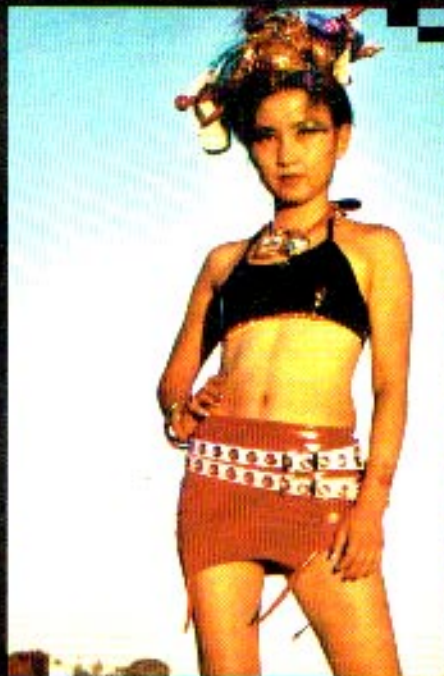
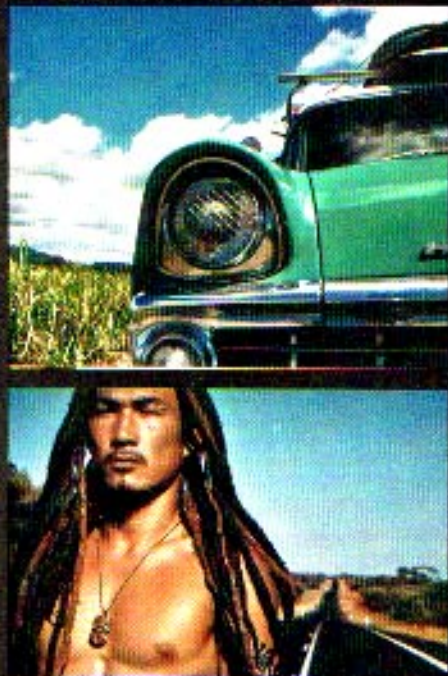
Bondi Tsunami is layered with multiple messaging - on the superficial eye candy level, it is a highly camp, childish and humorous satire on the animated nature of all that is Japanese and 'Oz'. On the deep, dark and profound level, it is an apocalyptic vision of an artificial Oz that exists somewhere between tourism imagery, surf culture, advertising and cyberspace. Oz is represented as a paradise and hell, a surreal magical theme park of palm trees, mysterious orange rocks, a fake story book blue sky, vast landscapes, giant fruit, manga-like Opera Houses and coat hanger bridges; the perfect laconic, zen-like environment for millennium travellers to find or lose themselves. The cast are all visually stunning to watch when filmed against the sacred 'void' of the Australian landscape. Bondi Tsunami is as much about the zen nature of Japanese and Australian aesthetics as it is about the zen nature of surfing, travelling and the format of pop music videos

THE IMAGE ATTITUDE, FASHION AND FEELINGS OF BONDI TSUNAMI ARE EVERYTHING

In recent years, it has become fashionable for bars, cafes, pubs and night clubs to run sport, music videos or movies on large silent screens as a means of background visual entertainment. Chatting patrons subconsciously drift in and out of watching the footage, which is often mismatched with techno music playing in the background. Bondi Tsunami has been designed with this premise in mind and is full of lavish, mesmerising colour and eye candy that the audience can literally tune in and out of.

As a DVD, viewers have the option of watching the movie in order or, putting the movie on 'shuffle mode' to play a random selection of tracks - not unlike karaoke. Interestingly, some scenes in Bondi Tsunami bear close reference to the melodramatic, contrived and often corny emotive style of Asian karaoke and music video footage.

The conflicting form of Bondi Tsunami with the traditional film is similar to the phenomena of subliminal electronic dance tracks with traditional pop songs. Electronic music that has no words, no meaning, just sounds and samples, meditating on a beat that defies explanation but evokes feeling. Interestingly it sells. The commercial music market has embraced what is essentially a very abstract form. Bondi Tsunami is a filmmakers response to this movement. Events are not linear to a realistic journey bordering on science fiction. But this agenda is perfect for the Japanese market - where 'the look' is everything and the package is often more important than what's in it and style is substance. The image, attitude, fashion and feelings of the Bondi Tsunami are everything, merely heightening the fleeting, ephemeral, unexplainable and empty moments in life where what we see and what we seem becomes a dream. To date Bondi Tsunami has had more resonance with music and fashion taste makers than film industry imperialists. The film takes its inspiration primarily from advertising and music video and its unique fusion of image, music and mixed culture has caught the attention of the popular mass media.

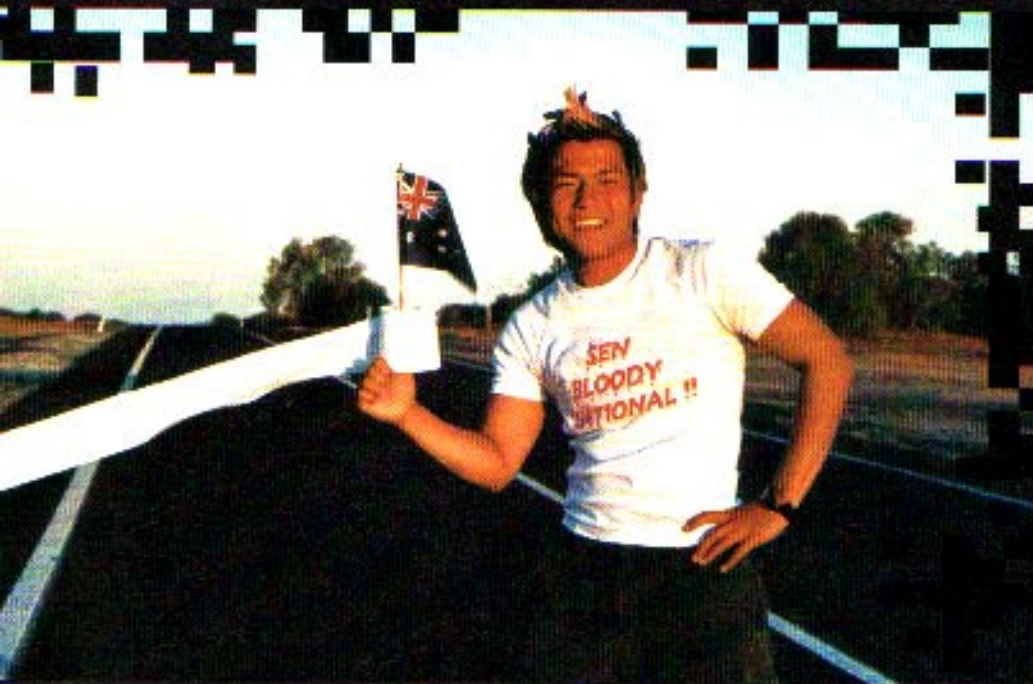


Bondi Tsunami defies conventional Western analysis on many levels; Western films are primarily audited by a cohesive, consecutive journey of actions and reactions that lead to a point of climax and conclusion. Easterners are not highly analytical people, they are not perplexed by the need for answers, indications or the need to quantify the mysteries of life with science and physical rationale. Easterners don't have an innate need to construct depth or react to their emotions in their films like westerners. They find truth in the obvious, the silences between words and the spaces between the lines, which makes them profound. They are more concerned with 'being' than knowing, having or winning. The art of stating the obvious has post modernist existential connotations in the west, but from a zen perspective there is a desirable, childlike 'purity' that arises when the mind confronts information without explanation. The void or 'emptiness' is a pure state of being for the Japanese, as the mind is open to infinite possibilities. When you're working with a minimalist crew and cast with no preconceptions of how films should be made and plenty of tape to burn, you have the freedom of spontaneity, the ability to veer off on bazaar whimsical tangents.

In Bondi Tsunami we had to continuously modify the script to suit the Japanese cast who had never acted before, as well as the remote locations and technical logistics of shooting with only one camera and a standard tripod. Most of the footage was shot on the run, hand held to save time consuming set ups, to catch good light and detract public attention. We were able to avoid permits by working this way as our crew were no more obtrusive than a group of tourists. We were able to move around quickly and adjust the script to suit what was working in the moment. By working in the moment, we were able to capture truths that would have been impossible to have either written or foreseen in the script. We would often hand the camera over to the cast so that they could film themselves in the car to save time while travelling between towns. The results were both spectacular and hilarious and the movie began to evolve from drama to bizarre satire.

The Japanese have an innate sense of theatrical style yet strangely enough share a similar sense of paradox and irony to Australians. Australians and Japanese understand the understated, particularly when it comes to humour and all that is cute and surreal. This is most explicitly expressed in Bondi Tsunami in the scene where Yuto surfs past the Big Pineapple, Big Banana and Big Prawn on the top of the moving Holden.

The bizarre aesthetics of the Big things are entirely Japanese in their cuteness and entirely Australian in their surrealism. If you look at Japanese theatre (Kabuki, Noh etc) or any Japanese aesthetic (sushi platters, geisha girls, Japanese gardens) it becomes obvious that Japanese style is often a complete exaggeration on anything that is real or natural. The sushi platter is a highly stylised palate of perfectly sliced fish. The Japanese geisha is a living doll, an exaggeration of female beauty. Likewise in the movie, Kimiko is a modern high fashion version of the Japanese geisha. She is a punked-up Kabuki doll. Yuto, Shark and Gunja Man share a similar cartoon-like disposition. Ironically, they could all just be mistaken for a bunch of Tokyo fashion victims! This artificial sense of presentation pervades most aspects of Japanese pop culture and is the basis for the hyper-world of Bondi Tsunami. The film is pervaded by a forced visual and sonic perspective, rich colours and shifts in time and space which force a mesmerising, zen-like disposition upon the viewer; it is a sensory feast that will entertain, challenge and inspire viewers on a multitude of levels. 



Bondi Tsunami tours Australia and Japan in summer 2003/04
Vote for Bondi Tsunami to screen in your town:

www.bonditsunami.com.au