

Premiere Japan 06 プレミア・ジャパン06

– First in Translation –

New Japanese Cinema at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), 195 Piccadilly, London W1J 9LN, 22-24 September 2006

Review by Sean Curtin



This year's highly popular annual three-day Japanese film festival, Premiere Japan 06, showcased some excellent films and the event is rapidly becoming an important fixture of the London movie-going scene. As in previous years, the well attended event was organized by the Embassy of Japan and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. Both organizations are keen to highlight Japan's dazzling spectrum of cinematic talents.

Japan has a vibrant home-grown movie industry which produces somewhere in the region of 250 to 300 films a year, about four times the number of their British counterparts. Despite such a prodigious output, only a tiny fraction of these movies are ever seen by British audiences, something this annual event tries to rectify.

As in past festivals, there was a very diverse selection of new Japanese movies from different genres, this time ranging from fantasy tales to gritty reality dramas. The majority of these productions were selected by the well known East Asian film critic, Tony Rayns, and gave the audience a real feel for the current themes Japanese filmmakers are exploring.

Amongst this year's seven offerings, most making their UK premiere, there was just about something for all tastes and age-ranges. Having said that *The Goblin Wars* (妖怪大戦争) which was described as being "family-friendly" in the promotional literature was far too scary for my four-year old son and even had me on the edge of my seat at times. Evidently some families are more comfortable about being scared out of their wits than others. Sharply contrasting with these mythical monster battles were thought-provoking works such as *Arigato* (ありがとう) and *Sea Without Exit* (出口のない海) which explored human suffering and the Japanese psychic.



With such a board sample of films it was also possible for the non-film critic to really appreciate the cinematic skills of the Japanese movie industry and perhaps even gain a little cross cultural insight into the Japanese perspective on life. There were certainly a number of recurrent themes in this year's offerings, particularly how ordinary people cope with the agony, grief and psychological dilemmas which arise out of the tragedies of war and natural disaster.

This year's "magnificent" seven were:

What the Snow Brings – 雪に願うこと (UK Premiere)

Route 225 – ルート 225 (UK Premiere)

The Goblin Wars – 妖怪大戦争

Arigato – ありがとう (UK Premiere)

Into the Picture Scroll: The Tale of Yamanaka Tokiwa – 山中常盤 (UK Premiere)

First Love – 初恋 (London Premiere)

Sea Without Exit – 出口のない海 (UK Premiere)