

DVD press release

Mikio Naruse

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs (1960)

Floating Clouds (1955)

Late Chrysanthemums (1954)

'Naruse's films celebrate, without extravagance, the lives of ordinary people struggling for something better than the hand fate has dealt them. Performed with quiet certainty by superb actors, shot and edited with a sure and relentless hand, they raise the ordinary and even the sordid to a quality near sublime.' – Audie Bock, Artforum

Before the BFI Southbank retrospective earlier this year, opportunities to see the films of **Mikio Naruse** (1905–1969) had been few and far between. Yet connoisseurs have long ranked him alongside Ozu, Mizoguchi and Kurosawa as the fourth great master of Japanese cinema. His little known yet substantial body of work spans four decades and 89 features.

Now the BFI releases three of Naruse's finest films on DVD. Individually sleeved, they are collected together in a presentation box. Extra features include exclusive audio commentaries on scenes from each film by Japanese cinema expert Freda Freiberg and extensive filmed interviews with Freiberg, director Teruo Ishii (Naruse's assistant) and Paul Willemen (Professor of film studies).

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs (Onna ga kaidan wo agaru toki)

The widowed Keiko (Hideko Takamine) manages a hostess bar in Tokyo's Ginza district. She remains faithful to the memory of her husband and supports her mother, brother and his son. The smiling mask she wears allows her to make a living, but the pressure to sell herself is unrelenting. Her business is failing and she must decide whether to raise the money to buy her own bar or marry one of her admiring affluent patrons. A superb, heart-rending film which was released theatrically by the BFI in June.

Extras

- Freda Freiberg interviewed by film writer Adrian Martin (16 mins)
- Freiberg: audio commentary (15 mins) and interview on the film (7 mins)
- Theatrical trailer

Floating Clouds (Ukigumo)

Adapted from Fumiko Hayashi's best-selling novel, Naruse's undisputed masterpiece contrasts two characters: a strong woman who relentlessly pursues her desire while hoping her lover and society will understand what she has to do to survive, and her lover who craves a conventionally validated social identity. To him, she represents a blind spot that he cannot face. They love each other, but are hopelessly out of synch, trying to live as individuals in a newly democratised Japan.

Extras

- Freiberg: audio commentary (10 mins) and interview on the film (10 mins)
- Paul Willemen on the film (7 mins)

Late Chrysanthemums (Bangiku)

Combining three Fumiko Hayashi stories about ageing geishas, the film focuses on Okin, the ex-geisha who has embraced the new post-war economy most successfully and single-mindedly. Former colleagues Tamae, whose son threatens to become a gigolo, and Tomi, who has a decidedly 'modern' daughter, live together and try to make ends meet. With his customary emphasis on the material circumstances that shape our lives, Naruse nevertheless manages to transform the film into a moving celebration of friendship.

Extras

- Freiberg: audio commentary (15 mins) and interview on the film (10 mins)
- Paul Willemen on Naruse (23 mins)
- Interview with Teruo Ishii (13 mins)

The DVD also contains a fully illustrated 32-page booklet including extensive essays by Freda Freiberg, Adrian Martin and Paul Willemen.

Release date: 26 November 2007

RRP £44.99 / cat. no. BFIVD694 / cert 12

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs: Japan / 1960 / b&w / 106 mins /
ratio 2.35:1 (16x9) anamorphic

Floating Clouds: Japan / 1955 / b&w / 118 mins / ratio 1.33:1

Late Chrysanthemums: Japan / 1954 / b&w / 97 mins / ratio 1.33:1

This disc contains optional subtitles for the hearing-impaired on all items
BFI DVDs are available from all good retailers, from the Filmstore at BFI Southbank and
by mail order from 0207 815 1350 or online at www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore

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