

OFFICIAL SELECTION - QUINZAINE DES REALISATEURS - CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2001

a HASHIGUCHI Ryosuke film

HUSH!

PORTFOLIO 1999



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presenteert



EEN FILM VAN
RYOSUKE HASHIGUCHI



HUSH! - een speelfilm van Ryosuke Hashiguchi

"Hush... little baby" klinkt het vrolijk uit de boxen. De bewuste baby uit deze song zullen we nooit te zien krijgen in HUSH! van de Japanse regisseur Ryosuke Hashiguchi. Er wordt echter des te meer over babies gepraat, gepland, geruzied en gefantaseerd. Wat gebeurt er wanneer een jonge Japanse vrouw plotsklaps beslist dat 'die ene man daar uit dat homokoppel enkele tafeltjes verder' bestemd is om de vader van haar kind te worden...

Naoya werkt in een hondentrimsalon en leidt een wat egocentrisch bestaan als jonge homo. Toch heeft hij het gevoel dat er iets mist in zijn leven. Dan ontmoet hij Katsuhiro, een wat teruggetrokken levende jongen op wie hij verliefd wordt en waarmee hij een relatie begint. Dan verschijnt ook Asako in zijn leven; een wat labiele vrouw die het vriendenstel voorstelt samen een kind te maken. Naoya is fel tegen het idee en raakt geïrriteerd met Katsuhiro, om diens onvermogen beslissingen te nemen en om zijn aarzeling uit te komen voor zijn homoseksualiteit. Opgeslurpt door alle emoties, krijgt het drietal visite van Katsuhiro's broer en schoonzus. De schoonzus, die is geobsedeerd door de verdeling van de familie eigendommen, krijgt weet van alle kinderplannen en wil een einde maken aan de familieband met Katsuhiro.

Terwijl Naoya, Katsuhiro en Asako verder worstelen, komen ze op een punt aan waar ze moeten beslissen wat het begrip familie voor henzelf precies betekent en hoe ze verder verkiezen te leven.

Regisseur Hashiguchi doorbrak al met zijn twee eerdere speelfilms LIKE GRAINS OF SAND en A TOUCH OF FEVER definitief het taboe op de *gay movie* in de Japanse cinema. Met HUSH! zet hij nu zijn ontdekkingstocht verder naar andere en nieuwe invullingen van de hedendaagse familie, sociale omgangsvormen en verwachtingen.

"As in his earlier films, A TOUCH OF FEVER and LIKE GRAINS OF SAND, Ryosuke Hashiguchi blends genres until you begin crying at what you were just laughing at..."

Agonized though we are, we are consequently moved in a way rare in film."

Donald Ritchie, *International Herald Tribune*, 29 June 2001

"Finesse in the scripting of the characters, in the sequence of events which cover a broad but coherent spectrum...but also finesse in the mise-en-scene..."

Le Monde, 16 May 2001

Hashiguchi's "most accomplished feature to date."

Moving Pictures, 14 May 2001

Hush! / 135 min. / 35mm / Kleur / Dolby Stereo / Japan 2001

HUSH! - CREW

Regie, script, montage	Ryosuke HASHIGUCHI
Camera	Shogo UENO
Licht	Kazuo YABE
Geluid	Yoshiteru TAKAHASHI
Art direction	Fumio OGAWA
Uitvoerend producent	Tetsujiro YAMAGAMI
Producers	Tomiyasu ISHIKAWA
	Hiroo TSUKADA
Muziek	Bobby MCFERRIN



HUSH! - CAST

Naoya	Kazuya Takahashi
Katsuhiro	Seiichi Tanabe
Asako	Reiko Kataoka

Over regisseur Ryosuke HASHIGUCHI

Geboren in 1962 in Nagasaki, Japan, begon Ryosuke Hashiguchi tijdens zijn tienerjaren te filmen op Super-8. Tijdens zijn filmstudie aan de kunstacademie van Osaka viel hij op door zijn documentaire stijl, waarmee hij zich richtte op een zo realistisch mogelijke benadering van zijn personages. Met zijn film THE SECRET OF LAST NIGHT won hij de PFF Grand Prize.

Hashiguchi stopte voortijdig met zijn filmopleiding en werkte als regisseur van televisieprogramma's en video's. Hij schreef en regisseerde zijn tweede film, A TOUCH OF FEVER; een portret van een wereldvreemde student die werkt als hoerenjong. De film werd in Japan in 1993 uitgebracht en werd daar en op vele festivals wereldwijd een groot succes.

Met LIKE GRAINS OF SAND (1995) won Hashiguchi belangrijke prijzen op het Internationale Film Festival van Rotterdam, het Film Festival van Duinkerken, en het Turijns Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

Hashiguchi schreef ook romans en essays, TV- en filmscripts. Recentelijk speelde hij als acteur mee in een TV drama.



1989	THE SECRET OF LAST NIGHT (<i>Yube no Himitsu</i>)
1992	A TOUCH OF FEVER (<i>Hatachi no Binetsu</i>)
1995	LIKE GRAINS OF SAND (<i>Nagisa no Shindobaddo</i>)

Over de cast van HUSH!

Seiichi TANABE (Katsuhiro)

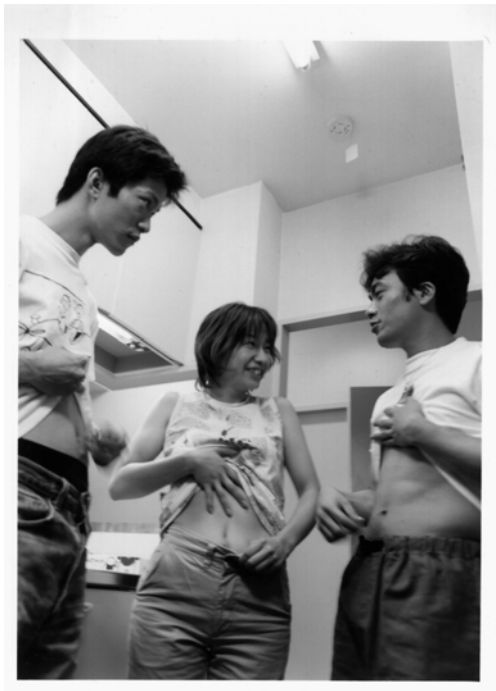
Seiichi Tanabe speelde eerder in SHIGATSU MONOGATARI, geregisseerd door Shunji Iwai (1998); BLUES HARP, geregisseerd door Takashi Miike (1998); en RING 0- BIRTHDAY, geregisseerd door Norio Tsuruta (2000). Hij schreef, regisseerde en speelde in DOG FOOD (1999).

Reiko KATAOKA (Asako)

Met HUSH! werden Reiko Kataoka en Hashiguchi Ryosuke weer samengebracht. Reiko maakte haar debuut in HATACHI NO BINETSU/*A Touch of Fever* (1993) van Hashiguchi. Sindsdien was ze te zien in FUKUSHU NO TENSHI/*Kamikaze Taxi*, geregisseerd door Masato Harada (1994); in CHINPIRA, geregisseerd door Shinji Aoyama (1996); in HOBOS, geregisseerd door Naoto Kumazawa (1997) en in OBORERU HITO, geregisseerd door Naoki Ichio (2001).

Kazuya TAKAHASHI (Naoya)

Kazuya Takahashi is international het meest bekend door zijn rol in Juzo Itami's MARUTAI NO ONNA/*A Taxing Woman* (1997). Zijn filmdebuut maakte hij in 1994, samen met Reiko Kataoka in Masato Harada's FUKUSHU NO TENSHI/ *Kamikaze Taxi* (1994). Hij speelde ook in Takumi Kimizuka's OSHIMAI NO HI (1999). Takahashi heeft op de Japanse theaterpodia onder anderen gewerkt met de Amerikaanse regisseur Robert Allan Ackerman aan A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER, A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE en KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN. Hij is ook een begenadigd musicus en werkte voor het eerst met regisseur Hashiguchi als componist, de muziek componerend voor LIKE GRAINS OF SAND.



Regisseur Ryosuke Hashiguchi over HUSH!
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" People experience a number of beginnings in the course of their lives. For some it is graduating from school, for others, getting a job, marriage, giving birth, or the death of a loved one. At these times, though the self may still be unsteady and driven by uncertainty, people find a way to come to terms with reality, pull their emotions together, and find new hope to guide their lives.

This film tells the story of a woman and two gay men in their 30s who find a new beginning from a state of despair. The woman has sought love from people too intensely, and has harmed herself and others in the process. She wonders if she is flawed as a human, if she is incapable of having a good relationship.

The two men are gay. One accepted the fact that he was gay in his teens and ever since has been living an openly gay life to the fullest. He is not unhappy with his present lifestyle. But he does feel somehow unfulfilled, that there is something lacking in his life.

The other man has concealed his homosexuality. It's not that he is ashamed. He knows he cannot change who he is, and he is fully aware that he has to get along with his inner self, but he cannot fully free himself from his feelings of guilt.

These three see themselves as units of 1, and they have given up hope of ever becoming a unit of 2 or 3. But they are somewhat mistaken. No one freely chooses to live a life of solitude, without hope or human warmth. Even these three, somewhere in their hearts, feel a desire to be a part of a 2 or 3. And they have in the past experienced being part of a 2 or 3. The pain of losing that happiness has left them timid. They don't want to suffer unnecessary pain and sadness again. Perhaps they have lost the courage to step into the wilderness.

My previous film, "Like Grains of Sand," portrayed the time of teenagers. Beyond the last scene of that film lay the time of adults. To me, when my youth had passed, the world called adult time stretched before me like a wilderness. The wasteland extended forever, without a home in sight. It seemed pointless to walk, there was nothing there. But still, I had to begin walking. And I had to dream of coming across someone and the moment when we would smile and say, "I finally found you."

Nowadays, when you turn on the TV, there is nothing but the worst news. One might even think that it wouldn't be surprising if the world were destroyed. But somewhere in this world filled with the worst, something most beautiful also exists. It's simply that there are so many awful things that it's become hard to see.

In this film, I want to capture that most beautiful something, or something that lets us believe that it certainly exists. And, I want to portray the three main characters finding the courage to walk in the wilderness and once again restart their lives.

For me, at 38, I also think courage is the only thing that will carry me through the rest of my life."

Tokyo, 2000

Ryosuke Hashiguchi

Interview by Tom Mes

Despite having only three feature films to his name, director Ryosuke Hashiguchi is a pivotal figure in the development of contemporary Japanese cinema. The box office success of his low-budget 1993 debut *A Touch Of Fever* (*Hatachi No Binetsu*) sent a shock through the industry and opened doors for independent filmmakers. He followed up on the promise of his debut with what is probably one of the best Japanese films of the 90s, *Like Grains of Sand* (*Nagisa No Shindobaddo*, 1995). After a six-year hiatus from directing, Hashiguchi returned with the striking *Hush!*, the story of a gay couple and the woman who wants one of them to father her child.

Though often portrayed as a kind of spokesman for the gay community in Japan, Hashiguchi's films above all show the universally human emotions of their characters, gay or straight. The label 'gay filmmaker', aside from its discriminatory undertone, is far too restrictive a term for this highly talented man.

Hush edges more towards comedy than your previous films. Some characters, like barfly Yuji and Naoya's mother even seem to function mainly as comic relief. What brought on this change of tone?

It was not my intention from the start to make a comedy. It was however my intention to tell a story about people of my generation and to give a fairly realistic portrait of the lives they lead. What I discovered was that humour and laughter form inextricable parts of these people's lives. So it started out as one thing and the comedy grew out of it in quite a natural way. Aside from that, since the characters lead very lonely, somewhat depressed lives, I felt that an element of comedy would actually emphasise this loneliness and depression.

All characters are in a way my alter egos. Naoya's mother is quite similar to my own mother. She still doesn't understand what it means to me to be homosexual. She still thinks that I spent my nights working at a gay bar in Nichome, even though I explained to her that I'm a film director. She also still thinks that I will grow breasts one day. That incoherent, absurd way of thinking of my mother's is directly reflected in that character.

There are six years separating *Hush* and your previous film *Like Grains of Sand*. Why did it take so long to make this film and what did you do in that time?

My previous film was a kind of turning point in my career. Making that film was like a state of bliss, because everything went so smoothly and the atmosphere on set was very close to how I would ideally like to see it. The great reviews the film received both at home and abroad were part of that too. As a result I felt a pressure to create something even better with my next film, but at that moment I lacked the confidence that I could pull that off immediately. I felt it would be necessary to spend some time working in other areas, away from cinema, to educate myself. I acted on stage, wrote for another director and tried being a TV presenter, in the hope of finding enough ideas and courage in that to eventually return to cinema and make my next film.

Is it correct that you acted in a television series as well, under the direction of Etsushi Toyokawa?

He approached me with this idea and at first I refused. But he insisted. Since he is a famous actor in Japan, I was very curious to see what he would be like as a director. So I agreed in the end and played a part in his television series.

The image of doctors in your films is on the whole rather negative. Both *Like Grains of Sand* and *Hush* feature scenes involving doctors which have a distinct negative tone. In *Grains* there is the

scene where characters talk about curing homosexuality, in *Hush* the character of Asako is told by her doctor to have a totally unnecessary hysterectomy.

The image of the doctors in both is not very far from the truth, because I had similar experiences with doctors. I was in hospital for a while just before I started shooting this film and the doctor treated me like I wasn't human. This is not unusual in Japan. Patients in hospital are at the mercy of a doctor anyway, and the doctors know this, so they have a very arrogant attitude towards the patients. When I did research for the film, I heard nothing but bad things about gynaecologists, for instance. So the image that's painted in *Hush* is very much based on real life.

In *Hush* there are similar observations about people working in shops and restaurants. They seem very selfish in their treatment of customers, like Naoya's colleague in the pet shop or the cashier in the restaurant who prefers reading his manga to doing his job.

I think that these kinds of comedy elements mainly stem from my experience working in theatre. There's a strong tendency towards comedy now in Japanese theatre and it's from there that I picked up this idea of giving characters a characteristic that makes them more comical. But it's a laugh that also contains poison. Aside from this it also comes from my own experience in shops and other places, where the behaviour of a waitress or cashier is so cold and arrogant that it can really put you in a bad mood for the rest of the day.

The cast of *Hush* consists of three very experienced actors. How did this influence your approach to directing this film as compared to *Like Grains of Sand*, which had three teenage leads?

It was definitely a different experience from directing teenagers, who for the most part don't have enough experience in life and in their work to fall back on. In *Hush* I worked with three people who are all experienced, who have their own techniques of doing their work and their own professional pride. Basically I don't direct in a different way, but I do have to keep each actor's sensibilities and professional pride in mind. It depends on the actor and his or her abilities and talents how I approach directing each of them.

Reiko Kataoka for instance is not someone who needs detailed, extensive direction. She is a very honest and straightforward person and quite direct in her approach, so with her I found it worked well if I put a certain amount of pressure on her. This was much more effective than trying to approach her in a very careful, roundabout way.

Kazuya Takahashi is more a passionate but also slightly naïve personality, so in his case that very direct approach would probably put the set in a state of emergency. With him I tried an approach which was based more on encouragement and compliments. He has a very good technique, so his performance remains very constant from one take to the next.

Seiichi Tanabe is someone who tries to rely on his intelligence, resulting in long discussions about his scenes. If I asked or suggested something to him, he would often need a long time to think about it, sometimes even a day or two days, before he came up with his own solutions and answers.

I had the opportunity to rehearse with many of the actors for a period of sixteen days before we started shooting, which is quite exceptional in Japanese film. The approach was largely theatrical in that sense and it's an approach that suits me well, even though it's rare in the Japanese film industry.

Is that where scenes like the confrontation between the three leads and Katsuhiro's family come from? It's a scene that's shot in very few takes.

I think that this period of rehearsal gives actors the opportunity to really immerse themselves in their characters, yes. As a result the off-screen behaviour between the actors remains the same as it is in the film, so that is reflected in the energy of such scenes.

There's another scene like that towards the end of the film, the confrontation between Katsuhiro, Naoya and Katsuhiro's female colleague who has a crush on him. It's a very chaotic scene in which all three actors, talk, yell and act at the same time. How do you shoot a scene like that and how close do you stay to what's written on the page?

It was shot almost literally the way I wrote it in the screenplay. In fact, I rehearsed that scene as little as possible, because with scenes like those, too much rehearsal tends to come at the expense of the spontaneity. I tried to rehearse it once or twice, but after that I just told the actors that I trusted them to deliver good performances once we got around to shooting the scene.

These two scenes are very beautifully built up, but they don't end in a real resolution. When the scene finishes, things have rarely been resolved, as if they end before their expected conclusion. Many scenes in A Touch of Fever also end like that. Why, for lack of a better word, the loose ends?

I guess in the end it all comes down to the credibility of the story you're trying to tell. Neither of those scenes is set at the end of the film, so in that sense it's logical that things are not resolved yet. I don't believe in using confrontations like those as a means to suddenly force a change in a character. Those kinds of solutions don't exist in real life either. It would become unbelievable if you wouldn't leave some loose ends.

Is it difficult to find actors to play gay characters? Both Seiichi Tanabe and Kazuya Takahashi have played gay parts before, in film and on stage respectively. What about other actors?

Well, I think that there are many actors who would be able to play such roles, but decide not to do so from a strategic standpoint. Famous actors in particular feel that they would be risking their careers. The part of Katsuhiro's sister-in-law, played in the film by Yoko Akino, I first offered to an actress who is quite famous. She initially agreed, but later came back on her decision, telling me she didn't want to play in a "homo film".

That character of Katsuhiro's sister-in-law came across to me as somewhat unsettling. Her personality changes very suddenly and strongly in the film. There is a strong contrast between the way she tells Katsuhiro that he should lead his life with someone he truly loves, and the way she tries to control his life in that scene of the family confrontation. There's a very strong contradiction there.

She's not based on anyone I know, but I think she's not that unusual a character. I think the audience in Japan can understand that contradiction very well. Maybe you know the two concepts that define the attitude of the Japanese people; the honesty in person-to-person relationships - honne - and a kind of façade in social situations - tatemae. In her case it's exactly like that. When she has that scene alone with Katsuhiro where she says he should be with someone he loves, that's the result of her sadness over her own arranged marriage. This is something she would never tell anyone in a different situation, even her husband or her daughter. But later on, in the social environment, when she is expected to deliver a certain type of answer, she does the opposite thing.

From my viewpoint she is like another version of the character of Asako, who is also torn between what she really wants and what she's expected to do. I think the sister-in-law recognises a lot of herself in Asako. When she was Asako's age, she probably had a boyfriend she loved, but it was a relationship that didn't work out. She decided to surrender to the situation and find herself a husband through an arranged marriage. She gave up thinking about the options she still had left in her own life and her child was born as a result of that. She recognises that Asako is at a similar crossroads in her life, but decides to take a different route. For Asako having a child is the result of not giving up. In Asako she sees someone who can realise all the things she couldn't, so she feels a kind of jealousy. In a social situation that's something she is unable to accept, because it would mean acknowledging that her own life has been worthless.

Watching Hush I got the feeling that the film tries to present alternative ways of living one's life, especially with regards to the family unit. The traditional family unit is only shown in a negative way. Was it your intention to question traditional families and present an alternative?

I wasn't aiming to criticise anything or to present the three characters' unusual relationship as an example of a new kind of family. I also didn't want to criticise the strongly held belief among the Japanese that blood ties are the best foundation for a family. What I was trying to do was to portray characters at that juncture in their lives, a point at which they went through bad experiences but want to overcome those difficulties. I wanted to show the flexibility and the determination these people have to not only keep moving forward, but also to hold on to the hope that they can still achieve something in their lives. The characters in the film choose to look for a solution in forming a family unit, but it might as well have been something else.

A lot has changed in the Japanese film industry since the success of A Touch of Fever. A whole generation of independent filmmakers has come up in the wake of that film, all of whom have made careers for themselves creating very personal films. Do you feel that you paved the way for these people in some sense?

Yes, I do. A Touch of Fever was shot on 16 millimeter with very little money and no payment for me or the actors. A homosexual character leading a normal life had never been dealt with in a Japanese film before, certainly not in a film released in general circulation. It was a very risky subject, but the film was a lot more successful than a number of commercial studio productions released that same year which were shot at many times the budget I had to work with. People in the industry were quite shocked by this, because they found out that a successful film could even be made on a small budget. So they suddenly started making films at much lower budgets, resulting in a whole series of awful, cheap studio films.

Since that time a lot more filmmakers have done the same thing as me and made an independent film with a very small budget and they've had the opportunity to release it theatrically. One of the results of this was that more money became available to independent filmmakers and that the distribution channels opened up to independent films. The result is that now there are many young filmmakers, including myself, who have the opportunity to get their work made and shown even abroad at festivals, so a lot has changed in that respect.

Also, aside from its effects on cinema, my film introduced the word 'gay' into Japanese society. With A Touch of Fever, that word became a common expression, so the film also had a positive effect on gay culture in Japan.

A very different question finally. What is your opinion on Ayumi Hamasaki's rise to pop music superstardom since her role in Like Grains of Sand?

Well, it's great, isn't? (Laughs). During the production of that film we would sometimes do karaoke together and I thought she was a really good singer. So I suggested she should try to become a singer. She was seventeen at the time and she replied that she would also like to become a singer, but she wasn't sure about taking that step.

So it's all thanks to you?

Maybe. I guess so, yes. I still keep a love letter from her that she wrote me in those days, in which she said I had to become her everything (smiles).





Reviewed by David Rooney at Cannes Film Festival (Directors Fortnight), May 14, 2001.

"As in his memorable 1996 tale of adolescent longing, *"Like Grains of Sand,"* Japanese director Ryosuke Hashiguchi again focuses on a triangle of characters, this time ruled by different desires and conflicts in his warmly observed third feature, *"Hush!"* Trading the earlier film's lyrical mood for an engaging lighter touch laced with sly humor, this is a meandering melodrama about gay relationships, friendship, loneliness and the elastic notion of family.

Refreshingly frank for a Japanese film in depicting gay themes, *"Hush!"* represents a natural continuation of Hashiguchi's previous work. His 1992 debut, *"The Slight Fever of a 20-Year-Old,"* explored sexuality on the threshold of adulthood, while *"Sand"* centered on a late-adolescent boy's sexual emergence and acknowledgement of his love for a straight school chum. The new entry shifts its attention to gay characters in their early 30s, one of them out and well-adjusted and another with one foot lingering in the closet.

The three principal figures are tracked separately before their lives intersect. Easygoing Naoya (Kazuya Takahashi) works in a pet store, socializes on the gay circuit and gets his share of sex without ties, but remains unfulfilled. His dissatisfaction is eased by the prospect of a relationship when he meets sweet-natured research engineer Katsuhiko (Seiichi Tanabe), who keeps his sexuality hidden from family and colleagues, including a female co-worker with transparent romantic designs on him. Third key element is Asako (Reiko Kataoka), a troubled young woman with a past history of psychiatric problems, abortions and casual sex.

Deciding she wants a baby in her life, Asako identifies Katsuhiko as the ideal donor, basing her choice solely on the fatherly look in his eyes during a brief encounter at a restaurant. Katsuhiko discusses the parenthood option with Naoya, who dismisses the idea. When he learns that Katsuhiko and Asako have continued meeting, and that his lover is still reflecting on the woman's proposition, Naoya is threatened by the intrusion into their relationship, adding to his frustration over Katsuhiko's self-acceptance issues.

The characters and their relationships take shape in interesting ways and despite it spending an inordinate time to get where it's going, the story's themes come together satisfyingly in the end. Standout of the appealing cast is Kataoka, who gradually softens her thorny exterior and obsessive determination to reveal warmth, vulnerability and sorrow over the direction her life has taken up to that point.

Lenser Shogo Ueno's work here fails to match the formal beauty of his earlier collaboration with the director on *"Like Grains of Sand,"* but *"Hush!"* has a crisp contemporary look that poses no distractions to the human drama."



Reviewed by Donald Richie for the International Herald Tribune, 29 juni 2001

"A turning-thirty hoyden wakes up to the fact that (Japanese catastrophe) she has never made a family. So she turns to a young homosexual couple as (however unlikely) likely fathers. They, too, she correctly intuits, are suffering family loss since custom forbids them to make one. At the end she is giving each an artificial insemination kit.

That the picture is a comedy this précis will indicate, but that it is also a quite serious one will be apparent only upon viewing. As in his earlier films, "A Touch of Fever" and "Like Grains of Sand," Ryosuke Hashiguchi blends genres until you begin crying at what you were just laughing at.

Real people are living under these gender jokes and pointed satire can draw blood. We are never far from real life, and the funny hell the trio finds themselves in has real fire.

Hashiguchi is particularly good at depicting the mute, inchoate longing so much a part of the Japanese young. These three are so hopelessly self-conscious that their tentative approaches, shown full length, are agonizing.

One remembers that excruciating sequence in "A Touch of Fever" when, during a family meal, the girlfriend's father turns out to be the boy's best customer. Agonized though we are, we are consequently moved in a way rare in film. Opened up by laughter we are forced to face the consequences. And one of these is to move toward our funny trio and find them just like us."