



WINNER

Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize – 2021 Berlinale

WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY

A FILM BY RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI



Silver Bear
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Berlin
Grand Jury Prize

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI

Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy

FILM MOVEMENT PRESENTS A FILM BY RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI. STORIES: KOTONO HIRAKAWA. MUSIC BY: YASUHIRO SHIBUYAMA. COSTUME DESIGNER: YUKI KAWA. EDITOR: SHINJI TAKAHASHI. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: YUKI KAWA, YUKI KAWA, YUKI KAWA. PRODUCED BY: YUKI KAWA. WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY: RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI. CASTING: YUKI KAWA. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: YUKI KAWA, YUKI KAWA, YUKI KAWA. PRODUCED BY: YUKI KAWA. WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY: RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI.

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Genre	Drama
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Links	Official website
Theatrical booking	Maxwell Wolkin, maxwell@filmmovement.com
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SYNOPSIS

An unexpected love triangle, a failed seduction, and a chance encounter with the past. Propelled by coincidence and imagination, and guided by love's gentle current, acclaimed director Ryusuke Hamaguchi (*Happy Hour, Asako I & II*) returns with an enchanting triptych that spins mundane encounters into a world of infinite possibilities. In **Episode 1: Magic (or Something Less Assuring)**, a young woman is startled when she realizes that her best friend's new flame might just be her ex; in **Episode 2: Door Wide Open**, a disgruntled student plots to trick his college professor, using his friend-with-benefits as bait; and in **Episode 3: Once Again**, a girl's college reunion leads to an unanticipated run-in with an old friend, and awakens feelings long since forgotten. Playfully inspired by life's tiny miracles, and bound together by memory, regret, deception, and fate, Hamaguchi leaves no stone unturned in his quest to chart the ever-deepening mysteries of the all-too-human heart.

Episode 1: Magic (or Something Less Assuring)

After a photo shoot, producer Gumi (Hyunri) confides to her best friend Meiko (Kotone Furukawa), a model, that she's met a man — unaware that her new paramour is Meiko's ex-boyfriend, Kazu (Ayumu Nakajimi). After Meiko reunites with Kazu, to see if their spark remains, she is confronted with a dilemma: reclaim what was once hers, or gallantly encourage her friends' budding romance.

Episode 2: Door Wide Open

Disgruntled college student Sasaki (Shouma Kai) wants revenge on his professor, Segawa (Kiyohiko Shibukawa), for not advancing him to his next level of studies. After Segawa wins a prestigious literary prize, Sasaki enlists Nao (Katsuki Mori), a friend with benefits, to entrap him in a sexual scandal. But Segawa holds his ground, deflecting her maneuver — until Nao unwittingly turns a positive encounter into something damning for both parties.

Episode 3: Once Again

Natsuko (Fusako Urabe), is a systems engineer who finds herself unemployed after a computer virus wreaks havoc on digital life. While attending a high school reunion in the provinces, she meets housewife Aya (Aoba Kawai) who she believes is her first love. But things are not as they seem — until the two strangers decide to enact a bold experiment, and a profound friendship is born.

A CONVERSATION WITH RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI AND CRITIC RORY O'CONNOR

I wanted to start by asking how you arrived at this title and the original Japanese title. They both feel like perfect fits.

The Japanese title directly translates into something more like Coincidence and Imagination, so it's a pretty direct title compared to the English. I think it's a nice title that picks at some of the important parts about this film, the part about coincidence. I think coincidence allows for people to imagine other possibilities, other worlds. And I feel like the title captures that really well. And I believe that coincidence is also something that leads two people to imagine possibilities.

You mention other worlds. The final section of the film dips into the realm of science fiction, but in this quiet kind of way. What was your thought process for including sci-fi in this story, and what is your own relationship with sci-fi?

So, in terms of the sci-fi element in story three, I was thinking about Covid. The first two stories in this collection of shorts were shot in 2019, so I didn't have anything with Covid in mind. However, the third story was actually shot in July 2020 and in Japan; that was after the first state of emergency was over, so that element of Covid was definitely in my mind. I'm no expert in sci-fi, but when I was a student I studied under director Kiyoshi Kurosawa, and when I was studying under him he gave us this impossible assignment—which was to remake *Solaris*. So when I was tasked with this, I read a lot of sci-fi, and in doing that I realized that sci-fi is often rooted in some kind of reality. However, it's seeing reality in a different way.

So I wanted to do something similar to that through this third story. In today's world, right now, there's the lockdown happening under COVID-19. However, in my story—for the third one—what I had was to almost have the opposite of what's going on today. So the virtual is locked down, as opposed to today, where we're living on the opposite spectrum, where everything is happening virtually. So in this sense I felt like I would still be able to work with the original story and the original concept whilst not ignoring the situation of COVID-19. And I felt that the audience can also maybe experience that as well.

You mentioned that story three was the only part filmed after 2019. What kind of challenges did you face filming during Covid?

I would say the difficulties we had were pretty general and quite common, in that we had to disinfect our hands, keep social distancing between the cast and the staff. We had to wear masks at all times. And it was sometimes difficult to find a location we could shoot in. But we were working with a very small production team for this, so in that sense there wasn't a huge difficulty in maintaining social distance, especially because we were often shooting in quite large spaces. Regarding the actors, there were moments that they would be in proximity with each other, but we had already gotten their approval to be able to do this and they'd tested negative. And if anything, more so than challenges, there was a lot of happiness in finally being able to see people in real life.

You have worked with improvisational theatre in the past, yet the scenes in your films feel so precisely crafted. Do you still use elements of improvisation?

With *Happy Hour* there was definitely some improvisational acting in there, but actually there's not too much improvisation work happening in that movie. Sure, there's improv happening in some of the scenes, like the long workshop scene, but in actual fact I would say about 90% of the film was spoken exactly as scripted. And regarding this film, I would say almost 100% of what's being spoken is exactly according to the script.

That all said, I do find the improvisational atmosphere to be really important. So, while in the dialogues there's really not much ad-libbing going on, I did want to emphasize with my actors to bring in whatever emotion they wanted, whatever emotion they were feeling at that moment and use those emotions to say the dialogue. So, in that sense I like to keep the atmosphere of improvisation alive.

Your films often feature long conversations that have a unique but kind of subtle complexity. When you're creating these scenes, do you start from a small idea and build the dialogue around, or is it a different process?

I actually start with thinking about the structure of the film as a whole. What I also do is start off with the most unrealistic ideas.—I have that unrealistic idea, and the reason why I start there is because I find that that's the way to make a movie interesting. If you start somewhere else, then it's not as interesting. So what I do is I have this unrealistic structure, and then once I really start writing the scenes I try to use words that are realistic. I have a kind of combat, or a fight within my head, between unrealistic structures and realistic characters.

Almost every film deals with time in some way, but here it seems an even more important factor. Maybe you could talk a bit about this.

As you saw, I have occasional long takes within the film. And the reason why long takes appear in my films is that these moments are when I feel that the acting is great, when I feel the actors are giving a great performance. The way we shot this film is, we shot from many different angles—and it's kind of a stupid way to go about shooting, in that sense, but it actually leaves a lot of editing possibilities. When I do leave a long take it really is me deciding that I want to stay on this acting. I really hope that the audience, when they see a long take, can also feel that way.

I think the idea of the passage of time is in relation to coincidence, which is a big theme in this film. And I believe that coincidences rarely happen; you can't have too many coincidences happen at once. And that's why, in the second story, you jump to five years ahead, because coincidences only happen sometimes. Since this film was about coincidences, yet these are short films, I had to think about how much time should pass in order to differentiate some of these coincidences.

Your films often have stark shifts in tone, from intimacy to tragedy or

comedy. Does this come naturally?

I don't tend to really strive for comedy or tragedy necessarily. But I realize it can be seen moment by moment, in one way or the other. But my general rule is that my protagonists are very serious about something. And even if it's something very trivial from an outsider perspective, it's a serious thing for them. And even if they might be wrong, they're trying to solve this and it's a very big matter for them. That's sort of a general rule I have for all my protagonists. They're living life seriously, in these ways. So, because of that I think these characters can, in turn, be both tragic but also funny at the same time. The seriousness in my characters is something that's fundamental for me.

Your last three films have centered mostly on female characters. I'm curious if there is a specific reason for this.

I do feel that my films have men as well. I do also have male protagonists and there are works about men, so it's not always women. But I do believe, after working on *Happy Hour*, I realized something interesting about having woman protagonists; I write them to live according to their desires, to chase after what they want, it always clashes against something about society. And so, in trying to depict these women going about living out their desires, I also realized I'm able to depict something about society as a whole, which I find really interesting.

Watching the film, there are some little echoes of silent cinema and even French New Wave. I know you speak about Cassavetes a lot. What is it about his work that you admire?

I, of course, like silent films. I also like French New Wave cinema—these are films that I watched as a student. I found them in the cinema. I also like classic Hollywood and Japanese films as well, but as you mentioned, Cassavetes really does have a special place in me. When I was 20 years-old I watched the film *Husbands* and it's still my favorite film. It's one of those films where I feel the more times I watch it, there's really no other film like it.

The reason I really loved the film when I was 20 is that I really felt that life was being portrayed in this film. The protagonists of *Husbands* are three white males in their 40s, or something, so they would seem to me as if they were very separate from me. However, I just felt in watching these characters that they were living a fuller life than I was. When comparing the lives of what I saw on the screen against my own life, my own life started to feel more fake. And it was the first time that I felt that way. And very few films, other than these Cassavetes films, have really made me feel those things.

Now that I think back on it, a conclusion that I come to is that a Cassavetes film is not a film. I make films because I like films. But there's a part of me that thinks so. By saying that a Cassavetes film is not a film, what I mean is that I think the general sense of what a film is is that there's a budget and then there's a schedule and within the schedule you sort of use up the budget. And that's the broad system of how a film is made. And perhaps Cassavetes is still part of that system. However, I feel like at the end of the day his films kind of go beyond that systematic way of thinking. And so he's

not making a film within this idea of budgets or within the idea of schedules, and because his films are so away from the systematic thinking we are able to see something that goes beyond that. That's something I finally understood once I was in my 30s, and while it still takes a lot of courage to try to get close to something like that, I'm still trying to attempt.

-This interview was originally published in The Film Stage

Director's biography



After graduating from the University of Tokyo, Hamaguchi worked in the commercial film industry for a few years before entering the graduate program in film at Tokyo University of the Arts.

He made his festival debut in 2008 with his graduation film *Passion* at San Sebastian and Tokyo FILMeX. Films include the Japan/Korea co-production film ***The Depths*** (2010) and a series of documentaries, ***The Tohoku Trilogy***, co-directed by Ko Sakai, (***Sound of the Waves***, ***Voices from the Waves*** and

Storytellers) from 2011 to 2013. The latter two films of the trilogy are composed of interviews of the victims of the devastating Great Japan Earthquake, and ***Storytellers*** is a documentary about research activity in Japanese regional folktales.

In 2015, his 317 minute feature film ***Happy Hour*** won major awards at numerous film festivals, starting at the Locarno Film Festival. His next film ***Asako I & II*** was selected for competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018. He is also the screenwriter on Kiyoshi Kurosawa's ***Wife of a Spy***, which won the Silver Lion at the 2020 Venice Film Festival. His film ***Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy*** premiered at the 2021 Berlin International Film Festival where it won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize. His latest work, ***Drive My Car***, premiered in Competition at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival where it was awarded the Best Screenplay Prize and the FIPRESCI International Critics' Prize.

Director's Filmography

PASSION (2008, 115min.)

Official Selection—San Sebastian Film Festival and Tokyo Filmex

I Love Thee for Good (2009, 58min)

Official Selection—Paris Cinéma International Film Festival

The Depths (2010, 121min.)

Official Selection—Tokyo Filmex

Sound of Waves* (2011, 142min.)

Official Selection—the 65th Locarno Film Festival

Intimacies (2012, 255min.)

Voices from the Waves Shinchi Town* (2013, 103min.)

Official Selection—Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival

Voices from the Waves Kisenuma* (2013, 109min.)

Official Selection—Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival

Storytellers* (2013, 120min.)

Official Selection—Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival

Touching the Skin of Eeriness (2013, 54min.)

Happy Hour (2015, 317min.)

Best actress & special mention for script—the 68th Locarno Film Festival

Heaven is still far away (2016, 38min.)

Asako I & II (2018, 119min.)

Official Competition—the 71st Cannes Film Festival

Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy (2021, 119min.)

Official Competition—the 71st Berlin International Film Festival

Winner — Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize

Drive My Car (2021, 179min.)

Official Competition—the 74th Cannes Film Festival

Winner — Best Screenplay Prize

Official Selection—the 46th Toronto International Film Festival

Official Selection—the 59th New York Film Festival

**Documentary feature*

Cast

Episode 1: Magic (or Something Less Assuring)



Kotone Furukawa as Meiko

Born in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, Kotone made her acting debut in Okinawa City's PR movie ***Chimdon-Dongoza*** (2018). In 2019, she won the 20th TAMA NEW WAVE Best Actress Award for the short film ***Spring***. Some of her noteworthy roles include the television series ***Yell*** (2020) and the film ***Any Crybabies Around?*** (2020).

Ayumu Nakajima as Kazuaki

Ayumu made his acting debut in 2013 after being selected from among 200 people for the stage production of "Black Lizard". The following year, he appeared in the television series ***Hanako to Anne*** (2002). His major film roles include ***Just Only Love*** (2019).



Hyunri as Tsugumi

Born in Tokyo and of Korean descent, she won the Best Emerging Actress Award at the 29th Takasaki Film Festival in 2014 for her role in ***The Voice of Water***. She also won the Asian Star Award at the Seoul International Drama Awards 2017. Her major works include ***Heaven is Still Far Away*** (2016) and ***Wife of a Spy*** (2020).

Episode 2: Door Wide Open



Kiyohiko Shibukawa as Segawa

Born in Shibukawa City, Gunma Prefecture. After working as a model, he made his film debut in 1998 in Toshiaki Toyoda's ***Porno Star*** and has been active in many films and TV dramas since then, including ***Passion*** (2008), ***Touching the Skin of Eeriness*** (2013), ***Lowlife Love*** (2016) and ***The Chrysanthemum and the Guillotine*** (2018).

Katsuki Mori as Nao

Born in Osaka, she was a model in her hometown. She started her acting career in the movie ***Child by Children*** in 2008. She has appeared in the films ***Utopia*** (2018) and ***Killing for the Prosecution*** (2018).



Shouma Kai as Sasaki

Shouma made his acting debut in 2015 and gained popularity by appearing in the ***Kamen Rider Ex-Aid*** series (2016-17). His major works include ***You Shine in the Moonlight*** (2019) and ***My Name is Yours*** (2020). He also played the lead role in the stage production of "Death Note: The Musical", and has been a main cast member in "Rent" and "Marie Antoinette".

Episode 3: Once Again



Fusako Urabe as Natsuko

Born in Chiba Prefecture, she made her debut in 1998 on the stage and has since been active in a wide range of fields, including stage, film and drama. She has appeared in films such as *Passion* (2008), *Asako I&II* (2018) and *The Phone of the Wind* (2020).

Aoba Kawai

Born in Tokyo, Aoba began modeling in her teens and became an actress in her twenties, and since then has been active in many films and TV dramas. Her major works include *Passion* (2008), *Touching the Skin of Eeriness* (2013), *My Man* (2014), *Maestro!* (2015), *Midnight Diner 2* (2016), *Wilderness* (2017), etc.



Crew

Director	Ryusuke Hamaguchi
Screenplay	Ryusuke Hamaguchi
DOP	Yukiko Iioka
Sound Design	Akihiko Suzuki
Sound	Naoki Jono
Production Design	Masato Nunobe
Costumes	Fuminori Usui
Make up	Yukiko Sumi
Assistant Director	Toru Takano Takayuki Fukata
Production Manager	Hitoshi Omika
Producer	Satoshi Takata