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FILM REVIEW: R100 (Matsumoto, 2013): Japan

Description

Reviewed by Larry Gleeson. Viewed during the AFI Filmfest 2013.

â??R100,â?• directed by Hitoshi Matsumoto, half of the Japanese comedic phenomenon, Downtown, is an absurdist Japanese comedy about an average, everyday family man, Takafumi Katayama, played by Nao Ohmori, leading an average everyday hum-drum, existence who decides one day to join a rather unusual club, a BDSM (Bondage and Discipline Sadism and Masochism) club surreptitiously named â??Bondage.â?• Bondage has some rather interesting rules. For example, all activities must take place outside the club in real life settings, the customers must be submissive at all times and no touching allowed. The â??masochist manifestoâ?• promises to lead to â??a revelation of the self.â?• Furthermore, the clubâ?• membership is for one year and once entered into cannot be cancelled under any circumstances.

True to its original roots, the club and its employees, a slew of dominatrices known as â??Queensâ?• begin a wide range of orchestrated hi-jinks upon an unwitting Mr. Takafumi Katayama. He is punched, kicked, whipped until achieving an erotic release visualized by a rippling effect upon Mr. Katayamaâ??s aural body.

At first the practices and the situations have a fairly unobtrusive element but it doesnâ??t take long before they penetrate Mr. Katayamaâ??s inner circle of family and employer. The public humiliations and the physical abuse wear heavily on Mr. Katayama as his employer witnesses a particularly offensive restroom scene against the submissive Katayama. The line is crossed when the Bondage bounds Mr. Katayamaâ??s young son.

Deciding enough is enough, Katayama makes the call to terminate his membership. The club, however, has other ideas and begins sending very dangerous and bizarre characters to eliminate Katayama. Here the storyline goes into warp drive with characters and situations passing through absurdity into irrationality. One character, Queen Big Mouth, devours another human being in a snake-like fashion. Another scene shows a group of businessmen producers exiting the theater discussing what theyâ??ve just seen trying to make sense of the directorâ??s over-the-top choices. The film the audience is seeing becomes a rough cut film in post-production. All the while, the screen depiction of a filmmaker director at age 100 exploring his sexual fantasies in a movie theater through a film underscores the absurdity of the Japanese social mores of acceptable behavior. Point in case, when Mr. Katayama tries to report the clubâ??s unlawful sexual activities to the police, heâ??s mocked and dismissed handily for getting what seems to be too much of a good thing.

In my opinion, Matsumoto is just throwing the kitchen sink at the audience landing bits and pieces trying to hit the mark with as many patrons as possible. He blends aspects of film noir, slapstick, zen and S&M. Itâ??s not so much quality as it is quantity. Seemingly, being present and in the moment is a requirement for enjoying Matsumotoâ??s midnight submission, â??R100.â?• Admittedly, I found many of the scenes quite funny and found myself laughing joyously. I also found many scenes that werenâ??t so funny and found myself scratching my head. So I guess it stands to reason (or does it?) why the show won the Midnight Category at the Toronto International Film Festival. Unfortunately for me, I saw the film on a Monday afternoon, Veterans Day to be more specific. Warmly recommended for mature audiences.

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