



Note from Roger ??? Tampopo

Description

Before sharing Roger's note and the Los Angeles Times review, I'd like to share a few words. I saw *Tampopo* yesterday at a 2:00 PM matinee screening at the Riviera Theatre in the hills above Santa Barbara. As I live close by, I arrived at or near showtime. Much to my surprise a line of filmgoers was still formed outside at the box office. On a warm, sunny, Sunday afternoon, waiting in line for a few minutes isn't the end of the world. Santa Barbara International Film Festival Executive Director Roger Durling was outside the theater greeting and cajoling members of the line on upcoming screening at the Riviera Theater, the new home of the Santa Barbara Film Festival. After securing a ticket, I exchanged pleasantries with Mr. Durling and quickly made my way into the theater bypassing the concession line (Concessions are a favorite of mine!) Inside I spotted seats up front. Without much adieu, I planted myself in the middle of the row ??? front and center. What I saw and experienced over the course of the next nearly two hours was a lush, sensuously orchestrated film that left me delighted ??? albeit at times in stitches. Happy to say, I wasn't the only one enjoying the film with raucous and clear audibles of laughter emanating from the seats behind me and from the few seats to the front of me. (Larry Gleeson)



Dear Cinephiles,

You canâ??t be glued to fivethirtyeight.com or CNN for the next 48 hours.

Come distract yourself and see the glorious restoration of TAMPOPO, the funny, sexy and affectionate celebration of food. But please come see this with a full stomach.

It plays tonight at 7:30pm, election night at 5:00pm â?? and Wednesday at 7:30pm at the Riviera Theatre. Weâ??re attaching the LA Times review on the filmâ??s restoration and importance.

See you at the movies!
Roger Durling

[Click here for tickets](#)



To slurp with love:

â??Tampopoâ?? makes a welcome return

By Justin Chang â?? Los Angeles Times

The surreally amusing vignette that opens the great 1985 Japanese comedy â??Tampopoâ?? now plays, more than 30 years later, like a remarkably prescient public-service announcement. A gangster in a white suit (Koji Yakusho) takes his seat in the front row of a movie theater and addresses us through the screen, warning us not to even think about crunching potato chips and crumpling wrappers once the film has started.

Had â??Tampopoâ?? been made today, the gangster might well have thrown in a message about the rudeness of talking, texting and other 21st-century breaches of moviegoing etiquette â?? and with good reason. Making a welcome return to theaters in a 4k digital restoration courtesy of Janus Films, JÃ»zÃ´ Itamiâ??s art-house hit offers the kind of sensory experience that demands a viewerâ??s complete surrender â?? to its sumptuous culinary imagery, to the subliminal aromas that seem to come wafting off the screen, and to a soundtrack alive with the sounds of food being prepared, cooked and devoured.

Naturally, too, â??Tampopoâ?? demands to be experienced on at least a partially filled stomach â?? not so empty as to turn the film into a torturous deprivation exercise, but not too stuffed to enjoy the bowl of ramen noodles that will almost certainly be your first post-screening meal. (Conveniently enough for Angelenos, the film is screening at the Nuart Theatre, a few blocks away from the ramen-packed stretch of Sawtelle Boulevard known as Little Osaka.)

An early scene laying out the proper way to approach a bowl of ramen â?? complete with foreplay-like instructions to â??first caress the surface with the chopstick tipsâ?? and â??then poke the porkâ?? â?? sets the tone for a movie with an intuitive understanding of the chemical bond between food and sex, of the sensual circuitry that connects all human appetites.

There are many love stories folded into this filmâ??s enjoyably meandering two hours, but â??Tampopoâ?? is above all about the romance of food, and the joyous, agonizing devotion and hard work required to tease out its manifold mysteries.

Setting herself to that task with good-humored determination is Tampopo herself (played by Itami's wife, Nobuko Miyamoto), a widow and single mother who runs a failing noodle shop in Tokyo. With the help of Goro (Tsutomu Yamazaki), a truck driver who wears his cowboy hat even in the bath, and his trusty sidekick, Gun (a very young Ken Watanabe), Tampopo sets out to turn her shop into a thriving, world-class establishment.

Her story becomes a sort of western spoof (à la "Once Upon a Time in the West," anyone?) as she and her growing band of business partners visit rival restaurants, sniffing out secrets, comparing recipes and inevitably making a few enemies. And so begins a rigorous crash course in the culinary arts, for Tampopo and the audience: the ingredients of a perfect broth, the secret of rolling perfectly smooth noodles, the right slicing proportions for pork and scallions, the trick to keeping customers' individually tailored orders straight.

Even as the movie playfully lampoons the obsessiveness with which Tampopo pores over these details — her boot camp consists of transferring a stock pot of water repeatedly from one stovetop to the next — its satire originates from a place of the utmost sincerity. Tampopo doesn't just take food seriously; it grasps the foundational roles that food plays in every culture, and Itami's curiosity about these roles, as well as his bottomless appetite for narrative incident, lead him away from Tampopo's story and in search of other epicurean adventures.

As the movie drifts from one anecdote to another, pausing every so often to check in on its heroine's progress, it shows how cuisine is both the great social leveler and a significant delineator of class. Its pleasures are at once elitist and egalitarian. A junior executive outclasses the high-powered dolts at a business lunch with his superior knowledge of French cooking; meanwhile, at the same restaurant, a group of young women practicing refined dining habits give in to their natural impulses, slurping down their spaghetti *alle vongole* as noisily as possible.

The screen becomes an international smorgasbord, the camera lingering over a deftly prepared dish of ketchup fried rice, over slices of Korean-style beef sizzling on a tabletop grill, and — most heart-stoppingly — over a freshly shucked oyster glistening with a single, Sriracha-hued drop of blood. The erotic undertones in that latter image are taken to particularly runny extremes by the gangster and his moll (Fukumi Kuroda), who turn a raw egg yolk into the ultimate aphrodisiac.

Cinematic fusion cuisine par excellence, Tampopo mixes genres and styles with similar gusto: It's a western one minute, a yakuza thriller the next, with ample downtime for dream sequences and grotesque interludes.

Whether they're played for irony, suspense, tragic farce or bawdy humor, these subplots suggest a stream of endlessly refillable side dishes — some more piquant than others, but all of them in service of a robustly satisfying main course. The thrill of Tampopo's end goal — to earn the sort of respect rarely accorded a woman in a male-dominated profession — is only mildly diluted by the fact that her quest for the perfect ramen requires about an hour's worth of group mansplaining. The final triumph is hers, and ours.

Released in American theaters in 1987, Tampopo predated a number of foodie cinema classics, such as *Babette's Feast*, *Big Night* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*. It was the second and most popular of the 10 features that Itami directed before his death in 1997 — an apparent suicide that has since been shrouded in rumors of foul play. His 1992 anti-yakuza satire

Minbo, or the Gentle Art of Japanese Extortion, made him enemies in Japan's criminal underworld, five of whom attacked and wounded him days after the film's premiere.

The social critique in Tampopo is gentler and more dispersed, but it animates every scene, and it accounts for why even in an era of celebrity chefs, food-porn Instagram accounts and cookery-as-contact-sport reality shows the movie has lost none of its power to revivify the senses, not least of all one's sense of humor. It has the irresistible freshness of a recipe that many have tried to copy and none have matched: a barbed, sprawling, scintillating vision of a society happily in thrall to its taste buds.

Category

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