



Patron: Jim Broadbent
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Sweet Bean (PG)

dir: **Naomi Kawase**

Starring: **Kiki Kirin, Nagase Masatoshi**

Sponsor: **The Venue cinema**

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Synopsis: Tokyo, the present. Sentaro manages a small café selling dorayaki, a traditional pancake filled with sweet bean paste. The café is not successful. He employs 76 year old Tokue as a kitchen assistant. He learns that she has a secret recipe for sweet bean paste; customers love it and start flocking to the café. Sentaro then learns that Tokue has spent time in a sanatorium. She resigns suddenly. Sentaro reveals he too has a secret. He visits Tokue at the sanatorium but discovers that she has died. The café owner decides her nephew will take over the café. Sentaro receives details of Tokue's sweet bean recipe and begins to sell pancakes on his own.

It is easy to forget what a breath of fresh air Kawase Naomi seemed within Japanese film-making circles when she first emerged, aged just 18, at the turn of the 1990s with a series of highly personal Super 8 diaries and experimental films. The subsequent international recognition for her *Caméra d'Or*-winning feature debut *Suzaku* (1997) trail-blazed a path for a new generation of women directors, such as Nishikawa Miwa and Tanada Yuki, who have since established successful commercial careers, slowly eroding the long entrenched gender imbalance within the industry. And yet in comparison with these figures, Kawase remains something of a marginal presence in her homeland, her prodigious output (which includes numerous documentaries, shorts and anthology segments alongside her 8 features) buoyed instead by European funding and a consistently high Cannes profile. This outsider status can be attributed in part to her decision to base herself far from the industry hub of Tokyo; many of her films, including *Hotaru* (2000), *Shara* (2003) and *The Mourning Forest* (2007), are set in her birthplace, the ancient capital of Nara, while *Nayano* (2009) and *Still The Water* (2014) unfold in exotic locales further afield, in Thailand and Okinawa respectively.

It seems fitting then that Kawase's first film to be set in Tokyo (or rather its suburbs) should deal with those on the margins. Sentaro (Nagase Masatoshi, best known in the west for Fridrik Thor Fridricksson's *Cold Fever* and Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train*), a dispirited vendor of *dorayaki* pancakes, merely goes through the motions everyday, turning up to work in order to pay off debts (incurred by a past misdemeanour) to the owners of the tiny patisserie he manages. Tokue (Kore-eda regular Kirin Kiki, seen in *Our Little Sister*, shown by LFS), the mysterious 76 year old woman he reluctantly takes on as his kitchen assistant, her passion inspiring a new sense of pride and purpose in his work, is soon revealed to be a resident of a nearby sanatorium for sufferers of Hansen's disease, or leprosy. Meanwhile Wakana, a school girl from a broken family, finds a home from home within the new *Gemeinschaft* that develops around the older woman's artisanal recipe for the pancake's *an* sweet bean filling, honed over 50 years of domestic cooking.

Limiting the focus to these three characters works in the drama's favour, certainly when compared with the typically meandering meditations on love, death and extended family life in Kawase's previous work. And there are none of the nakedly autobiographical elements that have proved such a sticking points for viewers resistant to Kawase's rather self-conscious, self-orientalising strain of *autourism*. These shifts in tone are best attributed to the fact that she is, unusually, adapting someone else's work rather than developing an original story: the source material is the novel *An* by Sukegawa Durian, which deals with the very real but otherwise almost



invisible issue of the outsider status of the several thousand leprosy patients currently housed in specialist sanatoriums across Japan. (Previous films broaching the subject include Toyoda Shiro's *Spring on Leper's Island*, 1940, Nomura Yoshitaro's *The Castle of Sand*, 1974, and Kumai Kei's, *To Love*, 1977.)

For viewers unfamiliar with Kawase's oeuvre, *Sweet Bean* provides a better entry point than its laboured predecessor, *Still the Water*, which became her first to receive UK distribution. Despite its more sentimental tone, aesthetically the new film adheres closely to the template she established at the beginning of her career, with the phases of the protagonists' shifting relationships relayed as impressionist fragments of everyday life against the changing Seasons. The low-key documentary naturalism is well served by Akiyama Shigeki's lucid cinematography, and the montage that plays out as Sentaro reads Tokue's letter of farewell, expressing the old woman's nativist connection to the earth, harks back to the lyrical visual poetry of Kawase's early 8mm work - notably the touching portrait of the great aunt who raised her, *Katsumori* (1994). But the director's characteristically mawkish dialogue in the accompanying voice-over, waxing in quasi-mystical terms about the adzuki bean's rite of passage from field to kitchen or "the soul of a *dorayaki*", may leave some viewers wishing that the centre of this latest confection were a little less cloying.

Credits

Tokue	Kiki Kirin
Sentaro	Nagase Masatoshi
Wakana	Uchida Kyara
Dorakai shop owner	Asada Miyoko
Yoshiko	Ichihara Etsuko
Director	Naomi Kawase
Screenplay	Naomi Kawase - from the novel An by Sukegawa Durian
Director of Photography	Akiyama Shigeki
Editor	Tina Baz
Music	David Hadjadj
Sound	Mori Eiji, Roman Dymny
Costume	Kobayashi Miwako
	Japan/France/Germany 2015.
	113 mins

Another View

Cannes 2015: 'An' (Sweet Red Bean Paste), A Taste Of Japan

Alright-ness continues at this year's festival with the Un Certain Regard opening film *An* ("Sweet Red Bean Paste") by Cannes regular Naomi Kawase. The film stars Masatoshi Nagase as Sen, a

middle-aged dorayaki pastry maker with alcohol issues and Kirin Kiki as Tokue, an elderly woman eager to work as Sen's assistant in the pastry shop. The youthful touch is provided by Kyara Uchida as a shy schoolgirl having a hard time getting along with her single mother. Reluctant at first, Sen ends up admiring Tokue's unique bean paste making talent and employs her to the displeasure of the pastry shop's owner. Gradually, the three generations forge an intimate friendship as their respective traumas are revealed.

This humble drama offers a predictable, even if delicious, delve into a small-town Japanese world of culinary redemption. Getting to Cannes jet-lagged from a first trip to Japan, I was a sucker for all things dorayaki (a pastry that deserves to be in the credits of *An* given its pivotal importance) and okonomiyaki so there is no denying that I found the film enjoyable and pleasant, which is probably how it will go down in film history. 'Feel-good' is likely the qualification that springs to mind – 'feel-good' in the vein of *Intouchables* (Éric Toledano and Olivier Nakache, 2011) and a countless number of permutations of the well-worn premise of an unlikely pair reluctantly and inevitable bonding over a shared central theme (the artisanal tradition of dorayaki manufacture) and gradually helping one another heal their respective wounds.

An is stuffed with a series of conventional tropes and recurrent visual motifs of Japan-ness – the lingering shots of cherry blossom, the luxuriant texture of the brewing red beans, the patient, unhurried unfolding of the plot, the emphasis on heeding nature's whisper, the polite, demure schoolgirl – zen filmmaking, if such a genre exists, at its most Japanese. While far from memorable, "An" succeeds at faithfully and leisurely evoking the mood and taste of a slice of Japan.

Zornitsa Staneva - Sound on Sight

**Our next screening: Saturday May 19th, 7.30pm
The Other Side of Hope (dir Aki Kaurismäki.
Finland 2017. Cert 12A)**

Finnish auteur Aki Kaurismäki brings his trademark lugubrious style to a compassionate story rooted in the refugee crisis that has beset Europe in the last 2 years. Khaled Ali, a Syrian migrant, emerges from hiding as a stowaway on a coal freighter in Helsinki harbour, determined to find his sister, who's also in Europe. During his stay, he encounters state bureaucracy, some skinheads, an idiosyncratic businessman and what it's like to work in quite possibly the strangest restaurant ever created. This film - rearranged from March 2nd - is compassionate, drolly funny and never less than wholly engaging.

Membership News

Membership for the new season opens on Monday May 14th, and will remain open throughout the summer.

Rates for the new season remain unchanged from 2017-18 (£33 Concession, £36 Single, £66 joint). However, all members will be required to complete a new membership form, to enable us to comply with the new data protection regulations which come into force at the end of this month, and everyone will be issued with a new membership number.

The form is available from the website and will be emailed to members. Paper copies will also be available at forthcoming screenings.

Programme news

To help with commemorations of the RAF centenary this year, we are joining with The Venue to present 2 films on June 8 & 9. Details are below

Dark Blue World (Czech Republic 2001. Cert 12. 110 mins. Showing Friday, June 8th, 7.30pm)

2 Czech pilots escape from their homeland after the Nazis invade and occupy it and make it to Britain, where they join the RAF to fight in the Battle of Britain. They face the dangers of combat, and the no less demanding challenge of how to fit into British society. With some fine action sequences, moments of humour and even a touch of romance, the film pays tribute to the many pilots from overseas who served with distinction during World War 2

A Matter of Life and Death (UK 1946. 100 mins. Cert U. Showing

Saturday June 9th, 2.30pm)

David Niven stars as a bomber pilot returning from a raid in a badly damaged Lancaster. About to crash, he contacts radio operator June (Kim Hunter), before bailing out without a parachute. The film then explores whether he has the right to live or die. Made in 1946 by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, (arguably British cinema's finest directors), this is not just an engrossing drama but is recognised as one of the most innovative British films of all time.

Entry is free but a collection will be taken at each film on behalf of the International Bomber Command Centre)

We're also joining with The Venue for a short film festival from July 6-9. Details will be available at our final film

Our new programme

The films provisionally selected (subject to availability) for the 2018-19 season are as follows.

A Fantastic Woman (Chile 2017)

Beast (UK, 2017)

Custody (France 2017)

Faces, Places (France 2017)

Goodbye Berlin (Germany 2016)

Good Time (USA 2017)

Happy End (France 2017)

In the Fade (Germany 2017)

Jeune Femme (France 2017)

Kedi (Turkey 2016)

L'Amant Double (France 2017)

Mountains May Depart (China 2015)

On Body and Soul (Hungary 2017)

Redoutable (France 2017)

Summer 1993 (Spain 2017)

The Breadwinner (Ireland 2017)

The Florida Project (USA 2017)

The Rider (USA 2017)

The Wages of Fear (France 1953 - classic film)

The Wound (S.Africa 2017)

Thelma (Norway 2017)

Under the Tree (Iceland 2017)

The Draughtsman's Contract (UK 1982) - Archive classic

3 new films, released over the coming months, will be added to the programme in November, February and April. With The Draughtsman's Contract (an extra screening), next season will have 27 films in total.