

**A Grasshopper Film Release**



# **ASAKO I & II**

A film by Ryûsuke Hamaguchi

119 minutes / DCP / 1.66 / 5.1 / Japan & France / In Japanese with  
English Subtitles / Not Rated

## **Synopsis**

A mysterious and intoxicating pop romance, Ryûsuke Hamaguchi's follow-up to the acclaimed *Happy Hour* begins with Asako, a young woman who meets and falls madly in love with a drifter, Baku, who one day drifts right out of her life. Two years later, working in Tokyo, Asako sees Baku again — or, rather, a young, solid businessman named Ryohei who bears a striking resemblance to her old flame. They begin to build a happy life together until traces of Asako's past start to resurface.

## **About the Director**

### **Biography**

Ryûsuke Hamaguchi was born in 1978 in Kanagawa, Japan. He studied at the University of Tokyo and the graduate program at Tokyo University of the Arts, where he was a student of Kiyoshi Kurosawa; his graduation film, *Passion*, was selected for the competition of the 2008 Tokyo Filmex. Hamaguchi's breakthrough came with 2015's *Happy Hour*, a nearly five-and-a-half-hour drama that earned a four-way Best Actress award and, for its script, special mention at the Locarno Film Festival. *Asako I & II* is his latest feature.

### **Filmography**

2018	ASAKO I & II
2016	HEAVEN IS STILL FAR AWAY
2015	HAPPY HOUR
2013	STORYTELLERS
	TOUCHING THE SKIN OF EERINESS
2012	THE SOUND OF WAVES
	INTIMACIES
2010	THE DEPTHS
2008	PASSION
2007	SOLARIS

## **Director's Statement**

I personally don't know any other love novel than *Netemo Sametemo* (from which *Asako I & II* originates) that was so truly compelling in describing how falling in love is a mystic force akin to magic or else a curse. Once I finished reading the novel, I personally suggested to produce a film based it. When it luckily became a reality, I really thought to be as close as possible to the style of the original author, Ms. Tomoka Shibasaki. That is making possible the coexistence of the minute description of everyday life and the sudden unfolding of absurd events. The character of Baku/Ryohei can be thought as symbolizing elements of the unexpected vs the routine, and I think we managed the embodiment of this principle thanks to the acting performance of Mr. Masahiro Higashide who has this dual nature of the outward appearance (handsomeness and mystery) and inside qualities (gentleness, honesty).

Also, this film depicts a time span of almost 10 years, and writing it nowadays made it natural to include events like the earthquake disaster. I actually think that it was essential for this film, which describes the mixing up of the everyday and the extraordinary. Today, the routine we are living in is simply the post-disaster "everyday." The disaster shed light on that basic truth: "today is a completely different day than yesterday." Taken earnestly, this would have normally made us incapable of feeling this sense of "everyday." Nevertheless, the society as a whole in Japan stubbornly insisted on the fictional reality that the "routine" was going on as usual, and that "yesterday was more or less like today and tomorrow might as well be like today." That is surely because nobody in Japan would endure a world without an "everyday." To begin with, we can't clearly separate the "ordinary" from the "extraordinary." People wonder if can live their life through as they don't even know what will happen tomorrow. The lovers in *Asako I & II* live exactly this very question.

Asako's behavior at the end of the film will considerably shock the audience. Most of them may share the anger of Ryohei or Maya (Asako's friend). As a reader, I was also shocked when I read the novel. But that was rather because I was asked: "would you be capable of living like her?"

Asako is a very consistent and sensible person. That is because when she is confronted to what is important for her "in the moment", she can always reach a judgment without reflecting and act accordingly. She is capable of respecting her own feelings without a doubt even if it means suffering the criticism of society. It might look violent but I think that is the very foundation on which to build any long-lasting relationship with someone. Without this "respect for your own feelings" you cannot keep a relationship with any kind of person. Asako understands this without any reasoning. And Ms. Erika Karata, who plays Asako, is also a very bright person with whom explanations are superfluous.

If two people mutually “respect their own feelings,” their being together does not simply bring joy, it bears at the same time the violence that can destroy them both. The fact that the original book *Netemo Sametemo* deals straight on with this complexity of love relationships makes it a wonderful love novel, and is the reason why I intensely desired to adapt it as a film. Through their falling in love and loving, the lovers in this story take a decisive step towards this harsh life after the boundaries between the everyday and the unusual have collapsed, where “you don’t know what the next second is made of.” Is that something absurd that is only possible because it is a fiction? When I keep looking at Mr. Higashide and Ms. Karata throughout the film, I feel like it is not just a matter of fiction. When I see their expression during the ending sequence I think the film *Asako I & II* became a wonderful love movie. I am deeply grateful for discovering a wonderful novel and meeting a wonderful cast.

## **Interview**

### **THE FILM IS AN ADAPTATION OF A NOVEL.**

I like deeply the novel by Tomoka Shibasaki, which has two main points of interest to me: the weirdness of a woman who falls in love with two men with the exact same face and the attentive description of everyday life. The long process of project development made me wonder if the film adaptation was even possible. This is when I met Masahiro Higashide (Baku/Ryohei), and Erika Karata (Asako) that I felt like this novel was finally ready to be adapted. I really feel this coming together of novel and cast is a tremendous sign of fortune.

### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MOVIE AND THE ORIGINAL NOVEL?**

I basically followed the plotline of the novel. The closing part had a big impact on me, and I read the book thinking that it was very movie-like. The novel is written in first person, so I changed a lot of parts where it was difficult to express that cinematographically, to facilitate the understanding of the audience. But I feel like I kept to the book, I relied on the fun of the original while writing the script, and even during the shooting.

### **WHAT IS YOUR REHEARSAL METHOD WITH THE ACTORS?**

For my previous feature film called *Happy Hour*, I went through the process of script reading a scene before shooting it (as Jean Renoir's script reading method). For *Asako I & II*, it's basically the same. The two main protagonists were fully committed to the script reading before the shooting, and I feel like we were simply taking the nuances off. We read the script without nuances, then we went filming. Once we were filming, I just let them act. I have this basic will of deciding everything on site but I believe that's not the way actors prepare. The fresher the take the better, and if there are more and more takes accumulating, there is less and less surprise. Overall this script reading is like a good luck charm.

### **HOW DID YOU CHOSE THE LIGHTING, WITH HINTS OF SHADOW, AND DESIGN THE IMAGE WITH SOME TONES OF DISQUIETUDE?**

I basically leave it all in the hands of the DOP, Yasuyuki Sasaki. There are three members of the team in total for the camera and the lighting, and I believe Mr. Sasaki thinks about how to do things with little lighting. I don't dislike the fact that there are some shadows. I think that's because there is something disquieting in this story. It is a love story, but it contains from the start a certain amount of anxiety, and I try my best to keep it alive.

### **MR. HIGASHIDE PLAYS BOTH BAKU AND RYOHEI; WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO ROLES?**

The characters derive directly from the novel. Baku is a free spirit, while Ryohei is more conventional, I don't know if there is such thing as an ordinary Japanese man, but he is more of that type. Asako is attracted by Baku, but she is also attracted by Ryohei because he has the exact same face. When I wrote down the characters, I

thought about differentiating the language. Higashide is Higashide, no matter what. I think that if the words you use are different, you use your body in a different way, so to put it simply Ryohei speaks kansai-ben [dialect of the Kansai region] while Baku speaks hyojun-go [official “standard” language]. But as a kansai-ben speaker Ryohei is a cheerful, open-minded type, while Baku keeps things to himself. I hope that this use of language naturally divides Mr. Higashide’s acting.

**WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE MR. HIGASHIDE FOR THE ROLE?**

He has an easily understandable two-sidedness. I first saw him in *The Kirishima Thing*, and then in *Kiseiju*, Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s films *Creepy*, and also on TV. When I saw him on the screen I had the impression that he had this two-sidedness and that you could grasp it very clearly, so I had the immediate intuition that it would be great if he could play those two difficult roles.

**COMPARED TO MR. HIGASHIDE, MS. KARATA IS LESS EXPERIENCED IN ACTING. DID YOU CHANGE SOMETHING IN YOUR DIRECTION?**

I don’t think I did. I think the script reading with Mr. Higashide was a big thing. They learned to trust each other through the process, and it created a synergy. We did the script reading and the rehearsal with this confidence, so I did not feel like I was working differently.

## **Cast**

Asako	Erika Karata
Baku/Ryohei	Masahiro Higashide
Kushihashi	Koji Seto
Maya	Rio Yamashita
Haruyo	Sairi Ito
Okazaki	Daichi Watanabe

## **Crew**

<i>Directed by</i>	Ryûsuke Hamaguchi
<i>Written by</i>	Ryûsuke Hamaguchi Sachiko Tanaka
<i>Based on the Novel by</i>	Tomoka Shibasaki
<i>Produced by</i>	Yûji Sadai Teruhisa Yamamoto Yasuhiko Hattori
<i>Editor</i>	Azusa Yamazaki
<i>Original Music</i>	Tofubeats
<i>Director of Photography</i>	Yasuyuki Sasaki
<i>Sound</i>	Mikisuke Shimazu
<i>Re-Recording Mixer</i>	Miki Nomura
<i>Stylist</i>	Masae Miyamoto
<i>Costume</i>	Sumiko Shimizu
<i>Hair &amp; Makeup</i>	Shinji Hashimoto
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Director</i>	Yu Koreyasu
<i>Production Design</i>	Masato Nunobe
<i>VFX Director</i>	Tetsuya Shiraishi

A BITTERS END PRODUCTION

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