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Tamasaburo Bando
star of the Grand Kabuki
in
Masahiro Shinoda's
**DEMON
POND**
a supernatural
love story

The remarkable Kabuki star Tamasaburo Bando is only one of many reasons to see "Demon Pond," a most unusual Japanese film opening today at the Embassy 72d Street. "Demon Pond" is a fable, told in a colorful, whimsical, theatrical style. It concerns a shy, humble woman from a village beside the enchanted pond of the title, and a beautiful princess who lives in the pond among its mud creatures. Both women are played by the lithe, graceful Mr. Bando, who is not in any way recognizable here as a man.

Mr. Bando, known simply as Tamasaburo in Japan, is a female impersonator of astonishing subtlety. As Yuri, the village woman, he is delicate and demure, speaking in a soft, feminine voice that is perhaps the most convincing part of his impersonation. As the bold, colorful princess, he has more authority and power. In either role, he painstakingly imitates the manner of a woman and does it so

unobtrusively that the audience may have to remind itself that this is no actress. Tamasaburo appears to be giving a subdued, naturalistic performance, particularly in Yuri's role, and especially in comparison to the more farfetched and fanciful creatures who otherwise populate the movie.

Masahiro Shinoda's film, which was written by Takeshi Tamura and Haruhiko Mimura from a story by Kyoka Izumi, tells of a traveler named Yamazawa from Tokyo, who finds himself in a parched village in northern Japan. Though the villagers are enduring a drought, there is a stream nearby, and a peculiar woman, Yuri, who tends a garden beside it. The source of the water, Yuri explains, in a slow, haunted manner that makes Yamazawa suspect she is a sorceress, is Demon Pond. The pond will overflow and drown all the villagers if an ancient companion of Yuri fails to chime a certain bell three times each day.

The rest of the film's secrets deserve to be kept, because its story unfolds slowly, in a mysterious manner. But it involves not only the townspeople but also the pond creatures, who suddenly appear midway through the film in its most flamboyant, delightfully stagey section. There is a catfish priest, delivering a letter from the princess and fearing, "Maybe that letter tells the princess to cut me into pieces, boil me and enjoy me like a turtle!" There are a fish and a crab who, hoping for a flood, sing, "Oh, turn the mountain into a river!" Their costumes are delightful, as are those of the other mud creatures, some representing real animals and others signifying beings that exist only in Mr. Shinoda's rich imagination.

Janet Maslin N.Y. Times



SURF Irving at 46th Ave/664-6300

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