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Inazuma (Lightning), Naruse, Mikio, 1952 Hikinige (Hit and run), Naruse, Mikio, 1966

Hataraku ikka (The whole family works), Naruse, Mikio, 1939 Koshiben gambare (Flunky, work hard!), Naruse, Mikio, 1931

Otome-gokoro sannin shimai (Three sisters with maiden hearts),

Naruse, Mikio, 1935

Tsuruhachi Tsurujiro (Tsuruhachi and Tsurujiro), Naruse, Mikio,

1938

Tsuma yo bara no yo ni (Wife! Be like a rose!), Naruse, Mikio,

1935

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Onna ga kaidan o agaru toki (When a woman ascends the stairs), Naruse, Mikio, 1960

Midaregumo (Scattered clouds), Naruse, Mikio, 1967

Yama no oto (Sound of the mountain), Naruse, Mikio, 1954

Ukigumo (Floating clouds), Naruse, Mikio, 1955

Iwashigumo (Summer clouds), Naruse, Mikio, 1958

Ani imoto (Older brother, younger sister), Naruse, Mikio, 1953

Midareru (Yearning), Naruse, Mikio, 1964

Tsuma to shite onna to shite (As a wife, as a woman), Naruse, Mikio, 1961

Horoki (Her lonely lane), Naruse, Mikio, 1962

Nagareru (Flowing), Naruse, Mikio, 1956

Bangiku (Late chrysanthemums), Naruse, Mikio, 1954

Fûfu (Husband and wife), Naruse, Mikio, 1953

Okasan (Mother), Naruse, Mikio, 1952

Kimi to wakarete (Apart from you), Naruse, Mikio, 1933

Kagirinaki hodo (Street without end), Naruse, Mikio, 1934

Yogoto no yume (Every night dreams), Naruse, Mikio, 1933



MAY 17

WIFE! BE LIKE A ROSE! (1935)

Considered by many to be Naruse's pre-war masterpiece, Wife! Be Like A Rose! was also the first Japanese "talkie" to be exhibited commercially in the United States. Kimiko, a "modern-thinking" office worker, decides to re-unite her estranged parents. She seeks out her father, who for several years has been living with a former geisha in the country; pleading with him to consider his obligations to her mother, she persuades him to return with her. Yet, the meetings with his wife are cold and formal, and he eventually decides to leave again. Perhaps in no other of his works in this period are the standard conventions of cinematic narration so obviously and purposefully flouted; Naruse continuously fragments space, locking even characters conversing together in the same room into discontiguous areas. Although some critics have attacked the film for its negative image of strong, independent-minded women, this critique seems problematic when seen in the light of his recurring preoccupation with the stifling quality of family life. 75 min.

TSURUHACHI AND TSURUJIRO (1938)

"Apart from anything else, Tsuruhachi And Tsurujiro is a musical treat as the story follows the turbulent partnership of a shamisen player and a ballad singer during the Meiji era. Nicely atmospheric in its backstage scenes and views of the little towns, it is also one of the most subtly composed of Naruse's Thirties work. Its main strength, though, lies in the witty and moving on/off relationship between the two main characters, played with much expressive feeling by the great Kazuo Hasegawa and Isuzu Yamada."—John Gillett, British Film Institute. 89 min.



MAY 18

REPAST (1951)

A poignant study of a disintegrating marriage, Repast is told from the point of view of a childless young wife who longs to escape her dreary routine and return to her family in Tokyo. After catching her husband in a compromising position with a visiting niece, she leaves him, and heads for Tokyo; yet her memories of Tokyo were before defeat and occupation by a foreign army, and in the end she resigns herself to her fate. Naruse's mature style took full bloom here; framings are rigid and settings sparse, with a minimum of any technical flourish, yet the "calm" seems, and is, unnatural, and instead reveals tensions seething below the surface.

It was also with Repast that Naruse discovered the novels of Fumiko Hayashi, an important feminist author; over the next decade, Naruse would bring all of her important works to the screen. 97 min.

THREE SISTERS WITH MAIDEN HEARTS (1935)

A sensuously striking "city symphony" that explores Tokyo's back-alley world, Three Sisters With Maiden Hearts marked Naruse's first experience with sound in cinema. A selfish, domineering mother wants her daughters to be shamisen street musicians; rebelling against her mother's restrictive plans, the eldest sister runs off with her lover, causing the full brunt of the mother's fury to fall on the more dutiful middle sister. Needing money, the eldest sister enlists the aid of some hoodlum friends in setting up a con game. Adapted by Naruse from an original story by Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata (Sound Of The Mountain, June 8), Three Sisters With Maiden Hearts features a tight, action-filled narrative reminiscent of Warner Brothers crime films of the same period. 75 min.

MAY 26

NIGHTLY DREAMS (1933)

In Nightly Dreams, a woman turns to prostitution to support her young son after her husband abandons them. The husband returns, and for a moment a semblance of "normal family life" returns, but when their son is injured the woman returns to the streets in order to help pay the medical bills. Possibly influenced by von Sternberg's Docks Of New York, Naruse creates a richly detailed harborside atmosphere with an assortment of remarkably colorful, richly drawn characters. Silent, 88 min.

STREET WITHOUT END (1934)

"Naruse's early Thirties films display, like other Japanese films of the time, a notably modern and sensitive feeling for their women characters. Street Without End, based on a newspaper serial about the loves and marriage of a girl who works in a tea salon, is both fascinating as social observation (including a film studio) and a remarkable piece of filmmaking, with a constantly roving camera and a plethora of intriguing characters. The great trackings in the climactic hospital scene perfectly encapsulates the story's feminist concerns."—John Gillett, British Film Institute. Silent, 93 min.

JUNE 1

MOTHER (1952)

The only Naruse film to have been shown widely in Europe until recently, Mother is to a certain extent not truly characteristic of the director's style or thematic preoccupations during this period. After the death of her husband, a widow (luminously portrayed by Kinuyo Tanaka) with three children tries to manage her husband's dry-cleaning business. Told from the point-of-view of her eldest daughter, the film is an unabashedly sentimental hymn to maternal self-sacrifice and dedication, yet a certain "edge" appears as Tanaka's self-deprecation takes on an unsettling, obsessive quality. A perennial Japanese favorite. 98 min.

LIGHTNING (1952)

The second adaptation of a Fumiko Hayashi novel to be filmed by Naruse, Lightning continues and expands the theme of entrapment within a family system which the director introduced in his pre-war work. Kiyoko (Hideko Takamine) grew up with three half-siblings, each of whose father was different than Kiyoko's. One of her half-sisters attempts to arrange a marriage for her, but Kiyoko suspects her intentions; meanwhile the husband of her other half-sister dies suddenly, leaving a large insurance policy to his widow; as family members move to outwit or gain advantage over each other, Kiyoko attempts to cut off ties and strike out on her own.

The complex network of at times contradictory emotional attachments is subtly yet exactingly delineated in a family study with broad implications about postwar society. 90 min.

MAY 19

FLUNKY, WORK HARD! (1931)

The earliest extant Naruse film is this short, bittersweet comedy, one of several he made during this period about the lives of the lower middle-class white-collar workers. Here, the "flunky" is an insurance agent who courts a rich family in an attempt to make a sale while his own, uninsured son suffers a serious accident. Silent, 28 min.

APART FROM YOU (1933)

"A sharp, knowing analysis of the social and family vortex which traps women within the geisha world, centering on a girl who falls in love with the son of an older geisha and tries to remove him from the rough company he falls into. Extraordinarily decorative and well-crafted in the interior scenes of geisha life with an open, lyrical episode in a seaside town to which the lovers temporarily escape. Deeply felt playing from Mitsuko Yoshikawa, Akio Isono, and Sumiko Mizukobo."—Iohn Gillett, British Film Institute. 80 min.

MAY 25

THE WHOLE FAMILY WORKS (1939)

Kiichi, the eldest son of a factory worker's nine children, is encouraged by a teacher to pursue his education. His parents discourage him—they cannot get along without the income he will bring in when he goes to work at the factory. One of the very best Depression-era Japanese films. 65 min.

HIDEKO, THE BUS CONDUCTOR (1941)

Hideko Takamine stars in the first of her seventeen films with Naruse, a charming, escapist comedy in which the war is, if anything, conspicuous by its absence. Filmed on location, the story follows a teenage girl who works in a country hotsprings village as a ticket-taker for a bus line that has seen better days (obviously, but not stated, due to the wartime conditions). She develops a scheme to liven up her route by turning it into a tourist line and herself into a "modern" tour guide. 54 min.

JUNE 2

OLDER BROTHER, YOUNGER SISTER (1953)

In 1953—a banner year for Japanese cinema, with the international success of Ugetsu and Rashomon—Naruse made three films structured around disintegrating relationships; Older Brother, Younger Sister is the darkest and most unsettling among them. Two extraordinary players more normally associated with Mizoguchi—Machiko Kyo and Masayuki Mori—star in this tense study of suppressed emotions and rivalries. After being left by her student lover, a young woman returns home pregnant. She becomes a constant object of scorn for her rowdy older brother, who also beats up the student when he comes looking for the sister. Meanwhile, the marriage prospects of a younger sister are ruined because of the resulting scandal. Abandoning his characteristic restraint, Naruse creates a melodrama of harrowing intensity. 86 min.

HUSBAND AND WIFE (1953)

Only recently rediscovered, Husband And Wife, together with Repast (May 18), and Wife (not included in series) form a trilogy about married couples in crisis. Much admired in Japan, the film again returns to the milieu of low-salaried, white-collar workers, a group symbolic for Naruse of the negative effects of westernization. A couple living alone in a dingy rented room grow tired of each other and contemplate separating; their recently widowed landlord, a nervous, eccentric character brilliantly incarnated by Rentaro Mikuni, serves to bring some distraction to their lives. 87 min.

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JUNE 8

LATE CHRYSANTHEMUMS (1954)

In Naruse's films, family life was often depicted as oppressive; yet the "freedom" seemingly available to those individuals, especially women, who have lived outside the family system is often illusory. Late Chrysanthemums, one of the director's finest films, follows the lives of four former geishas. One of them, Kin, now earns her living as a moneylender, occasionally advancing small sums to her former geisha friends; each of them, as they were once performers, knows well how to hide their emotions beneath placid exteriors. Each attempts to place her trust in another, but years of fending for themselves have made them rightfully suspicious of the way of the world. A rich, probing character study based on three short stories by Fumiko Hayashi, Late Chrysanthemums captures the special kind of warmth and camaraderie among women who have learned to depend upon each other for emotional support. 101 min.

SOUND OF THE MOUNTAIN (1954)

Nobel prize winning Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata was the source for Naruse's earlier Three Sisters With Maiden Hearts (May 18) and worked also on Repast (May 18); here, Naruse adapts one of the author's best-loved novels into a profoundly moving study of loneliness and changing postwar values. Setsuko Hara (best known for her many films with Ozu) is a traditionally-raised woman living with her in-laws and callous, philandering husband. Often alone, she develops a close and complex relationship with her father-in-law (veteran actor So Yamamura) through which she is able to cope with the indignities visited upon her by her wayward husband. Sound Of The Mountain is one of Naruse's densest, most accomplished works; emotions, dreams, and course of action are expressed through the subtlest gestures or movements. 96 min.

JUNE 16

SUMMER CLOUDS (a.k.a. HERRINGBONE CLOUDS) (1958)

Stunningly photographed in color and CinemaScope, Summer Clouds transfers a "typical" Naruse story line—a single woman coping with the pressures and restrictions of her family—from his traditional backstreet urban milieu to a rural, farmland setting. Chikage Awashima, an actress better known for her work with Ozu, attempts to break the tedium of her situation by writing short stories about farm life for a newspaper; her work brings her in contact with a married reporter, with whom she falls in love. One of the director's most lyrical, delicate works, there's a surprising use of nature and natural imagery, as the protagonist continually finds a haven for herself in the beautiful countryside. 130 min.

WHEN A WOMAN ASCENDS THE STAIRS (1960)

Ascends The Stairs is the story of Keiko (Hideko Takamine), a "Mama-san," or bar proprietess whose work is to entertain men for money. A thirty-year old widow, Keiko realizes that she is at a stage in her life in which she must either remarry or own her own business. Refusing to descend into prostitution, yet besieged by the furious competition of other Mama-sans, Keiko attempts to borrow the money she needs to continue without a male "sponsor," yet her plans change when one of her customers, Fujisaki (Masayuki Mori) proposes marriage. Their courtship, however, only bears witness to how vulnerable women like Keiko really are. In a haunting final scene, as she again prepares to meet her customers, she reveals the terrible pattern of her life: "Then it gets dark. I hate to climb the stairs. But once I'm up, I trust to luck." 111 min.

JUNE 9

FLOATING CLOUDS (1955)

When reviewing its New York theatrical release in 1980, New York Times critic Vincent Canby remarked, "Floating Clouds is so good that I can't imagine why it has taken so long to obtain a theatrical release here." Consistently voted one of the greatest of all Japanese films, Floating Clouds follows two mismatched lovers (Hideko Takamine and Masayuki Mori) from the time of their meeting in Indochina during the war until their unhappy end several years later. After their initial affair, the two return separately to a Japan which no longer has any meaning for either of them—he to his wife, and she to a lonely existence that prompts her to focus more and more obsessively on the love she has lost. In the frenetic atmosphere of postwar Japan rebuilding and westernizing, the memory of their brief encounter becomes a symbol for a life and tradition lost to a new world. Perhaps no other film better captured the subtle yet inescapable pessimism of Naruse's vision. 123 min.

FLOWING (1956)

The geisha world was the setting for some of Naruse's greatest films—Apart
From You (May 19), Late Chrysanthemums (June 8), and Flowing. Featuring a
"dream" trio of Japanese actresses—Isuzo Yamada, Kinuyo Tanaka, and Hideko
Takamine—Flowing charts the decline of a geisha house as witnessed by a loyal,
elderly maid (Tanaka). The proud mistress of the house, Tsutayakko (Yamada) has
accumulated large debts in her efforts to maintain standards; refusing to turn her
establishment into a restaurant, or a brothel, Tsutayakko attempts to get in touch
with a former patron, to see if he might come to her aid, but the man cynically
responds by sending a paltry sum he designates as "severance pay." Gradually, each
woman in the house comes to realize that their way of life is drawing to a close.

117 min.

JUNE 22

YEARNING (1964)

Naruse's final works somewhat recapture the feel of his pre-war work, especially in the complexity of their narratives and the occasional forays into expressive lighting and camera effects. In **Yearning**, a childless widow attempts to keep afloat the business left to her by her late husband in the wake of increasing competition from new supermarkets. When her in-laws decide that the going has gotten too tough, they sell the business, cutting out their daughter-in-law, who is forced to return to her own family. Naruse skillfully etches revealing psychological portraits of the several principal characters, and the ensemble acting, led by Hideko Takamine, is exceptional. 98 min.

HIT AND RUN (1966)

Naruse's final film with his perennial favorite Hideko Takamine, Hit And Run features her as a widow who becomes obsessed with exacting revenge on the family responsible for the death of her young son. The chauffeur of a wealthy family confesses to the accident, but the widow becomes convinced that his confession is merely a cover-up to hide the guilt of his employers. Based on a screenplay written by Takamine's husband, Zenzo Matsuyama, Hit And Run has more of a political thrust than one normally associates with Naruse; the helplessness and horror Takamine feels before a legal system designed to protect the interests of the rich is powerfully conveyed in her tense, increasingly hysterical performance. 94 min.

JUNE 15

HER LONELY LANE

(a.k.a. A WANDERER'S NOTEBOOK) (1962)

"...Naruse's adaptation of Fumiko Hayashi's autobiography again reveals the director approaching the height of his powers, as if restored by bringing to the screen the life story of Hayashi, the writer who had so frequently inspired him....The film allows Naruse to introduce to his spectrum another and most rare type of Japanese woman, the artist. Hayashi's story is not only that of a rebellious woman of peasant origins seeking independence, but also of such a woman becoming a respected literary figure. It is a monumental film, although, because it is set in our own century, it lacks the historical dimensions of Mizoguchi's The Life Of Oharu. But if Oharu's struggle can readily attract sympathizers who mourn the oppression of women in Japan's feudal past, Hayashi's, much closer to the situations of Japanese women today, inspires anxiety and discomfort, a measure of Naruse's success in capturing the psychological bondage plaguing his heroine."—Joan Mellen, The Waves at Genji's Door. 124 min.

THE OTHER WOMAN (a.k.a. AS A WIFE, AS A WOMAN) (1961)

A respectable university professor, Kono (Masayuki Mori) lives with his wife but keeps Miho (Hideko Takamine), the manager of a Ginza bar he owns, as his mistress; his two children, who live with him and his wife, are actually Miho's. Realizing the fragility and hopelessness of her position, Miho attempts to leave Kono, but soon becomes involved in a vicious power struggle over her livelihood and her children.

"Perhaps more so than any other of his films, this film illustrates the precariousness of the single woman's position in the world Naruse observes.... One of the
most intense scenes in all of Naruse's work is the confrontation between Ayako
(Kono's wife) and Miho. As fifteen years of bitterness comes out in words for the
first time, Naruse destroys all sympathy for any of his characters. At the end of the
film, the audience is left feeling what the children express: a horror at the enormity
of these people's selfishness."—Audie Bock. 106 min.

JUNE 23

SCATTERED CLOUDS (1967)

Already aware that he was dying, Naruse made this poignant, deeply affecting tale of impossible love that Japanese critics, especially, consider to be among his finest films. A young man with bright career prospects is killed in a car accident, leaving his pregnant wife a widow. Without financial resources, she undergoes an abortion, while the driver of the car is found to be innocent. He offers to make amends in any way he can, but she refuses. Some time later, they meet in a provincial city in northern Japan, and slowly a love between them begins to grow. Rural locations on the island of Hokkaido are brilliantly utilized, and the haunting, final scene between the couple could stand as a summation of the art of Mikio Naruse. 107 min.

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