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I WAS BORN, BUT...

Directed by.....Yasujiro Ozu
Screenplay by.....Akira Fushimi
Photography and editing.....Hideo Shigehara
Set design.....Takejiro Tsunoda and Yoshio Kimura

CAST

Father.....Tatsuo Saito
Mother.....Mitsuko Yoshikawa
Elder brother.....Hideo Sugawara
Younger brother.....Tomio "Tokkankozo" Aoki
The boss.....Takeshi Sakamoto
His son, Taro.....Seiichi Kato
The delivery boy.....Shoichi Kofujita

1932. Silent. 89 minutes. Japan.



I Was Born, But...

I started to make a film about children and ended with a film about grown-ups. While I had originally planned to make a fairly bright little story, it changed while I was working on it, and came out very dark. The company hadn't thought it would turn out this way. They were so unsure of it they delayed its release for two months.

Yasujiro Ozu on
I Was Born, But...

I Was Born, But... went on after that to win the Kinema Jumbo first prize for that year. Ozu's technique is of the simplest yet the most rigorous. He still considered sound something of a nuisance and was the last Japanese film director to enter into sound production, just as he was among the last to embrace color. His 1932 masterpiece, *I Was Born, But...*, a silent film with titles, is typical of his finest work, and at the same time shows the forming of his style. The theme or 'anecdote' is very strong. This comedy contrasts the world of the adult with the world of the child and finds the former lacking—yet, at the same time, recognizes that innocence must have an end. The theme is in the title: one is born... then the trouble begins.

A typical Japanese salaried-man steps one rung up the social ladder when he moves to the suburbs. His two little boys do not adapt so well. They fight with the neighborhood children, one of whom is the son of their father's boss. They want to know why their father has to curry favor with his boss. When he tells them that if he doesn't they won't eat, the two make the heroic decision to eat no more... The elder, voicing a truth apparent only to the innocent, says that he makes better grades and is stronger than the boss' son, that if he has to work for him when he grows up, he might as well not go to school any more. But the boys are only children. Seduced by empty stomachs, their moment of truth over, they forget—life goes on: they are not yet ready for the problem awaiting them.

In this film Ozu brought together in almost perfect form the various elements which made up his style, his personal way of looking at the world. The picture is a *shomin-geki*, and the rigidity of Japanese society is well implied. It is about a family unit, whose members interest Ozu more than the unit. It is about children, who innocently reflect the falseness of an adult society. Ozu goes further, suggesting that such innocence cannot continue. Though the film is a comedy, it is a serious one; the two little boys will never again be the same. Later, Ozu would realize that innocence returns, and he would celebrate the somewhat battered simplicity of his older men who in this cold world have kept, though at great cost, a kind of purity. In *I Was Born, But...*, so bright, so funny, he had not yet found it necessary to realize that innocence can, in a way, be retained...

Donald Richie

I Was Born, But...
(*Umarete wa Mita Keredo*)
1932, Black and White, Silent
89 Minutes

Other films by Yasujiro Ozu available from New Yorker Films:

A STORY OF FLOATING WEEDS (1934), THE RECORD OF A TENEMENT GENTLEMAN (1947), LATE SPRING (1949), THE FLAVOR OF GREEN TEA OVER RICE (1952), TOKYO STORY (1953), EARLY SPRING (1956), EQUINOX FLOWER (1958), LATE AUTUMN (1960), THE END OF SUMMER (1961), and AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON (1962)