

# THE HAPPINESS OF THE KATAKURIS



## CAST

Masao Katakuri **KENJI SAWADA**  
Terue Katakuri **KEIKO MATSUZAKA**  
Masayuki Katakuri **SHINJI TAKEDA**  
Shizue Katakuri **NAOMI NISHIDA**  
Ojisan Jinpei Katakuri **TETSURÔ TANBA**  
Yurie Katakuri **TAMAKI MIYAZAKI**  
Richâdo Sagawa **KIYOSHIRÔ IMAWANO**

## CREW

Directed by **TAKASHI MIIKE**  
Based on "THE QUIET FAMILY"  
Screenplay by **KIKUMI YAMAGISHI**  
Translation by **AI KENNEDY**  
Produced by **HIROTSUGU YOSHIDA**  
Music by **KÔJI ENDÔ** and **KÔJI MAKAINO**  
Cinematography by **HIDEO YAMAMOTO**  
Edited by **TAIJI SHIMAMURA**  
Animation Direction by **HIDEKI KIMURA**





# CONTENTS

## CREDITS

**KATAKURIS AND CORPSES (2015)** by Johnny Mains

**"I'M GOING TO PUT SOMETHING NEW IN IT" (2002)**  
An interview with Takashi Miike by Sean Axmaker

**THE ROCK-AND-ROLL HORROR PICTURE SHOW (2015)**  
by Stuart Galbraith IV

**THE UNHAPPINESS OF THE QUIET FAMILY (2015)** by Grady Hendrix

**ABOUT THE TRANSFER**

2

7

16

26

32

38



# KATAKURIS AND CORPSES

by Johnny Mains

In 2001, Takashi Miike directed eight films. Three of those stand the test of time to become core viewing alongside his greatest early work *Ôdishon* (*Audition*). The first, *Bijitâ Q* (*Visitor Q*), is infamous and one of Miike's most perverted offerings. It contains father/daughter incest and the trifling matter of how much faeces comes out of a corpse if you try to have your way with it. The second, *Koroshiya 1* (*Ichi the Killer*), is one of several yakuza films directed by Miike that year and showcases a level of insanity that will blow away even the most extreme Asian cinema fan. Every scene in the film is dripping with gore and it more than honours the Hideo Yamamoto manga it is based on. The third film, *Katakuri-ke no kôfuku* (*The Happiness of the Katakuris*) is the one that seems to have divided opinion the most. Again Miike uses it to explore the family dynamic, but this time when you think you have him all figured out, he twists it to pulsate in your hand like a ripped out uvula.

The set-up of the film is simple; Masao Katakuri (Kenji Sawada) uses his redundancy money to buy a rambling house near the base of active stratovolcano, Mount Fuji. Although the house itself is on a toxic dump, it is turned into a bed and breakfast. It carries the rather strange name of 'White Lover's Inn'. Living here, the family - which consist of obedient wife Terue, daughter Shizue, who falls in love with all the wrong men at a drop of a hat, (she also looks about the same age as her mother), son, ex-con and black sheep Masayuki, granddaughter Yurie (given the narrator's task), his father Jinpei and the dog, Pochi.

All, quite surprisingly, expect paying guests to come but no guests arrive. One stormy night and against the odds, a half-naked film critic (the actor's real job!) turns up. A reprieve? No, he promptly commits suicide using a knife fashioned from the oversized keyring for his room. Petrified that this visit could signify the start and end of their enterprise, the Katakuris decide to bury the body...

Whilst *Visitor Q* explored the collapse of the Japanese family, *Katakuris* is its flip side. There is an optimism in the film. The family remain together as all goes to hell around them.



Many Japanese families would relate to the wisdom of looking inwards to gain strength. Ten years before the film was made, in 1991, the Japanese stock market crashed and led to the so called 'Lost Two Decades' - 失われた20年, Ushinawareta Nijūnen. The interest rate remained under 1% from 1994 onwards. It was catastrophic for all but the strongest of communities and even today, it casts a long shadow – however the Japanese film industry appears to remain largely unscathed. Aside from that - the world's third largest economy continues to feel the strain.

*The Happiness of the Katakuris* is not an original film, the premise is a rough remake of Kim Jee-woon's Choyonghan kajok (*The Quiet Family*), released three years before. It starred a pre-fame Min-sik Choi (*Oldeuboi* [*Oldboy*] Chan-wook Park, 2003). It is a straight tale, simply told, with a much harder tone than *Katakuris*, and no musical numbers or lumbering zombies. That's not to say that *The Quiet Family* isn't a funny film, its humour is blacker than death in places, but the difference between the humour in these different tellings is noticeable – there is a sense of gleeful, maniacal abandon in *Katakuris* that is woefully absent in *The Quiet Family*, however it is the most technically adept film with stunning cinematography.

What *Katakuris* has, that gives it an undeniable charm, is Claymation (animation sequences with modelling clay). From the very start of the film, when an anonymous female diner is swilling about her soup and lifts out a tiny winged demon, you are thrown into a world that's as insane as Švankmajer's masterpiece of the grotesque, *Alice (Neco z Alenky)*, 1988). Whilst the opening scene lasts only a few minutes before live action resumes, there are enough ideas within it on the cycle of life and death, the food chain and rebirth to launch numerous other films. Miike himself said that you could watch the beginning and not need to see the rest of the film as he said what he wanted to say in those first few scenes.

Other animations run throughout the film and are filled with surreal themes. They do distract on occasion but are so bonkers and deliriously insane that if there were to be another cut where these parts were excised by Miike, they *would* be missed. Merit must be given to the clay animation director Hideki Kimura and his team too for their dedication and belief in the medium. Its use shows how far Miike is willing to push the envelope, but there is a danger, inherent with any film that dares to stray from so-called 'conventional' film-making, to overwhelm the casual film viewer and even partisan cineaste.

Which brings us to...the music. *Happiness* is a musical, and musical fans might not be happy with what they hear. Miike jokes that his film actually plagiarises von Trier's *Dancer in The Dark* (2000) which was released a year earlier. Known for being grim, silly and difficult to watch.

The first song 'Sayonara' is sung by the film critic when preparing to kill himself. It's gentle, heartfelt, badly sung and almost turns into a cosmic space opera before the door is knocked and the critic, raised from his reverie, stops singing to grab a beer from Masayuki. On discovery of the dead critic, a fast paced pop beat ensues with key actors gesticulating wildly as keyboards drone in the background. This scene, with its weird disconsolate lighting is actually reminiscent of Simon Pegg's zombie episode from the first series of *Spaced* ('Art', Edgar Wright, 1999) - itself a blueprint for the future *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, 2004).

The most affecting tune is sung by the conman Richâdo Sagawa, played by the late rock star Kiyoshiro Imawano who died of cancer, aged 58 in 2009. 'I Love You' comes closest to embodying the spirit of a musical and what it should strive to be. Surrounded by dancers, their timing perfection, it ends with the conman flying into the sky to be killed and brought back to life from a kiss by the hapless Shizue. She has, of course, fallen head over heels in love with him. And it would be hard not to, with the con artist riffing off Richard Gere's Zack Mayo - the white uniform perfect, playing at being both a member of the British Royal family and the US Navy. Interestingly, the character is based on a real-life conman who swindled money from lonely women. Sagawa is also one of the links in a chain that threatens to bring the house of Katakuris down. His demise is played out in Claymation which is a shame, because every second that Imawano is on screen is a beautiful treat.

As more people visit the bed and breakfast, more people die; the sumo wrestler and his underage schoolgirl girlfriend, crushed to death under him after he succumbs to a heart attack. Here we also see a slight allusion to the necrophilia in *Visitor Q*, when son Masayuki appears to want to see more of the dead girl.

And as the bodies are buried in their toxic soil we start to see why the film earned its moniker 'a zombie musical'. In truth, it's not - the zombies do not appear until an hour and a half into the film and have less than ten minutes screen time. They are not of the Romero school either, as they move around perfectly lithely, but sans dance skills of the





infamous and parodied *Thriller*. This is another concept or idea that is not explored fully as Miike races onto the next scene and the next. It is during the last quarter of the film where the already unsteady train threatens to come off the tracks and lose all sense of perspective (although it is debatable if *Katakuri* has a sense of perspective!). Gladly, however the tendency to go hell for leather seems to work in this film's favour.

Masao's dream of the family unit, of being able to look after his relatives, protect them and keep them happy is somehow realised. When it looks like a group that visits them will befall a horrible fate; when further threatened by the police's arrival; when it appears that the game is up - Grandpa offers to sacrifice himself to save them all, citing that God is kind to fools. In the end it turns out that there is no need for this and the police walk past to concentrate on a lone attacker they believe to have killed his girlfriend. It is towards the last few minutes that we really see the heart and balance of the film. Masao finally becomes the man he has always dreamed of being. And finally finds happiness.

With this, Mount Fuji explodes and catapults them into the greatest peril they will face and the potential loss of their loveable family dog. We see another and final segue into Claymation, a hideous nightmare of fire and spirits with the family riding a lava wave. The bulk of this animation appears to be there because of budgetary restraints (the whole film was shot on an estimated \$1.5m budget) but it works well – and you can make your own judgment.

Filming of the *Katakuri* was fast and frenetic with a lot of laughter on set, most of it coming from Miike himself. Filmed mostly on location, the scenery lends itself incredibly and gives the film a real sense of space. The studio work was mainly for the recording of the songs and the 'intense' choreography, whilst jovial, seems to be replete of the frenzy of the location shooting which is a shame as it is these hemmed in parts of the film that give it an unwarranted claustrophobia. Whilst surreal, the studio turns are Miike shooting at his most straight laced. A small drawback and more noticeable in *Ichii the Killer* but not without note here, is the CGI – what seemed fresh and daring back then, looks a little tired and worse for wear to audiences today.

Is *Katakuri* a horror film? No. Nowhere near one. It bends the usual genre tropes to fit into its weird world view. The tagline for Western audiences, 'The Hills Are Alive With The Sound Of Screaming' was wholly inappropriate and both the nods to *The Sound of Music*

(Robert Wise, 1965) and that famous dance on the hillside in *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) are blink and you'll miss them. It is however a fantastical film, with some jaw-dropping scenery and a sensibility that you don't 'get' in Western cinema. Indeed many films that we should be watching as an audience fall by the wayside because sometimes they appear not to translate, when in reality it's because our eyes and minds are not fully open.

When you look at the films that were released in the West at the same time as *Happiness*, the best it could manage was *Amelie*, *Adaptation* and *Donnie Darko*. Whilst Miike may have lost his way of late, with only a few flashes of genius (the bamboo sword scene in 2011's *Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai* is one of the most brutal self-harming scenes ever committed to film) this raw, untamed joyous energy was brought to nearly every film he touched. It is an energy that sets Miike apart from any director of his generation until the lacklustre *Yatterman* (2009) (a dip in form that not even *13 Assassins* could rescue). He is a true maverick that cannot be written off, because even on a bad day Miike serves up scenes of true cinema that anyone else would cut off their arms and legs for.

As a double bill you could do worse than play *Visitor Q* and *Happiness of the Katakuri* back to back - get the full metal Miike effect. View a film on the destruction of the family, followed by another on the survival of one of the most optimistic and happy ones you'd never choose to spend a night under the same roof as.

Because you *would* die.

*Johnny Mains is the editor of Salt Publishing's Best British Horror series*





# "I'M GOING TO PUT SOMETHING NEW IN IT."

AN INTERVIEW WITH TAKASHI MIIKE by Sean Axmaker

*Originally published in Asian Cult Cinema 37, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2002. Re-printed by permission.*

Takashi Miike, Japan's gonzo gun-for-hire, describes himself as "an arranger, not an author." Taking a cue from his own film title, I like to think of him as a cinematic agitator. Working largely within the confines of traditional genres (mostly gangster and action pictures), he's the unstable element introduced into the studio formula. His films can erupt at any time, and they usually do.

Miike-san came to Seattle in June 2002 to be honored as an "Emerging Master" at the Seattle International Film Festival with screenings of *The Happiness of the Katakuris* and the American premiere of his (then) new film *Agitator*. I expected to see him under the same mop of bleached blonde hair he wore in the movie (he's the one putting a karaoke microphone to obscene use in the opening scene), but he walked into the interview with a short cropped head of red hair and hid his eyes behind tinted glasses. Wiry and impish looking on screen, he's quiet and soft-spoken in person and he began the interview with his face almost stony. Through the course of the hour, however, he slowly became more animated, his hands came to life as he answered questions, and he even laughed.

The interview was conducted on June 5 and June 6, 2002. I spoke in English, he answered in Japanese, and a translator (a different one each day) interpreting for both of us.

*Sean Axmaker: I read that you initially wanted to become a mechanical engineer. Why did you change your mind to become a movie director?*

Takashi Miike: I wanted to become a racing car mechanic. But that was just a childish dream, like wanting to be a baseball player. It's a dream for something that you simply

cannot do. You must be good at mathematics (to be a mechanic), but I wasn't good at it. I couldn't do the math, which I discovered after getting into school. (laughs) Then I did not have anything to do, and I found a movie production school, which required no entrance exam. I was 18 or 19 at that time, and I did not want to become an adult. I was living in Osaka with my family at that time, but I wanted to get away from home. So I decided to enter this school in Yokohama.

*SA: What kind of training was V-cinema? Did it have an impact on the way you make movies now?*

TM: I have never had any official training in anything in my life. I got into a film school, but it wasn't because I loved movies and wanted to make movies on my own. In fact, I escaped to movies. Of course I never really disliked making films. But I did not want to become an adult, so I killed time for two years in school. I didn't study hard, but I had a lot of experiences. I worked at a club—what used to be called dance clubs—in Yokohama which American soldiers frequented. After two years I had to graduate and I reluctantly became an assistant director. After five years, I became an assistant director for Mr. [Shohei] Imamura. I do my job, I work hard on the work assigned to me. But I never went out to find work for myself. I was given the position of director. I wasn't really trying to make a career for myself, I was just given projects. It's still the same.

*SA: Do you develop any projects yourself, or do they all come to you from someone else?*

TM: When I made my first film, Japan was in an economic bubble. The economy was good and a lot of people had money. They didn't know how to make films but they had dreams of the film business so they approached me and I started making films for them. I got involved with those who had dreams. As for me, even when I read interesting books, I would not think about making it into a film. When I hear about someone who wants to produce a film based on a book, I think, "That's going to be hard work." Usually, you would be motivated to portray your feelings or impressions into a movie, but I don't have such motivation. I don't have a switch in me that turns my passion into ideas for films. I escaped from everything when I went to film school and I've continued to escape. That's why I went into the film industry. So I have the feeling that I just can't get enthusiastic about things. And yet, people still come to me.

When someone comes to me with a film, I step away, I think: "I don't want to make films," but even when I say no, they keep coming, they say "I really want to make this film." In that case, I feel it's my destiny to work with them. I decide I want to do it and then I get very passionate, very enthusiastic about the project. It takes a while for me to get interested, but I do my best in the given job.

*SA: Is it still that way? You make more films than anyone I know.*

TM: Since the beginning of last year, I started attending film festivals overseas. I did not talk much with the people there, but as I was looking at them, I asked myself: "Why am I here?" At this point in my life, I cannot do anything else (other than making films), and I felt I was in trouble. They are so enthusiastic, they have dreams, and they are very passionate about what do. I'm completely different from them. But it took me 20 years after graduating from movie school to get the opportunity to have dinner with such people. I can now look at myself subjectively. When I'm in Japan, I am making movies every day. Now I'm changing, I'm becoming a little more enthusiastic about making films. Then when I heard about Seattle International Film Festival, I thought about Bruce Lee. When I was 11 or 12, Bruce Lee was my hero. I loved his movies. If I could visit Bruce Lee's grave while I am in Seattle, I think I would be a completely different person when I return to Japan. I can become totally enthusiastic about making films.

*SA: Your films seem completely enthusiastic. When I watch your films, especially your action films, they are so full of energy that I feel great enthusiasm.*

TM: There is an enormous amount of passion that comes from people who make films with such enthusiasm. I'm a little different, but I have a passion too. I use a lot of this energy to keep up the tension while filming. I think that there is also energy when you take half a step back. I keep receding, but [the producers] keep coming. Then I feel it is my destiny to work with them. Then I start to understand the feelings and thoughts of the writers and producers and develop a chemistry with them. It's like they are starting a fire under me. So once I start the film I am on fire and running around...then the film is created. (laughs)

*SA: You once said that you like people on set to offer ideas and that you draw from the energy of the people you make movies with. I notice that you like to cast other directors in your films, like Shinya Tsukamoto and Hiroyuki Tanaka (aka Sabu), in your films. Does their participation give you a different kind of energy or excitement when you make your films?*

TM: Mr. Tsukamoto and Mr. Tanaka have a power that professional actors don't have. It stimulates the professional actors. Professional actors know each other's pay and position in the industry, and there is an understanding among the actors who is ranked higher and who is lower. But Mr. Tsukamoto and Mr. Tanaka change the atmosphere on the set. They just enjoy being actors for that moment. They think differently than professional actors and will do things that a professional wouldn't think of doing. It confuses the professional actors and gives them a different perspective. They are trying to find something that is different from usual. Sometimes they don't find anything, but there is a different energy going on.

*SA: Which of your movies are you most satisfied with?*

TM: Probably an original video that I made a long time ago that was only shown in Japan. The title was *Kenka no Hanamichi [The Way to Fight]*. I filmed it in Osaka with young actors. I'm not sure what audiences think when they see this film, but it contains something very important to the participating actors. We were all young. I was not a very good director and the actors weren't very good, but it has something pure in it. It's my most satisfactory film.

*SA: There are only a few of your films that are available on video in this country. The earliest I've seen is Fudoh: The New Generation. You apparently didn't make any more V-cinema after that. Was it a big success in Japan?*

TM: *Fudoh* was popular among the core fans, the people who like that kind of movie, but it wasn't really a big hit throughout Japan. It wasn't supposed to be a theatrical film. At that time the Japanese film industry made more money from videos than from film. I shot *Fudoh* for video, but when a producer came to see the editing he decided to show the films at the theater. They realized that if they can show the film in the theater they could draw an audience, then when they put it on video it would







make more money. It was never supposed to be a film, but it gave me the opportunity to move into the film industry from V-cinema. But I haven't changed just because of that.

*SA: How much freedom do you have from the time when you receive a script until you finish filming a movie?*

TM: There are different types of projects. There are times I receive scripts which have been worked on many times, and there are times when I receive only an idea for a film. A lot of directors complain "If only they had a bigger budget I could do this or do that," but I find that when I have a budget of 4 or 5 billion yen, I psychologically lose my freedom. However, if someone comes to me with a small budget, like 7 million yen, I feel I have unlimited freedom. The client can't really complain with such a low budget and I will be doing what I like to do to make a good film. But all in all, in any project, I think I have the same amount of freedom.

*SA: Does that mean you get involved in the script process? You don't take any writing credit on your films.*

TM: I'm currently getting into more writing. Usually I'm hired by producers for a project but eventually I'll be able to produce my own productions and create my own movies. In the future I want to work with producers outside of Japan.

*SA: Most of your films are action films. Is that because of your own personal interest, or is that what you are offered because of your success in the genre?*

TM: I'm more interested in taking on a vague, ambiguous project which I can shape with my own point of view. When I was less well known I had to take more well-defined projects which didn't offer me very much flexibility. It's not my intention to just make action movies, but given conditions such as budget and time, that's what I have to do for now. Making action films is not my ultimate goal, but it is a process to get there.

*SA: Since the majority of your work is action films, how did a film like Audition come your way?*

TM: When I directed *Audition*, horror movies were very popular in Japan, especially among young people. *Ringu* was one of them. A group of producers who wanted to make a different kind of horror movie came to me, since I am not a horror movie director. They thought, "Mr. Miike may be able to make a horror movie in our own style." They were hoping to make a different kind of horror movie than the ones in the theater at the time.

*SA: Whose idea was it to make The Happiness of the Katakuris as a musical?*

TM: It was not particularly anybody's idea, it came to us naturally. Because it was a remake of a Korean movie (*The Quiet Family*), the producers wanted to find a way to make it a little different. They had a discussion the first day, about switching the characters and changing the story a little bit, but the producer said "I want to make it a completely different kind of film." Then we naturally came to an idea of creating it as a musical.

*SA: What's an example of something you brought to the film?*

TM: My film is quite different from the original, but both films make the same point. What I wanted to show was the growing up process. Our lives don't change overnight, and tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow. Most likely things are going to be the same. We always want dramatic and drastic change in our lives. Instead of chasing a better house, better car, more money, we should change the way we look at happiness. It's an unconventional look at happiness. I want people to look at it in a different way.

*SA: You've done many gangster films. What is it that interested you in Agitator, and what did you do to make it different from other gangster films?*

TM: The screenwriter (Shigenori Takechi) used to be a gangster, a member of the Yakuza, but from an older generation, more than 50 years old. What got me interested in the story was the gap between his generation and my generation, the old and new, the contrast. I was interested in working together with him, with the older generation, to create something new. In movies we always chase something new. So I questioned "What is new?" The way the movie finally came out is very traditional, and that's what I wanted to do.





SA: *I counted 51 productions, for film, video, or TV, to your credit on the IMDb.*

TM: The number may be accurate but I'm not sure. I don't know if that number includes movies that are in production. But it's somewhere around that. I am starting a new film on June 17.

SA: *Can you tell me anything about it?*

TM: It's going to be more action oriented, very similar to *Agitator*, but *Agitator* focused on story, on the inside workings of the mob. This one is going to be along the same lines but more action oriented. It will be more like *Fudoh* or *Dead or Alive*, but those movies have already been made. There's no point in repeating them, so I'm going to put something new in it.

SA: *I find all your films have something new.*

TM: We don't live forever, so I always want to try something new.

*Afterward: After introducing The Happiness of the Katakuris and the American premiere of Agitator to audiences at the Seattle International Film Festival, Mr. Miike did indeed visit Bruce Lee's grave and even caught a Seattle Mariners baseball game to see Ichiro Suzuki—the first Japanese-born position player in the major leagues and the 2001 American League MVP and Rookie of the Year—in action. After a particularly cruel inning, when Chicago set the Mariners back by a couple of runs, Mr. Miike watched Seattle take the plate and gleefully (if quietly) exclaimed: "Now it's time for Seattle's revenge!" Sadly his prediction was wrong: Seattle lost the game 5-1.*

© 2002 by Sean Axmaker. Re-printed with permission of the author.

Sean Axmaker is a contributing writer for Seattle Weekly, Turner Classic Movies Online, Keyframe, and Cinephiled, and the editor of Parallax View ([www.parallax-view.org](http://www.parallax-view.org)). A former film critic for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and home video columnist for IMDb and MSN Movies, his work has appeared in Indiewire, Today.com, and Asian Cult Cinema among other publications.

# THE ROCK-AND-ROLL HORROR PICTURE SHOW

by Stuart Galbraith IV

From its dizzying jumble of opera, samba, Japanese *enka*, German waltzes, and J-Pop, Takashi Miike's *The Happiness of the Katakuris* is, at its core, a musical. For western viewers, it's probably the first and last Japanese musical they'll ever see—a shame, considering the film's myriad references and influences, from its dead-on spoof of banal karaoke videos (she the devoted office lady, he the hard-working salaryman) to its sweet duet atop an unsightly landfill. The Japanese musical remains the great untapped-in-the-west movie genre, one rich in the same sort of delights the deliriously cockeyed *Katakuris* offers in spades.

One thing lost on many western-world viewers, however, was director Miike's casting of musicians Kenji Sawada and Kiyoshiro Imawano as major characters in *The Happiness of the Katakuris*, the Japanese equivalent of landing rock icons David Bowie and Mick Jagger (with a dash of Bono). Imawano, the Mick Jagger/Bono parallel, was “Japan's King of Rock” while Sawada, the gender-blurring “Japanese David Bowie,” remains the only Japanese artist (other than Yoko Ono) ever to grace the cover of *Rolling Stone*.<sup>1</sup>

Sawada, the *Katakuris*' indefatigable patriarch, was born in 1948 in Tottori Prefecture but raised in Kyoto's fashionable Sakyo Ward. He dropped out of high school and, primarily with brothers Ittoku and Shiro Kishibe (later, like Sawada, to become respected film and television actors), formed a band called The Funnies. Rechristened The Tigers in 1966, lead vocalist Sawada led the Group Sounds movement of the mid-to-late '60s, a fusion of Japanese pop and the British Invasion. Their biggest hits, singles like “Seaside Bound,” “Mona Lisa Smile” and “Flower Necklace” became as omnipresent and lasting as “Yesterday,” “Michelle” and “Strawberry Fields Forever.”

1. Even Keiko Matsuzaka and Tetsuro Tamba had hit records, exemplifying the symbiotic relationship between film and record companies. Her biggest hit was “Love of Artificial Flowers in Water,” the theme song from her 1979 TV drama; his were “I've Got to Do It” and “Top-ya,” the latter with lyrics by director Hideo Gosha, both recorded in 1960.

Like The Beatles, The Tigers conquered all media, including three *Help!*-influenced vehicles: *The World Is Waiting for Us* [*Sekai wa Bokura o Matteiru*] (Yoshinori Wada), *A Lavish Vacation* [*Hanayahanaru shôtai*] (Kunihiko Yamamoto, both 1968), and *Swinging London* [*Hi! London*] (Katsumi Iwauchi, 1969). In two of the films Sawada's character was named “Julie,” a tribute to Julie Andrews and a relationship one might liken to Michael Jackson's odd obsession with Diana Ross. (This, of course, is underscored in the poster art for *Katakuris*, a nod to Andrews's *The Sound of Music*.) But the nickname Julie stuck, and became the title of Sawada's 1969 debut solo album, two years before The Tigers officially disbanded.

He went on to form PYG, Japan's first super-group, composed of members from two other popular Group Sounds bands, The Spiders and The Tempters. That didn't last, nor did a 1975 marriage to Emi Ito, seven years his senior and one half of The Peanuts, the '60s twin pop duo famous in the west as the fairy priestesses in *Mothra*. Sawada eventually had to pay Ito nearly two billion yen (around \$15 million) in alimony when they finally divorced in 1987.

Fortunately for Sawada, the money was rolling in. He was playing sold-out concerts and, like Bowie, adopting an increasingly androgynous stage persona. He wore make-up, dressed flamboyantly, sweated profusely onstage like Elvis, and developed signature moves like spitting mouthfuls of whiskey at his audience and performing with a parachute strapped to his back.

And then there were the movies that showcased his considerable and daring acting chops. He exhibited his worldliness in a movie with *Thunderball*'s Claudine Auger called *Melancholy Paris* (1974), made the requisite guest star appearance in a Tora-san entry for director Yoji Yamada (where he met actress Yuko Tanaka, Sawada's second wife), but most notably headlined Kazuhiko Hasegawa's masterpiece *The Man Who Stole the Sun* (1979) as a playful, doomed, atomic bomb-building high school chemistry teacher, a challenging role that even has Sawada convincingly disguised in drag. A subsequent appearance in Kinji Fukasaku's routine *Samurai Reincarnation* (1981) became noteworthy when, in widely published stills, Sawada locked lips with male co-star Hiroyuki Sanada. In 1985 he starred in the “Kyoko's House” segment of Paul Schrader's *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985), Sawada's most widely seen movie outside Japan before *Katakuris*.



Though his nearly 16 million in Oricon-certified record sales as a solo artist is dwarfed next to Electropop-Bubblegum bands like SMAP and AKB48, Sawada, at 66, is still a huge draw in the world's second-largest music market.

Kiyoshiro Imawano, the *gaijin*-accented Richard, lovesick Shizue's suitor and alleged step-nephew to Queen Elizabeth II ("Diana! If only I had been there!"), was born in Tokyo in 1951. He formed a band called The Clovers with Kenchi Haren; when they broke up Imawano and others left behind rechristened it Remainders of the Clover. In 1968, with more members coming and going, it changed names again, Spinal Tap style, this time to RC Succession, as in "Remainders of Clovers Succession." With songwriter Imawano on vocals and guitar, RC Succession steadily grew in popularity, finally hitting the big time in 1980 with their fourth LP, *Rhapsody*, which *Rolling Stone Japan* ranked No. 2 on its list of the "100 Greatest Japanese Rock Albums of All-Time."

Imawano fused his love of Otis Redding, James Brown, and Booker T. Jones with his passion for Japanese linguistics, cleverly playing with Tokyo dialects and double-entendres in famous songs like "Night Sky After the Rain" and "Transistor Radio." Inspired by Sawada he took to wearing extravagant make-up on stage, supplementing his trademark shock of hair (uncharacteristically limp in *Katakuris*) with a catchphrase that might equally be applied to the Katakuris, "We all love each other, right?" A lifelong fan of the anime of Osamu Tezuka, he drew and painted hundreds of pictures, often interpretations of Tezuka's famous characters, some of which have toured Japan's art galleries.

In 1988, RC Succession recorded an album called *Covers* for Toshiba EMI, which reflected Imawano's growing political consciousness following the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. In a country where entertainers, from musicians to stand-up comedians, are expected to be firmly apolitical, Imawano's antiwar, antinuclear songs (including Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues" with new lyrics) led to Toshiba EMI cancelling it outright, laughably declaring in a corporate statement, "The album is *too wonderful* to be released." Rival Kitty Records, which had distributed *Rhapsody*, picked up the rights, and *Covers* debuted at No. 1. Other Imawano songs, notably a punk version of Japan's national anthem, "FM Tokyo," and "Longing for North Korea," made him anathema during live radio and TV appearances, where he was frequently censored when not outright banned.

RC Succession broke up two years later, but Imawano worked steadily as a solo artist, sometimes performing on albums using pseudonyms and creating fictitious characters à la The Traveling Wilburys. In 1992 he recorded *Memphis* in Memphis and toured with Booker T. & the M.G.'s, and together they released a live album of their Nippon Budokan concert, *Have Mercy!*

In July 2006, Imawano announced that he was diagnosed with throat cancer. He resumed performing the following January but the cancer returned, more aggressive than ever, that July. When he died on May 2, 2009, Japanese media exhaustively covered his death for several days, on a scale that in Japan eclipsed western media coverage of the death of Elvis Presley and the murder of John Lennon. Forty-two thousand fans besieged his star-studded funeral (also attended by Miike), a number matched in Japan only by the funeral of another singing icon, Hibari Misora, who died in 1989.

Like Sawada, Imawano had also found work in films, debuting as "Dr. Loo" in the 1986 horror film *Death Powder* (Shigeru Izumiya, 1986). As an actor, the normally shy Imawano became mainly associated with comedies like *The Tomb & the Divorce* (Ryô Iwamatsu, 1993), *Chicken Heart* (Hiroshi Shimizu, 2002), and *Otakus in Love* (Suzuki Matsuo, 2004), though he did reunite with Miike to play General Nurarihyon in (and write a song for) *The Great Yokai War* (2005), and with *Katakuris* cameo star Naoto Takenaka for a short film Takenaka directed, *U2* (2005). (Great friends, Takenaka also delivered the eulogy at Imawano's funeral.) More notably, Imawano composed the music for John Junkerman's documentary *Power and Terror: Noam Chomsky in Our Times* (2002).

Imawano's atypical activism lives on. More than a decade before the 2011 earthquake/tsunami/nuclear disaster, he warned in an essay titled *People Should Hold a Greater Interest in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution*, "War comes after an earthquake. Politicians who want to have a military start saying boisterous things on TV. They make fun of the people and stir them to start a war ... I hope they will think about the possibility that their 'freedom of existence' is being placed in danger."

Partly inspired by Imawano, eventually Sawada too became outspoken in a way he never had been before, nor had ever expected to be. "When my popularity was

at its peak I really didn't think about such things," he said. "But as my popularity waned a bit and I became independent of the big record labels ... I no longer have to sing those popular songs I really didn't like. At 60, I can instead sing things like 'Our Plight' (about Article 9) ... I'm at the age where I have to say what I think. It's shameful to do otherwise."

*Stuart Galbraith IV is the author of The Emperor and the Wolf – The Lives and Films of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune and Japanese Cinema. The publisher-editor of the website World Cinema Paradise, he also writes Blu-ray and DVD reviews for DVD Talk.*





# THE UNHAPPINESS OF THE QUIET FAMILY

by Grady Hendrix

The battle between Kim Jee-Woon, director of *The Quiet Family* (1998) and Takashi Miike, who remade it as *The Happiness of the Katakuris* (2001), is an epic Clash of the Cool Dudes where victory goes to whoever keeps their pulse the lowest.

Kim: *The Quiet Family* is about a family with a failing mountain inn who keep killing their guests. It's a comedy.

Miike: *The Happiness of the Katakuris* is about a family with a failing mountain inn whose guests keep dying. It's a musical.

Kim: I only wrote *The Quiet Family* because I'd wrecked my car and needed the cash.

Miike: I only saw *The Quiet Family* on a beat-up VCR and could barely hear half of it.

But jackhammer beneath their crusts of cool, because it's mostly a marketing pose. Miike didn't merely extract the basic story from *The Quiet Family* and mutate it into his own madcap musical, he lifted complete shots, specific bits of character business, and oddball details. Both movies feature death by sharpened keychain, both foreshadow disaster with the early arrival of stray women (a homeless prophet in Kim's case, a quartet of spiritualists for Miike), both feature spit jokes at a family meal, and both feature extreme close-ups of bubbling stew. Miike may miss the deeper point of Kim's movie, but he's clearly watched it carefully enough to do a close imitation.

Kim cares a lot, too. Viewers are quick to assume that the blackly comic tone of *The Quiet Family* and Kim's insistence that it is ironic means this flick is little more than a heartless hipster calling card to show off his technical prowess. But Kim's definition of ironic isn't

Alanis Morissette's. "In *The Quiet Family*," he said in an interview, "the ironic aspect is displayed through the fact that everything goes the opposite way from what the title family desires." Or, as one of its actors, Choi Min-Sik, said to another after viewing the finished film, "Kang-Ho, this is how tough it is living in this world." Beneath its carefully composed shots, *The Quiet Family* has a great big heart that bleeds so much you can't ever hide the mess, no matter how many times you mop the floor.

Kim Jee-Woon was a movie-crazed kid who grew up to be a movie-crazed bum. His dad was a film buff, and Kim developed his celluloid habit early, watching illegal copies of *Fame* and *Caligula* in local teahouses before bumming around Paris, where he watched 110 movies in three months during a massive retrospective celebrating the 40th anniversary of *Cahiers du Cinema*. Returning to Korea, he did his military service, mooched off his sister (actress Kim Ji-Sook), appeared onstage in a production of *Guys & Dolls*, interned on some movie sets, and directed a little theater.

When he was 34, after a decade of screwing around, he wrecked his car and entered two screenplay contests for cash, winning both. He wrote *Good Times* for a competition run by *Premiere*, and he wrote *The Quiet Family* for a contest run by *Cine21*, Korea's biggest film magazine. *The Quiet Family* was picked up by Myung Films and Kim turned out to be the right man, with the right movie, at the right time.

In 1998, Korean cinema was primed to explode. The 50's and 60's had been its Golden Age, but after being censored into oblivion in the 70's, Korean audiences learned to stay away from their own movies in droves. By 1993, Korean films accounted for a pathetic 16% of the box office. Embarrassed, the government passed a series of laws in 1995 aimed at fixing their failing film industry, and in 1998, a crop of new movies appeared that signaled a sudden sea change, including the tear-jerker *Christmas in August* (Jin-ho Hur), also from Myung Films, and the horror movie *Whispering Corridors* (Ki-hyeong Park), both of which landed in that year's box office top ten.

Ready for success, Myung rolled the dice again with *The Quiet Family*, green-lighting this horror-comedy (a previously unknown genre in Korea) written and directed by Kim Jee-Woon (a previously unknown director). Industry insiders predicted total disaster. One of the worst omens? Kim blew most of his budget on the construction of a slick set depicting the mountain lodge. This wasn't how Korean movies were made! And yet, although it was

beaten at the box office by the Dreamworks Bible cartoon, *The Prince of Egypt* (Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner, Simon Wells, 1998), Kim's *The Quiet Family* sold a respectable 343,946 tickets, making it the sixth-highest-grossing Korean movie of the year.

Like *The Happiness of the Katakuris*, *The Quiet Family* is about a patriarch, Mr. Kang, who opens a mountain inn, hoping that a new highway being built nearby will make him rich. But construction is delayed, and the only guests who arrive are suicides looking for an isolated spot to die. Confronted with a cavalcade of corpses, Mr. and Mrs. Kang decide to hide them rather than go to the police — their oldest son (played by Song Kang-Ho, *The Host*, Joon-ho Bong, 2006) has a criminal record, and besides, no one will ever want to rent a room in such an unlucky location. So begins some back-breaking body disposal as one suicide after another (some of them not quite dead) get buried in the backyard and, after a date rapist and some nosy cops arrive, the corpses just keep piling up as the family desperately tries to protect their investment.

Both the box office success and the sheer originality of Korean movies in 1998 alerted audiences that there was life in the local box office yet, getting them ready for 1999 when everything exploded. That's when Kang Je-Kyu's action blockbuster, *Shiri*, became the number one hit of the year with 2.4 million admissions, and raucous comedy *Attack the Gas Station* came in at number three. Together they beat *The Matrix* and *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, filling Koreans with pride and launching a cinematic renaissance that's still going on today.

Movies like *The Quiet Family* and *Attack the Gas Station* also toured film festivals around the world, and not just the artsy boring ones populated by beard-strokers, but rough and tumble genre fests. With their slick production values, go-for-broke performances (*Quiet Family*'s Song Kang-Ho and Choi Min-Sik have gone on to become Korea's two most popular and respected actors), and anarchic spirit, they caught the eye of fans everywhere. Even more importantly, other countries started scooping up their remake rights, and filmmakers started studying their techniques, which brings us neatly back to Takashi Miike and his crappy viewing of a crappy tape of *The Quiet Family* that, even crappy, inspired him to remake the film.

Besides sharing a plot and some surface details, both *Katakuris* and *The Quiet Family* are brimming with music. Kim is obsessed with his childhood in the 70's when he listened

religiously to American Armed Forces radio, and from its opening blast of Korean hip hop, to its final credits scored to The Partridge Family's "I Think I Love You," his flick is overflowing with everything from Schubert, to Korean folksongs, to singles by The Box Tops, early 80's Korean pop singer Yoon Si-Nae, Love and Rockets, and Harry Nilsson.

But that's where the similarities end. Miike's *Katakuris* embraces the tacky look of television with its flat lighting, artificial backgrounds, and bargain bin digital effects, while Kim is deeply committed to visual splendor. The opening of *The Quiet Family* is a long, gliding Steadicam shot that roams through the empty interior of the mountain lodge like an outtake from a Korean Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), showing off Kim's expensive set while delineating the stage where a whole lot of terrible things are about to happen.

*Katakuris* feels like a fairy tale, swaddled in a past tense voiceover delivered by five-year-old Yurie Katakuri as an adult, looking back on what happened that summer with a sense of wonder and understanding. Right away, we not only know she's going to survive, but that nothing too bad is going to happen. *The Quiet Family* is narrated in the present tense by the Kang's angry, pissed-off, 17-year-old daughter Mina, who outlines her father's failure to hold onto his job in a cold-blooded monotone. Which is fitting, because at the end of the day, Kim's movie is all about the economy.

In 1998, it wasn't just the fictional Mr. Kang who had lost his job, it was everyone in Korea. Around November 1997 the banking system melted down under a mountain of bad debt. Eleven of the country's *chaebols* (huge corporations) went bankrupt, wiping out 20% of the national economy. In a single year the unemployment rate doubled, the currency lost half its value, and the suicide rate jumped 45%. The laughter kind of dies on your lips when you see the procession of suicides who start arriving at the Kang Family's mountain lodge. Without his inn, Mr. Kang would probably be one of them.

And then there's that road. Kim's obsession with the 70's isn't a shallow pop culture crush. His first three movies (the unproduced *Good Times*, *The Quiet Family*, and pro-wrestling comedy *The Foul King*, 2000) are his way of dealing with that decade's political turmoil. *Good Times* was a riff on the 1979 assassination of President Park Chung-Hee and the subsequent military coup, only set in a high school with pimple-faced adolescents playing the powerful politicians. And *The Quiet Family* is a no-holds-barred battle with the legacy of Park's "developmental dictatorship."



Ruling Korea from 1961 to 1979, Park dragged Korea into the future, supercharging its economy with massive infrastructure projects, pumping money into its export industries, and getting cozy with the *chaebols*. But Park was also an anti-communist hysteric who had his enemies disappeared and tortured. He was a lover of martial law, and was eventually assassinated in 1979 by the director of the Korean CIA, whom he himself had appointed.

In *The Quiet Family* it turns out that it's more than bad luck that brought the Kang family to this failing mountain villa: they've been lured there by the village headman, Mr. Park, who sold it to them for a song because he needs a place to murder his sister. The coming of the road is a sign that the government has removed development restrictions from the beautiful mountainside, and Mr. Park is eager to exploit this "goldmine" the second he can get his meddling sister out of the way. Mr. Kang's mountain lodge is the perfect location for his crime, and the Kang Family are so financially strapped they've got no choice but to go along.

President Park similarly pursued massive industrial expansion, including the famous Gyeongbu Expressway, which linked opposite ends of Korea but displaced thousands of families in the process. He turned Korea into his own goldmine and all he asked was that its citizens ignore the suspension of basic human rights, the destruction of the unions, martial law, and the disappearance of anyone who disagreed. But what's a little murder in the name of the greater good? Or in the name of saving the family business?

History repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce, and the assassination of Mr. Park's sister is full-on farce with bad weather, a surly hotel clerk demanding his \$30 room fee, and a mistaken identity all conspiring to turn the best-laid assassination into a bloody blunder. *The Quiet Family* takes place in the blackly comic zone where careful planning meets messy reality and everyone winds up either disappointed or dead. The Kang Family wanted a nice, quiet inn, but what they got was a mass grave. Mr. Park wanted a dead sister, what he got was his own coffin. President Park wanted a modern and orderly Korea. What he got was a bullet in the head. Sometimes, all you can do is laugh.

At the end of *The Quiet Family*, the corpse of a murdered police officer is discovered in the woods and the press breathlessly airs the story, informing viewers that this is the body of

one of the North Korean infiltrators who recently slipped over the border. All is well. The communist bogeyman is dead. Everyone can sleep soundly. Song Kang-Ho, as the son, who actually buried the body and knows it's no commie, bursts into wild laughter. *The Quiet Family* is covered in blood, just like Korea, and everyone keeps slipping and sliding and falling down, exactly like a bunch of clowns.

At the end of the film, the Kang Family turns to the camera, fingers on their lips, and shushes the viewer. They don't want to talk about the things they've had to do to hold onto their mountain lodge any more than most Korean politicians want to talk about the bodies buried in the foundations of modern day Korea, or the controversial legacy of President Park (his daughter is the current president). The only person who's shouting about any of this is the director, Kim Jee-Woon, but don't call him out on it. The second someone notices that he's wearing his heart on his sleeve, he'll slip on his sunglasses and act cool.

*Grady Hendrix is a writer and film programmer living in New York City. He is one of the founders of the New York Asian Film Festival and has written for Variety, Film Comment, Playboy, Sight & Sound, and the British Film Institute.*

## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*The Happiness of the Katakuris* was remastered in High Definition by Shochiku Co. Ltd. and provided to Arrow Films as a digital file.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

**Discs and booklet produced by** Francesco Simeoni

**Consultant** Marc Walkow

**Technical Producer** James White

**Production Assistants and Proofing** Louise Buckler, Liane Cunje

**QC** Nora Mehenni, Anthony Nield

**Authoring** David Mackenzie

**Subtitling** IBF Digital

**Artist** The Twins of Evil

**Design** Jack Pemberton

## SPECIAL THANKS

James Agnew, Alex Agran, Sean Axmaker, Michael Brooke, Louise Buckler, Liane Cunje, Ian Froggatt, Stephen Ford, Stuart Galbraith IV, Grady Hendrix, Yukihiro Izumi, Graham Jones, Andrew Kirkham, Sato Kiwamu, Shion Komatsu, Sigrid Larsen, Johnny Mains, Tom Mes, Mark Schilling, Shochiku Co. Ltd., Marc Walkow





FCD1113 / AV012