



Subarashiki nichiyōbi (*One Wonderful Sunday*) is a 1947 black-and-white live action fantasy feature directed by Akira Kurosawa. Below is Kino Ken's review of that motion picture.

10 of a possible 20 points = **1/2 = mediocre motion picture

Japan 1947 black-and-white 108 minutes subtitled live action fiction feature fantasy Toho Studios Producer: Sōjirō Motoki a Criterion dvd release

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 0 Direction: Akira Kurosawa
- 0 Editing: Kenju Imaizumi
- 2 Cinematography: Asakazu Nakai*
Stills: Yoji Takagi
- 2 Lighting: Kyuichirō Kishida
- 0 Screenplay: Akira Kurosawa and Keinosuke Uekasa
Script Supervision: Reiko Kawamura
- 0 Music: Tadashi Hattori and Franz Schubert (borrowed)
- 2 Production Design: Kazuo Kubo
- 2 Sound: Shigeharu Yasue*
Sound Effects: Ichirō Minawa*

2 Acting

0 Creativity

10 total points

Cast: Isao Nyumasaki (Yuzo), Chieko Nakakita (Masako), Atsushi Watanabe (Yamamoto), Zekō Nakamura (dessert shop owner), Ichirō Namaki (street photographer), Toppa Utsumi (street photographer), Ichirō Sugai (Yamiya, ticket scalping black marketeer), Masao Shimizu (cabaret manager), Tokuji Kobayashi (overweight apartment receptionist), Shiro Mizutani* (j) (waif), Aguri Hidaka (dancer), Midori Ariyama (Sono, Yamiya's mistress), Katao Kawasaki (bakery owner), Toshi Mori (apartment superintendent), Sachio Sakai (shady ticket man), others

One of Akira Kurosawa's most inept misfires, *Subarashiki nichiyōbi* (*One Wonderful Sunday*) is an attempt at a postwar Everyman romance with influences stemming from such films as King Vidor's *The Crowd*, D. W. Griffith's *Isn't Life Wonderful?*, Frank Borzage's *Seventh Heaven* and *Little Man, What Now?* and two of Frank Capra offerings: *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Rain or Shine*. There are undertones of David Lean's 1945 *Brief Encounter* in the final scene at the railway station. The train puffing away at the beginning of Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (*Obsession*) from 1942 may have suggested the opening of *One Wonderful Sunday*, though Kurosawa elected to shoot towards an oncoming locomotive rather than from behind it, thus improving on kinetic energy and suspense.

The story scripted by Keinosuke Uekasa in collaboration with the director draws its two leads from David Wark Griffith's 1924 poverty lane tale of repatriated Germans attempting to grow their own food on the outskirts of inflation-riddled 1920s Berlin. Hardship and scarcity is their lot throughout, with the future just as bleak as the present. A situation similarly confronting youthful lovers in Kurosawa's makeover.

So how could the Japanese dramatist make a flop of that triumph? Read on.

Isao Naumasaki's Yuzo, a surviving Japanese World War II veteran, cannot find gainful employment. He has a mere 35 yen to tide him over a Sunday date. His long-time betrothed Masako, played winsomely by Chieko

Nakakita, is trying to look on the sunnier side of their situation, suggesting a variety of entertainment options all of which lead to disheartening failure.

First Yuzo, inserting himself incongruously into a children's baseball game, manages to knock a baseball into a bakery shop, damaging several buns. Which he then must pay the owner for demolishing. While running the infield after clobbering the second pitch thrown his way, this ex-soldier knocks over a child fielder who inconveniently gets in his way. The accident victim is bribed to overlook injury through offer of a bruised bakery sweet in lieu of payment, bandage, or touch of iodine.

Then touring a cheaply fabricated new model house for free is spoiled when a well-healed couple enter. The snobbish wife repeatedly denigrates what she observes there.

Only temporarily disillusioned, their impoverished companions follow up on her husband's comment about an inexpensive apartment for rent. Only to find themselves inquiring about a one-room hovel with no temperature control, expensive monthly payments, and a key charge. It's beyond their scanty means to afford.

Later on, when Yuzo mentions an army acquaintance who now owns a cabaret, Masako urges him to make a visit to that exotic Western entertainment center. But the owner refuses to even see him, let alone provide entry and service for his scruffy former messmate.

Rain arrives, ruining any hope of pleasant strolling about the metropolis. Masako has a hole in the sole of one shoe. Neither of them possess an umbrella. A hasty trip to the concert hall for performance of Mr. Franz Schubert's incomplete opus – the one played on their first date – gets short-circuited because a ticket scalper precedes them in line and buys up all the cheap tickets to resell for a profit to those still waiting in line. An ensuing fight between Yuzo and that marplot only results in the former's defeat at the hands and feet of the profiteer's cronies.

Even what was supposed to be a quiet tête-a-tête in a small diner turns out to be another fiasco because negligent scanning of the menu results in a payment due shortage after cafés au lait have been already sent down the hatch. As for a subdued atmosphere, the radio inside is blaring a pop tune which sounds nothing at all like a delicate Japanese melody.

Faced with possibility of police action, Yuzo gives his overcoat to the eatery's owner as collateral until payday arrives.

With virtually all joint money spent, the all-but-bankrupt duo explore bomb ruins, fantasizing about starting a café business of their own with more moderate pricing than they had encountered earlier that day.

Arrival of neighborhood tramps cause them to relocate to an autumnally deserted band shell. Yuzo proposes to conduct an imaginary symphony. That plan is thwarted by windy blasts that seem to come on cue as he picks up his "baton." The would-be conductor is plunged into despair. But his lone listener applauds heartily and pleads with viewers to do likewise.

While that proposal works well with child auditors in stage productions of James Barrie's *Peter Pan*, it falls flat in this instance. Adults realize they're simply watching two-dimensional photos of characters on a screen. They react accordingly with stony silence.

Not at all what Kurosawa hoped to elicit. His excursion into socially committed filmmaking produced no impact on audiences who wanted the same kind of escape from everyday reality as the two lovebirds onscreen seemed to be experiencing.

Protracted silent scenes occur in Yuzo's apartment, where everything short of an actual suicide attempt contradicts the cheerful optimism of Masako, who's apparently the director's mouthpiece. These are extremely difficult for even a cynosure of patience to tolerate. False starts in the imaginary symphony sequences further interdict film momentum and sabotage viewer expectations. There are probably at least six different spots at which tediously repeated action could have been effectively omitted. Every one of which the movie's editor bypassed.

On the other hand, Asakazu Nakai's cinematography teems with brilliant camera captures. Especially remarkable is a montage of walking shots showcasing feet and legs. His work on the initial train scene is purely ingenious, combining suspense, noise, and propulsion in a manner worthy of matching against Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

Sound recording preserves in full fidelity dripping of raindrops from a leak in the roof above Yuzo's room, one he shared with an anonymous friend. Listeners will find themselves mentally calculating when the next one will

plop. Train whistle, wind gusts, and crack of a baseball bat making contact with leather are captured with equal verisimilitude.

Editing, woefully lax, is insufferably tenuous.

Except for obviously painted backdrops of Tokyo skylines, Kazuo Kubo's production design displays convincingly the desolation and grubbiness of a city not yet reconstructed from wartime devastation. Realism is apparent in every article of wardrobe on view, from smartly stylish apparel of wealthy businessmen and their consorts to the patchwork threads of what must surely be a war orphan.

Playing that child of the streets most effectively was young Shiro Mizutani, whose brutal interrogation of the Sunday daters can still chill the souls of listeners. Chieko Nakakita struggles to the best of her formidable acting ability to deal with a seemingly endless crying jag and flights of whimsy screenwriters shower upon her with predictably repulsive results. Her male counterpart, Isao Numasaki, has to seesaw back and forth between a Jimmy Stewart temper tantrum (see *It's a Wonderful Life*), and a Spencer Tracy cynicism overlaid atop non-committal resignation to inescapable shortages of cash, clothing, and connections (see *What Now, Little Man*).

Itself a dominant personality in this picture, abundant rainfall recalls torrential showers in Frank Capra's big top picture *Rain or Shine*. Kurosawa and Nakai seemed to be attempting to top Joe Walker's achievement in lensing there.

Aside from Franz Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* composition, music heard is rather bland. It doesn't do much to undergird either character or atmosphere.

Because of alternating bleakness and rapture, *One Wonderful Sunday* is too inconsistent, pedestrian, and despairing to make attractive viewing by youths and children. For adults, it's more curiosity than diversion. Kurosawa fans looking for the kind of exciting explosiveness of his samurai epics will be immensely disappointed.

It's best to give this one a runaround. Instead of wasting time on such a mishmash, move on to more mature works of an authentically talented Japanese master whose skills are only sporadically visible here. Films like *Rashomon*, for instance.

Later this summer, *One Wonderful Sunday* will be available to borrow from the Hugh Stouppe Library of the Heritage Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania as part of a Criterion five-disc dvd set titled *Postwar Kurosawa* (Eclipse Series 7).