



**Online screening information:**

Fri 26 Feb 72 hour rental window from 6.00pm

To browse our full selection of films and screening schedule, please visit:

[onlinecinema.jpf-film.org.uk](https://onlinecinema.jpf-film.org.uk)

For more information about Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme, visit:

[www.jpf-fim.org.uk](https://www.jpf-fim.org.uk)

A related talk event will be held online via Zoom on:

**2 March from 12:00pm**

Check Talks and Events on

[onlinecinema.jpf-film.org.uk](https://onlinecinema.jpf-film.org.uk)

for more details

Celebrating: Cultural Partners:



©2019 Yoshimoto Kogyo



We have a new Instagram account specifically for the Touring Film Programme! Follow us to stay updated and tag us in your stories and posts!

## Extro

エキストロ

2019/89min/Colour/English Subtitles

Distributor: Free Stone Productions

Director: MURAHASHI Naoki

Cast: HAGINOYA Kozo

"Extra," says cult director Nobuhiko Obayashi (*Hausu, Labyrinth of Cinema*) at the opening of Naoki Murahashi's *Extro*, "means extraneous." It refers to "people who are outside of the main system."

In filmmaking terms, this is somewhat true; to be a background actor has never promised to be lucrative, nor glamorous. But for many, there is a certain value in being a part of the magic of cinema — no matter how small the role. In a country with as rich a cinematic heritage as Japan, these "extraneous" cast members might even prove to be the most passionate on the whole job — and as *Extro* shows us, that can make for riotous entertainment in itself.

Extras can be just as dynamic a focal point as any yakuza enforcer or wandering ronin before. We've seen it in Ken Ochiai's 2014 drama *Uzumasa Limelight*, which cast real-life career stuntman Seizô Fukumoto (*Battles Without Honour and Humanity, Thirteen Assassins*) as an ageing movie extra forced to accept his dwindling prospects. In 2020 meanwhile, Sion Sono (*Love Exposure*) delivered one of the most endearing works of his career in *Red Post of Escher Street* — wherein a cast of hopefuls audition for a feature film, only to end up as extras. *Extro* offers something different from each of these by satirising the entire industry around them, utilising the humanistic charms of the lowly extra as a guiding light through the absurdities of film production.

*Extro* feels fresh, in the foremost, because it subverts Western expectations of what a Japanese comedy can deliver. Westerners, argues seasoned critic Mark Schilling (*The Japan Times*), most readily understand Japanese comedy productions as loud, wacky and over-the-top. (See *manzai* stand-ups, slapstick gameshows like *Takeshi's Castle*, or the manic, postmodern zombie romp *One Cut of the Dead*, for examples). But *Extro*, instead, takes the form of a deadpan mockumentary — where belly-laughs are derived from reading between the lines, and being attentive to subtleties. Comparisons to *This Is Spinal Tap* are inevitable — but *Extro* leans into the mould so proudly that it stands shoulder-to-shoulder.

Among the cast of dedicated background performers working on Warp Station Edo's period film set, one man trumps them all: Kozo Haginoya. A part-time dental assistant who models himself on Steve McQueen (his modest DVD collection includes two copies of *The Towering Inferno*), his misguided ambition encapsulates everything that makes *Extro* such a joy to behold. But Haginoya's dogged determination to elevate his own background performance also provides a tangible sense of humanity that a straight-faced comedy so dearly needs to be effective. His shortcomings are as endearing as they are hilarious — and his vindication at the climax is both side-splitting and heartwarming.

Beyond a rich cast of characters, *Extro* succeeds through a masterfully self-aware blending of fiction with reality that goes beyond handheld camerawork and on-

location filming. It lovingly mocks a history of *Godzilla* knock-offs in the shooting of wonderfully titled in-film production 'Prehistoric Space Monster Gamogedorah'. It satirises an unfortunate industry trend of film stars finding themselves at the centre of public scandals. And it features a host of real-life industry cameos — one of the more interesting being that of Kazuko Kurosawa (daughter of legendary director Akira Kurosawa), a costume designer known for her work on Hirokazu Kore-eda's Palme d'Or-winning 2018 drama *Shoplifters*.

As Obayashi suggests in his own cameo, the extras may be resigned to the background — but they are far from superfluous. "The extras make it real," he concludes, dubbing as "extraneous maestros" for their invaluable contributions to cinema. The portmanteau of these words provides this film's very title.

With such high praise for such performers bookended within this laugh-out-loud comedy, the question remains: who wouldn't want to be an *extro*?

**James Balmont**