**Furukawa Roppa** (3 August 1903 – 16 January 1961)

Japanese comedian, film actor and essayist, known for his round face with Lloyd’s glasses, active before and after World War II, successfully transferring his stage performances into a film career.

Roppa Furukawa, born the sixth son of Baron Katō Terumaro, was adopted by the Furukawa family, following his family custom. While attending Waseda University, he became a film critic and editor and published his own magazine *The Age of Film* (1926-1931). In 1926, Furukawa participated in the variety show group Troubled Society formed by the former *benshi* (performers providing live narration for silent film). Roppa’s specialty was voice impersonation. Recommended by Kikuchi Kan, the novelist and Kobayashi Ichizō, the founder of Hankyū Railway and Takarazuka Girls Opera, Furukawa became a professional comedian and made a stage debut at Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre in 1932. In 1933, Furukawa, contracted by Shōchiku’s Tokiwa Productions, formed the comedy troupe Kingdom of Laughter with the former members of Troubled Society, comedians popular in Asakusa, Asakusa Opera singers and Nichigeki Theatre’s dancers. Each production consisted of several short plays, accompanied by variety shows, which made an immediate success. Repertories include comedies such as *The Bumpy Broadcasting Station* (1933) and adaptation and dramatization of famous plays and masterpieces from Japan and the West such as *Chūshingura* (1933), *Carmen* (1933) and *Treasure Island* (1935). Future Tōhō’s Director Kikuta Kazuo was one of the major playwrights for the troupe.

In 1935, Furukawa, who joined Tōhō, left Asakusa and moved to Yūrakuza in the center of Tokyo, Marunouchi. His new troupe Furukawa Roppa Ichiza played many musical comedy hits including *Singing Yajikita* (1935)and *Garamasadon* (1935). His style is called *acharaka*, humorous and nonsensical comedy having both modern and premodern elements from East and West – such as *kabuki*, *rakugo*, *shimpa*, variety, operetta and musicals. Audiences were mainly white-collar businessmen and their families. As the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937 and Japan’s military successes continued, Furukawa, in line with tightening military censorship, began staging war propaganda plays including controversial *An Angel with a Beard* (1941), a play acted with Chinese War Prisoners from Shanxi*.* His popularity came to its peak during the wartime when acting in plays -- such as *If Roppa Fights* (1937) and *Roppa and Soldiers* (1940). Kikuta changed his style of comedy in6o sentimental home drama for Furukawa as in *Happiness of My House* (1942) and *Port of Flowers* (1943), which led to Kikuta’s postwar successful radio melodrama *Your Name Is?* (1953-1954).

Furukawa acted in over 100 films in his career. PCL (Photo Chemical Laboratory; later Tōhō) adapted his stage signature pieces into film. In 1941, Furukawa acted with film star Hasegawa Kazuo in *Iemitsu and Hikoza* and *The Best Years of a Man*, directed by Makino Masahiro. His postwar work began with Saitō Trajirō’s film *Five Men in Tokyo* (1945), acted with Yoshimoto Productions’ famous stand-up comedians, Yokayama Entatsu and Hanabishi Achako.

In 1946, Furukawa left Tōhō and had his first independent performance at Yūrakuza playing *The Island of Peace* and *Roppa God of Happiness*. The postwar largest success was a collaboration piece *Tōkaidōchū Hizakurige* (Shank Mare) acted with his rival comedian Enomoto Kenichi, which recorded a two-month long run. In 1949, Furukawa disbanded his theatre group. The audience’s interest was shifted to radio and film, in which Furukawa entertained his audiences. In 1951, Furukawa starred in Tōhō’s first production of the Teigeki Musicals *Morgan Oyuki*. His appearance as minor role actor continued in Tōhō’s musicals, comedy and modern drama in the late 1950s, but the age belonged to new and more skillful character actors such as his former troupe member Morishige Hisaya.

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