



PREVIEW

# Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy

‘Excuse me, can you go back the same way?’ The taxi turns around. This is the first manoeuvre in a film whose English title anticipates its narrative twists. Except this isn’t the same way, this isn’t quite repetition. The film is slippery with such divergencies. Premiering in this year’s Berlinale Competition, Ryusuke Hamaguchi’s *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy* continues the director’s interest in doublings, coincidences and duplicity that has earned him comparisons with Rivette and Rohmer since his debut melodrama, *Passion*, in 2008.

The film’s three episodes focus on female characters, as did Hamaguchi’s (over five-hour) Locarno success *Happy Hour* (2015) and *Asako I & II* (given a special mention at Cannes in 2018). Its tripartite structure frames stories of a hurtful love triangle, a botched seduction trap, and an encounter based on mistaken identity. Sections are labelled Magic, Door Wide Open and Once Again, but might equally be called Taxi, Door and Escalator, for the narrative vehicles that transport protagonists on fateful journeys through the neatly functional, Muji-middle-class spaces so characteristic of Hamaguchi’s Japan.

If the door had remained shut, could the professor’s former student have seduced him? If the women had not crossed paths on that pair of escalators? Or if they could cross paths again? Can you pretend to feel something? Can you play at being someone you’re not? The film’s Japanese title, *Coincidence and Imagination*, encourages such speculation. Characters are contingencies, scenarios are minefields of politeness and distress. Every pause is flammable and held back, pressing in the way Cassavetes holds characters until they snap.

Hamaguchi’s method of improvisatory workshoping (sometimes with non-professional actors, often working in pairs) facilitates these taut, even tortured, exchanges. He often has actors read scripts aloud, with no inflection, until ‘something happens’ (he struggles to explain quite what). Something happens that feels real, has a certain weight or thickness – and that is when he starts filming.

Something like this happens in an extended scene where the student tries to trap her professor. She reads aloud from his recent novel (an explicit section, as awkwardly prosaic as Murakami’s sex writing). Her delivery is flat, her face unmoving. The professor’s scalp twitches – in discomfort? In arousal? Moving around these characters and their nervous dynamic, Hamaguchi’s cameras palpate precisely that weight and thickness he talks about. It is the weight of desire and discomfort. The professor inches towards the student, lowering himself as he nears her. To reach for...? The door. He pushes the door wide open now.

What if things were different? Although this film’s charm is in its resolutely domestic, romantic subject matter, arriving on our (home) screens this year it inevitably presents an allegory for larger forms of speculation. When Hamaguchi zooms in on someone only to pan out again, restarting the scene and giving her a chance to do things over, it made me think. I watched *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy* and imagined what the past year might look like, if it too could start over.

**Becca Voelcker, *Sight and Sound*, [bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound](https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound), 5 March 2021**

## Ryusuke Hamaguchi on ‘Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy’

*I wanted to start by asking how you arrived at this title and the original Japanese title. They both feel like perfect fits.*

The Japanese title directly translates into something more like *Coincidence and Imagination*, so it’s a pretty direct title compared to the English. I think it’s a nice title that picks at some of the important parts about this film, the part about coincidence. I think coincidence allows for people to imagine other possibilities, other worlds. And I feel like the title captures that really well. And I believe that coincidence is also something that leads two people to imagine possibilities.

*You mention other worlds. The final section of the film dips into the realm of science fiction, but in this quiet kind of way. What was your thought process for including sci-fi in this story, and what is your own relationship with sci-fi?*

So, in terms of the sci-fi element in story three, I was thinking about Covid. The first two stories in this collection of shorts were shot in 2019, so I didn’t have anything with Covid in mind. However, the third story was actually shot in July 2020 and in Japan; that was after the first state of emergency was over, so that element of Covid was definitely in my mind. I’m no expert in sci-fi, but when I was a student I studied under director Kiyoshi Kurosawa, and when I was studying under him he gave us this impossible assignment – which was to remake *Solaris*. So when I was tasked with this, I read a lot of sci-fi, and in doing that I realised that sci-fi is often rooted in some kind of reality. However, it’s seeing reality in a different way.

So I wanted to do something similar to that through this third story. In today’s world, right now, there’s the lockdown happening under COVID-19. However, in my story – for the third one – what I had was to almost have the opposite of what’s going on today. So the virtual is locked down, as opposed to today, where we’re living on the opposite spectrum, where everything is happening virtually. So in this sense I felt like I would still be able to work with the original story and the original concept whilst not ignoring the situation of COVID-19. And I felt that the audience can also maybe experience that as well.

*Almost every film deals with time in some way, but here it seems an even more important factor. Maybe you could talk a bit about this.*

As you saw, I have occasional long takes within the film. And the reason why long takes appear in my films is that these moments are when I feel that the acting is great, when I feel the actors are giving a great performance. The way we shot this film is, we shot from many different angles – and it’s kind of a stupid way to go about shooting, in that sense, but it actually leaves a lot of editing possibilities. When I do leave a long take it really is me deciding that I want to stay on this acting. I really hope that the audience, when they see a long take, can also feel that way.

I think the idea of the passage of time is in relation to coincidence, which is a big theme in this film. And I believe that coincidences rarely happen; you can’t have too many coincidences happen at once. And that’s why, in the second story, you jump to five years ahead, because coincidences only happen sometimes. Since this film was about coincidences, yet these are short films, I had to think about how much time should pass in order to differentiate some of these coincidences.

### Production notes

WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY (GUZEN TO SOZO)

Director: Ryusuke Hamaguchi  
Production Company: Rachele Parietti  
Executive Producers: Sho Harada, Katsumi Tokuyama  
Producer: Satoshi Takata  
Production Manager: Hitoshi Omika  
Assistant Directors: Toru Takano, Takayuki Fukata  
Screenplay: Ryusuke Hamaguchi  
Cinematography: Yukiko Iioka  
Production Design: Masato Nunobe  
Costumes: Fuminori Usui  
Make-up: Yukiko Sumi  
Sound Design: Akihiko Suzuki  
Sound: Naoki Jono

Cast

Kotone Furukawa (Meiko)  
Kiyohiko Shibukawa (Segawa)  
Katsuki Mori (Nao)  
Fusako Urabe (Moka)  
Aoba Kawai (Nana)  
Ayumu Nakajima (Kazuaki)  
Hyunri (Tsugumi)  
Shouma Kai (Sasaki)

Japan 2021  
121 mins

Courtesy of Modern Films

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Oliver Stone in Conversation

Fri 14 Jan 18:20

Natural Born Killers

Fri 14 Jan 20:30

Fresh Meat 10th Anniversary: Q&A with cast and creatives

Sat 15 Jan 18:15

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 17 Jan 18:10

Preview: The Souvenir Part II + Q&A with writer-director Joanna Hogg

Mon 17 Jan 20:30

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Amulet + Q&A with writer-director Romola Garai

Fri 21 Jan 18:00

African Odysseys presents: UK Premiere: A Bruddah’s Mind Cabeça de Nego + Q&A with director Déo Cardoso

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