

– What's on TV –



# “Summer Snow”

by Matt Wilce

It is a rainy evening and I am stood between Ultraman's legs outside the TBS building. As I wait for my friend to show up I notice there are far more teenage girls hanging around than usual. I begin to wonder if they are there for the same reason I am. When Tomoe arrives we head up to the Actors Theater, next to Akasaka Blitz, and come face to face with a long line of giggling young women. They are all waiting to meet their dream man, Domoto Tsuyoshi, star of TBS' latest Friday night drama.

In the lobby, after the security check where we get our press-passes, Tomoe says she needs a couple of cigarettes to prepare herself for the big event. The smoking area is full of reporters and TBS staff, who chain smoke too, only for different reasons. The young girls, many in school uniform, bound up the steps and head for their seats, which have been assigned by lottery.

Inside the theater four or five hundred young

women scrutinize the campaign material they have received on the way in. At the front in the “mass-comi” section reporters casually look over the same pamphlet and the supplementary press pack. The young fans look jealously at the tape-recorders and cameras in the front five rows, and wish that they too could preserve the event. A couple of TV crews whip up and down the aisles filming the fans, trying to capture the party atmosphere. This is like no other TV drama launch I have ever attended. And I have to say most of the reporters look a bit annoyed at all the hoopla.

When Ito Kazuhiro, the producer of the show, takes to the stage there is a brief respite in the shouts and cheers as he nervously begins to introduce the show. “This is the first time that I have done this kind of presentation so I am a bit nervous,” he says. “I guess it is like giving a speech at a wedding...” He goes on to explain that “Summer Snow” is the third in a series of three teenage dramas he has produced and that each



drama has its own color code. The image color for "Summer Snow" is white, "Ao no Jidai" was blue and "Wakaba no Koro" was green. Incidentally, all three dramas also starred Domoto Tsuyoshi.

A further theme that seems to run through the producer and writer's work is disability. In the current production two of the characters suffer from disabilities or illness and this seems to be part of a wider trend within Japanese drama. This preoccupation with difference and disability pre-dates the recent success of "Beautiful Life," and has become somewhat of a cliché within the industry. Actually it would be refreshing to see a drama where one of the main characters was not trying to overcome a medical condition or physical disability.

Ito continues his introduction to the show by talking about the star of "Summer Snow" Domoto Tsuyoshi. "Up to now Tsuyoshi seems to have played rather violent characters, the kind who 'kieru' [flip out, loose it] this time his character is much softer, almost like a young version of Tora-san." He adds that, "Certainly at the beginning of the show the feeling is 'at home' and very warm." He goes on to say that this time the characters in the show all exhibit an *"unmeiteki na ikikata,"* which means something like a fatalistic way of living, or that they follow their own destinies.

When the cast are introduced, in a kind of reverse order of popularity, the crowd begins to go wild. Each cast member is greeted by shouts of "cawaii!" and by the time that Hirose Ryoko comes out the girls in the audience are in a frenzy. Hirose has to ask the crowd to "be quiet, otherwise



The "at home" feeling of "Summer Snow."

you won't be able to hear me!" When Tsuyoshi finally makes his appearance the girls in the audience can no longer contain themselves and the screams and shouts are just like those at a rock concert. He gives them a little time to settle down and despite their exuberance they are so desperate to hear him speak that they manage to stifle their excitement long enough for him to say a few words. I look across at Tomoe and realize she too has gone very quiet, she looks as if she has been smacked in the face with a mallet, she is simply stunned. I guess that is what happens when you get within 15 feet of your favorite idol!

Hirose comments that "this is the first time I have played an OL role. It has been fun to do something new." She also said that, "all of the characters are very loveable, they are all 'yasashi' and cute. I think everyone will really like them." [Not exactly a good advertisement of her supposed Waseda level intellect.] When she is asked what she

Cast of "Summer Snow." (from left) Kazukuno Takuzo, Ikewaki Chizuru, Hirose Ryoko, Domoto Tsuyoshi, Imai Tsubasa, Oguri Shun. (photo by Jam)





thought about working with Tsuyoshi she says, "You know he is a very 'waku waku' person [fun, uplifting]. I guess he has a typical idol image, but I think he is more like an old man! The location shoot was really fun and he made everyone laugh a lot."



Tsuyoshi teases Imai Tsubasa, who is wearing his Dad's shirt! (photo by Jam)

Tsuyoshi retaliates by saying that Hirose was a "tondemonai hito" ["She's absurd or outrageous]. "Everyone thinks she is a very quiet person but actually she is really *genki*. If she says I am like an old man then I guess she must be a little kid." More seriously he adds that, "although this is the first time we have worked together there was no tension between us, I think we get along very well." Certainly the rapport between them seemed to confirm that they like to joke around together and Tsuyoshi certainly came across as a bit of a clown.

Although the show is primarily aimed at a teenage audience Kakuno Takuzo who plays Katase Shogo said, "I think that middle-aged people will also feel for these characters and relate to some of the situations... For example my character's daughter has been ill, suffering from heart problems, from an early age and he is a little protective. But Tsuyoshi's character is such a nice guy that he doesn't worry about them being together and learns to let he go a little."

The story is basically your standard love/romance situation. Tsuyoshi plays Shinoda Natsuo, the 21 year-old owner of a bike shop. Shinoda's parents both died and he has been left in charge of the family business and also his brother Jun (Oguri Shun), who has hearing problems, and

Chika (Ikewaki Chizuru). Natsuo believes that his father is watching what the three of the do from heaven and does his best to take care of his siblings and live as honestly as possible. The love part comes in when he meets Katase Yuki (Hirosue Ryoko), a graduate from Sophia University, who is working as an OL. Since the age of five Yuki has struggled with her weak heart and her father has raised her singled handed since her mother died when she was two. Natsuo's rival for Yuki's affection is Tachibana Seiji (Nakamura Shunsuke), an intern at her company.

Expect lots of twists and turns as the relationships between the characters develop and the underlying message of overcoming physical and emotional problems is hammered home. Of course the diving scenes and beaches look great and the cast obviously had lots of fun filming the location scenes but I have to say that this looks like a pretty standard teen-drama. Still I am sure with the producer's track record and the strong cast that it will prove to be very watchable and entertaining. Certainly

Tsuyoshi's character seems to have been written to suit his personality and he will probably prove to be better at this kind of light romance than some of his previous "troubled young men" characters.

I am sure that all of the young fans who attended the launch event will make sure that they are at home on Friday nights to watch Tsuyoshi's comic turn and after watching the show a lot of people will end up hungry for a bit of "summer loving" and a trip to the beach. ♥



Imai Tsubasa and Oguri Shun. (photo by Jam)