



CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Autumn
Season
2009

Review by Jennie Kermode, Eye For Film:

How do we deal with the inevitability of death? There can be few more important subjects for a film to tackle, and yet this is a subject that is rarely discussed at all in western society. In Japan, things are quite different. Whereas Germans may sing an old song about a mayfly yet find it increasingly difficult to deal with the mortality of their loved ones, the Japanese celebrate Hanami each spring - the festival of the cherry blossom, symbol of ephemerality - and endeavour to maintain contact with the shadows of those who have passed away.

Trudi (the ever-wonderful Hannelore Eisner) has always longed to go to Japan. As the film opens, she is told that her husband (Elmar Wepper) is terminally ill. It's agonisingly painful for her - they have spent their whole adult lives together and she can't imagine life without him - yet she chooses not to tell him, to preserve his enjoyment of life. She takes the burden entirely upon herself, sparing their children too, as she has sought to do throughout her life.



Yet, whilst she acknowledges that the children - with their own lives and families and very different concerns - are increasingly strangers - there are things she fails to understand about her husband, too. Things that will lead him to undertake a strange journey and a path to understanding quite outside the bounds of his mundane Bavarian lifestyle. Through an unlikely friendship with a Japanese teenager (Aya Irizuki) his view of the world will be completely changed.

Cherry Blossoms is a film about death and a film about grief, yet it is also a film about how easily we can fail to understand one another, and how love, if it is to prosper, must take that in its stride. The central

couple are quietly rejected by their insecure, self-centred children, yet their daughter's girlfriend (beautifully played by Nadja Uhl) seems to see qualities in them that they are scarcely ready to see themselves, suggesting that sometimes we have to step outside the familiar in order to perceive the truth.

Rather than being just another culture clash story, this is a story about how the meeting of different ways of life can enrich both. As our hero and his young Japanese friend struggle to communicate in English, a language foreign to both of them, they discover a new language of signs, gestures and dance which transcends national differences.

Exquisitely made, this gentle, intelligent film is full of warm humour. It's a piece of work in which every detail counts, every shot beautifully framed and lit. A fly clinging to a windowpane, a handkerchief tied to a railing, a pair of slippers on a mat - all these little things are full of meaning. *Cherry Blossoms* invites us to slow down and discover the hidden layers of meaning in our own lives. It requires and solicits a certain generosity of spirit and an openness to experience, but what it offers in return is something remarkable.

Philip French, The Observer:

This attractive movie by one of Germany's most unpredictable independent directors is a reworking of, or homage to, Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953), one of the greatest films about marriage and family life. In Dörrie's film, a middle-aged Bavarian couple visit their estranged son and daughter in Berlin after the wife discovers her husband is terminally ill. But it's she who suddenly dies and he who fulfils her great dream of visiting their other son in Japan, a country that has fascinated her since childhood. It's a quiet, very beautiful film about the duality of love and death, and makes expressive use of the mysterious modern Japanese dance form called *butoh*.