

# film

## TAMPOPO

Director: Juzo Itami

Itami's new film has been variously described as the first Japanese noodle western and an Oriental answer to *La Grande Bouffe* but it seems gross to discuss such an elegant and deliciously witty movie in terms of those which have come before it.

*Tampopo* takes a Bunuelian glee in outlining his characters' obsession with food in all its forms — not only the food itself but, in true Japanese form, the decorum surrounding the eating of it. The first gastronomic scene is of a master and pupil discussing the ritual of noodle-eating with a marvellously mock-heroic seriousness. Similarly with the main plot which concerns the hapless heroine's attempts to bring her small noodles bar up to scratch with the help of two sympathetic truck drivers, one of whom is a regular John Wayne of the 18-wheelers.

*Tampopo* is a beautifully structured film. There are many parallels to the classic western, although incessant lashings of Liszt's *Les Preludes* on the soundtrack made me think more of *Flash Gordon*. The main plot and sub-plots which cross with it are finely dove-tailed, and Itami manages some extraordinarily funny scenes — a table of young Japanese girls slurping spaghetti with great seriousness, a discussion amongst a group of gourmet tramps on the niceties of French cuisine and wine, including such *bon mots* as "French cooking is a constant battling with burns".

As the saying goes, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". I'm sure it's the same with noodles, and you

will certainly have no idea of how intensely amusing *Tampopo* is until you actually see it.

## STATIC

Director: Mark Romanek

*Static* is quite a wonderful little piece of offbeat Americana. It tells the tale of an eccentrically idealistic young man (Keith Gordon) who is convinced he is able to create a direct video cable to Heaven on his television screen.

His ambitions go a little haywire and obliterate a bus-load of pensioners in a twisted replay of *Cocoon*, but Gordon's quest for individuality and success are touching, as are the vignettes of characters around him. It's been a few years now since the actor played the young man pitted against a killer car in John Carpenter's *Christine* but Gordon brings to *Static* the same intensity and nervous edge.

There are those who would compare *Static* to Alex Cox's *Repo Man* but, apart from their small town setting, they seem to me to have little in common. Romanek's film has none of the flashy action pieces and bizarre punk trimmings that gave *Repo Man* its atmosphere. *Static* unfolds at an almost alarmingly placid pace, yet the detail of a sleepy Christmas in Arizona is beautifully caught.

Gordon's character was very much inspired by the hero of Colin Wilson's classic novel *The Outsider*, and he lives in a strange world where religion and technology exist in an uneasy symbiosis, whether it be the assembly line crucifixes of the early factory scenes, or Gordon's warped concept of television as the eternal truth.

The soundtrack is quirky and apt. Alongside numbers by Eno, Matt Johnson, Japan and OMD, you'll hear Elvis Presley crooning 'Silent Night' and Johnny Cash doing 'Ring Of Fire'.

## GOOD MORNING VIETNAM

Director: Barry Levinson

"Good Morning Vietnam!" ... so begins the spiel that opens as Robin Williams' DJ turns on Saigon troops during the Vietnam conflict. The American actor plays the dauntless Adrian Cronauer, enlisted from the aisles of Greece to supply morale and muzak to the soldiers. The only trouble is that Cronauer is a feisty chap, and proceeds to throw out the Percy Faiths and Ray Conniffs in favour of the Beach Boys and Mary Wells.

And so, by degrees, Cronauer's eyes are opened to the crazy escalation of the Vietnam conflict, the corruption, the censorship and the expendability of human life — including his own, when a senior officer sends him off on a perilous jeep journey.

The problem, for me, lay with Williams' character. While I admired his various turns "on air", virtuoso pieces of stand-up comedy worthy of a Lord Buckley, the character of Cronauer is not overly sympathetic. Much of the film has him in a terminal flip groove and ever-ready with a sexist quip — it was not until his live "performance" to a truckload of raw recruits that *Good Morning Vietnam* found its heart, and the same sense of realism that make early Levinson films like *Diner* and *Tin Men* so special.

Two interesting points: firstly, *Good Morning Vietnam* is one of the few recent 'Nam films to present Vietnamese as characters, and Tung Thanh Tran's performance as the young Vietnamese boy Tuan is superb. Secondly, *Good Morning Vietnam* was produced by Touchstone Pictures, the adult arm of the Walt Disney Corporation. I wonder where Uncle Walt would have stood on the Vietnam issue back in the 60s ...

William Dart

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