



THE HARIMAYA BRIDGE

Spring
Season
2011

Review by Tom Long, Detroit News Film Critic:

Part loving postcard to Japan, part redemption story reaching across both racial and cultural divides, *The Harimaya Bridge* manages to lift itself out of movie-of-the-week hokeyness with sheer charm and perseverance.

At first, we seem to be following some good old-fashioned, ugly American bigotry, practiced by an African-American man named Daniel Holder (veteran actor Bennet Guillory).

As the film begins, Daniel is burying his son, Mickey, in San Francisco. Mickey had been an artist living in Japan for some time before his death. When Daniel finds out most of Mickey's paintings are still in Japan, Daniel decides to go there and claim them.

Which brings up the first problem: Daniel hates Japanese people since his father was killed in a Japanese prisoner of war camp during World War II. He also, apparently, hated his son living there, and the two hadn't spoken in a long time.

When Daniel lands in Japan, he is greeted by Yuiko Hara (Misa Shimizu), a friend of Mickey's who worked with him in local schools. She shows Daniel every courtesy, and he, in turn, is scathingly rude.

Daniel begins tracking down his son's paintings -- which now, of course, belong to other people -- and rudely demanding them. He's not out to win any popularity contests and acts like a complete clod.

But then he realizes that Mickey, who had secretly married, also fathered a child. And his mission in Japan changes.

First time writer-director Aaron Woolfolk is obviously on a mission of his own with this tale of cross-cultural redemption, and his camera absolutely loves Japan without relying on the typical Tokyo sparkle. The film plays too broadly at times -- Daniel is such a jerk initially -- but its heartfelt message ultimately wins the day.



Review by Kevin Thomas, L A Times:

Ben Guillory's Daniel Holder is a wealthy San Francisco widower determined to go to Japan to retrieve the paintings left behind by his son, who had been teaching English in a Japanese middle school when he was killed in a traffic accident. Daniel had worked so hard to make a better life for his son Mickey (Victor Grant) that he had little time for him. Having lost his own father to a hideous death as a prisoner of the Japanese in World War II, Daniel vehemently opposed Mickey going to Japan. Wracked with guilt and anger, plus his hatred toward the Japanese, Daniel arrives in Kochi Prefecture demanding that Noriko, a board of education official (Saki Takaoka), round up for him all of Mickey's paintings, even those his son had given to friends as gifts.



Not surprisingly, Daniel's mission proves complicated and involves some surprises. Although exasperated and put upon by Daniel, Noriko is a compassionate woman moved by his plight and is willing to stick by him in his gradual, painful journey of self-discovery. "The Harimaya Bridge" has accomplished portrayals from Guillory, Takaoka and others and a remarkably authentic Japanese feel to it -- and an African American perspective. (Indeed, Woolfolk is believed to be the first African American to make a feature film in Japan.) It is a unique, complex, consciousness-raising accomplishment.