

KINO LORBER



Japan/USA | 1988 | 99 min | Color | In English and Japanese with English subtitles | 4K DCP

New 4K Restoration by IndieCollect

**Created in association with the Academy Film Archive with funding from
Dolly Parton, Carol Burnett, the HFPA Trust, and donors to IndieCollect's
Jane Fonda Fund for Women Directors**

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Synopsis

Bleach-blonde wannabe rocker Wendy (Carrie Hamilton) is disillusioned with her life in New York City. After receiving a postcard from Japan saying “wish you were here,” she spontaneously hops on a plane to Tokyo with dreams of making it big as a singer. Quickly finding herself broke and a fish out of water, she moves into a youth hostel for *gaijin* (foreigners) and takes up work as a hostess at a karaoke bar. Just when she's at her breaking point, she meets Hiro (Diamond Yukai), a rock 'n' roller whose band is looking for their big break. They form a romantic and musical connection and Hiro convinces Wendy to become their lead singer. Through a combination of hustle and luck, they stumble into their 15 minutes of fame, but Wendy soon comes to realize that being a *gaijin* rocker may be nothing more than a passing fad. An underseen gem of '80s American independent cinema by Fran Rubel Kuzui (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), *Tokyo Pop* takes us on a breezy tour through bubble era Tokyo, replete with knowing nods to the city's vibrant pop culture.

Reflections on Tokyo Pop, 35 Years Later

By Fran Rubel Kuzui

The Origins of Tokyo Pop

In the 1980s my husband, Kaz, and I were splitting our time between New York City, where we met, and Tokyo. Japanese youth culture had exploded into a Pop phenomenon and Tokyo was irresistible. Fashion, music and street culture felt electrifying and dynamic. Anime was everywhere. Fashion became a means of personal expression. Everyone had a Walkman in their pocket. The Bubble Economy produced a dizzying amount of creative freedom.

In 1983, we began introducing films made by American filmmakers to Japanese audiences purely by accident. In New York we had seen Charlie Ahearn's *Wild Style*, the very first Hip Hop movie ever made, and decided it had to be shown in Japan. No discussion needed – Kaz easily found a financial sponsor. With Charlie and his wife Jane Dickson, we brought 35 kids from the South Bronx to Japan for the film's promotion, and the party began. It included the infamous break dancers Rock Steady Crew, DJ'S like Afrika Bambaataa and a group of rappers led by Grandmaster Caz and Fab Five Freddy. We followed *Wild Style* with David Byrne in *Stop Making Sense* and soon found ourselves running a distribution company in Japan.

The New York Indie movie scene was a dynamic community, all about making films. At parties in Ben Barenholtz's loft-like living room we met the Coen Brothers and film programmers from the major festivals. Jim Jarmusch heard about our Bandai robot toys and came to check them out and talk movies. Spike Lee would stop by for a cold one on his messenger rounds. After studying cinema at NYU, I'd dreamed of one day making a film of my own. Although at NYU that had been discouraged, one great thing about the indie world was that women were encouraged to make their own films. Everyone cheered me on, including the notoriously selective video store guys in Greenwich Village.

There hadn't been a film made in Tokyo by a female director and I suspected I could make something fresh and unique from my own experience. I looked at the films made by foreigners in Japan, and they seemed either romantic or macho. I didn't see anything that included the joys of pop culture made on the streets. My all-time favorite film is Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* (1972), a Jamaican film starring Jimmy Cliff, which beautifully incorporates reggae music into the story. I wanted to

put Japanese rock and roll into a Western story. One problem was I had no script and didn't know any writers, but I kept remembering how fascinated I was watching the *Wild Style* street kids interact with Tokyo, and I suspected it would be good material.

Months later I ran into college friends Lynn Grossman and Bob Balaban at a sushi dive in the West Village. Lynn was an in-demand script writer and agreed to read the draft of the script that I'd written and do some work on it. Several months later, with script in hand, Kaz and I set off for the Toronto Film Festival and began looking for financing.

Spectrafilm, a Canadian production and distribution company, agreed to finance the film if we could cast somebody who was recognizable for the video box – or, if not someone famous, at least a relative of someone famous with perhaps some name recognition. We met casting directors Ellen Lewis and Julie Alter and the quest began. They suggested I meet Eric Roberts' sister Julia, but I saw her picture and said I didn't think she fit my image of Wendy. Then I remembered that I'd seen a picture in *People Magazine* of someone who was exactly my definition of Wendy: Carrie Hamilton, one of the stars of the TV show "Fame", who was pictured with her mother Carol Burnett. There was no money in the budget for airplane tickets, so I flew out to LA with our rent money to meet Carrie. I was sure she was the person whom I was meant to make the film with, and after five minutes I knew I couldn't make the film without her. Luckily Spectrafilm agreed.

When it came to casting Hiro, Kaz had a friend back in Japan who managed rock bands. He suggested Diamond Yukai, who hadn't become a star yet and was still known as Yutaka Tadokoro. I went to meet him. "My manager is an asshole," were his first words. I was mightily impressed – so rock and roll. Little did I know he didn't speak English, and somebody told him to say that.

How TOKYO POP Was Restored

After we completed the film, *Tokyo Pop* was shown at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival in the Critics Week section. It was released in many European and Asian countries, as well as in several cities in the US. But then the distributor, Spectrafilm, went bankrupt around the time of the video release and there was nobody taking care of the film. There was a mad dash to retrieve materials so they wouldn't become involved in the bankruptcy. All the 35mm prints disappeared in the last-minute scramble. We searched for elements such as the internegative and sound elements that were kept at laboratories. We'd never made a film before and were quite naïve about protecting things, as most indie filmmakers tended to be at the time. We sent what

we could find to a lab in Los Angeles, but until now, the film has never been digitized and released on DVD.

I was contacted several times over the years by festivals wanting to show the film but had to tell them I didn't have a print available. *Tokyo Pop* came from the heart and was a labor of love. I'd made the film just to do it. Afterwards I became involved in a different world and forgot to look back on a film I had cared so much about.

In 2019, Kazu Watanabe went on a search so that New York's Japan Society could show the film as part of a festival of films shot in Tokyo. He discovered a print we didn't know existed at the Academy Archives, part of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. Following the screening, which was very well-received, Sandra Schulberg of IndieCollect announced that the Jane Fonda Fund was willing to restore the film.

We were thrilled! But just a few months later, the COVID pandemic hit New York and it became impossible to continue. In January 2022, Sandra and I decided to resume the restoration, only to discover that the Producers Film Center was closing its doors and the *Tokyo Pop* negative was in danger. Sandra contacted the Academy Archives and with their help the film was rescued – someone actually went to the lab and ferried the materials to the Academy in their car.

We looked frantically for the sound in what was pulled from the melee at the Producers Film Center, but it was gone! After some sleuthing, I found that the sound elements had been hastily sent to a laboratory in New Jersey in the rush to claim our materials from the bankruptcy. The lab had been bought by a bigger lab and they had no record of the materials. Nicholas Bergh at EndPoint Audio became the next hero when he found the sound in a major Hollywood studio archive in Chicago, and the other materials were discovered in a laboratory in London. Finally everything came together and we began the restoration in New York. When we told Carol Burnett that we were restoring the film she immediately offered financial support, and Dolly Parton, our partner on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, did the same. Along with the team at IndieCollect, Kaz and I could not have done this without them.

I can't wait to bring a new audience back to an exciting time in Japan and show people the genesis of many of the things that people are embracing in Japanese culture today. *Tokyo Pop* is one of so many films that could have been completely lost to history, and I've been so touched by the heroes who have saved *Tokyo Pop* from having a wretched existence as an out of sync YouTube video.

About the Cast

CARRIE HAMILTON as Wendy Reed

Born on December 5th, 1963 in New York City to comedy legend Carol Burnett and producer Joe Hamilton, Carrie Hamilton was a student of music and acting at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California before becoming an entertainer and filmmaker. Carrie was best known for her roles in the television shows "Fame" and "The X-Files", the Broadway play *Rent*, and the major motion picture *Tokyo Pop*, though her talents were not limited to acting; an accomplished singer and writer, she was lead singer and songwriter of her own L.A.-based hard rock band, Big Business, and later gained recognition as a screenplay writer, director and playwright.

Known for her optimism, Carrie embraced and loved the field of entertainment so much that she ran acting and creativity workshops for friends in her own home. Hollywood watched Carrie as she became one of the up and coming stars of her time, with many entertainment experts predicting that she was on her way to becoming one of the next big names on screen and television.

In 2001, Carrie shined as a filmmaker when she won the "Women in Film" Award at the Latino Film Festival, and in 2002 Carrie collaborated with her mother on the play *Hollywood Arms*, a stage version of Carol Burnett's best-selling memoir "One More Time" directed by Harold Prince. The production sadly premiered shortly after Carrie's life was cut short by cancer at the age of 38.

YUTAKA TADOKORO (DIAMOND YUKAI) as Hiro Yamaguchi

Yutaka Tadokoro (known professionally as Diamond Yukai) made his acting debut with *Tokyo Pop* as an aspiring rock 'n' roll singer. At the time he was ranked as one of Japan's newest rock stars with his band, Red Warriors.

The grandson of one of Japan's famous Noh acting teachers, Yutaka was born in Omiya City in Saitama Prefecture. With no formal musical training, he organized a series of amateur bands throughout high school, but could not keep one together for more than three months. In February 1985, he helped form the Red Warriors, and they made their recording debut in October of 1986 with Yutaka as lead singer.

Following his role in *Tokyo Pop*, Yutaka has continued to act occasionally, appearing in Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* as well as on television variety shows in Japan.

About the Filmmakers

FRAN RUBEL KUZUI – Director, Co-Writer

Fran Rubel Kuzui has made a home for herself in every corner of the film world as a director, writer, producer and distributor.

After receiving a MA in film from New York University, she was an Associate Producer at PBS and then worked as a Script Supervisor out of New York for over ten years. Fran first entered the spotlight by writing and directing the film *Tokyo Pop*, one of the hits of the 1988 Cannes Film Festival. She went on to direct *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for Twentieth Century Fox, a critical and box office success that generated the popular Fox TV series of the same name, which she packaged and then worked on as an Executive Producer. She was also an Executive Producer on the *Buffy* spin-off.

For twenty-five years Fran was also Co-President of Kuzui Enterprises with her husband Kaz Kuzui, distributing independent and art films in Japan. Kuzui Enterprises is credited with revolutionizing the marketing and distribution of independent film in Japan. During that time, she and Kaz brought a group of artists, break-dancers and rap singers to Japan and are considered the “Grandparents” of Hip Hop culture in Japan. They later partnered with legendary graffiti artist Keith Haring to open Pop Shop Tokyo and won a Tokyo Chamber of Commerce award for best new store selling his goods.

Continuing her tradition of choosing breakthrough, timely material, Fran produced *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone's first film, *Orgazmo*, which screened at the Toronto Film Festival and the Sundance Film Festival. After that she actively developed and financed material as both a producer and executive producer.

Fran has attempted to “retire” several times, but it has never worked out. She was a festival panelist and mentor for the Sundance Institute for many years and continues mentoring young filmmakers in both the United States and Japan. She now works as a journalist and is a contributing writer for Nikkei Asia.

KAZ KUZUI – Executive Producer, Producer

Kaz Kuzui has enjoyed a prominent career in both Hollywood and Asia. As President of Kuzui Enterprises, one of Japan's largest independent motion picture distribution companies, Kaz became known as an internationally respected film distributor as well as producer. He is credited with revolutionizing the marketing and distribution of

independent film in Japan by pioneering niche distribution of both American and European films.

Kaz served as one of the Executive Producers for eight seasons on the hit American TV series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" for Twentieth Century Fox. He was also an Executive Producer on "Buffy"'s successful spinoff TV series, "Angel". Both TV shows are based on the 1992 Twentieth Century Fox film, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, produced by Kaz as the first Hollywood studio film financed by a Japanese producer without Japanese investment. In 1988 Kaz produced the American independent film *Tokyo Pop*, directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui. The film was shown at film festivals worldwide including the Cannes Film Festival. *Tokyo Pop* has recently been restored in 4K and will be released by Kino Lorber in August 2023.

Kaz is known as the Godfather of Hip Hop culture in Japan following his introduction of breakdancing, rap music and graffiti art in the early 1980s as part of his promotion for *Wild Style*, the groundbreaking American Hip Hop film. His book on the subject is considered a classic in Japan. With Keith Haring as their business partner in Japan, Kaz and his wife Fran opened the Pop Shop Tokyo and won several awards, including the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce award for 1989.

Kaz is an accomplished painter and shows his work through Ginza's Goto Gallery in Japan.

LYNN GROSSMAN – Co-writer

Lynn Grossman has written screenplays for SUBWAY STORIES (HBO; Jonathan Demme/Rosie Perez producer); HOPELESS PICTURES (IFC), and has script-doctored films nominated for Golden Globes, Emmy, SAG and Writers Guild awards. Her short stories have been published in "TriQuarterly," "Story Quarterly," "Equator Magazine" and "The Quarterly" and have been anthologized and translated into many languages. She has recently written a new film of the musical SOUTH PACIFIC, and is working on a screenplay with the director David O Russell.

"NEVER FORGET"

Theme Song to TOKYO POP

Sunrise, city skies
Never thought I 'd ever write this song
But I'll find peace of mind
back in the place where I belong

And I will never forget the way you made me feel
you set me free with a lovin' touch so real
The way you held out your net to catch my falling soul
Oh Hiro you loved me just enough to let me go

Alone I 'd given up hope
watchin' as the days just passed me by
but fate had something else in mind
I knew it when I saw you in the corner of my eye

And I will never forget the way you made me feel
you set me free with a lovin' touch so real
The way you held out your net to catch my falling soul
Oh Hiro you loved me just enough to let me go

I just couldn't see
thought I'd sung out of key
spent my life hanging in the shadows
but I found harmony of my own melody
if you like you can sing it with me
c'mon shout it with me

This time I'm doin' it right
if you could see me now you'd be so proud
I've found I'm fine and winning the fight
but everywhere I turn I see your face in the crowd

And I will never forget the way you made me feel
you set me free with a lovin' touch so real
The way you held out your net to catch my falling soul
Oh Hiro you loved me just enough to let me go

Credits

Starring

CARRIE HAMILTON

and

YUTAKA TADOKORO

Original Score and Musical Direction by
ALAN BREWER

Edited by
CAMILLA TONIOLO

Director of Photography
JAMES HAYMAN

Screenplay by
FRAN RUBEL KUZUI
LYNN GROSSMAN

Executive Producers
JONATHAN OLSBERG
KAZ KUZUI

Produced by
KAZ KUZUI
JOEL TUBER

Directed by
FRAN RUBEL KUZUI

Music Credits

"Hiro's Song"

Written by Yutaka Tadokoro. Composed by Kogure Takehiko
Performed by Red Warriors. Yutaka Todokara, Vocal.

"Never Forget"

Written, Composed and Performed by Carrie Hamilton

"Hearts and Diamonds" (Love Theme)

Composed and Performed by Tadokoro

"You"

Written and Composed by Alan Brewer. Performed by Michael Cervera

"Rakuen, Rakuen" ("Paradise, Paradise")

Written, Composed and Performed by Papaya Paranoia

"Iyanano"

Written, Composed and Performed by Katogawa Rin

"Blue Suede Shoes"

Written and Composed by Carl Lee Perkins.
Performed by Yutaka Tadokoro, Vocal

"Natural Woman"

Written and Composed by Gerry Gofin, Carole King and Jerry Wexler
Performed by Yutaka Tadokoro, Carrie Hamilton

"Do You Believe in Magic"

Written and Composed by John Sebastian
Performed by Tutaka Tadakoro, Carrie Hamilton and the Be Bops

"Jappleegae"

Written, Composed and Performed by Jon Kisk

"Sardines"

Written and Performed by The Junkyard Band

"Hat Dance"

Written, Composed and Performed by Mute Seat

"Nantonaku Nantonaku"

Performed by The Spiders.

Courtesy of Nippon Phonogram Co., Ltd.

"Shirao San gasho"

Performed by Zoo N. Boo.

Courtesy of Nippon Columbia Co., Ltd.

"Monkey Dancing"

Performed by Red Warriors.

Courtesy of Nippon Columbia Co., Ltd.

"Nemureru Otome"

Performed by Adams. Courtesy of Apaian Records, Ltd.

All Music produced for *Tokyo Pop* by Alan Brewer.

35th anniversary 4K Restoration by IndieCollect, created in association with the Academy Film Archive with funding from Dolly Parton, Carol Burnett, the HFPA Trust, and donors to IndieCollect's Jane Fonda Fund for Women Directors

Keith Haring artwork © Keith Haring Foundation

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