

JANUS FILMS

booking@janusfilms.com • www.janusfilms.com



A KIYOSHI KUROSAWA FILM

C U R E

Kiyoshi Kurosawa's spellbinding international breakthrough established him as one of the leaders of an emerging New Wave of Japanese horror while pushing the genre into uncharted realms of philosophical and existential exploration. A string of shocking, seemingly unmotivated murders—each committed by a different person yet all bearing the same grisly hallmarks—leads Detective Kenichi Takabe (Koji Yakusho) into a labyrinthine investigation to discover what connects them, and into a disturbing game of cat and mouse with an enigmatic amnesiac (Masato Hagiwara) who may be evil incarnate. Awash in a mood of hushed, hypnotic dread, *Cure* is a tour de force of psychological tension and a hallucinatory journey into the darkest recesses of the human mind.

Japan | 1997 | 111 minutes | Color | In Japanese with English subtitles | 1.85:1 aspect ratio

Booking Inquiries: Janus Films
booking@janusfilms.com • 212-756-8761

Press Contact: Courtney Ott
courtney@cineticmedia.com • 646-230-6847

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Kiyoshi Kurosawa was born on July 19, 1955, in Kobe, Japan. In the 1970s, he studied at Tokyo's Rikkyo University under renowned film critic Shigehiko Hasumi and began making Super 8 films. During the 1980s and '90s, Kurosawa worked in Japan's "pink film" (movies featuring nudity) and "V-cinema" (straight-to-video) industries, where he honed the craft of directing genre movies quickly and cheaply. His national and international breakthrough was 1997's *Cure*, which proved immensely influential in igniting Japan's "new New Wave" and the Japanese horror movement. Since then, Kurosawa has directed several more horror landmarks—

including *Séance* (2000), *Pulse* (2001), and *Retribution* (2006)—while branching out into other genres, such as drama (*Bright Future*, 2003) and black comedy (*Doppelganger*, 2003). Kurosawa's *Tokyo Sonata* (2008) won Best Film at the Asian Film Awards as well as the Un Certain Regard Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival; in 2015, Kurosawa won Cannes's Un Certain Regard directing award for *Journey to the Shore*, and in 2020, he won the Venice International Film Festival Silver Lion for his direction of *Wife of a Spy*. In addition to cinema, he has produced literature and works for television, and currently teaches at Tokyo University of the Arts. ●

PRODUCTION HISTORY

About four years before the release of *Cure*, Kiyoshi Kurosawa watched a television report about a recently captured murderer. The director became fascinated with the testimony of neighbors who were shocked that a man they had perceived as perfectly normal had committed such crimes. While the report speculated that the murderer was a psychotic who had posed as an average citizen in order to elude detection, Kurosawa wondered if there might be another explanation: that the man had been normal but was somehow spontaneously inspired to kill. The question remained, however: What on earth would compel a mentally sound individual to engage in the most heinous of acts?

In order to explore this question, Kurosawa wrote a screenplay in the mode of the serial-killer movies that had burgeoned in the wake of worldwide blockbusters such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Yet Kurosawa was more interested in testing and even breaking the conventions of that genre than adhering to its formulas. The serial killer of *Cure* would not only engage in murder by proxy, but he would do so through a form of hypnosis that edged the narrative into the realm of the paranormal (or at least the extrasensory), while Kurosawa's oblique, elliptical storytelling techniques would subtly raise troubling implications about the tenuous nature of identity.

Kurosawa had cut his directorial teeth on nudity-containing "pink films" and straight-to-video "V-cinema," movies produced and distributed outside of Japan's mainstream film industry. With a larger budget and intended for theatrical release, *Cure* was a step up in prestige from the director's previous efforts. However, as he explained to the website Midnight Eye, "In terms of atmosphere, the production wasn't that different from what I was used to: it was produced by Twins, the same company that produced my V-cinema works. The crew consisted mostly of the same people, and although the cast was different, I wasn't aiming to make anything completely different from my V-cinema films." In other words, while *Cure* would be created on a wider canvas for a bigger audience, it would lose nothing of Kurosawa's early pulp edge.

CAST

Kenichi Takabe	Koji Yakusho
Kunio Mamiya	Masato Hagiwara
Makoto Sakuma	Tsuyoshi Ujiki
Fumie Takabe	Anna Nakagawa
Ichiro Kuwano	Yukijiro Hotaru

CREDITS

Director	Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Written by	Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Producers	Atsuyuki Shimoda
	Tsutomu Tsuchikawa
Executive producer	Hiroyuki Kato
Director of photography	Tokusho Kikumura
Production designer	Tomoyuki Maruo
Editor	Kan Suzuki
Music	Gary Ashiya



In shooting *Cure*, Kurosawa employed the economy of means he had learned from years of work in the rapid-paced V-cinema industry. Such practicality aligned well with the film's visual style: for instance, in order to instill a dread-suffused atmosphere as well as to depict characters' gradual transformations from good to evil and sane to insane, Kurosawa shot many scenes in single long takes or lengthy master shots. Yet despite the elaborate choreography often demanded by such a style, Kurosawa did not run his actors through extended rehearsals or shoot multiple versions of sequences. In a discussion of the film at the Toronto International Film Festival, Kurosawa said that was probably a result of "my background in V-cinema, where we had to shoot films very cheaply. *Cure* was shot on film [as opposed to digital], so we had to be even more judicious with time."

Crucial to achieving the look of *Cure* was production designer Tomoyuki Maruo. Kurosawa and Maruo had worked together on several V-cinema projects prior to *Cure*, with the director repeatedly relying on the designer to realize his penchant for using dilapidated buildings in and around Tokyo, a modern city with very little in the way of old, ruined architecture. For *Cure*, Maruo discovered several such buildings and made strategic modifications to transform them into the film's memorably creepy hospitals, prisons, and ramshackle apartments.

Koji Yakusho plays a haunted detective named Takabe who navigates these dark, mysterious spaces in an attempt to stop a strange young psychology student from dominating the minds of others who then carry out his murderous deeds. Having played leads in international hits such as 1996's *Shall We Dance?*, Yakusho was already a major star by the time he was cast in *Cure*, and his central role in Kurosawa's film lent it credibility as a serious project and not just another rote policier. But Kurosawa wasn't interested in Yakusho merely for his star power: from the start, the director envisioned Yakusho as Takabe, since the actor, as Kurosawa himself has explained, "plays a wide variety of characters and always brings some level of ambiguity to them." Yakusho was perfect for conveying Takabe's obsessive pursuit of justice as well as a vulnerability that could allow the killer to corrupt and even control his moral convictions. *Cure* would be the first of several Kurosawa-Yakusho collaborations.

Upon release, *Cure*'s success with audiences and critics resulted in Kurosawa's ascension to the upper echelons of the Japanese film industry, where he earned the reputation as a master of horror and where he continues to direct acclaimed films across the stylistic spectrum. Beyond that, *Cure* proved a crucial opening salvo of the renaissance that would unfold during the next decade for Japanese horror films and Japanese filmmaking overall. Kurosawa's ability to bring the philosophical and aesthetic ambitions of art cinema to a unique police thriller-horror hybrid paved the way for future hits such as *Ringu* (1998) and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002), in addition to influencing an entire generation of directors around the world. •



TRIVIA

Kiyoshi Kurosawa has never been hypnotized, nor does he intend to be. When asked in an interview if he had ever directly experienced the technique, the director answered, "Uh no, never. I had the chance a couple of times, but, to be honest, I was scared. I did have the utter confidence that I would never be susceptible to being hypnotized, but I was told by several people that those people—those who are the most confident—are the ones who are most vulnerable to this type of thing. When the chance arose, I basically said, 'No, let's not do this!'"

Cure's ending originally depicted the hypnotized waitress entering the restaurant's kitchen and stabbing her boss. Kurosawa edited the scene in order to imply rather than show a final act of violence because he felt the initial version was "too much."

Before *Cure* went into production, Kurosawa and Koji Yakusho met on several occasions at the Royal Host restaurant in Tokyo to discuss the screenplay, though Kurosawa was nervous about bringing a movie star such as Yakusho to such a public space. Yakusho asked Kurosawa to clarify various aspects of the screenplay that he found ambiguous, but Kurosawa claimed that he couldn't do so since they were just as ambiguous to him as to anyone who read it.

Kurosawa shot *Cure* on a conventional workday schedule of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The orange-red dress that appears conspicuously in the background of *Cure*'s second laundry-shop scene pays homage to Henri-Georges Clouzot's classic 1955 suspense thriller *Diabolique*. In that film, the guilty accomplices are alarmed to find out that a laundry shop has recently pressed a suit belonging to someone they thought they had killed.

Kurosawa has described the characters in his films played by Yakusho, who is roughly the same age as the director and also resembles him, as alter egos.