



Publicity still from 'Bondi Tsunami'.

## Bondi Tsunami

### Review by Megan Spencer (2004)

Young Australian filmmaker [Rachael Lucas](#) says that her DIY feature *Bondi Tsunami* is a new type of Australian film: a pop-cinema fusion between music video and features that she calls "music video motion picture".

For those wedded to straight up linear storytelling *Bondi Tsunami* may well be a frustrating exercise, seeming more like 'busy'

background wallpaper than a 'real' movie. But others keen on pop experimentation (and multi-platform viewing) might agree with her ambitious proclamation.

Whatever you make of Lucas' Japanese slacker surf-road movie, there is definitely something *very* different going on here, handled with a definite sense of purpose and vision. And *Bondi Tsunami* is eternally cool – has there ever been a cooler road movie made here in Australia? Even on that score alone *Bondi Tsunami* deserves much more than just a passing glance. The film is so ambitious that there is almost too much to discuss in one review. Here goes...

Shark (Taki Abe), Yuto (Keita Abe), Kimiko (Miki Sasaki) and Gunja Man (Nobu-Hisa Ikeda) are four dreamy road trippers, 'hellbento' on surfing Australia's East Coast. In their iconic, two-tone 1961 EK Holden station wagon they trawl the back roads and front beaches in search of the perfect wave, the perfect beer and the perfect kitsch tourist attraction. Sky meets land, sun meets water and digital video meets culture mash in this the first Japanese road movie ever made in Australia.

There is definitely a lot more going on in *Bondi Tsunami* than meets the eye, but what meets the eye – and ear for that matter – is aggressively constructed and designed.

*Bondi Tsunami* is heightened on every level; it is colourful, camp, kitsch, and ferociously embraces 'the superficial'. It is no more and no less than hyper-playful eye and ear candy, just as the director wanted it. It is almost a thesis in superficiality - the surfaces of things - yet consciously so.

Things that are deemed of no value in 'serious culture' – music videos, comics, cut n' paste pop music, fashion, design – are strategically thrown into this movie mash up with verve. Lucas is uncompromising in her message: she wants to see just how far she can push the relationship between narrative, meaning and form in one fell swoop and, in one fun movie. (She also trusts that this generation of movie-going audience can handle it). 'The surface of things' is her badge of honour as is the intersection between icons of Eastern and Western youth and pop culture.

Which is a kind of paradox given that *Bondi Tsunami's* genesis was so 'run n' gun'. Maxing out her 'credit card budget' to the tune of \$40 000 and using an improvised script, family members as crew and casting four unknowns who had never acted before might make for more of a documentary than a highly constructed feature. But there is a sense of improvisation that also pervades the film, and an



unpredictability that leaks out from its loose shooting process. It gives the film a necessary 'endless summer' feeling for it to take its place alongside the many surf movies that have come before it.



Needless to say *Bondi Tsunami* makes the most of its video origins. Its story is told mainly in extended montage. Split screens interrupt Zen poetry musings with an inspired surf-pop soundtrack leading the way. By Western viewing standards *Bondi Tsunami* doesn't work so well as a stand alone movie within a traditional cinema environment: the visual repetition might grate especially if you're not into music videos.

But this is also its calling card and point of difference; at this point in cinema evolution – one where many are bemoaning the death of the medium - who knows, given half the chance, Rachel Lucas could be Australia's answer to music video motion picture directors Spike Jonze and Michel Gondry.

Swimming strongly - and independently - outside the flags, someone just needs to spot her from the shore...

**Words by Megan Spencer © 2004**