

The Proceedings

– A New Film by John Williams based on Franz Kafka’s “The Trial”



■ ABOUT THE PROJECT

On his thirtieth birthday a mild-mannered bank clerk wakes in his apartment in the suburbs of Tokyo to discover two men in his room, who tell him he is under arrest...

The film sets Kafka’s novel in present day Tokyo and uses it as a metaphor for the recent mood of self-restraint and self-censorship in Japanese society. It is also a comment on the creeping suppression of dissent and divergent opinion in Japan right now. The director of the film, John Williams has previously made three Japanese language feature films, *Firefly Dreams* (2001), *Starfish Hotel* (2007) and *Sado Tempest* (2013) and has won several awards at international film festivals.

■ PLOT

A man wakes up in his apartment somewhere in the suburbs of Tokyo to find that he is under arrest. The men who have come to deliver the message claim that they don't know the reason. The following day he is summoned to a strange "Court" on the outskirts of the city, but still nobody will explain the nature of his crime. The man protests his innocence, but everybody around him, including his family and the woman he likes, seem to think he is guilty. The more he fights, the guiltier he appears and the world around him begins to grow stranger and stranger, as if he is slipping away from reality himself. Little by little he realizes there is no way out of the deadly maze into which he has fallen and that the conclusion of "the proceedings" always ends badly for the accused...

(The plot closely follows the original book, but with a paranoid thriller atmosphere and pacing.)



■ WHY SUPPORT THIS FILM

If, like us, you are fed up of the mindless entertainment offered on Japanese TV and you feel that the country is actually ruled by advertisers and bureaucrats, who give us a choice between the totally dumb or the soft and sentimental. If you want an edge to your cinema and a critical but entertaining film If you long for more debate in class, on TV and in society, and if you think that democracy is being undermined slowly by powerful and sinister forces but you can't quite put your finger on what they are... please support this film.



■ DIRECTOR



John Williams

Writer and Director, John Williams came to Japan from the UK in 1988 and has lived here ever since. He has written and directed three award-winning Japanese language films, *Firefly Dreams* (2001), *Starfish Hotel* (2007) and *Sado Tempest* (2013). He has also produced shorts, documentaries and features and works at Sophia University, where he teaches Film Production, Scriptwriting and Translation.

■ BUDGET

The total budget for the film is between 8 and 10 Million Yen. We have 2 million Yen already and hope to raise at least a further 3 million through Crowd Funding to have enough money to start production. For post-production we are looking at Grant Aid or Soft Funding in countries outside Japan to complete the film.

■ WHY CROWD FUNDING

We want to make a film that is both entertaining and “critical” and we want to keep control of the content and not have it softened up or watered down to meet the needs of some imaginary “market.” If we raise the money through Crowd Funding it means we know there is an audience for this kind of cinema and it is important for us to reach the audience and to make a film with integrity. Many of the factors involved in the production of this film are considered “risky” - original script, novel that is perceived to be “difficult,” dark and edgy material, so it is a hard sell to “commercial” funding, and in Europe or the UK it would be the kind of project to be supported by government subsidies. In Japan however, the government subsidy is difficult to access for independent film and the amounts are much smaller than in Europe.

■ CONTACT

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

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Director's Statement

Why Kafka's "The Trial" right now?

I follow the book very closely in structure but I've reset it in present day Tokyo. A mild-mannered bank clerk wakes up to find he's "under arrest." Nobody explains his crime to him and the Court that is trying him is a labyrinthine bureaucracy. Every attempt by others to help him only results in him appearing more guilty and the more he insists on his innocence the more he appears to be digging his own grave. Kafka's book is about a nightmare situation, but it resonates so much with what is happening in Japan now, with people in the media and in public either refusing to speak up, or now being actively shut up by their superiors. I'm using the Trial as a metaphor for contemporary Japanese society.

POINT ONE – Reaching an Audience, Building an Audience

I used to think that Crowd Funding was a sort of charity method for young filmmakers or people with projects that couldn't get funded otherwise, but I now think it is actually a kind of way of reaching an audience. The most important thing when you make a film is to reach an audience. You don't necessarily have to "please" an audience – sometimes you might want to challenge them or even make them angry, but if you don't reach them then there is no point in making a film. So I think Crowd Funding is an opportunity to reach an audience in advance. It's actually not much different from what all the Major Japanese studios used to do – pre-selling tickets, or what Hollywood does – pre-selling territories. I think Crowd funding is pre-selling the film to the audience.

POINT 2 – New Opportunity for Independent Filmmakers

Given that the traditional methods of Exhibition and Distribution have broken down and that even the majors are struggling to understand the new platforms and new ways of reaching audiences I think Crowd Funding presents an interesting new opportunity to by-pass the traditional funding sources and get straight to an audience.

POINT 3 – Making “challenging” or critical cinema in Japan.

I think another thing that Crowd Funding can do is help to make films that are considered “difficult” by the industry – this is a problem in every country in the world, but at least in Europe there is public funding, which has supported minority filmmakers for example. There is also an understanding in Europe that film needs to be supported as an “art form” as well as a commercial venture. For me the biggest problem in the Japanese industry is the fear of the “muzukashii” This very soft culture of non-offensiveness has its good sides but it also means there is little room for dissent, and recently we’ve seen how the government is actively trying to clamp down on these divergent voices and opinions, actively muzzling the media and passing laws that threaten journalist’s freedom. My version of Kafka’s books is set in a very real contemporary Japan where these things are happening and I think the echoes and the sub-texts are quite clear as critiques of these problems in Japan now.

POINT 4 – Not Stuff but Participation

Our crowd funding approach is slightly different from others I think – we aren’t giving away T-shirts or DVD’s or signed posters. I think there’s too much stuff in the world anyway, so I don’t want to clutter it up with more stuff. The thing is the film itself and a sense of participation in the making of the film, so not only are we selling tickets and streamed online versions, but also an ability to get involved in screenings through pre-buying local screening rights, or even to become a co-producer and be involved in the development of the script, the shoot and the marketing. So we’re actually offering a kind of boot camp for filmmakers too.