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MADE IN JAPAN

A Film By Josh Bishop

Executive Producers: Morgan Spurlock and Elijah Wood

World Premiere | SXSW 2015 | 89 MINS
In English and Japanese with English Subtitles

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SYNOPSIS

“MADE IN JAPAN” is the remarkable story of Tomi Fujiyama, the world’s first Japanese female country music star. From playing the USO circuit throughout Asia, to headlining in Las Vegas and recording 7 albums for Columbia records, Tomi’s career culminates in a 1964 performance at The Grand Ole Opry where she followed Johnny Cash and received the only standing ovation of the night. Forty years later Tomi and her husband set out on a journey through Japan and across the United States to fulfill a dream of performing at The Grand Ole Opry one more time.

“MADE IN JAPAN” is a funny yet poignant multi-cultural journey through music, marriage, and the impact of the corporate world on the dreams of one woman.

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FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

Somehow around age 23, I came to the realization that no one was going to give me money to make the personal feature films that I aspired to write and direct. I was a commercial PA at the time and most of my aspiring director PA buddies were all trying to build their commercial director's reels or were floundering trying to find "the money" for their films. This was something that I wasn't interested in so I spent my own money on short "artsy" projects that were ultimately rewarding to make but didn't really go anywhere. I came to the understanding that if I was going to succeed in making the films I wanted to make, I was going to have to make a feature on my own and that this was going to have to happen bit by bit. Enter Tomi Fujiyama.

I got married in 2004 at the age of 24 to a Japanese jazz singer and ended up going to Japan for the first time shortly thereafter. My then wife had told me of this Japanese country singer lady "Tomi Fujiyama" that used to give her vocal lessons and that I should meet her. We went to one of Tomi's gigs in Yokohama and I found the whole thing to be utterly fascinating. Here in front of me was a 4'11" Japanese lady belting out Hank Williams songs and shredding on the guitar...absolutely killing it. I talked to her after the show and she told me her whole story about getting on the Grand Ole Opry etc.

The next night I was at another music event with my wife and I couldn't pay attention to the stage because I could not get Tomi out of my head. Here was a woman who was Japanese, had been singing American country music for over 50 years and had been on the Grand Ole Opry. The story was there and I knew it was a film... an actual movie that I felt I could make. I was going to tell her story and get her back on the stage of the Opry in the process. It would be a no brainer I thought.

I made an appointment to go over to her house and met with her and her husband to present this idea. What I found there was that she had an insane amount of memorabilia from her life in the form of recordings, guitars, clothes and even better, had documented her whole life with photographs. I was utterly flabbergasted and knew I had stumbled upon something great. A year later I cobbled together a few thousand dollars of my own money and was shooting with her in Japan.

MADE IN JAPAN represents a decade of my life and was very difficult to make, however I knew that Tomi's was a story the world needed to hear about and that if I had the patience I was going to be the one to tell it. This is an important film to me because she is an incredible person who has never given up on what she wanted out of life and to be honest I just followed suit in a way. I was going to make movies no matter what.

MADE IN JAPAN

When I first started on this film I did not think it would take me 10 years to complete it. So after 10 years, a failed marriage and a son (who is now 7 years old), I can honestly say that to me, this film is just about the most important thing I have ever done. It is worth

mentioning is that when I was 24 and promised Tomi I was going to do this, and I meant it. It means a lot to me now at the age of 35 that I was able to keep this promise to her.

Making the film came with a number of challenges including:

- **Financial:** I had no money at all when I started making this film. It was a piece meal effort every step of the way. Obviously I eventually did find money to complete the film but that money was found after years of working on project.
- **Distance:** Tomi and her husband live in Tokyo. I live in New York. This made things very difficult for obvious reasons.
- **Culture and language:** There are many cultural differences between Japan and the West. Language, customs and etiquette and business practices to name but a few. I was married to a Japanese woman at the time so I had someone to help guide me through it a bit but these cultural differences proved to be very problematic. Now ten years later I actually speak quite a bit of Japanese and have a much better understanding of how to conduct myself in the Japanese culture but this knowledge was only gained after making many many mistakes.
- **The passing of time:** After years on the project the film started to feel like a huge drag but I knew that if I gave up, all my work would be lost forever and that this incredible material would not see the light of day. It was mentally very challenging to keep going with this project especially after my marriage crumbled in 2010. Somehow I didn't have it in me to throw it all away however and it did finally get done.
- **Technology:** I spent so much time on this film that filmmaking technology literally changed around me. When I started shooting, mini-dv was still a viable independent filmmakers medium, by the time I was done it had become completely obsolete. Also, being that I had no money I had to load all the footage, organize the project, and make pre-edits myself. In other words I had to do all the work an assistant editor would do. Luckily my producers Josh and Jason Diamond used to be power house editors themselves before they moved further up the chain and were able to advise me and make sure that I was doing things correctly but this literally took years. In the process I became so familiar with the footage that when we did finally find money and I was able to finally hand the project off to other editors (the oh so talented Julie "Bob" Lombardi and Vicki Lesiw) they were able to take the project and run with it.

A lot of the storytelling ideas I had initially did come through in the final product but in all fairness, this film is very different from the film I had envisioned at first. If I had the funds to film this story in oh say a year instead of the ten that it took, then I would never have gained the knowledge of the Japanese culture, language and attitude that was ultimately

necessary to properly access the depth of Tomi's story. It could have very easily turned into a run of the mill, made for tv style, cookie cutter documentary but it didn't. Certain things that I was aiming for in the beginning of shooting that seemed very attainable turned out to

be impossible to make happen and this felt disastrous at the time. Now however, I am convinced that we have a stronger film because of these challenges.

Despite the many different challenges we had multiple gifts from the Film Gods during the making of "MADE IN JAPAN." One of my favorite stories is when she was reunited with Oscar Sullivan, the Opry member who invited her onto the Grand Ole Opry in 1964. There is a moment in the film when she is on a radio show in Nashville and is being interviewed about her life. She starts talking about Oscar Sullivan and how she stayed with him and his wife in Nashville in 1964 during the weekend that she was on the Opry and that she remembers them fondly. She was under the impression that Oscar had died and she finds out on the air that both the man and his wife were still alive and that they were living not too far from Nashville. When she found that out on that radio show, I swear that the pressure in the room changed... every hair on the back of my head stood straight up and a tingle went down my spine. She had not seen these people in over 40 years and had just assumed them to be dead. It was the kind of moment you see in a documentary and wonder *"How the hell did the filmmaker capture that?"*

After the show, we were given Oscar and his wife's number and we called them. They remembered Tomi very well but unfortunately due to scheduling we could not reunite them during that trip. Tomi and Bamba did come back 2 years later however and we were able to reunite them then. It was one of those things that makes you as a filmmaker shake your head in disbelief and say "Did I make this happen or did some other unknown hidden force do it?" Sadly, a year later both Oscar and his wife had passed and we were all upset to hear this news but I felt blessed never the less to have had the opportunity to meet this man and his wife and to have given Tomi the chance to be reunited with them. Oscar Sullivan was a true American musical pioneer and I suggest you look him up if you don't know who he is. You will probably be amazed.

It wasn't until after the initial shoot that I found the multiple collaborators that I needed to ultimately finish the project a decade later. There were many along the way but most notable were my Producers Josh and Jason Diamond who came onboard as editors initially and helped me cut a piece that we ended up showing Elijah Wood who was already a friend of theirs. Elijah (a music buff in his own right) was incredibly interested in Tomi and somewhere around 2007 officially came on as an executive producer and agreed to narrate the film. By 2013, I had officially shot everything needed to tell the story. I was able to raise a decent chunk of money to edit the film and we approached Julie "Bob" Lombardi who had cut "Super Size Me" and Victoria Lesiw who came highly recommended from a mutual friend to edit the film and got them working on the project as well. When we were done Julie showed it to Morgan Spurlock who she had maintained a good relationship with over the years and he agreed to come on board with his partner Jeremy

Chilnick to help us see this film through till the end as executive producers.

MADE IN JAPAN As a filmmaker, I work hard to express ideas and thoughts that ring true to me. With "MADE IN JAPAN" I tried to show what can happen when a person is determined and believes in what he or she is doing. "Rising to the top" and "overcoming all obstacles" are

not themes that I consider integral to a good story however and I would even go so far as to say that if I was making a narrative film I wouldn't feel comfortable exploring those themes because I feel we see them in almost every fiction narrative, especially films that come out of Hollywood. I want to show the audience something that they have not seen before (as pretentious as that may sound) as opposed to rehashing ideas that have been proven to "work". I aspire to hypnotize, provoke and engage the audience. Hopefully by showing Tomi's 60 plus year journey I have succeeded in that.

Following your dreams is the right thing to do. It kind of means more than anything. I don't care what happens along the way, if you listen to the voice inside you, I mean actually LISTEN to it and can tune out the negativity, the naysayers and the people who don't want you to succeed then you can achieve anything. That sounds like a cheesy story that some clown would have told you when you were in the first grade but I think Tomi is actually living proof of this and have come to truly believe it. We do not have to go along with what society expects from us. It's ok to be different and weird.

-Josh Bishop
Director

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FILMMAKERS BIOS

DIRECTORS BIO

Josh Bishop is a New York based writer. director who considers himself “a citizen of the world.” After living in California, Alabama, Colorado and Arkansas his family moved to Rotterdam (Holland) on his twelfth birthday. Three years later they moved again, this time to Antwerp (Belgium) where he would remain for eight years. In Antwerp he studied Art and Film and made the decision to follow the path of the filmmaker and eventually relocated to New York in 2002. Using a unique combination of American, European and Japanese influence he strives to make original, multi- cultural films that will perhaps not only entertain people, but will also make them think. Currently he is working on “The Module” a documentary project“MADE IN JAPAN” is his first feature effort.

PRODUCERS BIO(s)

Josh and Jason Diamond (The Diamond Bros.) are equal artists and technological mercenaries treading the fine line of cutting edge technology and storytelling. The main focus; always looking for a better way to tell the story. Forging a path, directing and producing numerous award winning music videos, short films and documentaries as well as being the go to team for Digital Filmmaking knowledge from some of New York’s well known filmmakers, they began breaking ground Executive Producing features such as “Light and the Sufferer,” in 2006 starring Paul Dano. That film contained a fully CG character in an indie film before that even seemed feasible. Next came the award winning “Exploding Girl”, one of the early features shot on a RED Camera in 2008, starring Zoe Kazan who won the Best Actress award at the Tribeca Film Festival for her role. The Diamond Bros. have been tapped to direct and produce content for clients such as Sony Playstation, American Express, FILA, Nike, MTV, SpikeTV, VH1, including the viral hit “Share it Maybe” for Sesame Street (18,851,899 views on YouTube) and provided cameras and technical support to DP Bradford Young on his film “Mother of George” which won Best Cinematography at Sundance 2013.

Julie 'Bob' Lombardi is a producer and editor of documentaries and television. Bob made her editorial debut with the Oscar® nominated, 2004 documentary, "Super Size Me" directed by Morgan Spurlock. She went on to cut "Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden?" and MTV's critically acclaimed hit series "16 and Pregnant", "Teen Mom", and "World of Jenks". Her other credits include "David Blaine; Dive of Death," "American Pickers," and "Town of the Living Dead" to name a few. She just finished producing and editing “MADE IN JAPAN” and is currently working on the documentary “Freedom!” for Warrior Poets.

Morgan Spurlock is a New York based writer, director and producer. His first film, Super

Size Me, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004, winning Best Directing honors. The film went on to win the inaugural Writers Guild of America Best Documentary Screenplay award as well as garner an Academy Award nomination for Best Feature Documentary. Since then he has directed, produced and distributed multiple film, TV and digital projects, including the critically acclaimed CNN television series Morgan Spurlock Inside Man, the FX series 30 Days and the films Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden?, Confessions of a Superhero, Czech Dream, Chalk, The Future of Food, What Would Jesus Buy?, the WGA Award-winning and Emmy nominated The Simpsons 20th Anniversary Special: In 3-D! On Ice!, Freakonomics, POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold, Comic-Con: Episode IV – A Fan’s Hope, Mansome, and One Direction: This Is Us.

Morgan is currently working on season three of Morgan Spurlock Inside Man for CNN and 7 Deadly Sins for Showtime. His upcoming digital projects include “Connected,” the first long-form series for AOL and “Smartish,” a new premium branded content channel for Maker Studios.

Jeremy Chilnick is an Emmy-nominated film and television producer. He is a partner in Morgan Spurlock’s production company, Warrior Poets, where he currently oversees all aspects of production. After co-producing the Shopocalypse-chronicling documentary What Would Jesus Buy?, as well as the official Cannes selection The Third Wave, Jeremy has gone on to write, produce, and executive-produce multiple films and television shows. Since 2008, Chilnick has co-written and co-produced Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden?, The Simpsons 20th Anniversary Special: In 3-D! on Ice!, the documentary adaptation of The New York Times best-selling Freakonomics, POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold, Comic Con Episode IV: A Fan’s Hope, Mansome, and the 3D concert documentary One Direction: This Is Us. Jeremy is currently Executive Producing 7 Deadly Sins for Showtime, Dark Horse Nation for History, and Morgan Spurlock’s Inside Man for CNN.

EDITORS BIO(s)

Julie 'Bob' Lombardi served double duty on MADE IN JAPAN as both producer and editor. See bio above.

Victoria Lesiw is Brooklyn-based filmmaker with over 10 years of experience in film and advertising. She has edited multiple award-winning features and thrives on the creative nature of collaborative storytelling. She is currently finishing work on BEASTS OF NO NATION with director Cary Fukunaga and planning her next trip around the world.

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TOMI FUJIYAMA BIO

TOMI FUJIYAMA is Japan's first lady of Country music.

In 1951 "Tomoko Yamaji" changed from performing traditional Japanese Enka songs for local Japanese audiences, to Country Music for American soldiers on military bases across Japan. It was at one of these military bases that she became "Tomi" after the mispronunciation of her name by a soldier in the audience.

Playing the military circuit for American soldiers, recording 21 singles and 5 albums for "Columbia Records" and going to Las Vegas to play a backbreaking 7 day a week, 4 show a night contract at "The Mint Hotel" are just some of the things that she would do before the magical night of November 9th 1964 when she sang at the 39th Birthday of America's number one Country Music institution "The Grand Ole Opry," in Nashville Tennessee. She played right after Johnny Cash and got the only standing ovation of the 5 hour show. This is something every Country musician wants to achieve and was an event that would shape her life and stay with her forever.

Tomi returned home and continued to play the military bases around Japan and was eventually sent on a USO tour of Vietnam and South East Asia during the height of the Vietnam War in 1967. After a hiatus in the 1980's, "Columbia Records" put out a "Best Of" album in 1994 and in 1996 she recorded "Lonely Together" in Nashville, with Bill Anderson, her first new work in 30 years. She returned to Nashville again in 2002 to record "Gold".

Today Tomi is still performing in clubs and venues all over Japan and her passion for music and lust for life continues to move and inspire people everywhere. She still dreams of going back to Nashville and the Opry... one more time.

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TOMI's TIMELINE

January 10th 1940

Tomoko Kamei is born on January 10th 1940 in Nagoya to parents Tsuyoshi (a tailor) and Mie (house wife) Kameii.

1945-1952

The whole family moves to a new home/tailor shop across the street from a brothel after the Nagoya fire-bombings destroy their first home. For the next couple of years Tomi is around musicians on the street as well as a record player in the store (a novelty at the time) and starts singing. At age 8 she convinces her father to be her manager and starts gigging around Nagoya singing traditional Japanese Enka. She learns to play the guitar as well. At this time she performs under the name Tomoko Yamaji.

1952

Signs to Teichiku records after moving to Tokyo with her father. Simultaneously starts to sing at American military bases and converts to Country music. She fully takes on the Country persona and will dress the part for the rest of her life. Soldiers mispronounce her name as "Tomi" and it sticks.

1959-1963

Signs to Columbia Japan and "Fujiyama" is added to her name. She records multiple records for Columbia and is very busy in the Japanese music industry while simultaneously still playing at military bases.

1963

An American promotor named Thomas Ball discovers her at a military base in Yokohama and brings her to play a show called "Hong Kong Scandals" in Las Vegas at "The Mint Hotel."

November 9th, 1964

Tomi is invited as a guest onto the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville Tennessee by Lonzo and Oscar. She performs at the 39th birthday (they say birthday not anniversary at the Opry) and immediately following plays the Midnight Jamboree. A flurry of press attention ensues.

December 1964

Tomi plays on the Les Crane Show on ABC in New York City.

1965

Tomi is called back to Japan by Columbia records as she is was still under contract. All of the original people she knew at Columbia are gone and she is given no exposure

whatsoever. She leaves Columbia records and returns to playing the American military

circuit.

1967

She plays USO shows all over Vietnam and South East Asia during the war and returns safely. Her sister is sent with her on these trips and her father no longer acts as her manager.

1967-1980

Tomi play USO shows and other clubs across Japan. Does not record at all but does occasionally make TV appearances etc. Somewhere in the 70's she meets Shoichi Bamba her future husband.

1980

Tomi and Bamba get married. Shortly thereafter Tomi's father passes away and Bamba parents both fall ill. She puts her career on hold for over a decade in order to take care of her husbands ailing parents but becomes very depressed in the mean time.

1994

Bamba's parents have both passed away and she restarts her career again with the help of her husband. Columbia Japan gets wind that she is active again and releases a "Best Of" She continues to gig around Japan.

1996

She goes to Nashville to record "Lonely Together" A self financed album with A list Nashville studio musicians. She starts to place in indie country hit charts worldwide but does not do well with sales.

2002

She records other album in Nashville "Gold" also with A list studio musicians and also self financed and once again does not do well with sales.

2004-2012

Meets Josh Bishop and agrees to let him make a film about her life. Her life as a performer of course never stops.

MADE IN JAPAN
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CREDIT ROLL

CAST

Tomi Fujiyama
Shoichi Bamba
Ishakawa Maki
Kyoko Tojo
Katsuyori Ito
James Miki
Pat McMakin
John Walker
Craig Havighurst
Eddie Stubbs
Gail Davies
Chris Scruggs
Eric Paslay
Keishi Shikata
Charlie Louvin
Oscar Sullivan
Geneva Sullivan
Kelly King
David McCormick
Chris Katchoulis
Jim Lauderdale
Tim Lager
Joe Limardi
Akira Maekawa
Tugio Kouda Maekawa
Yoshiaki Tokunaga
Tuneo Suzuki
Sakae Uchida
Teruhiko Nagumo
Toshikazu Tanaka
Jyun Hayashi
Akihiko Imai
The Naked Cowboy - Robert John Burck

Michael McMahon
Garth Powell
Jon Hammer

Christopher Pizza Band:
Luke Easterling
Andrew Sovine
Michael Mallicote

The Whiskey Gentry:
Lauren Staley
Jason Morrow
Chesley Lowe
Sam Griffin
Price Cannon
Michael Smith
Rurik Nunan

Music City Roots band 2010:
Chris Scruggs
Billy Hensen
Michael Mallicote
Mike Bubb

Music City Roots band 2012:
Allison Brown
Gary West
Larry Atamanuik
Maro Kawabata

The Madison Square Gardeners:
Aaron Lee Tasjen
Mark Stepro
Rich Hinman
Ramblin' Rob Heath
Bryn Roberts
John Kengla

Written, Produced and Directed by
Josh Bishop

Narrated
by Elijah Wood

Morgan Spurlock
Jeremy Chilnick
Jeremy Settles

Producers
Josh Diamond
Jason Diamond
Julie Lombardi

Producers
Juan Reinoso
Jim Muscarella

Co-Producers
Sanae Kojima

Director of Photography
Gregg de Domenico

Original Score by
Kaki King

Edited by
Victoria Lesiw
Julie Lombardi

Co-Producer
Sanae Kojima

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Todd Mayo
Todd Jarrell

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Hiroo Takaoka

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Todd Jarrell
Jillian de Domenico
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