



Waterboys

Shinobu Yaguchi

JAPAN, 2001

90 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **Altamira Pictures/
 Fuji Television/Toho/Dentsu**
 Executive Producer: **Shoji Masui**
 Producer: **Akifumi Takuma,
 Daisuke Sekiguchi**
 Screenplay: **Shinobu Yaguchi**
 Cinematographer: **Yuichi Nagata**
 Editor: **Ryuji Miyajima**
 Production Designer: **Takeshi Shimizu**
 Sound: **Hiromichi Kori**
 Music: **Gakuji Matsuda**
 Principal Cast: **Satoshi Tsumabuki,
 Hiroshi Tamaki, Akifumi Miura, Kuen
 Kondo, Naoto Takenaka**

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Shinobu Yaguchi's previous films (including *Down the Drain* and *Adrenaline Drive*) have all been funny in a kind of dark, zany way, their screwball antics kept in check by a veneer of arty cool. Well, forget the cool: *Waterboys* is a flat-out gut-buster from the first pratfall to the jaw-dropping, show-stopping synchronized swimming musical finale. This is cinema at its broadest. Not that the film isn't rife with subtext – it pushes the inherent homoeroticism and sexual politics of the teen comedy to the breaking point – but you'll be laughing too hard to notice until later.

It's springtime and the Tadano High School swim team is down to one member named Suzuki (the impossibly adorable Satoshi Tsumabuki) and the filthiest pool in Japan. A pretty young coach shows up with the idea of creating the top synchronized swimming team in the country. But she faces some problems – Tadano is an all-boys school and she is only able to interest five hopelessly bad swimmers, including Suzuki, in taking part. When she discovers she is eight months pregnant and takes off for maternity leave, the team seems doomed.

But they persevere in the face of derision from fellow classmates, the mounting pressure of college exams and constant failure. Their only support comes from a gaggle of local drag queens and the crazy owner of a local aquarium (Naoto Takenaka, the toupée aficionado from *Shall We Dance*), who ultimately takes on the team's coaching

duties in order to exploit the team as free labour. Of course, all turns out well, as it must in such a film.

Yaguchi has never featured gay characters in his films before, but here they literally leap off the screen, from the team's shortest member to the rowdy queens buying up all the tickets to their show. Ultimately, Yaguchi embraces the obvious – when you've got a bunch of teenaged boys in swimming trunks engaged in the girliest sport around, there are some issues you just can't avoid!

■ **Noah Cowan**

Shinobu Yaguchi was born in Kanagawa, Japan in 1967 and studied graphic design at Tokyo's University of Art and Design. While there, he began working with friends on Super 8 films and directed his impressive first feature, *Down the Drain*, in 1993. Feature filmography: *Down the Drain* (93), *My Secret Cache* (96), *Adrenaline Drive* (99) and *Waterboys* (01).

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