



AOI OKUYAMA

Nationality : Japan **DOB :** Feb 23rd 1999 **Height :** 5.34ft (163cm) **Weight :** 99.2lb (45kg)
Eyes : Black, Brown **Hair :** Black **Special Skill :** Casting spell in Harry Potter

After seeing the Harry Potter films Aoi left her hometown in Hokkaido with a dream. If she cant be a character in the Harry Potter she will become an actress who can appear in the world of Harry Potter. She will create magic by becoming an actress and telling stories. She went to Tokyo and within a year of acting training, she was called in to audition for GIRIHAJI.

TV

2021 「Cold Case 3」 WOWOW	Supporting	Takako Koduki
2019 「Giri/Haji」 BBC×Netflix	Supporting	TAKI
「Yume Shokudo no Ryourinin」 NHK (Japan Broadcasting Co)	Supporting	TANAKA

Theater

2019 「SAHARA」 USP ACADEMY	Lead	KEI/HADUKI
2018 「A Midsummer Night' s Dream」 UPS ACADEMY	Supporting	PUCK



BBC Netflix Original Drama 「Giri/Haji」



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**SPOTLIGHT
A DEBUT ON THE
MEAN STREETS**
Aoi Okuyama heads
to London for first
acting role | PAGE 10

From Hokkaido to the mean streets of London

Actor Aoi Okuyama wins acclaim for debut in yakuza series 'Giri/Haji'

Television

BY KENTON WATSON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As captivating Anglo-Japanese crime thriller series that explores the societal effect of a single murder in two separate cities, "Giri/Haji" (Duty/Share) has been well-received by both fan and critics alike. Writer Ikuo Haruno ("Shinners") and director Jilian Farrow ("Ranzang", "Mars@Work") have been lauded for the BBC/Netflix co-production, which looks at the impact and actions of the yakuza through a number of compelling characters, many of whom are morally ambiguous.

The quality of the acting from a glistening cast has also been highly praised, with Emmy award recipient Kelly Macdonald ("Broadway Empire", "Trainspotting") and Tadanobu Asai ("Sakigashira") leading the way in their starring roles as detectives Sarah Watanabe and Kenzo Morit. However, for many viewers, it's the pairing of Aoi Okuyama and Will Sharpe, playing Mori's rebellious teenage daughter Taki and drug addict Rodney, respectively, that really stands the show.

Okuyama, described as "extraordinary" in "The Independent" and "a revelation" in "The Daily Times", makes her screen debut in the series. A die-hard Harry Potter fan, Okuyama, 20, decided to become an actor after graduating from high school with hopes of one day becoming part of JK Rowling's franchise.

She enrolled in the LPA Academy actors' training organization in Tokyo, founded by Yoshinori Nakahara. The renowned casting director, who helped launch the Hollywood career of Ken Watanabe, told Okuyama about the role of Taki. Taki, a series who had never auditioned for anything before, decided to give it a go.

"It was all new, so I didn't think I had a chance," says Okuyama. "The process started with a video audition and then I had to perform in front of the director and other crew members when they came to Japan. The last time was with Hina. I had so much fun, but it was over before I knew it. While it was a great experience, I was sure that would be the end of it."

She was wrong. Just before going into class, Okuyama, then age 18, was informed that she had been cast as Taki.

"I took a while to register," she says. "I'm always watching Netflix at home and now I was going to be in one of those. Even after getting home, I still thought I was dreaming. Once reality set in, I signed up at an English school and started preparing for the part, thinking deeply about the character."

Firstly, it was important for her to get inside the head of Taki, who follows her father Kenzo to London. A detective in Japan, he has flown to the U.K.'s capital in search of his captious brother, Yuto (Yusuke Kubozuka), who has been accused of a murder that brought an end to a long-running yakuza truce. As tensions mount, the siblings end up on different sides of the fence during an epic battle in the city's Sobo neighborhood.

"It's difficult for Taki," says Okuyama. "She respects her father but struggles to communicate with him. As for her uncle, she loves him and thinks he's cool, yet is aware he's done bad things. She's an opinionated girl who's determined to go her own way even though she's not sure what the right direction is. You can see her grow as a person while in London."

Closely connected to the characters of Kenzo and Yuto, Okuyama spent a lot of time with Hina and Kubozuka both on and off set.

"They were like father figures, always offering advice," she says. "Both have so much experience in the industry. I remember the first day being in a taxi with Kubozuka. Suddenly, it dawned on me that I was being sent to the set from 'Oh, a film crew. That was a strange feeling.'"



With the rest of the British cast there were some language barriers, but Okuyama said managed to strike up a good relationship with them and they sometimes surprised her by speaking Japanese. They also taught her some English slang.

The Hokkaido native says she worked hard on her language skills and became quite good at listening, though sometimes found it difficult to know whether people were joking or not, particularly director Farrow. "He usually was," she says with a laugh.

One cast member Okuyama was particularly excited about meeting was Kelly Macdonald, who played Helena Ravenclaw in "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2".

"I told her I was a fan of the movie, but not how crazy I was about it," says Okuyama. "I also saw her in 'Trainspotting'. Being a big star, I thought she might be quite cool, yet she was so down-to-earth and cute, constantly asking us if we'd like some of her jelly babies. She also tried to teach me some Scottish English."

On screen magic: Aoi Okuyama says she became an actor after realizing her dream of becoming a wizard was unlikely at the moment.

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