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Ugetsu monogatari (Ugetsu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1953

Miyamoto Musashi (Musashi Miyamoto), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1944

Joyû Sumako no koi (The love of Sumako the actress), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1947

Gion no shimai (Sisters of the Gion), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1936

Yoru no onnatachi (Women of the night), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1948

Waga koi wa moenu (My love has been burning), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1949

Oyû-sama (Miss Oyu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1951

Yuki fujin ezu (A picture of Madame Yuki), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1950

Gion bayashi (A geisha), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1953

Chikamatsu monogatari (A story from chikamatsu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1955

Orizuru Osen (The downfall of Osen), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935

Gubijinsô (Poppy), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935

Fujiwara Yoshie no Furusato (Home town), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1930

Uwasa no onna (A woman of rumor), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1954

Yôkihi (Princess Yang Kwei-Fei), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1955

Josei no shôri (The victory of women), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1946

Akasen chitai (Street of shame), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1956



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FALL 1996 PROGRAMME GUIDE OCTOBER 16 TO DECEMBER 1

**CINEMATHEQUE**  
O N T A R I O

A division of the Toronto International Film Festival Group

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 1

# MIZOGUCHI

## THE MASTER

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溝口健二

# NAVIGATING THE RETROSPECTIVE

We have had the luxury to organize the retrospective, daunting in its size and richness, as a "vertical" rather than a "horizontal" series. This simply means that instead of running for two weeks straight, two films a night every night, the series is scheduled over a month, with screenings always on the same nights (Tuesdays and Thursdays for the shorter features) and afternoons (Sundays for the epics) to allow planning and to avoid exhaustion. If we make one plea, it would be for you to sample from the lesser known works in Mizoguchi's oeuvre. The most casual cinephile will have heard of the masterpieces which everyone seems to agree upon; but, as so many critics have discovered, much of Mizoguchi's strongest work is comparatively unknown. For this reason, we offer a guide to Mizoguchi's films, reflecting critical consensus (as far as possible), to help you navigate the retrospective.

## THE PANTHEON:

UGETSU; SANSHO THE BAILIFF; CRUCIFIED LOVERS; THE LIFE OF OHARU; STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS; THE LOYAL 47 RONIN; SISTERS OF GION; OSAKA ELEGY

## CANDIDATES FOR THE PANTHEON:

PRINCESS YANG KWEI FEI; MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING; STREET OF SHAME; THE TAIRA CLAN SAGA; UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN; A GEISHA

## REVELATIONS:

WOMEN OF THE NIGHT; THE WOMAN OF RUMOUR; MISS OYU; THE VICTORY OF WOMEN; LOVES OF SUMAKO THE ACTRESS; PORTRAIT OF MADAME YUKI

## IMPORTANT ESOTERICA:

POPPY; MUSASHI MIYAMOTO; HOMETOWN; THE FAMOUS SWORD; THE DOWNFALL OF OSEN; CASCADING WHITE THREADS

## PASSPORT TO MIZOGUCHI!

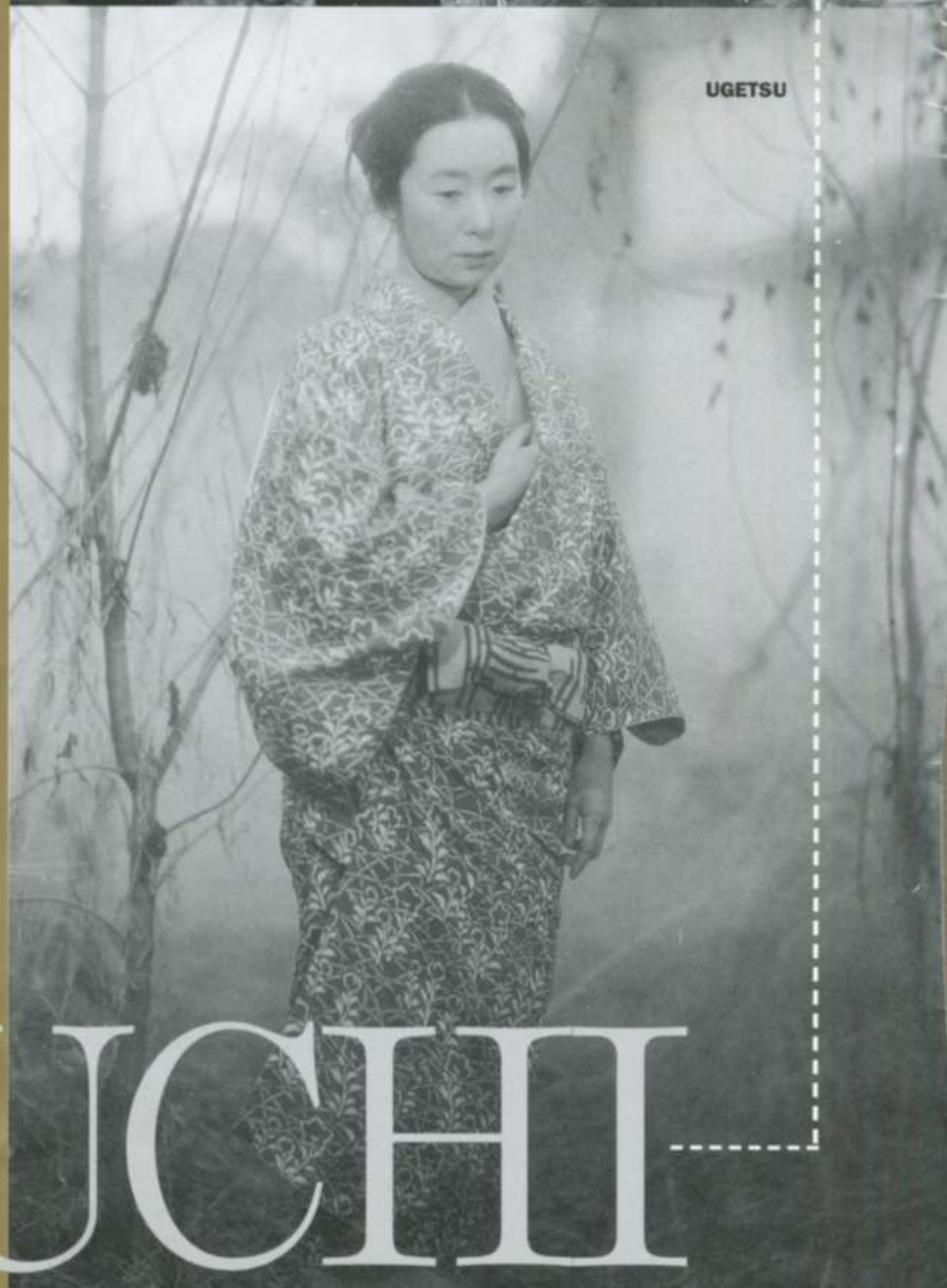


To receive reduced ticket prices; a large format booklet, containing several essays on Mizoguchi, film descriptions, bibliography and other invaluable material; a poster; a chance to win two return-tickets Vancouver to Tokyo courtesy of Japan Airlines; and a once-in-a-lifetime experience, purchase our "Passport to Mizoguchi": ten separate tickets (2 from the Pantheon; 3 from Candidates; 3 from Revelations; and 2 from Esoterica) for \$37.50 (including GST) for members; \$75 (including GST) for non-members. Please note that non-members who purchase passports will be allowed to secure their tickets in advance, and that passports can be purchased only at the 2 Carlton Street box office.

CRUCIFIED LOVERS



UGETSU



MIZOGUCHI



# MIZOGUCHI

## The MASTER

"The greatest of Japanese filmmakers.  
Or, quite simply, one of the greatest of  
filmmakers"

- Jean-Luc Godard

"Of all Japanese directors  
I have the greatest respect for him. . . .  
With the death of Mizoguchi, Japanese  
film lost its truest creator"

- Akira Kurosawa

"By any standard Kenji Mizoguchi  
must be considered among the world's  
greatest directors"

- Dudley Andrew

"One of the great directors of the  
sound era"

- Vincent Canby

"Like Bach, Titian, and Shakespeare,  
he is the greatest in his art"

- Jean Douchet

"Mizoguchi, Maître absolu du grand  
écran"

- Le Monde

### Kenji Mizoguchi

began his career in the silent period, and quickly became known for his fierce independence and uncompromising artistry. Working in many genres—contemporary melodrama and historical epic, social realism and domestic tragedy, on occasion biography, ghost story and samurai tale—Mizoguchi produced several dozen films, many of which were lost during the war. Those that remain, almost all of which will be screened in this retrospective, constitute one of the most beautiful bodies of work in any art, of any time. It is little wonder that critics the world over have chosen Mizoguchi as one of the greatest directors in the history of cinema. Such classics as *UGETSU*, *SANSHO THE BAILIFF*, *CRUCIFIED LOVERS*, *THE STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS* and *THE LIFE OF OHARU* are unequalled for their pictorial and narrative richness and their emotional force; lesser known works such as *A GEISHA*, *SISTERS OF GION*, *OSAKA ELEGY* and *STREET OF SHAME* are perhaps even more moving in their fierce beauty.

The anxiety that critic David Thomson expresses in his paean to Mizoguchi's art—"this is a greatness that could one day soon be lost. By 2010 will it be possible to see these films on the screen they deserve?"—underscores the importance of this retrospective. Working in coordination with the Audio Visual Division of The Japan Foundation, Tokyo, Cinematheque Ontario has organized a ten-city tour of the extant, subtitled films of Mizoguchi, half of which will be shown in 35mm prints struck for the event.

The comparisons are as inevitable as they are unfashionable: Mizoguchi is cinema's Shakespeare, its Bach or Beethoven, its Rembrandt, Titian or Picasso. But these analogies are entirely apt: Mizoguchi's oeuvre is imposing in its immensity, its reach, accomplishment and influence. (Rivette, Godard, Pasolini, Fassbinder, Yanagimachi, Angelopoulos, Shindo, Straub and Tarkovsky are just a few of the directors who have been influenced by him.) His artistry, though august and exquisitely refined, was also aggressive, reflecting the turbulence of the world and the searching discontent of his own nature. He was, as Peter Grilli characterized him, "a restless genius, driving himself like a Picasso or a Beethoven to innovate and extend his art, never repeating earlier achievements, always setting new challenges for himself." Compare Mizoguchi's work to that of the (sublimely) parametric Ozu, the (sublimely) reiterative Naruse, and the (not so sublimely) confident Kurosawa, and one can only agree with Grilli's estimation.

Which is not to say that Mizoguchi's work is eclectic. Indeed, he offers a textbook case of stylistic and thematic coherence, of "authorial legibility." French critics were the first in the West to celebrate



UGETSU



Mizoguchi, recognizing in OHARU, UGETSU and SANSHO, the films that won three consecutive top prizes at the Venice Film Festival, a distinctive visual and editing style. (Unsurprisingly, Mizoguchi's oeuvre became central evidence for the auteur theory.) Subsequent critics have catalogued many motifs in Mizoguchi's cinema, both visual (fire and water, especially) and thematic: the interplay of art and life, distance and identification, the transience of life, vanity of human ambition, transcendence through love after death, and, most insistently, the subjugation of women in Japan.

His portrayal of women remains the most contentious of his central themes. Whether set in Japan's medieval past or in the streets of mid-Fifties Tokyo, Mizoguchi's films almost invariably focus on women and their travails in a world that demeans, enslaves or crushes them. (Note, for instance, how Mizoguchi shifts the emphasis in the finale of THE 47 RONIN to the fate of the woman, breaching the traditional approach to this oft-told samurai tale.) Time and again, one encounters the situation in which a woman sacrifices everything—often driven into prostitution or concubinage—so that a debased man can achieve success or personal transformation. As David Owens has pointed out, "THE DOWNFALL OF OSEN is the most dramatic example of this persistent theme in Mizoguchi's work, one which film critic Tadao Sato attributes to the director's guilt feelings about the sacrifices his own mother and sister made for him."

Whether or not this simple biographical data can explain the fierce determination with which Mizoguchi repeatedly treated the subject of women's subjugation is debatable. Such films as SISTERS OF GION and OSAKA ELEGY are lacerating portraits of the exploitation of women; others, such as MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING and THE VICTORY OF WOMEN, are explicit and unyielding in their condemnation of a society that sets out to destroy women who do not submit to its ideals of servility. Can the force of these films' feminism, which audiences still find astounding today, be accounted for as an act of expiation? It is no surprise that, with an art as complex as Mizoguchi's, some critics have questioned whether his cinema is feminist at all, aesthetizing as it does women's sacrifice and suffering, offering what is essentially a conservative world view in which change is impossible, escape imaginable only through death. (Some have gone so far as to find Mizoguchi's insistence on women's agony pathological.)

But if there is debate about the source and meaning of Mizoguchi's themes, there is little about his style, one of the most sublime in all cinema. As with all great art, his style can be parsed but ultimately explication must give way to the ineffable: one can

come away from his films exhausted from their beauty. The key components of his style: elegant long takes and sequence shots, reflecting Mizoguchi's one-scene/one-take method; deep focus compositions that organize background and foreground to energize the space contained in the frame, and employ strong diagonals to emphasize offscreen space; intricately planned pan, crane and follow shots that earned him comparisons to such stylists as Murnau and Ophuls; and a propensity for the long shot—"I hate close-ups," he said. In two famous instances—the final shots of UGETSU and SANSHO—the camera moves away from his characters to the landscape, its movement indicating transcendence (and transience), where a similar gesture by another director might suggest decorative indifference. (Mizoguchi critics prone to abstraction suggest that his camera style collapses time and space—a manifestation of zen aesthetics—thereby offering us a vision of "wholeness and unity," a glimpse of infinity.)

The conspicuous distance between camera and actor reflects much about Mizoguchi's aesthetic; his style has often been called "objective," with its multiple viewpoints (he often inscribes an observer in key scenes) and its rigorously composed images of loss, exploitation and sacrifice. Mizoguchi's is an art of paradox, his aestheticism both containing and intensifying his often ferocious depictions of chaos and cruelty; the elegance and complexity of his style in service of often blunt social criticism; his materialism and fanatical dedication to realism employed to portray spiritual transcendence, and to conjure the uncanny and the spectral; his distancing (through style and narrative construction) deepening our emotional response to the suffering of his characters; his emphasis on the transient and the tragic often ameliorated by affirmation—of kindness, solidarity, or endurance.

The latter is perhaps ironic, given that Mizoguchi's bullying, ruthless working method was infamous. He spared no one, least himself, to achieve what he thought was truth. He is famous for the obsessive care he took in designing his compositions, both for aesthetic effect and for fidelity to reality. (Kurosawa, though much more famous in the West, conceded that Mizoguchi was the superior artist, saying: "Mizoguchi's greatness was that he would do anything to heighten the reality of every scene.") Tyrannical with his writers, technicians and actors—that the great Kinuyo Tanaka made so many films with him is something of a miracle—he achieved the most refined, even ethereal effects, the most humane and moving of stories, the most exquisite compositions and nuanced performances, all through a force of will that often amounted to cruelty. Great art is sometimes born of such abusive perfectionism, and there is little art greater than Mizoguchi's.

— JAMES QUANDT



SANSHO THE BAILIFF

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### UGETSU

(UGETSU MONOGATARI)  
Japan 1953 96 minutes  
Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Machiko Kyo

UGETSU invariably turns up on critics' lists of the ten greatest films in the history of cinema. (Eric Rohmer last year chose it as his favourite Japanese film, as did numerous other directors, critics and programmers.) In a 16th-century village, a potter is seduced away by an exquisitely beautiful woman who turns out to be a phantom. Mizoguchi's rigorous compositions and camerawork, his use of the mist-enshrouded landscape around Lake Biwa, the intense performances of two of Japan's greatest actresses (Kyo and Tanaka), and the theme of the illusory nature of human ambition and desire: All contribute to a work of infinite beauty and significance. "Its stylistic perfection and the rich overtones of its theme make UGETSU one of the most beautiful films of all time" (Georges Sadoul). "Simultaneously realistic, allegorical and supernatural, UGETSU is the most stylistically perfect of all Mizoguchi's work, and many critics consider it the greatest Japanese film ever made" (David L. Cook).

Friday, October 18 6:30 p.m.

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### SANSHO THE BAILIFF

(SANSHO DAYU)  
Japan 1954 123 minutes  
Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Yoshiaki Hanayaki

One of Mizoguchi's three greatest films (along with UGETSU and OHARU) according to most critics. (Jonathan Rosenbaum recently chose it as one of the ten most important Japanese films, David Bordwell and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith as one of the ten best films in the history of cinema.) In 11th-century Japan, a family is dispersed: the father is exiled by a cruel governor, the mother is sold as a courtesan, and the children are sent to a remote province as slaves. Tanaka towers as the mother, and rarely did Mizoguchi achieve the balance between barbaric violence and formal beauty that he did here. Miyagawa's cinematography, with its awe-inspiring long takes and complex use of background and offscreen space, lends even the most harrowing sequences an extraordinary eloquence. "Staggering . . . sublime" (Andrew Sarris). "The last scene of SANSHO DAYU is one of the most affecting in the history of cinema. . . . As with OHARU, YANG KWEI-FEI, SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI and so many of his works, SANSHO DAYU is one of those films for whose sake the cinema exists" (Gilbert Adair).

Sunday, October 20 1:30 p.m.



PRINCESS YANG KWEI FEI

MIZOGUCHI THE MASTER was organized by Cinematheque Ontario and The Audio-Visual Division of The Japan Foundation, Tokyo. The Japan Foundation has made the retrospective possible by striking a dozen new prints, supplying others, and shipping all of them to North America. Our profound gratitude to Mr. Tomozo Yano and Ms. Marie Suzuki of The Japan Foundation for their Herculean efforts on behalf of the retrospective. Our thanks also to: the Kawakita Memorial Film Institute, Tokyo, and coordinator Kanako Hayashi for supplying several key prints; Bruce Goldstein, Film Forum, New York, who originated the idea of the retrospective, along with us; Milestone Films, New York for THE LIFE OF OHARU; all the participating North American venues, and the many contributors to the accompanying publication, edited by the indefatigable Gerald O'Grady.

THE JAPAN FOUNDATION



THE MITSUI CANADA FOUNDATION

Cinematheque Ontario also wishes to thank The Mitsui Canada Foundation for its generous support of this series.



# MIZOGUCHI

## UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN

(UTAMARO O MEGURU GONIN NO ONNA)  
Japan 1946 93 minutes  
Cast: Minosuke Bando, Kinuyo Tanaka

The most erotic and autobiographical of Mizoguchi's films, *UTAMARO* is considered by many critics the crowning achievement of his middle period. The film draws many parallels between Mizoguchi, who was also a painter, and the printmaker who is its subject. Amidst the frenzied world of 17th-century Edo, with its sprawl of brothels and bars, the woodblock print artist Utamaro patiently, painstakingly devotes himself to his art. (The "five women" of the title are the models who inspire him.) When Utamaro is arrested for outraging a local magistrate and forbidden to draw for fifty days, art becomes, as it no doubt was for Mizoguchi, a matter of life and death. The subject of much recent analysis for its treatment of both artistic creation and sexuality, *UTAMARO* "ranks with Tarkovsky's *ANDREI ROUBLEV*" (New Yorker Films).

**Tuesday, October 22  
6:30 p.m.**

UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN



## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### THE WOMAN OF RUMOUR

(UWASA NO ONNA)  
Japan 1954 84 minutes  
Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Yoshiko Kuga

"Magnificent" (Robin Wood). Kinuyo Tanaka blazes as the "woman of rumour," the madam of a prosperous Kyoto brothel who falls in love with a young doctor with whom her daughter is also in love. (Mizoguchi was compassionate to both the women characters—mother and daughter—but was cruel to Tanaka behind the camera. When she rejected his marriage proposal, he reportedly attempted to prevent her debut as a film director. The long and fruitful collaboration between star and director then came to an acrimonious end.) Aside from the extraordinary ensemble acting, and the cool precision of Mizoguchi's psychological insight and formal design, the film offers probing camerawork of the brothel and its environs by the great cinematographer Miyagawa. "The film has the feeling of late Ford or Buñuel, of a director who has rummaged through all the styles of expression and arrived at the most subtly exquisite, minimalist ways of expressing his deepest, most complex sentiments" (Andrew Sarris).

**Tuesday, October 22 8:45 p.m.**

*"If the cinema has  
yet produced a  
Shakespeare, its  
Shakespeare is  
Mizoguchi. . . .  
There are no more  
beautiful compositions  
anywhere in the  
cinema"*

**- Robin Wood**

*"To paraphrase  
Peter Brook about  
Shakespeare, I would  
say: One speaks about  
the world of Ozu, of  
Kurosawa, of Naruse;  
one does not speak  
about the world of  
Mizoguchi because  
Mizoguchi is the  
world"*

**- Michel Ciment**

## THE TWO THAT MADE MIZOGUCHI

A double bill (in new 35mm prints) of the films that, while virtually bankrupting their studio Daiichi and enraging censors, also made Mizoguchi's reputation. (Critics now consider them the best pre-war Japanese films.) Though he had made dozens of films before, many of them important and popular, it was these two starkly realistic, wrenching studies of women's oppression that earned Mizoguchi the status of maverick and master. Critics raved about them, audiences flocked to them, and censors later banned them as "decadent." Prime examples of Mizoguchi's profound humanity and formal mastery, they lie, in every way, literally and figuratively, at the heart of Mizoguchi's art. "I believe that it is only since I made *NINIWA HIKA* and *GION NO SHIMAI* that I have been able to portray humanity lucidly" (Mizoguchi).

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### OSAKA ELEGY

(NANIWA HIKA)  
Japan 1936 71 minutes Cast: Isuzu Yamada, Benkei Shiganoya

Mizoguchi's "most brilliant prewar film" (Joan Mellen), *OSAKA ELEGY* was banned by wartime censors for its "decadent tendencies." Isuzu Yamada plays a young switchboard operator who supports both her indigent father and her brother, whom she is putting through school. Financial pressures lead first to an affair with her boss and then into prostitution. The final shot, in which Yamada stares accusingly out into the audience, was—and still is—heart stopping. "Isuzu Yamada's riveting performance as Ayako is still regarded in Japan as one of the greatest screen portrayals ever" (David Owens).

**Thursday, October 24 6:30 p.m.**

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### SISTERS OF GION

(GION NO SHIMAI)  
Japan 1936 69 minutes Cast: Isuzu Yamada, Yoko Umemura

John Harkness (*NOW*) chose this as one of the ten greatest films in the history of cinema in the latest *Sight & Sound* poll. *SISTERS OF GION* is the only Mizoguchi film that ever won the Japanese award for Best Film of the Year. Hoping to repeat the great critical and popular success of *OSAKA ELEGY*, Mizoguchi used the same cast and crew for this follow-up, made the same year. A portrait of two sisters—one conservative and traditional, the other cynical and rebellious—who are faced with sexual humiliations as geisha in a Kyoto teahouse, the film inevitably leaves its audiences in stunned silence. (The ending is, if anything, more rending than that of *OSAKA ELEGY*.) "A masterpiece . . . one of Mizoguchi's greatest contemporary dramas" (Tadao Sato). "My favourite work of Japanese cinema" (King Hu).

**Thursday, October 24 8:00 p.m.** (Note early start time)





THE LIFE OF OHARU

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### THE LIFE OF OHARU

(SAIKUKU ICHIDAI ONNA)  
Japan 1952 133 minutes  
Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Toshiro Mifune

Mizoguchi considered OHARU to be his masterpiece, and many critics agree: "Mizoguchi's greatest film after A STORY OF CHIKAMATSU . . . perhaps the finest film made in any country about the oppression of women" (Joan Mellen). (Godard has said that he has seen it over a dozen times, and its influence is certainly apparent in such films as VIVRE SA VIE and TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER.) No film rivals OHARU's exquisite sense of composition, and the implacability of its chronicle of the downfall of a woman. Kinuyo Tanaka, whose career was synonymous with Mizoguchi's for many years, plays Oharu, an imperious court lady of the Edo period who lives in Kyoto. When she is sold to a feudal lord, she is subjected to a series of humiliations and ends up as a broken old streetwalker. "One of the ten greatest films in the history of cinema" (Derek Malcolm).

**Sunday, October 27 1:30 p.m.**

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### PRINCESS YANG KWEI FEI

(YOHIKI)  
Japan/Hong Kong 1955 98 minutes  
Cast: Machiko Kyo, Masayuki Mori

Fabiano Canosa recently declared PRINCESS "the most beautiful film ever made" and selected it as his favourite Japanese film of all time, as did Portuguese master Manoel de Oliveira. Louis Marcorelles pronounced PRINCESS "perhaps the most beautiful hymn ever raised by the cinema to the love of a woman for a man;" Andrew Sarris called it "one of the most beautiful films ever to treat beauty as a subject." Mizoguchi's first colour film, set in Eighth-century China, concerns a T'ang Emperor who is unable to forget his beloved dead wife. He marries a poor, beautiful servant from the countryside, and makes her his princess, which leads to political catastrophe. Among the most haunting sequences in all Mizoguchi is PRINCESS' famous finale, in which the lovers transcend death and join in an embrace of ghostly laughter—"what must be one of the most chillingly beautiful moments in all cinema" (*The New York Times*).

**Tuesday, October 29 6:30 p.m.**

## MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING

(WAGA KOI WA MOENU)  
Japan 1949 84 minutes  
Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Mitsuko Mito

Critics hailed BURNING as an undiscovered masterpiece when it was released in Britain and North America in the Seventies: "A film that deserves the same kind of praise as UGETSU MONOGATARI and SANSHO DAYU" (*Time Out*); "A must for anyone remotely interested in the career of one of the great directors of the sound era" (Stanley Kauffman). Kinuyo Tanaka plays a 19th-century feminist who breaks with her family, moves to Tokyo, and becomes involved with a liberal politician. Denounced as a "wild animal film" when it was originally released, BURNING still shocks: Mizoguchi spares little in depicting the social horrors that the young woman encounters, and the feminism that informs the film is pure and ferocious; the final image of female solidarity is unforgettable. "Any Mizoguchi revival deserves a blare of trumpets and BURNING is no exception. . . . Mizoguchi secures a tremendous performance from Tanaka" (Derek Malcolm). "One of the ten greatest films in the history of cinema" (Robin Wood).

**Thursday, October 31 6:30 p.m.**

## THE VICTORY OF WOMEN

(JOSEI NO SHORI)  
Japan 1946 80 minutes Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Michiko Kuwano

Heeding the call to make films to foster democracy and the rights of women in postwar Japan, Mizoguchi produced this searing work. (It takes on a subject no one would dare touch today.) Based on a screenplay by Kaneto Shindo, who was to later become a major director, and Kogo Noda, Ozu's longtime scenarist, VICTORY stars Kinuyo Tanaka as an idealistic young lawyer. She takes on the case of a former schoolmate, a destitute woman who has suffocated her baby rather than have it suffer in the starvation and chaos that followed the war. She is opposed in court by none other than her brother-in-law, a representative of the military government who has also imprisoned her husband. Startlingly feminist and stirring, THE VICTORY OF WOMEN has perhaps the most inspirational of all endings in Mizoguchi.

**Thursday, October 31 8:45 p.m.**

## NEW 35MM PRINTS!

### THE LOYAL 47 RONIN PARTS I & II

(GENROKU CHUSHINGURA)  
Japan 1941-42  
Part I: 111 minutes Part II: 108 minutes  
Cast: Chojuro Kawarazaki, Yoshizaburo Arashi

"For admirers of Japanese cinema, THE 47 RONIN is . . . essential" (Tom Allen, *The Village Voice*). In its subject, epic sweep and length, THE LOYAL 47 RONIN stands to Mizoguchi's career as THE SEVEN SAMURAI does to Kurosawa's. It goes without saying that Mizoguchi's approach to the samurai saga is more meditative and refined than other directors'. (Kurosawa rejected the film, saying "Mizoguchi was no good at samurai.") Commissioned by the military government to boost Japanese morale, the film is actually more stately than inspirational, focusing more on patterns and pageantry than on swordplay. Which is not to say that Mizoguchi's version of the famous story of the 47 ronin, in which the loyal retainers of a 17th-century lord, commit ritual suicide rather than capitulate to his enemies, isn't thoroughly exciting. Mizoguchi employs the boxed courtyards and formal gardens of his impeccably authentic set to choreograph the warfare, turning action into pure aestheticism. This is a rare screening of the complete two parts of the film, in prints struck for this retrospective.

Please note special prices:

Separate tickets to each part are available at the regular Cinematheque prices; tickets to both parts (when bought at the same time) are: \$7.50 (members, student members and seniors); \$13 (non-members); all prices include GST. There is a 40 minute intermission between the two parts.

**Part I**  
**Sunday, November 3 1:30 p.m.**

**Part II**  
**Sunday, November 3 4:00 p.m.**

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### CRUCIFIED LOVERS

(CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI)  
Japan 1954 102 minutes  
Cast: Kazuo Hasegawa, Kyoko Kagawa

Japanese critics consider CRUCIFIED LOVERS Mizoguchi's greatest film, and most western critics also rank it in his pantheon. (Robin Wood has listed it as one of the ten greatest films ever made, and Joan Mellen ranks it as his best work.) Set in Kyoto around 1683, the film is based on a famous play by Chikamatsu, Japan's Shakespeare. It centres on the doomed affair between a merchant's wife and his servant. The illicit couple are hunted down and crucified, less because of their infidelity than because their persecutors view the woman as an ideal sacrifice for their own ends: They owe her husband money, and they think they can destroy him by destroying her. Distinguished by exquisite tracking and crane shots, and some of the most memorable sequences in all Mizoguchi, CRUCIFIED LOVERS is a work of "power and magnificence [by] the greatest of Japanese filmmakers" (Jean-Luc Godard). "Personal cinema at its highest" (Eric Rohmer).

**Tuesday, November 5 6:30 p.m.**

## NEW TALES OF THE TAIRA CLAN

(SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI)  
Japan 1955 108 minutes  
Cast: Raizo Ichikawa, Yoshiko Kuga

"Arguably Mizoguchi's best and the best of all films" (Ian Cameron). Mizoguchi spared nothing in this lavish treatment of the popular historical novel about the fortunes of the Taira clan in the 12th century. The prosperity of the Japanese film industry in the mid-Fifties allowed him most everything—sumptuous colour, elaborate sets and costumes, armies of extras—except Cinema-Scope, which he wanted to use for this epic, but was denied. Against a backdrop of political struggles, this tale of the Taira clan focuses on an ambitious young general who seizes power, then is defeated by his own vanity. Visually stunning, TALES is orchestrated around the contrast between the serene composure of the imperial court and the chaos of the streets outside, where the traditional aristocratic order was disintegrating. The use of colour is, as one might expect with Mizoguchi, meticulously planned. *Cahiers du cinéma* championed TAIRA, saying that it made all contemporary cinema look "slow, old, and turgid" and that in it Mizoguchi went "to the end of cinema in finding a new relation between camera and scene."

**Tuesday, November 5 8:45 p.m.**



## **PORTRAIT OF MADAME YUKI**

(YUKI FUJIN EZU)  
Japan 1950 86 minutes  
Cast: Michiyo Kogure, Ken Uehara

*Cahiers du cinéma* declared MADAME YUKI "an authentic masterpiece" when the film was released in Paris in 1987. A work of sublime understatement and grace, YUKI was considered something of a "sex film" at the time of its release, featuring the most "bed sequences" of any Japanese film to date. (Joan Mellen has compared it to Buñuel's BELLE DE JOUR.) YUKI focuses on the daughter of a provincial nobleman, who has lost most everything in the postwar occupation of Japan, except a villa at the resort of Atami. Her boorish, philandering husband demands that she pay off his debts, and though she despises him, cannot resist his sexual power. When she is unable to find happiness with a lover, she resorts to the only course she knows out of the situation. The final sequence, set on a mist-enshrouded lake at night, is one of the summits of Mizoguchi's art.

**Thursday, November 7 6:30 p.m.**

## **MISS OYU**

(OYU-SAMA)  
Japan 1951 95 minutes  
Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Nobuko Otawa

A crucial Mizoguchi, in that it marked the first collaboration between the director and the great cinematographer Miyagawa, and also signalled a shift in Mizoguchi's themes, from those of "social justice" to "themes of passion, sacrifice, and transcendence" (Stephen L. Barr). Kinuyo Tanaka is superb as Oyu, widowed before the age of twenty-one. When she rebuffs the advances of a wealthy young man, he marries her sister to ensure access to the widow. Their *menage à trois* causes a scandal, and Oyu is banished from her husband's house. "An exceptionally poignant melodrama" (Andrew Sarris) based on a Tanizaki novel, MISS OYU offers sequence after sequence of astonishing elegance, including one shot that lasts almost six minutes.

**Thursday, November 7 8:45 p.m.**



STREET OF SHAME

## **NEW 35MM PRINT!**

### **THE STORY OF LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS**

(ZANGIKU MONOGATARI)  
Japan 1939 142 minutes Cast: Shotaro Hanayagi, Kakuko Mori

"One of the ten most important Japanese films" (Jonathan Rosenbaum). A majestic and moving Mizoguchi, in which the director refined the style for which he became famous, CHRYSANTHEMUMS is set in the 19th-century world of Kabuki actors. A young actor is expelled from his family because of his lazy, unprofessional attitude towards the art of Kabuki. He is saved from dissolution by the family's maid, who urges him to perfect his art. She sacrifices everything for him, and, in the famous final sequence, splendidly shot in the canals of Osaka, her sacrifice becomes total just as he triumphs as a great actor. "Bristling with passion, Mizoguchi's film is a true find: a heartbreaker to end them all. . . . Justif[ies] its reputation as the peak of Mizoguchi's filmmaking" (*Time Out*). "Sublime . . . possessing a richness of detail and texture to rival that of a Sternberg film" (Kevin Thomas, *The Los Angeles Times*).

**Sunday, November 10 1:30 p.m.**

## **NEW 35MM PRINT!**

### **A GEISHA**

(GION BAYASHI)  
Japan 1953 87 minutes Cast: Michiyo Kogure, Ayako Wakao

"Not only one of Mizoguchi's masterpieces," Penelope Gilliatt proclaimed in *The New Yorker* when A GEISHA was released in the U.S. twenty-five years after it was made, "but also one of the few perfectly tuned works of sensibility in the twentieth-century visual arts." Made between the twin peaks of UGETSU and SANSHO THE BAILIFF, the film is compact, fiercely beautiful and heart-rending. Set in the Gion District of Kyoto, it focuses on a teenaged girl who becomes the protégé of a veteran geisha. There is little in Mizoguchi as insightful and moving as his portrayal of the relationship between the self-centred and idealistic young geisha and her mentor. Though too old to change her ways, the mature geisha encourages her apprentice to rebel against the grubby world of businessmen on the make. "Quite simply a masterpiece of the highest order" (George Morris, *Take One*). "The most exciting film of the year" (Roger Greenspun).

**Tuesday, November 12 6:30 p.m.**

## **NEW 35MM PRINT!**

### **STREET OF SHAME**

(AKASEN CHITAI)  
Japan 1956 85 minutes Cast: Machiko Kyo, Ayako Wakao

Mizoguchi authority Jean Douchet last year chose STREET OF SHAME as his favourite work of Japanese cinema: "For me, along with Chaplin's M. VERDOUX and Renoir's RULES OF THE GAME, the greatest film in the history of cinema" (Douchet). "The best of all films examining the problems of women in postwar Japan" (Donald Richie), this over-whelming work was Mizoguchi's last. The "street of shame" runs through Tokyo's red-light district where the women at the Dreamland salon eke out a living for their families. Mizoguchi's portrait of this group of prostitutes, from a hard-boiled glamour girl called Mickey to a widow in her forties worried about her fading beauty—was so powerful in its indictment of women's oppression that, a year after its release, it led to a government bill outlawing prostitution. An ensemble of Japan's finest actresses—it rivals the fine female ensembles of Naruse's films—brings dense emotional life to this unforgettable group portrait.

**Tuesday, November 12 8:45 p.m.**

## **THE WOMAN OF RUMOUR**







STREET OF SHAME

## THE LOVES OF SUMAKO THE ACTRESS

(JOYU SUMAKO NO KOI)

Japan 1947 95 minutes

Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, So Yamamura

Japanese film authority Noël Burch considers SUMAKO "one of Mizoguchi's most accomplished . . . a plateau of excellence" in the director's career. Kinuyo Tanaka is formidable as Sumako Matsui, one of Japan's first actresses and emancipated women. The film chronicles Sumako's stormy career: her rise to fame in a succession of roles in plays by Ibsen and Tolstoy; her relationship with her husband (whom, in one memorable sequence, she thrashes) and her subsequent affair with her cruel director (which in some ways reflected the relationship between Tanaka and Mizoguchi); and her suicide, after a final performance as Carmen. One of the great "behind the scenes at the theatre" movies, SUMAKO is a forceful statement of Mizoguchi's belief that great artists should sacrifice all for aesthetic excellence.

Thursday, November 14 6:30 p.m.

## CANADIAN PREMIERE!

### CASCADING WHITE THREADS

(aka WHITE THREADS OF THE WATERFALL; THE WATER MAGICIAN; TAKI NO SHIRAITO)

Japan 1933 110 minutes

Cast: Takako Irie, Tokihiko Okada

"A great success, a film I had wanted to make for a long time" (Mizoguchi), CASCADING WHITE THREADS was chosen as one of the two best Japanese films of the year it was released. Erotic and moving, WHITE THREADS offers an unusual Mizoguchean heroine, played by superstar Takako Irie: a top-billed circus performer called Shiraito, who falls in love

with a young student. She supports him while he is in law school, but when the circus falls on hard times, she accidentally commits murder while struggling with its owner. The judge assigned to her case is . . . her lover. Based on a famous Japanese novel, WHITE THREADS is uncharacteristic Mizoguchi in some ways—it employs many close-ups, for instance—but its tale of female sacrifice and its visual splendour are unmistakably Mizoguchean. The titles are by Donald Richie.

Thursday, November 14 8:45 p.m.

### WOMEN OF THE NIGHT

(YORU NO ONNA TACHI)

Japan 1948 73 minutes

Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka, Sanae Takasugi

Japanese cinema's equivalent of ROME OPEN CITY, this harsh study of prostitution in postwar Osaka is shocking even now. In one of her best roles, Kinuyo Tanaka plays a war widow who takes a job as a secretary to survive and is harassed into becoming her boss's mistress. To free herself from what is essentially concubinage, she becomes a prostitute and quickly rises to become the reigning madam in Osaka's red-light district. When she contracts syphilis, she declares that she will contaminate as many men as possible to take revenge for her humiliation. "My favourite Japanese film of all time. . . . The most Rossellinian film of Mizoguchi" (Alain Bergala).

Tuesday, November 19 6:30 p.m.

### POPPY

(GUBIJINJO)

Japan 1935 72 minutes

Cast: Kuniko Miyake, Ichiro Tsukida

An ornate melodrama which looks forward to the trilogy of "bourgeois tragedies" of the early Fifties, POPPY is set in contemporary Kyoto and has an unusually calculating and self-centred woman as its heroine. Intelligent, beautiful, well-bred and ambitious, she is married to the son of a diplomat, but falls in love with the man hired to teach her English. He, too, is to be married, a fact she cannot accept. With the deftness of Max Ophüls, Mizoguchi tracks the romantic roundelay through the circulation of a symbolic object: a watch intended as a wedding gift. "It marks two important stages in the development of Mizoguchi's filmmaking: his growing interest in working with contrasting female characters; and his willingness to experiment with elements of style" (Keiko McDonald).

Tuesday, November 19 8:00 p.m.

(Note early start time)



# MIZOGUCHI MARATHON FOUR RARE MIZOGUCHIS

An afternoon Mizoguchi marathon, featuring four rare prints, including a newly struck print of his first sound film, HOMETOWN. A pass for all four films costs \$11.00 (including GST) for members, student members and seniors; \$16.00 (including GST) for non-members.

## MUSASHI MIYAMOTO

(MIYAMOTO MUSASHI)

Japan 1944 53 minutes Cast: Chojuro Kawanazaki, Kanemon Nakamura

The legend of Musashi has been told many times, by many writers, dramatists and filmmakers. After the great success of THE LOYAL 47 RONIN, Mizoguchi was pressured by the military government to make his version of the heroic exploits of a 17th-century swordsman. Typically, Mizoguchi's Musashi is more mature than most, and the woman who pursues him is no naïf, as she usually is, but an expert swordswoman, determined to lead a vendetta. Little wonder the film was censored by the military.

Sunday, November 17 1:30 p.m.

## THE FAMOUS SWORD

(MEITO BIJOMARU)

Japan 1945 66 minutes Cast: Shotaro Hanayagi, Isuzu Yamada

Though intended as another of the inspirational films commissioned by the military government, SWORD managed to import more Mizoguchi than message into its tale of a 19th-century fencing master. Arrested when he carelessly breaks his lord's ceremonial sword in a battle with samurai, he is rescued by one of his clansmen who in turn demands his daughter's hand in marriage. When the swordsman refuses this payment, he is killed. The daughter, a true Mizoguchi heroine, then determines to avenge her father's death. The spectral daughter looks forward to UGETSU, just one of many reasons to see this rare Mizoguchi.

Sunday, November 17 2:30 p.m.

## THE DOWNFALL OF OSEN

(ORIZURI OSEN)

Japan 1935 78 minutes Cast: Isuzu Yamada, Daijirō Natsukawa

A pivotal work in Mizoguchi's career and a critical hit in Paris recently, THE DOWNFALL OF OSEN bridged the silent and sound period. (The voice over was recorded by a *benshi*, the traditional Japanese narrator of silent films.) Still remarkable for its narrative structure, which unfolds largely in flashback—Noël Burch has praised the film as "remarkably inventive"—DOWNFALL tells a quintessential Mizoguchean tale of a woman who sacrifices everything, including her body and her sanity, so that the man she loves can achieve success. "THE DOWNFALL OF OSEN is the most dramatic example of this persistent theme in Mizoguchi's work, one which film critic Tadao Sato attributes to the director's guilt feelings about the sacrifices his own mother and sister made for him" (David Owens).

Sunday, November 17 4:00 p.m.

## CANADIAN PREMIERE!

### HOMETOWN

(FURUSATO)

Japan 1930 86 minutes Cast: Yoshie Fujiwara, Shizue Natsukawa

We are extremely grateful to the National Film Centre, Tokyo, and The Japan Foundation for collaborating on making, from the only surviving print of this important work, an English subtitled copy of Mizoguchi's first sound film. (The sound process used for the film was called "MinaTalkië.") A striking melodrama, it focuses on a young singer (played by a popular tenor of the time) struggling to make a name for himself. He is taken up by a rich patron of musicians, a woman whose interest in him is not just artistic. Shot on location in northern Japan, HOMETOWN is important for many things, especially for revealing the beginnings of the mature Mizoguchi style with its emphasis on long takes. A must for all Mizoguchians, film historians, and lovers of Japanese cinema.

Sunday, November 17 5:30 p.m.