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Author(s)	Donald Richie
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GONZA THE SPEARMAN

Directed by
MASAHIRO SHINODA

Straight to ruin!
Victims of the law that binds them.

A Shochiku/Hyogensha Production

On Gonza the Spearman

One of the finest of postwar Japanese films was Masahiro Shinoda's *Double Suicide* (*Shinju Ten no Amijima*, 1969). Based on a *bunraku* play by Monzaemon Chikamatsu (1653-1725), a playwright often called "the Shakespeare of Japan," it was scripted for the screen by Taeko Tomioka, scored by Toru Takemitsu, and starred Shima Iwashita.

Now, these artists—joined by Kazuo Miyagawa, Japan's finest cameraman—have once more come together to create another Chikamatsu play on film.

This is the 1717 *bunraku* play *Yari no Gonza Kasane Katabira*, literally, *Spearman Gonza's Illicit Love*. Again, as in the earlier films, the conventions of the *bunraku* are retained (the monologues, for example) but this time a new realism is insisted upon.

The result is an extremely realistic and pictorially beautiful film—one in which the world of the early-18th century comes alive. It is as though old prints, scrolls, screens have been made animate. Against this detailed background the doomed couple are led to their deaths—killed by the ideals of that very society the beauty of which we have been led to admire.

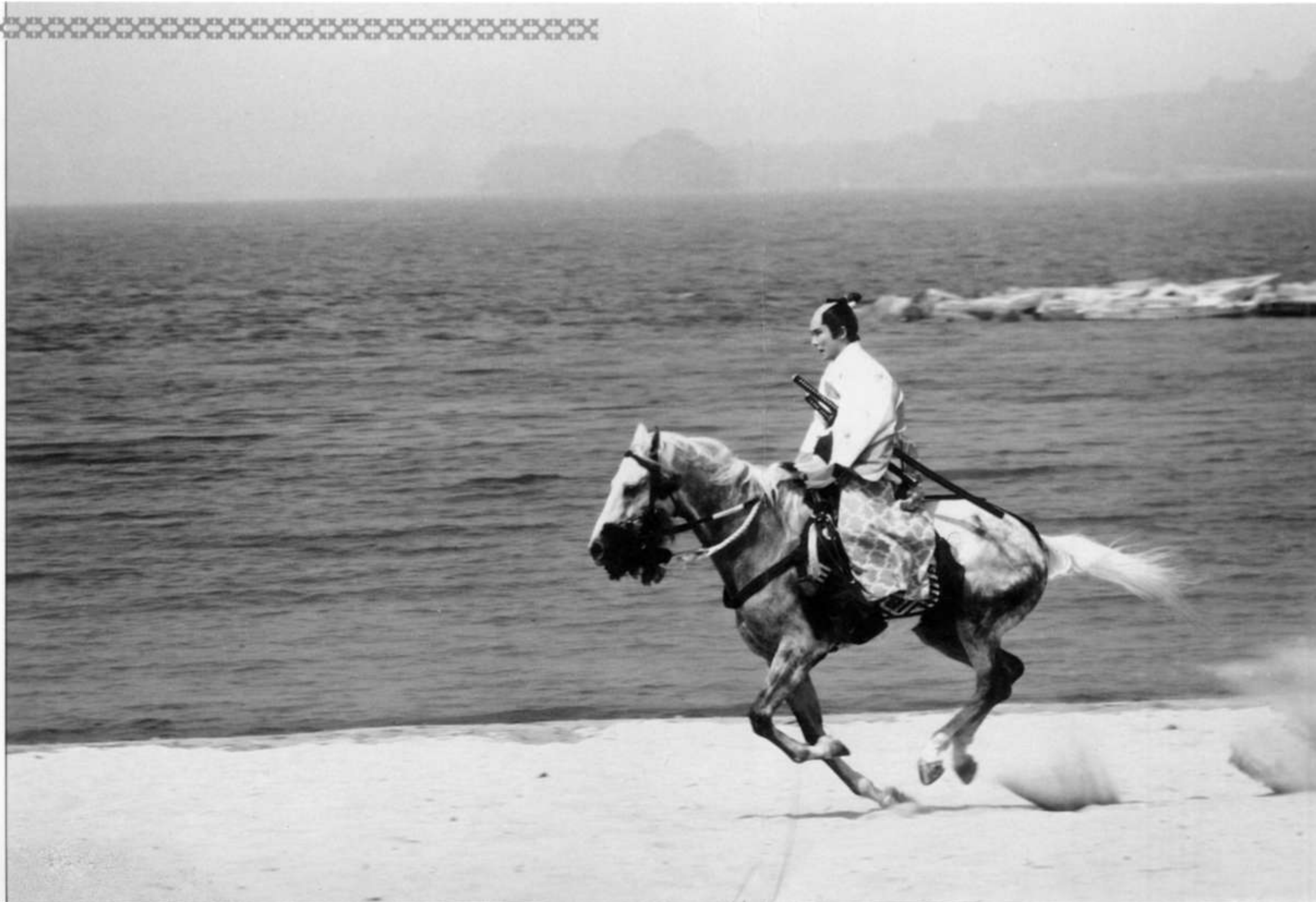
The husband is forced to kill his wife and her supposed lover—even though the two became lovers only after having been accused. This rigid

social morality is the obverse of the aesthetic beauty of old Japan. It is this double vision which Chikamatsu saw and it is this—the beauty and the sorrow—which Shinoda shows us in this film.

About Gonza the Spearman

Shinoda's best film since *DOUBLE SUICIDE*. Again Taeko Tomioka, Toru Takemitsu, Shima Iwashita—this time joined by Kazuo Miyagawa—combine to make another fine Chikamatsu adaptation. This one, a virtual reconstruction of 17th century Japan, is also one of the most pictorially beautiful films of the year.

DONALD RICHIE



	Length	Running Time
Feature	3,523.8 meters	126 minutes
Trailer	73.2 meters	3 minutes





Gonza the Spearman-Synopsis

During the long rule of the Tokugawa shogunate it was obligatory that provincial lords spend alternate years in the capital of Edo. Wives and children were left behind and this often resulted in tragedy.

One such was that of the lord of the Matsue clan in Izumo, Ichinoshin Asaka. While he was serving in distant Edo his wife was, apparently, led into an affair with one of his retainers.

She—Osai—asked Gonza Sasano, one of the clan's finest spearmen, to marry her daughter, Okiku. He agreed, though he was already engaged to Oyuki, the sister of Bannojo, a fellow retainer.

His reason was that he wanted to be considered a member of the Asaka family because in this way he could learn the family secrets regarding the art of the tea ceremony. This knowledge was necessary because he had been appointed to officiate at a tea ceremony and did not want to disgrace his lord.

All of these various intentions led to tragedy. Osai learned of the prior engagement, became angry and jealous, and incriminated both herself and Gonza before the spying Bannojo. Though they were innocent, he—jealous—claimed that they had committed adultery, and all of the evidence was against them.

Not knowing what else to do, they fled, pursued by the returned Ichinoshin and Osai's brother, Jinbei. And in the course of their flight they became what they had been accused of—lovers.

Apprehended, they were killed by Ichinoshin. The truth of their story was never known—the tragedy was complete. And Ichinoshin was left with his thoughts: To kill my wife...to kill the mother of my children. This is duty...such is the world we live in.

CAST

Hiromi Go as *Gonza Sasano*
Shima Iwashita as *Osai*
Shohei Hino as *Bannojo*
Misako Tanaka as *Oyuki*
Haruko Kato as *Oyuki's nurse*
Takashi Tsumura as *Ichinoshin*
Kaori Mizushima as *Okiku*
Hideji Otaki as *Iwaki*
Choichiro Kwarazaki as *Jinbei*

PRODUCTION TEAM

Directed by Masahiro Shinoda
Based on the Monzaemon Chikamatsu play
Script by Taeko Tomioka
Executive Producers: Kiyoshi Iwashita/Masayuki
Motomochi/Masatake Wakita
Photography by Kazuo Miyagawa
Music by Toru Takemitsu
Art Direction by Kiyoshi Awazu



On Masahiro Shinoda

Veteran Japanese film director Kon Ichikawa once said of the younger Masahiro Shinoda, "his work has such a personal freshness and so brilliant a style that he is assured a place in Japanese film history."

Born in 1931, Shinoda made his directorial debut in 1960 at the Shochiku studios. Three years later he made *Pale Flower*, a film now generally considered among his best. Later Shochiku films include the excellent *Assassination* and the Kawabata-based *With Beauty and Sorrow*. In 1969 he reached the international audience with the famous *Double Suicide*.

As film historian Audie Bock has noted: "Shinoda's aesthetic concerns...are close to Mizoguchi's fatalism cast

in exquisite beauty." And the master director does indeed remain an ideal for the younger.

He also has a special admiration and respect for the Edo-period playwright Monzaemon Chikamatsu whose work he utilized in both *Double Suicide* and, now, in *Gonza the Spearman*. As Shinoda has said: "I would like to be able to take hold of the past and make it stand still so I can examine it from different angles."

Director of over twenty-five feature films as well as many noteworthy documentaries, Shinoda's strong visual style with its pronounced emphasis upon pictorial beauty displays a concern for the meaning of the past which is rare in cinema.





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13-5, Tsukiji 1-Chome, Chuo-ku, Tokyo, 104 Japan Phone: (03)-542-5551 Cable Address: SHOCHIKU TOKYO Telex: SHOCHIKU J 32903

OVERSEAS OFFICES

USA Shochiku Films of America, Inc. 8230 Beverly Boulevard, Suite 9, Los Angeles, California 90048 Tel. (213) 653-7003 Telex: 691658 SHOCHIKU LSA

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