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Ikimono no koroku (I live in fear), Kurosawa, Akira, 1956

Tsubaki Sanjuro (Sanjuro), Kurosawa, Akira, 1962

Yojimbo, Kurosawa, Akira, 1961

Warui yatsu hodo nemuru (The bad sleep well), Kurosawa, Akira, 1960



KUROSAWA AND MIFUNE

"The greatest actor-director team in film history!"

—David Shipman

"Kurosawa was one of the great treasures of film history. . . . His influence is so profound as to be almost incomparable. There is no one else like him."

—Martin Scorsese

We thank John Vanco and Jeff Reichert, Cowboy Pictures, New York, and Janus Films for making this presentation possible.

TSX group



THE SEVEN SAMURAI

Cinematheque Ontario, Fall 2002 (Oct. 16 - Dec. 5, 2002) pp. 3-6
ALL NEW 35MM PRINTS!

Cinematheque Ontario mounted the last complete Kurosawa retrospective in North America, in our first season in Fall 1990. Since then, many of his films have been unavailable here, or only in poor quality prints. New York distribution company Cowboy Pictures, working in tandem with Janus Films, has recently made new prints of a central corpus of Kurosawa's work: a dozen of the classics he made with the great actor Toshiro Mifune, which by all critical accounts constitute the peak of the director's achievement. Newly struck and in many cases newly subtitled by ace translator Linda Hoaglund, these prints come to us as a special presentation. Please note that we intend to show a number of other Kurosawa films in upcoming seasons.

Less auspicious, perhaps, than the lineage of director/actress teams in the history of cinema, director/actor duos have produced such celebrated pairings as Scorsese/De Niro, Truffaut/Léaud, Ford/Wayne, Mann/Stewart, and Buñuel/Rey, but none so potent, durable, and rich as the collaboration of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune. In sixteen films, extending from DRUNKEN ANGEL in 1948 to RED BEARD in 1965, the Japanese *sensei* and his mercurial star produced a seemingly ceaseless series of masterpieces, including RASHOMON, YOJIMBO, and THE SEVEN SAMURAI. Theirs was not the uncanny concert of, say, Ingmar Bergman and Liv Ullmann, in which the star was both muse to the master and an incarnation

of his secret self. Rather, it was a volatile negotiation between the autocratic Kurosawa and his glowering leading man — "the Emperor and the Wolf," as the title of Stuart Galbraith IV's recent joint biography deftly puts it. The wildness and versatility of Mifune seemed to elicit in Kurosawa more than the imperious control he was infamous for: a contending sense of venture, of risk and expansiveness. (The sometimes static and ornamental quality of his late cinema was rarely apparent in his films with Mifune.)

Their careers were intertwined but not synonymous. Mifune appeared in roughly half of Kurosawa's films, and made over one hundred films with other directors. The shared arc of their respective accomplishments, however, offers clear evidence of their mutual reliance. The film that made Mifune's reputation, DRUNKEN ANGEL, was also the one that Kurosawa considered his first true, independent achievement as a director, and their final collaboration almost two decades later, RED BEARD, is often considered the last great work of both director and star. While the two collaborated on some minor films, SCANDAL and THE QUIET DUEL among them, their greatest successes were the films they made together. Kobayashi's REBELLION and Mizoguchi's THE LIFE OF OHARU are two notable exceptions in Mifune's filmography, but he is certainly not the star of the latter. (The magnificent Kinuyo Tanaka is.) IKIRU is generally cited as the only non-Mifune masterpiece of Kurosawa, though this is debatable.

KUROSAWA & MIFUNE

RASHOMON



Kurosawa and Mifune shared many qualities—both were intense, forceful, hard-drinking and disciplined—but as Galbraith's "emperor/wolf" dichotomy suggests, the director was aristocratic in demeanour, peremptory and authoritarian, while Mifune exhibited humility, ingenuous need, and, perhaps contrarily, a certain feral vehemence. Kurosawa immediately recognized the wildness in Mifune, who had come to the Toho studio after the war hoping to become an assistant cameraman, and was instead drafted into the New Face programme for emerging talent. Uncharacteristically revising his original plan for DRUNKEN ANGEL when the blazing young actor showed a Brando-like febrility, Kurosawa "turned loose" Mifune, whose extravagant performance as a pomaded *yakuza* with tuberculosis made him a star.

Mifune's relationship with Kurosawa has frequently been compared to that between John Wayne and John Ford, and Mifune has also been likened to Clint Eastwood, no doubt because flinty Clint said he modelled his performance on Mifune's when YOJIMBO was remade by Sergio Leone as FISTFUL OF DOLLARS. But it is difficult to square the leathery, laconic, tamped and invariant quality of Wayne and Eastwood with the speed, explosiveness, and emotional intensity of Mifune. More torrential than the rain that frames the story of RASHOMON, Mifune's performance lays waste to good taste with its wild excesses. Stripped and capering, all eyebrows, armpits and glinting teeth, he is less bandit than beast of the jungle. Similarly, Kurosawa's dense, muscular compositions in THE SEVEN SAMURAI can hardly contain the volatile performance of Toshiro Typhoon, whose swaggering exaggeration in the early sequences imperils the surrounding rice paddies more than it does the marauders. Mifune's modulation from manic to tragic in SAMURAI is one of the great achievements of his career, and signals the depth and range of his acting.

Grim and contained as the vengeful, bespectacled salaryman in THE BAD SLEEP WELL, Lear-like in his rage and despair as the aged patriarch of I LIVE IN FEAR, fiercely frenetic as the masterless samurai in YOJIMBO and SANJURO, or wise and sternly compassionate as the top-knotted doctor in RED BEARD, Mifune showed remarkable range, as did Kurosawa's films, which encompassed many genres (gangster, detective, and samurai film, social and family drama, even satire) and tones, contemporary and period settings, and varied literary sources, most of them western (Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Gorky, Ed McBain). The two equally multifarious artists collaborated to produce a body of work at once dynamic and contemplative, grotesquely funny, savage, deeply humanistic and often tragic. While Mifune was viewed as a kind of ideal or icon of postwar Japan, Kurosawa was increasingly criticized for his western influences, which may have contributed to his mental breakdown and suicide attempt after the failure of his first post-Mifune film, DODES'KA-DEN. Certainly, the sad story of the final split between the intractable director and the bewildered actor suggests that the *sensei* was acutely aware of how reliant his cinema had become on the force of Mifune, and resented it. That the two men died within nine months of each other only sealed this seeming sense of locked destinies, even though they had not worked together in thirty years.

—James Quandt



THE SEVEN SAMURAI

(SHICHININ NO SAMURAI)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1954 208 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura

**FULL-LENGTH VERSION!
NEW 35MM PRINT WITH NEWLY TRANSLATED SUBTITLES!**

"The finest Japanese film ever made." —Donald Richie

"One of the great art works of the twentieth century." —Stanley Kauffman

"An unquestionable triumph of art." —John Simon

A banner event. Consistently voted one of the greatest films of all time, THE SEVEN SAMURAI comes to us in a newly struck, newly translated and subtitled print of the full-length version. Kurosawa's tumultuous tale of seven masterless warriors hired by peasants to defend their village from pillaging bandits in 16th-century Japan must be seen on the big screen to appreciate the full exhilarating force of its visual and narrative power. The compositions and action sequences have renewed elemental force, and the new translation restores the earthy tang of the dialogue that previous subtitles had refined.

Kurosawa achieves epic grandeur with a stately sense of structure (the film is divided into three parts), rich historical detail. Shakespearean sequences of low comedy and barbaric violence, and roiling narrative force. The battles are choreographed as surging spectacle, particularly the final rout in the rice fields in slashing rain. Kurosawa uses an arsenal of visual effects: slow motion, wild tracking shots, abrupt close-ups, and telephoto shooting, which all but thrusts the audience into the mud, crush, and struggle of the war scenes. (The film has been copied many times but its formal mastery has never been equalled.) Kurosawa paces his epic with contrasting moments of grace and rage, silence and tumult, and gives it propulsive rhythm with such old-fashioned devices as hard wipes and depictive music (weird oboe, choral chants, kettle drum). His dense, muscular compositions can hardly contain the volatile performance of Toshiro Typhoon, whose scenery chewing in the early sequences imperils the surrounding rice paddies more than it does the marauders. Mifune's modulation from manic to tragic is one of the great achievements of his career. "SEVEN SAMURAI is much more than thrilling entertainment. Like all truly great films, it is rich in character, exquisitely structured, technically adroit. . . . This remarkable film—Kurosawa and Mifune would make none better—is, even at more than three hours, lean" (Stuart Galbraith IV).

**Friday, October 18 6:30 p.m.
Saturday, October 19 2:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 20 1:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 27 4:45 p.m.
Monday, October 28 6:30 p.m.**

Please note: Special prices are in effect: \$7 (including GST) for seniors and members; \$11 for non-members.

RASHOMON

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1950 90 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Machiko Kyo

"***** One of the most brilliantly constructed films of all time, RASHOMON is a monument to Akira Kurosawa's greatness. . . . A hallmark of film history" (James Monaco). RASHOMON was the film that introduced Japanese cinema to the western world (which, properly amazed, immediately lavished prizes on it, including the Grand Prize at the Venice film festival and the Academy Award® for Best Foreign Film). It landed actress Machiko Kyo on the cover of Life Magazine, made Toshiro Mifune an international superstar, and influenced generations of filmmakers, from Resnais (LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD) to Tarantino (RESERVOIR DOGS). Indeed, its impact on popular culture was so immense that "Rashomon" has become a code word for the multiplicity/relativity/unattainability of truth. Set in 12th-century Kyoto, RASHOMON famously examines a tale of rape and murder from four different perspectives and asks, "which is the true story?" Opening in the rain-pelted ruins of a temple (which gives the film its name), it flashes back through a series of complex and conflicting accounts of the same event. A bandit (Mifune) comes upon an aristocratic woman (Kyo) and her samurai husband (Masayuki Mori) in the forest. He rapes her and murders him, but the versions of how and whether this happened as told by the three participants (including the dead husband's spirit!) and a supposed witness to the crime, contradict each other in significant ways. Each has a reason to tell the tale the way he or she does, but none ultimately can be trusted for the truth. More torrential than the rain that frames the story, Mifune's performance lays waste to good taste with its wild excesses. Stripped and capering, all eyebrows, armpits and glinting teeth, he is less bandit than beast of the jungle. Not to be outdone, Machiko Kyo combines simpering servility and fierce vengeance. And Kurosawa's style, with its flashy editing, peculiar music (Ravel's *Bolero*), and high-contrast cinematography—the great cinematographer Miyagawa turns the sun-dappled forest into an arena of cruelty and metaphor for memory—transforms RASHOMON into a startling tour de force.

Saturday, October 19 6:30 p.m. • Thursday, October 31 6:30 p.m.



RED BEARD

RED BEARD (AKAHIGE)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1965 185 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Kinuyo Tanaka

Unavailable in North America for more than two decades, **RED BEARD** was a watershed film for Kurosawa: his last collaboration with Mifune and his last film in black-and-white. It also marked a different kind of divide; Donald Richie considers it the last of the great Kurosawas, a summation of all of his previous work, and many other critics agree that Kurosawa never regained the power and complexity of his films afterwards. "I was determined with **RED BEARD** to try to push movie-making to its very limits . . . in its content and its power to move audiences," Kurosawa said, "I wanted to make something that my audience wanted to see, something so magnificent that people would just have to see it." Mifune won another Best Actor award at the Venice film festival for his "powerhouse performance" (*Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide*) as an autocratic doctor in a 19th-century slum who tends to the poor and dissolute. When an arrogant and ambitious young intern returns from training in Europe and becomes his assistant, the gruff veteran teaches him a lesson in humility and compassion. A humanist epic, **RED BEARD** is a triumph of design: its meticulous reconstruction of an earthquake-prone Edo era village employed authentic materials from the previous century, and was so impressive that tourists flocked to the set during the two grueling years of production. "The film's formal perfection is remarkable even among Kurosawa's works" (Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto).

Saturday, October 19 8:15 p.m. (note early start time)

Please note: Special prices are in effect: \$7 (including GST) for seniors and members; \$11 for non-members.

THE BAD SLEEP WELL (WARUI YATSU HODO YOKU NEMERU)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1960 152 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Takeshi Kato



"Better than Shakespeare . . . The first thirty minutes seem to me as perfect as any film I have ever seen," proclaimed Francis Ford Coppola of this superb thriller, which in many ways is Kurosawa's version of *Hamlet*. Mifune plays the seemingly meek secretary to the president of a government housing corporation. After he marries the president's daughter, he sets out to revenge his father's death five years earlier, which was officially designated a suicide but he suspects was a corporate assassination. His vendetta against the men responsible leads him into a vast conspiracy of murder and embezzlement. The long opening sequence, with such ominous details as a wedding cake in the shape of an office tower and a rose marking the place of the supposed suicide, has "a brilliancy unparalleled even in Kurosawa."

writes Donald Richie, "... one of the most dense, the most brilliant, the most incisive, in Kurosawa's entire output." With faked accidents and spurious murders, imposters and poseurs, and a corporation bent on defending itself at any cost, **THE BAD SLEEP WELL** is both a caustic critique of Japan's postwar culture and a Jacobean revenge tragedy. A favourite of Martin Scorsese, **THE BAD SLEEP WELL** is clearly "one of Kurosawa's most underrated films" (Stuart Galbraith IV).

Monday, October 21 6:30 p.m.

THRONE OF BLOOD (KUMONOSU-JO)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1957 110 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Izuzu Yamada

"Among the supreme creations of cinema . . . Quite the most brilliant and original attempt ever made to put Shakespeare on screen" (*Time Magazine*). Kurosawa faithfully adapts *Macbeth*, but sets it in 16th-century Japan, in and around the Castle of the Spider's Web (which gives the film its Japanese title). Mifune plays the power hungry warlord whose fatal combination of ambition and moral weakness drives him to ignore the prophecies of a witch, and to be goaded into acts of escalating evil by his wife (who is a foreshadowing of the gorgon-like Goneril of Kurosawa's *RAN*, another Shakespeare adaptation). Influenced by Noh theatre, **THRONE OF BLOOD** strips the Shakespeare tragedy to its essentials, intensifying its tragedy and terror. From the mist-enshrouded forest and looming "spider castle" of the eerie opening sequence, through the invasion of the throne room by a flock of birds, to the (unfaked) hail



of arrows slicing the air into a million slivers in the astonishing final battle scenes, **THRONE** has a fierce, stylized beauty. No wonder it was T. S. Eliot's favourite film. "My choice remains 1957's **THRONE OF BLOOD** [as the best Kurosawa film] . . . It remains a landmark of visual strength, permeated by a particularly Japanese sensibility, and is possibly the finest Shakespearean adaptation ever committed to screen" (Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*).

Tuesday, October 22 6:30 p.m. • Saturday, October 26 6:30 p.m.



I LIVE IN FEAR

I LIVE IN FEAR (IKOMONO NO KIROKU)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1955 104 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Eiko Miyoshi

"Perhaps Kurosawa's most sweeping statement on the human condition" (Film Forum), **I LIVE IN FEAR** also features what many critics think is Mifune's greatest performance. He is not the lean, primal being of Kurosawa's other films, but a stooped, bespectacled old foundry owner whose obsessive fear of nuclear disaster leads him to beg his family (including his mistress and their child) to move to the safety of Brazil. They respond by trying to have him committed to a mental institution. (The film has strange affinities with Tarkovsky's *THE SACRIFICE*.) Lear-like in his piteous fear and rage, Mifune has many over-the-top and towering moments, including his imploring speech to his uncomprehending family. Kurosawa called the film "the kind of picture that, after everything was all over and the last judgment was upon us, we could stand up and account for our past lives by saying proudly: 'We are the men who made **I LIVE IN FEAR**.'" "One of Kurosawa's strangest and most personal films" (Philip Kemp, *Sight & Sound*).

Tuesday, October 22 8:45 p.m.

HIGH AND LOW (TENGOKU TO JIGOKU)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1963 143 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai



"The ultimate kidnap movie, with Kurosawa at the peak of his filmmaking powers" (Film Forum), **HIGH AND LOW** is one of the director's most formally and morally complex works, which is perhaps why Susan Sontag chose it for her *Carte Blanche* at the Cinematheque. Toshiro Mifune stars as Kingo Gondo, a self-made magnate whose Yokohama company is in financial trouble. When a psychotic kidnapper snatches not Gondo's child but that of his chauffeur, and demands a huge ransom even after he discovers the mistake, the industrialist is torn between two sets of responsibilities: to his company and to his employee. Tautly photographed in CinemaScope, with a succession of stunning deep focus compositions and thrilling set pieces, including the ransom exchange on a bullet train, **HIGH AND LOW** is so

detailed in its depiction of the crime that Kurosawa was said to have received "all kinds of complaints and reprimands accusing me of teaching criminals how to go about kidnapping children." Eminent film historian William K. Everson called **HIGH AND LOW** "undoubtedly the most complex detective film of all . . . It contains so many nuances of narrative, photographic technique, and acting, that it demands to be seen far more than once." "Among Kurosawa's neglected contemporary masterpieces . . . Not to be missed" (John Harkness, *NOW Magazine*).

Wednesday, October 23 8:30 p.m. (note early start time)

Tuesday, November 12 8:15 p.m. (note early start time)

STRAY DOG (NORA INU)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1949 122 minutes • Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura



Proclaimed a "bona fide masterpiece" (*Time Out New York*), **STRAY DOG** is sweaty and intense, full of startling *noir* compositions and an electrifying performance by Mifune. He plays a hapless young detective, awkward in a white suit, who has his gun stolen on a crowded bus and then discovers that it has been used in a robbery and murder. Afraid that he will lose his job, he becomes a "mad dog," stalking the thief through the heat-baked back streets of Tokyo, from the black market sector to a "girlie show" and finally to a seedy hotel, where he finds himself face to face with a homicidal double. The Langian theme of the cop and criminal as mirror images is given a startling obsessiveness in Kurosawa's vision of postwar Japan, with its atmosphere of moral chaos and urban decay. Among the film's many bravura feats are a

dialogue-less sequence, lasting almost ten minutes, shot by a hidden camera in the tougher sections of Tokyo, and the final showdown, in which a Mozart piano sonata spikes the tension; never mind that strange moment when the tough girlfriend's sudden flood of tears seems to cue the heavens to commiserate with their own downpour! "One of the greatest detective films ever made" (Elvis Mitchell, *The New York Times*).

Thursday, October 24 6:30 p.m.

**KUROSAWA
& MIFUNE**

FALL PROGRAMME GUIDE

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DRUNKEN ANGEL

DRUNKEN ANGEL (YOIDORE TENSHI)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1948 98 minutes
Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura

"One of Kurosawa's most celebrated works" (Stephen Prince) and "widely regarded as Kurosawa's first major work" (Stuart Galbraith IV), DRUNKEN ANGEL made Toshiro Mifune a star, and marked many firsts: the first collaboration between Kurosawa and Mifune, the first of Kurosawa's films to win the Kinema Jumo [Japanese Oscar equivalent], and the film the director considered his first true achievement. It is also "to Japanese cinema as PAISA or BICYCLE THIEF is to Italian, [in] that it perfectly epitomizes a period, its hopes, its fears" (Donald Richie). Mifune is a force of nature as the inebriated cherub of the title, and Kurosawa wisely got out of his way. A pomaded *yakuza* who rules the back streets of postwar Tokyo through extortion and intimidation, Mifune is wounded in a shoot-out, only to discover that he has tuberculosis. His relationship with the drunken slum doctor who makes the diagnosis is classic, humanist Kurosawa, though the film's overwrought style with its raking, high key compositions and jumpy American dance music reveals a debt to forties Hollywood cinema.

Thursday, October 24 8:45 p.m.



THE HIDDEN FORTRESS

(KAKUSHI-TORIDE NO SANAKUNIN)

Director: Akira Kurosawa
Japan 1958 139 minutes
Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Misa Uehara

"Grand, bold moviemaking" (Roger Ebert), THE HIDDEN FORTRESS is the acknowledged source for the STAR WARS saga, and is one of Steven Spielberg's three favourite Kurosawa films. Shooting on a typhoon-swept Mount Fuji, Kurosawa employed the new format of CinemaScope with gusto, turning his samurai farce into a pure widescreen spectacle. (The elaborate fire festival has been compared to a big Hollywood musical number.) Pitting a fierce Mifune against a clan of warriors who are after their princess' trove of gold, FORTRESS is "probably

Kurosawa's most dazzling exercise in pure filmmaking" (Film Forum). The action, including a twenty-minute spear duel and combat on horseback, lets up only for the ribald bickering of the two farmers Mifune dragoons into his mission. When THE HIDDEN FORTRESS was re-released in North America in the eighties, one critic remarked that it was like "visiting the well-spring of The Force." "An exhilarating experience with the great Toshiro Mifune delivering a performance that blows Luke Skywalker out of the galaxy" (Michael Rechstaffen). "Unusually dazzling cinema . . . Kurosawa set a new standard for visualized excitement" (Armand White).

Saturday, October 26 3:45 p.m.



YOJIMBO

YOJIMBO

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1961 110 minutes
Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai

Wildly kinetic, outrageously funny, and very influential—it was the source for Sergio Leone's FISTFUL OF DOLLARS and several other laconic copies—YOJIMBO is "Kurosawa's most commanding film: a visually faultless and highly sophisticated satire on violence and human weakness" (*Sight & Sound*). A stray dog with a severed hand clamped in its jaws pays welcome to a scruffy unemployed samurai (Mifune) who has arrived in a town that appears deserted but is in fact just cowering. A protracted battle between two gangs—one run by the silk merchant, the other by the *sake* merchant, both evil—has devastated the place. The wily warrior hires himself out to each side as a *yojimbo* (bodyguard) and then systematically destroys them both. As the sly, amoral mercenary, Mifune won the Best Actor award at the Venice film festival for holding his magnificent own amid Kurosawa's brilliantly choreographed widescreen mayhem, and for giving us that scornful way of walking. "Kurosawa has made the first great shaggy-man movie. . . . In a triumph of bravura technique, [he] makes it explosively comic and exhilarating" (Pauline Kael).

Friday, November 1 8:45 p.m.

Monday, November 4 6:30 p.m.

SANJURO (TSUBAKI SANJURO)

Director: Akira Kurosawa • Japan 1962 96 minutes
Cast: Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai

Faster and funnier than its predecessor, YOJIMBO, the souped-up SANJURO gives Mifune a chance to reprise, and possibly top, his role as that film's masterless samurai. A funky bundle of twitch and stink, the soldier of fortune becomes the leader of a band of dedicated young warriors who are determined to fight corruption and rescue a kidnapped chancellor from a war lord (scary Tatsuya Nakadai). The green, idealistic lads seem to know *bushido* only in theory, so are eager to be trained by Mifune's worldly warrior. Deftly satirizing the showy but empty heroics of the corrupted samurai code, SANJURO revels in the contrast between the fervent but inept "boy-scout" samurai and their shaggy, stinking mentor. The final showdown between Mifune and Nakadai is legendary, its flurry of flashing steel and geyser of gore shockingly funny—the template for the jokey screen violence of much subsequent cinema. "A superb parody" (Donald Richie).

Monday, November 4 8:45 p.m.



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We are proud to sponsor Cinematheque Ontario's Kurosawa retrospective.