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Friday December 13

JapanScope

Chushingura (47 Ronin) 7:30

Hiroshi Inagaki (Japan, 1962)

Japan's classic tale of loyalty and revenge, dating from 1748 and based on an actual incident of heroic mass suicide, has been immortalized as a Bunraku puppet play and Kabuki drama, and has seen over 200 screen adaptations. Hiroshi Inagaki's is the recognized masterpiece among them. The film has a special place in the hearts of Berkeley filmgoers who remember the days, in the 1960s, when it played at the Cinema, at Shattuck and Haste, for years running. We excerpt the Cinema Guild notes from 1968, written by Edward Landberg, who was not alone, although he may have been the most ecstatic, in considering the film "the greatest of all Japanese films...Shakespearean in intensity and sweep." *Chushingura*, he writes, "mingles exultation with a dreadful sadness, for precisely those most worthy of life sacrifice themselves for the good of future

generations. Yet this profound, subtle film never descends to a mere catalogue of heroic ideals and deeds...Inagaki directs with unbelievable control some of the most complex sequences in film history...His pacing is equally sublime: the rising action alternates discreetly with passages of lyric contemplation until it closes in the most completely satisfying denouement on film."

• Written by Toshio Yasumi. Photographed by Kazuo Yamada. With Koshiro Matsumoto, Yuzo Kayama, Yoko Tsukasa, Toshiro Mifune. (210 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, Color, 'Scope, 35mm, Print from Milestone Film and Video)