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PROGRAM NOTES

Friday September 27, 1974

McKenna Theatre 7:30 pm

Contemporary Japanese Cinema:

AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON (Samma No Aji)

Japan 1962

113 minutes

Direction.....Yasujiro Ozu
Script.....Kogo Noda and Ozu
Photography.....Yushun Astuta
Editing.....Yoshiyasu Hamamura
Music.....Takanobu Saito
Art Direction.....Tatsuo Hamada

Cast: Chishu Ryu.....Shuhei Hirayama
Shima Iwashita.....Michiko Hirayama
Shinichiro Mikami.....Kazuo Hirayama
Keiji Sada.....Koichi Hirayama
Mariko Okada.....Akiko Hirayama

Yasujiro Ozu is known as the "most Japanese of all Japanese directors"; his films have been domestically proclaimed as the most representative of the Japanese national character. And yet, western audiences are less familiar with Ozu's films than they are with those of say, Kurosawa. Donald Richie, noted Japanese film historian, has suggested that this paradox might be attributable to the Japanese distributor's reluctance to release Ozu's films internationally, assuming that western audiences "could not hope to appreciate anything truly Japanese". (If this is indeed the case, these distributors might take cue from the critical success of the 1972 New York release of Ozu's 1953 Tokyo Story. The film received nothing less than unanimous raves with many critics calling for the importation of Ozu's other works.)

Ozu's career began in the silent era with the "nonsense film", a genre not unlike the Hollywood screwball comedy of the 30's and 40's. It featured endless cavortings and highly improbable comic occurrences. It is significant to note that the nonsense film held a certain disregard for plot--a trait that will become typical of Ozu's subsequent works. Toward the end of the sound period, Ozu's nonsense comedies began dealing more and more with white collar workers. His Pumpkin (1928), Life of an Office Worker (1930), and I Was Born, But... (1932), all are prime examples.

These films marked the crude beginnings of the SHOMIN-GEKI, the genre that would ultimately become Japan's national cinematic style, the origination of which has been attributed partly to Ozu. A shomin-geki film is about essentially "proletarian or lower-middle class life, about the sometimes humorous, sometimes bitter

relations within the family, about the struggle for existence, it is the kind of film many Japanese think of as being about 'you and me'. Through the shomin-geki, Ozu sought a "higher realism which led to the elimination of the plot for its own sake and to the development of the discursive-chronicle, the simple recording of events..."

Ozu's style evolved along with that of the shomin-geki. He dispensed with "fades, dissolves, and even a moving camera, telling everything through straight pictorial content and simple editing feeling that this austere film vocabulary properly reflected the true nature of Japanese life." He even avoided the use of sound, making silent films through the 30's. He treated his characters not as members of a society, but as members of a family, thusly capturing the most eternal aspect of Japan--its traditional emphasis on the family. Ozu always lets character and incident take priority over action and plot.

"The excess of the nonsense film had taught him the value of lightness, of underplayed, underemployed humor." He developed a slow pace and presented characters in a "leisurely fashion". He is strictly a visual director; no believer in dynamic composition or montage. He gives great importance to script.

"The Japanese are as they are says Ozu and this is how they act. This is something which exists; it need not be criticized or explained, it is a fact. This placid, funny, lovely, elegiac, final picture (An Autumn Afternoon) affirms an acceptance of the world as it is."

-all the above compiled from
The Japanese Film by Anderson
and Richie

"Ozu's last film is a **summing** up of his world and style. His main theme--the inevitable separation between parents and children--is treated with compassion and touches of humor. Ending on the usual note of resignation, An Autumn Afternoon pays homage to man's ability to accept his fate. The obvious simplicity of Ozu's contemplative style is matched by the warm colours"

- Arne Svensson in Screen Series:
Japan

--Notes by Bob Krumm--