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Ryuhei Matsuda as Kano
in Nagisa Oshima's "GOHATTO"

"GOHATTO"

Flippantly summarized by a film journalist as a "gay-samurai movie," "GOHATTO" is actually a tense, intricate and nuanced psychodrama with subtle humor by one of Japan's great directors, Nagisa Oshima, who helped launch that country's New Wave of the 1960s. Although fourteen years have passed since his last feature, Oshima has returned with a powerful impact, not only in subject matter, but in critical acclaim. "GOHATTO" was nominated for The Golden Palm at Cannes, and won the Japan Critics' Circle award for Best Director. Set in a 19th century samurai school, the film shows the unsettling and disruptive effects when an impossibly attractive new recruit (Ryuhei Matsuda) joins the ranks (among them, "BROTHER'S" director and star, Beat Takeshi), and upsets the balance of power. Sexuality is a nearly-taboo topic in Japan, and especially homosexuality; the translation of the film's title is "strict rules," or "taboo."

"The film is as fiercely controlled as the fighting itself," notes James Christopher of The Times of London. "Yet there's humour about this somber, limpid, daring work that belies the hot blasts of samurai sex. A thrilling discovery." ■

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