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Hakuchu no torima (Violence at noon), Oshima, Nagisa, 1966

Nihon shunka-ko (A treatise on Japanese bawdy songs), Oshima, Nagisa, 1967

Natsu no imoto (Dear summer sister), Oshima, Nagisa, 1972

Shiiku (The catch), Oshima, Nagisa, 1961

Koshikei (Death by hanging), Oshima, Nagisa, 1968

Shonen (Boy), Oshima, Nagisa, 1969

Kaette kita yopparai (Three resurrected drunkards), Oshima, Nagisa, 1968

Ninja bugei-cho (Band of Ninja), Oshima, Nagisa, 1967

Gohatto (Taboo), Oshima, Nagisa, 1999

Ai to kibo no machi (A town of love and hope), Oshima, Nagisa, 1959

Nihon no yoru to kiri (Night and fog in Japan), Oshima, Nagisa, 1960

100 years of Japanese cinema, Oshima, Nagisa, 1994

Ai no koriida (In the realm of the senses), Oshima, Nagisa, 1976

Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence, Oshima, Nagisa, 1983

Ai no borei (Empire of passion), Oshima, Nagisa, 1978


Tokyo senso sengo hiwa (He died after the war), Oshima, Nagisa, 1970

Kyoto, my mother's place, Oshima, Nagisa, 1991

Max, mon amour (Max my love), Oshima, Nagisa, 1986

Etsuraku (The pleasures of the flesh), Oshima, Nagisa, 1965





# IN THE REALM OF OSHIMA:

THE FILMS OF  
JAPANESE MASTER

# NAGISA OSHIMA

*"Plainly the greatest living Japanese filmmaker."*

– Jonathan Rosenbaum

*"Japan's greatest living filmmaker."*

– J. Hoberman

*"By far the most important Japanese filmmaker of his generation."*

– Noël Burch

*"No other director of Oshima's generation has made more vital, inventive and challenging films, or taken more risks. He is a giant in contemporary cinema."* – Tony Rayns

*"I am not interested in making films that can be understood in fifteen minutes."* – Nagisa Oshima



Much parsed and puzzled over, Shohei Imamura's famous pronouncement, "I'm a country farmer; Nagisa Oshima is a samurai" may be ambiguous in tone and intent – is it ironic, invidious, deferential? – but it emphasizes the directors' differences: class, stylistic, and otherwise. Often paired as twin avatars of the Japanese New Wave, a term Oshima (born in Kyoto, 1932) took every opportunity to spurn and disparage, the two fit uncomfortably in that "movement" and with each other. Sharing formal and social audacity, a brilliant ability to exploit the widescreen format, a rejection of the refined and self-sacrificing tenor of traditional Japanese cinema, a propensity for mixing fiction and reality, and certain key themes – sex and criminality, the abuse and resilience of women, incest, the social fissures of postwar Japan, the aggravated acts of outcasts in a tightly battened monoculture – Imamura and Oshima nevertheless can be construed as contraries, if not opposites. (It would be illuminating to pair certain of their films: Imamura's *A Man Vanishes* with Oshima's *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*; *Pigs and Battleships* with *The Sun's Burial*; *Vengeance Is Mine* with *Violence at Noon*.) Where Imamura made defiantly "messy" and "juicy" (his preferred terms) films that celebrated the irrational, the instinctual, the carnal, squalid, violent, and superstitious life of Japan's underclass, Oshima's films are primarily ideational, probing, and controlled even when anarchic (e.g. *Three Resurrected Drunkards*). Which is not to say they are dry (as opposed to juicy) or cerebral. Even at their most complex – the densely structured *Night and Fog in Japan*, for instance, all but dictates a second viewing – Oshima's works exhibit such wit, beauty, and furious invention, never mind profound feeling, that their conceptual gambits take on sensual and emotional force. They are less the product of a postmodernist sensibility, as some critics have characterized Oshima's strategies, than of a desperate intelligence. Oshima made films as if they were a matter of life and death.

"I do not like to be called a samurai," Oshima said, perhaps contending with Imamura's dictum, "but I admit that I have an image of myself as fighter. I would like to fight against all authorities and powers." Rejecting the aristocratic lineage and traditional Japanese culture that the samurai appellation implies, Oshima instead emphasizes its warrior import. Appropriately so: from his first film forward, Oshima was a fighter, less a maverick than an insurgent, rebelling against every myth, tradition, and piety of Japan Inc. (Fond of polemics, he sometimes dismissed the entirety of Japanese cinema.) Though born into privilege, the son of a government worker in Kyoto (reportedly of samurai ancestry), Oshima was a nascent socialist whose ideals were formed in his youth by the general strike of 1947; the Pacific War, Emperor Hirohito's capitulation after the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the subsequent American occupation of Japan; and the mass student struggle against the Korean War and, most markedly, against *ampo*, Japan's security pact with cold war America. Steeped in Marxist and Freudian thought from his father's prodigious library, Oshima opposed using ideological systems to probe his nation's psyche: "I am not a Marxist," he insisted. "In fact, I find Marxism and Christianity to be the same thing and both of them are bad."

So thorough-going was Oshima's rejection of dogma that he mocked doctrinaire activist-filmmakers in *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, one of whom rotely declares that the last filmed images left by a dead comrade portend "the end of a petit-bourgeois unable to achieve proletarian consciousness," or vented his bitter disappointment at the failure of leftist progressives to effect change by making Langian doubles of men who are actually ideological foes in the brilliant, acrimonious *Night and Fog in Japan*. Both men, Oshima implies, are impotent, too caught up in internecine skirmishes to attend to the real struggle for political change in Japan, to give voice and power to all those "left out" by the country's postwar economic miracle, its stultifying political system and cultural conformity. Oshima's fierce determination to expunge from his own art the signifiers of that national obeisance led to his initial shunning of traditional shots of the sky or of people

sitting on tatami mats, and, most famously, his banishment of the colour green from his films as a "too comforting" hue – it "softens the heart," he averred – because of its association with nature, with the traditional Japanese garden and its proximity to the consolations of home. (Is it too literal to note also his aversion to the "deep green worn by the American army and then by the occupation forces that we Japanese became accustomed to seeing," which he associated with the repression of Korea and, later, the Vietnam War, described in his essay, "Are the Stars and Stripes a Guardian Deity?")

Green forbidden as insidious or anodyne, red would become the marker of Oshima's dire vision of Japan, not only in the motif of the Japanese flag, the *Hinomaru* with its burning sun, repeatedly invoked and maligned in the director's films, but also in the many objects keyed to carmine in his extravagant colour films. (Think of the first burst of colour in the hitherto black-and-white *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, the incarnadine bedroom of the young lovers and the glowing red tent theatre of the kabuki troupe, the "cherry blossom" stain left on the sheets by Umeko's deflowering and the blood later poured down her leg and splashed on the fake decapitated head.) "The blood of this young boy dyes all of Japan red," claimed the trailer for *Boy*. In the mother's red sweater and dyed hair, the little girl's red boot and forehead wound, the ubiquitous Japanese flags and various red objects given prominence in the Scope screen, *Boy* joins such scarlet-scored films as Nick Ray's *Party Girl*, Godard's *Pierrot le fou*, and Bresson's *Le Diable probablement* (screening on December 3), each a portrait of moral drift, corruption, suicide. Of course, red most readily represents blood, the stuff of life, which is defiled, bought and sold in the black market in *The Sun's Burial* or, conversely, the deathly apotheosis of sexual passion (the sluice of blood that ends the cloistered lovemaking in *In the Realm of the Senses*).

Extremity defined Oshima's vision, and his stylistics: *Night and Fog in Japan* was shot in only forty-seven long takes, while the cutting in *Violence at Noon* came on like a Kurosawa hail of arrows: over two thousand edits, several used for one short sequence. (The long takes in *Cruel Story of Youth* and *The Catch* have been compared to Mizoguchi's.) Oshima's earliest films were mostly shot in the widescreen and colour formats then favoured by Japanese studios, but he would readily retreat to the old-fashioned mode of black and white and 1.37 square aspect ratio for others. (New Wave compatriot Teshigahara strangely maintained this retro format for all his films, through *Face of Another*.) Oshima was wont to use extreme long shot or obscuring chiaroscuro to shoot some important events, or to develop an unbearable intimacy using relentless close-ups, as in *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, whose images of fleshy confinement offer another instance of the claustrophobia of Oshima's cinema, which often features shut-off or isolated settings, most markedly the lovemaking room in *Realm* and the execution chamber in *Death by Hanging*.

"I always try to deny the style I used in a previous work . . . I never make films in the same style," Oshima told Joan Mellen, which helps account for his swing from Nick Ray histrionics or the kino-fist aesthetic of Sam Fuller (*Cruel Story of Youth* and *The Sun's Burial*) to the refined modernism of Resnais or Antonioni (*The Ceremony*), from stern alienation effects (*Night and Fog in Japan*) to pop-modernist playfulness (*Three Resurrected Drunkards*), all the while maintaining his singular sensibility. Oshima told another interviewer: "I have to agree with someone like Ozu who said that he could only make 'tofu' movies. Bean curd was the only thing he knew how to cook and so he could not make a 'beefsteak' movie. . . . I feel that what I've been doing in my films, perhaps, is something much closer to making sake. Sometimes my films approach the full blends and rich flavour that the sake should have, and at other times they're very raw and they become the kind of sake that burns your throat as it goes down."

Throat-burning mostly. The director instantly became a pariah with his first film, the cheerily named *Town of Love and Hope*. Not only was the



title forced on him by the Shochiku studio – Oshima preferred his blunt original, *The Boy Who Sold His Pigeon* – but the director was also expected to hew to the studio's popular Ofuna-style family melodrama in his tale of a poor boy befriended by a rich girl. (The scam by which the boy supports his family introduced themes of extortion, imposture, crime, delinquency into Oshima's cinema; the director's clear-eyed sympathy with the cheating boy – the first of many self-portraits, which include the pimply Motoki in *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, and even, Oshima insisted, “that demonic rapist in broad daylight” of *Violence at Noon* – established his identification with young outcasts and criminal aliens, which would define his subsequent cinema.) Oshima delivered neither the optimistic humanism demanded by the studio, nor the prescribed social message. “This film is saying that the rich and the poor can never join hands,” studio head Shiro Kido fumed, suspending the director for six months and declaring *Town* unhealthy and leftist. When Oshima returned to Shochiku to make two subsequent films in the popular “sun tribe” genre about disaffected youth, their tonal temerity and colour-coded desolation came as a bitter surprise – *The Sun's Burial* has to rank with cinema's great visions of hell – even if Kon Ichikawa had taken the genre into darkest territory half a decade earlier with *Punishment Room*. Hand Oshima a genre – the samurai film in *Shiro Amakusa*, *The Christian Rebel* and again in *Gohatto*, the family chronicle in *The Ceremony*, anime in *Band of Ninja* – and, while ostensibly observing its conventions, he would twist it to reflect his own concerns.

Those concerns centred on sex, crime, and death. Oshima's familiarity with Freud, Marx, and, one infers, Marcuse – the latter's *Eros and Civilization* invoked in Imamura's *Intentions of Murder*, so obviously “current” in Japan at the time – tempts one to read their influence in Oshima's cardinal themes of human desire in conflict with social codes and strictures; of freedom sought through criminality, sexual abandon, or social revolution; of compulsion and stymied rebellion. But Oshima's sensibility is too intuitive, anti-ideological, and steeped in Japanese culture to deduce their thinking in any systematic way. It was, Oshima insisted, the “unaware” and unconscious nature of both sex and crime that made them the central obsessions of his cinema; “behaviour with clear motivation is uninteresting,” he insisted. However, the enticement of psychology, of biographical reduction, when interpreting his films is great. To abridge Oshima's early work to a vast psychodrama of parental abandonment would be unconscionable, but when Oshima says, “I always want to go back to my boyhood” because of the loss of his father at age six – a deprivation he wrote movingly about in an essay – one wonders if that familial yearning could help explain the many incomplete and broken households in his cinema, the previously mentioned preponderance of children, adolescents, teens, few of them innocent, all participants in or witnesses to the criminal world of adults. (Note, for instance, the marked presence of children at the communal evils committed in *The Catch*.) The stark title of *Boy* emphasizes this violation, the film's manipulation of scale and repeated disconnection of the supposedly unified family within the widescreen frame – Oshima was the master of the decentered Scope composition, along with his New Wave comrade Yoshishige Yoshida – stressing the boy's isolation and vulnerability. Similarly, Oshima describes the harsh world of the amoral teens in *Cruel Story of Youth* in Scope images of the abject and precarious: an intensely compacted composition of Makoto's midriff in plaid skirt, a wad of bills and sheet of directions to an abortionist clutched in her hand, or the rape among the logs in

Tokyo harbour, a travesty of the traditional understanding of “the floating world,” rendered with virtuosic but unstable travelling camera. (Oshima's hand-held pans and tracking shots sometimes judder, not to signify authenticity but to transcribe his characters' restless, tenuous existence.)

Just as he rejected the Japanese New Wave rubric, Oshima chafed at the inevitable comparisons critics made between his films and Godard's. Though he would politely respond to questions about the latter's influence with evasive statements about shared enthusiasms and common concerns (predominantly politics and cinema), he took to calling Godard “the Oshima of France” after one too many comparisons or accusations of being a JLG imitator. The similarities between the two run to a substantial list – none diminishing Oshima's originality, it must be emphasized – but in hindsight, Oshima seems to have as much affinity with Fassbinder in his prolificacy and swift, single-take shoots (look at his output in years 1960 or 1968 alone!); his sometimes sentimental sympathy for outsiders – sexual, ethnic (particularly Koreans), and political; his development of a “house” technical and acting troupe employed in film after film; his use of music as alienation device and such Brechtian strategies as the intertitles in *Death by Hanging* or the theatrical friezes in *Night and Fog in Japan*; and his acerbic view of human nature and how sex often subverts both emotion and politics.

In his “international” period, Oshima seemed to mellow as a modernist, taking on the suave tone of late Buñuel (a director he once claimed as his favourite) in *Max Mon Amour*, or reviving the methods of the traditional Japanese cinema he once utterly abjured in the deep focus and use of wipes in *Empire of Passion* and the duel on a soundstage misty marsh at the end of *Gohatto*. Critics have argued over whether Oshima remained an iconoclast or succumbed to nostalgia, but surveying a gay samurai film, a brittle comedy of manners about a diplomat's wife in love with a chimp, and a legendary work of hard-core sexual transgression, it's a little difficult to cast Oshima as a Mizoguchi manqué. Perhaps Oshima provided the clue for this transition: love became the third element in his cinema, he commented, along with sex and crime.

– James Quandt



We wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the following individuals and organizations who made the Oshima retrospective possible: Nagisa Oshima, Tokyo, and Eiko Oshima, Oshima Productions, Tokyo; Marie Suzuki, The Japan Foundation, Tokyo; Masayo Okada, Yuka Sukano, Atsuko Fukuda, Kawakita Memorial Film Institute, Tokyo; Peter Becker, Kim Hendrickson, Fumiko Takagi, Sarah Finklea, Janus Films, New York; The Japan Foundation, Toronto; Donald Richie, Tokyo; Haden Guest, Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge; Jeremy Thomas, London; Julie Pearce and Waltraud Loges, BFI Southbank, London; Richard Peña, Film Society of Lincoln Center/New York Film Festival; Dan Talbot and José Lopez, New Yorker Films; Marty Gross, Toronto; Yuji Namba, Directors Guild of Japan, Tokyo; Gen Mizoguchi, Toei, Tokyo; Pervenche Beurrier, Service Culturel, Consulat général de France, Toronto; Trond Trondsen, Calgary; Juliet Clark, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley; Jane Wright, BBC, London; and Max Papillon, BBC, Toronto.

# NAGISA OSHIMA

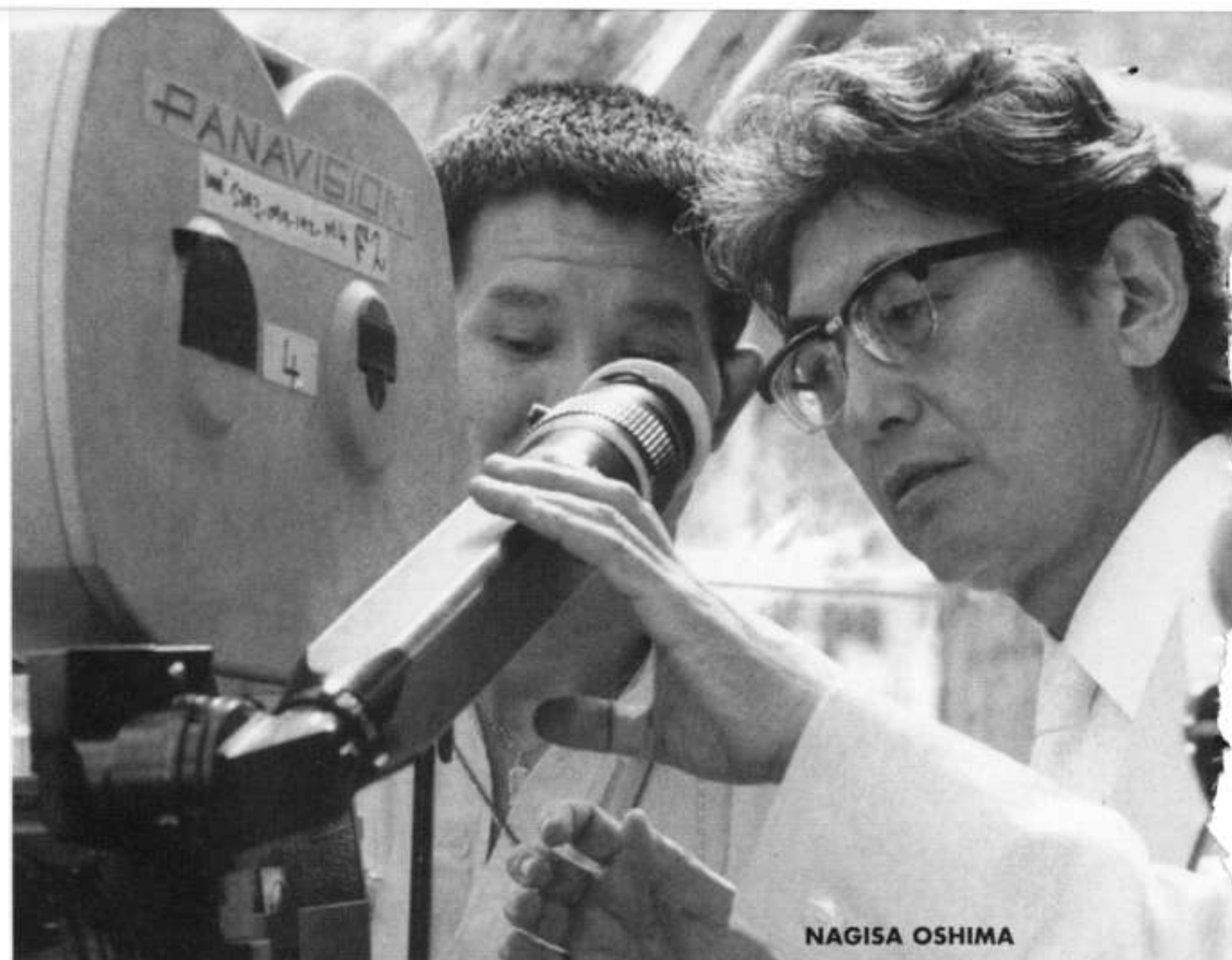


# THE OSHIMA RETROSPECTIVE

"Suffice it to say that in the late 1970's and early 80's any film buff asked to name the most dynamic living Japanese director would have answered Oshima. . . . There is a pressing need now for an Oshima retrospective. . . . His pictures are extra-ordinary, from *Cruel Story of Youth*, *The Sun's Burial*, *Night and Fog in Japan* (all 1960) through *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide* (1967), *Death by Hanging*, *Three Resurrected Drunkards*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (all 1968), *Boy* (1969) and *The Ceremony*." – David Thomson, *The New York Times*, October 8, 2000

Why has there been no major Oshima retrospective in North America in two decades? Why, when Cinematheque Ontario has presented countless series dedicated to Japanese masters (Ozu, Naruse, Mizoguchi, Suzuki, Imamura, Kurosawa, Shimizu, Ichikawa, Fukasaku, Masumura, Uchida et al), has the director whom critics generally agree is the country's greatest living filmmaker never been accorded more than a handful of screenings here? The reasons, as with our comprehensive Roberto Rossellini retrospective two years ago, similarly long deemed "impossible," are many and complex: unavailability of prints, vexing rights issues, rapidly changing aspects of film exhibition, and, subsuming all three, the growing aversion in our culture to the difficult and critical – the *serious*, as Susan Sontag called it. Now, after some years of research and preparation, we are able to present a retrospective of Oshima's feature films, much of it in new or recently struck prints, so that the current generation of cinephiles who have not had the opportunity to see the films of this seminal figure of the Japanese New Wave can judge his immense achievement. (Oshima's television documentaries of the Sixties will remain a project for another day, their public exhibition rights currently impossible.) Some of the Cinematheque's retrospectives pass through Toronto like so much cultural weather, even when their rarity is apparent – e.g. Rossellini – but the urgency of this one should be obvious.

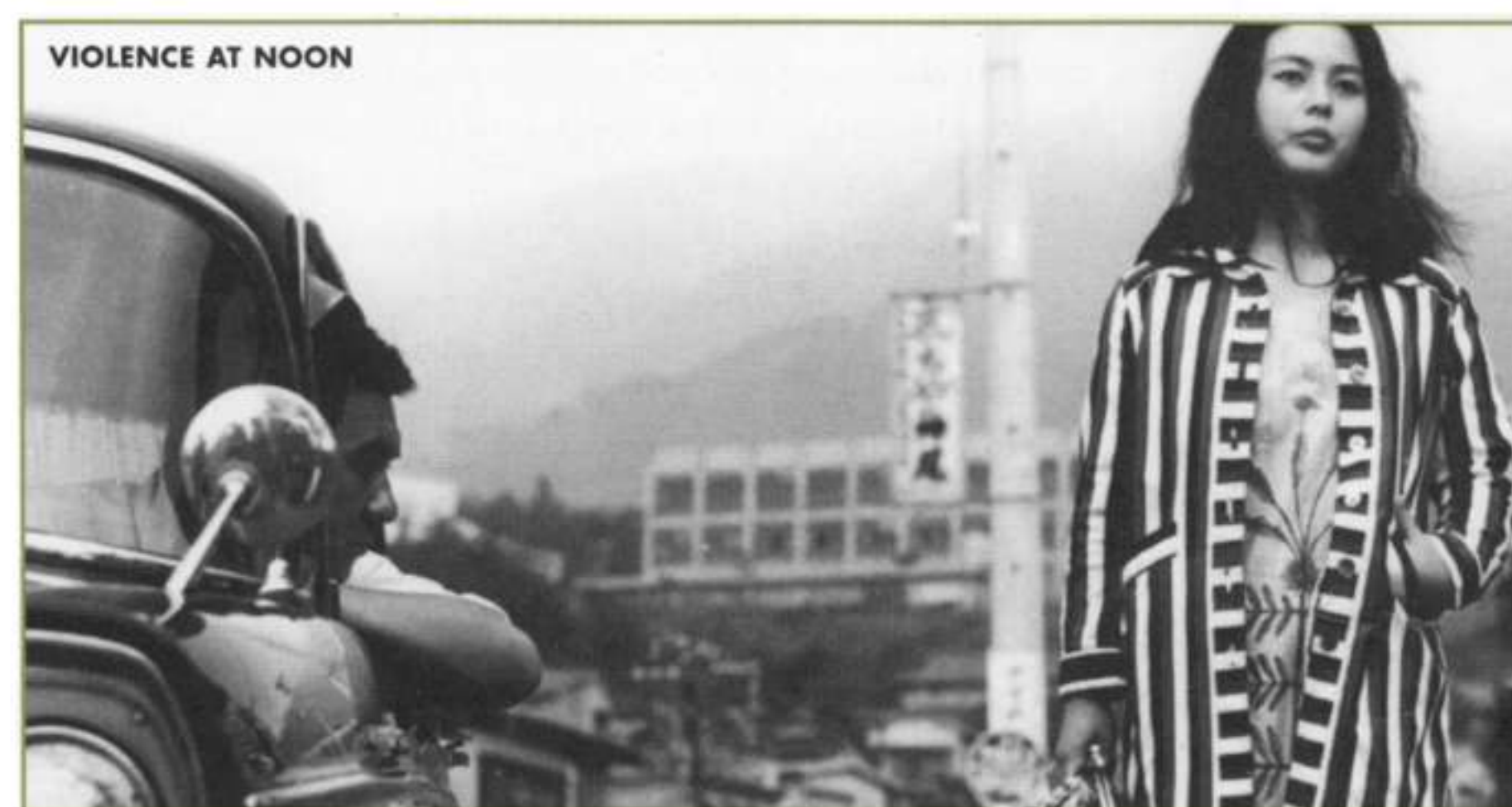
It is impossible to write about the Oshima retrospective objectively or impersonally. When I organized the last one in 1988 for Harbourfront, several colleagues warned me off inviting the director because he was infamously "difficult." Much the opposite proved to be true. He was among the sweetest, most generous, intelligent, and engaging people I have ever encountered. Our talk about politics, culture, sexuality, his cinema and others – Angelopoulos was a mutual god at the time – his delight at Toronto and its oddities, his immense charm and selflessness with audiences, made Oshima's time at Harbourfront the highlight of my professional life, and we corresponded for a long time afterward. (Seeing a busload of Japanese tourists descend upon him in frenzied excitement at the Art Gallery of Ontario was to understand his other source of celebrity, as a popular television talk show host with extravagant clothing and provocative opinions.) Because one of Oshima's dream projects, *Hollywood Zen*, about the meeting of silent stars Rudolph Valentino and Sessue Hayakawa, involved a Toronto producer, he once came to town and simply "dropped in." By strange coincidence, we were showing his *Violence at Noon* that night in a series of Japanese Scope films in, alas, a worn 16mm print, much to our shame – but, like everything else, Oshima took it in stride, and happily introduced the screening to a startled Cinematheque audience.



NAGISA OSHIMA

Oshima had a debilitating stroke at a British airport over a decade ago, but went on to make the immensely popular *Gobatto*, assisted by his son. We had already fallen out of touch, but I became determined that another retrospective of his films was needed to ensure that his work would not slip from view here – very little is available on DVD and almost none is in North American distribution – and, prodded by Haden Guest of Harvard Film Archive and Donald Richie, renewed the project that, as I was often told last fall in Tokyo, "has been tried by many people without success. You will need luck." My invaluable colleagues at The Japan Foundation, the Kawakita Memorial Film Institute, and Janus Films provided more than luck and forbore my psychotic persistence with gracious patience. Our debt to them is immense, for here are films that radically remake not only one's sense of cinema but one's sense of the world.

– James Quandt



## THE OSHIMA TOUR

Cinematheque Ontario will tour the Oshima retrospective to the following North American venues from September 2008 - June 2009: New York Film Festival; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge; Pacific Cinematheque, Vancouver; Gene Siskel Film Center, Art Institute of Chicago; American Cinematheque and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Northwest Film Center, Seattle; Cleveland Cinematheque; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus; National Gallery of Art, American Film Institute, and American Film Institute & Freer Gallery, Washington D.C.; George Eastman House, Rochester; College of Moving Images, Santa Fe; Madison Cinematheque; Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley.



# ESSENTIAL OSHIMA

Inspired by the list "Essential Oshima: 10 Key Films from the Director of *Gobatto*," appended to Asian film specialist Chuck Stephens' rave review for *Gobatto* in *Film Comment* (November - December 2000) and included here minus its annotations, we canvassed a number of Oshima authorities – film historians and critics who have written extensively about his work, some of whom know him personally, and such Oshima admirers as Martin Scorsese – to make their lists of essential Oshima films and to name one or two "buried treasures." Several anguished over reducing the list to a few titles, and en masse all offered a reconfiguration of the Oshima pantheon; the inclusion of *Three Resurrected Drunkards* and *Sing a Song of Sex* (a.k.a. *Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Songs*) on so many lists is particularly gratifying.

Herewith the results:

**Audie Bock** – Film historian, author of *Japanese Film Directors* and translator of Kurosawa's *Something Like an Autobiography*.

As film directors age, they sometimes look back on their early work as if it were something created by a totally different artist. The socio-political and cultural atmosphere surrounding the creative process of the moment is already history, so the director feels a detachment from the pulse of the work – Akira Kurosawa is a case in point. How much more so for Nagisa Oshima, whose films vibrate with the issues of the day, nationally and internationally. Yet from these raging energies emerge classics of cinematic philosophy. My favourite Oshima, *The Ceremony*, assesses the dynamic of the Japanese patriarchal family system. Through the flashbacks of a group of relatives who either rebel against or succumb to the tyranny of the father, he analyzes the Japanese character and its descent into the Second World War. In their interactions with each other in the present he shows the lingering psychological damage that makes them weak or twisted, or at best frustrated. Of this film Oshima once said he saw in it a great deal of himself. My second favourite is a technically very modest work with a message that proved quite exciting for film students in the classroom. *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* attacks the belief that cinema can change the world. The angry and optimistic spirit of the youth movement of the Sixties harkened back to the cinema luminaries of the Russian Revolution, of Pudovkin and Eisenstein. But Oshima shows in this little film that what emerges on the screen sometimes has meaning only for the director himself, and that the bridge to significance for the rest of society is a very difficult one to cross. High school students attempting to record the youth violence of 1969 Tokyo find themselves caught not in historic significance or movement-making but in personal tragedy. One of the greatest commentators on the flaws in the Japanese character, of prejudice, cowardice and hypocrisy, Oshima for me is greatest when his films also reflect on his own role as a filmmaker.

**David Bordwell** – Jacques Ledoux Professor of Film Studies, Emeritus, Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison, scholar and author of *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging*; his website is at [davidbordwell.net](http://davidbordwell.net).

*Cruel Story of Youth*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *The Catch*, *Ceremonies* (a.k.a. *The Ceremony*), *Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, *Three Resurrected Drunkards*

"If you need even more obscure, I'd plump for *Band of Ninja* (still the best comic-book movie I know) and *Shiro Amakusa*, the only movie I know lit almost entirely by firelight."

**David Desser** – Author of *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* and co-editor of *Cinematic Landscapes*, reissued by University of Texas Press this fall.

*Cruel Story of Youth*, *The Sun's Burial*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*. Buried Treasures: *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Songs* (a.k.a. *Sing a Song of Sex*), *Dear Summer Sister*

**Kyoko Hirano** – Curator and historian of Japanese cinema, former director of the Japan Society film programme in New York, and currently an independent scholar and free-lance writer.

"My annotation? You must see these films!"

*Cruel Story of Youth* – The film's energy is so refreshing and unparalleled. When the Japan Society invited Mr. Oshima for the Madame Kawakita film series in March, 1995, I saw this film after many years, and I was simply blown away by the scene in which the Yusuke Kawazu character violently pushes the Miyuki Kuwano character into the water. I told Mr. Oshima that the dialogue was so rich, I could not believe that he was only 27 or 28 when he wrote such lines. He smiled and said that "If you have two or three great sections, it will be enough to be a great film;" *Night and Fog in Japan* – Before watching this daring work, I could never imagine how much a film could do; *Boy* – Oshima based this incredibly sensitive and at the same time sharply political film on a real-life story; *Violence at Noon* – The strange charm of this film is hard to describe but very precious. My best of the unknown Oshima: *The Catch*; *Unforgotten Imperial Family* (a documentary about a handicapped WWII veteran who cannot receive Japanese governmental assistance), *Sing a Song of Sex*.

**Joan Mellen** – Author of *Voices from the Japanese Cinema*, *The Waves at Genji's Door*, and the BFI Film Classics study, *In the Realm of the Senses*.

*Cruel Story of Youth*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, *Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, *Ceremonies* (a.k.a. *The Ceremony*), *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Gobatto*. Lesser known: *Diary of Yubogai*, *Violence at Noon*

**Annette Michelson** – Professor of cinema studies at New York University, and editor of *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: The Writings of Nagisa Oshima, 1956-1978*.

"When I visited Oshima in Tokyo some years ago, he was despondent at the state of cinema generally, and was still working in television. For myself, despite the accomplished films coming out of China and a couple from Japan nothing in Asian cinema more generally – apart from the single film, *Still Life* – possesses the originality, the force and beauty of Oshima's work."

For a basic introduction: *Boy*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *Death by Hanging*, *In the Realm of the Senses*. Among the lesser-known works: *Diary of Yubogai*, *The Sun's Burial*.

**Olaf Möller**

"Totally from the hip, Oshima films I would consider indispensable, from an oeuvre rich and complex."

*The Sun's Burial*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *Diary of Yubogai*, *Violence at Noon*, *Band of Ninja*, *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide*, *Three Resurrected Drunkards*, *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Gobatto*

**Richard Peña** – Program Director, Film Society of Lincoln Center and Director, New York Film Festival

*Cruel Story of Youth*, *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, *Gobatto*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *Boy*, *Violence at Noon*, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Empire of Passion*, *Pleasures of the Flesh*

**Tony Rayns** – Curator of Asian and Japanese cinema (at the Vancouver International Film Festival, among other venues), film historian, and film critic for *Sight & Sound* and several other publications; Rayn's article on Oshima can be found in the September - October 2008 issue of *Film Comment*.

The Korean Trilogy (*Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Songs* a.k.a. *Sing a Song of Sex*, *Death by Hanging*, *Three Resurrected Drunkards*), *Boy*, *The Ceremony*, *In the Realm of the Senses*. Buried Treasures: *Kyoto*, *My Mother's Place*, *100 Years of Japanese Cinema*

**Donald Richie** – Historian of Japanese cinema and author of several volumes on Japanese culture, recently including *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* and *A Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics*.

*The Catch*, *Diary of Yubogai*, *Death by Hanging*, *Forgotten Soldiers*, *Boy*, *The Man Who Left his Will on Film*, *Ceremonies* (a.k.a. *The Ceremony*), *Dear Summer Sister*, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Gobatto*. Buried Treasure: *Max Mon Amour*

**Jonathan Rosenbaum** – From 1987 through 2007, staff film critic for the *Chicago Reader*. Rosenbaum's most recent books include *Essential Cinema* and *Discovering Orson Welles*, and his website is at [jonathanrosenbaum.com](http://jonathanrosenbaum.com).

"There are many that I still haven't seen, but these are among my favorites among those I know:"

*Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, *In the Realm of the Senses*

**Catherine Russell** – Professor of Film Studies at Concordia University, Montréal, and author of *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio: Women and Japanese Modernity and Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure, and New Wave Cinemas*.

*Boy*, *Death by Hanging*, *Cruel Story of Youth*, *The Sun's Burial*. Also: *In the Realm of the Senses*, *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, *Night and Fog in Japan*

**Tadao Sato** – Japanese film historian, critic, and theorist, author of *Currents in Japanese Cinema*

*Boy*, *Death by Hanging*, *Merry Christmas*, *Mr. Lawrence*, *Sing a Song of Sex*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *Violence at Noon*, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Cruel Story of Youth*, *A Town of Love and Hope*, *Gobatto*

**Martin Scorsese**: *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *Pleasures of the Flesh*, *Violence at Noon*, *Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, *The Ceremony*, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Merry Christmas*, *Mr. Lawrence*, *Gobatto*. Buried Treasure: *Kyoto*, *My Mother's Place*

**Chuck Stephens**: *Cruel Story of Youth*, *The Sun's Burial*, *Violence at Noon*, *Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *The Ceremony*, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Merry Christmas*, *Mr. Lawrence*

**Max Tessier** – Curator and historian of Japanese cinema and author of several essays on Oshima as well as the anthology *Le cinéma Japonais au présent*.

Oshima's Ten Best Films (the "must be seen") in chronological order: *A Town of Love and Hope*, *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *The Catch*, *Pleasures of the Flesh*, *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide*, *Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, *The Ceremony*, *In the Realm of the Senses*. My personal choices, two rarities: *Violence at Noon*; *Three Resurrected Drunkards*

**Maureen Turim** – Professor of English and Film Studies at the University of Florida and author of *The Films of Oshima Nagisa: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast*.

"In reverse historical order. I couldn't narrow it down to ten easily, leaving off so many fascinating films. *Gobatto* is also great, as is *Bawdy Songs*, etc."

*Empire of Passion*, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Ceremonies* (a.k.a. *The Ceremony*), *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, *Boy*, *Three Resurrected Drunkards*, *Death by Hanging*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *Night and Fog in Japan*, *The Sun's Burial*, *Cruel Story of Youth*





CRUEL STORY OF YOUTH

**NEW 35MM PRINT!**  
**CRUEL STORY OF YOUTH**

a.k.a. **NAKED YOUTH**

(SEISHUN ZANKOKU MONOGATARI)

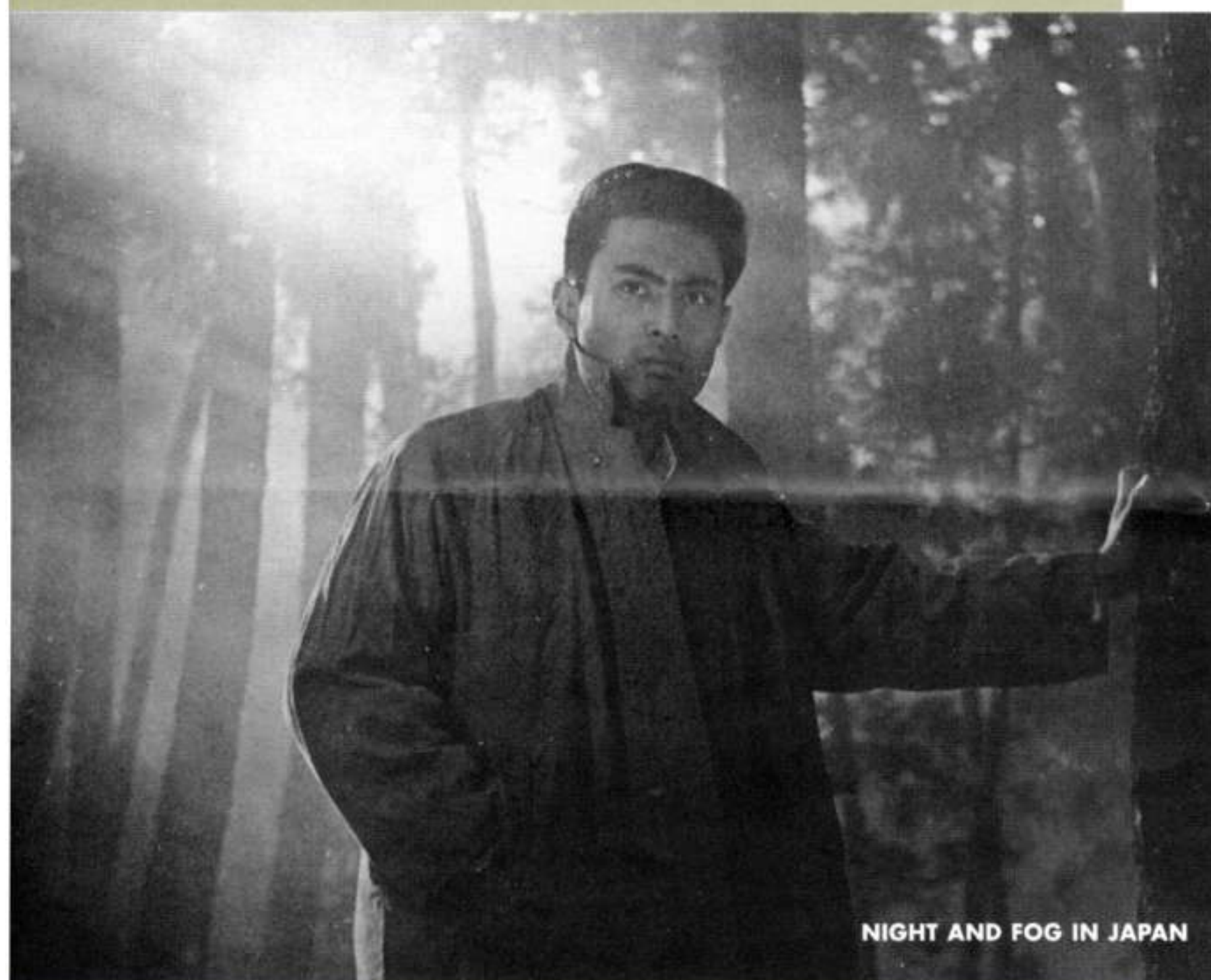
Japan 1960 96 minutes

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Cast: Yusuke Kawazu, Miyuki Kuwano

*Cruel Story of Youth* proved the seminal work, the *Breathless*, of the Japanese New Wave. "One of Oshima's best films," pronounced the formidable Japanese film critic Tadao Sato, who said this epoch-making work – its shocking ending was widely decried – made Oshima "the darling of the age." Never more beautiful (or crueler!) than in this recently struck print, which emphasizes its sublime riot of retro – hot neon, red, blue, and turquoise telephones, rockabilly, teased, shellacked hair, a V-neck terry towel T-shirt to die for – *Cruel Story of Youth* focuses on a couple of teenage lovers who declare: "We have no dreams, so we won't see them destroyed." Emblems of the alienated youth culture that had emerged in Japan, the two rebels lounge in sleazy bars, make love in brackish industrial backwaters, roar through Tokyo on a motorcycle, attempting to achieve total freedom but finding only its opposite. Full of virtuoso sequences which feature Oshima's innovative use of hand-held camera and decentered compositions within the widescreen frame, *Story* makes for a vertiginous visual experience that reflects the disoriented, precarious quality of his characters' lives. The Number One Essential Oshima, according to Chuck Stephens in *Film Comment*: "Oshima's second feature is as lurid and full-fistedly tabloid as anything by Sam Fuller."

**Friday, October 31 7:00 p.m.**



NIGHT AND FOG IN JAPAN

**NEW 35MM PRINT!**  
**NIGHT AND FOG IN JAPAN**

(NIHON NO YORU TO KIRI)

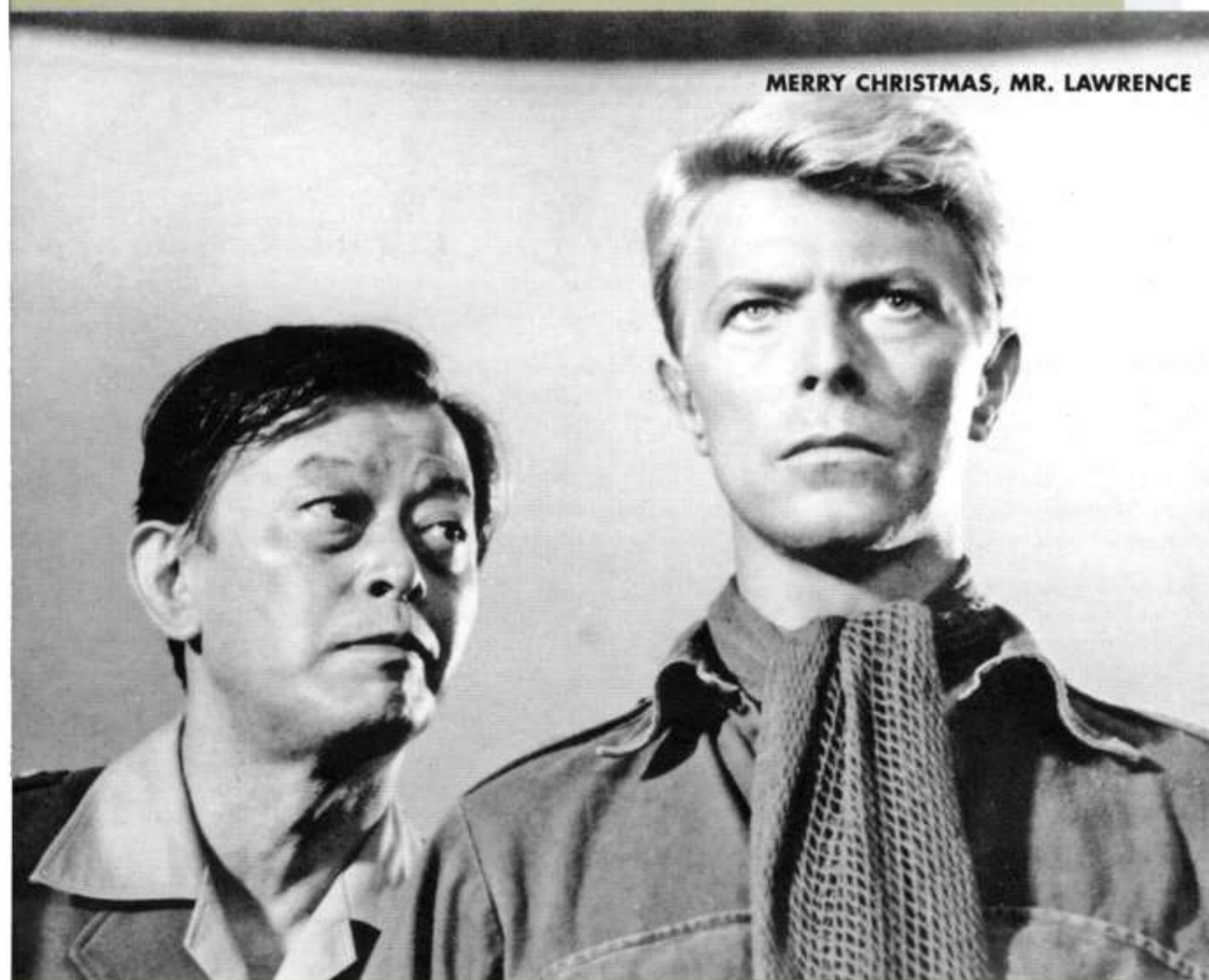
Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1960 107 minutes

Cast: Fumio Watanabe, Miyuki Kuwano

"Was and remains a landmark of Japanese cinema . . . the key work of that time" (Max Tessier). Tied with Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (!) as one of the dozen best Japanese films ever made in a poll in the prestigious journal *Kinema Jumbo*, *Night and Fog in Japan* packs more visual audacity into its ten-minute opening shot than many directors can muster in an entire film. Deemed dangerous and inflammatory by its studio and withdrawn only days after its release, *Night and Fog* takes its title from Alain Resnais' short film about the Holocaust (shown this past summer at the Cinematheque) and certainly lives up to its inspiration. Shot and acted with ferocious intensity, the film takes place at the wedding of two leftist "comrades," a celebration that quickly turns into a bitter round of denunciations, accusations, and self-recrimination. "False despair is the same as false hope," declares one of the radicals, while another demands, "What's dancing to do with the revolution?" The ashen guests, who look like ghosts, confirm another's comment: "Call this a wedding? It's a funeral!" The intellectual savagery is framed by perhaps the most inventive mise en scène of the director's career: hand-held long takes; swish pans; theatrical friezes (anticipating Fassbinder); flashbacks-within-flashbacks; fog-enshrouded or tautly diagonal compositions; freeze frames; blackouts with spot lighting; rack focusing; elaborate pans. Called "one of the most beautiful films about youth in the history of Japanese movies" (Tadao Sato), *Night and Fog in Japan* ranks with such films as Godard's *La Chinoise* as a key document of its age. "One of the year's best. . . . Without question one of the most piercing political films I have ever seen, as great in its way as Jancsó's *The Confrontation*" (J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*). "An audacious and original work, conceptually rigorous, blisteringly political" (*senses of cinema*). "Revolutionary in style . . . outrageously theatrical" (Max Tessier). "This was a film without precedent in world cinema" (Tony Rayns).

**Saturday, November 1 7:00 p.m.**



MERRY CHRISTMAS, MR. LAWRENCE

NAGISA  
 OSHIMA



**EXCLUSIVE LIMITED RUN!**  
**NEW 35MM PRINT!**  
**MERRY CHRISTMAS, MR. LAWRENCE**

(SENJO NO MERI KURISUMASU)

Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 UK/Japan 1983 122 minutes  
 Cast: David Bowie, Ryuichi Sakamoto

We're thrilled to have a new print, made in Japan, of Oshima's late career triumph, an international co-production that briefly made his name, if not household, certainly recognizable to cinephiles and rock fans the world over. Long unavailable in Canada, *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* features two rock icons as arch-nemeses in a World War II POW camp in Java in 1942. David Bowie plays Celliers, an upper crust New Zealand major, responsible for the British POWs' morale; Ryuichi Sakamoto, who contributed the film's hypnotically spare music track, plays Yonoi, the fanatical camp commander whose Mishima-like obsession with *hara-kiri* is replaced by his growing fixation on his androgynous blonde prisoner. Sharing tea and a mystification with each other's code of honour, the two joust over cultural differences, Orient vs Occident, their civility barely masking desire, until a series of incidents in the camp locks the commanders in direct conflict. Takeshi Kitano plays unhinged Sergeant Hara who utters the film's famous title as he drunkenly impersonates Santa Claus. A sensation at the Cannes film festival, *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* has often been described as a "thinking man's *Bridge on the River Kwai*," and you can contrast and compare with the Lean epic, screening on December 6. "This is a spectacular, fascinating film" (David Thomson, *The New York Times*). "The final episode . . . is perhaps the most movingly melodramatic in all Oshima's cinema" (Chuck Stephens, *Film Comment*).

**Saturday, November 1 9:00 p.m.**  
**Saturday, November 8 9:00 p.m.**

Special ticket prices apply. Please see page 24 for details.

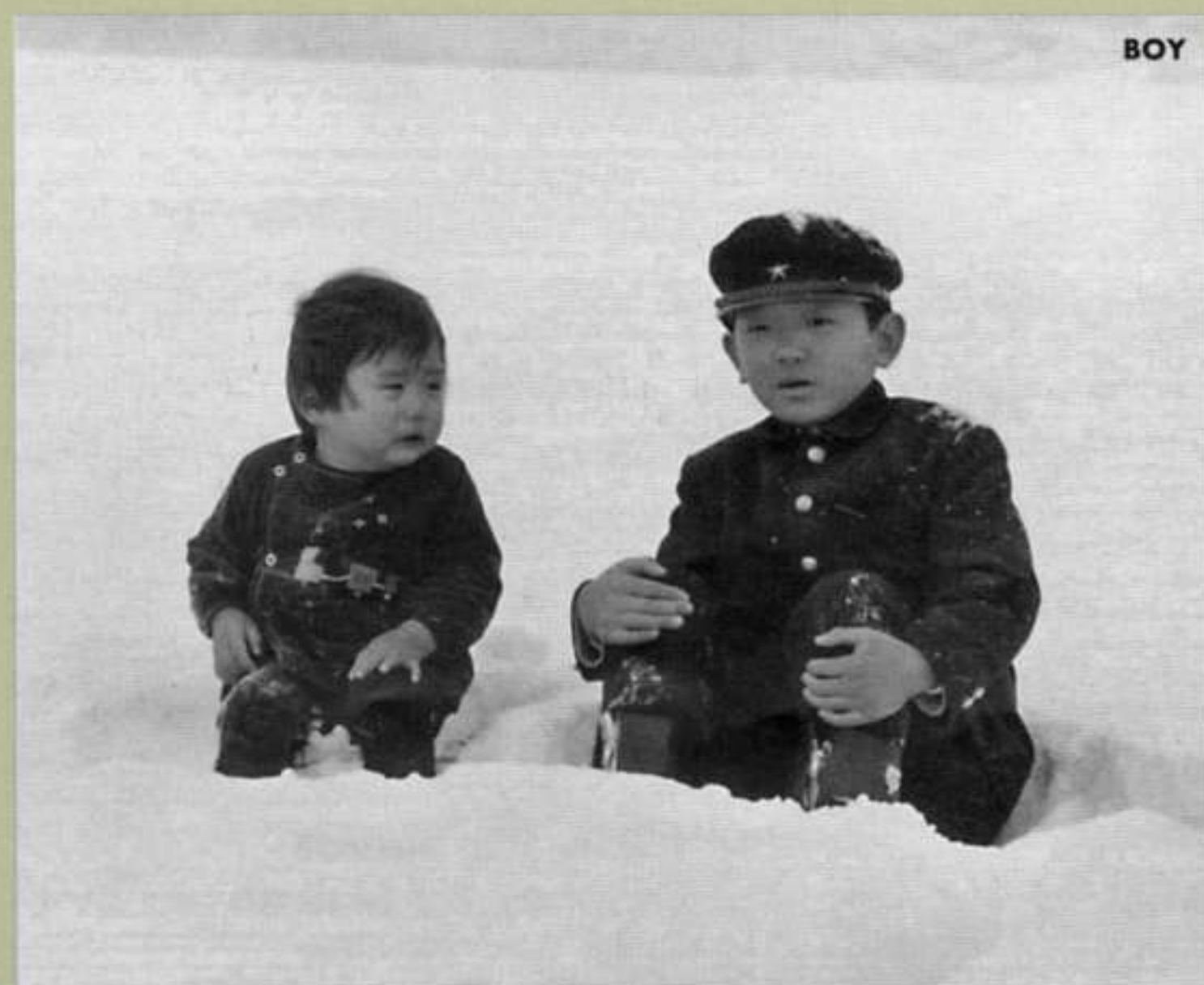
**NEW 35MM PRINT!**  
**BOY**

(SHONEN)

Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 Japan 1969 105 minutes  
 Cast: Fumio Watanabe, Akiko Koyama

On no account to be missed: a stunning new Scope print of "Oshima's finest film" (Donald Richie). *Boy* recounts the true story, one that briefly shocked Japan in 1966, of a married couple who trained their ten-year-old child to fake being hit by autos so they could collect damages from the shaken drivers. Oshima brilliantly employs this simple tale in a complex double portrait – of the desperate family, driven to callous extortion and exploitation, and the grasping society in which they live, one the director holds accountable for their actions. ("The blood of this young boy dyes all of Japan red," claimed the trailer for the film.) With rigorous empathy, Oshima portrays the father, who was a soldier in the war and whose wounds are both real and symbolic; the hard-nosed stepmother, "the worst outlaw of all" according to Oshima; and their two children, the unblinking boy who throws his small body against speeding metal to ensure the family's survival, and his mercifully uncomprehending baby brother. Stunningly shot in Scope throughout Japan (including snowy Hokkaido), with charged use of colour, composition, and unnerving music, *Boy* was for Oshima both an objective view of a dire situation and what the director called "a prayer." His tender, matter-of-fact treatment of the boy has rarely been equalled in cinema for its evocation of a child's apprehension of the world. "Extraordinary: a mysteriously tranquil tale . . . cool and remote, shot in bright, jewel colours, the film builds steadily and sleekly to a haunting climax. . . . Weird, beautiful, and terrifying" (Tom Milne, *The Observer*).

**Sunday, November 2 3:15 p.m.**



**NEW 35MM PRINT!**  
**THE SUN'S BURIAL**

(TAIYO NO HAKABA)

Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 Japan 1960 87 minutes  
 Cast: Kayoko Honoo, Isao Sasaki



"One of the two top essential Oshimas" (Chuck Stephens, *Film Comment*). Words fail in the face of this great film, so utter is its vision of human abjection, which has earned it many comparisons with Buñuel's classic *Los Olvidados*. The cred-

it sequence establishes the film's tone as human blood is bartered for booze in the Kamagasaki slum outside Osaka, where everything is for sale: birth certificates, plasma, weapons, women's bodies. "Love and Hope for the Youth," a sign promises amidst the desolation, Oshima's ironic eye for official lies trained on a world in which the state has abandoned its duties to those "left behind" by the postwar economic miracle. Tough, resourceful prostitute Hanako, who seems a relative of Imamura's obstinate, scheming women, finds a competitor for her black market profits in a devious militarist known as the Agitator, who stockpiles weapons in hopes of selling them at great profit when WWII between Japan and the Soviet Union breaks out. Hanako seeks the help of the leader of a rival criminal gang, and in her determination to survive, plays all odds against the middle. Sweatily shot in Scope, keyed to carmine and orange, and breathlessly edited, *The Sun's Burial* crams a lot of filthy, grasping humanity into its outrageous frames, and buries the sun, representing old Japan, in heaps of industrial refuse. Tawdry, gaudy, and truly magnificent, *Burial* has been called "*Rebel Without a Cause* written as a fireball of hopeless destruction" (Stephens) and "like a scroll painting of Hell" (Tadao Sato).

**Friday, November 7 7:00 p.m.**

# PASSPORT TO OSHIMA!

## QUANTITIES LIMITED - BUY NOW

To receive reduced ticket prices purchase our "Passport to Oshima," ten separate screenings for \$50 (members) or \$80 (non-members). Prices do not include GST, building fund fee, or service charges. Choose three films from Section I, three films from Section II, and four films from Section III. For complete details and restrictions call 416-968-FILM.

### SECTION I:

*Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence; In the Realm of the Senses; Cruel Story of Youth; Boy; The Ceremony; Night and Fog in Japan; The Sun's Burial; Gobatto*

### SECTION II:

*Three Resurrected Drunkards; Death by Hanging; Diary of a Shinjuku Thief; Violence at Noon; The Catch; Empire of Passion; The Man Who Left His Will on Film; A Town of Love and Hope*

### SECTION III:

*Max Mon Amour; 100 years of Japanese Cinema/Kyoto, My Mother's Place; Dear Summer Sister; Japanese Summer: Double Suicide; Pleasures of the Flesh; Sing a Song of Sex; Shiro Amakusa, The Christian Rebel; Band of Ninja*





## DEATH BY HANGING

### NEW 35MM PRINT! THE CATCH

(SHIIKU)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan 1961 97 minutes  
Cast: Rentaro Mikuni, Sadako Sawamura

A terrific film, grievously overlooked in Oshima's oeuvre, *The Catch* was the director's first independent production after his initial work for the Shochiku studio. Based on a prize-winning novella by Kenzaburo Oe – Oshima removes the homoeroticism of the source but adds his typical touch of incestuous desire – *The Catch* is set during the final days of World War II. A black GI (played by Hugh Hurd) is captured in a remote Japanese farming village, and becomes a pawn in a power struggle between various factions. As the villagers squabble over their "catch," Oshima explores subjects that would become his hallmarks – Japanese hypocrisy, racism, xenophobia, insularity, scapegoating – with detached ferocity. Evocatively shot in black-and-white Scope with long, mobile takes, striking overhead compositions, and arresting close-ups – what do those microscopic bodies suggest in the credit sequence? – *The Catch* builds to a pitch of unbearable tension as mass irrationality takes hold, and the villagers, now bonded in common purpose, close together to cover up the past. "Superb" (Tadao Sato). "*The Catch* represents Oshima's most angry and outspoken rejection of traditional values" (Claire Johnston, *International Film Guide*).

**Saturday, November 8 7:00 p.m.**

### DEATH BY HANGING

(KOSHIKEI)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan 1968 117 minutes  
Cast: Kei Sato, Fumio Watanabe

"The most fantastic scenario in the history of cinema – a masterpiece" (Luc Moullet). For many critics the high point of Oshima's cinema in the Sixties – countless essays have been written about it, by everyone from Keiko McDonald to Tadao Sato – *Death by Hanging* challenges its audience to a test at the outset. "Are you for or against abolition of the death penalty?" it demands before going on a funny, shocking Brechtian bender as it tells the true story of R., a Korean student who is hanged for the rape and murder of two women, but whose body will not cooperate with the state: it simply refuses to expire. From this grimly ironic situation Oshima makes stinging black comedy. Resuscitated, R. is found to be amnesic, and after consulting the guide-book about this unimaginable situation, panicked prison officials are forced to "reconstruct" his identity and re-establish his guilt so they can hang him all over again. Exquisitely designed and shot, its story derived from the writings of the actual R. and divided into seven chapters, *Death by Hanging* "for three quarters of its length can be read as a brilliantly, insolently witty Brechtian parable" (Tom Milne, *Monthly Film Bulletin*) but gradually darkens to become "probably the most powerful film against capital punishment ever made" (Pacific Film Archive). "Oshima's angriest and most moving film" (Tony Rayns).

**Sunday, November 9 5:30 p.m.**

### THE MAN WHO LEFT HIS WILL ON FILM a.k.a. HE DIED AFTER THE WAR

(TOKYO SENSO SENGU HIWA)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan 1970 94 minutes  
Cast: Kazuo Goto, Eimiko Iwasaki

"This is one of Oshima's signature achievements" (Chuck Stephens, *Film Comment*). Chosen by almost every Oshima authority as an Oshima essential (see "Essential Oshima" on pages 31), this requiem for a generation begins as Endo, a young filmmaker being chased by police, leaps to his death. Was it suicide? An accident? Or was it, as the film sometimes seems to suggest, an illusory act? Endo leaves behind evidence in his movie camera that yields no clues: "meaningless" random shots of Tokyo rooftops and streets. Motoki, a comrade who believes the leap was suicidal, becomes obsessed with finding the truth, and slowly begins to take over the life of the deceased militant, starting with Endo's girlfriend. He uses the remaining film footage to reconstruct the journey that led to the fatal jump, a quest that leads him into sexual fixation – the couplings foreshadow *In the Realm of the Senses* – and abandonment of self. Oshima, whose original title for the film was *The War of Tokyo: Postwar Confidential*, claimed great identification with Motoki, and the film can be seen as a revealing self portrait as well as something of an existential puzzle movie. Did Endo truly exist, or was he an invention or alter ego of Motoki? (The Antonioni urban landscapes suggest affinities with *The Passenger*.)

**Monday, November 10 7:00 p.m.**



## THE MAN WHO LEFT HIS WILL ON FILM





IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES

### EXCLUSIVE LIMITED RUN! NEW 35MM PRINT! IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES

(AI NO KORIIDA)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan/France 1976 110 minutes  
Cast: Eiko Matsuda, Tatsuya Fuji

"Perhaps Oshima's greatest" (Donald Richie). Banned, butchered, debated, and denounced when it was released – it caused riots at Cannes, was forbidden in Ontario, and severely censored in its home country – Oshima's ferocious tale of sexual obsession now takes its place as a classic of world cinema. "Is it pornography or is it politics?" – Godard's question about his own film *Numéro Deux* – applies just as well to *In the Realm of the Senses*. An exquisite spectacle that links various kinds of bondage and subjugation – between man and woman, master and servant, individual and state (note the historical backdrop of war preparations) – *Senses* is based on an incident that took place in 1936, in which Abe Sada, a hotel maid, murdered and castrated her employer after several days of sequestered love-making with him. The film portrays an erotic abandon so absolute that it creates its own world. One can veritably smell the room in which the lovers isolate themselves, its mats soaked with saké, sweat, semen, urine, and, in the final shocking sequence, a sluice of blood. Hard core sex, hard core politics, thrilling cinema. "One of his most profound films, one as complex and rich an exploration of the Japanese consciousness as any of his earlier works. . . . A revolutionary moment in the cinema of Japan" (Joan Mellen).

**Friday, November 14 8:30 p.m.**  
**Saturday, November 15 9:00 p.m.**

Special ticket prices apply. Please see page 24 for details.

### BAND OF NINJA

(NINJA BUGEI-CHO)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan 1967 100 minutes  
Note: Animated film narrated in English

"Still the best comic-book movie I know" (David Bordwell). Oshima's only *anime*, *Band of Ninja* shows, as does *Shiro Amakusa*, that Oshima could employ almost any form or genre to his own ends. Choosing a favourite comic strip of Sixties students and radicals, Sanpei Shirato's *Ninja Bugeicho*, which centres on a boy's revenge for the death of his feudal lord father and his alliance with a renegade ninja leading a peasant rebellion, Oshima does something radical: instead of animating it in the usual fashion, he employs his camera to move over actual comic book pages to give them life and movement, adding voices, narration, and sound effects. Densely told, compressing many hours of narrative into less than two (and we warn that the English narration offers only a cursory account of the convoluted plot!), *Band of Ninja* offers a square-jawed, hunky hero with major hair, and surrounds him with some of Oshima's strongest female characters, including a pregnant warrior and a "lady bandit."

**Saturday, November 15 2:00 p.m.**



BAND OF NINJA



SING A SONG OF SEX

### NEW 35MM PRINT! SING A SONG OF SEX

a.k.a. **A TREATISE ON JAPANESE BAWDY SONGS**

(NIHON SHUNKA-KO)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan 1967 103 minutes  
Cast: Ichiro Araki, Hideko Yoshida

This gets our vote as the most overlooked of Oshima's films, underrated perhaps because its English title makes it appear frivolous. It's decidedly not. Despite flights of comedy, (unnerving) sexual fantasy, youthful yearning, karaoke and hootenannies, *Sing a Song of Sex* offers an intent, penetrating portrait of a generation confronting its new freedoms and its inability to act on them. Oshima obviously considered the film very important, one infers from the essays he wrote about it. In some ways, *Sing a Song* resembles Godard's *La Chinoise* (notice the pop visual compositions, with looming movie posters and Coca-Cola billboards). A group of provincial students arrives in Tokyo to take university entrance exams. Disillusioned and nihilistic, they spend their time singing dirty songs and fantasizing about strangling a rich girl. Set on a politically charged day – the Founder's Day holiday, reinstated in 1967 after the American Occupation had banned it – amid gently falling snow, this tender, crushingly sad examination of the alienation of Japanese youth suggests that solidarity is illusory, and that political action will always be trumped or undone by sexual desire. The portrait of Otake, the students' mentor who teaches them the sex songs of the title, which he says express the despair of the oppressed, is movingly ambiguous. The film's final sequences are among Oshima's most disturbing.

**Saturday, November 15 7:00 p.m.**

### A TOWN OF LOVE AND HOPE

a.k.a. **A STREET OF LOVE AND HOPE**

(AI TO KIBO NO MACHI)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan 1959 62 minutes  
Cast: Hiroshi Fujikawa, Yuko Mochizuki

Oshima's remarkable first film, in which "the essence of Oshima can already be discerned" (Tadao Sato), made him an instant pariah; the studio head suspended the young director for six months, declaring *A Town of Love and Hope* unwholesome and leftist. (Oshima had already complained about the optimistic title forced on him; he wanted to call the film *The Boy Who Sold His Pigeon*.) Foreshadowing the masterpieces of Oshima's middle period, especially *Boy*, but more classically neorealist in style, this black-and-white Scope debut employs a simple tale to complicated ends, and succeeds with heart-breaking acuity. Bluntly stating "I need money," a young boy plays a con game, selling and reselling his homing pigeon to pay for his mother's medical bills. When he is befriended by a girl whose wealthy father is a manufacturer of television sets, the impoverished boy's chances in life seem to look up. Poetic, political, very finely acted and observed, the compact but complex *Town of Love and Hope* "shows that Oshima's political acumen was a great deal stronger than Godard's at this time" (Tony Rayns, *Time Out Film Guide*). "A bitter lament for the lost innocence of the teenaged" (Chuck Stephens, *Film Comment*).

Followed by:

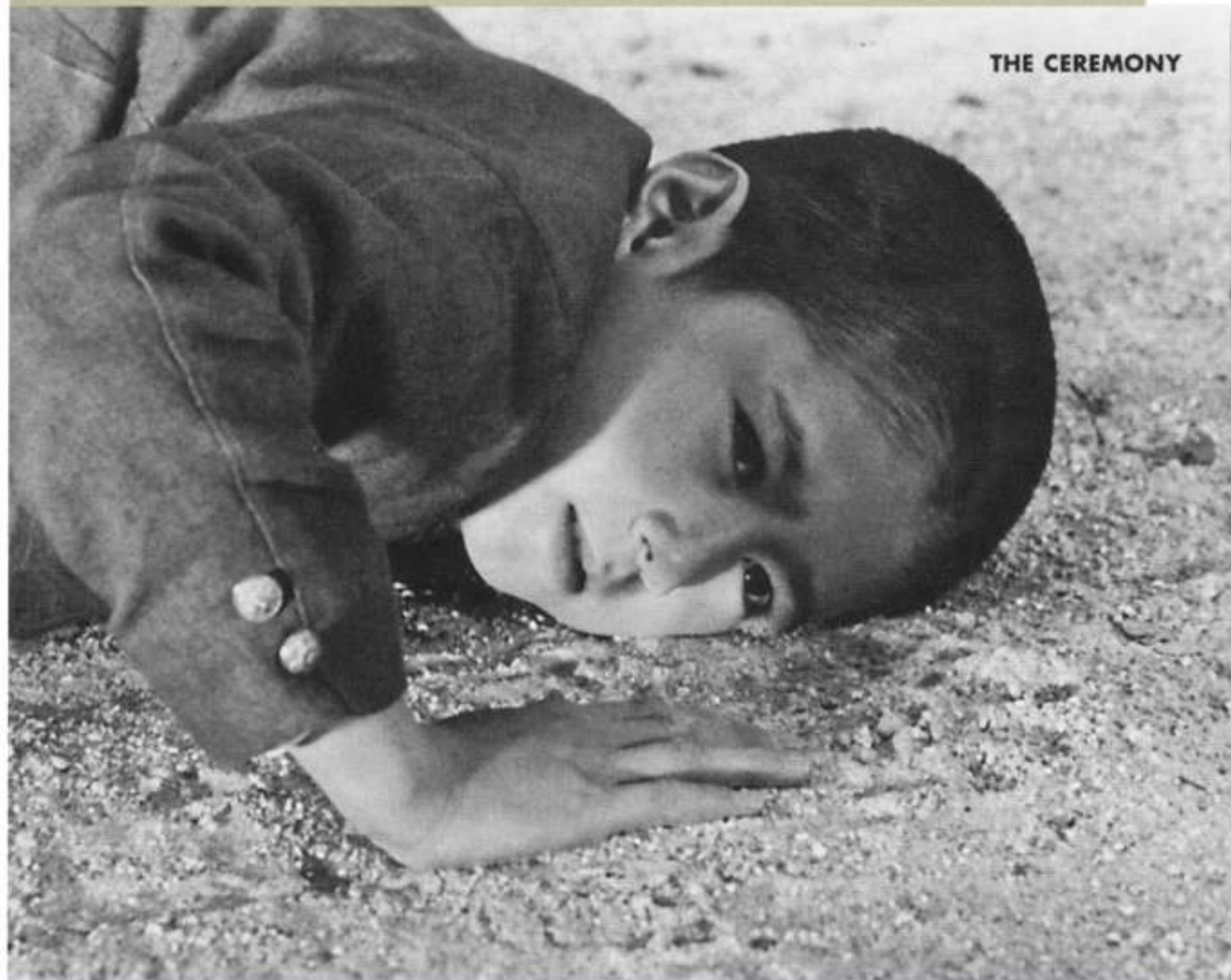
### DIARY OF YUNBOGI

(YUNBOGI NO NIKKI)  
Director: Nagisa Oshima  
Japan 1965 30 minutes  
Cast: Hosei Komatsu

This touching short film collages still images taken by Oshima during a trip to Korea in 1964 and overlays it with the voices of an orphaned Korean boy reading from his diary and his eight-year-old sister. A narrator (Oshima) recites lines that remind the viewer that Japan's wartime occupation of Korea continues to have dire consequences for its people.

**Sunday, November 16 3:00 p.m.**





THE CEREMONY

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### THE CEREMONY

a.k.a. **CEREMONIES**

(GISHIKI)

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1971 122 minutes

Cast: Kenzo Kawarazaki, Atsuko Kaku

Japanese cinema authority Max Tessier wrote that *The Ceremony* – he, like most Oshima experts, prefers *Ceremonies* as a more appropriate title – “today more than ever appears to be the summation of Oshima’s work to date . . . . In this film, Oshima reveals his innermost feelings in nearly perfect form.” *The Ceremony* was widely hailed as the most ambitious Japanese film of its decade; it makes much contemporary cinema look puny by comparison, so dense and complex is its achievement. Cast as a family saga, the film focuses on a young boy, born in Manchuria, and his mother, who make it back home after the war to rejoin the powerful Sakadura clan. Oshima savagely chronicles the family’s fortunes and woes from 1946 to the present, as its members gather for yearly ceremonies: burials, weddings, reunions. Through magisterial use of flashbacks, Oshima reveals the Sakaduras’ dark past, its communists and militarists, war criminals and rising businessmen, sports heroes and suicidal patriarchs all involved in postwar Japan’s economic rise and societal shame. The Sakaduras’ distorted, feudal values and power struggles, hidden behind and intensified by elaborate ritual, become a form of shared madness, and Oshima employs the clan’s collapse – part Jacobean, part House of Atreus – into incest, illness, and violence as an allegory of postwar Japan’s moral wasting. The film’s exquisite formal design only magnifies the sense of slow-motion entropy. “Brilliant and haunting . . . a truly modern film, but with classical echoes, and it is not to be missed” (Andrew Sarris, *The Village Voice*). “Oshima’s masterwork” (Stephen Schiff, *The Boston Phoenix*). “Oshima’s most profound work” (Joan Mellen). “Oshima’s most celebrated film” (Noël Burch).

**Monday, November 17 7:00 p.m.**

## TORONTO PREMIERE!

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### JAPANESE SUMMER: DOUBLE SUICIDE

a.k.a. **NIGHT OF THE KILLER**

(MURI-SHINJU: NIHON NO NATSU)

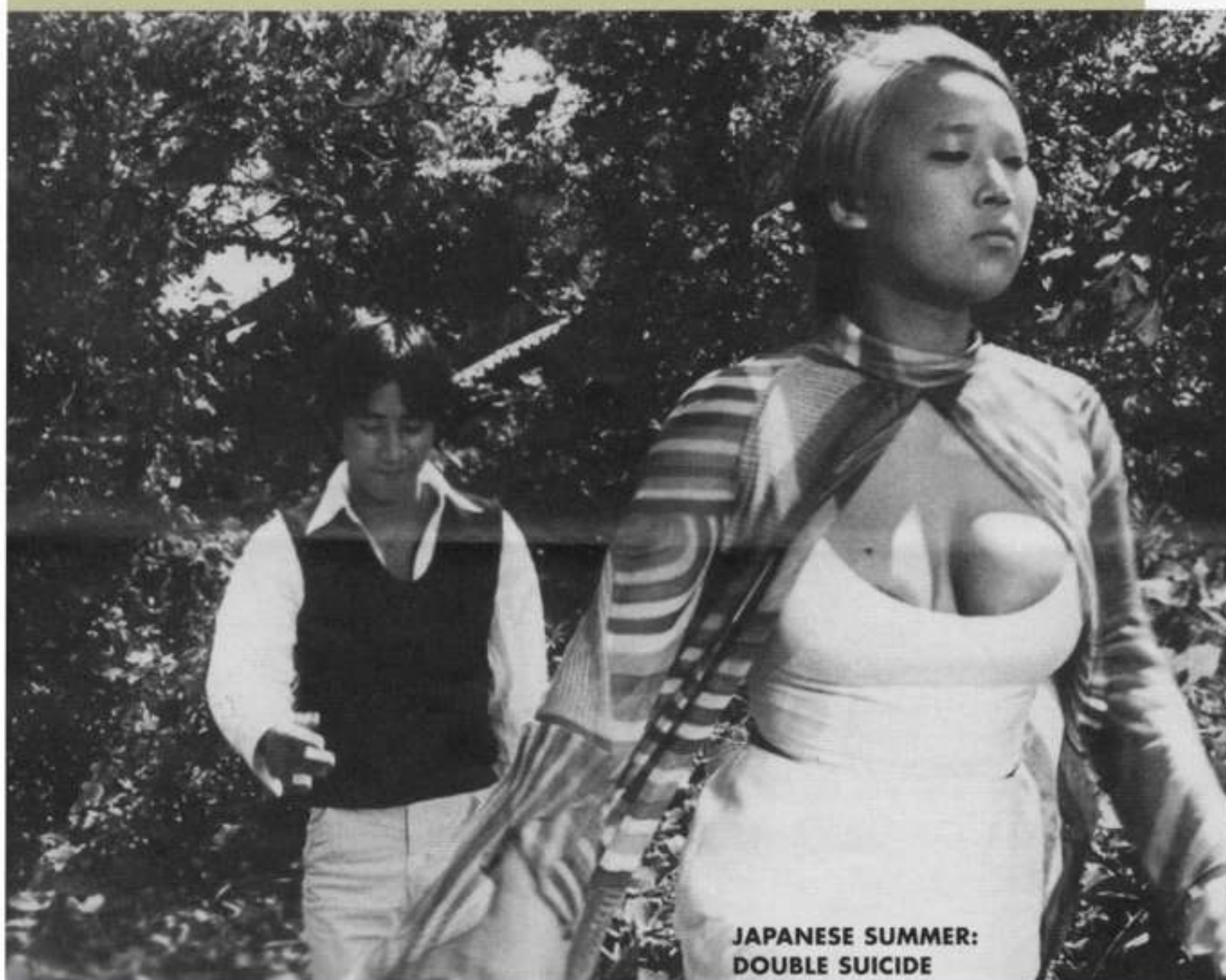
Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1967 98 minutes

Cast: Keiko Sakuai, Kei Sato

“One of Oshima’s ten best films. . . a landmark. Profoundly tragic and examines most of Oshima’s obsessions” (Max Tessier). Never before shown in Toronto, this extremely rare Oshima puts his twist on a traditional Japanese tale – that of the double suicide, basis of, most famously, the classic film of that title by Masahiro Shinoda. Set in the criminal underworld in a setting even more stylized than that of *The Sun’s Burial*, *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide* “centres on the ‘death-impulse’ in Japanese society” (Tony Rayns) through the blazing tale of a trio of the director’s most neurotic outsiders: Meijiko, an androgynous man who wears his hair long on one side, short on the other, white in front, black in the back; Otoko, a paranoid gangster known as the “gun-toting devil,” who hopes to find someone to kill him; and Nejiko, a woman looking for someone to make love to her. (She’s been called a nymphomaniac, but Oshima sees her more complexly than that.) Their elaborate game of hide-and-seek in a world of what the director calls “television, toys, and demons,” pushes so far into the fantastic and anarchic that the film feels like it could slip the bonds of its sprockets altogether. (Oshima took pride in Mishima’s saying he did not understand the film.) In an essay on *Double Suicide*, Oshima firmly rejected the common reading of the characters as, respectively, death and life force: “Insofar as Otoko’s desire for life is convoluted, it is intensely beautiful – more so than Nejiko’s straightforward desire to live.”

**Tuesday, November 18 8:30 p.m.**



JAPANESE SUMMER:  
DOUBLE SUICIDE



VIOLENCE AT NOON

# NAGISA OSHIMA



## NEW 35MM PRINT!

## VIOLENCE AT NOON

a.k.a. THE DAYLIGHT DEMON

(HAKUCHU NO TORIMA)

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1966 99 minutes

Cast: Saeda Kawaguchi, Akiko Koyama

"One of Oshima's greatest films" (Noël Burch). A chilling, brilliant crime film, based on a true story about a serial killer who terrorized Japan in the Fifties, *Violence at Noon* was once considered the most highly edited work in the history of Japanese cinema; dozens of cuts are often used for one short sequence, and there are over two thousand shots in all. Seemingly influenced by Godard and Resnais, Oshima transcends mere formal virtuosity, employing the rapid editing, as well as a swirling, swooping camera and a blurring of past and present, to penetrate the psychology of a criminal and the two women who love him: one his schoolteacher wife, the other the first victim of his crimes. After a youth commune collapses, its members driven to despair or suicide, a psychotic drifter encounters a co-worker from the collective who is now working as a maid. She falls under his spell, becoming his witness, abettor, and protector as he repeatedly rapes and murders, the police close on his trail. Always concerned with the connections between individual and societal pathology, Oshima here goes to new extremes to explore the failure of idealism in Japan and its aftermath. "A masterpiece . . . portrayed with a poignancy that is both ominous and compelling" (Tadao Sato). "One of three top essential Oshimas" (Chuck Stephens, *Film Comment*).

Sunday, November 23 2:30 p.m.

## DEAR SUMMER SISTER

(NATSU NO IMOTO)

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1972 95 minutes

Cast: Hosei Komatsu, Hiromi Kurita

"Essential Oshima" (Donald Richie). "Certainly the oddest Oshima film yet to surface in this country," was how Vincent Canby, an Oshima champion, characterized *Dear Summer Sister* when it got its first New York release in 1985, and the film remains quite amazingly strange. The director takes a very serious subject – the return of Okinawa to Japan from American control – and gives it a pop, almost parodic feel, with a floating camera and free-form narrative. Sunaoko, a teenaged girl, travels from Tokyo to Okinawa to look for a boy who may be her half-brother. Oshima sends her on a Godardian travelogue; in an orange polka dot mini-dress, she tours the island with a friend and an elderly, beer-swilling "gentleman" in a white suit. "We're not ordinary tourists," Sunaoko declares as they visit war memorials, beaches, and burial sites to learn about Okinawa's recent history, culture, and funeral rites. Though he claimed at the time that the film was very clear and straightforward, Oshima keeps adding all manner of strange characters and incidents, hints of incest and illegitimacy, a murder plot, and commentary on Japan's war crimes and abuse of Okinawa, all the while maintaining a breezy, sometimes farcical tone. The effect is sometimes enchanting, sometimes baffling. "*Dear Summer Sister* has something of the manner of a frisky Japanese homage to Michelangelo Antonioni . . . The performances are good, especially those of Hiromi Kurita as Sunaoko and an actress simply called Lily as Momoko. The photography – this time by Yasuhiro Yoshioka – is exceptionally bright and vivid, as it always is in Oshima's work" (Vincent Canby, *The New York Times*).

Tuesday, November 25 7:00 p.m.

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

## PLEASURES OF THE FLESH

(ETSURAKU)

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1965 90 minutes

Cast: Katsuo Najamura, Mariko Kaga

None other than Martin Scorsese put this on his list of essential Oshima films (see "Essential Oshima" on page 31). Oshima's second "debut" – his return to filmmaking after a long period making television documentaries and writing criticism – proved so popular, it turned his career around. The bizarrely funny *Pleasures of the Flesh* satirizes Japan's "economic miracle" with its crazed tale about a young college graduate, alienated in his white-collar job and pining for a woman for whom he has committed murder though she isn't aware of it. In a complicated twist, the naive young murderer ends up entrusted with a vast sum of money by a corrupt government official, and squanders it on a series of prostitutes, planning to commit suicide when the cash runs out. His pursuit of sensual abandonment in a hyper-modern "love hotel" yields many funny, caustic insights into Japanese society, Oshima's themes writ in extremis: sex and death, desire and capitalism, the body personal and the body politic bound together in this symbolic setting, which looks forward to *In the Realm of the Senses*. (Oshima's original title, *Pleasures in the Coffin*, better captures the film's sense of dead-end dissolution.) "One of Oshima's ten best films. . . . A brilliant stylistic exercise on a sensual subject" (Max Tessier).

Friday, November 28 8:45 p.m.

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

## DIARY OF A SHINJUKU THIEF

(SHINJUKU DOROBOKU NIKKI)

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1968 94 minutes

Cast: Fumio Watanabe, Kei Sato

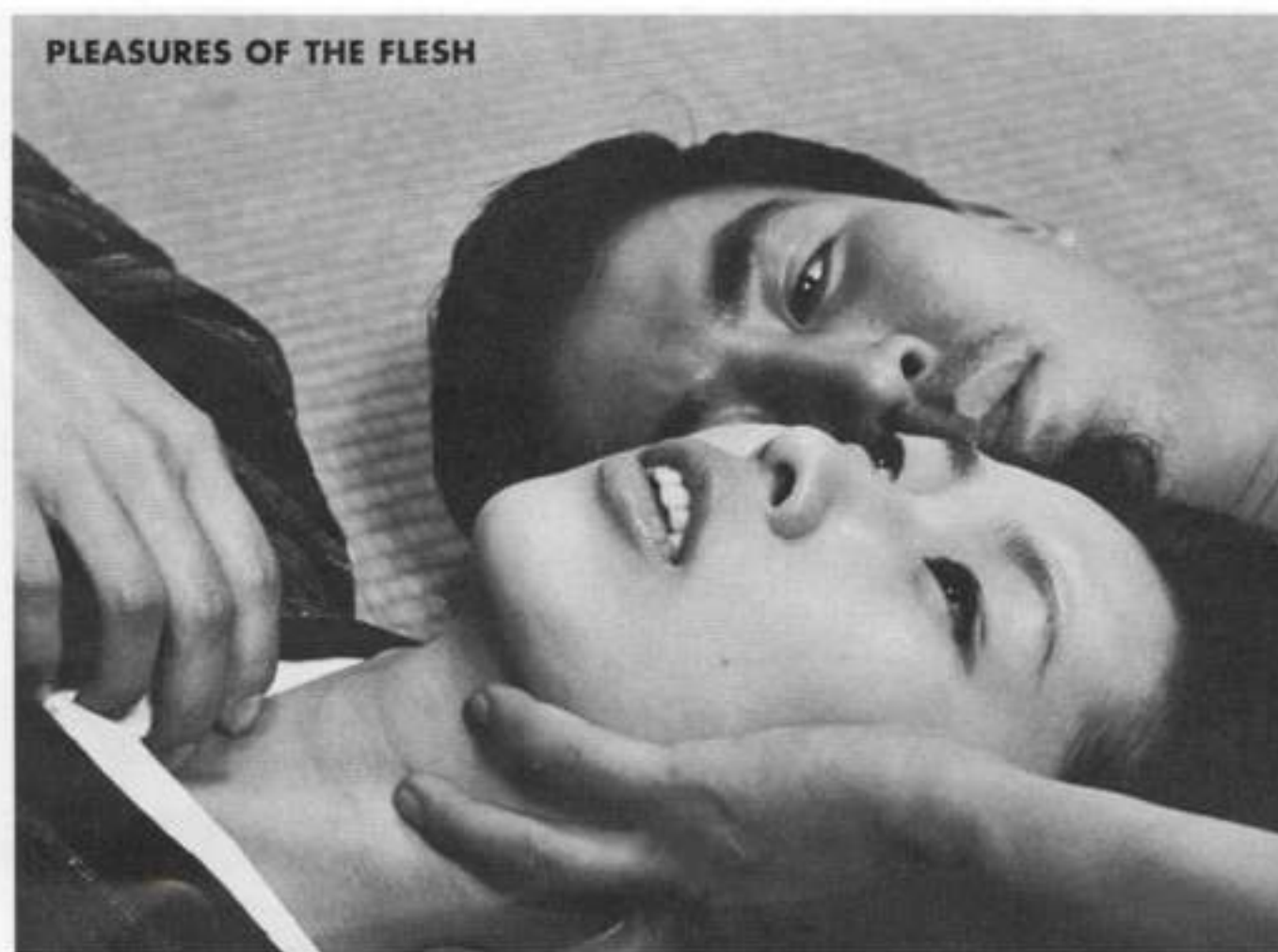
A new print of a film that always elicited superlatives: "one of Oshima's most important films" (David Desser); "I have not seen a more important new film this year . . . the most complex and most difficult of Oshima's films" (Ian Cameron); "Probably the most extraordinary agit-prop movie ever made" (Tony Rayns); "The film is without doubt one of the most erotic and sexually probing movies that has ever been made" (*What's On*). *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* tells the story of, in the words of Oshima, "a boy and girl in search of their rightful moment of sexual ecstasy." (The film would make an ideal double bill with Susumu Hani's marvellous *Inferno of First Love*.) The title refers to Genet's *A Thief's Journal*, and Oshima begins his brilliant study of sexual frustration and political subversion with an accusation of thievery: a young man is chased by a crowd in Shinjuku, Tokyo's centre of youth culture, and strips to a loincloth to show that he is hiding nothing, only a big rose tattoo over his navel. He inspires an onlooker, called Birdy Hilltop, to his own larceny in a local bookstore (watch for the Genet book), and soon Birdy and his girlfriend Umeko, a counterfeit clerk at the store – another instance of imposture in Oshima – are led into "the labyrinth of the world of sex." Theft, sex, and spectacle ensue as the two attempt to find their place in the world. Shocking in its day for its copious nudity and sexual depictions, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* in hindsight takes pride of place alongside Godard's films of the same period, which says a great deal. Tender, funny, moving, it's unspeakably wonderful.

Saturday, November 29 7:00 p.m.

DEAR SUMMER SISTER



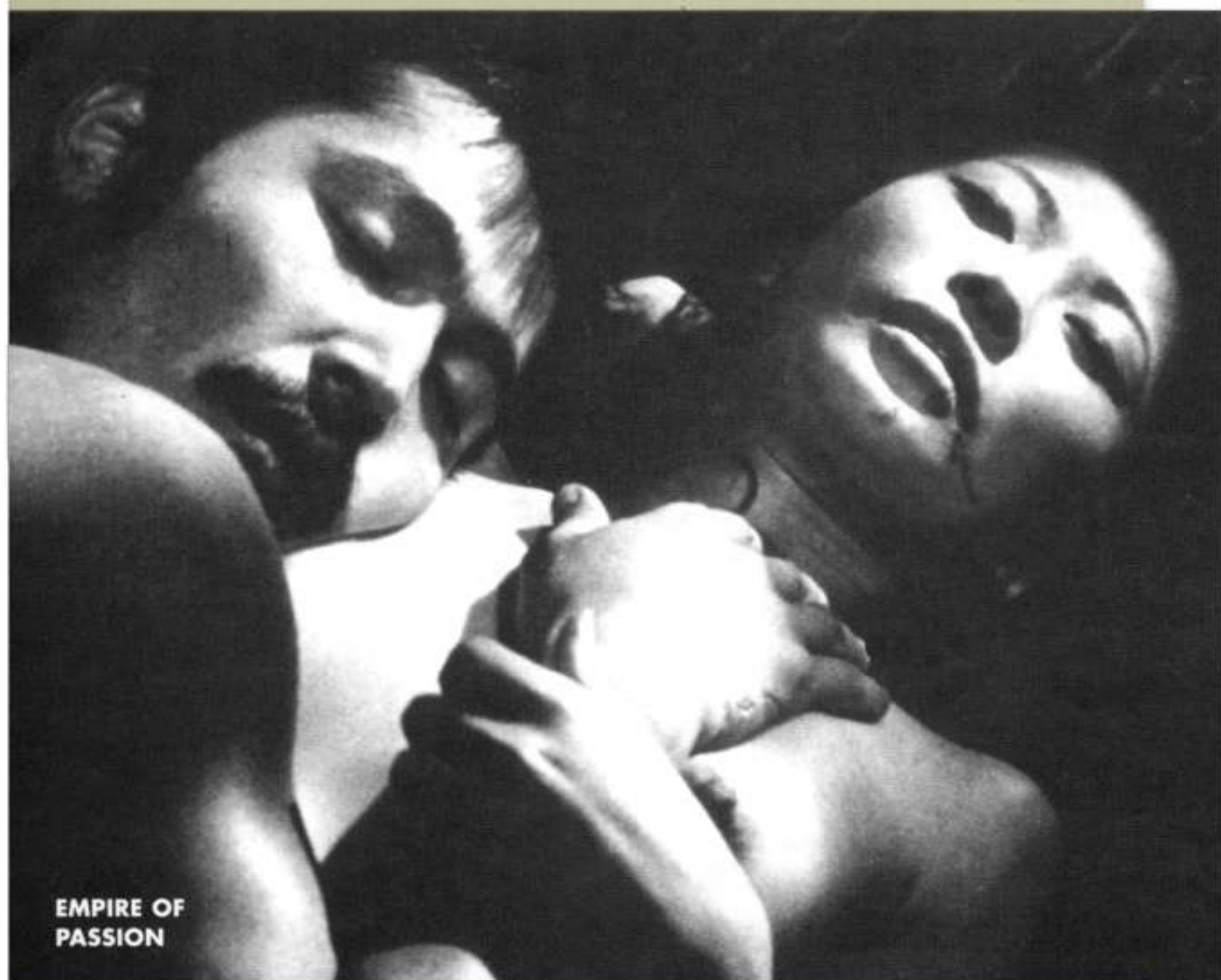
PLEASURES OF THE FLESH



DIARY OF A SHINJUKU THIEF







EMPIRE OF  
PASSION

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### EMPIRE OF PASSION

a.k.a. **IN THE REALM OF PASSION**

(AI NO BOREI)

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan/France 1978 106 minutes

Cast: Takahiro Tamura, Kazuko Yoshiyuki

Positioned as sister and sequel to *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Empire of Passion* similarly deals with the conflict between sexual desire and social strictures, but does so in a more decorous – and, for many critics, more profound – fashion. Visually sumptuous, it won Oshima the Best Director award at Cannes. Set in a rural village during the last days of the nineteenth century, *Passion* centres on the affair between an indolent young soldier recently discharged from the army, and an older woman who is married to the boozing, yam-eating local rickshaw man. In the tradition of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and its ilk, the lovers' crime of passion is punished, mostly by guilt (the old man's ghost returns three years after the murder), and then by society. (As Tony Rayns has pointed out, Oshima's "hatred of the 'authority' figure here reaches heights unseen since *Death by Hanging*." "Beauty of this magnitude is ravishingly universal" (Jay Scott, *The Globe & Mail*). "A finer work than *In the Realm of the Senses*" (Richard Roud).

**Sunday, November 30 3:00 p.m.**



THREE  
RESURRECTED  
DRUNKARDS

## NEW 35MM PRINT!

### THREE RESURRECTED DRUNKARDS

a.k.a. **SINNER IN PARADISE**

(KAETTE KITA YOPPARAI)

Director: Nagisa Oshima

Japan 1968 80 minutes

Cast: Kazuhiko Kato, Osamu Kitayama

Unbelievable fun once you grasp its quirky manner – one reel change alone can cause mass consternation in an unsuspecting audience – *Three Resurrected Drunkards* ranks high among the "buried treasures" of Oshima's career. We're crazy about it, and it was gratifying to see that some of the Oshima authorities are too (see "Essential Oshima" on page 31). *Drunkards* is shot in eye-popping widescreen and pulsing colour – from purple underwear to paisley trousers to hot pink outfits sported at an *onsen* (hot spring) – and scored with crazed insistence (the music veers from James Bond parody to a pop song by lead Kazuhiko Kato, celebrated singer of the Sadistic Mika Band and the tall one of the three lead actors). All the better to serve its *Hard Day's Night* tale of a trio of hapless young guys who have their clothes stolen while cavorting in the sea, are mistaken for Korean stowaways, and become involved with a young woman whose brutal older husband, sporting an eye patch and metal hook, represents Japan's repressive older generation. This is 1968, after all, and amid the hi-jinx, chases, conceptual jokes and flash costume changes (including one into female drag), Oshima injects stinging commentary on the Vietnam War, Japan's war guilt, and prejudice against Koreans, and gives the film a very powerful and moving finale. Reminiscent moment to moment of Tashlin, Godard, Sam Fuller, Buñuel, *Drunkards* makes for raucous satire, brilliantly achieved and surprisingly touching. As one fan recently wrote on Criterion's website: "What a stunning, hilarious, and unforgettable film *Three Resurrected Drunkards* is."

**Monday, December 1 7:00 p.m.**



MAX MON AMOUR



GOHATTO



**MAX MON AMOUR**

Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 France/USA/Japan 1986 98 minutes  
 Cast: Charlotte Rampling, Anthony Higgins

Was there ever a more notorious ménage à trois than that the one in Oshima's crackling comedy of manners, described on the film's poster as "a love triangle of primate proportion:" Anthony Higgins and Charlotte Rampling as a decorous British diplomat and his enigmatic wife, plus the lover she has fallen head over heels for and brings into their upscale Parisian home: a hideous chimpanzee called Max. Buttoned-up but broad minded, the diplomat maintains his composure in the face of his wife's strange transgression but, like the film's audience, cannot control his growing curiosity about just how far she has gone with Max, son amour. With a script by long-time Buñuel collaborator Jean-Claude Carrière and elegant cinematography by New Wave legend Raoul Coutard, the film maintains a dry, matter-of-fact tone – suggesting Buñuel does *Bedtime for Bonzo!* – as it explores the cultural discomfort and tortured politesse that greet Rampling's determination to introduce her simian lover into the couple's social circles. "It's touching, moving, funny," Rampling said about the film, and she certainly has a high old time as the blithe bourgeoisie who returns the repressed in its most primal form to her cultivated world of refinement and ritual. "Directed with scathing restraint . . . a hilarious send-up of the French sex comedy. . . . *Max Mon Amour* is as stunning an investigation of sexual love as, dare I say it, *Rules of the Game*" (Amy Taubin, *The Village Voice*). "Funny and strange" (Chuck Stephens, *Film Comment*).

**Tuesday, December 2 7:00 p.m.**

**GOHATTO**

(TABOO)  
 Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 Japan 2000 101 minutes  
 Cast: Takeshi Kitano, Ryuhei Matsuda

"★★★★ Masterpiece . . . One of the year's ten best" (Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Chicago Reader*). Oshima's first fiction film in fourteen years seems at first glance to be another taboo-breaker (as its title suggests) but, in its gorgeous design and cinematography, actually evokes the golden age of Japanese cinema. A tale of homosexual desire amongst samurai, *Gohatto* is set, spectacularly, in Kyoto in 1865 during the tumultuous last days of the Shogunate. Two new conscripts join the Shinsengumi militia, which is assigned to protect the shoguns from rebellion: Tashiro, a rough, handsome rural warrior, and Kano, a supernally delicate teenager with prominent forelock and rosebud lips. The latter, who elegantly performs an execution as a test of will, soon becomes the object of desire for several Shinsen members, including the macho Tashiro and Captain Hijikata, played by none other than Takeshi Kitano. A complex drama of lust, honour, and revenge culminates in a final battle between the two new recruits, one very much in love with the unattainable other, evocatively staged in a misty marsh in the style of Mizoguchi. A work of great formal beauty, the stylized, dreamy *Gohatto* "distills Oshima's mastery into exquisite, mesmerizing classicism and graceful economy" (Gavin Smith, *The Village Voice*). "One of the ten best of the year" (J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*).

**Saturday, December 6 7:00 p.m. Rated 14A**  
 - Mature Theme, Not Recommended For Children, Violence

**SHIRO AMAKUSA, THE CHRISTIAN REBEL**  
a.k.a. **THE REVOLUTIONARY**

(AMAKUSA SHIRO TOKISADA)  
 Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 Japan 1962 100 minutes  
 Cast: Hashizo Okawa, Satomi Oka

Hired to make a vehicle for hot young star Hashizo Okawa (much as Imamura was commissioned to showcase Frank Nagai in *Nishi Ginza Station*), Oshima settled on a true story, familiar to every Japanese student: that of a 1637 rebellion in which starving Christian peasants, oppressed by landowners and samurai alike, rose up, led by a teenaged boy called Shiro, against the Shogunate. No surprise that Oshima fashioned this historical pageant – a genre seemingly at odds with his sensibility – into a lightly-veiled comment on the contemporary rebellion of Japanese youth against the country's repressive rulers. (The persecution of the Christians is shockingly depicted, so determined is Oshima on emphasizing their martyrdom.) Oshima aims at making a popular historical epic, but his rebellious ways turn *Shiro Amakusa* into a fascinating succession of subversions. "No classes, no tyranny, our ideal," the Christian rebels proclaim, giving voice to Oshima's own beliefs. This would be Oshima's last samurai film before *Gohatto* and he makes the most of it with long takes in CinemaScope, some astonishing tracking shots, scenes daringly lit only by fire, an insistent music score (that sometimes sounds like Schnittke!), and a young actor who storms the screen, even when kept in the background of several compositions. (Veteran Rentaro Mikuni stars as a treacherous artist.) "Blatantly subversive" (J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*).

**Monday, December 8 7:00 p.m.**

**100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA**

Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 UK 1995 52 minutes  
 Please note: Narration in English

If Godard's history of French cinema for the British Film Institute's "Century of Cinema" series was predictably polemical, Oshima's goes it one better by producing a history of Japanese film that is outright perverse in its seeming disdain for many of its giants. (Critics have speculated as to why Mizoguchi, Ozu, and Kurosawa are slighted, given one clip each while Oshima accords his own films four!) Oshima begins with the silent period, and shuttles through the family dramas of the Thirties, the rise of militarism and the effect of WWII on the film industry, the postwar golden age, the arrival of the Japanese New Wave, and the subsequent emergence of independent directors from Terayama and Kitano to Yoshimitsu Morita and Yoichi Sai. Oshima ends with the wish that Japanese cinema "free itself from the spell of Japan and blossom as pure cinema." Fascinating in the context of this retrospective, Oshima's history of his country's cinema has a muted string quartet score by Toru Takemitsu.

Followed by:

**KYOTO, MY MOTHER'S PLACE**

Director: Nagisa Oshima  
 Scotland/Japan 1991 50 minutes

A lovely, revealing portrait of a place that also becomes a self portrait, *Kyoto, My Mother's Place* was commissioned by BBC Scotland and was chosen by Martin Scorsese as "the buried treasure" of Oshima's career. Oshima begins with his mother, showing pictures of her and interviewing her friends to reveal the period in which she lived: "A single woman, a stranger, who arrives in Kyoto 'must obey those in power, look after the neighbours, avoid conflict, decorate beautifully, avoid starting fires, endure all sorts of trials.' Kyoto is made complete, and Oshima's love-hate relationship with Japan's ancient capital emerges. Unlike his previous documentaries about politics and society, *Kyoto, My Mother's Place* is a very private film about Oshima's mother, the Kyoto where she grew up, and about Oshima himself" (Yamagata Documentary Film Festival).

**Tuesday, December 9 7:00 p.m.**

NAGISA  
OSHIMA