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Kaze no naka no kodomo (Children in the wind), Shimizu, Hiroshi, 1937

Kodomo no shiki: Shunka no maki ; Shuto no maki (Four seasons of childhood), Shimizu, Hiroshi, 1939

Arigato-san (Mr. Thank You), Shimizu, Hiroshi, 1936

European audiences had a brief introduction to Shimizu's work in the travelling package *Treasures from a Golden Age* in 1983. The wave of pleasure and surprise which greeted films like *A Star Athlete*, *Mr Thank You* and *Four Seasons of Childhood* made it inevitable that a fuller retrospective should eventually be mounted and NFT audiences will be the first to see it outside Japan.

Hiroshi Shimizu (1903-1966) was something of a maverick in Japanese film history. Although it was claimed he was prone to laziness, he turned out around 150 films between 1924 and 1959 (including, occasionally, ten films a year). Unhappily, most of this

There is nothing inaccessible for the Western viewer in Shimizu's world – he loved his children, his roads, his travelling camera, his gentle, episodic stories – but the apparent air of improvisation hides a film-maker who knew exactly what he wanted. Our tragedy is that his best work has been kept from us for so long. Don't miss it now. – *John Gillett*.

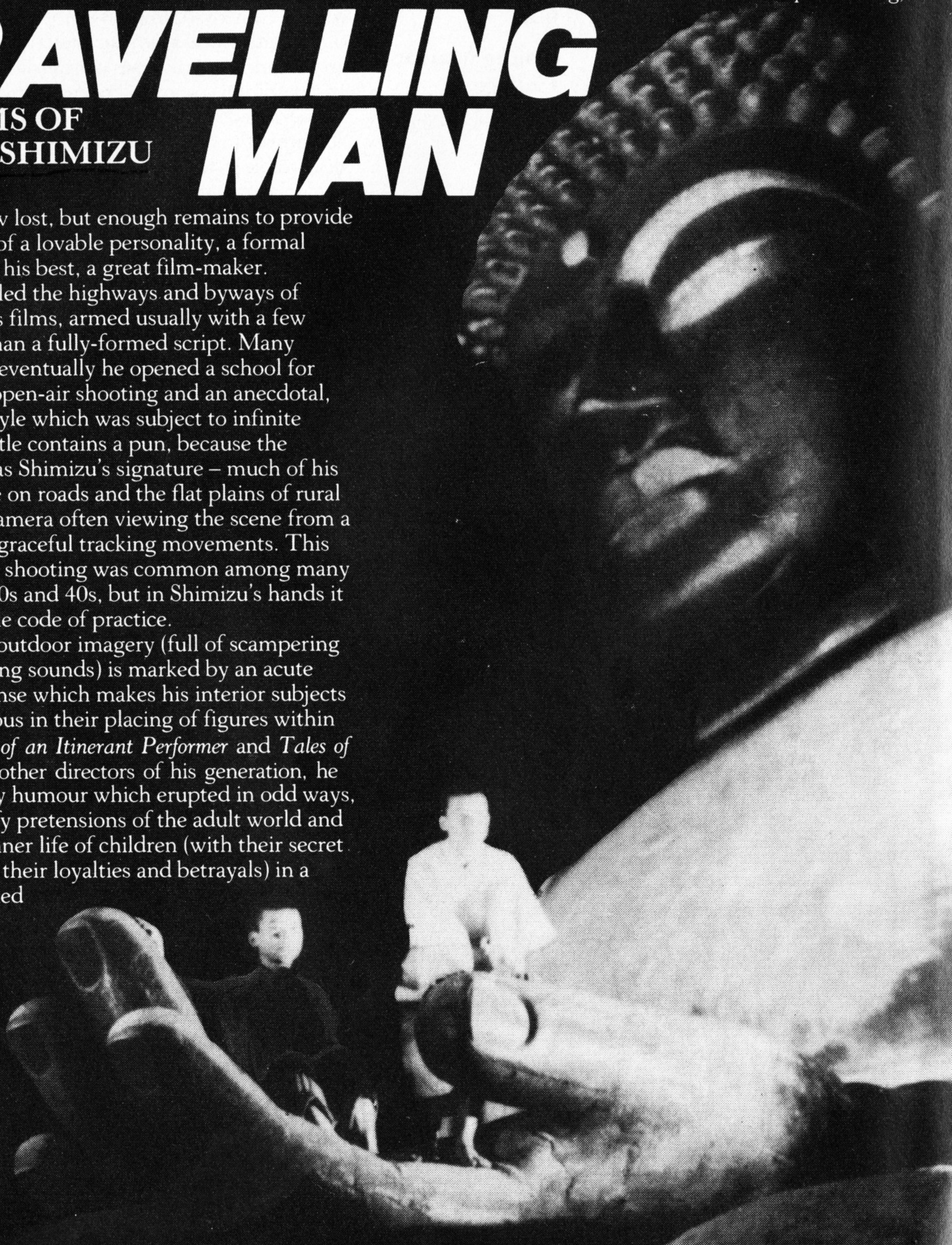
Thanks are due to Mrs Kawakita and Mr A Shimizu of the Japan Film Library Council; Film Centre, Tokyo; the Japan Foundation; Mrs Hiroko Govaers (Paris); and the production companies involved. A Shimizu Seminar will be held in NFT3 at 7 pm on 28 Jan (admission free, no pre-booking).

TRAVELLING THE FILMS OF HIROSHI SHIMIZU MAN

vast output is now lost, but enough remains to provide a partial portrait of a lovable personality, a formal innovator and, at his best, a great film-maker.

Shimizu travelled the highways and byways of Japan to make his films, armed usually with a few sketches rather than a fully-formed script. Many feature children (eventually he opened a school for orphans), much open-air shooting and an anecdotal, almost plotless style which was subject to infinite variations. Our title contains a pun, because the travelling shot was Shimizu's signature – much of his action takes place on roads and the flat plains of rural Japan, with the camera often viewing the scene from a great distance in graceful tracking movements. This kind of distanced shooting was common among many directors of the 30s and 40s, but in Shimizu's hands it became a veritable code of practice.

The beautiful outdoor imagery (full of scampering figures and echoing sounds) is marked by an acute compositional sense which makes his interior subjects equally harmonious in their placing of figures within the frame (*Notes of an Itinerant Performer* and *Tales of Jiro*). Like many other directors of his generation, he also had a sly, dry humour which erupted in odd ways, pricking the stuffy pretensions of the adult world and celebrating the inner life of children (with their secret games and plots, their loyalties and betrayals) in a manner unmatched even by Ozu.



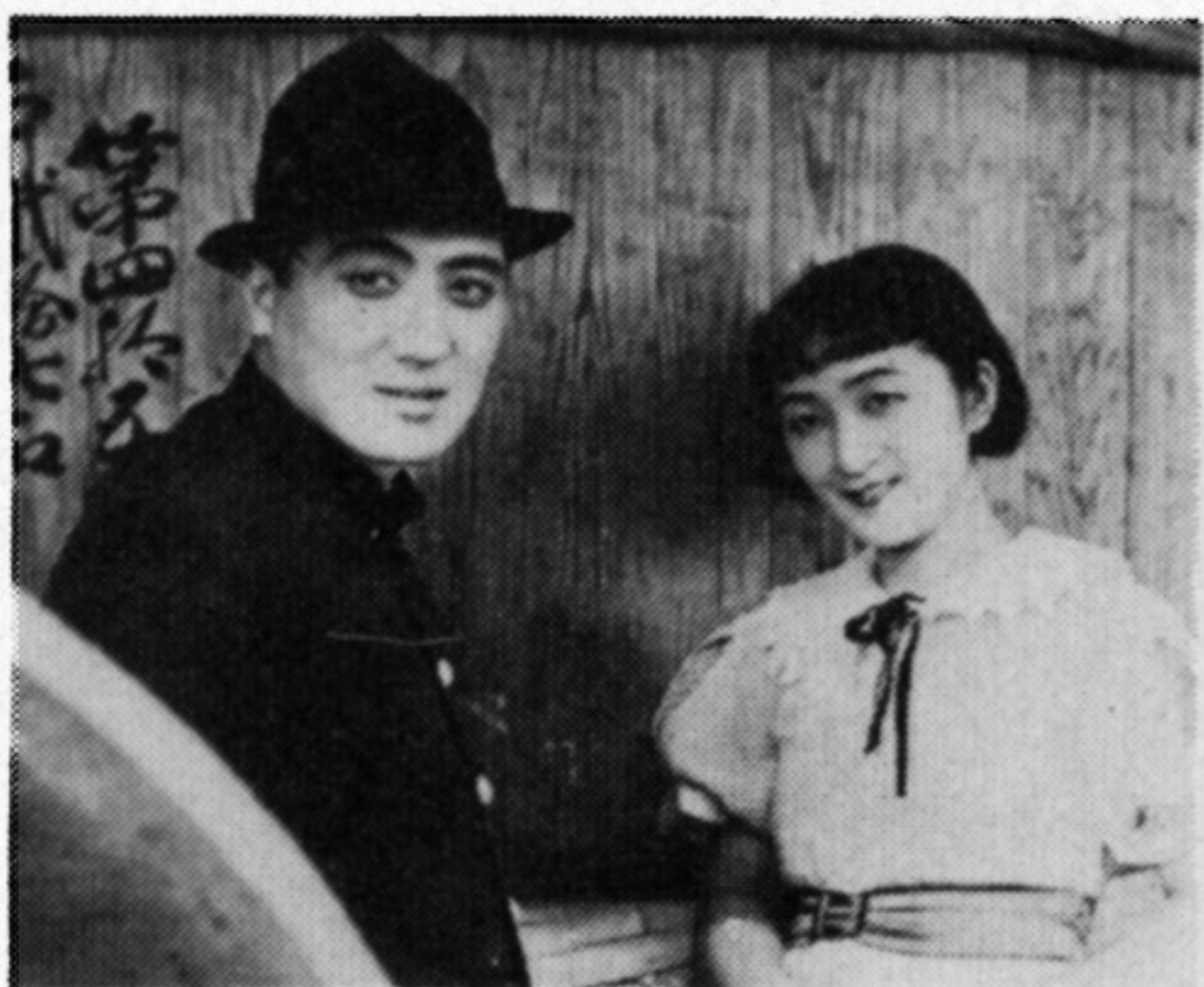


Tue 5 Jan
6.15

Japanese Girls at the Harbour

(Minato no Nihon musume)

We begin with a real discovery from Shimizu's early period. The style was already formed in this neo-romantic study of two young women, a lover, a murder and a final reconciliation. Some liquidly beautiful distant images of streets and waterfront are contrasted with the harsh melodrama of the middle section (some sensational travelling movements here), in which Shimizu introduces several surreal touches, such as characters optically disappearing from the frame. But, as we now know, this kind of free experimentation was quite common in the Japanese 30s. 1933.



Thu 7 Jan
6.15

Young Man at College

(Daigaku no waka-danna)

Here Shimizu seems to be acknowledging Ozu's college comedy-dramas in a story of a student, the son of a wealthy father, whose infatuation with a geisha and a dancing girl causes consternation in the family and within his rugby team. Again made up of little incidents, some dramatic, some knockabout, it owes something to American comedies, especially discernible in the stereotyping of characters. Sharp pacing and some sly satirical encounters give it a lively surface, even though there is little of the familiar tracking. 1933.



Thu 7 Jan
8.30

A Hero of Tokyo

(Tokyo no eiyu)

Unusually plot-filled for Shimizu, this is a family saga extending over many years beginning with a young son who idealises his father. Later, on becoming a journalist, he discovers that his father was involved in a fraudulent gold-mining business. The narrative is mainly concerned with the strain put on family loyalties by social circumstances which lead to poverty and compromise. Shimizu explores this theme with much attention to environment, even though the plotting gets a little clotted and contrived at times. 1935.



Tue 5 Jan
8.15

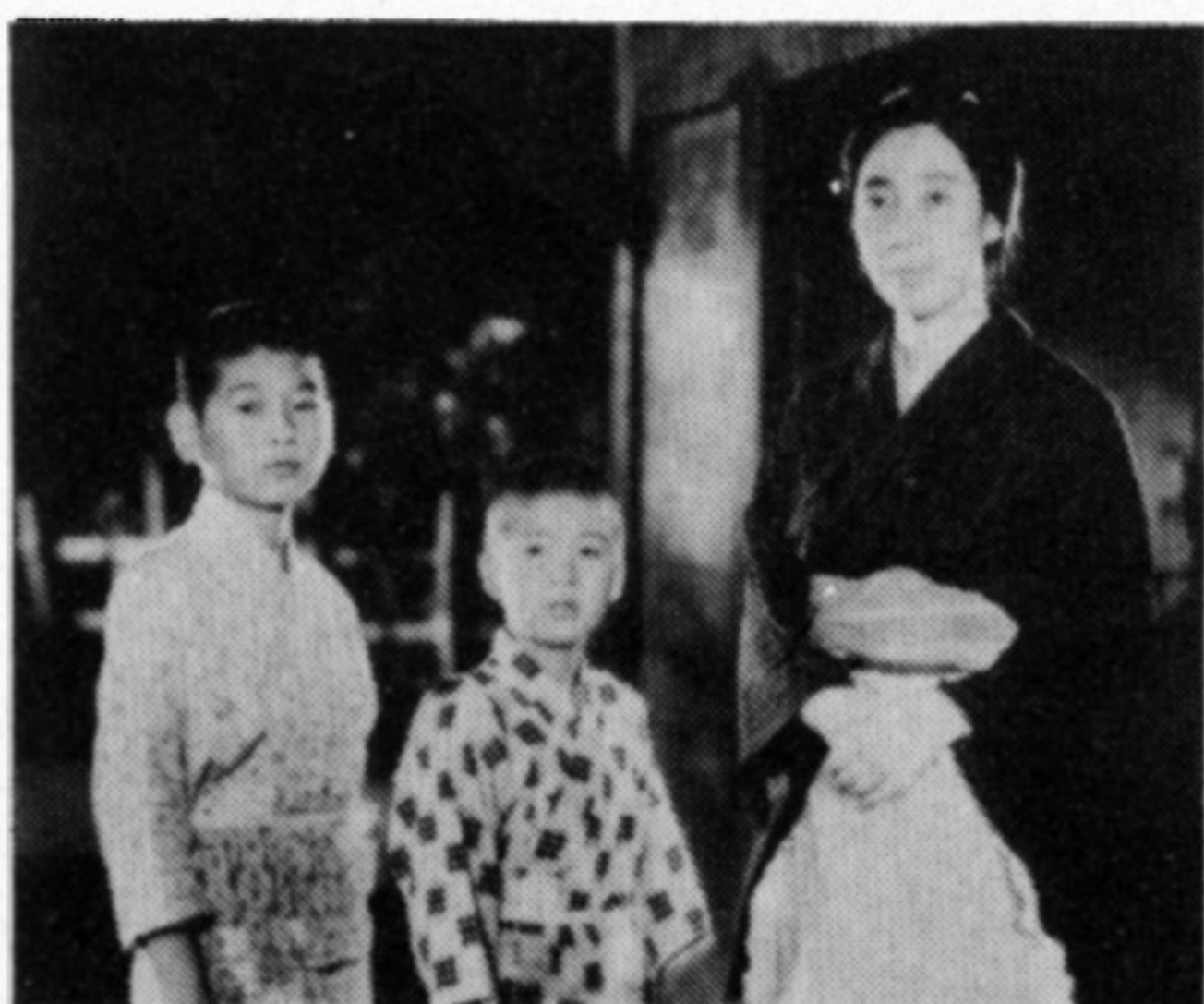
A Star Athlete

(Hanagata senshu)

Mr Thank You

(Arigato-san)

Starting as a study of student life, *Athlete* turns into a series of witty, virtuoso filmic 'ploys', centring on a marvellous road march sequence enclosed within about 40 consecutive travelling shots, capped by a final charge along a river bank. 1937. *Mr Thank You* is the driver of a bus chugging its way through the hills and villages of rural Japan. Shooting entirely on location, Shimizu merrily tracks along the winding paths, accompanied by some favourite American tunes to while away the journey. An irresistible double-bill. 1936. Total 138 mins.



Mon 11 Jan
6.30

Children in the Wind

(Kaze no naka no kodomo)

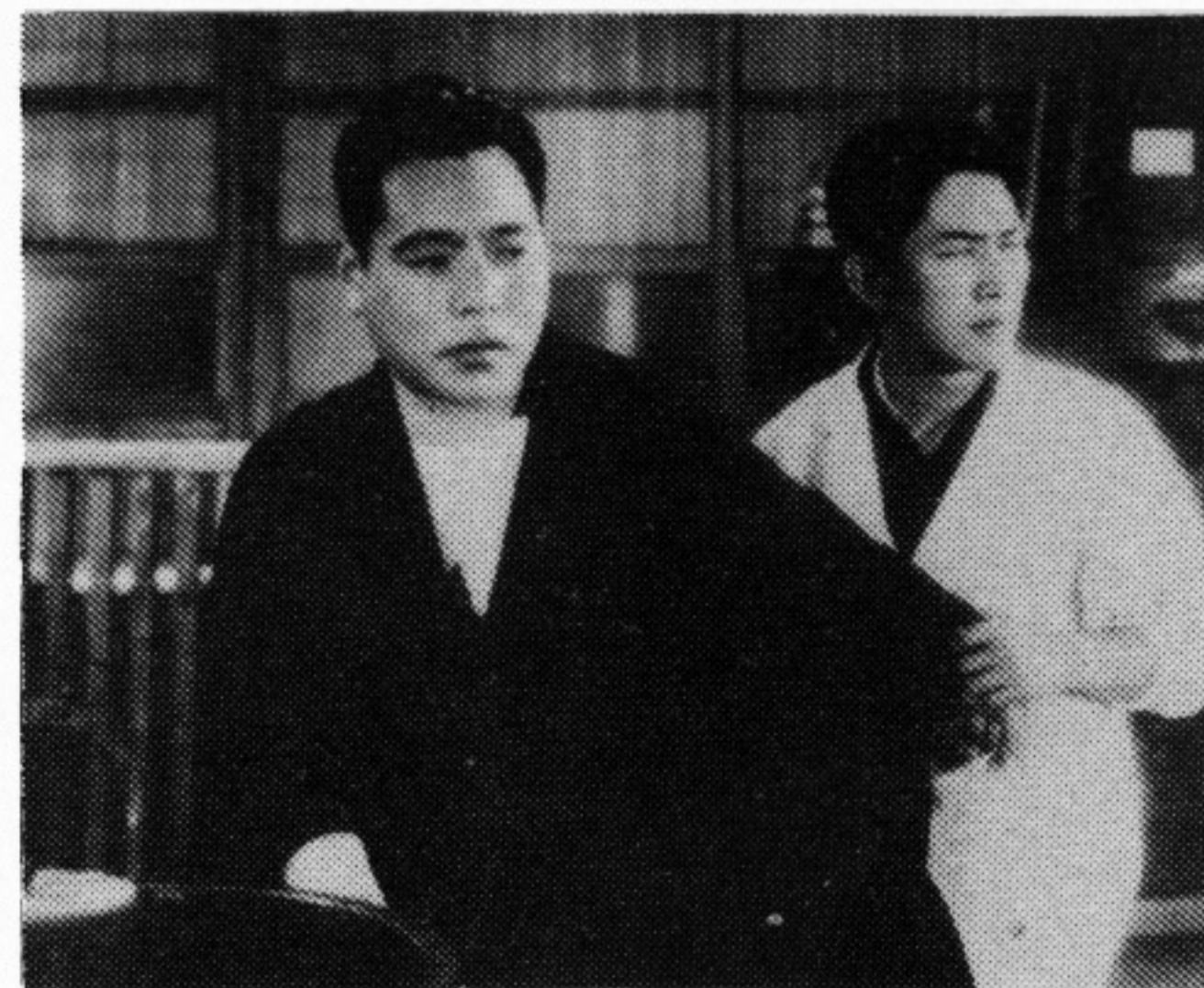
This has a rather more detailed plot than other Shimizu films featuring children. The father of two young boys is arrested for forgery; after many adventures in the country, the boys discover some evidence which will clear him. Again utilising a variety of open and sunny locations, Shimizu creates another set of memorable child studies – these kids are just as human as Ozu's but seem to have greater resilience. 1937. With M Hayama.

Perhaps only a Japanese director like Shimizu would have dared to make a black comedy about two fumbling (but resilient) blind masseurs plying their trade in a hotel. They are very good at defending themselves against ruffians, they become involved in various liaisons and try not to get in everyone's way. The little hotel and surrounding town are neatly evoked and there are some splendid country episodes plus a poignant farewell scene taking in a wonderfully apt forward tracking movement on the road. 1938.

Sun 10 Jan
6.15

The Masseurs and a Woman

(Anma to onna)



An expressive fusion of all of Shimizu's thematic and stylistic preoccupations: distant shooting of figures placed in a living, open-air landscape, a loving regard for children (and their early experiences of adult chicanery), and a superb compositional sense and use of gliding camera movements. The four seasons are conveyed in sequences of limpid, lyrical impressionism, laced with humour and an acute understanding of childhood *mores*. If this film had been exported at the time, it would now be an established classic of World Cinema. 1939. 138 mins.

Sun 10 Jan
8.15

Four Seasons of Childhood

(Kodomo no shiki)



Beginning with a graphic, documentary-like introduction to a reformatory, the film consists of little vignettes showing how the boys and girls cope with their enclosed existence. These incidents crystallise into drama when a water path has to be constructed in the area (in a sequence owing something to the Russians and King Vidor). Its 'inspirational' tone becomes apparent towards the end, but then Shimizu produces a glorious virtuoso sequence as the children bid farewell to the school in a series of opposing travelling shots. 1941.

Tue 19 Jan
6.15

The Introspection Tower

(Mikaeri no to)



Beginning with a wonderful track through a forest, this period (1890s) story concerns a travelling player who discovers a sudden business acumen which helps to revive her patron's failing business. Probably the nearest Shimizu came to making a Mizoguchi-type subject, this features some superbly composed interiors (with much distant shooting in corridors) and a great funeral wake scene. Yaeko Mizutami nicely underplays as the heroine, whose obsequious manner and tiny voice mask a subtle control over men, even as she moves towards self-sacrifice. 1941.

Tue 19 Jan
8.30
Sun 24 Jan
9.00

Notes of an Itinerant Performer

(Utajo oboegaki)



Shimizu here (and elsewhere) forsook his more experimental style for plain, unvarnished storytelling. Set in a spa, it centres on a war veteran who is injured by stepping on a hairpin. Much consternation ensues among the guests as to who is responsible, but a young lady guest eventually confesses. Escaping from an unwanted patron, she gradually finds that life in the spa refreshes and renews her. Touched with a light irony, this features a gentle interplay of characters and moods. 1941. With Kinuyo Tanaka, Chishu Ryu.

Thu 21 Jan
6.15

Ornamental Hairpin

(Kanzashi)





Thu 21 Jan
8.45

Children of the Beehive

(Hachinosu no kodomo-tachi)

A young soldier returning from the war teams up with a gang of vagrant children (all marvellous amateurs) and together they embark on an odyssey through a devastated, post-war countryside. Lovingly filled with all the familiar ingredients, with roads, children and several virtuoso set-pieces like the incredible mountain ascent by two boys, shot in short, vertiginous tracking movements. 1948. Plus *Acorns* (1941, illustrated) a charming short story about a father who encourages his son to climb a tall tree (this time with vertical travellings!)



Sat 23 Jan
6.30

Mr Shosuke Ohara

(Ohara Shosuke-san)

Based on an archetypal Japanese character who eats and drinks away his family fortune, Mr Ohara is a small-time farmer who loses his land in the post-war agriculture reform. He takes leisurely baths, gives away all his assets and, on the day he loses everything, he is burgled . . . Shimizu's affectionate portrait includes a vivid panorama of village intrigue with much witty detail of life within the old house and its environs. Veteran star Denjiro Ohkuchi makes an expansive Mr Ohara, resilient to the end. 1949.

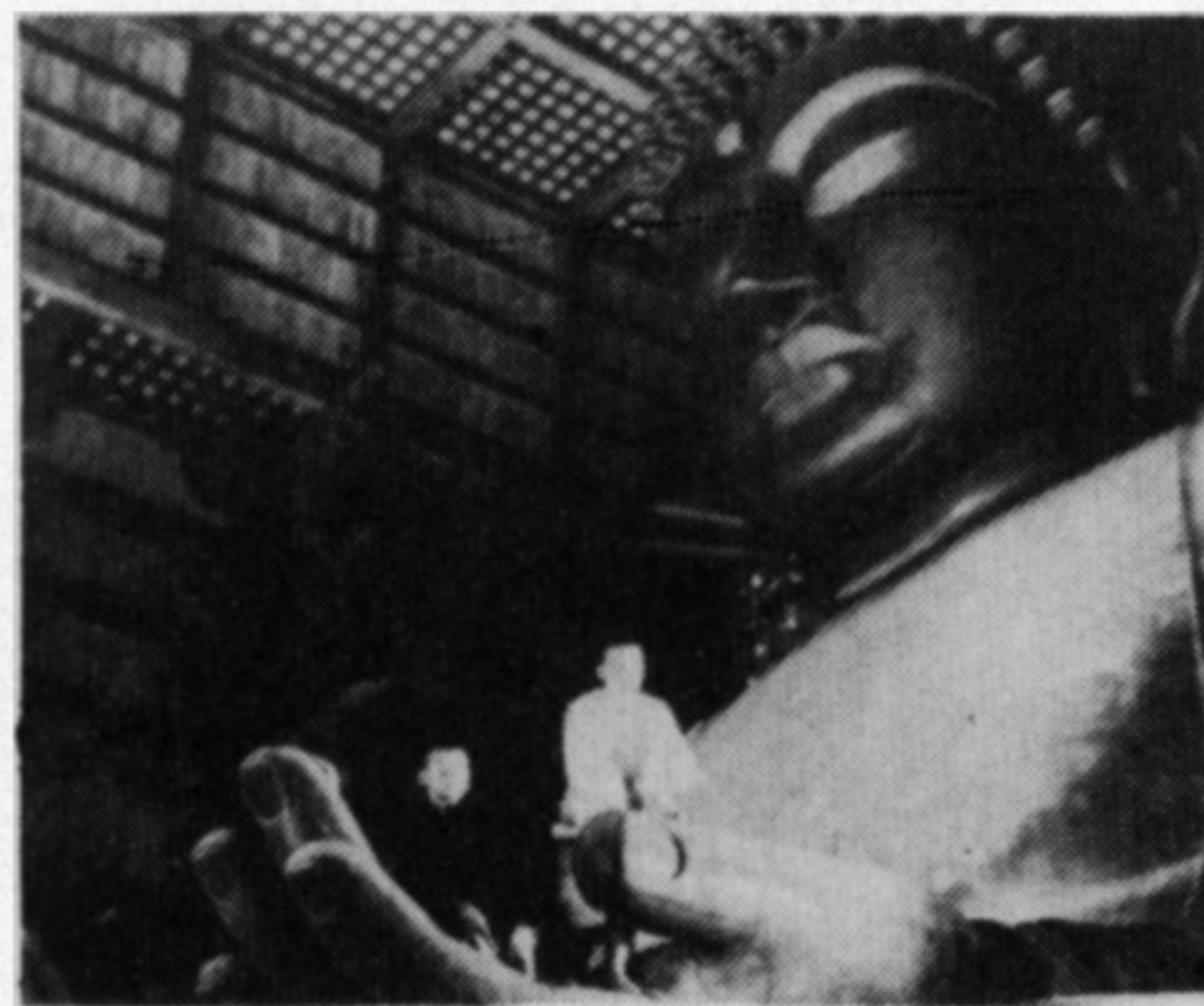


Sat 9 Jan
6.15
Sat 23 Jan
8.30

A Mother's Love

(Bojo)

This is a road movie about a poor mother, with several children from different fathers, who is forced to leave them with relatives and foster-parents. The problem child is a boy whose bed-wetting means that nobody wants him. Here Shimizu recalls several favourite themes – bus rides, country encounters and rainy streets – all enclosed within a vibrant camera rhythm and sense of people passing through landscapes in search of their destiny. Warm, sentimental and funny, with a wonderful final shot of freedom and pleasure. 1950.



Wed 27 Jan
6.15

Children and the Great Buddha

(Daibutsu-sama to kodomo-tachi)

A remarkable example of how Shimizu's vision and style were sustained in the post-war period, this substitutes a series of vignettes for a linear plot. 'It centres on a group of war orphans who serve as tourist guides. The main figure is a precocious boy who acts as mentor for the other children . . . The film is composed predominantly of huge long shots, taking in the giant statues, the towering temples, and with the characters often little more than tiny silhouettes scurrying along the edge of the frame'.—Noël Burch. 1952.



Wed 27 Jan
8.30

The Shiinomi School

(Shiinomi gakuen)

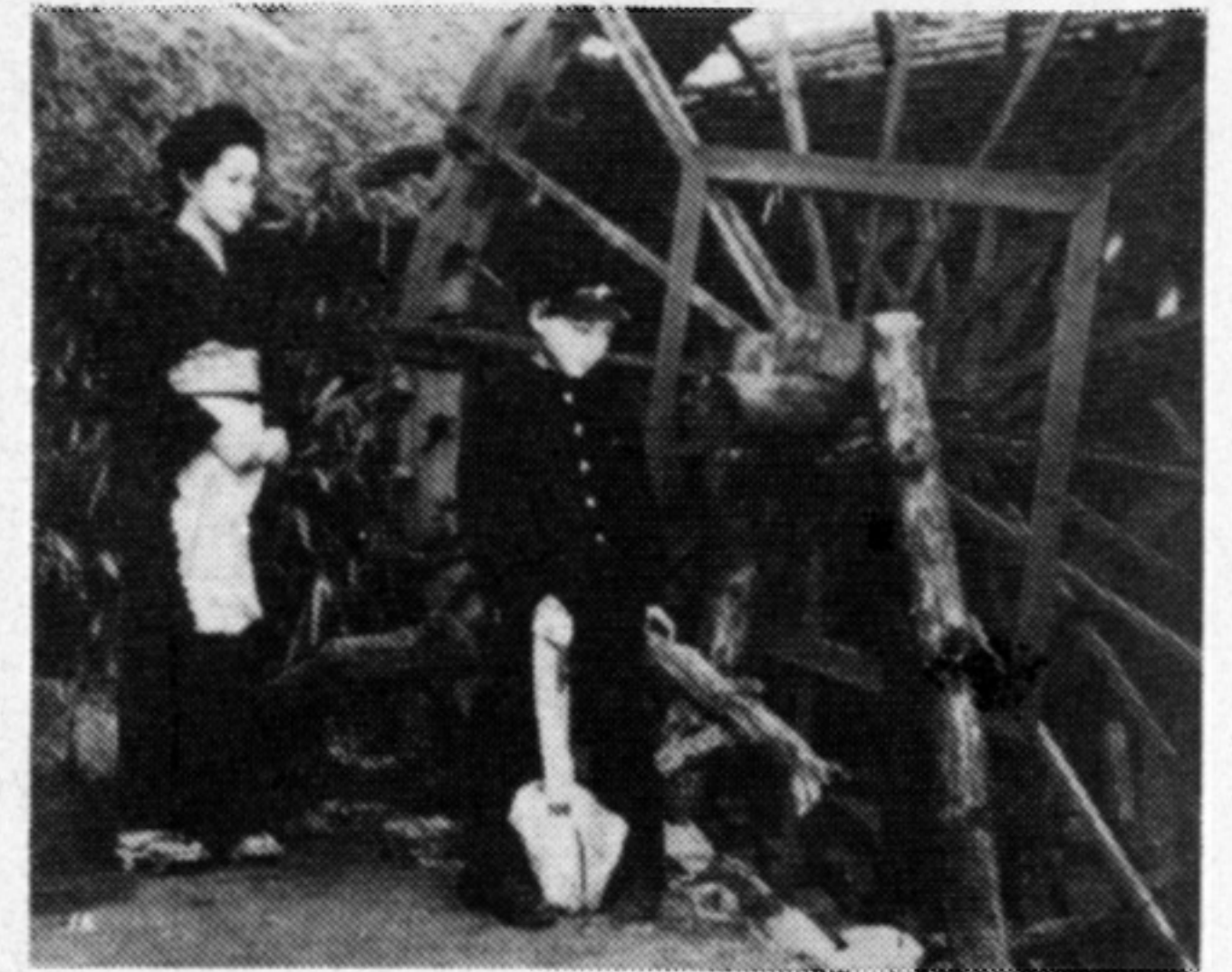
Based on a real school for physically handicapped children – mainly polio victims – the narrative takes in little anecdotes concerning several of the inmates, finally centring on a boy whose parents have abandoned him. Very popular in Japan for its sentimental, human attitudes, it may seem rather determinedly 'inspirational' for Western viewers, but there can be no doubt about the skilful playing of the children. Shimizu shapes and directs his mainly young cast with great sympathy, stressing their pain, resignation and resilience. 1955. With Jukichi Uno.

The only 'Scope film in this Season concerns an awkward, rather sensitive boy's country adventures. Glistening open-air photography places the boy in an idyllic, lyrical setting which slowly darkens as his mother becomes ill. The final sequence is a masterly fusion of emotion and superb filmcraft – the boy's increasing tension, a great tracking shot as he runs for help and a marvellous moment when he rolls over on the mat towards his mother. Although marred by a few commercial concessions, this is another eloquent childhood study. *1955.*

Thu 28 Jan
8.30

Tales of Jiro

(Jiro monogatari)



One of Shimizu's last films is this adaptation of a Kafu Nagai story, a writer known for his tales of love and sex. Set in Asakusa, it concerns the impact on a young couple when the wife's sister comes to live with them, quickly becomes a famous dancer and gets into trouble with men. Unseen in Europe until now, it apparently contains some remarkable photography and design, and stars two of the finest actresses of the time, Machiko Kyo and Chikage Awashima, now well-known to NFT audiences. *1957.*

Sat 30 Jan
4.00

Dancing Girl

(Odoriko)

