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Masahiro Shinoda

Japanese director talks about his new film *MacArthur's Children*

When Japan lost the war, I was fifteen years old. I remember every film I saw for the next ten years. Because they were trying to change the Japanese people's thinking, all the movies were American. So I'm one of MacArthur's children, too.

I was deeply impressed by something I hear from General MacArthur. When he came to Japan, he announced that the cultural level of the Japanese was that of a twelve-year-old. Since I was already fifteen, it pained me greatly that he put me at the twelve-year-old level. That statement may have been the first inspiration for this movie. The boys in this movie are twelve years old.

The first thing we had to do when the war was over was prosecute the war criminals. And it seems that the Japanese couldn't find a positive way to deal with the defeat. Now the Japanese have plenty to eat and live a full life, so maybe at last they can have the leeway to look at the images of their own defeat. I may be a member of the last generation that remembers MacArthur calling us cultural twelve-year-olds. If I had made this film twenty years ago, I might have been stabbed in the back by a right-wing assassin.

I wanted to show how Japanese people expressed their feelings forty years ago. You probably feel that Japanese and all Asian films show excessive emotion. But I wanted to give an accurate representation of how people expressed their emotions at that time. Today's Japanese behave almost exactly like Americans, I think.

The plot does not center too much on the main character, but gives each character in the film his own story. So you can look at this film from the point of view of the Admiral, or if you look at it from the teacher Komako's point of view, you can understand what kind of impact America had on Japanese education.

What I most wanted to do with this film was to shoot a school ground. And I wanted to do it from the vantage point of the corridor that connects the classrooms. After receiving your training in the classroom, you come out and feel the wind or the rain in that corridor. It's a kind of melancholy that you feel in the break before having to go back in for more. Sidney Lumet has a film called *A View From the Bridge*, and maybe that tile expresses the vantage point of the whole film. My film has its vantage point, too, its view "from something." I wanted to look at the history of this era fairly, and I wanted to preserve the purest of feelings. By the time we are in junior high school, we already know some of the art of living. I think that last year of elementary school — the sixth grade — is the purest time of our lives. So I wanted to find that purest moment of our lives in this movie.

— from *American Film*, May 1985



Masahiro Shinoda's *MacArthur's Children*

Fri. thru Thurs., Aug. 9-22

Nitely 7:30, 9:30 p.m. (Sat., Sun. 5:30 also)

***MacArthur's Children* Bell**

An audience favorite in its U.S. premiere at the RIVERTOWN III INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, *MacArthur's Children* is the latest film of master Japanese director Masahiro Shinoda, who won international critical acclaim with *Demon Pond* and *Double Suicide*. Here he tells a story of his own childhood: of the post-war occupation of Japan by American forces, and the simultaneous "invasion" of American culture which challenged (and finally defeated) the traditions and culture of Imperial Japan. The story is told through the eyes of a fifth grade class whose teacher, concerned about the future of her students, teaches them how to play baseball in the hope that learning this most American of all games will help them assimilate into their new world. A masterful, poignant and encompassing history full of humor and color, *MacArthur's Children* represents the first time that the Japanese have presented their account of the hard post-war years; the film has the scope of a Dickens novel, dealing with universal themes of acceptance, love and belonging. *Japan 1985/dir. Masahiro Shinoda color 115 min.*