

The Buffalo Film Seminars

4/19/2000

Angelika & Theater

Ran (Chaos, 1985)

Director Akira Kurosawa
Cinematography Asakazu Nakai, Takao Sa itô, Masaharu Ueda
Film Editor Akira Kurosawa
Script Masato Ide, Akira Kurosawa, and Hideo Oguni,
based on William Shakespeare's *King Lear*
Producers Katsumi Furukawa, Masato Hara, Hisao Kurosawa, Serge Silberman
Music Toru Takemitsu
Production Designers Shinobu Muraki, Yoshiro Muraki
Costume Designer Emi Wada (Academy Award)

Tatsuya Nakadai Lord Hidetora Ichimonji
Akira Terao Taro Takatora Ichimonji
Jinpachi Nezu Jiro Masatora Ichimonji
Daisuke Ryu Saburo Naotora Ichimonji

Mieko Harada Lady Kaede
Yoshiko Miyazaki Lady Sue
Masayuki Yui Tango Hirayama
Peter Kyoami

AKIRA KUROSAWA (23 March 1910, Omori, Tokyo, Japan—6 September 1998, Setagaya, Tokyo) wrote nearly all the films he directed and edited several of them as well. Some of them are: *Ame Agaru* After the Rain 1993, *Yume* Dreams 1990, *Kagemusha* 1980, *Dersu Uzala* 1974, *Dodesukaden* 1970, *Yojinbo* 1961 (remade in 1964 as *Per un pugno di dollari* and in 1996 as *Last Man Standing*), *Kakushi toride no san akunin* 1958 (remade in 1977 as *Star Wars*), *Kumonosu jo* Throne of Blood 1957 (based on *Macbeth*), *Shichinin no samurai* Seven Samurai 1954 (remade as *The Magnificent Seven*), *Ikiru* 1952, and *Rashomon* 1950 (remade as *The Outrage*). Kurosawa received three Academy Awards: best foreign picture for *Rashomon* and *Derseu Uzala*, and a Lifetime Achievement Award (1990). He received a nomination for best director for *Ran*.

TATSUYA NAKADAI (13 December 1930 or 1932, Tokyo) is one of Japan's best-known actors; his international reputation rivals Toshiro Mifune's. He appeared in nearly 70 films, including *Ame agaru* After the Rain 1999, *Kagemusha* 1980 (he played both leading roles), *203 kochi* The Battle of Port Arthur 1980, *Gekido no showashi: Okinawa kessen* The Battle of Okinawa 1971, *Yojinbo* 1961. He had an uncredited role as a passing samurai in *Seven Samurai* 1954. **AKIRA TERAO** (18 May 1947, Kanagawa) has appeared in only six films, three of them with Kurosawa: *Ame agaru* 1999, *Yume* 1990, *Ran* 1985. **JINPACHI NEZU** (1 December 1947, Yamanashi) first appeared in film in *Kagemusha*. Since then he has appeared in seven other films: *Nobody* 1999, *Kuro no tenshi* The Black Angel 1997, *Gennsou Andalusia* 1996, *Gonin The Five* 1995, *Tenshi no harawata: Yoru ga mata koru* Alone in the Night 1994, and *Daijoobu, Mai Furendo* All Right My Friend (1983). **MIEKO HARADA** (26 December 1958, Tokyo) first performed in films in *Seishun no satsujin sha* 1976. She played the snow fairy in *Dreams*. She also appears in *Hatsukoi* 2000, *Ame agaru* After the Rain 1999, *E no naka no boku no mura* Village of Dreams 1995, *Teito monogatari* 1988, *Danpu Wataridori* 1981, and *Daichi no komoriuta* Lullaby of the Earth 1976. **YOSHIKO MIYAZAKI** (11 December 1958, Kumamoto) has appeared in *Ame agaru* 1999, *Otoko wa tsurai yo: Torajiro no kyuuujitsu* Tota-san Takes a Vacation 1990, *Maison Ikkoku* 1986, and *Ran* 1985.

Kurosawa was equally comfortable making films about medieval and modern Japan or films based on Shakespeare, Dostoyevski, Maxim Gorki, and Evan Hunter. He loved American westerns and was conscious of them when he made his early samurai pictures. When someone told him that Sergio Leone had lifted the plot of *Yojinbo* for *A Fistful of Dollars* spaghetti western with Clint Eastwood, Kurasawa told his friend to calm down: he'd lifted the plot himself from Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* (Schlock filmmeister Roger Corman stole the plot back for a sword-fighting science fiction nudie movie, *The Warrior and the Sorceress* in 1984, and in 1995 *Last Man Standing* with Bruce Willis. The story, as they say in the film business, has legs.) For much of his career he was appreciated far more in the West than in Japan. Zhang Yimou (director of *Red Sorghum* and *Raise the Red Lantern*) wrote that Kurosawa was accused "of making films for foreigners' consumption. In the 1950s, *Rashomon* was criticized as exposing Japan's ignorance and backwardness to the outside world—a charge that now seems absurd. In China, I have faced the same scoldings, and I use Kurosawa as a shield."

Kurosawa wrote:

What is cinema? The answer to this question is no easy matter. Long ago the Japanese novelist Shiga Noya presented an essay written by his grandchild as one of the most remarkable prose pieces of his time. He had it published in a literary magazine. It was entitled "My Dog" and ran as follows: "My dog resembles a bear; he also resembles a badger; he also resembles a fox. . . ." It proceeded to enumerate the dog's special characteristics, comparing each one to yet another animal, developing into a full list of the animal kingdom. However, the essay closed with, "But since he's a dog, he most resembles a dog." I remember bursting out laughing when I read this essay, but it makes a serious point. Cinema resembles so many other arts. If cinema has very literary characteristics, it also has theatrical qualities, a philosophical side, attributes of painting and sculpture and music elements. But cinema is, in the final analysis, cinema.

The role of director encompasses the coaching of the actors, the cinematography, the sound recording, the art direction, the music, the editing and the dubbing and sound-mixing. Although these can be thought of as separate occupations, I do not regard them as independent. I see them all melting together under the heading of direction.

With a good script a good director can produce a masterpiece; with the same script a mediocre director can make a passable film. But with a bad script even a good director can't possibly make a good film. For truly cinematic expression, the camera and the microphone must be able to cross both fire and water. That is what makes a real movie. The script must be something that has the power to do this.

Characters in a film have their own existence. The filmmaker has no freedom. If he insists on his authority and is allowed to manipulate his characters like puppets, the film loses its vitality.

I intended to be a painter before I became involved in film. A curious turn of events, however, brought me to cinema, where I began my present career. When I changed careers, I burnt all the pictures that I had painted up until then. I intended to forget painting once and for all. As a well-known Japanese proverb says, "If you chase two rabbits, you may not catch even one." But since becoming a film director, I have found that drawing rough sketches was often a useful means of explaining ideas to my staff...

When I was young and still an art student, I used to dream of publishing a collection of my paintings or having an exhibition in Paris. These dreams were unexpectedly realized with the publication of my pictures for *Kagemusha*. Life is strange indeed. Now the drawings I made for *Ran* have been made into a collection. Inquiries about exhibitions are coming on from all over the world. It seems like a dream.

I cannot help but be fascinated by the fact that when I tried to paint well, I could only produce mediocre pictures. But when I concentrated on delineating the ideas for my films, I unconsciously produced works that people find interesting.

The best book on Kurosawa is Donald Ritchie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd ed., University of California Press, 1999. The original script and Kurosawa's gorgeous story boards are available in *Ran*, Shambhala, 1986. Kurosawa once wrote that he didn't "really like talking about my films. Everything I want to say is in the film itself; for me to say anything more is, as the proverb goes, like 'drawing legs on a picture of a snake.'" After Jean Renoir, one of his two favorite filmmakers (the other was John Ford) wrote an autobiography, Kurosawa decided it was okay to write about the life that produced the films. His *Something Like an Autobiography* (Knopf, 1982, 1978) is the happy result. Two good web sites devoted to Kurosawa are [//members.aol.com/ronintom/Kurosawa.htm](http://members.aol.com/ronintom/Kurosawa.htm) and [//www2.tky.3web.ne.jp/~adk/kurosawa/AKpage.html](http://www2.tky.3web.ne.jp/~adk/kurosawa/AKpage.html).

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-email Diane Christian: engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu

-for the series schedule, links and updates: www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~bjackson/movies.html

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**The Buffalo Film Seminars will resume Wednesday August 30 with a series of 14 more great films.
We hope to see you then. Have a good summer.**