

Two Masters of Japanese Cinema: Kaneto Shindo & Kozaburo Yoshimura at BFI Southbank in June and July 2012



April 2012 marks the 100th birthday of **Kaneto Shindo**, one of the leading talents in post-war Japanese film. Throughout June and July **BFI Southbank** will host a two-part retrospective which pays tribute both to Shindo himself and to his friend, colleague and contemporary **Kozaburo Yoshimura** (1911-2000), one of the neglected masters of classical Japanese film.

June's programme focuses primarily on the 1950s, the period when their collaboration was closest. Yoshimura and Shindo's work together constitute a revealing social history and include some of Japanese cinema's most powerful and moving films. Beginning with a **Season Introduction** on Wed 6 June by the season's curator **Alexander Jacoby** (Lecturer in Japanese Studies at Oxford Brookes University), Jacoby will explore the collaboration between Shindo and Yoshimura situating their work in the social, political and cinematic context of a rapidly changing post-war Japan.

Shindo is a versatile director, skilled screenwriter and pioneer of independent production who has astonishingly remained active into very recent years, releasing his latest film, **Postcard**, at the age of 98. Under contract to Shochiku studios as respectively director and screenwriter, Yoshimura and Shindo initiated a fruitful collaboration with **The Ball at the Anjo House** (1947), a Chekhovian study of the decline of the pre-war aristocracy, which scooped the top prize in the critics' poll conducted that year by the leading Japanese film magazine, Kinema Junpo. But both men found their creativity inhibited at Shochiku, and by the early 1950s had established their own independent production company, Kindai Eiga Kyokai. Here, with Yoshimura often serving as his producer, Shindo began to direct a sequence of politically conscious films, tackling issues ranging from the

atomic bomb in **Children of Hiroshima** (1952) to urban poverty in **The Gutter** (1954).

Meanwhile, at another major studio, Daiei, Yoshimura achieved a new reputation as the director of a sequence of outstanding films about women in the changing post-war Japan, including such little-known gems as **Clothes of Deception** (1951) and **Sisters of Nishijin** (1952), which earned him comparison with **Mizoguchi** for his sensitive exploration of female experience. Working from Shindo's carefully constructed scripts, he created some of the Japanese studio system's most revealing accounts of social change in a rapidly modernising and Westernising Japan.

The collaboration between Kozaburo Yoshimura and Kaneto Shindo continued into the 1960s, with Shindo continuing to script many of Yoshimura's films. Their work straddled the studio system and independent production, with Yoshimura working primarily within one of the major companies, at Daiei, while Shindo directed for his own independent outfit, Kindai Eiga Kyokai.

Part Two of the season in July concentrates on Yoshimura's output from his later years at Daiei. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he continued to explore his traditional theme of female experience in a changing Japan. While Shindo scripted many of his films, he also worked with other writers, including **Yoshikata Yoda**, whose script for **Osaka Story** had been left unrealised by **Kenji Mizoguchi** at his death. After leaving Daiei, Yoshimura made some films independently, including his final work, **The Tattered Banner** (1974). Though he lived for another quarter of a century, no more films were to follow. He died in 2000 in Kyoto, the city that had provided inspiration for much of his finest work.

Shindo's career as director and writer, by contrast, has extended to the present day. But from the 1960s, he shifted focus from the realism and explicit political commentary of his earlier work towards a greater stylisation. With **Onibaba** and **Kuroneko**, still arguably his best known films in the West, he produced two of the seminal works of Japanese horror, and revealed a new concern with sexual themes. This interest in the erotic is one of the central strands of Shindo's later work, while other recurring themes include a focus on the lives of artists and, naturally enough for a director still active in his 80s and 90s, a concern with the ageing process. All these strands are represented in the selection of films screened during July, which span the period stretching from the 1960s to the 21st century – into which Shindo has survived to become one of the last living links to the Golden Age of Japanese film.

Notes to Editors:

Alexander Jacoby acknowledges the curatorial co-operation of Johan Nordström in the planning of this season, which is co-organised by the Japan Foundation.

Films in the season: JUNE 2012

Kozaburo Yoshimura & Kaneto Shindo: Season Introduction

In 1947, Kozaburo Yoshimura directed *The Ball at the Anjo House* from a Kaneto Shindo script. Over the next 25 years, Shindo would script most of Yoshimura's major films, and the two men together founded an independent production company, Kindai Eiga Kyokai, that produced most of Shindo's own work as director. This illustrated introduction by season curator Alexander Jacoby explores the collaboration between the two men, situating their work in the social, political and cinematic context of a rapidly changing postwar Japan.

Tickets £5

Wed 6 June 18:20 NFT2

Warm Current

Danryu

Japan 1939. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Shin Saburi, Mitsuko Mito, Shin Tokudaiji, Mieko Takamine. 124min. EST

Predating his collaboration with Shindo by nearly a decade, this understated melodrama with a medical setting brought Yoshimura commercial success and some critical notice, with the film ranking seventh in the Kinema Junpo Top Ten for that year. Praised by New Wave director Kazuo Kuroki for its 'modern and fresh' approach, this characteristic example of the pre-war Shochiku women's picture is both touchingly acted and imaginatively filmed.

Fri 1 June 20:40 NFT2

Sun 10 June 15:15 NFT2

The Ball at the Anjo House

Anjo-ke no butokai

Japan 1947. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Osamu Takizawa, Masayuki Mori, Setsuko Hara, Yumeko Aizome. 89min. EST

Arguably Yoshimura's most famous, though not his most typical, work, this hauntingly Chekhovian account of the decline of the pre-war aristocracy displays both visual flair and dramatic intensity. With inventive camerawork and marvellous performances from Setsuko Hara as the vibrant daughter of the house and Masayuki Mori in an atypical 'angry young man' role, the film is both a moving drama and an intelligent study of post-war Japan in transition.

*Introduction by Alexander Jacoby

Sat 2 June 16:00 NFT2*

Tue 12 June 20:40 NFT2

Clothes of Deception

Itsuwareru seiso

Japan 1951. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Machiko Kyo, Yasuko Fujita, Keiju Kobayashi. 103min. EST

One of Yoshimura's masterpieces, this searing account of female experience in post-war Kyoto dramatises the conflict between old and new through the experiences of two sisters, one a geisha in the Gion district, the other employed by the tourist board. Machiko Kyo gives a superb lead performance. 'Praised for its exact and realistic creation of the very special Gion atmosphere, it made Yoshimura something of a rival to Mizoguchi, and established his position as a specialist in films about women.' (Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie).

*Introduction by Alexander Jacoby

Sun 3 June 18:15 NFT2

Wed 6 June 20:40 NFT2*

The Tale of Genji
Genji monogatari

Japan 1951. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Kazuo Hasegawa, Denjiro Okochi, Michiyo Kogure, Mitsuko Mito, Machiko Kyo, Nobuko Otowa. 124min. EST

This prestigious adaptation of the classic 11th-century prose narrative by Lady Murasaki, often considered the world's first true novel, was made to celebrate Daiei's tenth anniversary. Supervised by respected novelist Junichiro Tanizaki, who had translated the text into modern Japanese, it produces a fitting hero for the post-war world in Kazuo Hasegawa (*An Actor's Revenge*). Yoshimura's visual style is at its most decorative as he recreates the courtly life of ancient Kyoto.

Mon 4 June 15:40 NFT2

Sun 10 June 20:30 NFT2

Sisters of Nishijin

Nishijin no shimai

Japan 1952. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Yumiko Miyagino, Mitsuko Miura, Yuko Tsumura, Kinuyo Tanaka, Jukichi Uno. 115min. EST

After their father's suicide, a family of weavers contemplates an uncertain future. Set in the Nishijin textile-making district of Kyoto, this subtle drama is another of Yoshimura's elegant chronicles of female experience set against the backdrop of social change. Yoshimura gathers a superb ensemble cast, including Mizoguchi's favourite actress, Kinuyo Tanaka, in this elegiac study of traditional crafts in decline in the face of Japan's post-war modernisation.

Fri 8 June 18:20 NFT2

Sun 17 June 20:40 NFT2

Cape Ashizuri

Ashizuri misaki

Japan 1954. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Keiko Tsushima, Isao Kimura, Sumiko Hidaka. 108min. EST

Screenwriter Shindo's influence is clear in this work, one of Yoshimura's most explicitly political films. Described by Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie as 'a gentle but forceful protest against excessive injustice', this stark account of the sufferings of left-wing students in the pre-war era was independently produced for their Kindai Eiga Kyokai company. Stark black-and-white imagery eloquently conveys the bleak mood of this account of life under militarism.

Sun 17 June 18:20 NFT2

Tue 19 June 20:40 NFT3

Children of Hiroshima

Genbaku no ko

Japan 1952. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Nobuko Otowa, Osamu Takizawa, Jukichi Uno. 97min. EST

A female teacher returns to Hiroshima after the war in search of her former pupils. Himself a native of Hiroshima, Shindo was well placed to direct this heartfelt account of the atomic bombing of that city in the last days of World War II. The Japan Teachers Union, who had commissioned the film, protested that Shindo's sentimental approach had 'destroyed [the story's] political orientation', but it remains an intensely moving film, and the Soviet-style montage of the bombing itself is extraordinary.

*Introduction by Alexander Jacoby

Tue 5 June 20:50 NFT2*

Sat 16 June 18:20 NFT2

**Epitome
Shukuzu**

Japan 1953. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Nobuko Otowa, Sumiko Hidaka, So Yamamura, Jukichi Uno. 133min. EST

This dark geisha story, which evokes the themes, though not the style, of Shindo's mentor Kenji Mizoguchi, might be considered a hard-edged Tokyo riposte to Yoshimura's more genteel stories of female experience in Kyoto. Focusing on a girl forced by poverty to become a geisha, Shindo crafts what Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie called 'a general exposé of the world of the geisha, insisting on the sordidness behind the glamorous facade.'

Sat 9 June 20:20 NFT2

Thu 28 June 18:00 NFT2

**The Gutter
Dobu**

Japan 1954. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Nobuko Otowa, Jukichi Uno, So Yamamura. 111min. EST

Three years before Kurosawa made *The Lower Depths*, Shindo visited similar territory with this bleak account of the underbelly of Japanese society, focusing on the tragic experiences of a prostitute (an intense and haunting performance by his wife and regular star, Nobuko Otowa). The film displayed the trenchant social criticism that was characteristic of Shindo's early work, and its dramatic visual flair confirmed, in Anderson and Richie's words, 'that Shindo can hold his own as one of Japan's best pictorialists.'

Fri 15 June 18:20 NFT2

Sat 16 June 20:40 NFT2

**Lucky Dragon No 5
Daigo fukuryu maru**

Japan 1959. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Jukichi Uno, Nobuko Otowa, Eitaro Ozawa. 115min. EST

In 1954, in the aftermath of US nuclear tests on Bikini Atoll, a crew of tuna fisherman suffered from radioactive contamination. This event, which became a cause célèbre in Japan, forms the basis of Shindo's sombre film. Described by leading Japanese film critic Tadao Sato as 'a powerful work devoid of romantic embellishment and flashy sensationalism', it's also, in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear crisis triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, a frighteningly topical one.

Sat 23 June 20:45 NFT3

Fri 29 June 18:20 NFT2

**The Island
aka The Naked Island
Hadaka no shima**

Japan 1960. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Nobuko Otowa, Taiji Tonoyama, Shinji Tanaka. 92min

One of Shindo's most famous films, this stark account of peasant life boldly dispenses with spoken dialogue, narrating its story entirely through imagery and sound. Hikaru Hayashi's plaintive yet mellow music complements the harsh yet beautiful imagery of Japan's Inland Sea. The film scooped the Grand Prize at the 1961 Moscow Film Festival, while New York Times film critic Bosley Crowther praised the film's 'sense of the pride and pathos in primitive life.'

Sun 24 June 18:15 NFT2

Fri 29 June 20:40 NFT2

Mother

Haha

Japan 1963. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Nobuko Otowa, Haruko Sugimura, Taiji Tanoyama. 100min. EST

Rarely screened in the West, this film is a key work of Shindo's, and one of the last films from the early, more explicitly political phase of the director's career. Shindo's characteristic concern with the legacy of the Hiroshima bombing is visible in this account of a hibakusha (A-bomb survivor), played by Shindo's wife and regular star Nobuko Otowa, and her determination to become a mother.

Wed 28 June 20:50 NFT2

Sat 30 June 18:10 NFT2

Films in the season: JULY 2012

Kozaburo Yoshimura

Night River aka Undercurrent

Yoru no kawa

Japan 1956. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Fujiko Yamamoto, Ken Uehara, Keizo Kawasaki, Michiko Ai. 104min. EST

Yoshimura continued his sequence of films set in Japan's ancient capital, Kyoto, with this depiction of 'a new type of Kyoto woman' (Hitoaki Kono), which vividly explores the postwar clash between tradition and modernity through the story of a kimono designer's affair with a married scientist. One of Yoshimura's most moving films, it's also one of his most beautiful: his first film in colour, it fully exploited the new medium, especially in its striking use of red.

Sun 1 July 18:20 NFT2

Mon 2 July 20:40 NFT2

Osaka Story

Osaka monogatari

Japan 1957. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Raizo Ichikawa, Kyoko Kagawa, Shintaro Katsu, Michiko Ono. 97min. EST

Yoshimura was widely viewed as an heir to Kenji Mizoguchi, and, when Mizoguchi died, Yoshimura replaced him as director of his final project: a tragicomic account of a farmer turned-merchant and his destructive obsession with wealth. One may speculate as to what Mizoguchi might have made of the material, but Yoshimura's version remains a remarkable film, 'filled with excellent satire on the inception of capitalism' (Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie).

Sat 7 July 16:00 NFT2

Wed 18 July 20:40 NFT2

Night Butterflies

Yoru no cho

Japan 1957. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Machiko Kyo, Fujiko Yamamoto, Eiji Funakoshi, So Yamamura, Eitaro Ozawa, Hiroshi Akutagawa. 90min. EST

A film, write Anderson and Richie, 'which with utter seriousness (not entirely devoid of satiric touches) presents the sad lives of fashionable Ginza bar 'madames'. A Tokyo counterpart to the themes of Yoshimura's accounts of female experience in Kyoto, it is set in the capital's wealthy Ginza district, much frequented by politicians and businessman. Yoshimura gathers a superb cast led by his frequent star, Machiko Kyo.

Sun 1 July 20:40 NFT2

Tue 3 July 20:40 NFT2

In Revolt aka On this Earth

Chijo

Japan 1957. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Hiroshi Kawaguchi, Hitomi Nozoe, Kinuyo Tanaka, Kyoko Kagawa, Shin Saburi. 98min. EST

Set in the Taisho period (1912-26), this little-known film tells the story of a boy who finds a new political awareness after his mother is forced to take a job in a geisha house to pay his tuition fees. Shindo's script highlights themes of class and labour issues, making this one of Yoshimura's most explicitly political films. The Kinema Junpo reviewer thought the material ideally suited for the director.

Sun 8 July 20:30 NFT3

Wed 18 July 18:10 NFT3

A Woman's Uphill Slope

Onna no saka

Japan 1960. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Mariko Okada, Keiji Sada, Nobuko Otowa. 107min. EST

Yoshimura again explored his perennial theme of female experience in Kyoto with this moving drama, made not for Daiei but for Shochiku. Mariko Okada gives a superb performance as the modern young woman who inherits a traditional sweet-making business in the old capital. Intelligently scripted by Shindo and beautifully filmed in colour against the backdrop of a changing city, this is one of its director's most affirmative and most underrated films.

Mon 16 July 18:20 NFT2

Sun 22 July 20:40 NFT2

Bamboo Doll of Echizen

Echizen take ningyo

Japan 1963. Dir Kozaburo Yoshimura. With Ayako Wakao, Junichiro Yamashita, Tamao Nakamura. 103min. EST

Based on a novel by Tsutomu Mizukami, a celebrated writer whose fictions also furnished plots for directors from Tadashi Imai to Masahiro Shinoda, this haunting melodrama focuses on a young bamboo worker who takes his father's prostitute as his wife. Though uncharacteristically cold for Yoshimura, the film makes stunning use of its stark black and white cinematography, and boasts an extraordinary lead performance from Ayako Wakao.

Thu 26 July 18:20 NFT2

Mon 30 July 20:40 NFT2

Kaneto Shindo

Onibaba

Japan 1964. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Nobuko Otowa, Jitsuko Yoshimura, Kei Sato. 103min. EST

Arguably his most famous work in the West, Shindo's first horror film blends motifs from Japanese legend, Noh theatre and expressionism in a visually stunning pot-pourri. The desolate marshland locations, Kiyomi Kuroda's stunning black-and-white cinematography, and Hikaru Hayashi's thunderous percussion score combine to give it an extraordinary dramatic power. The film's supernatural themes seem a departure in Shindo's work, but the director's barbed analysis of class and sexuality is all his own.

Wed 4 July 20:30 NFT3

Tue 10 July 18:10 NFT3

Kuroneko

Yabu no naka no kuroneko

Japan 1968. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Kichiemon Nakamura, Nobuko Otowa, Kiako Taichi, Kei Sato. 99min. EST

After a peasant woman and her daughter-in-law are raped and murdered by a group of warriors, samurai begin to die mysteriously... Shindo's second horror film, based on Japanese legend, again uses the supernatural as a means of exploring class tensions. With another haunting score from Hikaru Hayashi and atmospheric monochrome photography from Kiyomi Kuroda, it's obviously a companion piece to *Onibaba*, but subtly different in tone, 'less erotic and feverish but more romantic and tragic' (Doug Cummings).

Fri 6 July 18:20 NFT2

Fri 13 July 20:40 NFT2

The Life of Chikuzan

Chikuzan hitori tabi

Japan 1977. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Ryuzo Hayashi, Nobuko Otowa, Mitsuko Baisho, Chikuzan Takahashi. 119min. EST

Shindo's biopic of Chikuzan Takahashi (1910-1998), a blind shamisen player from the north of Japan who became a cult figure in later life, blends documentary footage of Chikuzan in concert in the 1970s with dramatised sequences depicting his childhood and youth. Tony Rayns writes that Shindo 'doesn't shy away from the harshness of Chikuzan's stoicism or lapse into sentimentality', while Donald Richie calls it 'an underrated film, one of the director's best'.

Sat 7 July 18:20 NFT2

Fri 27 July 20:40 NFT2

The Strange Story of Oyuki

Bokuto kidan

Japan 1992. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Masahiko Tsugawa, Yuki Sumida, Nobuko Otowa. 116min. EST

A long-cherished project for Shindo, this film is a biopic of author and flaneur Nagai Kafu (1879-1959), whose writings charted the life and activity of Tokyo's pleasure quarters in the first half of the 20th century. The film focuses on Kafu's intense relationship with a prostitute, Oyuki. 'Both melancholy and fiercely sensual,' writes Tod Booth, 'The Strange Story of Oyuki is an intimate, passionate summation of Shindo's frequent explorations of eroticism in film'.

Sun 15 July 15:50 NFT3

Tue 31 July 20:30 NFT3

The Last Note

Gogo no yuigonjo

Japan 1995. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Haruko Sugimura, Nobuko Otowa, Hideo Kanze. 110min. EST

This tragi-comic account of the trials of old age is one of Shindo's best late works. The director gathered an outstanding cast of veterans, including his wife and regular star Nobuko Otowa, who died days after shooting was completed. Himself in his eighties, Shindo obviously felt close to his theme; the film, Emmanuel Levy comments, 'defies the sentimentality that characterises American movies about the elderly', allowing the characters 'to face old age – and death – with remarkable resilience and dignity'.

Wed 25 July 18:20 NFT2

Sat 28 July 20:40 NFT2

The Owl

Fukuro

Japan 2003. Dir Kaneto Shindo. With Shinobu Otake, Ayumi Ito. 119min. EST

In his nineties, Shindo produced this black comic riff on the themes of Onibaba in this story of a mother and daughter who rob and murder a sequence of male victims. The film won praise for its dark wit, fine performances, and for another memorable score from Shindo's regular composer Hikaru Hayashi. Derek Elley called it 'a delightful rondo of sex and death, underpinned by a tart commentary on Japan's post-war aspirations'.

Sat 28 July 18:20 NFT2

Sun 29 July 20:40 NFT2

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