

THE HIPPODROME FESTIVAL OF SILENT CINEMA

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Wednesday 13th March – Sunday 17th March 2013

Box office: 01324 506850 | hippfest.co.uk
The Hippodrome, 10 Hope Street, Bo'ness EH51 0AA

Saturday 16 March 2013 | 20:00

JUJIRO (CROSSWAYS)



JAPAN FOUNDATION

Dir. Teinosuke Kinugasa | Japan | 1928 | b&w | 1h 12m
Accompanied live by Minima (www.minimamusic.co.uk)
Screening in partnership with the Japan Foundation

Teinosuke Kinugasa (1896-1982) was among the first Japanese directors to make a name overseas. Born the same year motion pictures arrived in Japan, after finishing schooling he left home to join a traveling theatrical troupe, specializing in *oyama* (female impersonator) roles. He made his stage debut in 1914 and within three years was contracted to Nikkatsu studios, making his screen debut in 1917. With Japanese cinema bound by theatrical traditions that barred actual women from appearing onscreen, he found himself gainfully employed in both male and female roles until 1923. Famously, when Nikkatsu discovered the obvious box office draw of using genuine actresses in 1920, Kinugasa led the studio's dozen or so contracted *oyama* on strike.

Nevertheless, the writing was on the wall, and by 1920 Kinugasa had also started working on the other side of the camera, as a screenwriter and director. He proved wildly prolific, and eager to challenge the already hidebound conventions the Japanese film industry had settled into within its first few decades. In 1926, he embarked on his best-known film, *A Page of Madness*, scripted by the renowned novelist Yasunari Kawabata. An avant-garde depiction of life inside an asylum for the mentally ill, shot as if seen through the eyes of its inmates, it was unlike anything else made in Japan at that point.

After the confused public reaction and limited financial returns that greeted this cinematic experiment, Kinugasa retreated to safer ground with a string of more conventional period swashbucklers (known as 'Chambara'), before his next attempt at raising the art of the nation's cinema. Set in Tokyo's Yoshiwara pleasure district, the more accessible *Crossways* was described by its director as a "Chambara without swordfights" and was heavily influenced by German Expressionism. Long overshadowed by its better-known predecessor, it is a visual tour-de-force, featuring such powerful set pieces as the hallucinations accompanying the lovesick protagonist's nursing back to health by his sister - a disturbing series of superimpositions and



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dissolves of spinning archery targets and gaudily painted geishas parading around the carnivalesque fleshpots of Yoshiwara.

Kinugasa barely waited until the end of *Crossways*' theatrical run before hopping on the Trans-Siberian Express with a print of the film in the hope of selling it in Europe, stopping in Moscow en route, where he made the acquaintance of the Russian filmmakers Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein. He found a distributor in Berlin, and thus

Crossways became the first Japanese film to be screened widely overseas when it opened as *Im Schatten des Yoshiwara* (*The Shadows of Yoshiwara*). It showed in several cities across Europe, including London in 1930, and later opened in New York as *Slums of Tokyo*.



Returning to Japan, Kinugasa kept up a steady output for the next four decades. His achievements include the first period drama talkie, *The Surviving Shinsengumi* (1932), the first sound version of the classic tale *The Loyal 47 Ronin* (1932) and the melodrama *Actress* (1947). But widespread global recognition was to come relatively late in his career with *Gate of Hell* (1953), a sumptuous tale of love and betrayal set in the 12th century. It was Japan's first ever film shot in Eastmancolor, and was awarded the 1954 Palme d'Or at Cannes, and 1955 Oscar for Best Foreign Film, owing much of its success to the beautiful cinematography of Kinugasa's cameraman since the 1920s, Kohei Sugiyama,. Ironically neither Kinugasa nor many others in the industry saw what all the fuss was about, claiming it to be among the director's least interesting works!

Kinugasa's subsequent films include a color version of *The Tale of Genji* (1957), and several literary adaptations. After directing over a hundred works, his last was the Russian coproduction *The Little Runaway* (1966), codirected with Eduard Bocharov, but it is for the two pioneering works from the 1920s, *Page of Madness* and *Crossways*, that Kinugasa deserves his status as one of the most important figures in the history of Japanese cinema.

Jasper Sharp is a writer and film curator based in the UK. The co-editor of www.midnighteye.com, the premier resource on Japanese cinema in the English language, Jasper is also the director and head programmer of Zipangu Fest (zipangufest.com), the leading festival in the UK showcasing Japanese films, and the co-director and co-programmer of the Shinsedai New Generation Japanese Film Festival in Toronto (shinsedai-fest.com).