



PRESS RELEASE June 2011

11/50

Shinjuku Diaries: Films from The Art Theatre Guild of Japan At BFI Southbank in August 2011



For many years **The Art Theatre Guild of Japan** was the home for Japanese filmmakers seeking creative independence. Throughout August **BFI Southbank** presents a season that marks the first UK retrospective of the Guild's experimental, vibrant and innovative output. Screenings of titles including **Pitfall** (1962), **Double Suicide** (1969) and **Pastoral Hide and Seek** (1974) with many being introduced by experts in the field including **Julian Ross, Hirasawa Go, Roland Domenig, Jasper Sharp** and **Tony Rayns**.

Partially inspired by the **BFI**, The Art Theatre Guild of Japan (**ATG**) was inaugurated in 1961 to tackle the deficiency in the showcasing of world cinema. ATG began as a distribution and exhibition association, programming an array of foreign and local titles scarcely or never screened before in the country. In 1967, ATG began to provide financial support for local independent filmmakers by co-producing their projects with the guarantee of unrestrained freedom. Beginning with Imamura's **A Man Vanishes** (1967) and Oshima's **Death by Hanging** (1968), ATG became the driving force behind a burst of creativity that represents the most innovative and audacious works by a generation of Japanese filmmakers.

Brought together for the first time in the UK, and curated by film historians **Roland Domenig** and **Hirasawa Go**, this 13 film selection of ATG titles represents an apex in Japan's creative explosion that united different corners of artistic activity into the realm of cinema.

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Season supported by The Japan Foundation and The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation



Pitfall (*Otoshiana*)

In this first of a run of feature collaborations with novelist and playwright Abe Kobo and composer Takemitsu Toru, realism is balanced with allegory in a tale where tangible problems result in ghostly consequences. Teshigahara portrays inhabitants of a coal-mining town who, ruthlessly attacked by a silent assassin, turn into ghosts and aimlessly roam the wastelands in a fable once named by the director himself a 'documentary fantasy'.

Japan 1962. Dir Teshigahara Hiroshi. With Igawa Hisashi, Sasaka Sumie, Yano Sen. 95min. EST

Tue 2 Aug 20:30 NFT2*

Wed 10 Aug 20:40 NFT2

***Introduced by Hirasawa Go**

Silence Has No Wings (*Tobenai Chinmoku*)

Kuroki Kazuo presents a series of life's vignettes from different corners of the Japanese islands. The buoyant cinematography by Suzuki Tatsuo captivates as the camera follows the development of a caterpillar into a butterfly while documenting the nation's history of melancholia on personal and societal levels. Kaga Mariko performs multiple roles to interconnect the stranded narratives and the ethereal soundscape pulls together an assortment of voices, both real and imagined.

Japan 1967. Dir Kuroki Kazuo. With Kaga Mariko, Komatsu Hosei. 110min. EST

Thu 4 Aug 18:00 NFT3*

Mon 8 Aug 20:45 NFT3

***Introduced by Roland Domenig**

A Man Vanishes (*Ningen Johatsu*)

Imamura and his crew set out on a search for a young woman's fiancé in an investigative documentary that pushes the limits of its genre until its established walls collapse. The boundaries between fact and fiction blur then vanish as the search spirals out of grasp to the point we question, along with Imamura, the extent a filmmaker controls what cinema is able to capture.

Japan 1967. Dir Imamura Shohei. With Hayakawa Yoshie, Tsuyuguchi Shigeru. 130min. EST

Thu 18 Aug 20:20 NFT1*

Fri 26 Aug 18:00 NFT2

***Introduced by Julian Ross**

Death by Hanging (*Koshikei*)

Capital punishment and the plight of Koreans in Japan are tackled through absurdist farce in the film that launched Oshima onto the world stage. Basing his story on a real-life figure, Oshima imagines a convicted Korean youth who survives execution and consequently develops amnesia, illuminating a loophole in the

Japanese judicial system. The officials re-enact his murders in an attempt to resuscitate his memory with hilarious yet darkly poignant outcomes.
Japan 1968. Dir Oshima Nagisa. With Yun-Do Yun, Sato Kei, Watanabe Fumio. 119min. EST

Mon 1 Aug 20:30 NFT2*

Sat 13 Aug 15:20 NFT

***Introduced by Hirasawa Go**

The Inferno of First Love (*Hatsuko Jigoku-hen*)

In an inspired collaboration between Terayama Shuji and Hani Susumu, the two contrasting voices of the art scene come together to produce a tender tale of adolescent confusion. Shun's troubled childhood suffocates his repressed sexuality and his intimate encounters with nude model Nanami and young Momi only bemuse him further. Despite the tendentious subject matters of abuse and impotence put forward by Terayama, Hani's camera caresses rather than condescends.

Japan 1968. Dir Hani Susumu. With Takaheshi Akio, Ishii Kuniko. 108min. EST

Sat 6 Aug 18:00 NFT2

Fri 12 Aug 20:40 NFT2

***Introduced by Jasper Sharp**

Human Bullet (*Nikudan*)

Reputed for his samurai films with Toho, Okamoto Kihachi also wrote and directed a number of films filtered through his experiences as a wartime soldier. This anti-war satire follows a nameless soldier who, on the day of freedom before his suicide mission, meets his first and final love. Mixing bittersweet humour with melancholic vexation, Okamoto never imposes his views, but his message is deeply felt.

Japan 1968. Dir Okamoto Kihachi. With Terada Minori, Otani Naoko. 117min. EST

Sun 7 Aug 20:30 NFT2

Wed 17 Aug 17:50 NFT3*

***Introduced by Tony Rayns**

Double Suicide (*Shinju Ten No Amijima*)

Adapting Chikamatsu Monzaemon's renowned bunraku play for the screen, Shinoda's radical modernisation of traditional forms revisits the familiar discord between social obligation and personal emotion. The domestic drama paints Jihei and Koharu as two lovers unable to consummate their unity and stuck for options. Theatrical aesthetics discover new realms in cinematic expression where sets collapse to reveal their artifice and hooded puppeteers interfere and guide the destiny of their characters.

Japan 1969. Dir Shinoda Masahiro. With Nakamura Kichiemon, Iwashita Shima, Komatsu Hosen. 104min. EST

Sat 20 Aug 20:20 NFT2

Mon 29 Aug 18:00 NFT2*

***Introduced by Oliver Dew**

This Transient Life (*Mujo*)

TV-director Jissoji Akio's feature debut – and one of ATG's biggest hits – is a sensuous exploration of Buddhist spirituality in tandem with sex. Scripted by Ishido Toshiro, the film contemplates incest with a daring sincerity that chimes with its unique shot composition and fluid camera movements that seem to defy gravity. The lucid pace and captivating control of its aesthetic universe enthralled its audience worldwide on its release.

Courtesy of National Film Centre, Tokyo

Japan 1970. Dir Jissoji Akio. With Hananamoto Kotobuki, Kobayashi Akiji, Okada Eiji. 146min. EST

Wed 3 Aug 17:50 NFT2*

Sat 13 Aug 20:00 NFT2

***Introduced by Roland Domenig**

Lost Lovers (*Arakajime Ushinawareta Koibitotachi yo*)

In their feature debut, TV documentarist Tahara Soichiro and avant-garde playwright Shimizu Kunio create a brisk portrayal of Japanese youth after the failed student protests of the 1960s. On an aimless journey to northern Japan, a garrulous former pole-vault youth champion meets a young deaf couple and discovers a new way of communication without words. Newcomer Momoi Kaoru makes an impressive debut by creating a new type of female heroine.

Japan 1971. Dir Shimizu Kunio & Tahara Soichiro. With Momoi Kaoru, Ishibashi Renji, Kano Tenmei. 123min. EST

Fri 5 Aug 20:30 NFT2*

Tue 16 Aug 17:50 NFT2

***Introduced by Roland Domenig**

Pandemonium Shura / aka Demons

Matsumoto blackens the screen in an adaptation of Nanboku Tsuruya's *Kamikakete sango taisetsu*. Relentlessly pessimistic, the tale depicts a story of bitter betrayal and brutal revenge that is infused, here in its film version, by Matsumoto's characteristic blurring of imagination and the real. With riveting intensity, aestheticised violence reaches its indomitable peak in what Noel Burch has called 'the most important and beautiful film made in Japan since Kurosawa's prime'.

Japan 1971. Dir Matsumoto Toshio. With Nakamura Katsuo, Sanjo Yasuk, Kara Juro. 135min. EST

Sun 21 Aug 20:15 NFT2*

Wed 31 Aug 18:00 NFT2

***Introduced by Julian Ross**

Ecstasy of the Angels (*Tenshi No Kokotsu*)

Extreme-left politics and sex collide in ATG's most controversial feature, where pink cinema's enfant terrible Wakamatsu Koji and Adachi Masao depict Tokyo as a bomb-zone at the boiling point of social agitation. Intimately linked with real-life activism, actual revolutionaries participated in production and the film pierced the zeitgeist by anticipating the bombing of police stations. Riveting intensity blackens the screen in a tale of betrayal and paranoia between extremist organisations.

Japan 1972. Dir Wakamatsu Koji. With Yoshizawa Ken, Yokoyama Rie, Arasa Yuki. 88min. EST

Fri 5 Aug 18:20 NFT2*

Tue 9 Aug 20:45 NFT2

***Introduced by Hirasawa Go**

Pastoral Hide and Seek (*Den'en Ni Shisu*)

A virtuoso who worked across many artistic disciplines, countercultural icon Terayama reshuffles his own material to explore the tensions between past and present, reality and fantasy, one art form and its peripheral neighbours in this film which borrows from his poetry collection of the same title. A filmmaker revisits his past as the subject for his new feature, only to find himself interacting with his childhood self.

Japan 1974. Dir Terayama Shuji. With Suga Kantaro, Takano Hiroyuki. 102min. EST

Wed 24 Aug 20:40 NFT2*

Sun 28 Aug 16:00 NFT2

***Introduced by Tony Rayns**

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema

- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.50, concs £6.75 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Filmstore

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The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank /