

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

Visit our website at:
www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk

Follow us on:
twitter.com/ChelmsfordFilmC
www.facebook.com/ChelmsfordFilmC



Ran

Dir. Akira Kurosawa

Japan/France, 1985

162 mins

Cast: Tatsuya Nakadai (Lord Hidetora Ichimonji); Akira Terao (Taro Takatora Ichimonji); Jinpachi Nezu (Jiro Masatora Ichimonji); Daisuke Ryû (Saburo Naotora Ichimonji); Mieko Harada (Lady Kaede); Yoshiko Miyazaki (Lady Sue); Hisashi Igawa (Shuri Kurogane)

From the website of the Independent Cinema Office, the distributor for this screening:

Our latest reissue is a stunning 4K digital restoration of Akira Kurosawa's (*Drunken Angel*, *Seven Samurai*, *Ikiru*, *Rashômon*) *Ran*, his famous interpretation of King Lear as a jidaigeki epic, and the most expensive Japanese film ever produced on its original release in 1985. The restoration has been created by Studiocanal and Japanese production company Kadokawa Pictures.

'Ran' stands for chaos, turmoil or fury in Japanese; all befitting Shakespeare's vision of a nihilistic world turned upside down and revolting against its natural order; dramatising the pain and rage of ageing and its inevitable loss of control.

Borrowing narrative elements from the legend of Mōri Motonari (a 16th century Japanese warlord) as well as the Shakespearean tragedy, *Ran* stars Tatsuya Nakadai as the vain, arrogant Great Lord Hidetora Ichimonji, who at seventy decides to abdicate and divide his domain amongst his three sons, with catastrophic results.

Spectacularly beautiful, with gorgeous, colour-saturated frames, it is an undoubted masterpiece; the product of a breathtaking artistic vision that works as an historical epic and Shakespearean adaptation as well as a bloody, action-packed war film with a silent central battle scene that must be seen to be believed.

<http://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/films/ran>

Akira Kurosawa was a defining figure in the cinematic intercultural exchange between postwar Japan and the west. Despite being held up by those outside Japan as the foremost exponent of Japanese cinema, he was decried as too western by detractors at home and would not have been considered representative of the domestic milieu. Yet, he still imbued his work with local theatrical tradition and is probably the greatest filmmaker in the samurai genre. He even once told devoted Japanese film scholar Donald Richie: "I find a western-looking format most practical, but I really only make my pictures for young Japanese in their 20s."

His relationship with European and North American film was most evident – and most enduringly famous – in the cyclical inspiration that formed between his samurai films and Italian and American cowboy flicks. However, Kurosawa's own influences were not purely found in movie theatres but on stages, canvases and in books. "I read classics and contemporary, foreign and Japanese literature without discrimination," he recalled in his autobiography and such foreign classics were to emerge in the particular form of William Shakespeare.

Steven Spielberg once described Kurosawa as "the pictorial Shakespeare of our time" and he adapted the Bard for the screen, and into contemporary and period Japanese settings, on three occasions. First he transposed Macbeth into feudal Japan in *Throne of Blood* (1957), then examined the rotten postwar state of his nation taking Hamlet as the inspiration for *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960). Finally, he adapted King Lear into the glorious jidaigeki [period] epic and his final masterpiece, *Ran* (1985).

Sharing far more commonality with *Throne of Blood*, *Ran* takes Shakespeare as scenarist for a tale of samurai-era warfare in which Kurosawa opts to convey the story with images rather than the eloquent language of its original form.

It has often been noted that the test that King Lear challenges his daughters to – in which they must linguistically proffer their eternal love to him – is replaced in *Ran* by a physical challenge. Lord Hidetora asks his sons to break a bundle of arrows, hoping to illustrate their combined strength and avoid internal conflict when he divides up his kingdom between his boys.

Tatsuya Nakadai's performance as Hidetora is equally as impressive in its physicality while eschewing dialogue. "I have full cause of weeping, but this heart / Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws, / Or ere I'll weep.—O Fool, I shall go mad!" lamented Lear. Despair and wounded pride are measured in the arch of Nakadai's back; he staggers at every betrayal like an arrow to the heart; his tragedy lays him as low as his nobility stands him high.

Kurosawa returns to the tension between western naturalism and Noh to express Hidetora's spiral into madness. His makeup gradually thickens and becomes more stylised to recall the recognisable motifs of the theatre as he is beset by peril and when he reaches his apparent nadir amid the incredible battle scene on the slopes of Mount Fuji. When he emerges from the burning fortress having failed to commit harakiri, his face is set in a rigid Noh mask of insanity. As he roams the wastelands in the driving wind and rain, he acts as a near perfect illustration of Kurosawa's brilliantly cinematic relationship with Shakespeare and the reason behind his comparison to him.

Ben Nicholson, British Film Institute, 23 March 2016

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/kurosawa-vs-shakespeare>

Our next film: **Mustang**, Monday 5 December