



**KUROSAWA**

# Kurosawa Season

## Introduction

Season co-programmers Asif Kapadia and Ian Haydn Smith will be joined by a guest speaker for this introduction event to discuss the key themes structuring the Kurosawa season and the films screening. While celebrating Kurosawa's samurai and action films, they will also explore the less familiar elements that make this giant of cinema's work so brilliant.

**[bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)**

'The term "giant" is used too often to describe artists. But in the case of Akira Kurosawa, we have one of the rare instances where the term fits.'

(Martin Scorsese)

Like a gathering storm, much of Kurosawa's cinema begins with a portent of the turbulence to come. But within his work lay a poetry – both in his visual style and the depth of his characters – and a fascinating exploration of Japanese culture past and present. And throughout, from his startlingly assured first feature *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943) to the ruminative and often humorous tone of his last, *Mâdadayo* (1993), the thoughts and actions of his characters, and the changes unfolding in the societies they live in, were reflected in the elements. The climate plays a key role within all of Kurosawa's work. But there are also a variety of themes that run through his dramas. Rather than journey through his work chronologically, this season breaks up his filmography into six themes. All are indivisible, but by focussing on specific elements within each film it is hoped that Kurosawa's brilliance will shine even brighter.

After a rewarding apprenticeship under Kajirô Yamamoto, whom he assisted on 17 features, Kurosawa made his feature debut in 1943 with *Sanshiro Sugata*. It's a great starting point to enjoy the filmmaker's style and to appreciate themes that would recur throughout his work, from exploring the teacher/student dynamic and the role of the hero to more existential inquiries. These films employ the structure of the family or professional lives to explore Japanese society and to probe the nature of power structures, cycles of violence in history and the role of myth within society. From his Shakespeare adaptations to his contemporary thrillers, Kurosawa earned the adulation of audiences and the admiration of filmmakers, with Federico Fellini describing him as 'the greatest living example of all that an author of the cinema should be'.

**Asif Kapadia and Ian Haydn Smith, season curators, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)**

'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.' (Akira Kurosawa)

‘Kurosawa has said that he could not possibly define his own style, that he does not know what it consists of, that it never occurs to him to think of it. While quite ready to talk about lenses, or acting, or the best kind of camera-dolly, he is unwilling to discuss meaning or aesthetics. Once I asked him what a certain scene was about. He said: “Well, if I could answer that, it wouldn’t have been necessary for me to have filmed the scene, would it?”’

(Donald Ritchie)

‘When I begin to consider a film project, I always have in mind a number of ideas that feel as if they would be the sort of thing I’d like to film. From among these one will suddenly germinate and begin to sprout; this will be the one I grasp and develop. I have never taken on a project offered to me by a producer or a production company. My films emerge from my own desire to say a particular thing at a particular time. The root of any film project for me is this inner need to express something. What nurtures this root and makes it grow into a tree is the script. What makes the tree bear flowers and fruit is the direction.’ (Akira Kurosawa)

‘He taught me practically everything I know, and it was he who first introduced me to myself as an actor.’ (Toshiro Mifune)

**Asif Kapadia** is an Academy Award, BAFTA, Grammy & European Film Award winning writer/director, best known for his trilogy of films exploring the price of fame; the double BAFTA-winning *Senna* (2010), *Amy* (2015) – which won the Best Documentary Oscar, Grammy and BAFTA and the BAFTA-nominated *Diego Maradona* (2019).

Kapadia’s debut feature *The Warrior* (2001), starring the late Irrfan Khan, shot in the desert and Himalaya of India won BAFTAs for Outstanding British Film and Outstanding Debut by a Director as well as being nominated for Best Film Not in the English Language. Kapadia directed episodes of *Mindhunter* (Netflix) for David Fincher, he exec produced *1971: The Year Music Changed Everything*. He co-directed and exec produced the mental health series *The Me You Can’t See*. Kapadia is presently in production with *2073*, a dystopian film on ‘the state of the world’ (Neon, Double Agent & Film4).

**Sonali Joshi** is a curator, subtitler and access specialist. Her interests cover Asian cinema, particularly Japanese and Southeast Asian cinemas, and architecture and cinema. Her PhD (University of Glasgow) focused on French actor, Jean-Pierre Léaud.

She is co-founder/director of Aperture: Asia & Pacific Film Festival. Her most recent curatorial project, ‘Urban, Natural, Human’, explored architecture and landscape in Japanese cinema.

She began her career in film programming at Cornerhouse (now HOME) before moving into film distribution in Paris and heading the translation subtitling department of a former London-based post-production house. She went on to found Day for Night with the aim of enabling broader access to underrepresented areas of cinema through curatorial projects, specialist distribution and access.

Sonali has given guest lectures at institutions including National Film & Television School, London Film School and Birkbeck, and has served on juries at International Film Festival Rotterdam, Open City Docs and Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival.

**Ian Haydn Smith** is a writer, editor and broadcaster. He has written and spoken widely on cinema and the moving image. Formerly the editor of the International Film Guide, Curzon and BFI Filmmakers Magazines, he is currently the editor of the BFI London Film Festival and Flare guides, Sheffield Doc/Fest guide and an advisor to London East Asian Film Festival. He is a regular interviewer for the BFI and BAFTA, most recently hosting the Screen Talk with Alejandro González Iñárritu at the 2022 BFI London Film Festival and the BAFTA Screenwriters Lecture Series event with Kore-eda Hirokazu. As a writer, publications include *The Short Story of Photography*, *A Chronology of Film* and, most recently, *Well Documented*.

## Recommended Reading

Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography* (Vintage Books, 1983)

Shinobu Hashimoto, *Cinematic Compounds: Akira Kurosawa and I* (Vertical, Inc. 2015)

Teruyo Nogami, *Waiting on the Weather* (Stone Bridge Press, 2006)

Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton University Press, 1999)

Donald Ritchie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* (University of California Press, 1998 edition)

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### KUROSAWA

#### High and Low (Tengoku to Jigoku)

Thu 19 Jan 17:45; Sun 29 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

#### The Lower Depths (Donzoku)

Thu 19 Jan 20:20; Mon 30 Jan 20:20

#### The Hidden Fortress (Kakushi Toride no San-Akunin)

Fri 20 Jan 20:20; Fri 27 Jan 17:45

#### The Idiot (Hakuchi)

Sat 21 Jan 16:50

#### The Bad Sleep Well (Warui Yatsu hoho Yoku Nemuru)

Sun 22 Jan 18:00; Sun 29 Jan 14:30 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

#### Scandal (Shûbun)

Tue 24 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

#### Sanjuro (Tsubaki Sanjûrô)

Thu 26 Jan 21:00; Tue 31 Jan 17:50

#### Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)

Sat 28 Jan 15:30 BFI IMAX

#### Kagemusha

Tue 31 Jan 19:35

#### Stray Dog (Nora Inu)

Wed 1 Feb 20:35; Mon 13 Feb 18:10

#### Drunken Angel (Yoidore Tenshi)

Thu 2 Feb 18:20; Fri 10 Feb 20:40

#### The Silent Duel (Shizukanaru Kettô)

Thu 2 Feb 20:40; Sat 11 Feb 18:40

#### Sanshiro Sugata (Sugata Sanshirô)

Fri 3 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by Ian Haydn Smith, season co-curator); Sun 12 Feb 15:50

#### Sanshiro Sugata Part Two (Zoku Sugata Sanshirô)

Fri 3 Feb 20:45; Sun 12 Feb 18:20

#### The Gathering Storm: Kurosawa Study Day

Sat 4 Feb 12:00

#### Living (Ikiru)

Sat 4 Feb 17:50; Wed 15 Feb 20:15

#### Kurosawa and Shakespeare, Adaptation and Reinvention:

##### An illustrated talk by Adrian Wootton

Sun 5 Feb 15:15

#### Ran

Sun 5 Feb 17:30 (+ intro by Adrian Wootton, CEO of Film London and film curator); Sat 11 Feb 11:50; Sat 25 Feb 17:20

#### I Live in Fear (Ikimono no Kiroku)

Mon 6 Feb 18:10; Mon 13 Feb 20:40

#### Dreams (Yume)

Wed 8 Feb 20:30; Sun 26 Feb 15:30

#### Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-jô)

Sun 12 Feb 13:00; Fri 17 Feb 20:40; Tue 21 Feb 18:10

#### Dersu Uzala

Thu 16 Feb 18:10 (+ intro by Ian Haydn Smith, season co-curator); Mon 27 Feb 20:10 (+ intro by Doug Weir, BFI Technical Delivery Manager)

#### Yojimbo Yôjinbô

Sat 18 Feb 20:45; Thu 23 Feb 20:15 (+ intro by Asif Kapadia, season co-curator)

#### Rhapsody in August (Hachigatsu no Kyoshikoku)

Sun 19 Feb 18:30; Sat 25 Feb 12:40

#### Mâdadayo

Mon 20 Feb 20:20; Tue 28 Feb 18:00

#### Philosophical Screens: Throne of Blood

Tue 21 Feb 20:10

#### A.K.

Wed 22 Feb 20:50; Sat 25 Feb 20:45

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