



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Ran

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Director: Akira Kurosawa

©/Production Company:

Greenwich Film Production

Production Companies: Herald Ace,

Nippon Herald Films

Executive Producer: Katsumi Furukawa

Producers: Serge Silberman, Masato Hara

Production Co-ordinator: Hisao Kurosawa

Production Manager: Ullly Pickardt

Production Administrators: Satoru Izeki,

Seikichi Iizumi, Teruyo Nogami

Collaborating Production Administrator:

Takashi Ohashi

Production Assistants: Masahiko Kumada, Ko Nanri

Directorial Consultant: Ishiro Honda

Assistant Directors: Fumiaki Okada, Bernard Cohn,

Takashi Koizumi, Ichirō Yamamoto,

Okiihiro Yoneda, Kyoko Watanabe,

Vittorio Dalle Ore, Kunio Nozaki

Screenplay: Akira Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni,

Masato Ide

Based on the play *King Lear* by:

William Shakespeare *

Directors of Photography: Takao Saito,

Masaharu Ueda

Collaborating Photographer: Asakazu Nakai

Assistant Photographers: Yoshinori Sekiguchi,

Noboru Asono, Kiyoshi Anzai, Satoru Suzuki,

Shigeo Suzuki, Mazakazu Oka,

Kosuke Matsushima, Hidero Igarashi,

Nobuyuki Kito

Lighting: Takeharu Sano

Stills Photography: Daisaburo Harada, Yoshio Sato

Editor: Akira Kurosawa *

Production Designers: Yoshiro Muraki,

Shinobu Muraki

Set Decorators: Tsuneo Shimura, Osami Tonsho,

Mitsuyuki Kimura, Jiro Hirai, Yasuyoshi Ototake

Wardrobe Design: Emi Wada

Make-up: Yamada Katsura, Tameyuki Aimi, Chihako

Naito, Noriko Takamizawa,

Shohichiro Ueda

Hair: Yoshiko Matsumoto, Noriko Sato

Titles: Den Film Effect, Films Michel François

Music: Toru Takemitsu

Music Performed by: Sapporo Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: Hiroyuki Iwaki

Sound Recording: Fumio Yanoguchi,

Shotaro Yoshida

Sound Re-recording: Claude Villand

Battle Consultants: Koichi Hito, Ryu Kuze

Kyogen Master: Mansaku Nomura

Armature Props: Masamori Minami

Publicity: Benjamin Baltimore

Cast:

Tatsuya Nakadai (*Lord Hidetora Ichimonji*)

Akira Terao (*Taro Takatora Ichimonji*)

Jinpachi Nezu (*Jiro Masatora Ichimonji*)

Daisuke Ryu (*Saburo Naotora Ichimonji*)

Mieko Harada (*Lady Kaede*)

Yoshiko Miyazaki (*Lady Sue*)

Kazuo Kato (*Kageyu Ikoma*)

Pitā (*Kyoami*)

Hitoshi Ueki (*Nobuhiro Fujimaki*)

Jun Tazaki (*Seiji Ayabe*)

Norio Matsui (*Shumenosuke Ogura*)

Hisashi Igawa (*Shuri Kurogane*)

Kenji Kodama (*Samon Shirane*)

Toshiya Ito (*Mondo Naganuma*)

Takeshi Kato (*Koyata Hatakeyama*)

Takeshi Nomura (*Tsurumaru*)

Masayuki Yui (*Tango Hirayama*)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

Akira Kurosawa often liked to draw on western literature for his material – Dostoevsky for *The Idiot* (1951), Gorky for *The Lower Depths* (1957), even thriller writer Ed McBain for *High and Low* (1963). This was one reason he was sometimes accused, in his native country, of making ‘westernised’ cinema. But above all he repeatedly returned to Shakespeare – and the great Shakespearean tragedies in particular. *Throne of Blood* (1957) reimagines *Macbeth* as a chilling samurai drama, strongly influenced by the conventions of Noh theatre. *Hamlet* migrates into the corrupt executive world of modern Japan in *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960). And for the last great film of his career, Kurosawa chose *King Lear*, relocating it in the same key historical period as *Seven Samurai* – the tormented 16th century, when Japan was torn apart by the conflicts of rival warlords.

Lear becomes the ageing Lord Hidetora Ichimonji, who decides to abdicate power and split his realm between his three sons – since in this patriarchal society, no daughter could ever think to inherit. But even so Kurosawa gives us a lethal woman as his Goneril equivalent – Lady Kaede, wife of Hidetora's eldest son Taro and lover of his second son Jiro. Close kin to Asaji, the Lady Macbeth figure in *Throne of Blood*, Kaede manipulates her far weaker menfolk to work out her long-nurtured scheme of vengeance against the entire Ichimonji clan.

‘We... are children of this age, weaned on strife and chaos,’ Hidetora's youngest son Saburo warns his father, vainly trying to deflect him from his disastrous plan. ‘Ran’ means ‘turmoil’ or ‘chaos’, and chaos is what Kurosawa unleashes across the full expanse of his Scope screen – but meticulously orchestrated chaos, as castles burn, colour-coded armies bearing windruffled banners wheel and clash, and images of death and desolation overwhelm the senses.

The film moves at a stately pace, and occasionally you may find yourself yearning for the light-footed, zip-panned action of *Yojimbo* (1961) or *Seven Samurai* (1954). But although the 74-year-old director's eyesight was starting to fail, his painterly instinct for visual composition was still unsurpassed, and his use of the Japanese landscape – from rolling wooded hills and lush meadows to the slate-grey, barren slopes of Mount Fuji – compels the eye.

As Hidetora, Tatsuya Nakadai (Mifune's nemesis in *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro*) builds on his dual lead performance from Kurosawa's previous film *Kagemusha* (1980) – we get the ageing warlord's arrogance and stubbornness but also his fatal naivety. But this is an ensemble piece – it's not the tragedy of one old man but the catastrophe and destruction of a whole society – and the entire cast are note-perfect, not least Mieko Harada as Lady Kaede and Shinnosuke Ikehata (a well-known transvestite who acts under the name of Pitā) as Hidetora's fool Kyoami. His tenderness towards the mad old man, tempered by bouts of exasperation, is at once funny and moving.

Vittorio Dalle Ore, only 24 at the time, acted as one of the production's several assistant directors. He landed the job through a Japanese cousin, but spoke no Japanese himself and had to learn fast. He was struck by the way everyone in the crew mucked in, with nobody standing on status. The chief electrician and the art director willingly helped with cutting grass. ‘The atmosphere was wonderful,’ he recalled. ‘Everyone would help everyone else, giving last touches to the sets, polishing floors and pillars, ageing the costumes for all the

Heihachiro Suzuki (*Fujimaki's general*)
Reiko Nanjo, Sawako Kochi
(*Hidetora's concubines*)
Haruko Togo (*Kaede's old lady*)
Tokie Kanda, Kumeko Otowa
(*Sue's ladies-in-waiting*)
France/Japan 1985©
162 mins
Digital 4K

* Uncredited

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Last Year in Marienbad

L'Année dernière à Marienbad
Thu 1 Aug 18:10; Wed 7 Aug 12:00;
Mon 12 Aug 20:30

Persona

Fri 2 Aug 12:20; Sat 10 Aug 20:50; Thu 15 Aug
18:30; Wed 28 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Lilia Pavin-
Franks, BFI Events)

Sebastiane

Sat 3 Aug 20:45; Sat 10 Aug 18:20;
Tue 13 Aug 14:40

Les Enfants terribles

Sun 4 Aug 18:00; Sat 17 Aug 12:50;
Sat 31 Aug 20:40

The Old Dark House

Mon 5 Aug 12:30; Sat 10 Aug 16:00;
Sun 25 Aug 14:10; Thu 29 Aug 18:30

Archipelago

Mon 5 Aug 18:00; Sun 11 Aug 13:10;
Thu 22 Aug 20:30

Woman of the Dunes

 Suna na Onna

Mon 5 Aug 20:30; Wed 21 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by
Tom Price, BFI Events)

The Philadelphia Story

Tue 6 Aug 12:20; Sun 11 Aug 18:30;
Mon 26 Aug 15:00

Charulata

 The Lonely Wife

Tue 6 Aug 14:50; Sun 11 Aug 15:50;
Fri 30 Aug 20:40

Bigger Than Life

Wed 7 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,
Programmer-at-Large); Sun 18 Aug 13:30;
Tue 27 Aug 14:30

3 Women

Thu 8 Aug 12:10; Fri 16 Aug 20:30;
Sat 24 Aug 17:10

All That Heaven Allows

Fri 9 Aug 12:15; Wed 14 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by
Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions);
Wed 28 Aug 20:50

In the Realm of the Senses

 Ai no corrida

Fri 9 Aug 18:10; Mon 19 Aug 20:40

The Shining (Extended Cut)

Fri 23 Aug 17:50; Mon 26 Aug 20:00

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extras.' Even the septuagenarian director himself would join in and contribute to these mundane tasks.

Kurosawa, Dalle Ore found, believed in extremely long rehearsals, over weeks or months, but then would often shoot even the most complex scenes in a single take. 'It would be one take, rarely more than two, and then "Thank you!" and that was it. He'd drawn these very detailed paintings, which was his way to think about the themes and develop the characters. So he knew just what he wanted.'

Kurosawa had had plenty of time to decide. *Ran* was ten years in preparation while the veteran moviemaker, spurned by the Japanese studios as too extravagant, was forced to scabble for funding. It wasn't until the maverick French producer Serge Silberman (who had supported Buñuel) came to his rescue, finding backing and chipping in some of his own money, that production could start. To some extent you can see why the studios were running scared. Kurosawa never believed in cutting corners, and *Ran* was at the time the most expensive Japanese production ever undertaken. It took two years to prepare the handmade costumes; most of the 200 horses were specially imported from the US; and the huge castle on the slopes of Mount Fuji was constructed complete and to scale before being burned to the ground as Hidetora's two elder sons attack their beleaguered father.

Of all Kurosawa's films, *Ran* is the bleakest and most pessimistic, set as it is in a world of treachery and slaughter – a world, as Saburo says, 'that is barren of loyalty and feeling'. His verdict is echoed at the end of the film, when both he and Hidetora lie dead, by the loyal samurai Tango (the Kent figure). 'It is the gods that weep,' Tango declares, when the Fool berates the seemingly callous deities. 'They can't save us from ourselves... Men prefer sorrow to joy, suffering to peace.' For although Kurosawa sticks largely to the plot of *King Lear*, he diverges from Shakespeare in one crucial aspect: while the play tells us little of Lear's past, in the film we learn how Hidetora gained and held on to power through the infliction of cruelty and suffering, often on the innocent, and it's these cruelties that come back, karma-like, to destroy him and his sons.

Something of Kurosawa's personal life may have fed into the film's pessimism; while it was in preparation, his wife of 40 years, Yoko Yaguchi, contracted cancer, and she died during the shoot. The film's final image is one of utter desolation: a blind man (himself one of Hidetora's victims as a child) teetering helplessly on the edge of a precipice, the protective image of Lord Buddha falling from his hand; this, Kurosawa seems to be telling us, is the epitome of the human condition. But despite the grimness of its theme, Dalle Ore recalls that *Ran* 'wasn't at all a depressing film to make. It was so intense and concentrated'.

And the massive expenditure paid off spectacularly, as can be seen in this handsome 4K digital transfer. *Ran* never looks anything short of magnificent, and the battle scenes stir the senses and the soul. The sound transfer makes the most of Kurosawa's meticulously detailed sound effects – banners snapping in the wind, horses' hooves thundering across the terrain, flames tearing at sundering wood, the shuffle and scuttle of phalanxes of footsoldiers manoeuvring into position, Lady Kaede's silken kimono sliding across the polished wooden floor. Toru Takemitsu's plangent score, strongly influenced – at Kurosawa's suggestion – by the symphonies of Mahler as much as by the music of Noh theatre, comes across with untrammelled emotional impact, not least in the final funeral march for Hidetora and Saburo.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, June 2016