

16/12/03

Artificial Eye presents

ZATOICHI¹⁸

The new film by
Takeshi Kitano

WINNER

SILVER LION BEST DIRECTOR - VENICE 2003

AUDIENCE AWARD Leone Del Pubblico - VENICE 2003

AUDIENCE AWARD AGF People's Choice Award - TORONTO 2003

LONDON FILM FESTIVAL 2003



Starring: Beat Takeshi, Tadanobu Asano, Guadalcanal Taka

Produced by Bandai Visual, Tokyo FM, Dentsu, TV Asahi, Saito Entertainment
and Office Kitano

Japan 2003 / Colour / 116 mins / 1:85 / In Japanese with English subtitles

UK Release 19 MARCH 2004

Opening at the CHELSEA CINEMA, RENOIR, CURZON SOHO, SCREEN ON
THE GREEN, EVERYMAN Hampstead, ELECTRIC Portobello, RITZY,
CLAPHAM Picturehouse, PHOENIX East Finchley, FILMHOUSE Richmond
and selected cinemas around the country

An Artificial Eye Release

www.artificial-eye.com

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Artificial Eye Film Company 14 King Street London WC2E 8HR

Written, Directed and	
Edited by	Takeshi Kitano
Executive Producer	Chieko Saito
Based on a short story by	Kan Shimosawa
Music	Keiichi Suzuki
Tap Dance Choreography	The Stripes
Costume Supervision	Yohji Yamamoto
Cinematographer	Katsumi Yanagishima
Lighting Designer	Hitoshi Takaya
Production Designer	Norihiro Isoda
Sound Designer	Senji Horiuchi
Costume Designer	Kazuko Kurosawa
First Assistant Director	Takashi Matsukawa
Co - Editor	Yoshinori Ota
Script Supervisor	Haru Shohara
Production Manager	Kensei Mori
Casting	Takefumi Yoshikawa
Line Producer	Shinji Komiya
Producers	Masayuki Mori & Tsunehisa Saito
Co-producers	Masanori Sanada & Takio Yoshida

**Bandai Visual, Tokyo FM, Dentsu, TV Asahi, Saito Entertainment
and Office Kitano**

CAST

Beat Takeshi	Zatoichi
Tadanobu Asano	Hattori, the Bodyguard
Michiyo Ogusu	Aunt Oume
Yui Natsukawa	Hattori's Wife
Guadalcanal Taka	Shinkichi
Daigoro Tachibana	Osei, the Geisha
Yuko Daike	Okinu, the Geisha
Ittoku Kishibe	Ginzo
Saburo Ishikura	Ogi
Akira Emoto	Tavern Owner

Not only is ZATOICHI my first period piece, but it's also the first time since my directorial debut VIOLENT COP that I have made a film from an existing idea conceived by someone else. I thought ZATOICHI was going to be a tough film to make because making a period piece is commonly considered to be much more painstaking. It actually turned out to be quite a fun film to make. I found the whole process of making a period piece much more fictitious because I had to fabricate everything. This allowed me to do preposterous things and explore new areas I hadn't before. I can certainly say that making the film has been one of the most artistically and creatively satisfying experiences of my career.

Takeshi Kitano

SYNOPSIS

19th Century Japan... Zatoichi is a blind wanderer who makes a living by gambling and giving massages. But behind his humble facade, Zatoichi is a master swordsman, gifted with a lightning-fast draw and strokes of breathtaking precision. Zatoichi discovers a remote mountain town at the mercy of the Ginzo gang. The ruthless Ginzo dispose of anyone who gets in their way, quicker than ever since they recruited Hattori, the mighty samurai ronin.

In a gambling joint, Zatoichi and his trustworthy young friend Shinkichi meet up with a couple of geishas. As dangerous as they are beautiful, Okinu and her sister Osei have come to town to avenge their parents' murder. With their only clue being the mysterious name Kuchinawa, the geisha sisters have lots of tricks up their sleeves. Sinister henchmen are soon hunting down Zatoichi. With his legendary cane sword at his side, Zatoichi's path is destined for many violent showdowns...

TAKESHI KITANO - FILMOGRAPHY

As a filmmaker

2003	ZATOICHI Director, writer, editor An Artificial Eye Release
2002	DOLLS Director, writer, editor An Artificial Eye Release
2000	BROTHER Director, writer, editor
1999	KIKUJIRO Director, writer, editor
1997	HANA-BI (FIREWORKS) Director, writer, editor
1996	KID'S RETURN Director, writer, editor
1995	GETTING ANY? Director, writer, editor
1993	SONATINE Director, writer, editor
1991	A SCENE AT THE SEA Director, writer, editor
1990	BOILING POINT Director, writer, editor
1989	VIOLENT COP Director

TAKESHI KITANO - FILMOGRAPHY

As an actor

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2003 | ZATOCHI
(An Artificial Eye Release) |
| 2003 | BATTLE ROYALE II
(dir: Kenta & Kinji Sukasaku) |
| 2001 | BATTLE ROYALE
(dir: Kinji Fukasaku) |
| 2000 | BROTHER |
| 1999 | GOHATTO
(dir: Nagisa Oshima) |
| 1999 | KIKUJIRO |
| 1998 | TOKYO EYES
(dir: Jean-Pierre Limosin) |
| 1997 | HANA-BI (FIREWORKS) |
| 1995 | FIVE OF THEM (GONIN)
(dir: Takashi Ishii) |
| 1995 | GETTING ANY? |
| 1994 | JOHNNY MNEMONIC
(dir: Robert Longo) |
| 1993 | SONATINE |
| 1993 | MANY HAPPY RETURNS (KYOUISO TANJOU)
(dir: Toshiro Tenma) |
| 1990 | BOILING POINT |
| 1989 | VIOLENT COP |
| 1983 | MERRY CHRISTMAS MR. LAWRENCE
(dir: Nagisa Oshima) |

TAKESHI KITANO

For his 11th film as a writer- director, Takeshi Kitano also stars, reviving the cult action anti-hero Zatoichi. ZATOICHI marks the first time Kitano directs a period piece, and he exchanges his trademark yakuza guns for a cane sword of lightning-fast speed. Since the extraordinary success of 1997's HANA-BI, Kitano has been recognized as a leading figure of international cinema. Among its numerous awards, HANA-BI won Venice's Golden Lion and was named Best Non-European Film by the European Film Academy. HANA-BI was cited on numerous Best Films of the Year lists, often in the premiere position.

In 2000, Kitano made BROTHER, his first film shot outside of his native Japan. Like BROTHER, Kitano-directed films such as his debut VIOLENT COP (1989), BOILING POINT (1990) and SONATINE (1993) centred around yakuza gangster characters. The filmmaker contrasted the violence and action of those films with comedy or tenderness in films like A SCENE AT THE SEA (1991), GETTING ANY? (1995), KIDS RETURN (1996), KIKUJIRO (1999) and DOLLS (2002).

As an actor, Kitano has also appeared in films which he has not directed himself. He won international attention for his role in Nagisa Oshima's MERRY CHRISTMAS, MR.LAWRENCE (1983). He collaborated again with Oshima in 1999's samurai epic TABOO (GOHATTO). He can currently be seen in Kenta and Kinji Fukasaku's BATTLE ROYALE II, after having appeared in Kinji Fukasaku's controversial 2001 Japanese box-office smash BATTLE ROYALE. His credits in films directed by non-Japanese filmmakers include Robert Longo's JOHNNY MNEMONIC (US, 1995) and Jean-Pierre Limosin's TOKYO EYES (France, 1998).

Kitano was born in Tokyo in 1947 and entered show business in 1972 as "Beat" Takeshi, the stage name he continues to use today as a performer. As part of the comic duo Two Beats, Kitano was one of the leading figures in the manzai (stand-up comedy) boom in the late 1970s. With his distinctive art of speech and his idiosyncratic perspective, Kitano became one of the most popular entertainers in the country during the 1980s. After an incredibly prolific and diverse 25-year career, Kitano continues to be one of the foremost personalities in Japan. He participates in weekly TV programmes, as well as several TV films and specials per year. He has written a number of novels and collections of short stories, essays and poetry. Also an accomplished cartoonist and painter, Kitano's artwork can be seen in HANA-BI and KIKUJIRO.

TADANOBU ASANO

Tadanobu Asano is one of Japan's most popular young stars. He can currently be seen in Cannes 2003 competition entry BRIGHT FUTURE (dir. Kiyoshi Kurosawa) and Thai director Pen-Ek Ratanaruang's LAST LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE (Venice 2003, Upstream), for which he won the best actor award in Venice. LAST LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE will be released by Artificial Eye in late spring 2004

Asano is perhaps best known to international audiences for his performances in Takashi Miike's ICHI THE KILLER, Katsuhito Ishii's SHARK SKIN MAN AND PEACH HIP GIRL and Nagisa Oshima's GOHATTO in which he co-starred with "Beat" Takeshi Kitano. His other credits include Hidenori Sugimori's WOMAN OF WATER (2002 Golden Alexander winner at the Thessaloniki Film Festival), Shinji Soomai's KAZA-HANA, Christopher Doyle's AWAY WITH WORDS, Hirokazu Kore-Eda's Cannes 2001 competition entry DISTANCE, 1995's MABOROSI, Shinya Tsukamoto's GEMINI, Shunji Iwai's PICNIC (1996 Berliner Zeitung Reader's Award at the Berlin Film Festival) and three films by Sogo Ishii - ELECTRIC DRAGON 80,000V, GOJOE and LABYRINTH OF DREAMS.

Asano began his career in Joji Matsuoka's 1990 film SWIMMING UPSTREAM. A few films later, Asano received a breakthrough starring role in Shinji Aoyama 's 1996 crime drama HELPLESS.

Born in 1973 in Yokohama, Asano is also a talented illustrator and an occasional composer/guitarist.

ZATOICHI BAFFLES

Zatoichi is practically invincible. He can take anybody on. The question is how? He is blind, so he shouldn't be that strong not seeing his opponents. I finally decided the secret to Zatoichi's strength is "This is a film!" I even played with the notion of Zatoichi's blindness at the end of the film : maybe Zatoichi isn't blind after all... Zatoichi baffles you, but that's his role.

ZATOICHI'S CANE SWORD

I thought red for the cane would be the natural choice. It would have looked un-cool if Zatoichi used an unpainted wood cane. It would have been too down-to-earth and might have made the film too much of a heart-warming story about ordinary towns people. I thought that if Zatoichi was blond and carried a red lacquered cane, the other characters would be a little wary of him and nobody would want to get involved with him too much.

THE ZATOICHI LEGEND

Zatoichi is one of the most popular heroes in Japanese period drama. I think everybody over 30 in Japan knows Zatoichi. Because it's been over 10 years since a film about him was made, now there are younger Japanese who aren't familiar with him. I hope my film gives them the opportunity to get to know him.

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

This project was proposed to me quite unexpectedly by Madame Chieko Saito, one of my mentors during my Asakusa period. She was a very good friend of the late actor Mr. Shintaro Katsu, who starred in the original episodes of the Zatoichi series on film and TV (from 1962 to 1989). A few years ago, she asked me if I would make a Zatoichi sequel. It sounded interesting because I had never directed a period piece. When she asked me she also wanted me to play the lead character, I panicked. There was no way I was going to replace Mr. Katsu! I politely declined, but Madame Saito wouldn't take no for an answer. I finally gave in on one condition: I would have to be allowed to make the film the way I wanted as long as the main character remained a blind masseur named Zatoichi who is also a master swordsman and a dice-gambling genius. Everything else would have to be entirely my own creation.

THE NEW ZATOICHI

My screenplay was not based on a story from any of Mr. Katsu's ZATOICHI films. I also saw no point in trying to impersonate his version of Zatoichi. I set out to create a new version that would be as different as possible both physically and psychologically. Mr. Katsu's Zatoichi had dark hair, dressed in a plain-coloured

kimono and carried a brown cane sword. Although this worked well in his time, I thought I would make my Zatoichi conspicuously different visually. My Zatoichi is actually a pretty eccentric person. He has platinum blond hair and a blood-red cane sword. Also, in terms of mentality, my Zatoichi is far more emotionally detached from the other characters. Mr. Katsu's Zatoichi was more about an almost heart-warming relationships he made with the good and meek town people. Mine doesn't fully mingle with the good guys. He just keeps slaying bad guys!

PERIOD PIECES

One would expect that period pieces impose greater restrictions than contemporary films, because of the costumes and locations having to be faithful to historical facts, etc. On the contrary, I felt greater creative freedom, because basically you can fabricate everything in a period piece. Every detail -- the looks of the characters, locations, etc. -- is actually more fictitious than in a contemporary piece since everything is being recreated. For example, almost all actors have to wear hairpieces to replicate the styles that suggest old times. As to the language, my choice went for modern Japanese as the film's essence is not of a classic period drama.

COMPUTER GRAPHICS

More and more films are beginning to rely on computer graphics and visual effects, but mostly in modern pieces. I have not felt comfortable using them in my films in the past. But to use it in a period piece, it can give the film an almost cartoon-like tone, which is more suitable. We mostly used computer graphics to show cuts and wounds. In the old times, you could get away with not showing blood gushing out nor showing the wound. But times have changed. So, we tried to show the wounds whenever possible more graphically.

SWORD AT MY SIDE AT ALL TIMES

I didn't want to rely on computer graphics and visual effects for the action scenes. I wanted to do my own swordplay stunts as much as possible because I love doing it! In the story and original films, Zatoichi holds his cane sword in a backhand grip when he unsheathes it. This imposed considerable restrictions on how I used the sword. I only had a few choices in terms of action -- swinging it up, downward or sideways. In order to capture sword movements on film in visually composed ways, I had to do those scenes in physically unnatural postures. There was a lot of painful twisting of my wrists, elbows and shoulders. It definitely required some practice.

DIFFICULTIES OF PLAYING BLIND

It was even more difficult to perform the sword movements with my eyes closed when the camera was facing me. Sometimes I didn't know where I was swinging my sword! It was very disorienting to have to do everything with my eyes closed. Even just walking straight was hard. Even with ground marks, I had my share of stumbles and falls. I couldn't tell what was the space between me and my co-stars. I couldn't see their expressions or actions when acting with them. It was tougher than I expected. When you act with your eyes open, you can indirectly get the feeling of how to make your moves and say your lines even though you can't physically see yourself.

ZATOICHI'S MOVES

We had a sword fighting choreographer on the set, but I ended up choreographing almost all the sword-fighting scenes myself except the one with the two geishas versus Ginzo's henchmen at Ogi's residence. I didn't want the sword fighting scenes to resemble those in past films where you can tell the same combinations are being used. I tried to do something different than the well-known past fight sequences choreographed by the experts. I hate duels where the sword dictates everything, resulting in a lot of clinking and clanking. Luckily, Zatoichi usually strikes with just one stroke, so I was able to avoid that type of sword-fighting. In contrast, I let actor Tadanobu Asano (as the ronin bodyguard Hattori) perform trickier stuff that I had accumulated over the years. Coming from Asakusa's comedy scene, I had done a fair amount of training in sword fighting, which was compulsory for any comic in those days. We often adopted sword fighting in our sketches on stage. My comedy master would first show us basic movements and then we rearranged it to make it look funnier. Ever since then, I had quite a few ideas in the back of my mind for tricky sword-fighting choreography, which I had always wanted to use in a period film if ever I would make one.

THE ACTOR RECEIVING THE BLOWS

Sword fighting in film is not about how good the fighter is, but how good the actor receiving the blows is. If the opponent is not skilled, the timing will be wrong and the scene will look unnatural. I didn't want to see actors receiving blows then collapsing facing the camera.

FILMING SWORD FIGHTS

Sword fights are all about timing. You can't be slow. I had to be fast. Sometimes the sword stroke practically flew by. But this is contrasted with the opponents' slower movements. To capture the swift sword movements, we used both a high speed and regular camera. The advantage of using two cameras simultaneously is that if one camera doesn't catch a certain moment, you have to rely on the other. Sometimes a camera didn't film the sword at all, so I had to count on the other camera to catch the action on film.

GUNS VS. SWORDS

The bam! of a pistol and the zunk! of a sword have different meanings. When it comes to filming a gunfight, not very many cameras are needed. There are times when the gun isn't even filmed. Also, when the gun goes off, there really isn't much else the guy who was shot can do. But with sword fights, you don't know what the next movement is going to be. When the blow is struck, the sword fighter must then attack his opponent's unguarded area. At times, he can't strike. Even after repeating the same thing several times in rehearsal, it comes down to reflex and agility in the filming.

ATTITUDE ON EDITING

I had to use more cuts in ZATOICHI than in my previous films. I needed to take several shots to hide imperfections, since the actors wear hairpieces and kimonos and every detail has to be in place. Using short shots is a norm, especially if there are a lot of camera movements. A period drama without moving the camera would look like a silent movie.

THE KUROSAWA WAY

Kurosawa usually did numerous takes of a well-planned out sword fight, which I think has a tremendous impact. It takes a lot of stamina to film the Kurosawa way. ZATOICHI's rain sequence is my homage to Kurosawa's SEVEN SAMURAI... Incidentally, while shooting that scene, not only was it cold, but the smell of the rain changed at some point. Apparently, water from a carp pond was used because there wasn't enough tank water. It really stunk. It felt like we had carp pouring down on us.

A TYPICAL HAPPY ENDING

I used to make fun of Japanese period dramas, which all had identical endings. For example, when the hero leaves town and walks on a road along a rice field, the farmers ploughing the fields suddenly started singing and dancing while they worked. When it came time for me to direct my first period piece, I thought, "Why not do my own rendition of a typical happy ending in a period drama!" I felt it would be boring to reproduce traditional Japanese folk dancing with a bunch of amateurs, which isn't too exciting visually and sonically. Then it struck me, "Why not let them tap dance?!" I figured that the basic premise of the Zatoichi story - a blind masseur-cum-master swordsman who can draw his secret sword cane at the speed of lightning - was in itself preposterous enough for me to set out to make an all-out entertainment movie. So I did my modernized rendition of typical festival dancing scenes in a period piece. I let Japan's top tap dancers, appearing as farmers and carpenters, dressed in traditional kimonos, wooden clogs and straw sandals, do the latest style of tap dancing backed by hip-hop rhythms.

TAP DANCING

A great entertainer should be able to do all kinds of things. I did some tap dancing but I found it to be a bit plain, no pizzazz. I didn't like the Gene Kelly type of tap dancing. But when I discovered the type of tap dancing Gregory Hines performed without music, I thought it was amazing. A few years ago, I became acquainted with the Japanese tap dancing team called "The Stripes." I saw their show and was completely fascinated by their dancing. I was awestruck as to how different their style was from the traditional style in which I was trained. That's how I came to use "The Stripes" in ZATOICHI.

HUMOROUS TOUCHES

I wanted a sense of balance to the film. I didn't want to have just action scenes throughout the film. I wanted to add some humour to lighten up the film. The character of Ogi (played by Saburo Ishikura) was supposed to be a very bad guy, but he joked around so much I decided to keep it. So, he's kind of a funny bad guy. The funny good guy, Shinkichi, Zatoichi's sidekick, is played by one of my oldest comedy protégés, Guadalcanal Taka.

THE STRIPES CHOREOGRAPHY

THE STRIPES are a rhythm and tap performance group formed and led by central member Hideyuki (a.k.a. HIDEBOH). The group calls their unique dance style Çfunka-stepÈ - a fusion of clog dance, African-American street-style rhythm tap dancing, club music and percussions using household items like buckets and frying pans. Since their formation in 1998, they have entertained thousands in hundreds of performances all over Japan.

KEIICHI SUZUKI MUSIC

Keiichi Suzuki is best known as a solo artist and vocalist / guitarist / keyboard player for the legendary Japanese group Moon Riders. In 2001, Moon Riders celebrated 25 years without any member changes and over 15 studio albums. Moon Riders evolved from Suzuki 's 1972 group Hachimi tsupai, one of the pioneers of 'the Japanese rock movement.' Suzuki collaborated with Yellow Magic Orchest ra's Yukihiro Takahashi to create the duo The Beatniks, and he also participated in the three-piece group Three Blind Moses. Suzuki's "Satellite Serenade" has become an international club classic since being trance-house mixed by Sasha and John Digweed for the "Northern Exposure" album and by the Orb for the "Auntie Aubrey's Excursions Beyond the Call of Duty" album.

In addition to Takeshi Kitano's ZATOICHI, Suzuki has worked as composer/arranger on feature films 2001's CHICKEN HEART (dir. Hiroshi Shimizu) and 2000's UZUMAKI (WHIRLPOOL aka SPIRAL) (dir. Higuchinsky). Born in 1951, Suzuki is an important producer on the Japanese pop music scene. He has also composed music for commercials and video games, such as Nintendo's Earthbound, Mother and Mother 2. Suzuki has also occasionally appeared as an actor, notably in Shuji Iwai's films LOVE LETTER and SWALLOW TAIL .

KATSUMI YANAGIJIMA CINEMATOGRAPHER

ZATOICHI marks Katsumi Yanagijima`s ninth collaboration with Takeshi Kitano. Since 1990's BOILING POINT, Yanagishima has become one of Kitano's key crew by working on A SCENE AT THE SEA, SONATINE, GETTING ANY?, KIDS RETURN, KIKUJIRO, BROTHER and DOLLS. Yanagijima made his debut as a cinematographer on 1989's MOT TOMO ABUNAI DEKA (dir. Toru Kawashima). His other credits include 1995's MARKS (dir. Yoichi Sai), 1998's IKINAI (dir. Hiroshi Shimizu), 2000's BATTLE ROYALE (dir. Kinji Fukasaku), 2001's GO (dir. Isao Yukisada) and 2003's MAKAI TENSHO (dir. Hideyuki Hirayama).

HITOSHI TAKAYA LIGHTING DESIGNER

Hitoshi Takaya has worked on all 11 Takeshi Kitano-directed films. Takaya made his debut in 1983's KAGI (dir. Aktaka Kimata). His other credits include 1985's FIRE FESTIVAL (dir. Mitsuo Yanagimachi), 1987's SARABA ITO SHIKI HITOYO (dir. Masato Harada), 1993's WE ARE NOT ALONE (dir. Yojiro Takita), 1998's IKINAI (dir. Hiroshi Shimizu), 1999's DEAD OR ALIVE: HANZA ISHA (dir. Takashi Miike), 2001's TAIGA NO ITTEKI (dir. Seishiro Koyama) and 2001's GO (dir. Isao Yukisada).

NORIHIRO ISODA PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Norihiro Isoda has collaborated with Takeshi Kitano on seven films: ZATOICHI , DOLLS, BROTHER, KIKUJIRO, HANA-BI, KIDS RETURN and GETTING ANY?. Before cinema, Isoda worked several years as a graphic designer. His other film credits include: 1993's MANY HAPPY RETURNS (dir. Toshihiro Tenma), 1995's TO KYO KYODAI (dir. Jun Ichikawa), 1998's FUKIGENNA KAJITSU (dir. Katsuo Naruse), 1998's IKINAI (dir. Hiroshi Shimizu) and 1998's GIVE IT ALL (dir. Itsumichi Isomura).

SENJI HORIUCHI SOUND DESIGNER

Senji Horiuchi has worked on all 11 Takeshi Kitano-directed films. He made his debut in 1988 as chief sound engineer on KAITO JIGOMA: ONGAKU-HEN (dir. Makoto Wada). His other credits include 1989's ZATO-ICHI (dir. Shintaro Katsu), 1993's WE ARE NOT ALONE (dir. Yojiro Takita), 1998's IKINAI (dir. Hiroshi Shimizu), 2001's OTOGIRI-SO (dir. Ten Shimoyama), 2001's MISUZU (dir. Takumi Igarashi) and 2002's Japanese-Korean co - production THROUGH THE NIGHT (dir.Sujin Kim).