

# THE ART OF THE BENSHI 2024

## Programs and Schedules

### Programs

#### Program I

*The Dull Sword*  
*A Straightforward Boy*  
*The Golden Flower*  
*The Water Magician*

#### Program II

*The Dull Sword*  
*An Unforgettable Grudge*  
*Blood Spattered Takadanobaba* (2 screenings)  
*Orochi*

#### Program III

*Sanji Goto: The Story of a Japanese Enoch Arden*  
*Jiraiya the Hero*  
*Our Pet*  
*A Page of Madness*

#### Program VI

*The Dull Sword*  
*The Immigrant*  
*Not Blood Relations*  
*The Oath of the Sword*  
*The Vindictive Snake*

#### Program V (Los Angeles only)

*Man and Wife*  
*Dog Heaven*  
*Sweetie*

#### Program VI (Tokyo only)

*Not Blood Relations*  
*The Oath of the Sword*  
*Sweetie*  
*Blood Spattered Takadanobaba*  
*A Straightforward Boy*  
*Jiraiya the Hero*

## Program Schedules

### 1. BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music) – April 5-7

April 5, 7:00 PM (Program I)  
April 6, 3:00 PM (Program II)  
April 6, 7:00 PM (Program III)  
April 7, 3:00 PM (Program IV)

### 2. National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution – April 12-14

April 12, 7:00 PM (Program I)  
April 13, 7:00 PM (Program II)  
April 14, 3:00 PM (Program III)  
April 14, 7:00 PM (Program IV)

### 3. Gene Siskel Film Center – April 16-17

April 16, 6:00 PM (Program I)  
April 17, 6:00 PM (Program III)

### 4. The United Theater on Broadway – April 19

7:30 PM (Program III)

### 5. Billy Wilder Theater – April 20-21

April 20, 3:00 PM (Program II)  
April 20, 7:30 PM (Program I)  
April 21, 3:00 PM (Program IV)  
April 21, 7:00 PM (Program V)

### 6. Okuma Theater, Waseda University - April 26

6:00 PM  
Program VI

**UCLA  
FILM &  
TELEVISION  
ARCHIVE**



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## Film Notes

### **The Dull Sword** (Namakura gatana), Japan, 1917

An overly-confident samurai looks for unsuspecting victims on which to try out his new sword but neither his targets nor his weapon prove willing to play along. *The Dull Sword* is the oldest known surviving example of moving image *anime*, simply drawn but highly expressive in its satirical take on period genre conventions.

DCP, silent, tinted, 5 min. Director: Junichi Kōchi.

DCP courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan.

### **A Straightforward Boy** (Tokkan kozō), Japan, 1929

Precocious children often take center stage in the works of Japanese master Ozu Yasujiro (*I Was Born But...*, *Good Morning*) with this fragment of a silent comedy short offering an early glimpse of his felicity with childhood. Trouble abounds for a pair of kidnappers who underestimate the energies of their young abductee who quickly challenges their patience for the job. This version includes seven more minutes than the previously known extant versions thanks to a newly-discovered print.

DCP, silent, tinted, 21 min. Director: Ozu Yasujiro. Screenwriters: Tadao Ikeda, Chuji Nozu. With: Tatsuo Saitō, Tomio Aoki, Takeshi Sakamoto.

### **The Golden Flower** (Kogane no hana), Japan, 1929

This charming example of stop-motion collage tells the story of a ceremonial dancer who encounters a demon serpent in the hills while on his way home after performing at a harvest festival. He escapes the encounter and returns with a group of villagers to destroy the creature but its spirit has the last laugh. Produced by studio Chiyogami Eiga-sha, *The Golden Flower* suggests the rich variety of styles being explored by early Japanese animators.

35mm, silent, 17 min. Director: Noburō Ōfuji.

### **The Water Magician** (Taki no shiraito), Japan, 1933

The elements of director Kenji Mizoguchi's mature style are evident everywhere in this galvanizing melodrama adapted from a novel by Kyōka Izumi. High angle shots and sweeping camera movements lend a distinctly modern dynamism to the story of a woman (Takako Irie) who sacrifices everything she has to ensure the future of a young man (Tokihiko Okada) who captures her imagination. Irie delivers a powerful, moving performance as a theater performer whose good deed leads to tragedy as Mizoguchi (*Ugetsu, The Life of Oharu*) interrogates the shifting strata of Japanese society. Of course, benshi played an essential role in the original release of *The Water Magician* in Japan but the benshi of a generation later played an equally important role in the film's restoration in 2006. DCP, silent, 102 min. Director: Kenji Mizoguchi. Screenwriters: Kennosuke Tateoka, Yasunaga Higashibōjō, Shinji Masuda. With: Takako Irie, Tokihiko Okada, Ichirō Sugai. DCP courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan.

### **An Unforgettable Grudge** (Bakumatsu kenshi: Chōkon), Japan, 1926

Only the final reel of this samurai melodrama from director Daisuke Itō survives today which is enough to suggest the enormity of the loss. An Edo-set story of samurai brothers who fall in love with the same woman, it culminates with a ferocious sword fight between the spurned brother and an army of warriors, as action-packed a film fragment as you're ever likely to see.

DCP, silent, tinted, 15 min. Director: Daisuke Itō. Screenwriter: With: Daisuke Itō. Denjirō Ōkōchi Yayoï Kawakami, Yuzuru Kume.

DCP courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan.

### **Blood Spattered Takadanobaba** (Chikemure Takadanobaba), Japan, 1928

Star Denjirō Ōkōchi and director Daisuke Itō helped remake the *chambara* genre in the late 1920s, infusing it with visual flash and mythic power. Sadly, the films of theirs that survive exist mostly in fragmentary form. Such is the case with *Blood Spattered Takadanobaba*. In this brief scene, the rōnin Yasube comes home drunk to a letter from his uncle requesting assistance fighting off a band of villainous samurai. Yasube races to his uncle's side and joins the battle already in violent progress! So that audiences can experience more directly how a benshi's specific style can influence a film, *Blood Spattered Takadanobaba* will be repeated over the course of this series with a different benshi narrating each time.

Print courtesy of the Toy Film Museum. DCP, b/w, silent, intertitles in Japanese with English subtitles, 12 min. Director/Screenwriter: Daisuke Itō. Cast: Denjirō Ōkōchi, En'ichirō Jitsukawa, Harue Ichikawa.

### **Orochi**, 1925 Japan

Tsumasaburō Bandō, one of Japan's earliest screen idols, plays a masterless samurai, forced to become a gangster's bodyguard in this dazzling *jidaigeki* (period drama). Japanese film critic Junichiro Tanaka praised it in the pages of *Kinema Junpo* in 1952, particularly its bravura, climactic chase scene, in which the "cinematic beauty of light, shadow, and movement flows into the screen along with Tsumasaburo's sword fighting."

DCP, b&w, silent with Japanese intertitles, 101 min. Director: Buntarō Futagawa. Screenwriter: Rokuhei Susukita. Cast: Tsumasaburō Bandō, Misao Seki, Misao Tamaki.

### **Sanji Goto-The Japanese Enoch Arden** (Narikin), Japan, 1918

Billed as the "the first ever Japanese production of its kind," *Sanji Goto* holds a fascinating place in international film history. After training as an actor with Thomas Ince, director Kisaburō "Thomas" Kurihara returned to Japan to make films for export to the U.S. beginning with this slapstick comedy. Iwajiro Nakajima, "the Japanese Charlie Chaplin," stars as an guileless janitor who journeys to the States on the chance of inheriting a fortune. Sadly, the film survives only as a fragment.

DCP, silent, 35 min. Director: Harry Williams, Kisaburō Kurihara. With: Iwajiro Nakajima, Goro Kino, Miyo Suzuki.

DCP courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan.

### **Jiraiya the Hero** (Gōketsu jiraiya), Japan, 1921

The first star of the Japanese screen, Matsunosuke Onoe plays the title character, a shape-shifting ninja who battles his enemies with an arsenal of magic, which includes transforming himself into a giant toad. Based on a famous folktale, *Jiraiya the Hero* was one Japan's earliest "trick films" and survives today as a fragment featuring a series of loosely connected fight scenes.

DCP, b/w, silent, intertitles in Japanese with English subtitles, 21 min. Director: Shōzo Makino. Cast: Matsunosuke Onoe, Suminojo Ichikawa, Kijaku Ōtani.

DCP courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan.

### **Our Pet** U.S.A, 1924

Diana Serra Cary, better known by her screen name, Baby Peggy, was only 19 months old when director Fred Fishback cast her in a series of comedy shorts in 1921 alongside Brownie the Wonder Dog. By the following year, she was one of the biggest child stars in the world. In *Our Pet*, discovered at auction in 2016 by master benshi Ichirō Kataoka, Peggy is awakened from sleep by a series of burglars who quickly find themselves, in over their heads, *Home Alone*-style.

DCP, b&w, silent with Japanese intertitles, 11 min. Director: Herman C. Raymaker. Screenwriter: Herman C. Raymaker. With: Baby Peggy, Newton Hall, Winston Radom.

### **A Page of Madness** (Kurutta ichipeiji), Japan, 1926

With a scenario devised by Japanese novelist (and later Nobel Prize winner) Yasunari Kawabata with contributions from other members of the radical literary movement known as *Shinkankakuha*, director Teinosuke Kinugasa crafted this visionary masterpiece that was thought lost for almost 50 years. Wracked with guilt, believing his wanton cruelty drove his wife insane, a husband becomes a janitor at the asylum where she's incarcerated so he can care for her. When he comes to fear her illness may prevent their daughter from getting married, he gradually loses his own grip on reality. Replete with fantastical images, super impositions and rapid montage, the film subverts any sense of narrative coherence even as Kinugasa builds, according to critic Chris Fujiwara "an atmosphere of astonishing intensity."

DCP, silent, intertitles in Japanese with English subtitles, 70 min. Director: Teinosuke Kinugasa. Screenwriter: Yasunari Kawabata, Teinosuke Kinugasa, Minoru Inuzuka, Bankō Sawada. With: Masao Inoue, Yoshie Nakagawa, Ayako Iijima.

### **Not Blood Relations** (Nasanu naka), Japan 1916

Based on a contemporary set novel by Yanagawa Shun'yo, *Not Blood Relations* was adapted to the Japanese stage with multiple film versions to follow, including director Naruse Mikio's take in 1932. Director Inoue Masao also stars in this 1916 adaptation which

follows the destruction of a businessman and his family as mounting scandals reawaken lingering hatreds and induce new crimes. This surviving fragment features three sequences from the original film, including its denouement.

DCP, b&w, silent with Japanese intertitles, 12 min. Director: Inoue Masao. Cast: Inoue Masao, Kinoshita Kichinosuke, Akimoto Kikuya.

### **The Immigrant, U.S.A, 1917**

One of seven films written and directed by Charlie Chaplin on the National Film Registry, *The Immigrant* follows the Tramp's delightfully slapstick comic misadventures from the deck of a steamship sailing by the Statue of Liberty to the streets of America where penury and romance follow in short order. Working with essential onscreen collaborators Edna Purviance and Eric Campbell, Chaplin reworked the storyline and gags on the fly during production to craft this iconic comedy.

DCP, b&w, silent, 24 min. Director: Charlie Chaplin. Screenwriter: Charlie Chaplin, Vincent Bryan, Maverick Terrell. With: Charlie Chaplin, Edna Purviance, Eric Campbell.

### **The Oath of the Sword, U.S.A., 1914**

The rediscovery of *The Oath of the Sword* in 2016 and its subsequent restoration by the Japanese American National Museum and George Eastman Museum brought a lost film back to the screen and illuminated a long overlooked facet of early film history. A tragic tale of ambition and love betrayed, it was produced by a Los Angeles-based company founded by Japanese immigrants and featured Japanese actors in the lead roles, making it the earliest known Asian American film production.

DCP, tinted, silent, 31 min. Director: Frank Shaw. With: Tomi Morri, Miss Hisa Numa, Yutaka Abe.

Restored by the Japanese American National Museum and George Eastman Museum. Funded by the National Film Preservation Foundation. Digital restoration from a 35mm nitrate print and 35mm safety negative from the George Eastman Museum collection was done at Eastman Museum Film Preservation Services and at Colorlab.

DCP courtesy of George Eastman Museum.

### **The Vindictive Snake** (Shūnen no dokuja), Japan, 1932

A vengeful ghost takes center stage in this rarely seen, early Japanese horror film shot in Okinawa and Hawaii. An immigrant story gone wrong, it stars Okinawan native Seizen Toguchi, who also wrote the script, as a husband who emigrates with his wife from Okinawa to Oahu where they find work on a sugarcane plantation. When she contracts leprosy, he abandons her and flees back to Japan only to be driven mad, years later, by her spirit, transformed into the serpent of the title. A seminal genre work with roots in Okinawan folklore, *The Vindictive Snake* is the oldest known narrative film shot in Okinawa.

DCP, tinted, silent, 71 min. Director: Jirō Yoshino. Screenwriter: Seizen Toguchi. With: Seizen Toguchi.

### **Man and Wife**, U.S.A., 1923

The Perkins sisters are a study in contrasts: Dolly thrives in the rural setting of the family farm, while Dora chafes against it and restlessly dreams of a move to the big city. Following an argument with her father, Dora leaves for the beckoning metropolis, sparking a storyline replete with deception, bigamy, madness, and finally, reconciliation. Norma Shearer who plays Dolly would soon become a major star at MGM under the guidance of legendary producer Irving Thalberg. "A wild tale, wildly done on the screen," as per *Variety's* review at the time, *Man and Wife* is silent melodrama at its most satisfying.

DCP, tinted & toned, 54 min. Director: John L. McCutcheon. Screenwriter: Leota Morgan.

**With:** Maurice Costello, Gladys Leslie, Norma Shearer.

*Restoration funded by the National Film Preservation Foundation. Restored by UCLA Film & Television Archive from a 35mm tinted and toned nitrate print. Laboratory services by Roundabout Entertainment, Inc., FotoKem. Special thanks to Library of Congress.*

### **Dog Heaven**, U.S.A., 1927

Pete the Pup, a.k.a. Pal, the Wonder Dog, the beloved American Staffordshire Terrier that starred in Hal Roach's Our Gang comedies from 1924-1930, takes center stage in his own light-hearted story of love and betrayal. When his owner Joe (Joe Cobb) develops a young crush on Clarabelle (Annette De Kirby), Pete feels left out, becoming so dejected that he decides to end it all—to the delight of the local cats and kittens. Of course, Pete's never in any real danger and a climatic race to the rescue ultimately set everything right.



DCP, b/w, silent, 31 min. Director: Robert A. McGowan, Charles Oelze. Screenplay: H.M. Walker. With: Joe Cobb, Annette De Kirby, Jackie Condon.

Restoration funded by The Louis B. Mayer Foundation. Restored by UCLA Film & Television Archive from a 35mm acetate fine grain master positive. Laboratory services by Roundabout Entertainment, Inc., The PHI Stoa Film Lab. Special thanks to Screen Media.

**Sweetie, U.S.A., 1923**

In this rags-to-riches tale, an orphaned and destitute Baby Peggy (a.k.a. pioneering child star Diana Serra Cary) enlists the aid of a mischievous performing monkey to seek restitution for an elderly violinist. After an epic chase, she is adopted by a wealthy couple—then steals the spotlight at the evening social.

DCP, b/w, silent, 21 min. Director: Alfred J. Goulding. Screenplay: Alfred J. Goulding. With: Baby Peggy, Jerry Mandy, Louise Lorraine.

*Preservation funded by The Packard Humanities Institute and David Stenn. Preserved by UCLA Film & Television Archive in cooperation with Filmarchiv Austria, Lobster Films, and The Museum of Modern Art from a 35mm nitrate print and two 16mm prints. Laboratory services by The Stanford Theatre Film Laboratory. Special thanks to: David Shepard.*

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