

“Killing” (Zan) by Shinya Tsukamoto



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Director: Shinya Tsukamoto

Country: Japan

Genre: Drama, Sword action

Duration: 80min.

Actors – Filmography: (selective)

Sosuke Ikematsu (Mokunoshin) - *The Tokyo Night Sky is Always The Densest Shade of Blue* ('17), *The Long Excuse* ('16), *Death Note: Light Up the New World* ('16), *The Last Samurai* ('03)

Yu Aoi (Yu) - *Birds Without Names* ('17), *Tokyo!* (by Bong Joonho '08), *Hula Girls* ('06), *Hana and Alice* ('04)

Tatsuya Nakamura (Genda) - *Fires on the Plain* ('14), *Bullet Ballet* ('99)

Shinya Tsukamoto (Sawamura) - *Silence* (by Martin Scorsese '16), *Shin Godzilla* ('16), *Fires on the Plain* ('14)

[International Sales]
NIKKATSU CORPORATION

[Production]
Kaijyu Theater

3-28-12, Hongo, Bunkyo-ku Tokyo
113-0033, JAPAN

Phone : +81-3-5689-1014

Emico Kawai & Taku Kato
international@nikkatsu.co.jp

FESTIVAL

Mami Furukawa
m.furukawa@nikkatsu.co.jp

< Synopsis >

After about 250 years of peace in Japan, samurai warriors in the mid-19th century were impoverished. Consequently, many left their masters to become wandering ronin.

Mokunoshin Tsuzuki (played by Sosuke Ikematsu) is one such samurai. He survives by helping farmers in a village out of Edo. To maintain his swordsmanship skills, Mokunoshin spars daily with Ichisuke (Ryusei Maeda), a farmer's son. Ichisuke's sister Yu (Yu Aoi) watches them train with a hint of disapproval although there's an unspoken attraction between her and Mokunoshin. While farm life is peaceful, there is monumental turmoil in Japan. The US Navy has sent Commodore Perry to Japan to insist that it trades with them. This in turn causes civil unrest. Yu is concerned as she senses that Mokunoshin will soon leave to join the impending civil war, and consequently die.

One day the three of them come across two dueling samurai. The winner is Jirozaemon Sawamura (Shinya Tsukamoto), a mild-mannered yet skillful ronin. Sawamura invites Mokunoshin and Ichisuke to go with him to Edo where a group of samurai is waiting. The group will eventually go to Kyoto to fight in the civil war. Mokunoshin and Ichisuke agree to join although Ichisuke feels inadequate as he is a farmer's son and not a samurai. Sawamura assures him that his swordsmanship is all that matters. Sawamura observes the two spar with each other and is particularly impressed by Mokunoshin.

Sawamura stays in the village to look for other potential warriors when a group of outlaw ronin arrives. The villagers have heard terrifying rumors about the outlaw's leader, Sezaemon Genda (Tatsuya Nakamura).

Mokunoshin is in awe of a sword's formidable power. While he contemplates what it means to wield a sword, Ichisuke is eager to leave farm life behind to fight in a war. Yu is worried to death about her brother and heartbroken that Mokunoshin is leaving. At the same time, she also grows fascinated with Sawamura's valor.

When the hot-blooded Ichisuke takes on the outlaws, the direction of their lives drastically changes.

< Director's Statement >

A young ronin who stares at his sword with ardor.

This was the germ of an idea that I'd first had years ago.

How will I kill another person with this sword? How can I?

Some samurai must have thought that.

Even if it's my master's order, how can I bring myself to do it?

Wouldn't some of them have thought so?

Since no samurai remain, I went to the next best thing, a WWII veteran and asked him if he'd encountered any conscientious objectors. Did he know anyone who'd quit because he didn't want to kill or be killed? His answer: "Becoming a soldier wasn't questioned as it is today. Even if you didn't want to join up, there was no escaping it. War was such an ordinary part of everyone's life that it was simply inevitable. People today must find such a story of samurai incomprehensible."

The weight of his words contextualized that single line, "*A young ronin who stares at his sword with ardor*" for and stayed with me.

In *Fires on the Plain* I explored the ultimate horror of war so this time I wanted an entirely different theme for my movie. Then that line that had been floating in my head, became the kernel for this movie. As I inhaled the current state of the world I had an urge to let it out like a scream. The single line inflated into a story and with an incredible cast of performers and a dependable crew, I had a movie. A movie that is simple, relevant, and gives voice to my scream.

Travelling back in time from the 1940s of *Fires on the Plain* and condensing all the firearms into one sword drew me a little closer to the essence of man.

< Director's Biography >

Born in Tokyo, Japan on January 1, 1960. He started making films when he was a junior high school student. He graduated from Nippon University, majoring in oil painting. After graduating the university, he was employed by a TV commercial film production. While working for the production, he participated in stage activity along with the people who became both the cast members and film crew for his film, Tetsuo The Iron Man ('89). The film instantly put him in limelight as a filmmaker with an original vision and style in the international film scene. The films that followed Tetsuo received many rave reviews and prizes: Tetsuo II The Body Hammer ('92), Tokyo Fist ('95), Bullet Ballet ('98). He won the Jury's Prize (Contro Corrente section) A Snake of June ('02) at the 59th Venice International Film Festival and the New Visions Award for Vital ('04) at the 37th Sitges – International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia and Orizzonti Prize for Kotoko ('11) at the 68th Venice International Film Festival. In 2014, Fires on the Plain ('14) was selected in the competition at the 71st Venice International Film Festival.

He is also an ardent actor and has acted for many directors. He received the Best Leading Actor as well as the Best Director at the Mainichi Newspaper Film Concours in 2015 for Fires on the Plain. He also plays Mokichi, an impoverished villager/martyr, in Martin Scorsese's Silence ('16).

Filmography as director:

ZAN aka KILLING ('18)

NOBI aka FIRES ON THE PLAIN ('14)

KOTOKO ('11)

HAZAKURA TO MATEKI aka THE WISTLE ('10)

TETSUO THE BULLET MAN ('09)

AKUMU TANTEI2 aka NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE2 ('08)

AKUMU TANTEI aka NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE ('06)

HAZE ('05)

TAMAMUSHI aka JEWEL BEETLE ('05)

VITAL ('04)

TOKAGE aka LIZARD ('03)

ROKUGATSU NO HEBI aka A SNAKE OF JUNE ('02)

SOUSEIZI GEMINI ('99)

BULLET BALLET ('98)

TOKYO FIST ('95)

TETSUO II THE BODY HAMMER ('92)

TETSUO THE IRON MAN ('89)

Awards:

Kotoko – The Orizzonti Prize at the 68th Venice International Film Festival

Vital – Sitges –International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia – New Visions Award

A Snake of June – Venice International Film Festival 2002 – Kinematrix Film Award & San Marco Special Jury Award

Tokyo Fist – Sundance Film Festival in Tokyo 1995 – Grand Prize

< Cast Profiles >

Sosuke Ikematsu

Ikematsu has mesmerized audiences with his awe-inspiring acting since his first role in *The Last Samurai* (2003). 2014 was a year that stood out in his career as he received Newcomer of Year award at the Japan Academy Film Prize and the Best Supporting Actor award from the Blue Ribbon Awards. He starred in high-profile movies such as *Pale Moon*, *Love's Whirlpool*, *Undulant Fever*, *Our Family*. His impressive movie appearances continue with *The Vancouver Asahi* (2014), *Mozu the Movie* (2015), *Seto and Utsumi* (2016), *Death Note Light up the New World* (2016) and so on. In 2017 he received the Best Actor award at the 9th Tama Cinema Forum and the 39th Yokohama Film Festival for his performance in *The Tokyo Night Sky Is Always the Densest Shade of Blue*. He remains prolific in 2018, starring in *Shoplifters*, the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or winner, *You, Your, Yours*, *Samurai's Promise*, and *Killing*. He is definitely one of the most sought-after performers of our time. Ikematsu was born on July 9, 1990 in Fukuoka, Japan.

Yu Aoi

Aoi's first acting role was in the theatre production of *Annie* in 1999. Her film debut was in 2001, when she starred in *All About Lily Chou-Chou*. She continued to star in movies such as *Hana and Alice* (2004), *Letters from Kanai Nirai* (2005), and *Hula Girls* (2006) for which she received the Best Supporting Actress award and the Newcomer of Year award at the Japan Academy Film Prize among numerous other accolades. Her recent screen appearances include *Over the Fence* (2016), *Japanese Girls Never Die* (2016), *Birds Without Names* (2017) for which she won the Best Actress from the Japan Academy Film Prize. She has been active in the theatre also with plays such as *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (2016) and *Antigone* (2018). Aoi was born on August 17, 1985 in Fukuoka, Japan.

[Venice & Toronto IFF Press Contact]

Gloria Zerbinati

gloria.zerbinati@gmail.com

+33 (0)7 86 80 02 82