

Kobayashi on Harakiri

Japanese director defends scenes of brutality

By WARREN CLEMENTS
Japanese film-maker Masaki Kobayashi doesn't believe in faking his action sequences.

For the climactic samurai sword-fight in his 1962 period epic Harakiri, in which many of the participants were sliced and disembowelled,

Kobayashi insisted that his actors use real samurai swords.

The swords, aside from being uncommonly heavy, have an edge as sharp as a razor blade's.

"I wanted a cathartic effect," Kobayashi told a capacity crowd in Curtis LH-L Friday night.

"It is impossible to slay any man with your wrists. You must effectively use the lower torso. Actors in the past had used dummy swords, and trotted around as though they weren't even carrying swords.

"I believe the use of the genuine, heavy samurai swords produced in my film a credibility and impact unequalled in any earlier period pieces."

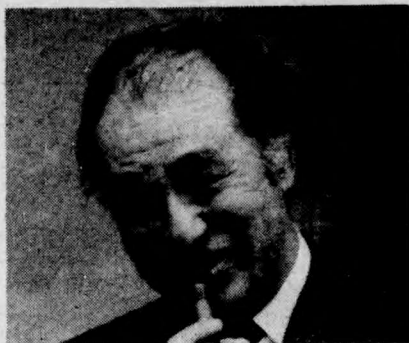
He paused. "I would like to offer my sympathies to my actors for their numerous injuries."

Kobayashi was visiting York as part of the Japan Week festivities, a Fine Arts exhibition which lasted from January 8 through 12. The 57-year old director's appearance was arranged with the assistance of the University of Quebec, by York social science professor Toyomasa Fuse, who also acted as Kobayashi's interpreter.

Among Kobayashi's 19 films to date are The Fountainhead (1956), A Soldier's Prayer (1961), Harakiri (1962) and Kwaidan (1964).

Harakiri, shown Friday night, was a gripping tale of hardship, pride and, ultimately, vengeance. Set in the 13th century, the story was a bitter attack on the feudalism of that time.

Kobayashi's symbol of the "brutali-



Masaki Kobayashi

ty and cruelty" of the feudal institution, the act of harakiri (pronounced "set-buku"), made its strongest appearance in a scene in which a young samurai is forced to disembowel himself using a sword made not of the traditional metal, but of bamboo.

"After the 1963 screening of this film at Cannes," said Kobayashi, "I was bombarded with people asking me if it was necessary to create such a graphically brutal scene.

"I felt that the more brutally portrayed it was, the clearer the understanding would be of the difficulty of resistance to feudalism by the main character.

"I was told that when the controversial scene was shown in Poland, some people fainted in the audience." He looked at the Curtis audience with a smile. "What about you?"

Kobayashi admitted he had trouble deciding how to film that particular scene.

"After much frustration, I resorted to drinking as a means of diversion.

"While drinking heavily, a brilliant idea flashed in my mind. It was nearly impossible to pierce through the belly with a bamboo blade. But by balancing the sword against the platform, you could push your belly through it.

"The brutality might have been a bi-product of my alcoholic euphoria."

Kobayashi declined to discuss his future film projects.

"If you verbalize a theme, you often risk degenerating it into falsehood," he said. "It's something you burn, consume and nurture in the ferocious process of creative production."

Sight and Sound

Hitchcock's Frenzy shakes Curtis

Alfred Hitchcock's Frenzy, his latest film and one of his best in recent years, grips the screen tonight at 7 and 9:30 p.m. in Curtis LH-I. A sex criminal known as the Necktie Murderer terrorizes modern-day London, catching an innocent man in his net. You'll never eat potatoes again. And nervous patrons are asked to loosen their ties. Environmental Studies is responsible for this International Film series, but they neglect to say what the admission price is.

Polanski's Macbeth stalks again

Roman Polanski, of Repulsion and Rosemary's Baby fame, directed a recent version of Macbeth with Jon Finch and Francesca Annis, and even threw in a couple of nude witches to please producer Hugh Hefner. Winters brings this revamped classic to Curtis LH-I Friday and Sunday nights at 8 p.m., charging everyone \$1.25 except Winters students, who pay \$1.

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