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## **1960's NIKKATSU ACTION FILMS: "NO BORDERS, NO LIMITS"**

### ***Seneca Valley Alum to Screen Japanese Films for First Time in Pittsburgh***

**Pittsburgh, PA – May 8, 2008** – Pittsburgh native Mark Walkow, a graduate of Seneca Valley High School, is excited to be returning to his roots, and to be visiting the Andy Warhol Museum for the first time on Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup> to provide digital subtitles, as well as the sub contexts to a unique screening of four Nikkatsu Action Cinema films as part of the third annual [Silk Screen Asian American Film Festival](#). The four films are screening at the **Andy Warhol Museum**: On Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, the festival will screen "**The Warped Ones**" at 7:30 PM and "**Glass Johnny: Looks Like a Beast**" at 9:00 PM; the next evening, Friday, May 16, 2008, two different films will be shown, "**A Colt is My Passport**" at 7:30 PM and "**Plains Wanderer**" at 9:00 PM. Tickets for each movie are \$8.00 and may be purchased onsite.

Presented for the first time in the US, this series of super-stylized action films celebrates the golden age of Japan's oldest and boldest film studio, Nikkatsu. Influenced by both Hollywood and the French New Wave, these films reflect the Westernization that swept away old values, while teaching an entire generation a new Japanese meaning of 'cool.' Walko, Programmer and Director of the [New York Asian Film Festival](#), is excited to be sharing these films with Pittsburgh audiences during the Silk Screen Asian American Film Festival, which runs May 9-18, 2008.

Says Walko, "Most of the films from this genre have never been seen before by American audiences, even those who consider themselves Japanese film experts."

During their peak, from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, Nikkatsu Action films evoked a cinematic world neither foreign nor Japanese. It was a mix of the two, where Japanese tough guys had the swagger, moves, and even the long legs of Hollywood movie heroes. It was a place where the Tokyo streets, Yokohama docks, and Hokkaido hills took on an exciting, exotic aura, as though they were stand-ins for Manhattan, Marseilles, or the American West. To audiences reaching adulthood in postwar Japan, that mix was not just fantasy. It reflected the Western influences that were already all around them, from cowboy movies to be-bop jazz, from the big American cars on the city streets to the cavernous nightclubs full of hip urbanites...and yakuza.

Clustered under the title "No Borders, No Limits," these four films were first presented as part of a larger group of 15 movies at the [2005 Far East Film Festival](#) in Udine, Italy. The aim of this retrospective series is to broaden the discussion and provide opportunities for the discovery of new classics of Japanese

genre cinema that may stand alongside those already enshrined in the critical canon and made available on home video in the West. Walko is working with the series' compiler Mark Shilling, author of "**The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films**," to present the films at international film festivals in North America, including San Francisco, Boston, Los Angeles, Montreal and Vancouver.

But Walko is doing more than just presenting the films. Much like the piano player who accompanied silent films years ago, because of the age and language issues associated with these screen gems, Walkow is actually going to be on site to *manually* operate the digital subtitles during the screening. It's a pretty sneaky trick to see how it's done live, and Mark will be on hand prior to the screenings to describe that process, as well as the significance of each film. In addition, he will also have a limited copies of Shilling's book, "**No Borders, No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema**," published by FAB Press, available for purchase afterwards.

Tickets for each movie are \$8.00, and a multiple screening pass good for eight (8) films during the run of the entire festival is \$64.00. For more information on tickets, including detailed descriptions of all 25 films presented in this year's festival, or to purchase festival merchandise, please visit the Silk Screen website at [www.silkscreenfestival.org](http://www.silkscreenfestival.org).

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*Silk Screen Asian American Film Festival is a unique multiple-day International Film Festival premiering May 9-18, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. With 25 feature films in multiple venues, and a Red Carpet Gala, Silk Screen is an annual event showcasing the cultural heritage of Asia. Asia is defined by the Festival as Asian-speaking countries east of the Bosphorus, such as India, Japan, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and more. Simply put, Silk Screen will showcase films with universal themes that transcend political and cultural boundaries. Silk Screen is a Pennsylvania-based 501(c)3 non-profit media arts organization.*

*For full information about the films and the festival schedule, please visit: [www.silkscreenfestival.org](http://www.silkscreenfestival.org). For general inquiries only, please contact Harish Saluja, Festival Director, at 724-969-2565 or [info@silkscreenfestival.org](mailto:info@silkscreenfestival.org).*

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**PLEASE NOTE:  
COMPLETE FILM DESCRIPTIONS ARE LISTED BELOW.**



[SILK SCREEN]

**FOUR NIKKATSU ACTION FILMS  
AT THE ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM**

**MAY 15-16, 2008**

**Silk Screen Asian American Film Festival 2008**

[www.silkscreenfestival.org](http://www.silkscreenfestival.org)

**A COLT IS MY PASSPORT** \_\_\_\_\_ (Colt wa ore no passport, 1967, Takashi Nomura, 84:00)

In Takashi Nomura's chilly noirish thriller, Jo Shishido plays a hitman hired by a gang to whack a rival boss. He does the deed with a sniper rifle and, together with sidekick Jerry Fujio, makes his escape. But before they can board their getaway plane, they are snatched by thugs from the rival gang. Through Shishido's quick thinking, they make a narrow escape and end up at a cheap inn for truckers near Yokohama. They arrange passage on a boat bound out of the country, but deadly complications ensue, forcing Shishido to improvise yet another escape for himself and his partner, but before they can depart, they're forced into an explosive showdown with killers from the rival gang.

Released at the beginning of Shishido's second peak year at Nikkatsu—his first was 1961—**COLT** bears a family resemblance, in its hunted hitman hero, hard-boiled stylistics, impressionistic widescreen black-and-white photography, and mind-bending climactic shoot-out, to Seijun Suzuki's better-known **BRANDED TO KILL**, made the same year. Like Suzuki's film, the plot of **COLT** is spare, yet familiar, and one can see why the directors felt the need to bring such a fresh approach to the visuals. Though the formal experimentation and editing is in no way as extreme as in **BRANDED TO KILL**, it is still pretty much in evidence. The final showdown between a solitary Shishido and a bullet-proof car full of gangsters staged on a deserted beach at dawn, the howling wind sweeping sand across the ground, is as impressive as anything of the era in this neglected masterpiece. Audiences may be surprised to discover, however, that **COLT** was released four months earlier than **BRANDED**, and that it gives fuller play to Shishido's invention, panache and tough-guy cool, remaining one of the highly prolific actor's Nikkatsu favorites.

**GLASS JOHNNY: LOOK LIKE A BEAST** \_\_\_\_\_ (Glass no Johnny - yaju no yo ni miete, 1962, Koreyoshi Kurahara, 108:00)

Inspired by Federico Fellini's **LA STRADA** and a sharp departure from the Nikkatsu Action norm, **GLASS JOHNNY** stars Jo Shishido as a bike track tout whose mission in life is to make a winner out of a struggling rider (Daizaburo Hirata), and himself rich as a result. But before he can achieve it, he becomes the unwilling savior of a pure-hearted, simple-minded whore (Izumi Ashikawa) who is on the run from her pimp (George Ii). The pimp, however, is persistent — and the tout is less than heroic. When he abandons her, the pimp reclaims her, but ends up wounded and arrested. Instead of making her escape, however, she nurses the pimp back to health. Is she simply a foolish victim, or something more? The tout and pimp both come to realize they were wrong about her, and try to find her, before it is too late.

Prior to **GLASS JOHNNY**, Ashikawa's portrayals of cute-but-spunky virgins in Nikkatsu melodramas had won her a

devoted male following. (One fan, animator Hayao Miyazaki, later used her as a model for his anime heroines.) In **GLASS JOHNNY**, however, she moves bravely from idol to actress, while following Giulietta Masina's journey in *LA STRADA* from victimhood to transcendence.

### **PLAINS WANDERER** (Daisogen no wataridori, 1960, Buichi Saito, 83:00)

In the nine-part *WANDERER* series (1959-1962), Akira Kobayashi played a traveler on Japan's back roads with most of the accoutrements of a Western hero, from a horse to fringes, a guitar and even a trusty bullwhip. He moseys into a town or ranch, sides with the good local folk against gangsters or other evildoers, while winning the heart of a local maiden (played in all but one installment by Ruriko Asaoka). He also finds a rival, then ally, in Jo Shishido, playing his usual role as a scapegrace with a good heart.

The series reached its peak with this, its fifth installment, in which Kobayashi's drifter takes the side of the Ainu—Japan's aborigines—fighting a developer (Nobuo Kaneko) who wants to turn their land into an airstrip for tourists. First, though, he encounters Shishido, just out of prison and back to collect from the developer after taking the fall for a bank robbery they pulled seven years earlier. After some initial back-and-forth, the two men take a liking to each other, but Shishido goes over to the dark side, accepting a job as muscle for the developer. Meanwhile, the niece (Asaoka) of an Ainu-friendly landowner falls for Kobayashi, but is engaged to the landowner's son. As it happens, an Ainu girl (Mari Shiraki) is in love with the son, and is thus on Kobayashi's side. These complications make for an engagingly twisty story, as Kobayashi and Shishido exchange snappy banter and slick moves with a can-you-top-this cool. Kobayashi's singing in this series made him a pop sensation, while his off-screen romance with co-star Asaoka made him a tabloid by-word. When he married pop diva Hibari Misora in 1961, upsetting all expectations, the tabloids had another field day, and Asaoka exited the *WANDERER* series soon after.

### **THE WARPED ONES** (aka Season of Heat) (Kyonetsu no kisetsu, 1960, Koreyoshi Kurahara, 75:00)

One of director Koreyoshi Kurahara's boldest departures from studio convention was this frantic, black-and-white portrait of youth culture gone wild, starring Tamio Kawachi as Akira, a punk who hangs out at a jazz coffee house, living and breathing the wild Western music. One day he picks the pocket of a hooker's client (with her cooperation), but is caught and sent to jail. There he meets the like-minded Masaru (Eiji Go), and when they get out, they steal a car in the Ginza and pick up the hooker, who arranges the same scam with her latest John. Celebrating, they drive to the beach, where they find the reporter who snitched Kawachi to the cops, together with his artist fiancée Yuki (Noriko Matsumoto), whom they grab and take to the beach, where Kawachi rapes her. The lawless trio then rent an apartment together with money from selling the stolen car, living together and sharing sex as they would cigarettes. But one day, Akira runs into Yuki at the jazz bar, where she tells him she is pregnant with his child. To Akira this announcement is just another crazy riff in the jazz solo that is his world, but actions, he will see, do have consequences: sometimes violent, fatal, and absurd.

Released not long after Godard's *BREATHLESS*, **THE WARPED ONES** (also known as *SEASON OF HEAT*) has similarly amoral characters, frenetic pace, and dynamic hand-held cinematography, but Kurahara's vision is, if anything, more extreme, even to the point of existing in a world of its own, beyond normal comprehension. Kawachi's punk, especially, transcends the usual social and moral categories, like an animal in human form. (Kurahara reportedly told Kawachi to think of his character as a "hungry lion roaring at the sun.") A fascinating experiment in style (not to mention the limits of human behavior), Kawachi's famously uninhibited performance catapults the film into the highest ranks of "bad youth" cinema, and perfectly captures the essence of Beat. A stylistic and amoral high point of early 60s cinema, **THE WARPED ONES** was actually released in dubbed form in the US by Radley Metzger's Audubon Films as *THE WEIRD LOVEMAKERS*.