

**wexner center**  
for the arts

**For Immediate Release**

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**RETROSPECTIVE OF THE WORKS OF DARING JAPANESE  
FILMMAKER KON ICHIKAWA AT WEXNER CENTER**

One of the first Japanese directors to be acknowledged in the West, Kon Ichikawa receives his first major North American retrospective in a tour that stops at the Wexner Center during the month of February. Born in 1915 with a career that has spanned five decades, Ichikawa is often referred to as the link between the "golden age" of Japanese cinema and the New Wave of the sixties. Through his astonishing output of 80 films, he's produced some of the most daring thematic and stylistic experiments in postwar Japanese cinema, tackling such subjects as the atomic bomb, murder, and pornography. His films often feature black comedy and outrageous swipes at movie genres. This series includes Ichikawa's best-known film, *Tokyo Olympiad*, and titles seldom seen outside of Japan.

The films in the **Kon Ichikawa Cinematheque** will be screened throughout February in the Wexner Center Film/Video Theater. Most of the movies are shown as double features; many are new 35mm prints. Tickets per night are \$5 for general public; \$4 for Wexner Center members, students, and senior citizens; and \$2 for children under 12.

**Friday, February 1 / 7 pm / double feature**

A classic of world cinema, *Fires on the Plain* (1959; 105 mins.) is a riveting portrait of Japanese soldiers stranded on a Pacific island in the last days of World War II. As critic Pauline Kael noted, "Cautious as I am about superlatives, I think the term 'masterpiece' must be applied....It has the disturbing power of great art; it doesn't leave you the same." *Ten Dark Women* (1961; 103 mins.) is one of the major discoveries of the Ichikawa oeuvre: it's a stylish noir revenge melodrama about a man whose 10 former mistresses band together to get rid of him. Ichikawa has great fun toying with the genre and takes swipes at television and the "new" Japanese male along the way.

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**Wednesday, February 6 / 7 pm / double feature**

***An Actor's Revenge*** (1963; 114 mins.) is the last word in wide-screen, gender-bending “kinky Kabuki,” focusing on a professional female impersonator out to get revenge on his parents’ murderer. Hailed as “a masterpiece” by Susan Sontag, it’s a deliriously stylized spectacle set to bursts of cocktail lounge jazz. Known by its English title of *Odd Obsession*, ***Kagi*** (1959; 96 mins.) is a perverse comedy about pornography, voyeurism, and murder. It focuses on an old man who involves his entire family in his desperate attempts to restore his virility. As Pauline Kael writes, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a movie that gave such a feeling of flesh.”

**Friday, February 8 / 7 pm**

***Tokyo Olympiad*** (1965; 170 mins.) is the distillation of 70 hours of CinemaScope film footage that Ichikawa and his 164 cameramen captured during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. It’s a highly stylized take on the proceedings, yet at the same time a surprisingly intimate one. The film met controversy immediately upon release for its refusal to give Japanese athletes special treatment—both the film’s commissioners as well as the emperor and his family reportedly loathed it. Yet it remains a nearly inimitable achievement in world cinema, comparable only to Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympiad*.

**Wednesday, February 13 / 7 pm / double feature**

A shockingly funny satire of postwar Japanese society, ***Pu-San (Mr. Pu)*** (1953; 98 mins.) follows the misfortunes of beleaguered math teacher Mr. Pu, who’s treated with contempt by everyone he meets. Decades before Woody Allen’s *Zelig*, Ichikawa drops Mr. Pu into documentary footage of leftist demonstrations, a bold instance of the director’s formal brilliance coupled with his penchant for deeply black comedy. *Pu-San* is followed by ***A Billionaire*** (1954; 83 mins.), a film about an ethical young tax collector confronting rampant corruption, prostitution, and tax evasion, and the atomic-bomb anxieties running through postwar Japan. Called “a pitch dark fresco of venality, madness and suicide,” it includes a young woman orphaned by Hiroshima who is now building her own atomic bomb in a shack.

**Friday, February 15 / 7 pm / double feature**

One of Ichikawa's most honored films and a landmark of pacifist cinema, ***Harp of Burma*** (1956; 116 mins.) tells the moving story of a Japanese soldier waiting out the end of World War II in Burma. The sole survivor of an attack on his unit, he disguises himself as a Buddhist monk and begins to walk home, but the appalling carnage he encounters causes him to stay to tend the wounded and bury the dead as an act of expiation. ***Punishment Room*** (1956; 96 mins.) provoked heated controversy upon release for its disturbing look at the violent and sexually liberated lives of wealthy youths during the postwar economic boom.

**Wednesday, February 20 / 7 pm / double feature**

Based on Mishima's ***The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, Enjo*** (1958; 99 mins.) is a visually miraculous rendering of a true tale. Ichikawa's personal favorite of his own works, the film is about a young student whose ideals of purity quickly turn into obsession after being sparked by the breathtaking Golden Pavilion in Kyoto. The dean of Japanese film critics, Donald Richie, calls it "beyond comparison." Inspired by the youth culture of the 1960s, ***The Wanderers*** (1973; 96 mins.) is the bleakly funny story of three 19th-century farmboys determined to become big-time gamblers and masterless samurai.

**Friday, February 22 / 7 pm / double feature**

Ichikawa's most popular film in the West, ***The Makioka Sisters*** (1983; 140 mins.) is the Chekovian saga of a shipbuilder's family trying to marry off one of four sisters on the eve of World War II. The family's privilege allows them to dwell on cherry blossoms and brocade kimonos while ignoring the warnings of cataclysm all around them. Japanese cinema authority Max Tessier calls ***The Men of Tohoku*** (1957; 59 mins.) "superlatively weird and grotesque...one of the most bizarre films in the entire history of cinema." The film is a ribald tale of a tribal family in which only the eldest son can take a wife; the others must swear off sex and shaving, and dress only in rags. When a woman is bound by her husband's will to have sex with all "the younger brothers," the results are outrageous, even by Ichikawa's standards.

## **EVENT SUPPORT**

*Kon Ichikawa* was organized by **Cinematheque Ontario** and **The Japan Foundation**. The companion catalogue, including essays by Pauline Kael, Yukio Mishima, Donald Richie, and Ichikawa himself, is available in the Wexner Center Bookshop for \$29.95.

Support for the 2001–02 film/video season is provided by the **Rohauer Collection Foundation** and the **Corporate Annual Fund of the Wexner Center Foundation**.

International films, documentaries, and visiting filmmaker presentations are presented with support from the **Ohio Arts Council**.

## **FILM AND VIDEO AT THE WEXNER CENTER**

Every year the Wexner Center screens more than 100 film and video works from around the world, including award-winning independent international and American films, documentaries, and Hollywood classics. The center often brings in directors to introduce their own films, including Terence Davies, Todd Haynes, Allison Anders, Philip Kaufman, and Jim Jarmusch. The Center's film program has been described as “a national treasure.”

### **CALENDAR INFORMATION: Kon Ichikawa Cinematheque**

**Description:** Retrospective of Japanese director Kon Ichikawa's films.

**Dates:** Most Wednesdays and Fridays in February.

**Location:** Wexner Center Film/Video Theater, 1871 N. High St. (at 15th Avenue).

**Tickets:** \$5 for general public; \$4 for Wexner Center members, students, and senior citizens; \$2 for children under 12.

**Ticket outlet:** Wexner Center Ticket Office/Information Desk.

**Public information:** 614 292-3535 and [www.wexarts.org](http://www.wexarts.org).

The Wexner Center for the Arts is The Ohio State University's multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art. Through exhibitions, screenings, performances, artist residencies, and educational programs, the Wexner Center acts as a forum where established and emerging artists can test ideas and where diverse audiences can participate in cultural experiences that enhance understanding of the art of our time. In its programs, the Wexner Center balances a commitment to experimentation with a commitment to traditions of innovation and affirms the university's mission of education, research, and community service.

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