



Iwane: Sword of Serenity

居眠り磐音

2019/121min/Colour/English Subtitles

Distributor: NTV

Director: MOTOKI Katsuhide

Cast: MATSUZAKA Tori, KIMURA Fumino, YOSHINE Kyoko

Exeter Phoenix screening information:

Wed 2 Mar	Kiba: The Fangs of Fiction	6.00 pm
Wed 9 Mar	Ora, Ora Be Goin' Alone	7.00 pm
Wed 16 Mar	Life: Untitled	6.00 pm
Sun 20 Mar	Aristocrats	3.00 pm
Wed 23 Mar	Iwane: Sword of Serenity	8.00 pm
Wed 30 Mar	The House of the Lost on the Cape	8.00 pm

The popular novel series by SAEKI Yasuhide is the inspiration for this 2019 *jidaigeki* (period drama) feature film, which places its protagonist in samurai sword action and tragedy, before being forced to take the solitary path of a *ronin* (masterless samurai).

The term *ronin* is familiar within a range of media in Japan, and in Western countries. Hollywood has adopted it within action films (*Ronin*, 1998), as well as taking narrative cues for fantasy titles (*47 Ronin*, 2013), and for shaping central and supporting characters. Further examples range from the Wild West re-telling of KUROSAWA Akira's 1954 epic *Seven Samurai*, in the form of *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) – to the bloody and vengeful transformation of Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye into 'Ronin', within the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

However, in Japan the term is much more than an excuse for a character to become a lone warrior and wield a weapon. The latest adaptation of the Iwane novels is rooted in the historical reality of perhaps the most common setting in *jidaigeki* stories – the Edo Period, also known as the Tokugawa era (which lasted until the Meiji Restoration, and the beginning of Japan's rapid modernisation). In 1603, Edo (now Tokyo) was made the capital, instead of Kyoto. Until 1868, the Tokugawa Shogunate maintained peace and unity throughout the regions of Japan and their rulers, the *daimyo*. Samurai warriors were loyal to their *daimyo* lords. They would maintain peace when commanded, but the wars of the early medieval period were over, so most samurai became civil servants that were paid in units of rice (*koku*). Payment would be in multiples, where one *koku* would enough rice to feed a man for a year, or it could be traded for one gold coin (*ryo*).

Iwane's story in *Sword of Serenity* involves both samurai culture and the finances of the time. The swordsman's tragic origins are told first, where both his romantic and platonic relationships are ripped apart. Iwane, Shinnosuke and Kinpei are close friends and sparring partners, but one false rumour is enough to spark a bloody feud which Iwane must end, as well as his intended marriage to Kinpei's sister, Nao. Some years later, Iwane has abandoned the samurai way of life, but is forced to pick up his sword again for money, and to uncover a conspiracy involving the *koku/ryo* money exchange system. Thus, the quandary of the *ronin* is revealed. They have the freedom to travel to and infiltrate numerous areas of society to vanquish foes, without the limitations of being a loyal

Dates & Venues:

4 – 13 February
ICA, London

5 – 22 February
Phoenix, Leicester

5 February – 26 March
Firstsite, Colchester

6 – 27 February
Eden Court, Inverness

6 – 27 February
Watershed, Bristol

8 – 23 February
Depot, Lewes

9 – 27 February
Storyhouse, Chester

12 February – 1 March
**Cambridge Film Trust,
Cambridge**

13 February – 2 March
Aberystwyth Arts Centre

13 February – 27 March
**Hyde Park Picture House,
Leeds**

13 February – 27 March
**Chapter Arts Centre,
Cardiff**

15 February – 3 March
HOME, Manchester

16 February – 16 March
**Brewery Arts Cinema,
Kendal**

21 February – 31 March
**Tyneside Cinema,
Newcastle**

26 February – 20 March
**Queen's Film Theatre,
Belfast**

28 February – 28
March

**Macrobert Arts
Centre, Stirling**

1 – 30 March
**Warwick Arts Centre,
Coventry**

2 – 15 March
**Dundee
Contemporary Arts,
Dundee**

2 – 30 March
**Exeter Phoenix,
Exeter**

4 – 6 March
QUAD, Derby

7 – 28 March
Cinema City, Norwich

7 – 28 March
**City Screen
Picturehouse, York**

8 – 31 March
**Showroom Cinema,
Sheffield**

12 – 20 March
**Belmont Filmhouse,
Aberdeen**

15 – 29 March
**Plymouth Arts
Cinema, Plymouth**

18 – 24 March
**Broadway,
Nottingham**

18 – 24 March
Filmhouse, Edinburgh

retainer. However, they often still feel bound to their moral codes, despite being forced into other work (violent or not) for food and shelter.

Iwane's tale shines a light on the plight of the *ronin*, and their continuous appeal as protagonists. This is also demonstrated by the sale of over 20 million copies of SAEKI's original books. NHK had adapted the stories into 3 TV series broadcast from 2007 to 2009. Now, Nippon TV hopes to ignite interest in a new depiction of Iwane. Director Motoki and the film's producers seem to have aimed for historical realism, which distinguishes *Sword of Serenity* from the stylish and bombastic *Rurouni Kenshin* films (2012-2021). While we wait to see if there will be future instalments or adaptations of Iwane's story, enjoy the sumptuous visuals and historic culture found in this film, which engross Japanese film and TV audiences to this very day.

Dr Jonathan Wroot
Senior Lecturer in Film Studies
University of Greenwich

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