

Milestone presents:  
The Explosive New Film by Takeshi Kitano

## **FIREWORKS (Hana-Bi)**

Winner of the Golden Lion,  
Venice International Film Festival 1997

A Milestone Film Release  
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### **Fireworks (Hana-Bi)**

#### **Cast:**

Yoshitaka Nishi .....	Beat Takeshi
Miyuki (Nishi's wife) .....	Kayoko Kishimoto
Horibe .....	Ren Osugi
Nakamura .....	Susumu Terajima
Tezuka (Junkyard Owner) .....	Tetsu Watanabe
<i>Yakuza</i> Hitman .....	Hakuryu
The Criminal .....	Yasuei Yakushiji
Kudo .....	Taro Itsumi
Doctor .....	Kenichi Yajima
Tanaka .....	Makoto Ashikawa
Tanaka's widow .....	Yuko Daike

#### **Credits:**

Director/Screenwriter .....	Takeshi Kitano
Producers .....	Masayuki Mori Yasushi Tsuge Takio Yoshida
In association with .....	Shigeru Watanabe Kouichi Miyagawa Hideto Osawa
Co-producers .....	Hiroshi Ishikawa Kazuhiro Furukawa
Music .....	Joe Hisaishi
Paintings and Drawings .....	Takeshi Kitano
Cinematographer .....	Hideo Yamamoto
Lighting .....	Hitoshi Takaya
Art Director .....	Norihiro Isoda

Editing.....	Takeshi Kitano Yoshinori Ota
Sound Recording.....	Senji Horiuchi
Script Supervisor.....	Hideko Nakata
First Assistant Director.....	Hiroshi Shimizu
Production Manager.....	Shinji Komiya
Line Producer.....	Yoshito Yamazaki
Set Decorator.....	Tatsuo Ozeki
Costume Supervisor.....	Masami Saito
Hair and Make-up Artist.....	Michiyo Miyauchi
Still Photographers.....	Kazutoshi Sasada Satomi Saito
Key Grip.....	Takashi Yokohama Naoki Sashou
Gun Advisor.....	Kikuo Noutomi
Special Make-up Artist.....	Tomoo Haraguchi
Casting.....	Takefumi Yoshikawa
Production Coordinator.....	Akira Yamamoto
Assistant Editor.....	Souichi Ueno
Negative Cutter.....	Yoshiko Tsujii Reiko Kubota Youko Sato
Sound Timing.....	Taro Kumayama
Optical Photography Supervisor.....	Keiji Igarashi
Optical Recording.....	Akira Rizawa
Recordist.....	Akira Nakano
Sound Effects.....	Yukio Hokari Masahiko Okase
Title Design.....	Youkouzou Akamatsu
Publicity Producer.....	Ryo Terumoto
Publicity Co-producer.....	Naoki Takahashi Tomoyuki Igarashi
Production Publicist.....	Noritoshi Hamaguchi
International Affairs.....	Naoyuki Usui
Script Affairs.....	Tetsuyasu Sato
Musical Production.....	Makoto Sasajima Kazunori Terakawa Nobumasa Uchida Kentarō Koyama

Yukio Yamashita

Toru Takigawa

Music Recorded by ..... Shinichi Tanaka

Original Soundtrack ..... Polydor

An Office Kitano Production.

Color. Running Time: 103 minutes. Aspect Ratio: 1:1.85. Sound: Dolby SR.

Awards: Golden Lion, Venice Film Festival, 1997;

Screen International Award for a Non-European Film, European Film Academy, 1997.

The paintings and drawings that appear in *Fireworks* were created for the film by Takeshi Kitano.

### **The Themes of *Fireworks***

*The Japanese word hanabi translates into fireworks in English. But Fireworks' Japanese title is spelled with a hyphen: Hana-Bi, symbolizing the film's themes.*

*Hana (flower) is the symbol of life while Bi (fire) represents gunfire, and so death.*

The story of a good cop with an explosive violent streak, Takeshi Kitano's seventh film, *Fireworks* transcends the structure of a crime thriller to explore questions of life and death. Set in Kitano's familiar world of hard-boiled cops and ruthless *yakuza*, the film is a moving story of friendship, marriage and sacrifice. Detective Nishi (played by Kitano) is torn between his commitment to his job and his duty to his terminally ill wife. When Horibe, his partner, is gunned down while Nishi is visiting his wife in the hospital, he leaves the police force and embarks on a violent and tragicomic quest for justice and redemption. Throughout the film, beautiful, eerie paintings and drawings (also the work of this multi-talented filmmaker) mirror and foreshadow its powerful story. *Fireworks'* climax is harsh, beautiful, heartbreaking, and unforgettable.

### **Synopsis**

In a dark suit and sunglasses, Yoshitaka Nishi stares down a blond punk and his sidekick who have been eating lunch on his car. After a brief standoff, he makes the two wash the car. When the blond slips on the wet hood, Nishi kicks him in the ass. The next time Nishi returns to the parking lot, "Drop Dead" is scrawled in red paint in his spot. Nishi drives away.

Flashback to a conversation between veteran detectives Nishi and Horibe. Horibe reminisces about how he and Nishi have known each other since high school. They even met their wives together — Nishi left with Miyuki, the pretty one, and he ended up with the dog. Horibe encourages Nishi to go visit his wife, who has spent the last two years in a hospital near their current stakeout. Horibe gripes that he won't get a wink of sleep before taking his daughter to the amusement park the next day.

Horibe chats with two young detectives in a van — Nakamura and Tanaka — who are staking out the apartment of a *yakuza* who recently killed several people. Horibe kids Nakamura about being overdressed for a stakeout and asks if he can work late so that Nishi can go to the hospital. Nakamura says that he has a date and can't stay. Tanaka asks if Nishi's wife is suffering from leukemia. Horibe says that the death of their young daughter left her mute and in a state of shock. Now, Nishi's work as a cop leaves him no time to visit her. Tanaka offers to stay, but Horibe tells him to go home since he is a family man. Horibe calls to tell his wife that he won't be coming home and promises to take his daughter to the amusement park another day. He stakes out the apartment by himself.

Miyuki sits silently on the bed in the semi-darkened hospital room. Nishi takes out a cigarette and flicks open the lighter.

A gun blazes and Horibe falls to the ground. A second shot hits him in the stomach. A *yakuza* stands over him with a smoking gun hidden in a newspaper. Horibe crawls to the van, leaving a trail of blood, and radios for help. Nishi meets with his wife's doctor, who tells him that Miyuki does not have long to live. Her leukemia is terminal and she should spend her remaining time at home. They are interrupted by Nakamura, who tells them that Horibe has been shot.

End of flashback. Nishi and Horibe, in his wheelchair, visit the beach. As they look out at the sea, Horibe explains that his wife and daughter have left him. Now, without work, he feels he has nothing to live for. Since he lives by the sea, he has thought about learning to paint, but he has never tried before and supplies are expensive. He tells Nishi not to worry — he might start by buying a beret.

In a coffee shop, Nishi is sitting with Tanaka's widow. She tells him that she is getting by; the hardest part is when her son talks about how he misses his father. Nishi has a flashback of Tanaka's murder.

Nishi is at a bar with Nakamura and Kudoh, a novice detective. Nakamura announces that he is getting married. He first became serious about his girlfriend when she came to the hospital every day after he was wounded in the shoot-out that killed Tanaka. Nakamura says that he visited Horibe and that he seemed lonely. He tells Nishi not to blame himself for Horibe's injury and Tanaka's death — danger goes with the job. Nishi has a flashback of the shootings of Nakamura and Tanaka.

Two *yakuzas* enter the bar and sit on either side of Nishi. They harass him about not paying back his loan. When one calls him a bum, Nishi whirls around and drives a pair of chopsticks into the *yakuza's* eye. He throws the other to the ground, kicking him in the face as he falls. Nishi walks out, leaving the two men bloody and sprawled on the floor.

Nishi approaches his parking spot, takes off his jacket and wraps it around his hand. The blond punk approaches with a knife. The blade flies through the air and the punk lands on the ground. Nishi picks up the knife, stands over the fallen man and drops it — the punk catches it just in time. Nishi drives to the hospital. While a nurse tends to the gash on his chest, Miyuki's doctor comes in with her medication. He tells Nishi to take Miyuki on a trip. Nishi returns to his apartment. At the entrance of the building, he picks up a tricycle and puts it to the side. Inside, Nishi watches his wife sleep. He gets a phone call and goes out.

Nishi and Kudoh are in a car in front of Horibe's apartment. Horibe attempted suicide with sleeping pills — his landlord found him just in time. Nakamura joins them and says that Horibe will recover. Nishi remembers Horibe alone on the beach, staring at the sea. On their way home, Nishi insists on getting out. Nakamura tells Kudoh that Nishi used to be a highly decorated cop and that he and Horibe were a great team. When Horibe got too rough, Nishi could always calm him down.

At the *yakuzas'* office, the gangsters are berating Nishi for asking to borrow another four million yen when he can't even pay the interest on the money he owes. The *yakuzas* jokingly suggest that Nishi work for them as a bodyguard to pay back his loan. Even the *yakuza* consider Nishi crazy and they talk about the time he emptied his gun into the corpse of the man who shot Horibe and Tanaka. Nishi is about to walk out of the gangsters' office when Tojo, a sadistic *yakuza*, corners him and points a gun at his head. Nishi does nothing as Tojo pulls the trigger. The gun doesn't fire and Tojo snickers as Nishi calmly stares.

In the car, Nakamura tells Kudoh that although Horibe was more violent in everyday life, when Nishi lost control, he was more frightening. He too describes Nishi shooting the dead body of the *yakuza*.

Horibe receives a large box containing an assortment of art supplies and a beret.

Flashback to Nishi, Nakamura and Tanaka in an underground mall where the *yakuza* who shot Horibe is hanging out in a coffee shop. Tanaka and Nishi follow as the gangster wanders into the crowd. When the

*yakuza* pauses in front of a magazine stand, Nishi leaps out from the back of the store and tackles him. The man throws Nishi off and Tanaka and Nakamura jump on top of him, pinning him down. There is a muffled gunshot and Nakamura is shot. Another shot and Tanaka is dead. As the *yakuza* pushes Tanaka's body off, Nishi reaches for his gun and shoots him. He steps on the dead man's head and shoots all his remaining bullets into the body.

Flashback ends. In a junkyard, Nishi asks Tezuka, the yard's owner, if he can buy a police light. Tezuka asks what he is going to do with it. "I'm thinking about robbing a bank," he replies. Tezuka gives him the light for free and wishes him luck.

Nishi returns to his apartment where Miyuki is working on a puzzle. Nishi brings out two plates and serves her a slice of strawberry shortcake and himself a cream puff. Miyuki reaches over and puts the cream puff on her plate. She mischievously takes the strawberry from her cake and puts it on his empty plate. Nishi smiles. They work on the puzzle together. The next morning, the strawberry is back on Miyuki's empty plate.

A punk tries to sell Tezuka a cab but the junkyard owner tells the kid that he is too young to have a taxi license and threatens to call the cops. The punk runs away, leaving the cab. Tezuka offers it to Nishi for 200,000 yen. When Nishi suggests that it may be stolen, Tezuka quickly lowers the price to 50,000. They both laugh. Nishi takes a police uniform out of his car and walks into the shack where the cab is parked. He hears a siren behind him. Tezuka tells Nishi that he'll throw in the siren too.

Horibe is in front of a florist shop. The beautiful colors and the shapes inspire visions of magical creatures: a lion with a sunflower head, empire penguins, dragonflies, a rhinoceros with a ginkgo-leaf head, yellow flowers transformed into little children, an owl with sunflower eyes, a Japanese bride in a kimono with a white lily for a head ...

Inside the shack, Nishi finishes his paint job on the cab. The words "Metropolitan Police" now adorn the side of the gleaming white car. He attaches the police light. Nishi changes into his police uniform and starts the patrol car. At the junkyard, Tezuka hears the siren and turns to catch sight of Nishi's car. "Good luck with the bank robbery!" he calls out with a smile.

At the *yakuzas'* office, a businessman who owes money is being threatened. He doesn't take the gangsters seriously. As he walks out, Tojo follows him, points a gun and blows his brains out.

The bank robbery is seen almost in complete silence. Surveillance cameras capture Nishi, dressed as a cop, standing at the counter. The teller looks up and sees his gun. Nishi hands her a bag. A customer notices the gun and looks incredulously at Nishi. The teller quietly fills the bag and hands it back to Nishi, who walks out. Silently, on the surveillance video, the bank employees begin to panic. Two patrol cars with flashing lights pass in the opposite direction as Nishi drives away.

Mount Fuji. Inside a minivan, Miyuki holds up playing cards and Nishi guesses what they are. He gets it right every time and she is baffled — she doesn't realize that he can see the cards in the rearview mirror. Miyuki finally realizes and holds up a card covering by a candy bar. Nishi, laughing, guesses "Crunchy Chocolate."

Tanaka's widow receives a package and calls Nakamura to ask if she should keep it. Nakamura tells her Nishi would want her to. After he hangs up, he dials Nishi's number. The phone rings in an empty apartment. Kudoh and Nakamura go to check out Nishi's apartment.

At the *yakuzas'* office, all the gangsters stand around gawking at a pile of money Nishi has sent to pay off his loan. One wonders whether he stole the money. Another dismisses the idea as impossible.

In a meadow, Nishi lights fireworks and runs back to Miyuki who is sitting beside the van. The couple sit together as the sparks die out. Miyuki looks disappointed and Nishi runs over to check it out. Just as he gets to the rocket, it explodes. He falls back in surprise and she laughs. Miyuki watches as fireworks light up the starry sky.

In front of a historic site, Nishi positions his camera on top of the van and sets the self-timer. He hurries to Miyuki's side. When she puts her arm through his, he shrugs her off, embarrassed. Just as the shutter is about to go off, a car passes, ruining the picture. They laugh together. Later, Nishi and Miyuki are sitting beside a huge temple bell. An old man and his grandson approach. The grandfather tells the little boy that the bell makes a big sound but no one can strike it until later in the day. As the two are about to leave, they hear the sound of the bell.

Nakamura visits Horibe and asks whether he has heard from Nishi recently. Horibe tells him that he received a large shipment of art supplies from him. He says he feels bad about the gift, because Nishi must be having a tough time with his wife. Horibe wonders whether Nishi might not be better off than he is, even though his wife is dying.

Miyuki waters a bouquet of wilted flowers in a lake. A man who has been skipping stones yells at her that it's no use watering dead flowers. When she doesn't stop, he taunts her, asking if she has lost her mind after being dumped. He turns to find Nishi coming toward him. Nishi throws him into the lake and kicks him again and again. The water turns red.

Miyuki and Nishi are fishing side by side. Down the beach the beat-up guy sits naked and shivering while his clothes dry. The *yakuza's* car pulls up next to Nishi's van. The gangsters spot Nishi by the lake, as the naked man scurries away. Nishi, noticing them too, selects a rock and wraps it in a towel. He tells Miyuki to wait for him and approaches the *yakuzas*. They tell him that their boss is unhappy about the interest he still owes. In a flash, Nishi smashes both with the rock. Nishi picks up a gun from the ground and hands it to the driver who is hiding in the car. He dares him to shoot. The driver pulls the trigger but the gun is empty. Nishi puts the bullets in the driver's mouth. He tells him "Next time, I'll kill you," knocking him to the ground.

Nakamura and Kudoh question people at the temple which Nishi and Miyuki visited.

By the lake, Miyuki is picking flowers. Nishi throws bullets into a bonfire. As they explode, Miyuki looks up to see the fireworks. Nishi grills a tiny fish on a stick. He hands it to Miyuki, calling it "an Italian delicacy." She laughs.

In a mountain snowstorm, Nishi struggles to put chains on his tires. He tells Miyuki to drive forward. Instead, she puts the car in reverse and Nishi screams. Nishi's glove is left in the tire tracks. Later, Miyuki needs to go to the bathroom and Nishi tells her to go by the roadside. As he stands guard, he hears a thump. He turns around to find Miyuki buried up to her neck in snow. Nishi runs over to help her.

Horibe's new painting features hundreds of tiny snowflakes in the shape of the character "snow" and flickering lights in the shape of the character "light." At the bottom of the painting, the characters for "suicide" are written large in red.

At the inn, a maid comes to tell Nishi that he has a visitor. Outside Kijima, the *yakuza* from the bar, is waiting for him. He points a gun at Nishi and tells him that his boss wants to see him. Nishi says "Sorry about your eye." Kijima is caught off guard and Nishi grabs the gun, jamming his finger under the hammer. As the *yakuza* tries to pull the trigger, the hammer digs into Nishi's finger, drawing blood. Nishi slugs him and takes the gun. Tojo and the others gangsters are waiting in their Mercedes. Nishi gets into the passenger's seat. The *yakuza* want the rest of his money. Nishi shoots the men in the back seat and puts the gun to the driver's head. "I told you I would kill you the next time I saw you." The gun gleams

in the dark. One last shot is fired. Nishi walks away from the car and sees Kijima start to run into the woods. Nishi shoots but the gun is empty.

At Horibe's, red paint splatters the characters for "suicide."

At the inn, Kudoh finds the Mercedes and opens the door. A body falls out. Nakamura tells him to put it back in and close the door.

Morning. Nishi's van is parked at the beach. Miyuki sits facing the sea with her back to her husband. In the sideview mirror, Nishi sees a car pull up. Nakamura and Kudoh get out. Miyuki is still looking at the sea. Nishi loads two bullets into his gun. Nakamura tells him they found the bodies of the *yakuzas*. Nishi asks if he can wait a little longer. Nakamura is silent.

A young girl is flying her kite on the beach. Nakamura and Kudoh sit in their car and watch. Nakamura says quietly "I could never live like that." Smiling, Nishi and Miyuki watch the girl play. She smiles back at them. Nishi holds the kite for her as she runs toward the sea. He doesn't let go soon enough and is left with part of the kite in his hands. Miyuki laughs. The girl runs around with the torn kite. Miyuki leans on Nishi and says "Thank you ... for everything." He puts his arm around her and pulls her close. Over a scene of blue sky and sea, two shots ring out. The girl looks on.

## **Takeshi Kitano**

### ***Director/Screenwriter/Film Editor/Artist/Actor***

Takeshi Kitano was born in Tokyo on January 18, 1947, the youngest of four children of Kikujiro, a craftsman and Saki, who did piecework at home to help keep her kids in school. In his autobiography *Takeshi-ku! Hai!*, Kitano wrote about the postwar poverty his family endured. He described going to a second-hand shop to buy a globe and returning in tears because he was 180 yen short. He also wrote that his father drank to drown his shame over having to work as a house painter and when drunk, beat his wife. Kitano also recalled that in 1956 his family was the first on the block to get a television set and that people from the neighborhood would come over to watch, "like one big family."

Kitano's mother was (and is) a strong-willed woman who wanted her children to succeed. When his father complained that Kitano's studying was keeping him awake (the family lived in a one-room house), his mother got a flashlight, led the boy outside and made him read by the light of the street lamp. Kitano attended Meiji University and studied engineering, which his mother believed was a ticket to a good job. While his older brother listened to her and is now a professor of engineering, Kitano dropped out in the third year at the age of nineteen.

After leaving home, he drifted from job to job, working as a janitor, waiter, airport baggage handler, taxi driver and finally elevator operator in the France-za burlesque theater in the Asakusa entertainment district of Tokyo. There he had the opportunity to watch comedians who later went on to national fame. Kitano apprenticed himself to veteran comedian Senzaburo Fukami. While he continued to support himself with menial jobs, Kitano polished his comedic skills as a France-za emcee. In 1973 he was asked to step in for the partner of Beat Kiyoshi (Kiyoshi Kaneko), another Fukami protégé. The two clicked and a new comedy duo was born: *Tsuu Biito* or Two Beats.

As "Beat" Takeshi (the name he still uses for his acting and television work), Kitano and his partner honed their style of *manzai* comedy in strip joints. *Manzai* resembles the comedy of Abbott and Costello, where a straight man feeds gag lines to a scatterbrained partner. The Two Beats quickly rose to the top of the *manzai* world and were considered to be *the* alternative comedians of the 1970s. Although their rapid-fire, risqué and irreverent routines were popular with students, at first they were considered too outlandish for television. Even after their 1974 TV debut, the pair were known largely for their live comedy until they became regulars on *Waratteru Baai Desu Yo!* (It's Time to Laugh!) in 1980.

Kitano first achieved solo stardom on *Oretachi Hyokinzoku* (We Are Wild and Crazy Guys), an ensemble show that featured ad libs, running gags and free-form parodies of songs, TV shows and commercials. The program gave Kitano the opportunity to create wild characters (including Take-chan Man — a kind of anti-Superman who crushed the weak and helped the strong) and to display his razor-sharp wit. *Oretachi*'s producer, Takeshi Yokozawa, later said that Kitano was “far quicker on the uptake than anyone else. Everyone, including the staff, wanted to make him the center of the show.”

Kitano also built a fanatical following for his iconoclastic views and humor on the late-night radio show, *All Night Nippon*, which aired from 1981 to 1990. Even before the Two Beats broke up in the early 1980s, Kitano extended his range by hosting talk shows, acting in dramas and writing humorous short stories. In 1981 Kitano began acting in films. His portrayal of Sgt. Hara in Nagisa Oshima's *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (Senjo No Merry Christmas) (1983) won him international attention. He has gone on to appear in seventeen films, often portraying tough guys capable of explosive violence.

Since the early 1980s Kitano has maintained an incredibly diverse and prolific career and is now considered Japan's foremost media personality. In 1995 he was voted the best-liked man in Japan in a *Spy!* magazine poll and he was chosen the country's favorite TV celebrity every year from 1990 to 1995 in the annual NHK poll. In a 1994 poll of the Japanese electorate, he was even voted the man they most wanted to see as prime minister. Despite his enduring popularity, Kitano's career has weathered several crises. In 1986 a gossip magazine, *Friday*, published photos of a college student with whom he was reportedly having an affair. In retaliation, Kitano and eleven of his associates invaded the magazine's offices, attacked staffers with fists and umbrellas and were arrested on assault charges. Kitano reached an out-of-court settlement with *Friday* but was forced to take a six-month leave from television. At the time, he feared that his career was ruined forever.

Kitano and his career *were* nearly finished on August 2, 1994 when he crashed his motor scooter into a guard rail in Tokyo, after a night of partying. The crash almost killed him and left the right side of his face partially paralyzed. After seven months of rehabilitation, he returned to television in March 1995. Soon he was back hosting six network shows, writing six regular columns for national magazines and a sports newspaper and releasing his fifth film, the comedy *Minna Yatteruka?* (Getting Any?).

Kitano today stars in seven prime time television shows a week, appears in commercials and publishes columns in several magazines and newspapers. He also writes poetry, essays, and serious novels and has published fifty-five books. Kitano took up painting after his accident and has created hundreds of striking artworks, including those featured in *Fireworks*. He also acts in films for other directors — most recently in Robert Longo's *Johnny Mnemonic* and Takashi Ishii's *Gonin*. He also starred in the film adaptation of his novel, *Many Happy Returns* (Kyoso Tanjo) (1993) a satire of Japanese religious cults.

Kitano turned film director in 1989 to make *Violent Cop*, a film he was originally slated only to star in and now considers filmmaking his first love. Like all his work, Kitano's films challenge Japanese conformity and social taboos. His films have become cult favorites in Europe and North America — especially in Great Britain where three of his films are among the all-time best-selling foreign-language videotapes. After winning the Golden Lion for best film at the Venice International Film Festival, *Fireworks* was shown at the Toronto, Vancouver, New York and Pusan film festivals.

Masayuki Mori, Kitano's long-time colleague and manager, has said: “He's very conscious of creating different characters for different audiences. That, I think, is why audiences don't tire of him; he keeps giving new versions of himself. But essentially he's a very shy man. That's why he gives so few interviews; he believes that his work says all that needs to be said.”

*This section is adapted in part from Mark Schilling's The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture (1997, Weatherhill, New York) with the permission of the author*

### **Filmography of Titles Directed by Takeshi Kitano**

*Violent Cop* (Sono Otoko Kyouboi ni Tsuki) 1989 (also played lead role)  
*Boiling Point* (3–4x 10 Gatsu) 1990 (also wrote screenplay and played supporting role)  
*A Scene at the Sea* (Ano Natsu, Ichiban Shizukana Umi) 1991 (also wrote screenplay and edited)  
*Sonatine* 1993 (also wrote screenplay, edited and played lead role)  
*Getting Any?* (Minna Yatteruka?) 1995 (also wrote screenplay, edited and played supporting role)  
*Kids Return* 1996 (also wrote screenplay and edited)  
*Fireworks* (Hana-Bi) 1997 (also wrote screenplay, edited and played lead role)

### **Television Shows Takeshi Kitano Appears in Weekly, Winter 1998**

*Super Jockey*, NTV  
*Sekai Maru Mie, TV Tokusoubu* (Around the World, TV Special Task Force), NTV  
*Kitano Fuji*, Fuji TV  
*Heisei Kyouiki Iinkai* (Heisei Educational Department), Fuji TV  
*Beat Takeshi no TV Tackle* (Beat Takeshi's Tackle TV), TV Asahi  
*Takeshi no Banbutsu Souseiki* (Takeshi's Book of Genesis), TV Asahi  
*Takeshi no Daredemo Picasso* (Takeshi's "Anyone can be Picasso"), TV Tokyo  
Additional Internet Information

For more information on Takeshi Kitano and *Fireworks*, please check out the following web sites:

### **Office Kitano Home Page - Fireworks (official site)**

[http://www.trans.or.jp/OFFICE-KITANO/INDEX/MOVIE/STORY/E\\_STO/story.html](http://www.trans.or.jp/OFFICE-KITANO/INDEX/MOVIE/STORY/E_STO/story.html)

### **The official web site for Takeshi Kitano's Art works in *Fireworks***

<http://www.tfm.co.jp/hana-bi/index.html>

### **The Unofficial Takeshi Kitano Home Page, Sweden (in English)**

<http://www.tk.medstroms.se/>

### **Mister Shock Value**

[www.php.co.jp/japaninface/intersectjapan/intersectjapantext/intersectarchi ves.html](http://www.php.co.jp/japaninface/intersectjapan/intersectjapantext/intersectarchi ves.html)

### **The Unofficial Takeshi Kitano Home Page, American**

<http://www.dimensional.com/~smah/kitano.html>

### **Japanese Folk Humor and the Manzai Comedy Movement**

[www.jinjapan.org/today/culture/culture14.html](http://www.jinjapan.org/today/culture/culture14.html)

### ***Thunder Magazine* — Kitano Interview**

<http://www.thundermag.simplenet.com/>

### ***Time Magazine*: Faces of the Future, Japan**

<http://pathfinder.com/time/magazine/1997/int/970428/asia.portraits.html>

### **Aaron Gerow article, *The Daily Yomiuri*, 3 October 1996**

<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/Markus/Review/Films96/Kitano.html>

### **Kinema Club — Kitano articles bibliography**

<http://pears.lib.ohio-state.edu/cgi-bin/KineDB/view.html>

### ***Baseline Review***

<http://www.pkbaseline.com/screen/coming/ca2.html>

### **Reuters report on the Golden Lion, Venice**

[http://204.71.177.75/headlines/970907/entertainment/stories/film\\_venice\\_4.html](http://204.71.177.75/headlines/970907/entertainment/stories/film_venice_4.html)

### **Ren Osugi, *Horibe***

Born in 1951, Ren Osugi first became interested in acting while at college. He left school before graduation to join the Kaiten Gekijo theatrical company and made his stage debut in 1973 in “Mon.” Until the company disbanded in 1988, he starred in many of its productions, including “Komachi Fuden,” “Mizu No Eki,” and “Chi No Eki.” both in Japan and overseas. The Kaiten Gekijo company was also active overseas, and Osugi worked in Poland, England, Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, Australia and the United States. Osugi began his film career in Banmei Takahashi’s *Kinbaku Ikenie* (1980) and has gone on to act in Takahashi’s *Tattoo Ari* (1982), Genji Nakamura’s *Weekend Shuffle* (1982), Masayuki Suo’s *Fancy Dance* (1989) and Naoto Takenaka’s *Muno No Hito* (1991). In 1993, Osugi began his collaboration with Takeshi Kitano with *Sonatine* and he is now a familiar face in Kitano films.

### **Kayoko Kishimoto, *Miyuki***

Kayoko Kishimoto was born in 1960 and began her career in show business in 1976, when she was spotted by an agent while she sat in the audience for a television show. The next year she appeared as a maid on the hit TV drama *Mu*. Her performance earned her a regular role on the sequel series *Mu Ichizoku* in 1978. At the same time, Kishimoto appeared in other television shows and TV miniseries, including *Ningen No Shomei*, *Kyuketsuki Dracula Kobe Ni Arawu* and *Chotto My Way*. Also in 1978, she won the role of a mentally retarded girl in *Yume Ichizoku: The Rival*. Kishimoto also memorably portrayed the daughter of a warlord in the period TV movie *Waga Ai No Shiro* (1981). Known for her warm personality and off-beat humor, Kishimoto appeared in several TV commercials and became a household name. Her 1978 stage appearance in “Yuki Maroge” won the Golden Arrow Award for Best New Actress in the Theater Section. Her other film credits include the comedy series *Otoko Wa Tsuraiyo: Torajiro Kami Fusen* (1981), *Kaze Slow Dance* (1991) and *Sora Ga Konnani Aoi Wakega Nai* (1993).

### **Susumu Terajima, *Detective Nakamura***

Born in Tokyo in 1963, Susumu Terajima made his screen debut in 1983 in Yusaku Matsuda’s *Ahomance*. He has also appeared in Masato Harada’s *Saraba Itoshiki Hitoyo* (1987), Seiji Izumi’s *Kono Muneno Tokimeki* (1988).and Keisuke Kuwata’s *Inamura Jane* (1990). But Terajima’s breakthrough role was in Kitano’s 1989 film *Violent Cop*. Since then he has worked with Kitano on all his films: *Sonatine* (1993), *Getting Any?* (1995), *Kids Return* (1996) and *Fireworks*. His other screen credits include Go Riju’s *Elephant Song* (1994, Winner of the Berlin Film Festival), his first starring role in Makoto Shinozaki’s *Okaeri* (1996) and Shinji Aoyama’s *Chinpira* (1996).

### **Hakuryu, Tojo (the sadistic yakuza)**

Born in 1952, Hakuryu started the Hakuryu rock band in Kyushu in 1978 and the next year debuted as the group’s lead singer. Between 1980 and 1983 Hakuryu appeared in more than one hundred live performances. In 1984 he made his first film appearance in Yoichi Sai’s *Itsuku Dareka Ga Korosareru*. After his explosive portrayal of the ruthless hitman in Kitano’s 1989 film, *Violent Cop*, Hakuryu decided to concentrate on his acting career. As a not-too-smart gangster in Yojiro Takita’s *Nettai Rakuen Club* (1994), he revealed a talent for comedy. That same year, he also portrayed a ruthless and calculating syndicate member in Tatsumi Kumashiro’s *Bo No Kanashimi*, demonstrating the versatility that makes him a valuable asset to Japanese cinema.

### **Tetsu Watanabe, *Tezuka* (the junkyard owner)**

Born in 1951, Tetsu Watanabe dropped out of the Tokyo Institute to help establish the Shakespeare Theater. Between 1975 and 1978 he appeared in all but one of the 36 Shakespeare plays staged there. In 1985, Watanabe drew praise for his first screen appearance as the rugged warrior in Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran* (a role for which he took intensive training in horseback riding). He received more international attention for his role as the POW camp chief warden in the Australian film *Blood Oath* (1990). Watanabe also appeared in Juzo Itami’s *Minbo No Onna* (1992) and Kurosawa’s *Madadayo* (1993). He first worked with Kitano on *A Scene at the Sea* (1991) and *Fireworks* in their third collaborative effort.

### **Hideo Yamamoto, Cinematographer**

Born in 1960, Hideo Yamamoto attended the Yokohama Film School (now Nihon Film School). After graduation he worked as an assistant under such established cinematographers as Junichiro Hayashi and Katsunori Yanagishima. He worked as assistant cinematographer on Kitano's *Boiling Point*, *A Scene at the Sea* and *Sonatine*. As head cinematographer, he is best known for his work on Tatsunori Hosono's *Shabu Gokudo* and Takashi Miike's *Kishiwada Shonen Gurentai*.

### **Joe Hisaishi, Composer**

Joe Hisaishi began his career in music by studying composition at the Kunitachi Music College in Tokyo, where he was strongly influenced by the work of minimalist composers Terry Riley and Philip Glass. His solo albums include *Mkwaju*, *Information*, *@-bet-city*, *Curved Music*, *Piano Stories*, *Illusion*, *Pretender* (recorded in New York), *I am* (recorded at the Abbey Road studios in London), *My Lost City*, *Melody BLVD* (recorded in Los Angeles), *The Night in Galaxy Express*, *Monoke Hime Image Album*, and *Piano Stories —The Wind of Life*.

In 1984 Hisaishi composed the music for the film, *Nausicaa*, and released three different soundtrack albums for the film, all of which ranked in the top-40 album chart for more than six months. Since then Hisaishi has gone on to compose and direct the scores for many films, including: *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Free and Easy*, *Comeback*, *Tasmania Story*, *Pesuke Gatapishi Story*, *Kojika Story*, *Kusa No Omoi*, *Futari*, *Fukuzawa Yukichi*, *The Locking House Men*, *Porco Rosso*, *Haruka Nostalgia*, *Samurai Kids*, *Turning Point*, *Parasite Eve*, and *Mononoke Hime*. He worked with Kitano on the music for *A Scene at the Sea*, *Sonatine*, *Kids Return*, and *Fireworks*. Several of his scores have been awarded the Japanese Academy Award for best film music.

Hisaishi has also written extensively for television, including the scores and theme songs for *The Human Brain and Mind*, *The Friday Road Show*, *The Universe Within* and *Hana No Wakare*. He has performed and recorded concerts with several major symphony orchestras and served as musical advisor to the 1996 National Athletic Games, which were held in Tokyo. Hisaishi is now known in the Japanese film and music worlds as a leading composer, producer, arranger and piano and keyboard player.

### **Milestone Film & Video**

Milestone was started in 1990 by Amy Heller and Dennis Doros to bring out the best films of yesterday and today. The company's new releases have included Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*, Luc Besson's *Atlantis*, the documentaries of Philip Haas, and Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi*.

Milestone's re-releases have included restored versions of Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and his Brothers*, F. W. Murnau's *Tabu* and *The Last Laugh*, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass and Chang*, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*, Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Antonio Gaudi* and *Woman in the Dunes*, and Kenji Mizoguchi's *Life of Oharu*.

Milestone is also known for rediscovering, acquiring, restoring and distributing unknown "classics" that have never been available in the US. These include Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, Alfred Hitchcock's "lost" propaganda films, *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, *Early Russian Cinema* (a series of twenty-eight films from Czarist Russia), Mikhail Kalatozov's astonishing *I am Cuba* and Jane Campion's *Two Friends*. In 1998, Milestone will also release the "lost" films of Kevin Brownlow: *It Happened Here* and *Winstanley*. Milestone received a Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics in 1996 for its restoration and release of *I am Cuba* and four of its restored titles (*Grass*, *Tabu*, Clarence Brown and Maurice Tourneur's *The Last of the Mohicans* and Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*) are listed on the Library of Congress's National Film Registry.

Milestone's third member, Fumiko Takagi, joined the company in 1995. Takagi, whose title is Vice President, corrected the subtitles for *Fireworks* and read and translated all the Japanese reviews, interviews and articles on the film for this press kit.

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**Excerpts from an interview with Takeshi Kitano  
by Makoto Shinozaki  
*Studio Voice Magazine*, November 1997**

*Shinozaki: Many critics are already calling Fireworks a culmination of your six earlier films, but Fireworks is clearly different in certain ways from your older films and I think this is reflected in the way you shot the film too. What do you think?*

Kitano: Making a film is a collaborative effort. It's not just the story or the acting, but it's also the performance of the crew around you. Like who is your assistant director, who does camera for you. Until now, my cameraman was Mr. Yanagijima, but this time he was studying in England, so I asked the assistant cameraman to shoot it. Of course, he was very excited and was all geared up. But when I thought about this cameraman, I realized it would be rude to ask him to shoot it exactly the way Yanagijima did. So I told him we were going to move the camera a lot this time. He was practicing in the back. In the scene where there's all that shooting in the Mercedes in the snow, I told him to shoot it from above. He was on a crane shooting from all angles. Normally, I wouldn't have the camera do such complicated movements. I was thinking that this way, by asking him to do something a little bit more challenging, he would really feel like he was being asked to do it his way and not his old boss's. The film turned out great because of the dedication and the teamwork of the crew.

*In your previous films, it seems you shot the characters straight on and the mise-en-scene was also very bare with the least amount of distractions. In Fireworks, you use the vertical space very imaginatively, placing the actors in the back of the shot, moving the camera around a lot. For example, the scene when Nishi and Miyuki's doctor are talking, they are set up in the back of the shot and in the front, you put the fuzzy head of the nurse.*

I put the head of the nurse where it bothered the viewer the most. That shot was not going to hold your attention long enough for the conversation between Nishi and the doctor to end, even though the tree outside the window with the green leaves blowing in the wind was a nice touch. When I put the nurse in the front of the shot, she was really in the way. But when I shot her out of focus, it had a different effect. My staff had a fit. According to the rules of filmmaking, it's the last thing you're supposed to do. But when I did it, it kind of worked. Film theory is always evolving and the audience is evolving with it. I think we can afford to turn things around a little, and the audience will follow. That shot is weird, but I figured I could get away with it. That's something I realized while shooting *Sonatine*. There was a shot in the film where the camera was supposed to pan and follow a passing car. The cameraman panicked during the pan and lost the car from the shot, having to move the camera around to find it again. He was mortified, but I okayed the shot. He protested that when shots like that are used, it gives him a bad reputation, but I wanted to use it. When *Sonatine* was shown in England, they commented on that very shot, claiming that the shaking of the camera foreshadows what is to come in the film. They asked if I had instructed the camera to do that, so I lied and said I did. It made me laugh. I thought to myself, "Hey a mistake can be a good thing too." When things are too perfect, it's no fun. There are parts that need to be shot precisely, but a certain looseness is nice too. I thought about those things while shooting *Fireworks*.

*You go back and forth in time a lot too in this film.*

I re-edited the film 14 times, I think. I called in the editor so many times. I'd tell him "We're going to change the whole thing." And he'd say "Again?" So we'd do it all over and I would proclaim it done, only to have him tell me that this was exactly the same as the first cut. So we'd recut again. I really didn't want to use a flashback, but if you don't some people won't understand the story. So I did it in a way that was most informative without becoming tedious.

*I felt that in Fireworks, you were actively inserting certain elements into each shot. So I think it's unfair just to call this film a survey of all your other films. Those who say that are not watching the film carefully enough. I think the filmmaking style has a different air. Like in the shot where Nishi is visiting his wife at the hospital, you give the shot an edge by using the nurse's movement through the vertical space of the shot. Also when Nishi is walking away from the lakeside toward the camera, it cranes down slowly to reveal the backs of the two yakuza's in the foreground. These shots actively utilize the vertical space, which was not the case in your other films.*

That sort of vertical movement started in *A Scene at the Sea* ... In this film I really thought about being creative in the way I shot things, especially in the action sequences. I experimented with a lot of styles. Sometimes it worked and other times I had to settle for shooting it in a conventional way. I thought of doing a whole shoot out with just the sound of the bullets. But seeing this Mercedes in the distance and hearing the gun shots is a boring way to end the film. And I've done that in *Sonatine*. The shot where I use a knife worked well, I think, using the shadow.

*In that shot with the knife, I felt the audience catch their breath. Hollywood films these days are so sloppy. You see the explosions coming a mile away. They're so predictable. What I miss most in movies today are those moments that they catch you by surprise and shock you.*

Hollywood films used to be able to shock you with the explosions themselves. Those were the times. The audience loved it back then. But then it became bigger and bigger, and we got used to the most amazing explosions. None of it shocks us anymore. It's like a fireworks show. It gets old fast to be told that they're going up and then seeing them explode. If you don't expect it, a little firecracker can scare you. I think that's the way to do it.

*I think another thing that is different in this film is the way you capture landscapes. Until now, when you shot the beach, it was any old beach and your shots of the city were often run-down factories or places of exposed concrete—drab, dreary settings. But this time, you've got Mount Fuji, a cherry blossom in full bloom ... you seem to be seeking to capture a traditionally Japanese landscape.*

How shall I put this ... If it were two men standing in front of Mount Fuji, there would be nothing more absurd. But in this film it's a couple. I figured it was all right if it was a woman standing next to you. If it's a couple going to a typical tourist spot, it works all right, especially if the characters are loaded with dark pasts. Like a terminal illness. That makes the scene suddenly very tragic. If I had a very happy healthy couple go to Mount Fuji it would be kind of lame, but since the guy is volatile and dangerous, I figure I could have him stand anywhere. So I might as well choose a picturesque place that I haven't used before. I had not shot Mount Fuji before.

*The shot where Horibe, Nishi's ex-partner, played by Ren Osugi, is sitting in his wheelchair underneath the cherry blossoms made a real impression on me.*

People see that shot and ask me if I'm a fan of Seijun Suzuki. I figured I could get away with having Mr. Osugi under the cherry tree even if it's a little cheesy because the character is a painter. Also, it's not that he just went out to see the blossoms because he didn't have anything else to do— he just attempted

suicide, and finally decided to start painting. To have him under the cherry blossoms with all that history makes the scene much more significant.

*I really liked the fact that we don't get this very emotional close up of Mr. Osugi's face looking up at the tree. Instead we have a long shot of this lone figure of a man in a wheelchair underneath this blossoming tree. Not to say that there is any influence or connection, but this scene for some odd reason reminded me of Nagisa Oshima's Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence. That film is set entirely in the jungle with no landscapes resembling Japan and you certainly don't see any cherry blossoms. There is one moment in the film, however, where the character played by Ryuichi Sakamoto tells Mr. Lawrence that if he could, he would like to invite every single prisoner to see a cherry tree in full bloom. Mr. Lawrence replies that what he remembers of Japan is the frozen tree in the midst of a landscape covered in snow. As a film, the two have nothing in common, but somehow after I saw the movie, I thought of Mr. Oshima.*

Yes, it's not an influence in the style of shooting or anything like that, but we share a certain mind set. There are other moments in the film where I feel we share a certain state of mind. So I guess I was influenced by him, or something of my experience with him stayed with me.

*I believe that a director is the greatest critic of his own films. I get the feeling that you are constantly rejecting your previous films with your new film ...*

I think that's right. For example, others consider their bad films failures. I pick up on the faults of the film and I criticize myself, but I would not call the film a failure. If there are three things about the film that are good, those are the three souvenirs the film left me and I don't need anything else. Then in the next film I collect a couple more and they add up. I made *Fireworks* with all the good things that I've collected over the years from different films, and in that sense, it is a survey of the past. It's a film born of all the good parts of all my past films. If they want to call it a survey of my past works, I guess it's a survey ...

*But even if it is a survey, it's not that you just abbreviate and combine your past films, nor is it that you just refine your past films. The other thing that's different about this film that I wanted to ask you about is the color. You seem to be actively involving all sorts of bright colors. One thing is, you have included your own paintings in this film which must have something to do with it. If *Sonatine* was based on the color blue and it was your blue period, *Fireworks* is ...*

The critics at Venice still thought the film was "Kitano blue." I didn't get it, but they told me that the blue I use in my films is called Kitano blue. I thought that was nice. I do use blue as my base color, but I try to use it adventurously. I really can't shoot the city, though. I hate shooting Chinatown at night or something. Too many colors. But I figure now is the time to practice so that one day I can shoot those kind of colors too. As part of the practice, I included all those bright paintings. A painting is not a landscape, so I thought I could deal with it. I could be bold with the paintings, but the city is still shot in very subdued colors because I don't think I have the technique or the confidence to use bright color for that. So the landscapes are still blue. I made my splash of color with the paintings and the blossom tree, but my base is still blue.

*Even in the shot at the hospital, there is a bunch of brightly colored flowers by the door. Was that something you put there for the shoot?*

No, it happened to be there. I told them, if you see flowers during the shoot, film them. When we went to the beach, these fish happened to be jumping so we shot it. There is no significance to those shots. You could have a man and a woman on a beach, and a third person and that person would mean nothing to the couple. Even if you share the same shot and space, there is no relationship. It's like that in real life — things that are completely unrelated exist side by side. It's the same with the flowers. You see flowers there and you don't know why they're there, but they just are. I'm not shooting the flowers with some

heavy significance but I'm introducing them as bits of color. The red of a flower in the blue. It paves the way to all the primary colors in the paintings. The reason why I had the film start with my paintings is to familiarize the audience with my paintings. You have to introduce them slowly because otherwise, if they're hit over the head with it, the film could potentially end before they get over it and understand the film.

*Regarding color, when I interviewed you a while back, you told me that after the accident, you began to experience color much more vividly. Thinking about that, my very favorite scene in this film, the scene that moves me greatly and at the same time upsets me, is the scene where Horibe first encounters color at the florist. I imagine that this cop had lived completely indifferent to colors until that very moment and right then he realizes for the first time that he was surrounded by all this color. Did you have a moment after the accident when you experienced this?*

It was flowers for me too. Until then, I was stepping on flowers, and I scoffed and mocked the idea of sending flowers to women. Then I had the bike accident and my head hit the pavement and I was destroyed ... I was walking around with my bandaged eye, because I had nothing better to do, and I came to a florist where I began staring at the flowers. Then I realized that they were each so different from the other and I was really struck by it. I thought maybe I should paint them. I bought the paint and the supplies. I looked at some stuff van Gogh did, and realized I could never paint like that. But I couldn't shake the notion of painting the flowers. I wondered how I could do it, when the idea of arranging them into something else came to mind. Looking at a sunflower I thought it looked like a lion. This idea made me so happy. So I painted the lion with the sunflower head. I had that painting way before I started shooting the film. And then one looked like a deer, another leaf looked like a penguin. They would keep coming to me. It was really instantaneous. In this film, I wanted to show that this guy Horibe doesn't know where he's heading but is somehow drawn to the florist and ends up there. He suddenly wants to paint so badly and he is so happy to have discovered this new thing, he buys a bunch of flowers and the images keep coming to him ...

*I got the feeling that it wasn't that he was trying to create images from the flowers, rather that the images kept seeping out of him.*

Yeah, like there is this voice inside of him saying "Do it, do it." It's as if the flowers are telling him who he is and what he should do while he himself is just sitting in front of the store consumed.

*I like Mr. Osugi's expression there because it's very natural.*

I told him to continue staring at the flowers. He couldn't take it anymore and tears started running down his face. I continued rolling, and the minute I said cut, he apologized for crying. Before the next shot, he asked me if I wanted tears, and I told him it wasn't necessary. I didn't want him to be staring all teary eyed.

*But when the woman comes out and asks him she can help him and we cut back to Horibe, he's no longer crying.*

The make up person was bothered by that. They said I was just being lazy. It doesn't take much to do this, just a few eye drops. But I just didn't want it.

*I thought that you probably didn't want that scene to be sappy. Even the actual moment that Horibe begins to cry looking at the flowers is cut out. One of the paintings is inserted in that spot and when you come back his cheeks are already wet. Normally, that's the part you want to keep in as a tearjerker. Instead the colors tell it all and that made it very moving.*

I like that scene very much myself. I was really geared up to shoot that scene. The opening scene in the parking lot and this scene were the two that I knew I was going to have in the film while I was shooting.

*That opening is very cinematic even just reading the script. When I read it, the image just came to me. The way the parking lot would be shot, the shot where the blue sky is reflected on the hood of the car ...*

Like the apartment by the sea where Horibe lives. The reason why I chose that place is because the roof of the crappy house behind it is blue. All blue. I set my heart on that house. “Well if we shoot here, where exactly does Horibe live?” asked a crew member. I told him I didn’t know. I figure if we shoot him coming home this way, the audience will just assume he lives somewhere over there. The crew complained that they had to build a door. I told them it’s not the morning soap opera, I’m not going to have shots of him going in and out of his apartment. All I needed was the inside of the apartment. I liked the blue of the roof, I wanted to shoot there. If the roof was of a different color it wouldn’t be half as interesting. And it was by the sea ... I really was fanatically picky about the blue. That also meant that when ever any other color was introduced, I was doubly cautious as well.

*That’s why the colors that you introduce in your paintings, like the yellow of the ginkgo leaf, are that much more vivid.*

When you have a dark blue next to a light blue, it doesn’t stand out in any way. To make a color pop out you have to bring a completely opposite color next to it. That’s why I wanted the base color to be blue and then use other colors to punctuate the look of the film — give the film an edge.

*The placement of color was important to you.*

I really thought about Kayoko Kishimoto’s costume too. Not just in terms of color, but I didn’t want her to look too domestic. I wanted this couple to have many dynamics — like sometimes the wife could be the mother and the husband is the son or vice versa. I didn’t want them to have a very man/woman relationship. The reason why I didn’t have them talk too much to each other is because in my mind, a conversation between a man and a woman often leads to sex. I wanted to get rid of any sexual tension by doing away with the talking, and I thought I could show their relationship better by just portraying the moments they shared together. Just because his wife is ill, I was not going to have the guy ask her if she’s all right every place they went. I hate that.

*You don’t need that because you really get the feeling that he cares for her deeply without all those words. Now I’ve spent a lot of time talking to you about the technical aspects of filmmaking, but I really find the charm of your film to be more in the way your own life experiences are reflected in your films ... Of course, it doesn’t necessarily mean the character is the director. Filmmaking isn’t that simple ... But after watching this film, the thought crossed my mind was that perhaps in Fireworks, you consider the various possibilities of what might have happened to you after the accident and project them onto the two characters, Nishi and Horibe.*

Well, I feel like I’m found out. It puts me in a slightly defensive position. Horibe is obviously definitely an image of myself after the accident. You know, I was the king of prime time. Then the motorbike accident happened and some people left me. It made me realize that some people obviously didn’t really care about me. So I thought “Maybe I’ll take up painting.” On the other hand, there was also that incident where we raided the publishing company. I thought that was the end of me. But I did it for a woman, you know. I really thought I was done for in society. I was lucky to have been able to come back to television after that. I felt I did what I had to do to prove my love for her. I felt I had to go. That was reflected in Nishi. The friendship and strong bond between Nishi and Horibe is a reflection of my relationship with my troupe. I single-handedly pulled my whole crew into that raid and we could have all become convicts. One of my guys still recounts with tears in his eyes how I told them I would take care of them, even if that meant I had to be a construction worker. I asked them to forgive me. I guess little bits of my essence end up in the films and in the characters. So I don’t want to say it too loud, but I think it’s inevitable. That’s why I hate people who are only interested in film. I think people should be many things. It’s all right if you get into a fight. There will be a moment when that experience will come in handy. A

director has to study the techniques of filmmaking, but more importantly, it's about what you have of your own to put into the film. I think good things and bad things can be 50/50 in life. So I dislike it when something good happens. I mean this film was a good thing, right? The reason why I can keep going, is because I never let myself be as happy as others expect me to. I feel like I'm going to die if I'm too happy because they'll just say, "Hey, you've had enough fun, you're done". I think that's why I've succeeded in so many areas. It's not to be pompous. It's just that I feel if I let myself be completely satisfied, I couldn't move onto the next thing.

*We talked about your crew, and though they're not major characters in this movie, a number of them have smaller roles supporting you from afar. Like the doctor who gives Nishi a new shirt at the hospital, and the junkyard owner ...*

How they support Nishi is important. Like the junkyard owner played by Tetsu Watanabe. When he first appears he is beating somebody up violently. How do you make a guy like that warm to you? Nishi goes to buy a scrapped police light from the junkyard and when he asks the owner about it, he takes off his sunglasses. It's courtesy. If some punk came to him with his shades and said "Sell this to me," he would tell him to get lost. It's a small thing, but it's the way it works in certain neighborhoods. There is a feeling that what you give is what you get — whether it's respect or it's attitude. It's the way some men bring each other's guard down. I wanted him to play the character that way.

*There is an instant bond between the two characters.*

The chemistry between two guys is often decided instantaneously. It's the same with communication between men and women too. But I feel it's not all the things that are said between them, rather it's all in the small things you do for each other.

*It's not that you decide whether you like the other person or not depending on what he does or says before, but rather that it's decided instantaneously the moment you meet.*

I really have a habit of doing that. Even if it's a guy I've never met, I pretty much know the moment I see him. When friends introduce me to their friends I know instantly if it works or not.

*Now that you've made seven films, does the fact that you've succeeded in film give you more freedom?*

*Sonatine* was a turning point for me. I could have gone towards making a sonata from there or gone pop. With *Fireworks*, I feel I went closer to a sonata. I don't want to use any guns in my next film. If you make the same sort of film again, even if you make it more intense, it doesn't really make an impression. If you make a film from a completely different perspective it will be more shocking. Everyone around me says since *Fireworks* was such a success, do another one, but that's the same as Tora-san series. I don't like that. Though with *Getting Any?* I failed by doing something different. That's why this time, I want to do something different and succeed. I want my next film to be the kind of film where the audience starts dancing as the end credits start rolling. I think this comes from my background in live stand up comedy. The audience used to get into it so much they were still laughing at us through the next act. In the same token, if I could make a movie where the audience was dancing at the end, that would be a great service. I think films should be capable of doing that. Even at film festivals, the audience gives standing ovations while the director stands outside the theater. It's the audience's way of thanking the director and congratulating him. I think the director should get them going even more — not just clapping. We can make a film where people are hugging and crying throughout it. We should move the audience more.

*Last question. I asked you this after you wrapped Sonatine also, but now that you've completed seven films: what is film to you?*

I thought at first that film was the puss created when Japan became infected by the disease called Westernization. But now I feel that puss has transformed itself into a good tissue. Inside of me that is.

From a young age, I've experienced and absorbed many things. When I wondered which culture it came from, I realized it was the one that sneaked in — the American culture. I'm just an old timer infected by this culture creating a paper theater, but I'd like to keep creating better paper theater.