

Winter 2005

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# CJST Quarterly

The Canada-Japan Society of Toronto

## Iraq, Tsunami, and CJST Events

*Global themes are reflected in CJST's mission, and in our upcoming events. Not convinced? Argue your points with me over a pint of Asahi at the next Ichi-Moku-Kai...*

BY CRAIG MARTIN, CJST PRESIDENT

I have been reminded that I should provide the President's Message for the first Newsletter of 2005. It occurred to me that I could describe all the new events and activities that the CJST has developed over the last year, such as the "Windows on Culture" film nights, or describe how we've been improving upon some of CJST's traditional activities such as Ichi-Moku-Kai (IMK), but then I realized I would have nothing to talk about at our upcoming Annual General Meeting!

The thought crossed my mind, however, that it has been a rather eventful year in the world at large, and that some of the themes and potential lessons that can be drawn from those events have some things in common with both the CJST mission, and some events that we are planning for our members in the coming months. What, you may ask, can the CJST mission, or any of its upcoming events, have anything to do with wars in Iraq, elections in the U.S.A., or tsunamis in Asia? Well, you may think it a stretch, but then you'll just have to read on, come to our events, and then find me at IMK to prove me wrong over a few pints of Asahi.

Our mission, of course, is to enhance and deepen Japanese-Canadian relations on a micro level through providing a forum for inter-cultural exchange here in the Toronto area. And that may not have any direct connection with the more notable events of the past year, given that Japanese-Canadian relations were not at the forefront of world news. But cross-cultural understanding, and the impact of local cultural communities on macro decision making, is indeed a theme running through some of those events.

Take the war in Iraq, to begin. Putting aside all the loaded political issues as to whether the war was justified or was a colossal mistake,

## Iraq, Tsunami, and CJST Events *(continued from Page 1)*

there is little disagreement now that the planning for the post-war period was deeply flawed. And one of the more grievous errors, apparently, was a failure on the part of the U.S. administration to understand the profoundly complex cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity of the country, and the political ramifications of that diversity. The failure of the U.S. administration to draw on the sizable local Iraqi immigrant population in the U.S., among other sources, to gain a better understanding of the cultural imperatives in Iraq, is difficult to comprehend.

The different ways in which different countries reported on and responded to events in Iraq over the last year was also interesting from the perspective of cross-cultural understanding. In Italy the release of two Italian women held hostage by Iraqi insurgents led to national celebrations, while in England the execution of a British hostage led to outrage against the insurgents. When I was in Japan last October, however, I was astounded to find that the public response to the seizure of a young Japanese national, was to blame the poor lad for being there. He was criticized not only for being the author of his own misfortune, but for having created trouble for the government and bringing shame and embarrassment upon the nation.

And the tsunami, you ask? Well, take a look at the Canadian response in the aftermath of the tsunami. Notwithstanding that the worst damage and suffering by far was in Indonesia, and that most Canadians missing were in Thailand, the focus of the Canadian government's response was immediately on Sri Lanka, led by Bill Graham, Minister of National Defence. Why? Because Sri Lankan immigrants comprise a much more potent political force in this country, and particularly

in Mr. Graham's riding in Toronto. Once again, cross-cultural relations on a local level impacting on macro decision making.

Some of these broad and global themes will likely be reflected in some of the CJST events planned for 2005. In our first such event (February 24th), the new Consul General of Japan to Toronto, Mr. Hisao Yamaguchi, will provide our members and guests with his thoughts on some aspects of Canadian and Japanese foreign policy, and how they differ. We are also hoping to prevail upon Professor Michael Donnelly of the University of Toronto later in the year to speak to our members on how Japan has changed over the last ten years, and particularly, how in his view, it has become a freer society than it once was. Finally, we will be trying to nab John Davis of Davis Law Offices in Tokyo during one of his short sojourns in Toronto to speak to our business members about his thoughts on the current status of Canadian-Japanese economic negotiations.

Still not convinced? Well, as I said, you will have to come out to the events to see for yourself. And if all this is far too serious for your liking, then you'll just have to drop in to our film night after-party at the I.V. Lounge, or IMK at Sushi Bistro, and give me an earful over a pint, and feel free to let us know what other kinds of events you would like to see the CJST organize. But do not underestimate the value and importance of inter-cultural relations on the micro level; a pint here and there can be the rustle of butterfly wings that lead to greater international relations on the other side of the planet. ■

Event updates: [www.cjst.org](http://www.cjst.org)  
Membership email: [membership@cjst.org](mailto:membership@cjst.org)  
General email: [info@cjst.org](mailto:info@cjst.org)

# CJST Event Summary

Gidayu Music:  
Highlights from Bunraku Theatre  
in Concert

Friday, December 3, 2004 at  
Isabel Bader Theatre

*The CJST is grateful to Mr. Toshi Aoyagi of The Japan Foundation Toronto for generously providing CJST members with free tickets to the best seats in the house.*

BY ANNETTE GOULIN

On a chilly December evening, a lucky audience of about 200 was entertained by *Gidayu Music: Highlights from Bunraku Theatre in Concert*. It was a complimentary performance sponsored by The Japan Foundation Toronto, as part of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Canada and Japan.

Michiko Ueno-Herr provided an informal 20-minute introduction in English to the art and history of Bunraku, which was recognized by UNESCO in November 2003 as a “masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity.” She also wrote the detailed program synopsis.

Ms. Ueno-Herr explained that the Bunraku tradition began in Japan in 1703 (some say even earlier), when Takemoto Gidayu wrote his first play. Bunraku, performed with puppets, music,

and a storyteller, is often a love story or a love suicide story.

When the puppets are not used, as in the December 3rd performance, the performance is called *suitoruri* (literally, “plain narration”). The plain narration includes a *shamisen* player and a *tayu* (the storyteller/singer). On stage, their relationship is said to be like that of a husband and wife. The *tayu* is the husband and lead role, with the *shamisen* player, the wife, the secondary or assistant role. If the storyteller changes something or falls behind, it is up to the *shamisen* player to make appropriate and seamless amendments. The two players, clad in brightly-coloured traditional costumes, kneel *saiza* style while performing.

Members of Japan’s Bunraku-za Theatre, managed by Ms. Ueno-Herr, performed in two parts with a brief intermission in between. Part One: *Shunkan on Devil Island* was comprised of one long scene, while Part Two: *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki* was divided into three scenes. There were six male performers in total throughout the evening. Monzaemon Chikamatsu, known as the Shakespeare of Japan, wrote both Parts. Above the stage on a large but inobtrusive screen, Surtitles Inc. (Toronto) provided English subtitles to the Japanese-language performance.

The music and story were both tragic and beautiful. The audience was captivated by the intensity of the emotions and the energy portrayed by the performers. This traditional Japanese art was a rare treat to see performed live in Toronto. ■

# Film Review

## **Nobody Knows (*Dare Mo Shiranai*)**

2004, 141 minutes

Directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda

Principal Cast: Yuya Yagira, Ayu Kitaura, Hiei Kimura, Momoko Shimizu, Hanae Kan, You

BY HARUMI TYLER

### **Synopsis:**

Four siblings live happily with their mother in a small apartment in Tokyo. Each of the four children has a different father. They have never been to school. The very existence of three of them has been hidden from the outside world. One day, the mother leaves behind a little money and a note asking her 12-year-old boy to look after the others. And so begins the children's odyssey that "nobody knows."

Suddenly abandoned, the four children strive to survive in their own little world, devising and following their own set of rules. When they are finally forced to interact with the world outside, the fragile equilibrium sustaining their hidden existence collapses.

*Nobody Knows* depicts the children's longing for their mother, their wary fascination with the outside world, their fear and courage, and their kindness and loyalty to one another even as their situation becomes increasingly desperate.

### **Review:**

Hirokazu Kore-eda (*Maboroshi*, *After Life*, *Distance*) is a filmmaker of great compassion. He has made a number of documentaries about people - a man with AIDS; a man suffering from anterograde amnesia (the inability to store new memories after a brain injury); children in Nagano who study without textbooks.

Although not a documentary, *Nobody Knows* is loosely based on true events. In 1988, four children in Tokyo were found abandoned in a small apartment. The sad events resonated with Kore-eda, who wrote a script based on the events, then held onto it for nearly 16 years, waiting for the right opportunity to turn it into a film. And Kore-eda has transformed the events into a film of surprising tenderness and poignance, while avoiding maudlinness. The story is sympathetically narrated through the children's eyes, rather than from a journalistic point of view, although the film has a certain element of *verité*.

The children in *Nobody Knows* are filmed with an intensity and naturalness reminiscent of a good documentary. Kore-eda went to great lengths to make this possible. He shot the film in chronological order so as to capture the increasing closeness between the young actors over time. He also spent a significant amount of time communicating with the actors, exploring their inner characters and encouraging feedback. The 14-year-old lead actor, Yuya Yagira, was awarded the Best Actor prize at Cannes in 2004 - the youngest, and the first Japanese, actor to receive the award.



Director Hirokazu Kore-eda  
Photo: Harumi Tyler

As a counterbalance to its dark subject matter, the film utilizes lush natural light, infusing a gossamer atmospheric quality and preventing the film from plunging into obvious doom and gloom. The soundtrack, featuring Gontiti and Takako Tate (who sings the affecting theme song, "Jewel"), also lends an uplifting feel to the film.

*Nobody Knows* is simultaneously powerful and delicate. It is also emotionally disturbing, as it compels us to examine the meaning of responsibility and compassion. ■

***Nobody Knows is scheduled for limited theatrical release in 2005.***

# Interview

## Film Director Hirokazu Kore-eda

### at the 2004 Toronto International Film Festival

BY HARUMI TYLER

(This interview was conducted in Japanese)

**Q:** *Nobody Knows* is based on actual events that occurred in Tokyo in 1988. I understand that you wrote the script soon after. Why did you wait such a long time to make the film?

**A:** I wanted to start shooting immediately but couldn't obtain funding for this film. I really wanted this story to be my feature film debut. As it turned out, I made my debut with *Maboroshi*, which I'm happy with. After that, every time I completed a film, I'd always want *Nobody Knows* to be my next project, but it just didn't work out until now.

**Q:** *Nobody Knows* is a story of children abandoned by their own mother. What was it like for you to tackle such a serious subject matter with such young actors?

**A:** None of the children had any previous acting experience. I didn't give them a written script, and I directed them only verbally. Luckily, this approach seemed to work perfectly with these young actors. I think I was able to draw natural expressions from them.

There was nothing particularly difficult in directing children. They became increasingly close with one another as the story went on. After a while they really became like a real family, and called each other by their character names even off-camera. They even created nicknames for each other based on their character names.

**Q:** All the children deliver sensitive, natural performances. Was most of their performance improvised?

**A:** Most of the dialogue was written in the script. However, I spent a lot of time with them, and eventually rewrote their lines based on each person's speech pattern and vocabulary, which made them feel and sound more natural. And there were very detailed and specific directions for physical expression such as eye movement and so on.

**Q:** What made you select Yuya Yagira, who played the oldest brother? Were there any particular qualities that you were seeking while searching for an actor for this role?

**A:** I chose Yagira because he had very strong eyes, but no, I didn't have any particular image of this character already set in my mind. I wanted to stay open and discover the great qualities of each young actor. I'd rather create characters based on the actors' own qualities.

**Q:** *Nobody Knows* is narrated through the eyes of the children in a dire situation. What was it that you wanted to express through this story?

**A:** I had no intention of pointing fingers at the world or at any particular individual. All of us have childhood memories that we only slightly remember; I wanted to awaken them. Everyone can relate to the feelings that these children went through. Perhaps people can interact with children differently after they see this film.

**Q:** How much of the story is true to the facts of the actual events?

**A:** Unfortunately there seemed to be no detailed records of how the actual children were living. The story consists of the bits of facts I was able to find, plus my imagination. It's also based on my own childhood memories and from the inspiring natural qualities of children in general.

**Q:** Is there a specific message that you want to convey to the audience?

**A:** Although *Nobody Knows* is about children struggling through the devastating consequences of their abandonment, my intentions are not to accuse anyone, as I've mentioned previously. Some people may accuse certain individuals anyway, as we all have different points of view. However, I believe that filmmaking is not a tool for accusation - well, not for me anyway. There is no clear line between good and bad or black and white. I would say we are all more or less grey. I am interested in telling stories about people living within those grey gradations.

**Q:** Please tell us about your next film.

**A:** I am working on a *jidai geki* (period film) set in the Edo era. But it won't be a samurai action flick; it'll be about people living in poverty.

**Q:** We all look forward to it. Thank you so much for your time today. ■

# Restaurant Review

***For the appetizers, it's worth the winter trip to the Beach***

## Akane-ya

2214 Queen St. E., Toronto  
416-669-0377  
Open for dinner only  
Closed on Mondays

Chef: Yoshi Taneichi



**REVIEWED BY  
STEVE FRY**

Although the summer season is long over, there is still one good reason to head out to the Beach area. Akane-ya is a wonderful Japanese style restaurant that provides a delicious respite from the many copy-cat Japanese spots out there that all serve the same old, same old sushi, tempura and teriyaki. Japanese owned and operated at the same location for over 11 years, owner Hagiwara-san has learned well how to mix the traditional Japanese with his own creative twists to create unique and tasty offerings.

While I lived in Japan I was very fond of *izakaya* style food, where the menu was filled with a wide variety of appetizers, much like Spanish tapas. I always enjoyed pointing at the board of the daily specials, knowing they would all be served as appetizers for everyone to share, and seeing what the chef was able to conjure up. I also particularly enjoyed smaller restaurants where the owner or chef took the time to chat and where

you knew there was a personal interest in making sure you enjoyed your meal. Akane-ya is one of the few restaurants in Toronto that reminds me of this interactive, convivial style.

Akane-ya offers the full spectrum of your typical Toronto Japanese food, including sushi, tempura, katsu, donburi, and various combo-sets, all at reasonable prices; from previous visits I can attest to their quality. What sets Akane-ya apart from other Japanese restaurants, though, are its appetizers. On this visit I was most interested to see what Chef Yoshi Taneichi could put together for us, and decided to make a whole meal out of appetizers.

Oysters were on the daily special board, and so that's how we started. The oyster plate included three different styles: *namagaki* (raw), miso-baked, and *kaki-fry* (deep-fried). I'm not a big fan of raw oyster, but this batch wasn't too pungent, and went down smoothly. The baked ones were excellent, the miso providing a tasty and creative accent.

Our meal continued with another appetizer off the daily special board. The board announced "fish cakes," and I wasn't sure what to expect. I was pleasantly surprised to see that what we got resembled Japanese-style *korokke* croquettes. The fish n' cream filling was delicious.

Next, we had the black cod cooked in a miso flavour that elegantly complemented, without overpowering, the taste of the fish. Then, baked baby pumpkins filled with a Japanese style pork stew. Then, another of the daily specials, a spicy sashimi plate that included three varieties of fresh raw fish served in a spicy honey mustard sauce, a delightfully unusual twist to the traditional sashimi. Seriously, sticking to the appetizers is the way to go at Akane-ya!

Chef Yoshi then told us that he was going to serve something that I had never tried before. I was excited to see what he had in store. He prepared some sushi rolls, and I could see he was topping some of them with *umi* (sea urchin), one of my favourites. But then everything

***Continued on Page 8***

# CJST Event Summary

Private tour of the  
archived Japanese collection

Royal Ontario Museum  
November 11, 2004

BY ANNETTE GOULIN

On November 11, 2004 a small group of CJST members was treated to a behind-the-scenes tour of the archived Japanese collection at the Royal Ontario Museum which is currently not on public display. However, that will all change upon completion of the museum's ongoing \$200 million Renaissance ROM renovation and expansion program. The new Prince Takamado Gallery of Japan, scheduled to be unveiled in December 2005, will be a permanent gallery of Japanese artifacts alongside the Chinese and Korean collections in the north wing of the building facing Philosopher's Walk.

You may recall that the Prince's widow Princess Takamado visited Canada in June 2004 and officially toured the ROM. Her visit was part of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of diplomatic relations between Canada and Japan. The ROM's collection of 5,000 Japanese objects, the largest in Canada, includes folding screens, woodblock prints, artwork, dishes, lacquerware, armour, swords, tea ceremony collections, original Hiroshige prints, Buddhist paintings and sculptures, and more. The new 3,000 square-foot gallery, looking over Philosopher's Walk, is expected to be wide-open, with plenty of space for visitors to walk around, even exuding a zen-like quality.

Jody Townshend of the Royal Ontario Museum Foundation greeted the CJST group in the museum's rotunda. She showed us the construction currently underway of the new crystal-shaped building and the redevelopment of the existing building. We made our way to the curatorial

offices, where we met Dr. Klass Ruitenbeek, Senior Curator and the ROM's Louise Hawley Stone Chair of Far Eastern Art. Dutch-born Dr. Ruitenbeek is an expert on Asian art, architecture, history and literature, and has been with the ROM since 1996. He also lectures at the University of Toronto in the Department of East Asian Studies.

Dr. Ruitenbeek took us into the rooms housing the Japanese collection. He explained that many of the items have been in storage for close to 25 years due to lack of space on the display floor. Pieces have been taken out for short periods of time over the years; however, they have not all been on display at the same time - that is, until the new gallery opens in December 2005. Many of the items are covered in sheets of paper, under glass, wrapped up, or otherwise protected from heat, light, and humidity.

The CJST group was treated to a rare opportunity to view some recently acquired items, such as a beautiful 17th century double folding screen depicting a bird's-eye view through the clouds of people arriving in boats at a shrine in Osaka. The gold lacquer and brilliant colours were astounding. Another piece showcased by Dr. Ruitenbeek was a 17th century book of artwork by Hiroshige. He carefully unwrapped the tissue paper, revealing a beautiful, fragile book of Hiroshige's paintings depicting nature, people, and other typical Japanese scenes. Since the pages have been closed for most of their 150 years, they are in remarkably good condition, with the colours still bright and undamaged. This was indeed a rare treat to see, for it is very difficult for a book to be displayed in a museum. Perhaps only two pages could be shown at a time in a museum display case; here, Dr. Ruitenbeek flipped carefully through every page for us to view briefly.

Other items Dr. Ruitenbeek showed us were some Chinese and Japanese pottery that were over 100 years old, and new acquisitions of the museum. They were carefully and intricately painted on the inside and out.

Dr. Ruitenbeek kindly and engagingly answered all our questions throughout the tour. I'm sure we could have asked many more questions if time had permitted. The CJST is grateful for his time and expertise, and we look forward to the opening of the Prince Takamado Gallery of Japan. ■

## Akane-ya *(continued from Page 6)*

disappeared into the kitchen and we waited anxiously to find out what was happening behind the scenes. When everything re-emerged, we discovered that the sushi had been baked! Indeed, “cooked” sushi was something I had never tried before. I must admit I was skeptical, but it was really good. The rice was soft and warm, and the toppings of fish and sea urchin lost none of their sublimely delicate quality after a trip through the oven. I especially liked the sushi rolls Chef Yoshi prepared tempura-style. Apparently cooked sushi wasn’t even on the menu yet; I felt privileged to be a guinea pig. We anointed it *yaki-zushi*, and if you want to try something really delicious and different you should definitely ask for it.

Beverage-wise, Akane-ya offers a variety of sake, along with Asahi, Kirin and Sapporo Japanese beers. However, for something a bit more unusual that would nicely complement Akane-ya’s distinctive dishes, you could try the unfiltered *nigori*-style sake that’s also available.

Akane-ya offers a traditional Japanese atmosphere with a welcoming personality. It’s definitely worth a winter trip to the Beach for the unusual and accomplished appetizers. Two thumbs up! ■

### *Windows on Culture:* The CJST Movie Nights

#### Upcoming films in the 2004 – 2005 Series:

Fri., Feb. 18/05

*Love Letter* (1995, Shunji Iwai)

- plus a special post-screening reception at the NFB  
(drinks, Japanese food)

Fri., March 18/05

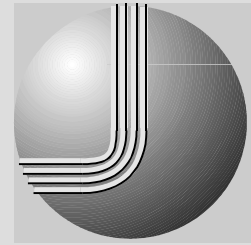
*Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1983, Nagisa Oshima)

Fri., April 15/05

*Battle Royale* (2000, Kinji Fukasaku)

Screenings take place on the third Friday of every month at the National Film Board (NFB), 150 John St. at 6:30 p.m. \$5 admission

Suggestions for future screenings welcome. [info@cjst.org](mailto:info@cjst.org)



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We welcome comments, suggestions and contributions you may have on Japan and related topics for this publication.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not of the CJST or its Board of Directors.

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