

Masaru Sato (Composer) (May 29, 1928 - December 5, 1999)

One of the most prolific composers in film history, Masaru Sato studied at the National Music Academy and later served as an assistant at Toho Studios under Akira Kurosawa's composer, Fumio Hayasaka. His official career began at age 27, when he completed the unfinished score to Akira Kurosawa's *I Live in Fear: Record of a Living Being*. From 1956-1965, he worked with Kurosawa on such films as *Throne of Blood*, *Sanjuro* and *Red Beard*. Sato's credits include over 300 compositions for film and TV, including an astonishing 18 film scores in 1959. His diverse body of work includes dramas, thrillers, comedies, documentaries, animes, as well as four *Godzilla* films. He is particularly known for using popular Western styles and jazz in his music.

Yakuza

Yakuza are members of traditional organized crime groups in Japan, a.k.a "The Japanese Mafia." Outside of Japan, the term also refers to traditional Japanese organized crime in general. Today, the yakuza are one of the largest organized crime cultures in the world.

The term "Yakuza" comes from a Japanese card game, *Oicho-Kabu* (similar to *baccarat*), and means "good for nothing" -- it comes from the worst hand in the game, a set of eight (or "Ya" in the traditional Japanese form of counting), nine ("Ku"), and three ("Sa"). The Ya-Ku-Sa hand requires the most skill at judging opponents and the least luck to win. The name was also used because it signified bad fortune, presumably for anyone who went up against the group.

There is no single origin for all Japanese yakuza organizations; rather, they evolved from different elements of traditional Japanese society. Most modern yakuza organizations trace their origin to two groups which emerged in 18th century Japan: *tekiya* (peddlers) and *bakuto* (gamblers). As Japan began to industrialize and urbanization became more prevalent, a third group, called *gurentai*, began to form. Their status as a traditional yakuza group has been debated, but they were the origin of the violent gangs that peddle their brutality for profit.

The Yakuza follow the traditional Japanese hierarchial structure of *oyabun-kobun*, where the *kobun* (foster child) owes their allegiance to the *oyabun* (foster parent; the boss, or "Godfather"). The *oyabun-kobun* relationship is formalized by the ceremonial sharing of sake from a single cup. Members of yakuza gangs cut their family ties and transfer their loyalty to the gang boss. They refer to each other as family members - fathers and elder and younger brothers. The Yakuza is populated entirely by men, and there are usually no women involved except for the *Oyabun's* wife (called "o-neh-san" or "ane-san," older sister).

Yubitsume, or finger cutting, is a form of penance or apology. In the film, Matsu uses a rock to cut off his finger and Tsutomu suggests cutting off all his fingers to apologize for his relationship with the boss' daughter. Upon a first offense, the transgressor must cut off the tip of his left pinky finger and hand the severed portion to his boss. Its origin stems from the traditional way of holding a Japanese sword. The bottom three fingers of each hand are used to grip the sword tightly, with the thumb and index fingers slightly loose. The removal of digits starting with the little finger moving up the hand to the index finger progressively weakens a person's sword grip. The idea is that a person with a weak sword grip then has to rely more on the group for protection, reducing individual action.

Until recently, the majority of yakuza income came from protection rackets in shopping, entertainment and red-light districts within their territory. However, they have expanded to various other criminal activities, including blackmail, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, Internet SNS fraud, and international crime.

The Railway System in Japan (A brief overview)

The first railway in Japan, the Tokyo-Yokohama railway, was built in 1872 and ran between Shimbashi Station and Yokohama Station.

By 1907, the Japanese government nationalized the railway by purchasing over 2,800 miles of track from 17 private railway companies.

In 1949, the newly named Japanese Government Railways (JGR) became a state-owned public corporation. However, over the years, the expansion effort eventually resulted in a massive debt load of 25 trillion yen (US

\$200 billion).

In 1987, the Japan Railways Group (JR Group), a group of seven independent companies, purchased the former government-owned railways.

They are divided into six regions: Hokkaido, East Japan, Central Japan, West Japan, Shikoku and Kyushu.

South Manchuria Railway

Following the Russo-Japanese War and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905, the Japanese-controlled South Manchuria Railway was founded in 1906. Running from the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula to Harbin, the success of the railway ultimately created a number of large subsidiary companies, including Showa Steel Works, South Manchurian Glass and Dalian Ceramics.

By 1930, the South Manchuria Railway was the largest and most profitable corporation in Japan with assets rising to over one billion yen and accounting for over a quarter of the government's tax revenues.

During the time *The Wolves* takes place, half of the world's supply of soybeans came from Manchuria and over 75% of the South Manchuria Railway's income was generated from transporting this export.

The Manchurian Incident

The Manchurian Incident, also known as the Mukden Incident, occurred in 1931 when a section of railroad, owned by Japan's South Manchuria Railway, was blown up by officers from the Kwantung Army of Japan.

Following the staged event, Chinese dissidents were accused by the Imperial Army of committing the crime. This accusation provided a pretext for Japan's invasion of Manchuria, an early skirmish that eventually led to the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).

The Shamisen Player's Songs

Although it is customary for AnimEigo to translate song lyrics in our films, we decided not to translate the shamisen player's lyrics for following reasons:

- 1) We could not find any lines in the original Japanese script.
- 2) Even though we could decipher a few words, without knowing the entire song, we can not make proper translation.
- 3) The lines of the songs have nothing to do with the story-line of the film.

In effect, we felt that translating part of the song might confuse viewers, so we decided to omit everything.

The Shamisen (Tsugaru Shamisen or Tsugaru Jyamisen)

The shamisen (lit. three taste strings), also called samisen or sängen, is a stringed instrument played with a large pick called a "bachi." Though it's about the same length as a guitar, the neck is longer, slimmer, and without frets. The rectangular body, known as the do, is covered on both sides with skin, like a banjo. Though recently, some types of plastics are being tried, the best shamisen are typically made with cat or dog skin, and on some, the position of the animal's nipples can still be seen.

The three strings have typically been made of silk, though nylon is increasingly becoming the norm. The bachi was traditionally made of ivory or tortoise shell but is now usually wooden, and shaped like a ginkgo leaf. The shamisen has derived from the sanshin, which came from Southern Okinawa in the 16th century, and which itself evolved from the Chinese sanxian.

Chin-don-ya (Vaudeville) Singing

Chin-don-ya, a type of Japanese marching band, consists of street performers dressed in outlandish outfits,

playing an array of instruments, usually from both Japan and the West. The musicians perform to advertise the opening of a business, a sale or special event. The repertoire ranges from ancient Asian music to current popular pop songs. The tradition of street performing has been around Japan for hundreds of years, but Chin-don-ya specifically started in Osaka during the 19th century. With the advent of television and its strong advertising appeal, the need for Chin-don-ya disappeared. There are still a few Chin-don-ya in Japan, but it is rare to see them performing.

Film Notes

The Wolves was filmed on location on the beautiful Shimokita peninsula.

Located on the northeast cape of Japan's main island of Honshu and part of Aomori Prefecture, the peninsula is largely uninhabited on its interior, but has a small population of people along its coastline. It is best known as the home of Mount Osore, the mythical Japanese location to Hell. There is a localized Japanese legend in Aomori that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross, but instead made his way to Shingo, Aomori, to live out the rest of his days as a rice farmer, due to "ancient Hebrew documents" which later disappeared. His "grave" is a major tourist attraction in Aomori.

"Kojima Yu, convicted of illegal tattooing"

Pictorial tattooing in Japan became very popular during the 18th century, but because of the association between criminals and tattoos, it was outlawed for being "deleterious to public morals." However, common people such as firemen, laborers, and those of the lower classes still continued to get tattoos.

With the publication of the Chinese novel, Suikoden, which features heavily tattooed heroes, tattooing was once again popular. However in 1867, upon Emperor Meiji's coronation, the laws restricting tattooing became strictly enforced because the new leaders believed that the people of the Western world would think that Japanese customs were strange and barbaric.

Over the next 75 years, artists continued to tattoo their clients illegally. After WWII, under the American occupation, General MacArthur liberalized many of the Japanese laws and made tattooing legal again.

"Farewell, Oyu."

Etiquette in Japanese culture is very important and can be seen in the way Japanese people converse with one another, especially with regard to elders: "mother" is "o-kaa-san" and "father" is "o-to-san." The use of the prefix "o" is also a traditional way of giving someone a nickname, as seen in the film when Aki says goodbye to Kojima Yu.

Its use also extends to food. Since rice and tea are held in such high regard in Japan they are denoted with the prefix "o." Rice, which is "kome" is pronounced "o-kome" and tea which is "cha" is pronounced "o-cha."

"The price of lumber's gone up ten to twenty times since the Great Kanto earthquake."

The Great Kanto Earthquake hit the main Japanese island of Honshu on September 1, 1923, devastating the area which included Tokyo and causing over 100,000 deaths. Based on the Richter scale, the earthquake had a magnitude of 7.9 to 8.4, making it one of the biggest earthquakes ever recorded. The damage was exacerbated because the quake occurred during lunchtime, which meant that many people were using fires to cook. Numerous fires quickly spread, creating firestorms which were amplified due to the strong winds caused by a typhoon off the coast of northern Japan. The fires, the biggest cause of death, raged for days, and attempts to fight them were made more difficult because of massive damage to the water mains, and there was widespread violence, in particular against ethnic Koreans, sparked by false rumors.

If a similar earthquake struck Tokyo today, it is estimated that it would take the lives of 50,000 people, and result in damages of more than a trillion dollars.

"You're the first detective I've met with a tattoo of Fudo."

In Vajrayana Buddhism, Fudo is the best known of the Five Wisdom Kings of the Womb Realm who watch over

the Five Wisdom Buddhas. Fudo is the Buddhist divinity of Wisdom and Fire and provides protection during dangerous times. He carries a sword in his right hand and a rope in his left hand which he uses to tie up demons.

“I been thinking of going to Harbin after the festival.”

Harbin, nicknamed “Ice City,” due to its lengthy cold winter, is located in Northeast China. Harbin was founded in 1898 as a result of the construction of the Russian built Chinese Eastern Railway, which was an extension of the Trans-Siberian railroad. After the Russo-Japanese War, Harbin became an international metropolis with an influx of several thousand nationals from over 30 countries. The establishment of sixteen consulates and the formation of several hundred companies, solidified its status as the center of northeast China.