

## Message from Consul-General of Japan Takako Ito

July 2018

It is said that Toronto hosts over 50 film festivals each year. Among them, the Toronto International Film Festival held every September is celebrated around the world. Meanwhile, Toronto's Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC) has hosted the Toronto Japanese Film Festival (TJFF) since 2012. The seventh TJFF held this year featured a total of



27 films in the three weeks between its opening on June 7 and closing on the 28, attracting a total of over 10,000 people. Along with New York, it is now the largest Japanese film festival in North America. I joined the audience of the TJFF for the first time this year, and was amazed by the wide

variety of genres presented – from documentaries, through comedy, suspense, anime and historical fiction – with audiences at some screenings consisting of over 500 people. I of course could not attend all of the screenings, but every one of the films I did manage to see superbly depicted Japan's culture and history, Japanese ways of thinking as well as the general allure of the country. They were also exceptional in terms of cinematography, music, casting and other facets of filmmaking. As well, about once a week during the TJFF, a director and/or actor from Japan visited Toronto to interact with and take questions from the audience. It truly was a fulfilling film festival.



I once met a Canadian at an event held at the JCCC, who told me, “Japanese films are different from those from Hollywood, and this difference is wonderful. I am a big fan of Japanese films.” For example, the film *A Beautiful Star* by Daihachi Yoshida is based on a novel with the same title by Yukio Mishima, but its story changes the global threat facing humanity from nuclear war to climate change. Some members of the audience who attended the screening suggested



his film should be more widely seen. There was also a Japanese woman who, because she was so moved when she saw this film for the first time in Japan, has followed its screenings around the world, seeing for the 100<sup>th</sup> time here in Toronto. She said “There is no other place that received this film as warmly. I am very happy to have been able to be part of the audience here.” By the way, I also believe it’s rare for Mr. Yoshida, the director, to have a photo taken with his audience while assuming the “Martian pose”.

As well, the 1953 film *Hiroshima* was produced with the full-fledged cooperation of the citizens of that city, who provided 90,000 extras for the filming just eight years after the atomic bombing. I was extremely touched, imagining how it would feel to appear in the film after directly experiencing the bombing or losing friends and family members because of it. Before and after the screening of this film, Toronto’s Ms. Setsuko Thurlow, herself a survivor of the bombing who accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), gave presentations in which she strongly advocated against the horrible tragedies caused by nuclear weapons and appealed for a nuclear-free world.

The TJFF is made possible by its many sponsors and the JCCC’s tireless volunteers, and an expression of gratitude for their efforts was extended before each screening by the emcee. I also was deeply grateful for the work devoted toward promoting Japanese culture among Canadians by the JCCC’s staff, as well



as the TJFF’s supporters and volunteers. The sponsors consisted not only of Japanese businesses operating in Canada, but also: foundations formed by Japanese Canadians; movie theatres and film festival organizations made up of Torontonians; organizations comprised of anime and manga fans who hold their own events; as well as the Canada Japan Society, the Japanese Restaurants Association of Canada and others. It is clear everyone wants the TJFF to attract greater attention from more organizations in Toronto. There seems to be greater understanding, given the constant, past success of the TJFF, that

participating in this event results in meaningful contributions toward Japan-Canada relations.



The Grand Jury Prize at this year's TJFF was awarded to Mr. Yoshida's *The Scythian Lamb*, while the Audience Choice Kobayashi Award went to Mr. Takumi Saitoh's *blank 13*. As well, a Special Director's Award was presented to Mr. Masato Harada, who has repeatedly submitted films of exceptional quality to the Festival and who has come to Toronto a number of times. This resulted in each of the filmmakers who came to this year's Festival receiving an award. These three acclaimed directors, however, courteously answered questions from their audiences, and, before or after the screening of their films, posed for photos and signed autographs. They truly worked hard as ambassadors of Japanese culture. Knowing how full their schedule is in Japan, and that they were exhausted while they were in Toronto due to jet lag, words cannot express my appreciation of their devotion to their fans here in Canada.

Last year, Mr. Takashi Yamazaki attended the TJFF as the director of *Fueled: The Man Called Pirate*, and used the opportunity to tour Niagara Falls. Footage of the falls he took during that visit was used in the opening film in this year's Festival, *Destiny: The Tale of Kamakura*. I am hoping that the three directors who attended the Festival this year will also use images of Toronto in their films and return here with these films next year, as I look forward to next year's TJFF.



Video message from Mr. Yamazaki