

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

July 2022

We are experiencing warmer days now with the arrival of July. I hope everyone is keeping well. Temperatures in Toronto often come close to 30°C, but there is usually a pleasant breeze in the shade. Summer in this city is a very lovely season.

This month, I would like to tell you about the Toronto Japanese Film Festival.

The 11th Toronto Japanese Film Festival (TJFF) was held for 15 days, from June 16 to 30, at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC) – in-person for the first time in three years. The TJFF has grown to become the largest Japanese film festival in North America. It does not function simply to showcase new Japanese movies, but lets audiences experience Japanese culture through screenings of the latest popular films. It is an invaluable event which promotes friendship and mutual understanding between Japan and Canada.



This year's TJFF

There have been a number of movies from the past 11 TJFFs which garnered a lot of attention in Toronto. While he is now more involved in the production end of filmmaking, SAITOH Takumi made an appearance during the 2018 and 2019 festivals. In other words, a popular actor rarely seen in public in Japan appeared before Toronto audiences two years in a row. Fans, not just from the GTA but across North America, rushed to the TJFF by plane and by car. Many even traveled from Japan, and a long line formed around the JCCC. There have also been more than a few movies which had their world premieres at the TJFF. This year, *Dreaming of the Meridian Arc* (directed by NAKANISHI Kenji, and starring NAKAI Kiichi, MATSUYAMA Kenichi, and KITAGAWA Keiko) was screened outside of Japan for the first time at the Festival. In 2019, *Dance with Me* had its world premiere at the

TJFF (screened for the first time anywhere, including Japan). Its Director YAGUCHI Shinobu and lead actress MIYOSHI Ayaka made an appearance in Kobayashi Hall (the large auditorium in the JCCC; the TJFF is held every year in this hall) to the audience's thunderous applause.



SAITOH Takumi's
A Gambler's Odyssey 2020



Dance with Me

From YAMAZAKI Takashi (*A Man Called Pirate*) to HARADA Masato (*Kakekomi*), the TJFF is also known for appearances by frontline Japanese film directors. Past festivals have also featured dialogue between filmmakers and interaction with audiences. The TJFF is now considered one of the most important events which promote Japanese cinema to the world. The directors and actors who come to TJFF are subsequently also able to fully enjoy Toronto and its surrounding areas through visiting Niagara Falls and other activities.

I should also note that the TJFF has also been a reverse export to Japan. It has been held four times in the Hibiya district of Tokyo, and will be again in October this year. Most of the audience at this event are foreign residents in Japan, and the Japanese films screened there will have English subtitles. This is apparently useful to ascertain what kinds of Japanese movies are most likely to garner attention and become popular in North America, as well as what kind of trends might follow.

I was given the opportunity give remarks at the opening of this year's TJFF. I personally have the experience from my student days of appearing as an extra in Maestro KUROSAWA Akira's *Ran*, due to my involvement with Japanese archery. I along with my fellow archery club members took part in temp work as extras shooting

arrows from our bows. What was captured on film was not me but my arrow. It is unclear whether one of my arrows actually appeared in the final product, but I was able to convey this story to the festival audience.



Image from Ran courtesy of Toho Company, Ltd.
Giving remarks at the TJFF opening

The TJFF in this way has established a firm place for itself in North America, but it is not an easy to continually assemble its lineup. This is because this task requires a profound knowledge of Japanese cinema and the film industry network. The TJFF was established and developed by the JCCC's Executive Director James Heron, TAKABATAKE Aki and Chris Hope, the JCCC's Vice President and future President. The founding and development of the TJFF by these three individuals is an immensely significant accomplishment. We also cannot forget the representatives of the JCCC and the sponsors from the Japanese business community who provide invaluable support to the TJFF.



Mr. Heron with Ms. Takabatake and Mr. Hope, along with actress MATSUOKA Mayu who appeared at the TJFF

I hope the TJFF will continue to grow in the future as an ideal event to promote Japanese cinema in Canada and the world.