

Blu-ray Review: Criterion Brings Brutal ‘Sansho the Bailiff’ to Wider Audience

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 18, 2013 - 12:32pm

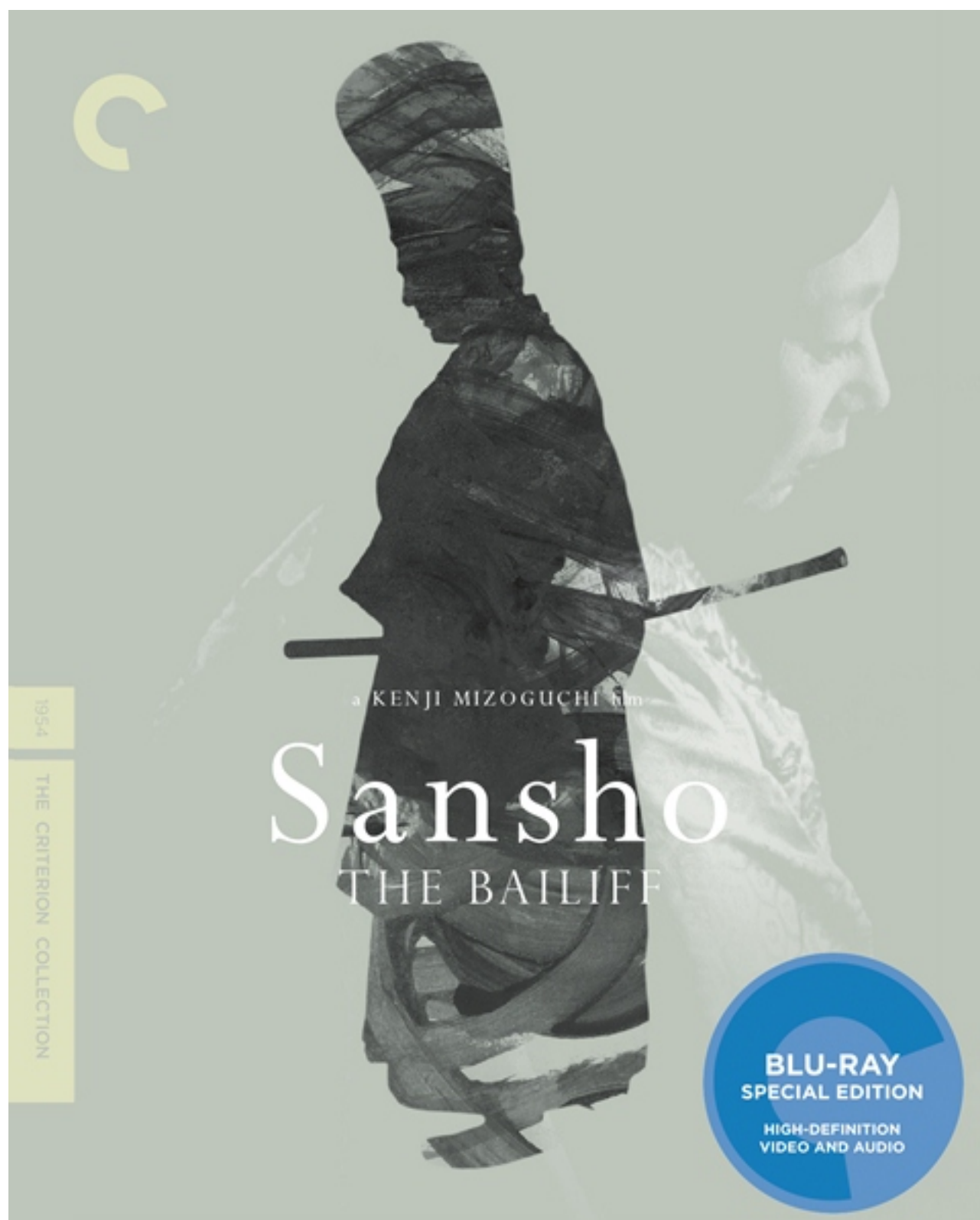
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CHICAGO – The Criterion Collection attempts to shine a brighter light on a Japanese director once considered a national treasure but too ignored by history in favor of internationally recognized names like Akira Kurosawa and Yasujiro Ozu — Kenji Mizoguchi, with his accomplished and remarkable “Sansho the Bailiff,” recently upgraded from Criterion DVD to Criterion Blu-ray.



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

“Sansho the Bailiff” is a brutal, dark, historical epic with a human tone in the way it reflects the impact of the power of evil on the will of the good. “Sansho” is a story of unspeakable horror and the survival of the human spirit but that might make it sound more sentimental than it is. The film is darker than most of Mizoguchi’s contemporaries, which could be one of the reasons it hasn’t had the same international acclaim over the decades since its release. It’s not an easy film to experience. And yet it’s a beautiful film at the same time. The tracking shots along the shore as a boat is taking people away and forever changing their entire family tree — they’re beautiful filmmaking capturing human horror. That’s what’s so notable about “Sansho”. And the high-definition restoration is a beauty. The special features are kind of slight but the film alone is worth remembering on Blu-ray.



Sansho the Bailiff was released on Blu-ray on February 26, 2013

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Synopsis:

When an idealistic governor disobeys the reigning feudal lord, he is cast into exile, his wife and children left to fend for themselves and eventually wrenched apart by vicious slave traders. Under the dazzling direction of Kenji Mizoguchi’s dazzling direction , this classic Japanese story became one of cinema’s greatest masterpieces, a monumental, empathetic expression of human resilience in the face of evil.

Special Features:

- o Audio Commentaries Featuring Japanese Literature Scholar Jeffrey Angles
- o Interviews With Critic Tadao Sato, Assistant Director Tokuzo Tanaka, and Actress Kyoko Kagawa On The Making Of The Film And Its Lasting Importance
- o Booklet Featuring An Essay By Scholar Mark Le Fanu And Two Versions Of The Story On Which The Film Is Based: Ogai Mori’s 1915 “Sansho The Steward” and An Earlier Oral Variation In Written Form

“Sansho the Bailiff” was released on Criterion Blu-ray and re-released on Criterion DVD on February 26, 2013.



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