



Jam Session: Kikujiro No Natsu Koshiki Kaizokuban

Jam Session

Makoto Shinozaki

JAPAN, 1999

93 minutes ■ Colour/16mm
 Production Company: **Office Kitano**
 Producers: **Masayuki Mori, Takio Yoshida**
 Cinematographer: **Taro Kawazu**
 Editor: **Manabu Kikawa**
 Sound: **Masahiro Shinbo**
 Music: **Joe Hisaishi**
 Principal Cast: **Takeshi Kitano, Hou Hsiao-hsien, crew and cast of Kikujiro**

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In a few short years, Takeshi Kitano has become one of the superstars of international cinema. This fame is largely based on the great gangster films *Sonatine* and *Fireworks*, in which he stars as existentially-challenged tough guys. His personal magnetism as an actor, coupled with the spare, poetic style in which his films unfold, have made his few personal appearances outside of Japan electric affairs.

Kitano took one of the greatest risks of his career this year. He moved decisively away from his earlier work with the sweet, sentimental comedy *Kikujiro*, in which he still plays a tough guy, but a considerably more dopey and likeable one than before. For a man who trades on being the essence of "cool," this was a big step indeed.

Jam Session gives us a rare portrait of the man in action, a vortex of creative energy, but also shows the anxiety he feels every day, worried that he might be making the biggest mistake of his life. This tension pervades every scene in the film, from instructions barked while shooting, to jokes about how low his swimsuit should be pulled down when he passes out by the pool.

But this is no conventional on-set documentary. Director Makoto Shinozaki is a talented filmmaker in his own right – his *Okaeri* was a big prize-winner a few years ago – and one of Japan's finest film critics. Kitano's producers have given him complete freedom to make the best film possible and this one eschews virtually all genre

conventions. It is without dullard narration, cutesy quick cuts of crew members, excerpts from the film and other annoyances. Instead, long sequences of Kitano working truly give us the sense of a film being born, of art itself being created out of the mind of this tempestuous genius.

Although the most riveting parts of the documentary involve Kitano at work, many will delight in a kind of summit meeting between him and a visiting Hou Hsiao-hsien. Their "casual chat" more closely resembles a Spassky-Fischer chess match than anything remotely social.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Makoto Shinozaki was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1963. He studied psychology at Rikkyo University, and later became a projectionist. He has also worked as a film critic, interviewing many acclaimed filmmakers. In 1995, he made his award-winning debut feature, *Okaeri. Jam Session* (99) is his second feature film.

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