

## Awards

2005 Fantasia Festival - Official Selection  
2005 Hochi Film Awards - Best Actor - Somegoro ICHIKAWA  
2005 Nikkan Sports Film Awards - Best Actor - Somegoro ICHIKAWA 2005 Kinema Junpo Awards - Best New Actress - Erika SAWAJIRI  
2006 Yokohama Film Festival Prize - Best New Talent - Erika SAWAJIRI

## Cast/Credits

### Somegoro ICHIKAWA (Izumo)

Born in 1973 and the son of Koshiro MATSUMOTO, Somegoro ICHIKAWA was educated as a Kabuki actor from a very young age. He made his Kabuki stage debut at the age of 5, and was also the youngest Hamlet in history at just 14 years old. ICHIKAWA also appeared in many TV series and modern theatre performances, including the stage version of Ashura. This film is his first starring role in a feature film, but certainly not his last. Considered to be one of the top young Kabuki actors, ICHIKAWA directed all of the Kabuki acting in this film (since he knew much more about the subject than the director).

### Rie MIYAZAKI (Tsubaki)

Rie MIYAZAKI was also born in 1973, and made her feature film debut in *Seven Days' War* (1988). She went on to appear in numerous films, and is well known across Asia for her recent successful international coproductions. She won the Japan Academy Award for *The Twilight Samurai* in 2003, and has won many Best Actress awards (Moscow International Film Festival, Kinema Junpo Awards, and the Blue Ribbon Awards to name a few).

### Yojiro TAKITA (Director)

[Yojiro TAKITA](#) was born on December 4, 1955, in Toyama Prefecture, Japan. In 1974, TAKITA joined Hiroshi MUKAI's Shishi Productions as an assistant director. He made his directorial debut in 1981 with *Chikan Onna Kyoshi*, and went on to direct over twenty adult films. TAKITA's first commercial feature, *Komikku Zasshi Nanka Iranai / Comic Magazine*, was released in 1985 and screened at the New York Film Festival, attracting lots of attention. Great reviews gave Yojiro TAKITA international notoriety, and he went on to make an eclectic variety of films, including *The Yen Family* (1988), *We Are Not Alone* (1993), and *Secret* (1999). His greatest success came in 2001, with the release of the special effects period fantasy, *Onmyoji*. This was followed by a sequel, *Onmyoji 2*, in 2003, which was immediately followed by the internationally acclaimed historical samurai drama, *Mibu gishi den/When The Last Sword Is Drawn*, which won a variety of awards, including Best Film at the 2004 Japan Academy Awards.

## Other Notable Credits

Art Direction: Yuji HAYASHIDA (CASSHERN, Azumi)  
Action Director: Yuta MOROKAJI (*Battle Royale II*, *Red Shadow*, *Onmyoji*)  
Theme Song: "My Funny Valentine" performed by Sting and featuring Herbie Hancock

## Kabuki Version of Ashura

This film is based upon the hit stage play, *Ashura jo no Hitomi* (Eyes of Ashura Castle), or *BLOOD GETS IN YOUR EYES*, which was staged in 2000, and featured the young Kabuki star Somegoro ICHIKAWA as Izumo. The play was the first collaboration between Shochiku and the "Shinkansen" theatrical troupe, who are well known for their insistence on following Kabuki tradition by performing historical roles in a modern, noisy, and outlandish way - to shock modern audiences in the same way that Kabuki traditionally did. The play's

aweinspiring speed and entertainment value prompted immediate reactions from live-theatre fans, and the play was later revived in 2003. Hailed as a masterpiece, it became a long running hit.

### **Demons who dare to appear right in front of Demon Wardens. What courage!**

The term “OniMikado” is translated here as “Demon Wardens,” though it also can be translated as “Oni Emperors”, “Demon emperors”, or “Demon Lords.” The word “Oni” refers to supernatural creatures from Japanese folklore, similar to demons or ogres. The word “Mikado” literally means “the Gate”, but is also a dated term for “emperor”, specifically “Emperor of Japan.” “Demon Wardens” is an attempt to encompass all of these meanings.

### **Go for it!**

Yago are “house names” which are often yelled at Kabuki actors during play performances. All Kabuki actors have not only a stage name but also a house name, which they share with other members of the same acting house, or “ya”. The major yago are Korai-ya, Matsushima-ya, Narikoma-ya, Otowa-ya, etc... The Yago of Kabuki Actor Somegoro ICHIKAWA, who played Izumo in this film, is Korai-ya, which is shared with his family. In this film, “Furai-ya” is a fictional Yago for Izumo, which makes it a bit of an in-joke reference. It's an old tradition for enthusiastic audience members to cheer their favorite actor upon entrances or at crucial moments during a performance by shouting out his yago. Anyone who's been to a midnight screening of “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” knows just what we mean. [A brief introduction to Kabuki is available here.](#)

### **Dear, dear!**

“Kuwabara kuwabara” is a mantra (literally “mulberry tree field”) traditionally used to avoid disaster associated with thunder and lightning, similar to the English phrase, “knock on wood,” used to prevent bad luck. One explanation asserts that, according to ancient Chinese legend, mulberry trees are not struck by lightning. A more popular explanation involves the ancient tale of the Thunder God and the farmer:

While he was out one day, the Thunder God accidentally fell into the farmer's well. The farmer then put a lid on the well and did not let the god return to the surface. The Thunder God was not particularly happy (would you be?), and told the farmer, “If you would have played a chant of ‘Kuwabara, Kuwabara’, I would not have fallen into your well, since I hate the mulberry tree.”

Since then, people chant “Kuwabara, Kuwabara” to avoid thunder and lightning. It has also now expanded to include avoiding any kind of disaster or bad omen. The phrase is used by Volgin in the video game Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, whenever it is raining outside. Near the end, however, he neglects to utter the phrase, and is fatally struck by a bolt of lightning. *Excerpted from [Wikipedia](#)*

### **I just love a woman with values.**

Izumo's line literally translates as “I love a woman who is self-centered,” but our slightly more vague translation fits so well with the previous line, and the banter that gets slung back and forth between the two, that we could not resist.

### **Look at this... this way! Look at this... this way**

Similar to the Western game, “Rock, Paper, Scissors,” “Achi-Muite-Hoi!” is a popular children's pointing game played between two people. It translates to “Look at this...this way!”

Here's how to play: The players begin by doing “Rock, Scissors, Paper.” The winner gives an order to his/her partner. For example, the winner says “Look at this...this way!” and points in any of four directions: left, right, up, or down. If the partner looks in the indicated direction, the partner loses. If the partner looks in a different direction, the partner wins.

This game has been featured in several movies and television shows, including Episode 100 of Urusei Yatsura. A version of “Achi-Muite-Hoi!” can also be played as a minigame in the Mario Party videogame series from Nintendo.

### **Ashura...**

After Ashura manifests, Bizan usually refers to her as “Ashura-o”, which translates into “Queen Ashura.” In most cases, however, this translation doesn't look good in the subtitles, so apart from an occasional “My Queen” (which we could not use much because you'd start to say, “Hey, I heard an Ashura in there somewhere!”), we left it as just plain old Ashura. In the dubbed version, we have more flexibility, so Ashura is more queenly in English.

### **Reference**

The job of researching these program notes was made much easier thanks to the efforts of the many contributors to [Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia](#).