

## 13 Assassins

Japan 2011

**Directed by**  
Takashi Miike**Cinematography**  
Nobuyasu Kita**Original Music**  
Kôji Endô**Writing Credits**  
Kaneo Ikegami  
Daisuke Tengan**Cast**  
Kôji Yakusho  
Shinzaemon Shimada  
Takayuki Yamada  
Shinrouko  
Yûsuke Iseya  
Koyata  
Gorô Inagaki  
Lord Naritsugu Matsudaira

141 min

*Our next screening...***The Guard (Ireland)**

Tue 16 April 2013

Dir: John M. McDonagh

Odd couple comedy as an  
Irish policeman & FBI  
agent investigate drug  
smuggling.

Our second Japanese film of the season, and the second time WFS has shown a film by cult director Takashi Miike. Long-standing members may remember our previous screening back in 2003 – the very different *Happiness of the Katakuris!*

He's made over 80 films in 20 years – so Miike should have no trouble handling 13 heroes. If 2007's *Sukiyaki Western Django* refashioned Sergio Corbucci's 1966 spaghetti western *Django* (itself heavily influenced by Akira Kurosawa's 1961 *Yojimbo*) into a hyper-stylised post-modern reverie on the endless traffic between America and other cultures, then *13 Assassins*, the latest film from Japanese cinema's impossibly prolific bad boy Miike Takashi, similarly explores the beleaguered codes of masculinity that link the 'jidaigeki' (or samurai period piece) and the western. Miike's film is as much a reimagining of Kurosawa's 1954 *Seven Samurai* as a remake of Kudo Eiichi's 1963 *Jusan-nin No Shikaku* – but it plays like a revisionist western. Here, Shinzaemon and his wild bunch 'must do what must be done', yet the values of heroism and honour that they celebrate also seem entirely outmoded, as characters repeatedly contrast 'these days' with the nostalgia-tinged 'age of war'.

The film is terrifically entertaining, an ambitious big-budget epic, directed with great visuals and sound. The last 45 minutes are devoted to an inventive and ingenious battle scene, but it's not the sort of incomprehensible mayhem we often find in recent actioners. It's a lesson to the queasy-cam auteurs, because Miike choreographs the action to make it comprehensible – and, more important, has spent his first two acts establishing the characters. We know who the 13 samurai are, and we understand why many of them behave as they do under threat of death. The care taken with the screenplay and the shot composition deserves comparison with Kurosawa's (even better) *Seven Samurai*. There is a subtext in the film. The 13 assassins are essentially making a last stand for the traditional samurai code. Modern times are encroaching on Japan, and the shogunate is corrupt, decadent and a hive of nepotism. I was reminded in a lateral way of Yamata's *Twilight Samurai* (2004), about a samurai who works for his clan as an accountant, and is forced to recall the code of his tradition. While watching *13 Assassins*, I was sure CGI effects must have been used, but I was rarely able to notice them. That's the point, as it always was in traditional special effects: to deceive the eye, not insult it.

*Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times**Anton Bitel, Little White Lies*Voting for *Rust and Bone*: A-36 B-23 C-8 D-2 E-0 Attendance: 79 Rating: 83.7%