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PRODUCED BY **SHÔZÔ ASHIDA**  
MUSIC BY **HARUMI IBE**  
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **SHIGEYOSHI MINE**  
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## Detective Bureau 2-3: Go to Hell, Bastards!

by Jasper Sharp

If nothing else, Suzuki Seijun's early period at Nikkatsu, following his debut in 1956 with *Harbour Toast: Victory Is in Our Grasp* (*Minato no kanpai: Shôri o wagate ni*), can be characterised by an unflagging productivity that reached its peak with an astonishing eleven films released in the years 1960-61. This slumped to a mere two titles released in 1962, *Teenage Yakuza* (*Haitin yakuza*) and *The Guys Who Put Money on Me* (*Ore ni kaketa yatsura*), and for the rest of his time at the studio, before his unceremonious departure following the infamous debacle surrounding *Branded to Kill* (*Koroshi no rakuin*, 1967), he was averaging on around three or four titles annually.

This reduced output was largely symptomatic of the director's increasingly prickly relationship with the studio management, the result of which was less projects, and less prestigious projects, being assigned to him. Nevertheless, 1963 represented something of a high watermark for Suzuki in that it was the year that first saw him gaining the attention of local film critics, with the number of interviews, articles and essays about the director steadily accumulating over the ensuing few years.

The four Suzuki films released that year each occupy quite distinct registers. Suzuki's 27th as a director, *Detective Bureau 2-3: Go to Hell, Bastards!*, released on 27 January, is a detective drama with a light comedic touch. The hard-boiled yakuza movie *Youth of the Beast* (*Yajû no seishu*), released 21 April, is even more flamboyant in approach, but darker in tone. *The Incurable* (*Akutarô*), released 21 September, is a picaresque rite-of-passage adapted from a story by the popular author Kon Tôkô. Its affecting tale of young love and small-town rebellion in the early-Taisho era (1912-26) finally, albeit fleetingly, saw Suzuki earning the approval of his studio heads. *Kanto Wanderer* (*Kantô mushuku*), released 23 November, was a yakuza film based on a story by Hirabayashi Taiko originally serialised in the Asahi Shinbun newspaper. It had first been adapted in 1956 by Suzuki's mentor at Nikkatsu, Noguchi Hiroshi, under its original title of *Song from the Depths* (*Chitei no uta*), but this new version starring Kobayashi Akira really broke the mould in terms of its theatrical staging techniques, and an expressionistic rather than naturalistic or symbolic use of settings, the seasons, lighting and colour.

*The Incurrigible* was the first time Suzuki worked with production designer Kimura Takeo, who would become an integral member of his regular team of collaborators. Kimura would work on all of the director's subsequent Nikkatsu films and all but a small handful of titles made after Suzuki's sacking right up until his final film, *Princess Raccoon* (2005). This was really the title that first saw Suzuki's style and technique beginning to gel into something more personal and distinctive, with his subsequent scripts rewritten and reworked in consultation with Kimura and regular cinematographers Mine Shigeyoshi and Nagatsuka Katsue so that every shot was carefully conceived and considered to be as efficient and striking as possible.

Nevertheless, as Tom Vick writes in his monograph *Time and Place are Nonsense: The Films of Seijun Suzuki* (2015), "Even before Kimura came aboard, *Detective Bureau 2-3: Go to Hell, Bastards!* (1963), with its explosive opening shorts of a Pepsi delivery truck spewing bullets; flat bright color scheme (a signature of Mine's style); and experiments with scale and depth, began to synthesize Suzuki's first flashes of individuality."<sup>1</sup>

*Detective Bureau 2-3* is a film that is both as florid as its title and as pulpy as its source material, a six-installment series of books by Ōyabu Haruhiko based around the exploits of a private detective named Tajima Hideo. It was also Suzuki's first to feature Shishido Jō in the lead, although the charismatic star had previously appeared in supporting roles in *The Naked Woman and the Gun (Rajo to kenjū, 1957)* and *The Boy Who Came Back* (1958), as the young juvenile delinquent who attempts to thwart Kobayashi Akira's attempts to go straight after his release from reform school.

Shishido underwent several rebrandings before *Branded to Kill* showcased his iconic turn as the suave, icy cool contract killer Hanada. His first five years had consisted mainly of playing hoods and heavies, before collagen implants in his cheeks transformed his fortunes as well as his face. This led to regular turns as the arch-rival to leading man Kobayashi in a string of titles, including the first six instalments in the nine-film series initiated with Saitō Buichi's *The Rambling Guitarist (Gitaa o motta wataridori, a.k.a. Wandering Bird with a Guitar, 1959)* that ran to 1962, in which he first assumed his screen archetype of "Hitman Joe" (Korishiya Jōji), and in Yamazaki Tokujirō's *The Guitarist from the Sea (Umi kara kita nagaremono)* and the next three of its four sequels, all released in 1960.

It was only in 1961 that he was finally elevated to the ranks of the Nikkatsu's Diamond Guys line of leading men after a skiing accident that year put the studio's top box-office draw, Ishihara Yujirō, out of action for a brief stint, while a go-carting tragedy on the studio



<sup>1</sup> - Vick, Tom. *Time and Place are Nonsense: The Films of Seijun Suzuki* (Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2015), p. 40.





lot saw another star performer, Akagi Keiichirō, out of the picture entirely. Shishido's break came with *Dirty Work (Rokudenashi kagyō, 1961)*, a comic buddy movie directed by Saitō in which his coarse and cocksure screen persona was countered by that of Nitani Hideaki's altogether more polished diamond.

The actor's ascent coincided with the heyday of Nikkatsu's so-called *mokukokuseki* or "borderless action" brand of larger-than-life projected fantasies culled from a pop-cultural imaginary of movies, music and magazine images from across the world. Such films largely escaped the notice of overseas critics at the time of their release. After all, these weren't intended as trenchant critiques of postwar modernity or rejections of cultural orthodoxy from filmmakers green enough to believe they could change society rather than just reflect on its absurdities. Formulaic genre pieces they might well have been, but at their best they could be incredibly stylish, imaginative and, above all, highly entertaining.

Shishido's inflated chops were fully in keeping with the exaggerated cartoonish approach of such endeavours. He gave an ebulliently arch performance in Nomura Takashi's *Fast-Draw Guy (Hayauchi yaro, 1961)*, a quintessential example of the studio's 'Sukiyaki Westerns' that, as he sashayed into the movie's small frontier town setting with a song in his heart and a body slumped over the back of his steed, signified the performer's transformation from "Hitman Jo" to "Joe the Ace". He was "The Man called Gun" in *Gun of the Northern Railroad (Nosappu no gan, Matsuo Akinori, 1961)* and played the eponymous drifter, complete with sombrero and zapata moustache, in Kurahara Koreyoshi's *Mexico Wanderer (Mekishiko mushuku, 1962)*, one of the first Nikkatsu films shot on location overseas. He was the scourge of the South China Sea in Iida Tan's *Pirate Ship: Tiger of the Sea (Kaizoku-sen: Umi no tora, 1963)*, and pitted his wits against *Phantom Thief X: The Man with No Neck (1965)*, directed by the veteran actor Kosugi Isamu.

Shishido was riding high when he first starred for Suzuki. Released with months of one another, superficially *Detective Bureau 2-3* and *Youth of the Beast* are very much akin. However, they actually employed different screenwriters, art directors, musicians and cinematographers (Mine shot the former; Nagatsuka shot the latter) for their productions, highlighting that a large component of the discernible unity of any given cycle in Suzuki's eclectic body of work at Nikkatsu can be attributed to the films' stars. For example, *The Sleeping Beast Within (Kemono no nemuru)* and *Smashing the 0-Line (Mikkō zero rain)*, a duo of gritty crime thrillers from 1960 featuring Nagato Hiroyuki, are quite distinct from the ensuing run of titles anchored around Wada Kōji that began with Suzuki's first ever colour feature, *Fighting Delinquents (Kutabare gurentai, 1960)*, and culminated with *The Guys Who Put Money on Me (Ore ni kaketa yatsura, 1962)*, the title immediately preceding *Detective Bureau 2-3*. These in turn have a very different feel to *The Man With a Shotgun (Sandanjū*

*no otoko*, 1961), starring Nitani Hideaki, and *Teenage Yakuza* (1962), with Kawachi Tamio, released within this same period. Similarly the Suzuki films with Kobayashi Akira, such as *The Flower and the Angry Waves* (*Hana to dotô*, 1964) and *Our Blood Won't Allow It* (*Oretachi no chi ga yurusanaï*, 1964), feel like the work of another director to the one who shot the two Kawachi Ken titles *The Incurrible* (1963) and *Born Under Crossed Stars* (*Akutarôden: Warui hoshi no shita demo*, 1965).

For all their surface similarities, *Detective Bureau 2-3* is a very different beast from its successor, the title that really saw the director beginning to push the *mukokuseki* ethos to ever more ludic levels (there is an oft-cited scene in *Youth of the Beast* in which a violent sandstorm can be seen raging outside the window as a drug-addled floozie receives a violent thrashing from her gang boss). While it riffs heavily on the tropes of American gangster movies and features such incongruous locales as the provincial village church where a police intelligence team hide out, it feels more grounded in the real-world, with sequences shot on location in such instantly-recognisable Tokyo locales as Ginza and Roppongi.

Nevertheless, *Detective Bureau 2-3* offers up some exquisite cinematic moments, like the beautifully framed shootout in the boudoir of one of the gangsters' molls, bathed in soft pastels and bold reds, and a gripping fiery set piece as Shishido's private dick Tajima is trapped in the basement of the gang's lair with the frosty Chiaki (Sasamori Reiko), the reluctant and unfulfilled mistress to yakuza boss Hatano (Shin Kinzô).

Shishido oozes a characteristically bullish and boozy charm throughout, seemingly taking none of this too seriously, while the numerous cabaret sequences shot in Hatano's nightclub provide ample opportunity for the glitzy song and dance numbers that were a feature of many a Nikkatsu star vehicle, although his duet with his squeeze, played by Hoshi Naomi, make it quite clear he was never much of a singer.

Although very much identified with Suzuki, Shishido put in just one other performance for the director between *Youth of the Beast* and *Branded to Kill*, in one of their finest films together, *Gate of Flesh* (*Nikutai no mon*, 1964), in which he played the quick-to-temper, emasculated procurer for a gang of prostitutes who are quite capable of surviving in the postwar rubble of Tokyo without his services.

Shishido was back in Tajima's shoes in *Detective Bureau 2-3: A Man Weak to Money and Women* (*Tantei jimusho 2-3: Zeni to onna ni yowai otoko*), released on 7 July 1963, within six months of the first film. The sequel's no-name director Yanase Nozomu and the decision to shoot in monochrome, not colour, nevertheless highlight the production's humble







ambitions and that by this point both audiences and Nikkatsu's management had decided that Shishido did not have quite the same box-office clout as some of his contemporaries. The series ended with just these two films and he was soon back to B-movies or playing second fiddle to bigger stars like Kobayashi in titles such as *Three Stray Dogs* (*Sanbiki no nora inu*, Ushihara Yōichi, 1965) and *Retaliation* (*Shima wa moratta*, Hasebe Yasuharu, 1968), or newcomer Watari Tetsuya in films including *You are My Life* (*Anato no inochi*, Saitō Buichi, 1966).

Ironic then, that half a century after the fall from grace of both Shishido and the director who provided him with some of his most memorable turns on screen, the two are now seen as so emblematic of the studio's effervescent, border-busting approach.

*Jasper Sharp is a writer, curator and filmmaker based in the UK. He is the co-founder (with Tom Mes) of the website Midnight Eye and the author of Behind the Pink Curtain (2008) and The Historical Dictionary of Japanese Cinema (2011). He is also the co-director, alongside Tim Grabham, of the documentary The Creeping Garden (2014).*

## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*Detective Bureau 2-3 Go To Hell, Bastards!* has been newly transferred in High Definition by Nikkatsu Corporation and the film is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with original mono audio.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet produced by: **Ewan Cant**

Executive Producers: **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer: **James White**

QC: **Nora Mehenni**

Blu-ray authoring and subtitling: **The Engine House Media Services**

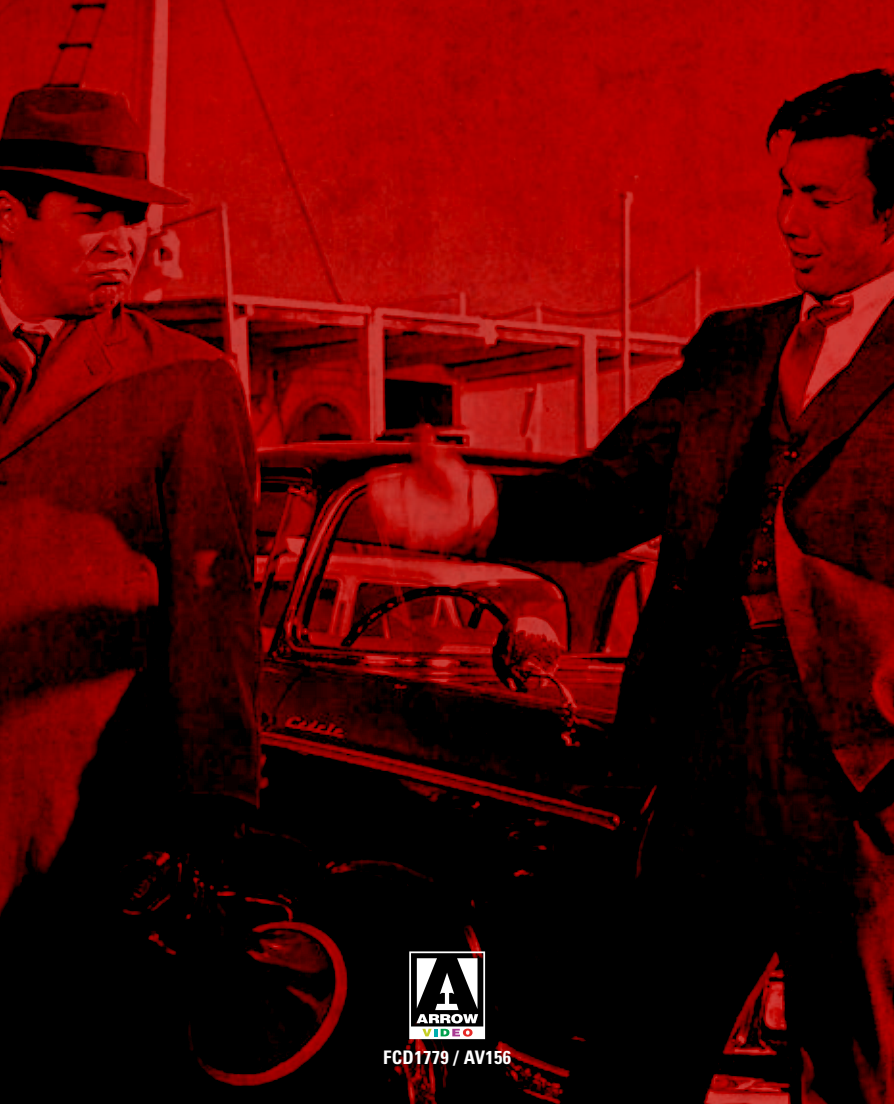
Artist: **Matthew Griffin**

Design: **Obviously Creative**

## SPECIAL THANKS

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