

Mark Whelan's Movie Picks

Seven Samurai (1954) Director: Akira Kurosawa. 204m Rated: N/A



Ranking among the handful of film masterpieces, Akira Kurosawa's **Seven Samurai** is as astonishing today as it was over half a century ago. Breeding innumerable replications and aiding as a template for superior screen storytelling, Kurosawa's "Eastern Western" inspired John Sturges' **Magnificent Seven** and brought international appreciation for stars Takashi Shimura and Toshiro Mifune.

Placed amid a morally bankrupt and blood-soaked era of feudal Japan, a settlement of farmers vanquished by drought (tallying a list of additional difficulties) happen upon an army of bandits that threaten to return and plunder once their harvest has seasoned. Fraught and with little opportunity the villagers elect to hire a band of warriors that will protect them against the oncoming massacre.

The illusory minimalism of Kurosawa's saga is enriched by an authoritative entourage of talent both in front and behind the camera. While the gently imposing Shimura and the unequaled Mifune are front and center they are accompanied by an outstanding cast of richly developed and faultlessly performed characters.

Seven Samurai is a triumph of cinematic artistry. Kurosawa's kiddingly nicknamed "world's greatest editor" is signified with mighty resolve as multiple cameras—an uncommon innovation for the time—were employed to capture the film's memorable action sequences. Though legendary for its kinetic energy, **Seven Samurai** is just as riveting in its softer and more intimate moments due in no small part to Asakazu Nakai's high-contrast camerawork and Fumio Hayasaka's classic score.



Seven Samurai is a landmark of Japanese cinema and one of the greatest motion pictures ever made.

—Mark Whelan, November 4, 2015.