

Japanese film festival offered

NEWPORT — Flickers — the Newport Film Society will hold its second annual Japanese Film Festival this weekend as its contribution to the ongoing Black Ships Festival.

“One of the most unique blessings to come out of our relationship with the people of Japan is the (Japanese) cinema,” Flickers director George Marshall said.

Overlooking the Godzilla monster flicks, serious Japanese filmmaking is deeply rooted in that country’s centuries-old Noh and Kabuki dramas.

These contemporary Japanese films show a country caught in a tug of war between traditional Japanese values and the push to Westernize this corner of the East, which began in 1853 when Commodore Matthew Perry and his Black Ships “reopened” Japan to trade.

Flickers’ mini-film fest of Japanese film will cover this social change with four films that will be shown Thursday through Sunday at the film society’s home at the Newport Academy of Ballet on Charles Street off Washington Square.

Director Yasujiro Ozu’s “Tokyo Story” will get its state premiere Thursday at 8 p.m. An international award-winner, this 1953 film is seldom shown in America.

It details the simple story of an elderly couple who travel to Tokyo to visit their married son and daughter. But the children are too busy to care for or entertain the parents who get pushed off to a resort.

The parents eventually leave the resort and return home. It is a poignant telling of a Japanese generation gap where both parents and children are disappointed with each other. Ozu uses a typically Japanese technique of detailing the film as if it were painted meticulously on a small canvas.

Flickers will jump to a French filmmaker’s perspective of Japanese culture when it shows Chris Marker’s “Sans Soleil” Friday at 7 and 9:15 p.m.

Marker is a maverick filmmaker on the fringe of French cinema. His most noted work was the sci-fi slide

show “La Jetee.” In his Japanese film Marker examines the Westernization of Japan in his own unique style which has been described as “philosophical journalism.”

Next on the marquee will be “The Ballad of Narayama,” shown Saturday at 7 p.m.

This is the 1983 winner of the Cannes Film Festival. Based on legend, it’s the story of the people from a remote northern village who bring their elderly to Narayama Mountain to die once they reach age 70. It is set in the 19th century.

Beautiful images and landscapes are shot in contrast to the harsh conditions of the peasants’ lives.

Narayama is considered a sacred mountain and the film focuses on a 70-year-old woman’s spiritual journey to that spot.

Flicker’s Japanese film fest will conclude Sunday with Akira Kurosawa’s “Ikiru,” a hopeful, uplifting story of a man who faces his own mortality.

Actor Takishi Shimura gives an Oscar-level performance as a man who learns he has six months to live and vows to make his final days meaningful. He learns to see things for the first time once again.

“Ikiru,” which means “To Live,” will be shown Sunday at 7 and 9:15 p.m. Admission to all films is \$4.