

The History of Komian

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(Editorial Board)

As the time draws near for the opening of the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, the call is growing among film people all around the world: “Let’s meet at Komian.” For the six days of this biennial festival, Komian becomes the gathering place where, after screenings end in each of the festival venues, directors and festival staff crowd together late into the night to strengthen friendships and to expound at heated length on cinema.

Komian, which since 1991 and the second Yamagata Documentary Film Festival has been the obligatory place for festival participants to meet and greet, is situated about five minutes walk from AZ Nanoka-machi, the festival’s main screening venue. It is run by Maruhachi Yatarazuke Company.

Maruhachi Yatarazuke Company was established in 1885 (Meiji 18) although the business was then known as Maruhachi Niizeki Toraji Shouten. At the time, the company brewed both miso and soy sauce and the storehouse which became Komian was used to hold the soy beans and other ingredients used in product manufacture. But in 1911, thirty years after the company began its operations, a huge disaster struck

the storehouse. In May, the Great Fire of Yamagata City North broke out and around 1300 residences, in addition to public facilities such as the prefectural office and the police headquarters, were destroyed in the flames. The Maruhachi warehouse was no exception and, as a result, was also razed to the ground.

In 1913 (Taisho 2), two years after the fire, the storehouse was rebuilt. And in 1992 (Heisei 4), it was converted into a restaurant specialising in local Yamagata cuisine. Seeking to “convey the fragrance and the taste of the hometown,” the business was given the name Komian – literally the cottage of fragrant taste. Since its opening, the highlight of the menu has been Tsukemono-Zushi — sushi made with Japanese pickled vegetable accompaniment — which has brought together two of the products for which Yamagata is best known — rice and Japanese pickles. Sushi varieties in which sweet-vinegared *myoga* — a pink ginger-like vegetable — takes the place of tuna, and *daikon* — white radish — replaces squid, are popular with both locals and the tourists who come to Komian looking for the authentic taste of Yamagata.

The floor size of Komian is about 50 square metres. When you enter the white plastered walls, there is a single room on the ground floor and two rooms above. During the film festival, when the business becomes the film festival club, people crowd not only into these rooms but overflow also into the corridor and foyer. Jostling each other

among the customers are fans asking favourite directors about how they came to make the films featured in the festival and the volunteers who labour diligently each day to ensure that everything runs smoothly. (While the second floor can hold only fifty people, the hideaway-like atmosphere of this space makes it very popular.) There have also been nights when over 400 people packed themselves into Komian.

For people associated with the film festival, the invitation, “Let’s meet at Komian,” has become synonymous with participation in YIDFF.

In 2013, Komian celebrates its 100th anniversary from the time of the reconstruction of the building after the Great Fire of Yamagata City North. This storehouse, which has been part of the history of the last one hundred years, has also witnessed the friendships that have grown between the many directors, audience members and staff who have come to Yamagata for the film festival over the past twenty-five years. Together with Yamagata Documentary Film Festival, may Komian make its further mark on history over the century that lies ahead. (Translated by Barbara Hartley)

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