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**A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE
 in association with KINO LORBER**

ZEN FOR NOTHING

“It is no small thing to be born as a human being.”

– Kōdō Sawaki (1880–1965)

Hidden between the tree-lined mountains of the Western coast of Japan, the small Antaiji Zen monastery, run by a German monk from Berlin who is peculiar to say the least, seems to have become a sanctuary for wanderers in search of spirituality. One of these is actress Sabine Timoteo who leaves her job and family behind in Switzerland to immerse herself in monastic life through the autumn, winter and spring. In his new documentary, Swiss director Werner Penzel follows this young woman as she encounters the philosophy of the Japanese Zen master Kōdō Sawaki and the surprises brought forth by everyday monastic life. Quietly compelling, *ZEN FOR NOTHING* is filled with moments of pristine beauty and meditative calm, as well as humor and humanity.

Werner Penzel is best known as the co-author of several films including the award-winning documentary STEP ACROSS THE BORDER (1990) and MIDDLE OF THE MOMENT (1995). The music for ZEN FOR NOTHING was created by longtime collaborator and composer Fred Frith.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Like most people, Sabine Timoteo has never been to a Japanese Zen Monastery. We meet her as she is sitting in a Japanese tour bus, weary after a long flight. In front of her eyes the endless industrial landscapes of Osaka and Kobe are passing by, and soon after, now on board a slow train, the rugged and wild landscape of the Western coast of Japan.

With only a backpack on her shoulders, she makes her way into the mountains, leaving the autumnal rice fields behind. In the middle of a wild forest, she finally reaches her destination – a long stone staircase, which leads to the Antaiji monastery. Sabine announces her arrival with three hammer blows on a board.

After a warm welcome, she is soon introduced to the centuries-old monastery rules: how to bow; how to sit in the meditation hall on the pillow in front of an empty wall; how to perform the individual movements with the chopsticks in connection with the three black lacquered wooden bowls; how to behave when cooking and cleaning in the bathroom, and while working in the fields. All new territory for Sabine.

During the course of the following weeks, the Zen novice becomes increasingly accustomed to the many rules of everyday monastery life: from getting up in the dark every day at 3:45 in the morning, to sitting motionless in the meditation hall; from the demanding work of cultivating vegetables on the farm and rice in the paddy fields, to chopping wood in the forest. But Sabine is not alone – a good dozen, mostly young Zen practitioners, from all over the world, have come here to contemplate their lives and connect with the present as well.

As Sabine learns, there's more to life than meditation, farming, and maintenance – there are picnics and music and there's Wi-Fi. There is life.

We meet Abbot Muhō, born Olaf Nölke in Berlin, the first non-Japanese abbot of a monastery in Japan. What is Zen good for? The answer is provocative and deceptively easy: Nothing!

Come winter, we see how the monastery disappears under the weight of the snow. Antaiji is cut off from the rest of the world for three months. Since there is only one warm room heated by a wood-burning stove in the cold monastery, the nuns and monks, along with the abbot and Sabine, pass the time with Zen Buddhist texts and stories known for their often-absurd humor. They also tell each other tales from their lives, surf the net on their laptops, and write emails to friends and family "back home".

With the last of the snow finally melting away under the warm spring sun and new rice being planted, newcomers arrive. To supplement their diet of fresh vegetables, bamboo sprouts are dug up in the forest, young fern shoots are cut, and sometimes a wild hog family stops by... And Werner Penzel's camera pays attention to the minutiae of these subtle, mundane, yet somehow transcendent moments – things we hardly notice in everyday life, like the cool shadows on a wall, the warm rays of sunlight on skin, frozen feet on the ground. Penzel treats these moments like the little wonders that they are.

In May, together with Abbot Muhō and Sabine, some of the nuns and monks travel together to Osaka, where they recite sutras in front of subway entrances as they solicit offerings in their traditional monk's robes. After one last overnight stay in a modest hostel on the edge of Osaka's red-light district, Sabine's Zen monastery adventure must come to an end. "If you ask me how it is to come back to this world," she says, "I am diving even more into it somehow."

YOU ARE ANTAIJI

by Muhō Nölke

Antaiji is dedicated to Zen practice as a natural expression of everyday life. Zazen and work are not just part of life in Antaiji: it is the 24 hours of each day that you spend here that must be a manifestation of Zen. In addition, no spiritual practices or meditation techniques are offered in Antaiji. It's not about getting to the bottom of the mystery of the Far East, having occult experiences, or simply getting a taste of Japanese culture.

The purpose is to understand and practice our own life as Bodhisattva practice. Although everyone in the community must do their utmost to enable a harmonious coexistence, at the same time everyone is solely responsible for his or her practice. Nobody will wipe your butt for you, so to speak. You have to be clear about the foundation of your practice and the reason that brings you here. If you expect anything else from your stay in Antaiji, other than what life has to offer in every single moment, you will be disappointed. So think about what you are looking for here – do not fool yourself or others.

Life here consists of Zazen, hard work, self-sufficiency, and study. Anyone who is serious about Zen exercise in the tradition of Dōgen Zenji is welcome in Antaiji. We do not charge a fee for the stay, but donations are welcome to keep Antaiji alive and running.

RESPONSIBILITY

As a newcomer to Antaiji, you cannot be responsible for everything that happens here. From the very beginning, your only responsibility is to be attentive to everything you need to know. Or do you want to come here and say after a week or several months, "I did not know because no one told me"?

Just like your experience in Antaiji is nothing else but your own life and therefore your responsibility, your mental and physical health is your own responsibility. Although you

are expected to participate in all activities and live in harmony with the other practitioners in Antaiji, there will be no one to push or pull you back. You will be largely dependent on yourself in your practice. Make sure you are aware of why you came here and that there is always something to give up – and nothing to take with you.

THE PRACTICE IN ANTAIJI (Excerpts)

Life in Antaiji is based on collaborative practice, making it impossible for individuals to follow their own roadmap. You are expected to work with everyone else and perform collaborative tasks at specific times.

Please observe and follow what other people do, and if you have additional questions, ask them in due course. Be thorough. Do not leave lights on, always close doors and windows and avoid excessive noise or excitement or time-consuming discussions and unnecessary conversations.

Make yourself familiar with the agenda, be attentive to whatever happens and what needs to be done, and – especially if you do not speak Japanese – get involved and contribute. As a novice, seize the opportunity, and learn all that you can.

At 3:45 the "Jikido" runs along the corridors with the alarm bell. Be ready to enter the Hondo (Antaiji's Zazen Hall) at 3:53. Wear comfortable clothes, but no socks and no cap. If you are cold, bring a towel or a blanket to cover your feet. When entering the Hondo, before, during and after Zazen, certain procedures are to be followed, which are explained in detail and shown to you. Follow these instructions carefully and try to put them into practice.

If you have never practiced Zazen before, you will be told what to do. Kinhin, which interrupts sitting meditation after an hour, is part of the Zazen practice – not a break. If you need to use the bathroom, go now. But if possible you should stay with Kinhin in the Hondo. After the morning Zazen, we sing "Takkesage", the "Kesa-Sutra". Make yourself familiar with this short text, maybe write it down. The morning Zazen is followed by a formal meal in the Hiroma. Go straight from the Hondo to the Hiroma, do not go to the

bathroom or your room first! The evening Zazen is followed by free time, but after 9 pm please rest. If you have questions, you can ask the Jikido.

The shared meals are a focal point of our life here in Antaiji. They take place in silence. Breakfast and dinner are taken in the Hiroma, lunch in the outer dining room. We usually eat utilizing Oryoki at formal meals. The exact procedures will be explained to you.

Eating in the Oryoki tradition seems difficult in the beginning. It will be explained to you, but the best thing is to watch and follow the people around you. We can provide you with the bowls and cloth set here. Be attentive and do not let others wait.

The food in Antaiji comes – for the most part – from our own fields and is mostly vegetarian, but not always. The central ingredients are rice and soup, accompanied by various side dishes. Everything that is on your plates and in your bowls must be eaten, even the non-vegetarian ingredients. It is not possible to follow certain diets here. After dinner, the plates must be washed.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As an 18-year-old, I was fascinated by the inspiration that beatnik writer and composer John Cage gained from Zen Buddhism and I began to study the relevant literature. Since it was repeatedly pointed out that a purely intellectual study of the doctrine and the findings of the Zen way ultimately only creates misinterpretations, I decided in 1978, when I was 28 years old, to travel to Japan to enter the Eihei-ji monastery, founded in 1244 by Dōgen. Sitting for hours in front of the empty wall of the meditation room, all my expectations soon crumbled. Not only in terms of Zen Buddhism, but also my ideas about knowledge or "enlightenment" turned out to be a perishable consumer good. In the years that followed, in addition to my work as a filmmaker, I repeatedly used part of my time for shorter stays in various monasteries.

In 2005, I discovered the small monastery of Antaiji – now headed by Abbot Muhō (the successor to the legendary Zen master Kōdō Sawaki), born Olaf Nölke in Berlin, the first non-Japanese abbot of a monastery in Japan. It was also the first monastery I visited, where young people from all over the world come and go and in which women and men practice in complete equality. After several stays, together with my partner Ayako Mogi, I suggested to Abbot Muhō and the nuns and monks not to make a film *about* them, but *in* the everyday life of the monastery.

During several visits with our film equipment, we finally gained the trust and interest of all involved in this project. Now we needed a protagonist, preferably a woman, who was willing to join a Zen monastery for the first time and thus explore the experience of a "beginner," not only for him or herself, but also as a surrogate for the audience of the film. In Sabine Timoteo we found this protagonist, not as the accomplished actress known to audiences, but as the human being she is.

SPIRITUALITY AND ZEN: MEDITATION DOES HURT

When I offered Sabine Timoteo the chance to go to a Zen monastery with a film crew, I told her in rich detail about my own experience: the contradictions and doubts, the

disappointments and the sometimes unbearable pain in knees, back, joints, in the head – everywhere – from meditating.

There were moments when I asked myself, "Why on earth are you doing this? Why do you not just get up, pack your backpack, go down the mountain, eat a fine tender steak in a pleasant restaurant and enjoy a good glass of wine? Let the others continue to torture themselves for hours on their stupid cushions in front of an empty wall – no one will stop you or reproach you..."

Unlike most religions, the Zen school also knows no comforting sayings. It has no paradisiacal notions about the present or the hereafter – no concept of God, no missionizing. Romanticizing contemplation is considered confusion. Disappointment is considered liberating.

After listening to what I said, after a while Sabine replied, "I'm in without hesitation." And after a while she added, "It's about self-responsibility, is it not?"

"Ever since my first stay at Japanese Zen Monastery Eihei-ji in 1978, I could not stop wondering how to turn the monastic experience of Zen practice into a cinematic experience." Werner Penzel

HISTORY OF THE ZEN MONASTERY "ANTAIJI"

(Source: www.antaiji.org)

Antaiji belongs to the Sōtō Zen school. It was founded in 1921 by Oka Sotan as a monastery for scholars to study the Shobogenzo. At that time it was located in northern Kyoto, and many leading scholars studied there.

During the second worldwar though, Antaiji was vacated until in 1949 Sawaki Kōdō and Uchiyama Kōshō, teacher and disciple on the buddha way, moved into Antaiji and made it a place for the pure and simple practice of sitting Zazen. During the late sixties, the name of this small temple became known for its practice, which consisted of Zazen and formal begging, not only in Japan, but also abroad, and many people gathered there. But the increase of visitors and the many new houses being built around the temple created much noise that made it difficult for the practice to be continued. Therefore the following abbot, Watanabe Kōhō, decided to move Antaiji to its present location in northern Hyogo. Together with the quietude of the mountains, he was looking for a new life style that would bring Zen back to its Chinese roots of self-sufficiency.

Presently, Antaiji is located near a national park on the coast of the Japanese Sea, and possesses about 50 hectares of land in the mountains. The former abbot Miyaura Shinyu protected this quiet and self-sufficient life of Zazen while putting the ideal of self-sufficiency into actual practice, until his sudden death in the snow in February of 2002.

His disciple, the German monk Muhō continues as the present abbot. He presently tries to create a new and lively sangha here at Antaiji.

ABBOT MUHŌ

Muhō became the abbot of Antaiji in 2002. He is called “dōchō-san”, which is Japanese for “abbot”.

He was born in 1968 in Berlin and grew up in Western Germany. At age 16, he was introduced to zazen by one of his high school teachers and soon had the wish to become a Zen monk. To prepare for his stay in Japan, he studied Japanese at the university in Berlin, along with philosophy and physics. During his studies, he spent one year at Kyōto University and learned about Antaiji for the first time. At age 22, he spent six months there as a lay practitioner.

Three years later, after graduating from university, Muhō ordained as a monk under the abbot Miyaura Shinyū Rōshi. Apart from Antaiji he trained for one year at the Rinzai monastery Tōfukuji in Kyōto, and one year at Hosshinji in Obama.

After obtaining the transmission of dharma (shihō) from his teacher Miyaura Rōshi he decided to live as a homeless monk in a park in central Ōsaka, where he led a Zazen group. He was 33 years old.

After six months though, in February of 2002, he learned of the sudden death of his teacher and was called back to Antaiji. He succeeded his teacher as the ninth abbot in the spring of that year.

Muhō is married since 2002 and has three children.

LITERATURE

The Abbot of the monastery Antaiji, Muhō Nölke, is recognized as a master of the Sôtō Zen school. He is the first non-Japanese abbot of a monastery in Japan and has translated numerous writings of Zen Master Kōdō Sawaki into German.

As an author, Abbot Muhō has become known for his book “Zazen oder Der Weg zum Glück” (Rowohlt).

In 2016, his new book was published: “Ein Regentropfen kehrt ins Meer zurück. Warum wir uns vor dem Tod nicht fürchten müssen”, published by Berlin Verlag.

BIOS

Werner Penzel (Screenplay, Director & Camera) was born in 1950 and grew up in Hannover, Berlin and Cologne. In the 1960s, he started playing music in various rock-bands and wrote poetry before turning to independent filmmaking. In the 1970s he worked and lived with the Brazilian theatre company "Oficina" in Rio De Janeiro, accompanied the "Living Theatre" in Europe, studied at the Munich Film Academy, traveled through South and Central America, North Africa, India, the USA and Japan, where he spent time practicing in the Zen monasteries Eihei-ji and Antaiji. After *Vagabunden Karawane* (1980), *Bokra-Piraten der Stille* (1984), *Adios al Odio* (1986), and other movies, in 1987 he established the production company "CineNomad" together with Nicolas Humbert, a collaboration, which results in movies such as *Step Across the Border* (1990) and *Middle of the Moment* (1995), the film-triptych *Three Windows* (1999), the chamber-film *Why Should I Buy a Bed if All I Want is Sleep?* (1999) and the jazz film *Brother Yusef* (2005).

With Nicolas Humbert, Nico Hofmann, Christian Wagner, Lutz Konermann, Fosco & Donatello Dubini, Penzel founded the filmmakers' cooperative "Der Andere Blick".

Since 1995 Werner Penzel teaches at various film and art schools in Munich, Berlin, Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Lugano, Kyoto and Hanoi. In 2006, together with Ayako Mogi, Res Balzli, Marion Neumann and Christoph Balmer, he founded "jourparjour compagnie" in Estavayer-le-Lac, Switzerland, which supports the cultural exchange between Western and Eastern artists. In 2009 he moved to the island of Awaji-shima in Japan founding "nomadomura" together with Ayaka Mogi and Misa Shimomura to continue movie-making, music and art, and kept working on cultural exchange and human research projects.

Sabine Timoteo was born in 1975, in Switzerland. Prior to acting, Timoteo was an award-winning dancer. After her dance education at the Swiss Ballet School,

engagements at the Deutsche Opera in Düsseldorf and tours with Charlotta Ikeda's company Ariadone followed.

Sabine Timoteo is considered one of the most distinguished Swiss actresses. In 2001 she was awarded the Swiss Film Prize as well as the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival for her first feature film role in Philip Gröning's *L'Amour*. She played the main role in *Die Freunde der Freunde* by Dominik Graf (Adolf-Grimme Prize 2003) and received another Swiss Film Award for her role in the movie *Nebenwirkungen* (2008) and 2015 for her portrayal of "Alice" in the film *Driften*.

Sabine Timoteo lives in Bern, together with her husband and two daughters.

ZEN FOR NOTHING

With Sabine Timoteo · Muhō Nölke
The Sangha community of the Antaiji Zen - Monastery of Japan

Director & Cinematography	Werner Penzel
Concept & Screenplay	Werner Penzel in collaboration with Ayako Mogi & Sabine Timoteo
Original Sound & Editing	Ayako Mogi
Soundtrack	Fred Frith
Soundtrack Recording & Mixing	Peter Hardt
Color Correction	Peter Guyer
Sound Editor	Peter von Siebenthal
Final Sound Mix	Felix Bussmann
Technical Support & Post-Production	Ueli Mueller
Graphic Design	Gerhard Blaettler
Producers	Peter Guyer, Madeleine Corbat & Werner Penzel
Co-Producers	Sabine Bubeck-Paaz (ZDF/Arte), Urs Augstburger (SRG)
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