



MADMAN

Presents

DEPARTURES



Okuribito

The gift of last memories...

Directed by Yojiro TAKITA

Masahiro MOTOKI

Ryoko HIROSUE

Tsutomu YAMAZAKI

Screenplay by Kundo KOYAMA

Music by Joe HISAISHI

Director of Photography Takeshi HAMADA

Production Design Fumio OGAWA

Editing Akimasa KAWASHIMA

Lightning Hitoshi TAKAYA

Sound Recording Satoshi Ozaki

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National Release: 15th October 2009

Rating: M

Running Time: 131 minutes

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All materials including key art and production stills can be found on our press site:

www.madman.com.au/pressarea



THE AWARDS

Academy Award ® Winner - Best Foreign Language Film

Winner of 10 awards at the 32nd Japan Academy prize awards - Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Lighting, Best Art Direction, Best Sound, Best Editing

Winner of Grand Prix des Amerique at the 32nd Montreal World Film Festival

Winner at Golden Rooster Award - Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Chinese Academy Awards)

Winner at 28th Hawaii Film Festival - Audience Award

Melbourne and Sydney Japanese Film Festival - Closing Film

Winner of Audience Award at the 20th Annual Palm Springs International Film Festival - Best Narrative Feature

Winner at Nikkan Sports Film Award - Best Director, Best Film

Winner at Hochi Film Award - Best Picture

Winner at Kinema Jumbo - No.1 film of the year, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor

Winner at the 51st Blue Ribbon Awards - Best Actor

Winner at Elan d'or Award - Best Picture, Best Producer

Winner at Mainichi Film Awards - Best Japanese Picture, Best Sound Mixing



INTRODUCTION

The 'encoffineers': with loving kindness they preside at life's final departure.

'Encoffination', the ceremonial washing, dressing, and placing of the deceased into the coffin in the presence of the bereaved, is a career less than highly sought-after, but one that in *Departures* serves as both heart-warming and life-affirming. A young man coming face to face with the many ways in which people are visited by death, a new life for himself.

Departures director Yojiro TAKITA is one of Japan's most accomplished, from his early success with comedies such as *The Yen Family* and *We are not Alone* through dramas such as *When the Last Sword is Drawn*. The script is by Kundo KOYAMA, his first for the big screen, although he served as writer on the cult-hit cooking series *The Iron Chef*. Maestro Joe HISAISHI who wrote scores for many Hayao MIYAZAKI films such as *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle*. provides an original score that is by turns intense and gentle, woven through with the sound of the cello into which the main character puts so much of himself. The film is shot on location in Yamagata Prefecture located in Japan's northeast, with the beautiful scenery around a backdrop to a story that moves through all four seasons of the year.

Masahiro MOTOKI gives just the right touch of the comic to a superbly nuanced performance as Daigo, a man who has lost his way in Tokyo and returns to his home town with his wife Mika, played by Ryoko HIROSUE. She brings clarity and naturalness to the role of a wife who initially disapproves of her husband's career choice, but eventually comes to understand and respect it. Tsutomu YAMAZAKI brings his craggy features and towering presence to his portrayal of Sasaki, the veteran who is Daigo's employer and mentor. The supporting cast of solid character actors includes Kimiko YO (*Café Lumière*), Kazuko Yoshiyuki (*Glory to the Filmmaker!*, *Granny Gabai*) and Takashi SASANO (*Kabei--Our Mother*).

Until our own 'departure' comes, we must all eventually 'send off' those we love. This universal theme evokes the love between married couples, of parents for children, of children for parents, and the ties that bind relatives, friends, and co-workers in a film that will raise powerful emotions of both laughter and tears.

The film opened in Japan on September 13, 2008, and has become a major box-office hit grossing over \$40M to date (Mar 3, 2009). Following the Oscar win in Feb 2009, the film has ascended to the number one position at the Japanese Box office after re-entering the top ten in eighth position. The film has also been acclaimed overseas, winning the Grand Prize at Montreal Film Festival, and being the Japanese contender for Academy Awards, Best Foreign Film.



THE STORY

'Preparing for the final departure'

When the orchestra in which he plays cello disbands, Daigo KOBAYASHI (Masahiro Motoki) abandons a career in music, and moves with his wife Mika (Ryoko Hirose) to his home town in the northeastern prefecture of Yamagata. He finds a 'help wanted' advertisement that seems to offer good terms for work with what he assumes is a travel agency, and goes for an interview in an office with new coffins lining the back wall. The company owner, Sasaki (Tsutomu Yamazaki), hires him with no more than a glance at Daigo's résumé, at which point Daigo asks what exactly the company does and is told the work involves the ceremonial 'encoffinating' of corpses prior to cremation. He is reluctant, but Sasaki urges him to take the job and he accepts, telling Mika the work involves 'ceremonies'. In this way he begins to travel around Hirano, in Yamagata, with Sasaki.

A beautiful suicide victim who turns out to be a cross-dressing boy; a tearaway teenager dead in a motorcycle accident, an elderly grandmother who admired the baggy white socks favored by her grand-daughters with their high-school uniforms: Daigo encounters death in various forms and, although he is uncertain at first, begins to understand this work of 'encoffination' and somehow a respect for life as well.

Mika, though, finds out exactly what sort of 'ceremony' the work involves. Appalled, she demands that he quit, and when he refuses, leaves for her family home back in Tokyo.

He becomes alone again since his mother died several years before and his father having deserted the family when Daigo was a boy, but continues to believe in the value of the work he is doing.

As winter turns into spring, he begins to feel confident in himself and his new career, but now a series of significant events take place in close succession: Mika returns, the mother of a close childhood friend suddenly dies, and he receives word that the father he has heard nothing from in 30 years has also passed away.

As an encoffineer, as husband, as a son, and as a human being: how will Daigo deal with life and death among the people who are dearest to him? A final departure, to a happy farewell...



BIOGRAPHY

Yojiro TAKITA - Director

Born in 1955. Takita joined Hiroshi Mukai's Shishi Productions as an assistant director in 1976, making his directorial debut in 1981 with "Chikan Onna Kyoshi" and going on to helm some twenty adult films. His first commercial feature "Komikku Zasshi Nanka Iranai!" (1986) was received warmly at the New York Film Festival, and his subsequent filmography include *The Yen Family* (1988), *We Are Not Alone* (1993), *The Exam* and *Secret* (both 1999). In 2001 his special effects fantasy "Onmyoji" (*The Ying-Yang Master*) stormed the box office and eventually generated a sequel, "Onmyoji 2", in 2003. This was followed by widespread critical acclaim in 2003 for his historical drama *When The Last Sword Is Drawn*, culminating in an impressive haul of trophies including Best Film at the 2004 Japan Academy Awards. His latest films include *ASHURA* (2005) and *The Battery* (2007).

Crew

Director: Yojiro TAKITA (*When the Last Sword is Drawn, Ashura*)

Screenplay: Kundo KOYAMA (creator of many TV series including *The Iron Chef*)

Executive Producer: Yasuhiro MASE

Producers: Toshiaki NAKAZAWA, Toshihisa WATAI

Music: Joe HISAISHI (*Spirited Away, Howl's Moving Castle, Sonatine*)

Director of Photography: Takeshi HAMADA (*Blood and Bones, Helen the Baby Fox*)

Lighting: Hitoshi TAKAYA (*Sonatine, Violent Cop*)

Production Design: Fumio OGAWA (*Silk*)

Editing: Akimasa KAWASHIMA (*Genghis Khan – To the ends of the earth and sea*)

Cast

Masahiro MOTOKI (*The Birdman of China, GEMINI, GONIN*) as Daigo KOBAYASHI

Tsutomu YAMAZAKI (*Doing Time, Rikyu, Tampopo*) as Shouei SASAKI

Ryoko HIROSUE (*WASABI, Love Collage, Secret*) as Mika KOBAYASHI

Kimiko YO (*Café Lumière, Wait And See*) as Yuriko UEMURA?

Takashi SASANO (*KABEI – Our Motehr, Love and Honor*) as Shokichi HIRATA

Kazuko YOSHIYUKI (*Glory to the Filmmaker!, Granny Gabai*) as Tsuyako YAMASHITA



COMMENTS FROM CRITICS

IN JAPAN AND OVERSEAS

-- "The film takes an unusual and unique subject, but is handled with grace and humor. It is a brilliant piece of art, and I have great admiration to the director Yojiro Takita, for putting this film together."

Mark Rydell (President of the Jury / Montreal World Film Festival)

-- "It was astonishing for me to discover that Japanese culture includes this elaborate ritual...that goes beyond religion into the culture itself, and ultimately beyond culture to touch our most basic, universal issues as social beings painfully aware of our mortality and the finiteness of human relationships. "

--"Okuribito (Departures)' ranks as one of the best films I've ever seen, and also did what movies do best, opening a world of specific human experience and emotion that flows between the characters and the audience, enlarging life itself."

-- "Everyone who is living in this world needs a film like this. Eventually, everyone dies... but we hope to be sent off like this."

-- "Hello - Long time no see - Good bye - See you again --- this film reminds us the importance of these words in everyday lives... I am very happy discover such a film."



Q&As

Masahiro Motoki interview (LA / Feb 23, 2009)

Q. It has been said that you were the one who came up with the original idea of the film, DEPARTURES. Was there any event that inspired you?

A. When I went to India about 15 years ago, I was totally moved to see that in India life and death co-exist in harmony and in a very natural way. They are both regarded equally valuable in human life.

Next to the people who are washing and grooming themselves in the river, there were people having a funeral and sending the dead bodies off. Death and life co-exists in balance there. I was fascinated and moved by the sight of these incidents.

When I returned back to Tokyo, I felt that death was intentionally hidden away from the everyday life.

People are just too busy running around and don't face or look at death as an important part of our lives. This in fact, also meant that in other words, we don't appreciate and enjoy "life" as much as we should.

Since my travel to India, I always think about the meaning of life and death which lie side by side.

When my child was born, I was there with my wife. Seeing my own child being born, I realized how close life and death were. I was so happy to see my child born and I couldn't be a happier man. But then at the same time I realized death carries the same importance as birth.

Q. Did you know, or was acquainted with the job of a "nokanshi" (= encoffiner / the person who works on the ceremonial preparations of the dead bodies before putting them in to the coffin) from before?

A. The first time I took deep interest in nokanshi / encoffiner was when I read a book called "Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician" by Shinmon Aoki.

I was deeply moved by the book.

As I had started to take interest in the way of life and death, I was totally fascinated by the book and the job of encoffinment.

I started to think about a movie based on the book from the first time I read the book.

Q. Did you actually study the encoffinment ceremony from someone, or attend the real ceremony?



When I was offered to do the character in this film “Okuribito” (DEPARTURES), I had to learn to be an encoffinner as you can imagine. I accompanied a professional encoffinner and learned how a professional encoffinner carry out the ritual. I tried to capture the elegance and the beauty that the ceremony conveyed as much as possible.

I even secretly attended the actual ceremony, where a professional encoffinner was actually performing the ritual in front of a grieving family.

As I looked and observed the ritual, it became more and more clear that the ritual of encoffinement was extremely artistic, just like the tea ceremony. It is peaceful and required polished skillfulness. I was amazed that the ritual was done in complete silence. It definitely reminded me of the tea ceremony.

Q. How do you choose the characters that you act, and how do you put yourself into these characters?

Creating a character to me is always an uphill battle. They are never easy.

During shooting I always suffer a great deal. It doesn't come easily.

But because I go through so much pain and struggle, when I find joy and peace in between, I can appreciate that much more.

However, I am not serious all the time. There is definitely a very punk side to me as well. I would like to show that part of myself in another film someday.

Q. Do you think this was your best performance ever?

When I am asked if I think my performance in this movie is my best so far, I don't know how to answer.

Charlie Chaplin always used to say when he was asked what his favorite film is so far, it would always be “The next film.”

I want to feel the same way, as I would like to think that my best work is still yet to come.

I never thought that this movie would become a big success or would go as far as it actually had achieved (including the Oscars), during the shooting.

I believe it is up to the audience to decide whether or not a film is great, and all that I would focus on will be to give my best during the shooting.



Motoki comment --- After the Academy Awards (Feb 27, 2009)

"The film talks about life and death which can be sympathized in a very personal level. I was very moved by how people (of different culture) received the film, and also believe that the way the theme was shown with gentle humanity and how it brought warm light to the subject may have been received with a fresh surprise to the audience."

"To live with the joy and the weight of the importance of receiving the Oscars from now on, will probably be a new challenge for me."

Masahiro Motoki's next project will be a period drama series for NHK (national broadcasting in Japan) "Saka no Ueno Kumo" where he will be playing the main character. The series is currently in shooting and planned to go on from 2009 to 2011



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