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FESTIVAL DE CANNES
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-SCREEN DAILY

MY SUNSHINE

A FILM BY HIROSHI OKUYAMA



MY SUNSHINE PRODUCTION COMMITTEE & COMME DES CINEMAS PRESENT "MY SUNSHINE" A FILM BY HIROSHI OKUYAMA STARRING KEIATSU KOSHIYAMA SOSUKE INEMATSU KIARA NAKANISHI RYUYA WAKABA PRODUCED BY TOSHIKAZU NISHIGAYA YUKI NISHIMIYA MAGA SAWADA
LINE PRODUCER SHINTARO HORI MUSIC RYOSHI SATO (HUMBERT HUMBERT) LYRICIST HIROKI NISHIGAYA SOUND RECORDING KOSUKE YANAGITA PRODUCTION DESIGNER NORIFUMI AJIWA DELEGATION KYOKO MATSU EXECUTIVE PRODUCER HARUKI KOMEIJI MAKEUP DEPARTMENT RUMI TERASAWA YUMIKO SUGIYAMA
EDITING TINA BAZ RE-RECORDING MASA YOSUKE HAMADA SOUND EFFECTS SAKURA KATSUMATA ASSISTANT DIRECTOR TOMOHIRO KUBO SUPERVISOR OF SKATING KANATA MORI PRODUCTION MANAGERS MAHO WATANABE ANTOINE JOUVE PRODUCTION TOKYO THEATRES THE ASAHI SHINGUN COMME DES CINEMAS IN ASSOCIATION WITH
MAM INC. INTERNATIONAL SALES CHARADES FRENCH DISTRIBUTION ART HOUSE FILMS WITH THE SUPPORT OF L'AIDE AUX CINEMAS DU MONDE & AGENCY FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN DIRECTION CINEMATOGRAPHY SCREENPLAY & TITLING BY HIROSHI OKUYAMA © 2021 MY SUNSHINE PRODUCTION COMMITTEE & COMME DES CINEMAS





FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE 2024
UN CERTAIN REGARD

MY SUNSHINE

A film by
Hiroshi Okuyama

90 minutes / 5.1 / Color / 1.85:1 / 2024 / Japan, France



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SYNOPSIS

One winter on the Japanese island of Hokkaido, a young boy named Takuya has resigned himself to the fact that he's the worst player on his ice hockey team. While practicing, he becomes transfixed by the figure skaters who share the ice rink, particularly Sakura, a rising star from Tokyo. Her coach, Arakawa, takes an interest in Takuya, seeing himself in the young boy. He pairs the two up and trains them as a competitive ice-dancing duo. Although tentative with each other at first, the kids eventually grow closer and form a deep bond with their supportive coach. But as the winter continues, unspoken feelings begin to surface and the harmony the trio once knew begins to falter.

"A gentle, unassuming film about the pain and misdirection that can arise from young love," (*RogerEbert.com*), Hiroshi Okuyama's sophomore feature MY SUNSHINE is a heartwarming coming of age drama buoyed by its picturesque cinematography and beautiful score.



HIROSHI OKUYAMA

Screenwriter, Director

« In 'Jesus', my first feature film, I drew on my own childhood experiences. It was an opportunity to realize that I have many childhood memories, but they are fragile and tend to fade day by day. Since then, I've made commercials, music videos, and TV movies, but my passion for cinema is strong. I want to use the lingering scents of childhood for this new film. [...] My ambition is to create a simple, poetic film without being explanatory. I want to bring staging to everything that appears on screen and through this, I hope the viewer can remember the emotions of their childhood as a treasure for the present. »

Hiroshi Okuyama was born in Tokyo in 1996. He is a screenwriter, cinematographer, editor, and director of his films. In 2009, at the age of 13, he directed the music video 'Graduationparty!!!!', which premiered at the Kyoto International Film Festival. In 2016 and 2018, he made two short films: 'The Swan Smiles' and 'Tokyo 21st October'. In 2018, Hiroshi Okuyama received the Best New Director award at the San Sebastián International Film Festival and the Best Cinematography award at the Stockholm Film Festival for his first feature film 'Jesus', a critical success. In 2022, he made a series of documentary films for Hermès on craftsmanship and collaborated in 2023 with Hirokazu Kore-eda on the screenplay for his series 'Makanai: Cooking for the Maiko House'. 'My Sunshine', his second feature film, is presented in the Official Selection Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival 2024.

FILMOGRAPHY

2024 – MY SUNSHINE

Official Selection Un Certain Regard - Cannes Film Festival 2024

2018 – JÉSUS

Best New Director - San Sebastián International Film Festival 2018

Best Cinematography - Stockholm International Film Festival 2018, Dublin International Film Festival 2019

Interview with Hiroshi Okuyama

How was the project "My Sunshine" born?

I always told myself that one day I would make a film about figure skating, which I was introduced to as a child. But I couldn't manage it. I had to accept that invoking memories alone isn't enough to make a film. Then I discovered the song "My Sunshine" by Humbert Humbert, and as I listened to it daily, the story I needed to film began to take shape. At the same time, I met Sōsuke Ikematsu, and I was convinced that if I could translate his charm onto the screen, I could make the film.

"Jesus", your first feature film, is inspired by your own childhood. Is this still the case for "My Sunshine," a coming-of-age story also centered around children?

The context of "My Sunshine" was heavily influenced by real experiences from my childhood. Firstly, figure skating, which I practiced in elementary school. I was just following my older sister, who was trying to become an athlete, but oddly, it never felt burdensome. I remember seeing girls who skated brilliantly, just like Takuya, the main character, and thinking I would like to dance like her. An experience also led me to imagine the protagonist having a stutter. Although I've rarely talked about it publicly, I suffered from a tic in my childhood that made me involuntarily clear my throat. Back then, I hoped so much that my classmates would leave me alone instead of mimicking me or giving me weird nicknames, that I wanted Takuya to have a best friend who never mentions his stutter and doesn't make a big deal out of it.

In this sense, the film also reflects my own life experiences, and after making it, I thought that I could draw inspiration from any happy or unhappy experience and I live with this idea deep within me. However, these influences pertain only to the context of the film, and the screenplay itself is not based on real experiences, unlike my previous film, "Jesus." Everything Takuya, the film's protagonist, experiences is an original creation.

In cinema, sports are often associated with a violent personal progression: the fight against oneself, physical pain, competition, or defeat... But you emphasize the gentleness of learning instead. Why did you choose ice dancing to illustrate this?

I wanted to avoid developing a typical sports film plot and falling into the classic trope of "the Spartan teacher and his pupil who struggles to measure up." After the snowfalls, a mysterious triangle forms and gradually becomes a harmonious triangle.

Then, as the snow melts, the contours of the triangle also dissolve. Portraying human nature in this way, by telling the story of these three characters—a boy, a girl, and their devoted coach who form an ice dancing team—seemed to me the best way to depict this "harmony."

But choosing figure skating as a film subject came with several difficulties. There were very few rinks that could be rented for the duration of the shooting at an affordable rate. And even when we could rent them, it generally required completely relighting the set with projectors because the rinks' lights cast a very flat light. Moreover, it is a sport where it is difficult to use professional athletes to double for the shots according to the script, so the only way is to call on people who can actually skate or to ask actors who can't skate to train hard. What I've learned is that if a subject has not been filmed much before, there's usually a reason!

"My Sunshine" speaks in a language, a way of being unique to childhood. How do you direct young actors and how did you choose them?

For the roles of Takuya and Sakura, I chose youths who could skate. As they had no experience as actors, I didn't give them the script. All the lines were dictated to them on set, without them memorizing them in advance. I wanted them to live the scenes we were filming as if they were real events, to interpret them freely as if what was happening on set was real life. Moreover, since it was impossible for them to memorize all the lines dictated to them on the spot, they reappropriated them and spoke them in a way that was more fluid and natural for them. I chose to work in this way because I was convinced it would make the acting more realistic. Furthermore, for the scenes where Arakawa trains Takuya and Sakura, I had written almost no dialogue in advance. Leaving a lot of blanks in the script allowed room for improvisation on set.

As for the choice of actors, it was obviously conditioned by this crucial criterion: that they know how to skate. Fortunately, I found Keitatsu Koshiyama, who plays Takuya, right away. He came to the casting office, had a temperament similar to Takuya's, and was also an experienced skater. However, finding Sakura was fraught with difficulties. Despite my searches through numerous talent agencies, I found no one who could both skate and match Sakura's personality. I ended up posting flyers in all the ice rinks in Japan saying, "Heroine wanted for a film!" And finally, Kiara Nakanishi, who not only could skate but also had experience in ice dancing and fit the character, saw one of these flyers and auditioned for the role. Needless to say, meeting her, who not only knew how to skate but also had ice dancing experience and matched the character, reinforced my motivation to shoot this film.

The character of Coach Arakawa is never, as you point out, a harsh authority figure. What does this character bring to this childhood story, and why did you choose Sōsuke Ikematsu to portray him?

Why is the character of Coach Arakawa not strict? Simply because the coach I learned to skate with as a child was very kind. It was easier for me to remain true to the image of the coach I knew. At the same time, Coach Arakawa is a character I wrote for Sōsuke Ikematsu, and in thinking about the character that would suit him, I naturally arrived at this gentle and compassionate man towards children, who also carries a form of resignation about life, coupled with a feeling of being rejected by society.

I remember very well the moment I knew I wanted to work with Ikematsu: it was when I filmed him as part of a promotional documentary for the Hermès brand. Seeing him talk while driving his own car or slipping away alone for a moment to smoke a cigarette, I desperately wanted to make a film with him.

These three characters are strangers to each other and, for various reasons, are on the fringes of societal expectations. But together they experience a discovery. How did you imagine this trio, their balance, and their complementarity?

They are strangers to each other, but for different reasons, each of them feels a sense of loneliness. And I think the attraction that brings them together arises because they unconsciously sense each other's loneliness. The reasons they are drawn to each other are also different: romantic feelings, admiration, the image of the other that one overlays on the person one once was. I tried to illustrate these feelings in a way that wasn't too explicit and to convincingly portray the fact that these three people, who had nothing to do with each other, meet and come closer.

Indeed, the modesty of the narrative and its characters seems to correspond to a certain modesty in the direction. Do you intentionally seek to not delineate a reading of the film?

Personally, I like films that are not too explanatory. The advantage when there is intentionally a part of emptiness is that it encourages me to try to understand the film, to attempt to interpret it by filling in the gaps with my own thoughts, until I come to think, "This is a film for me!" If the entire story and all the emotions are explained to me, I can't feel involved. That's why, when I direct films myself, I make sure not to be too explicit. When I write the screenplay, when I direct the actors on set, when I think about the staging, part of me wonders, "Am I explaining too much?" while the other

thinks, "Is it enough to convey the intention?" and these two opposing impulses battle within me.

On the other hand, the theme of evolution is illustrated by strong symbols: the initiation into skating, but also the construction of temporality over a season. Why did you choose this chronology, especially winter?

On the very first page of the folder I drafted when I decided to make this film, I wrote, "Journal of a young boy's growth from the first snows until the melting of the snow." If I was so keen to film the snow, it's because in my view, snow is the quintessential cinematic element. There is nothing else that can change the appearance of the world so dramatically in such a short span of time. At the beginning of the film, the first snowflakes fall sparsely, then in the blink of an eye, the landscape is covered with a thick layer of snow, and I thought it would be very cinematic to be able to represent the passage of time on screen in this way. That is the main reason why I incorporated snow into this film.

In Tokyo, where I was born and raised, it rarely snows, even in the middle of winter. That's why the joy I felt as a child when the snow piled up once every few years invariably comes back to me every time I see snow, even now that I am an adult. I hope that each viewer, empathizing with the feelings of Takuya and Sakura, can also recall forgotten memories and feelings experienced. I would very much like these pleasant childhood memories to accompany them and bring freshness to their present lives.

Three years have passed since your last film, and after having made commercials, music videos, and TV movies, you return to cinema. What is your relationship with directing?

Making videos such as commercials or music videos is about fulfilling an order and doing everything to meet the client's expectations. In other words, it's like driving someone as best you can to the destination they have in mind. On the other hand, making a film, especially a film that is not adapted from an original work as is the case with this one, feels like setting off on an adventure without knowing beforehand where you want to go. It's being free to choose both the direction you take and the way you drive. After making my first film, I was certain that my life would be dedicated to cinema until my death. When I attended the Stockholm Festival, I visited Roy Andersson's studio. I saw him and he kindly talked to me about how he sees creation. I then thought that I wanted to move forward in life by devoting myself to filmmaking with as much conviction as he has.

I often find commonalities and feel a closeness with foreign directors of my generation. Whenever this happens, I am happy to think that even though we have grown up in different environments and cultures, we still share similar feelings because we live in the same era. I think this is also why films can cross borders. Indeed, if I had to choose just one film that influenced me, it would be "The Red Balloon" by Albert Lamorisse. The young boy and his balloon taught me that cinema is not conveyed through dialogue but through the image.

On "My Sunshine" you are director, screenwriter, editor, and also director of photography. What does this multidisciplinary bring to you? Is your relationship with cinema inseparable from your relationship with the image?

In my view, the director's job is solely to "create a universe." Indeed, in this film as in my previous one, I was not only the director but also the director of photography, screenwriter, and editor. To be able to create my own universe, I think it's best that I take on these roles as much as possible so that I can then indicate the way forward to the teams handling decorations, costumes, and props. Whether in terms of writing the screenplay, directing, or editing, I obviously cannot measure up to those who have chosen to specialize in just one of these crafts. But these three stages are closely linked and cannot go off in too many different directions. For this reason, I am convinced that it is beneficial to take on these various roles. I direct the child actors on set by giving them their lines, I rewrite the screenplay based on the improvisations observed during rehearsals, and while editing in my head, I plan the shots as a director of photography. After experimenting with different ways of working, this approach suits me best, and I've always loved the sense of chaos in my head (even though, of course, there are times when I feel like running away...). For this film, I even laced up skates for some scenes where I filmed while skating! Doing all this at the same time, I sometimes cracked, and each time Sōsuke Ikematsu helped me as if he were also a director.

Moreover, I absolutely do not believe that it is more enriching to only make films. There is much to gain from creating other types of images because these activities nourish each other. It is probably no coincidence that the team that supported this film is primarily made up of people I met on commercial or music video shoots. For this reason, I intend to continue gaining experience by alternately working on commercials, music videos, or series, meeting people, and accumulating ideas until the time is right to make another film.

ARTISTIC LIST

Arakawa - Sōsuke Ikematsu
Takuya - Keitatsu Koshiyama
Sakura - Kiara Nakanishi

TECHNICAL LIST

Director, Screenwriter, Cinematography - Hiroshi Okuyama
Lighting - Hiroki Nishigaya
Set Design - Norifumi Ataka
Sound - Kosuke Yanagita
Editing - Tina Baz, Hiroshi Okuyama
Original Music - Ryosei Sato (Humbert Humbert)
Assistant Director - Tomohiro Kubo
Costumes - Haruki Koketsu

Production
Comme des Cinémas
Tokyo Theatres
The Asahi Shimbun
Executive Producer - Shintaro Hori
Production Directors - Miho Watanabe, Antoine Jouve
Producers - Toshikazu Nishigaya, Yuki Nishimiya, Masa Sawada, Anne Pernod

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