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Our Little Sister

A film by Hirokazu Kore-eda

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OUR LITTLE SISTER

Starring

Sachi Koda HARUKA AYASE
Yoshino Koda MASAMI NAGASAWA
Chika Koda KAHO
Suzu Asano SUZU HIROSE

Filmmakers

Directed/Written/Edited by HIROKAZU KORE-EDA
Original Graphic Novel by AKIMI YOSHIDA
“Umimachi Diary”
Published by Shogakukan Inc.
Chief Executive Producers TAKASHI ISHIHARA
SHINICHIRO TSUDUKI
MINAMI ICHIKAWA
TOM YODA
Executive Producers YASUSHI OGAWA
MAKOTO OMURA
TAICHI UEDA
SATOMI ODAKE
Producers KAORU MATSUZAKI
HIJIRI TAGUCHI
Associate Producer MEGUMI NISHIHARA
Director of Photography MIKIYA TAKIMOTO
Music YOKO KANNO
Sound YUTAKA TSURUMAKI
Production Designer KEIKO MITSUMATSU
Lighting NORIKIYO FUJII

SYNOPSIS

“Our Little Sister”, directed by internationally acclaimed director Hirozaku Kore-eda, is adapted from Yoshida Akimi’s best-selling graphic novel “Umimachi Diary”. Three twenty-something sisters – Sachi, Yoshino and Chika – live together in a large old house in the seaside town of Kamakura. When they learn of their estranged father’s death, they decide to travel to the countryside for his funeral. There they meet their shy teenage half-sister Suzu for the first time and, bonding quickly, invite her to live with them. Suzu eagerly agrees, and begins a new life with her older sisters.

Amidst the many and varied colors of Kamakura’s four seasons, the four sisters cause each other emotional anguish, and support each other through life’s trials, developing a very special bond in the process. Set against the summer ocean sparkling with sunlight, radiant autumn foliage, a tunnel of gorgeous yet impermanent cherry blossom trees, hydrangeas damp from the rainy season, and brilliant fireworks heralding the arrival of another summer, their moving and deeply relatable story depicts the irreplaceable moments that form a true family.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“Town and Time”

Why do none of the sisters bully their younger half-sister in the original graphic novel?

This question came to me when I was writing the script for OUR LITTLE SISTER. The story was missing something that you would normally find in the first half of the drama, like the little sister Suzu running away from home after getting into trouble with her older siblings.

The original author did not choose such predictable dramatic storylines: when the owner of the diner, Ms. Ninomiya, finds out that she has a very short time to live, she doesn't fight the disease; the oldest sister Sachi does not tell her boyfriend not to go abroad.

So, is the philosophy of life of the characters in this story to resign oneself to one's destiny? No, it is not. Then what? Perhaps the title of the original graphic novel “Umimachi Diary,” which means “Seaside Town Diary”, is the answer.

Of course, the main characters in the film are four sisters, and you can also say that the film is about the youngest sister, Suzu, affirming her own identity and the oldest sister, Sachi, accepting her parents. But more than that, I believe it also focuses on the town and the time that accrues there every day. Just like the movement of the sea's tides on the shore, the town remains, essentially unchanging, despite the regular arrivals and departures of inhabitants: Suzu, for example, or Ms. Ninomiya or Sachi's boyfriend.

Some day in the future, when all the characters in the story have died, others will come to the town and spend a part of their lives there. It is as if the life of a human is only a tiny thing - a grain of sand on the beach.

I wonder if the central character of the film is the time that absorbs the past and the future.

With this thought, I realized that to focus on and work up the troubled relationships between these human characters was not the right approach for this film.

What interests me is not only the beauty of the scenery of Kamakura - or of the four sisters - but also the accepting attitude of this seaside town itself, absorbing and embracing everything. It is the beauty that arises from the realization - not sorrowful but open-hearted - that we are just grains of sand forming a part of the whole, and that the town, and the time there, continue even when we are gone.

It was from this perspective that I directed OUR LITTLE SISTER.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR HIROKAZU KORE-EDA

After reading the graphic novel, you were immediately interested in doing a film adaptation. How faithful did you want to be to the source material?

At first I thought I would just rearrange the order of the scenes. But I gradually changed my mind and decided to write a screenplay that included scenes not in the graphic novel. After wondering how I would create something to fit the limits of a two-hour running time without losing the perspective of the original, I thought it would be better to limit the locations and characters, and add episodes instead. For example, the decision to place Ms. Ninomiya from the Sea Cat Diner at the center of the story was made in order to have her take on the role of characters who do not appear in the movie. There was certainly some trial and error but the direction I would take became clear after we had cast Suzu.

Usually your scripts are not completed until after the cast has actually been determined.

It was the same here, even with the original graphic novel to work with. The book's intriguing monologues and stage directions are striking, but I didn't want to rely on them too much. So I thought about how well I could depict those tones through the dialogue and expressions of the characters. As I directed, the distinction started to blur. I would wonder: "Was this scene in the original? Was this something I added?" I consider this proof that I was able to make the material my own.

You have created a new and different story of the four sisters.

As I read the original, I thought it was a story about the people around Suzu as they watch her. But in the movie, my intention was to position Sachi and Suzu as the central figures of the story. You have those two, next to them you have Yoshino and Chika, and you have characters like the mother, the great-aunt, and Ninomiya around them... I thought about how these people should be arranged around Sachi and Suzu. In a way, I think this is a story about women.

The form of the four sisters and the beauty of the Kamakura landscapes are very striking. Why did you decide to use Takimoto Mikiya as your cinematographer again after "Like Father, Like Son" ?

The straight posture of the characters is closer to the characters in the films of Ozu Yasujiro than that of Naruse Mikio. The four sisters are very dignified in their appearance. I thought it would be better to shoot them as part of a landscape as opposed to in a documentary style. This is what I had in mind when I approached Mr. Takimoto. We were very careful with camera blocking, determining the composition of a particular scene's key elements, and shot with a focus on that aspect.

This is the first time you have worked with the composer Kanno Yoko.

Ms. Nagasawa suggested Kanno Yoko when I was wondering on set what to do about the music. The first idea we had was to have the four sisters represented by a string quartet, determine one instrument for each sister, and weave everything together at the end. We matched up some of her past music to the footage we had shot and it sounded great, so I decided to ask her to work on the score.

There are a lot of funeral and Buddhist memorial service scenes. The sisters are frequently seen praying in front of a shrine to the deceased, making us aware of people who are not there.

This film is also a story about the father, Suzu's mother, the grandmother, people who are no longer around. It was a difficult task to depict the traces of these people through the characters' behavior, dialogue - and things like the whitebait toast - instead of flashbacks, and to show how their feelings toward these people would affect the sisters. I included the fried mackerel scene because I wanted to show how something is passed on even after something is gone. I think an important element of the film is that a part of it has the future in view.

Your point about how something is passed on seems to overlap with Sachi and her mother Miyako's manner of speaking.

If you consider this a story of Sachi acquiring a sense of motherhood, she breaks loose from her sisters and is placed in the position of the mother who was never there after Suzu comes to live with them. Only then is she finally able to accept the mother she has previously been unable to forgive.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Hirokazu Kore-eda was born in 1962 in Tokyo, Japan. After graduating from Waseda University in 1987, Kore-eda joined TV Man Union where he directed several award-winning documentary programs. In 2014, he launched his production company BUN-BUKU.

In 1995, his directorial debut, “Maborosi”, based on the original novel by Miyamoto Teru, won the 52nd Venice International Film Festival’s Golden Osella. “After Life” (1998), distributed in over 30 countries, brought Kore-eda international acclaim. In 2001, “Distance” was selected in the Official Competition at the Cannes Film Festival; and Yagira Yuya, the star of his fourth work “Nobody Knows” (2004), garnered much attention for becoming the youngest person ever to receive the Cannes Film Festival’s Best Actor Award. In 2006, “Hana”, a film centered on vengeance, became his first attempt at a period piece. In 2008, he presented the family drama “Still Walking”, which reflected his own personal experiences, and received high praise from around the world. In 2009, “Air Doll” made its world premiere in Un Certain Regard at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival and was widely-praised for marking a new frontier in its depiction of a sensual love fantasy. In 2011, “I Wish” won the Best Screenplay Award at the 59th San Sebastian International Film Festival. In 2012, he made his TV series directorial debut with “Going Home”. “Like Father, Like Son” (2013), won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, received the audience awards at San Sebastian, Vancouver, and Sao Paulo International Film Festivals and broke the box office records of his previous films in many territories.

Kore-eda has also produced films for young Japanese directors. “Kakuto”, directed by Iseya Yusuke, premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam 2003. “Wild Berries” (2003) was written and directed by Nishikawa Miwa whose second feature “Sway” premiered in Directors’ Fortnight at Cannes in 2006. “Ending Note: Death of a Japanese Salesman” (2011) by Sunada Mami moved audiences worldwide.

FILMOGRAPHY

As Director

1991 HOWEVER... (Shikashi...)

TV documentary

1991 LESSONS FROM A CALF (Kougai ha Doko he Itta)

TV documentary

1994 AUGUST WITHOUT HIM

(Kare no Inai Hachigatsu ga)

TV documentary

1995 MABOROSI (Maboroshi no Hikari)

1996 WITHOUT MEMORY (Kioku ga Ushinawareta Toki)

TV documentary

1998 AFTER LIFE (Wonderful Life)

2001 DISTANCE (Distance)

2004 NOBODY KNOWS (Dare mo Shiranai)

2006 HANA (Hana yorimo Naho)
2008 STILL WALKING (Aruitemo Aruitemo)
2008 WISHING YOU'RE ALRIGHT
JOURNEY WITHOUT AN END BY COCCO
(Daijoubu de Aruyouni Cocco Owaranai Tabi)
2009 AIR DOLL (Kuuki Ningyo)
2010 THE DAYS AFTER (Nochi no Hi)
TV drama
2011 I WISH (Kiseki)
2012 GOING HOME (GOING MY HOME)
TV series
2013 LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

As Executive / Producer

2003 WILD BERRIES (Hebi Ichigo)
directed by Nishikawa Miwa
2003 KAKUTO (Kakuto) directed by Iseya Yusuke
2009 BEAUTIFUL ISLANDS (Beautiful Islands)
directed by Kana Tomoko
2011 ENDING NOTE (Ending Note)
directed by Sunada Mami
2012 THAT DAY – LIVING FUKUSHIMA
(Anohi - Fukushima ha Ikiteiru)
directed by Imanaka Kohei

ABOUT THE CAST

HARUKA AYASE (Sachi Koda) was born in 1985 in Hiroshima, Japan. After appearances in several TV series, Ayase attracted much attention with the TV series “Crying Out Love, in the Center of the World” (2004). In 2008, she appeared in Kwak Jae-Young’s “Cyborg She”, in which her portrayal of a cyborg brought her international popularity. In the same year, she appeared as a blind swordswoman in “ICHI,” the remake of the internationally acclaimed “The Tale of Zatoichi” (1962). With “Oppai Volleyball” (2009), she was nominated for the Best Actress at Japan Academy Prize. In 2013, she starred in the nationally popular NHK historical drama series “Yae’s Sakura” as the leading character. In the same year, she appeared in “Real”, directed by Kurosawa Kiyoshi, which was premiered at Locarno and Toronto International Film Festivals. Her filmography includes Mitani Koki’s “The Magic Hour” (2008), Yaguchi Shinobu’s “Happy Flight” (2008), Nakata Hideo’s “The Incite Mill – 7 Day Death Game” (2010) and Sato Shinsuke’s “All-Round Appraiser Q – The Eyes of Mona Lisa” (2014).

MASAMI NAGASAWA (Yoshino Koda) was born in 1987 in Shizuoka, Japan. Nagasawa made her screen debut with “Pyrokinesis” in 2000. In 2003, she received the award of Newcomer of the Year at the Japan Academy Prize for her leading performance in “Robot Contest”. The following year, she received the Best Supporting Actress prize at the Japan Academy Prize for director Yukisada Isao’s “Crying Out Love, in the Center of the World,” which ranked as box office No. 1 among the Japanese films released in 2004. From 2013, she has participated in international projects such as the Taiwanese TV series “Chocolat” (2013) and John Woo’s “The Crossing” (2014). Her filmography includes “Touch” (2005), “Tears for You” (2006), “Say Hello for Me” (2007), “The Last Princess” (2008), “Love Strikes!” and “Beyond the Memories” (2013) among others. “Our Little Sister” marks her second appearance in a Korea film, after “I Wish” (2011).

KAHO (Chika Koda) was born in 1991 in Tokyo, Japan. Kaho was highly praised for her first leading role in the film “A Gentle Breeze in the Village” (2007), directed by Yamashita Nobuhiro, and received the award of Newcomer of the Year at the Japan Academy Prize among other awards. The film was internationally premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and well received on the international festival circuit. Aside from her career in TV drama series, her filmography includes “Sing, Salmon, Sing” (2008), “Sand Clock” (2008), “Trick: Psychic Battle Royale” (2010), “Police Dog Dream” (2010), “Beautiful World” (2012), “Blindly in Love” (2013), “Time Scoop Hunter” (2013), and “Puzzle” (2014). Her next film will be Yukisada Isao’s “Pink and Gray,” which will be released in 2016.

SUZU HIROSE (Suzu Asano) was born in 1998 in Shizuoka, Japan. Discovered by the management company of her elder sister Hirose Alice, Hirose started her modeling career in 2012 in the monthly fashion magazine “Seventeen”, and made her acting debut a year later in TV series “Kasukana Kanojo” (2013). The same year, she made her screen debut with “The Apology King,” followed by “CROWS: EXPLODE” (2014). In 2014, her popularity in Japan sky-

rocketed following her appearance in a TV commercial for the wedding information magazine 'Zexy' ('Recruit'). With the success of the TV series "Gakko no Kaidan" (2015) which she joined as the lead for the first time, she is now known as "The Busiest 16-Year-Old in Japan" and recognized as one of the brightest young actresses in Japan.

**BASED ON THE ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL
"UMIMACHI DIARY" BY
YOSHIDA AKIMI**

Born in Tokyo. Akimi Yoshida made her graphic novel debut in 1977 with "Chotto Fushigi na Geshukunin." Some of her best-known works include "California Story," "BANANA FISH" and "LOVERS' KISS." She won the 29th Shogakukan Manga Award for "Kissho Tennyo" and "Kawa Yorimo Nagaku Yuruyaka ni," and the 47th Shogakukan Manga Award for "YASHA." For "Umimachi Diary," she received the Excellence Award at the 11th Japan Media Arts Festival and the Cartoon Grand Prize 2013.