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FILM REVIEW: The Wind Rises (Miyazaki, 2013): Japan

Description

Reviewed by Larry Gleeson. Viewed during AFI Filmfest 2013.

The Wind Rises, is a new animated, full-length, feature film from legendary Japanese animation director, Hayao Miyazaki. Miyazaki announced at this yearâ??s Venice Film Festival this will be his last film. In 1997 his *Princess Mononoke,* was the highest revenue grossing film in the history of Japan at the time of its release and it also received the Japanese equivalent of an Academy Award for Best Film. Miyazaki is also well known for the films *Spirited Away,* (2001) and *Howlâ??s Moving Castle,* (2004) In 2003 Miyazaki received an Oscar for Best Animated Feature for the film *Spirited Away.*

His films have garnered international acclaim from critics and have provided Miyazaki public recognition within Japan. His films are known for compelling characters, engaging plots and eye-catching animation. Remarkable by todayâ??s standards his films allow no more than 10% of the footage to

come from computer animation.

In *The Wind Rises,* Miyazaki tells the story of Jiro Horikoshi, a real-life aeronautical engineer who designed fighter aircraft in Japan during WWII. The film opens with the young Jiro fantasizing of his plane flying above his hometown. As I watched the scene unfold, a rather powerful ominous feeling surfaced as I was reminded of Leni Riefenstahlâ??s opening scene from the Nazi propaganda documentary, *Triumph of the Will.* Nevertheless the early moments of the film are very heartwarming as Miyazaki chooses to highlight Jiroâ??s youth as an older brother to a delightfully spirited younger sister in a single parented household run by their kind and caring mother.

Jiroâ??s passion throughout the film is making good airplanes. Jiroâ??s daydreaming, which he does a few times during the storyâ??s arc. Admittedly, several of my favorite moments are Jiroâ??s imaginings with Count Caproni, a larger-than-life mustachioed Italian airplane designer who mentors Jiro with playful and good-natured ribbing, that provide insight into Jiroâ??s creative passion. Jiro finds his inspiration through such moments and Miyazaki makes space for them throughout the film.

The story is partially based on Tatsuo Horiâ??s 1938 novelette, â??The Wind Has Risen.â?• Miyazakiâ??s animation provides beautiful plush scenery with Monet-like backdrops and landscapes providing striking visuals while creating a powerful nostalgia for a simpler time lightly brushing over the complications of war and economic depression. With such a breathtaking mise-en-scene itâ??s no wonder a young Jiro falls in love with the young woman he saved during a traumatic, historic earthquake a few years before (the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake).

In direct juxtaposition to this frantic and rather manic scenario in the aftermath of the earthquake, young Jiro finds himself vacationing in a rural setting enjoying the greenery and the soft â??risingâ?• winds complete with majestic and billowing, flowery clouds when he coincidentally crosses paths with the beautiful girl he saved from the earthquake as she paints poetically on a hillside overlooking the spectacular countryside.

The Wind Rises, is a very light-hearted, entertaining film. The film focuses pretty much exclusively on the protagonist, Jiro, as an idealistic engineer whose primary purpose in life is to make planes. Granted, he falls in love and rubs elbows with German plane builders during WWII. Yet, WWII and the social unrest after the Great Kanto Earthquake are left virtually untouched. Tellingly, Jiroâ??s concern at the end of the war was over the planes that didnâ??t come back. Nevertheless, I wholeheartedly recommend the film for children and for adults with a penchant for Monet-esque visuals.

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