



DRIVE MY CAR

****WINNER - Best Screenplay Prize at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival****

****WINNER - FIPRESCI International Critics' Prize at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival****

****WINNER - Ecumenical Prize at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival****

**** WINNER - Silver Hugo Jury Award; Best International Feature Audience Award - 2021 Chicago International Film Festival ****

**** NOMINEE - Best Feature Film; Best Screenplay; Best Performance by an Actor; Achievement in Directing - Asia Pacific Screen Awards 2021 ****

**** NOMINEE - Best International Feature Film - Gotham Awards 2021 ****

**** OFFICIAL JAPANESE ENTRY FOR BEST INTERNATIONAL FEATURE AT THE 94TH ACADEMY AWARDS® ****



Directed by Ryusuke Hamaguchi

Written by Ryusuke Hamaguchi and Takamasa Oe

Based on the short story by Haruki Murakami

2021 / Japan / 179 min

New York Press Contacts - Cinetic Marketing

Ryan Werner | ryan@cineticmedia.com

Julie Chappell | julie@cineticmedia.com

Los Angeles Press Contacts - Divergent PR

Josh Haroutunian | josh@divergentpr.com

DriveMyCar.Film

** Cannes Film Festival 2021 (WINNER OF THREE PRIZES INCLUDING BEST SCREENPLAY) **

** San Sebastian Film Festival 2021 **

** Melbourne International Film Festival 2021 **

** Toronto International Film Festival 2021 **

** Calgary International Film Festival 2021 **

** New York Film Festival 2021 **

** Vancouver International Film Festival 2021 **

** Edmonton International Film Festival 2021 **

** Hamptons International Film Festival 2021 **

** Mill Valley Film Festival 2021 **

** BFI London Film Festival 2021 **

** Chicago International Film Festival (WINNER-JURY PRIZE & AUDIENCE AWARD) 2021 **

** Middleburg Film Festival 2021 **

** Indie Memphis Film Festival (CENTERPIECE) 2021 **

** Montclair Film Festival 2021 **

** FilmColumbia 2021 **

** Philadelphia Film Festival (OPENING NIGHT-MASTERS OF CINEMA) 2021 **

** San Diego Asian Film Festival (CLOSING NIGHT) 2021 **

** Denver Film Festival 2021 **

** Hawai'i International Film Festival 2021 **

** Hamilton Film Festival 2021 **

** 2021 AFI Fest **

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Two years after his wife's unexpected death, Yusuke Kafuku (Hidetoshi Nishijima), a renowned stage actor and director, receives an offer to direct a production of *Uncle Vanya* at a theater festival in Hiroshima. There, he meets Misaki Watari (Toko Miura), a taciturn young woman assigned by the festival to chauffeur him in his beloved red Saab 900. As the production's premiere approaches, tensions mount amongst the cast and crew, not least between Yusuke and Koji Takatsuki, a handsome TV star who shares an unwelcome connection to Yusuke's late wife. Forced to confront painful truths raised from his past, Yusuke begins - with the help of his driver - to face the haunting mysteries his wife left behind. Adapted from Haruki Murakami's short story, Ryusuke Hamaguchi's *DRIVE MY CAR* is a haunting road movie traveling a path of love, loss, acceptance, and peace.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Yusuke Kafuku (Hidetoshi Nishijima) is a successful stage actor and director, married to the mysterious Oto (Reika Kirishima), a beautiful playwright with whom he shares a peaceful life, despite a deeply painful past. When Oto dies suddenly, Yūsuke is left with unanswered questions and regret over his inability to truly understand her - and his unwillingness to try.

Two years later, still struggling with Oto's passing, Yusuke accepts an offer to direct a production of *Uncle Vanya* in Hiroshima. He drives to the posting in his beloved fire red Saab 900, where, upon arrival, to his surprise and disappointment, he learns that for legal reasons, he will be forced to let Misaki Watari (Toko Miura), a young chauffeur concealing a traumatic past of her own, drive his car.

Rehearsals move forward and eventually Yūsuke and Misaki settle into a routine, with the Saab increasingly functioning as an unexpected confessional for both driver and passenger. Less comfortable for Yūsuke, however, is the decision he has made to cast as his lead Koji Takatsuki (Masaki Okada) a handsome young TV actor with an unwelcome connection to his late wife.

As the premiere approaches, tensions amongst the cast and crew rise, and Yūsuke's increasingly intimate conversations with Misaki force him to confront uncomfortable truths, and to unravel haunting mysteries left behind by his wife.

Winner of three awards including Best Screenplay at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival, and adapted from Haruki Murakami's short story of the same name, Ryusuke Hamaguchi's

DRIVE MY CAR is an engrossing mystery, a parable of human connection, and a road movie traveling the path of love, loss, acceptance and peace.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There are three reasons why I wanted to make a film based on Haruki Murakami's short story, "Drive My Car."

One is that it features Kafuku and Misaki, and depicts the interactions between these two intriguing characters. And these interactions take place inside a car. These depictions jogged my own memories of intimate conversations that are only born within that closed-off, moving space. Because it's a moving space, it's actually nowhere, and there are times when that place helps us discover aspects of ourselves that we've never shown anyone, or thoughts that we couldn't put into words before.

Next is that the short story deals with acting as its theme. To act is to hold multiple identities, which is a socially accepted form of insanity, so to speak. Doing it as a job is obviously grueling, and sometimes even causes meltdowns. But I know people who have no choice but to do it. And these people who act for a living are in fact healed by that insanity, which enables them to continue living. This type of acting done as a "way to survive" is something that I've been interested in for a long time.

The last factor is the ambiguous character named Takatsuki and the way his "voice" is depicted. Kafuku is fairly certain that Takatsuki slept with his wife before she passed away, and he deems the man as being "not an especially skilled actor." But one day, Takatsuki bares Kafuku's blind spot. "If we hope to truly see another person, we have to start by looking within ourselves," he says, and the reason why this fairly stereotypical comment devastates Kafuku is that he senses intuitively that it's a "truth" that he could never have reached on his own — "His words were clear and charged with conviction. He wasn't acting, that's for sure."

I thought, "I know voices like this. I've heard them before in real life." What's more, I knew that once you heard a voice like that, you could no longer be the same as before, and that you were obligated to reply to what that voice was asking you. The short story didn't go into what happened after that — I felt that Kafuku's reply had yet to be depicted.

When I began working on the film adaptation of this short story filled with such fascinating elements, my aim was to let these questions and answers unfold as a chain

of “voices” containing truth, as depicted in the story, to arrive at Kafuku’s final answer. This was also about creating an experience for the audience that allows them to continuously, intuitively sense the truth through the fiction that is acting.

Does the film DRIVE MY CAR manage to pull that off? I don’t know. I think the answer to that is something that will take a long time to arrive at.

What I can say at this point is that the time we spent filming this work was a happy one. All the characters — beginning with Kafuku as portrayed by Hidetoshi Nishijima — express pain, but what I sensed from every actor on the set was the joy of acting. So which ended up being shot by the camera? I sincerely look forward to seeing how the audience will interpret and react to this movie.

- Ryusuke Hamaguchi

* Quotes from “Drive My Car” are from Men Without Women by Haruki Murakami (Alfred A. Knopf; translated by Philip Gabriel and Theodore Goossen)

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI

Can you talk about the process of making two films during the pandemic?

WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY was an independent project that I started myself, and for me it was more of a preparation for a longer feature. While I was thinking about WHEEL, producer Teruhisa Yamamoto, who also produced ASAKO I & II, approached me about DRIVE MY CAR.

I really didn’t think I’d end up finishing the two films around the same time. I shot the second story of WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY, then I shot the first story, and I planned to shoot the last story whenever I could after I finished DRIVE MY CAR, and I wasn’t in any rush to finish. But ten days into shooting DRIVE MY CAR, the number of COVID-19 cases was climbing dramatically in Tokyo, and we had to shut down. We stopped shooting DRIVE MY CAR for eight months. In that interim, we were able to complete the third WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY story, because the production was much smaller. In the end, we completed the two films around the same time.

What did you see in Murakami’s story that made you feel that you could turn it into a compelling film?

Murakami's work is very difficult to adapt, because a lot of his stories balance realistic realms and unrealistic realms; that's difficult to show on film. And he often depicts the inner lives and feelings of the characters, which is also a challenge to translate on screen.

I had read "Drive My Car" when it was originally published. The story deals with this idea of an actor struggling to process his emotions, but also uses the car as a moving space where conversations happen, and where intimate moments are able to occur within these moving spaces. These were concepts that resonated with me, and when I read the story I felt a closeness with these ideas.

Was it a challenge to turn a single story into a fully fleshed out feature film?

In Japanese, the story is only 50 pages long, and it really wasn't enough material to make a feature film. The short story ends abruptly, too, and I felt like I needed to take that story somewhere beyond where it ends on the page. I reread the other stories in *Men Without Women*, the collection that "Drive My Car" is in, and there were two I felt I could incorporate into the same storyline: "Scheherezade" and "Kino." In "Scheherezade" there is a woman who tells stories after having sex, and I included that in Kafuku's wife's character. "Kino" presented a psychological course for its character, and where he's meant to end up. This journey in "Kino" inspired Kafuku's path.

But now that the film is done, I keep wondering, how did I even write this? In my writing process, I think I do share something with the way Murakami works. I let my subconscious do the work. I read and reread the original Murakami story as well as *Uncle Vanya*, and in each re-reading I would subconsciously collect ideas. Once I started writing, it felt like the necessary story elements would suddenly appear when it was necessary, so the writing process was smoother than expected.

What is it about being in the car that allows your characters to share such intimate details? And how did you try to stage these scenes so they stay visually interesting?

The way the space of a car creates intimate conversations is a mystery, but it has really happened to me in my life. When I was making documentaries with Ko Sadai, after the

earthquake and nuclear accident in 2011 (VOICES FROM THE WAVES and THE SOUND OF THE WAVES), we spent a lot of time in the car. I would sit in the front seat, talking to the driver, if only to make sure the driver didn't fall asleep. I realized, though, that we were often talking about things we wouldn't otherwise have felt comfortable talking about. I felt that the shared landscapes and environment around us were helping move the conversations along, in addition to the car creating a warm, safe, intimate space.

Visually, in a way, the picture itself starts to move because the space is moving. If you're just watching two people talk in a cafe, it's very different from watching two people talking in a car. No shot in a car is truly static; the landscape moving behind you becomes an integral part of the image. It's hypnotizing, in a way, and I think it helps the audience keep listening to what people are talking about. That also just happens in real life to people, the car space allows for talking to continue.

The film has a very striking visual style to it. Could you discuss your collaboration with Hidetoshi Shinomiya, your cinematographer?

Hidetoshi Shinomiya is very talented. He never gets in the way of the performances. He says specifically not to give direction or discuss blocking with the actors; he'll move the camera and move the lighting to meet the actors where they feel they need to be. He is somebody that won't take away from the performances that are there.

How did you settle on the film's two leads?

Hidetoshi Nishijima ("Yusuke Kafuku") is an actor I've been watching since my 20s. I've seen him in many films, films by Takashi Kitano and Kyoshi Kurosawa. I've always considered him a wonderful actor, and he's a huge star in Japan. He's an actor who is always listening and seeing and reacting to what's in front of him.

I never thought I'd get to work with him, but I found out he loved ASAKO I & II, so I took a chance and offered him the role, which he accepted.

Originally, I really had no idea who should play Misaki, until I was casting for WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY and I saw a photo of her, and I was interested in meeting her. Generally speaking, my auditions mean I just have a conversation with that person. Usually we talk for an hour. She was so bright, wise beyond her years. She'd been

working as an actor since she was a child, and she spent her whole childhood engaging and witnessing an adult world. Even though she had been auditioning for WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY, I thought she would be perfect for the role of Misaki.

We encountered an unexpected hurdle when we learned Toko didn't know how to drive! She didn't have a license. but I believed she would look like she would be able to learn quickly.

You spoke in a recent interview about your rehearsal process, which is very similar to how you have Kafuku rehearse with his cast in the film. Is that correct? If so, why do you rehearse that way?

Yes, Kafuku and I share the same process. I ask the actors to do readings to be done where there are no emotions involved. I got this idea from a short documentary about Jean Renoir's process when working with his actors. In that documentary, he says he does this to take away preconceived ideas of what the performance should be, and by doing that it allows for acting to develop. When people have a plan of how exactly they're going to act it, flattens the development of the character.

What is the importance of the multilingual theatre productions within the film?

While thinking about Kafuku as a character, I kept coming back to this question: what is he like as a director? I felt that he would be a director who tried to allow the process of acting to be very simple.

Usually plays are done in one language, where the words and meanings are understood by all the performers. But when you take away that meaning, the actors start to react to each other's sounds and body language instead, and the actors become more in-tune with that. The actors see and hear in different ways, which allows for more lively performances. A lot of the strength was drawn from Chekhov's material, but allowed for more raw reactions to come through, and that's very crucial.

How did you work with your composer on the score? I know that Jim O'Rourke plays on the score - how did he come on board?

Eiko Ishibashi was introduced to me through my producer. When I listened to her music, it reminded me of music by musicians I love, artists like Tortoise, and other Chicago bands. The thing about Eiko's music is that it tends to be really cool, not overly emotional, and I initially asked her to do the same here.

However, once the film's edit was complete, I started to think we needed music that could connect and be a bridge between the audience and the film. I wanted music that could make the audience feel safe and open. I went back to Eiko and asked for a little bit of emotion and I think she did a really great job with that. It wasn't overt or too sly, but just the right amount.

Jim O'Rourke lives in Japan right now and often collaborates with Eiko. They've worked together before. But it was only in watching the end credits that I learned Jim O'Rourke played a part there. My composer didn't tell me! It was such a pleasant surprise.

Did you get any pushback on the film's runtime? How did you settle on the right length?

At the beginning, the producers asked me not to make the film longer than two hours and 20 minutes, but then the first edit came in and it was three hours and 20 minutes. I remember panicking when we clocked that runtime, but I felt I could shave away 20 additional minutes. So then I showed my producer the three hour version. I was willing to cut more because producers are the ones taking on the financial risk of making a film. But they agreed with me: the story was fully complete with the three hour runtime. I was so grateful to be able to work with the producers who really understood me, and saw that Drive My Car could not be a minute shorter.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

RYUSUKE HAMAGUCHI - DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER

Ryusuke Hamaguchi was born in 1978. After graduating from the University of Tokyo, Hamaguchi spent several years working in the commercial film industry before entering the graduate program in film at Tokyo University of the Arts.

He made his festival debut in San Sebastian and Tokyo FILMeX in 2008 with his graduation film PASSION. He then directed the Japanese-Korean co-production THE DEPTHS (2010), INTIMACIES (2012), and a series of documentaries, THE TOHOKU TRILOGY (THE SOUND OF THE WAVES, VOICES FROM THE WAVES, and STORYTELLERS), co-directed by Ko Sakai, from 2011 to 2013.

Hamaguchi made his first major appearance on the global stage with HAPPY HOUR, his 317-minute feature film, which premiered at the Locarno International Film Festival and went on to win major awards at numerous festivals worldwide. He followed this up with ASAKO I & II, which debuted in Competition at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival to universal acclaim. Hamaguchi additionally served as the co-writer of Kiyoshi Kurosawa's WIFE OF A SPY, which won the Silver Lion at the 2020 Venice Film Festival.

In 2021, Hamaguchi's WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, where it won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize. His latest work, DRIVE MY CAR, premiered in Competition at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival where it was awarded the Best Screenplay Prize, the FIPRESCI International Critics' Prize, and the Ecumenical Jury Prize.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY:

2021: DRIVE MY CAR

2021: WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY

2018: ASAKO I & II

2016: HEAVEN IS STILL FAR AWAY (short)

2015: HAPPY HOUR

2013: TOUCHING THE SKIN OF EERINESS (short)

2013: STORYTELLERS (documentary) *co-director with Ko Sakai

2013: VOICES FROM THE WAVES: KESENUMA (documentary) *co-director with Ko Sakai

2013: VOICES FROM THE WAVES: SHINCHIMACHI (documentary) *co-director with Ko Sakai

2012: INTIMACIES

2011: THE SOUND OF THE WAVES (documentary) *co-director with Ko Sakai

2010: THE DEPTHS

2009: I LOVE THEE FOR GOOD (short)

2008: PASSION

CAST BIOS

Hidetoshi Nishijima - Yusuke Kafuka

Born in 1971 in Tokyo, Nishijima has worked on over sixty films and thirty TV drama series since 1994.

In 1999, Nishijima's first lead role was in LICENSE TO LIVE, a film directed by acclaimed Kiyoshi Kurosawa, in which Nishijima played a young man trying to find a normal way to live after coming out of a coma. It earned him the Best Actor Award at the Japan Professional Movie Awards. Nishijima also starred in DOLLS, directed by world-renowned Takeshi Kitano. The film was selected for Competition at the Venice International Film Festival in 2002.

CUT, directed by Amir Naderi, led Nishijima back to the Venice International Film Festival for the Orizzonti opening in 2011. Nishijima won the Best Actor Award at the Takasaki Film Festival for the performance of a struggling film director pursued by the mob while trying to raise money to make a movie.

In 2016, the Berlin International Film Festival screened two films Nishijima appeared in with two Japanese masters. In Wayne Wang's debut WHILE THE WOMEN ARE SLEEPING, Nishijima starred alongside Takeshi Kitano. The film premiered in the

Panorama section. Nishijima also starred in CREEPY, directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa, which premiered in the Berlinale Special.

Nishijima has also starred in Nobuhiro Suwa's VOICES IN THE WIND (2020), which won the Generation 14plus International Jury Prize Special Mention in Berlin.

Toko Miura - Misaki Watari

Miura was born in Hokkaido in 1996.

In 2002, Miura started her career as the second poster girl for the Suntory orange juice "Natchan!"

Her filmography includes OUR HUFF AND PUFF JOURNEY (2015, directed by Daigo Matsui), TSUKIKO (2017, directed by Michio Koshikawa), DYNAMITE GRAFFITI (2018, directed by Masanori Tominaga), ROMANCE DOLL (2020, directed by Yuki Tanada) and I SHALL LIVE BY MYSELF (2020, directed by Shuichi Okita) which premiered at the Busan International Film Festival 2020.

Miura also took part as a vocalist in the theme song for the anime film WEATHERING WITH YOU (2019, directed by Makoto Shinkai). Miura is an active singer and her first mini album "ASTERISK" was released in 2020.

Masaki Okada - Koshi Takatsuki

Okada was born in Tokyo in 1989 and started his career in 2006.

His filmography includes A GENTLE BREEZE IN THE VILLAGE (2007, directed by Nobuhiro Yamashita), SOMEBODY (2016, directed by Daisuke Miura), GINTAMA (2017, directed by Yuichi Fukuda), THE MANY FACES OF ITO (2018, directed by Ryuichi Hiroki), FAMILY STORY (2018, directed by Takeyoshi Yamamoto), UNDER THE STARS (2020, directed by Tatsushi Omori) and THE NIGHT BEYOND THE TRICORNERED WINDOW (2021, directed by Yukihiro Morigaki). His upcoming films are ARC (directed by Kei Ishikawa) and CUBE (directed by Yasuhiko Shimizu), which is a Japanese remake of Vincenzo Natali's 1997 film CUBE.

Reika Kirishima - Oto Kafuku

Kirishima was born in Niigata in 1972. She debuted as a model and started her career as an actress in 1988.

Her filmography includes A STRANGER OF MINE(2005, directed by Kenji Uchida), which premiered at the Cannes Critics' Week in 2005, PERMANENT NOBARA(2010, directed by Daihachi Yoshida, NORWEGIAN WOOD(2010, directed by Tran Anh Hung), which premiered at the Venice Film Festival Competition in 2010, BREAD OF HAPPINESS(2012, directed by Yukiko Mishima) and THE FAMILY PLAYING TOGETHER (2015, directed by Eiji Uchida).

She also appeared in the TV dramas "24 JAPAN"(2020-2021) and "No matter how dark the night is／Yoruga dorehodo kurakutemo" (2020).

CREDITS

Main Cast

Hidetoshi Nishijima - Yusuke Kafuku

Toko Miura - Misaki Watari

Masaki Okada - Koshi Takatsuki

Reika Kirishima - Oto Kafuku

Park Yurim - Lee Yoon-a

Jin Daeyeon - Kon Yoon-su

Main Crew

Directed by: Ryusuke Hamaguchi

Screenplay: Ryusuke Hamaguchi, Takamasa Oe

Based on the short story by: Haruki Murakami

Producer: Teruhisa Yamamoto

Associate Producers: Tamon Kondo, Eunyoung Lee

Executive Producers: Kazuo Nakanishi, Yuji Sadai

Cinematography: Hidetoshi Shinomiya

Lighting Director: Taiki Takai

Sound Operator: Izuta Kadoaki

Production Designer: Hyeonsun Seo

Set Decorator: Mami Kagamoto

Costume Designer: Haruki Koketsu

Hair & Make-up Artist: Haruko Ichikawa

Chief Assistant Directors: Naoki Watanabe , Takamasa Oe

Editor: Azusa Yamazaki

Music: Eiko Ishibashi

Re-Recording Mixer: Miki Nomura

Korean Coordinator: Mizi Kwon

Assistant Directors: Naoki Watanabe, Takamasa Oe

2nd Assistant Directors: Hayato Kawai , Hiroki Kubota

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Duration: 179 mn.

Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1

Format: 2K

Sound: 5.1

Year: 2021

Original language: Japanese, Korean, English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Indonesian, German, Malaysian

Country of production: Japan

Production Companies: C&I Entertainment Inc., Culture Entertainment Co., Ltd., Bitters End, Inc.

With the support of: The Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan through the Japan Arts Council