



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 72=

My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro)

Hayao Miyazaki, the co-founder and driving visionary behind Japan's Studio Ghibli, is renowned for his world-spinning, fecund and furious animated fantasies: across his 11 features he has conjured pre-modern and post-apocalyptic, undersea and above-the-clouds milieux teeming with angry earth gods and lost robots, apprentice witches and wracked wizards, flying pigs, runaway fish-girls and endless vivid bit-creations besides. (His Oscar-winner *Spirited Away*, nearby in this poll, spills forth a phantasmic bathhouse of troubled ghouls.)

My Neighbour Totoro is his less-is-more work: a pastoral, pantheist chamber drama, where the 'chamber' lies under the canopy of a great camphor tree that lords over the woods behind a tumbledown farmhouse. Into this adventure realm move two sisters, pre-school Mei and preteen Satsuke, with their inattentive dad, to be nearer their hospitalised mum. Each in turn encounters the spirit of the woods: a giant, furry, ovoid mammal with mighty powers of flying, horticulture and slumber. (He comes with two smaller surrogates, who may or may not indicate a further world of *totori*.)

The storytelling is as simple as Totoro is inscrutable, unfolding in a series of delightful, exquisitely constructed sequences: Satsuke and Mei discovering the farmhouse and its soot-sprite occupants; Mei tracking Totoro's minions to his lair; the tired children, waiting in the rain for their dad at a bus stop, finding Totoro waiting too – for a twinkle-eyed cat bus; a village-wide hunt for Mei after a misunderstood message from hospital leads her to run away. My favourite is the nocturne in which the girls and Totoros conjure shoots from acorns with an incantatory dance, then soar triumphant through the trees on a spinning top. There's no plot, just rousing impressions of innocence and experience.

So many films ask us to see the adult world through children's eyes; *My Neighbour Totoro* summons wilder, wide-eyed wonder at the forces that inform us: life, nature, connection, change. And, of course, it hymns the uplift of imagination, with Joe Hisaishi's entrancing synth tunes essential to the magic.

The film got two votes in *Sight and Sound's* 2002 poll, 11 in 2012. A swift hit in Japan, it has spread its spell steadily across the world ever since; a third of a century after its release, many younger critics have grown up with it. It's clearly an antidote to urbanisation and technology, and a rebuke to a world of environmental breakdown. It's also a comfort and a reassurance that shows we still have artists who can create something timeless.

Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

My Neighbour Totoro is my favourite film. I would not change, add or remove a single frame. It is perfect as it stands, a shining moment in the career of a great director when everything was at its peak. Miyazaki Hayao's skills in almost every aspect of animation are justly renowned, and nothing showcases

them better than this film, so beautiful that every frame could hang on the walls of a gallery. (Many have done so, more than once.) Studio Ghibli produced this at the same time as *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), a pair of masterpieces on childhood and innocence exploring memories from the directors' pasts. Miyazaki made some beautiful films after *Totoro*, but none would ever capture so honestly and precisely the glorious, unfathomable, heart-breaking fragility of a child's world.

Totoro is among the simplest of films, one of very few with the courage to tell a child's story from a child's viewpoint at a child's pace. Time is intensely important, but not fixed; it is measured by adult things, like watches or bus schedules, or by the movement of light across childhood afternoons. Two young sisters move with their father to the country to be near the hospital where their mother is being treated for a nameless illness that never quite goes away. The hospital is named for the one where Miyazaki's mother was treated for spinal tuberculosis when he was a child. There is no villain, only the tiny conflicts all children experience. The girls discover the magic of nature and the unobtrusive kindness of the rural community. The older sister learns that death is not a man in a black hat, an enemy to be fought, but a fact of life that changes it forever, although its beauty endures.

This is a film in which everything that will ever be important happens without anything much happening at all. Every frame is packed with life – intensely observed, scrupulously presented, passionately loved. *Totoro*'s forest remains evergreen because there is more intensity and passion invested in any given frame than some franchises muster across an expensive multi-part run. The film's initial lack of box-office success gave way to a long run as Ghibli's biggest earner, largely by turning that dedication and commitment to making something beautiful into a delightful range of merchandise.

The woods, valleys and small farms that Miyazaki documents with such a depth of tenderness have now been built over, swallowed by the expansion of Tokyo. *Totoro*, however, endures, a remembered dream flying across a sky of perfect blue in a landscape that will never fade or die. If Miyazaki had never made another film, he would still be one of the greatest of all directors.

Helen McCarthy, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2020

Studio Ghibli was established after the success of *Nausicaä: Valley of the Wind* (1984) specifically for the production of Hayao Miyazaki's follow-up, the Swiftian tale of airborne adventure, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986). However, it was the double-billing of his next title with Isao Takahata's tonally quite different *Grave of the Fireflies* that really cemented the position of Japan's best-loved animation house on its home turf.

Ironically, at the time, *My Neighbour Totoro* was seen as the lesser of the pair. Nevertheless, this touching tale of two sisters who move with their father to a rickety wooden house in the country to be closer to their mother convalescing in a nearby hospital has gone on to achieve classic status. A celebration of the childhood imagination, it retains a freshness and originality that appears almost naive to modern viewers, and can be described (alongside 1992's *Porco Rosso*) as the most personal and heartfelt of Miyazaki's creations, with its setup stemming from an episode from his own youth when his mother was bed-bound with spinal tuberculosis.

A rich fantasy world beneath the ordinary is unveiled before our eyes as the girls explore their new environment, full of tiny spider-like creatures scuttling

through the rafters and other strange supernatural beings invisible to adults. These include the huge woolly beastie of the title, hidden deep within the nearby forest, who would become the most iconic of Ghibli's creations.

Jasper Sharp, bfi.org.uk, 27 March 2014

MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORO (TONARI NO TOTORO)

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Production Companies: Studio Ghibli, Tokuma Group

Executive Producer: Yasuyoshi Tokuma

Producer: Toru Hara

Line Producer: Eiko Tanaka

Assistant Director: Tetsuya Endo

Screenplay: Hayao Miyazaki

Production Camera Supervisor: Hisao Shirai

Supervising Animator: Yoshiharu Sato

Editor: Takeshi Seyama

Art Director: Kazuo Oga

Music: Joe Hisaishi

Sound Director: Shigeharu Shiba

Voice Cast

Noriko Hidaka (*Satsuki*)

Chika Sakamoto (*Mei*)

Hitoshi Takagi (*Totoro*)

Toshiyuki Amagasa (*Kanta*)

Shigeru Chiba (*Kusakari-Otoko*)

Shigesato Itoi (*Tatsuo Kusakabe*)

Sumi Shimamoto (*Yasuko Kusakabe*)

Reiko Suzuki (*Roba*)

Machiko Washio (*Sensei*)

Akiko Hiramatsu

Masashi Hirose

Tanie Kitabayashi

Chie Kojiro

Yuko Maruyama

Yuko Mizutani

Daiki Nakamura

Tomohiro Nishimura

Tarako

Naoki Tatsuta

Ikue Otani

Japan 1988

86 mins

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

The General Sun 1 Jan 12:10; Sun 29 Jan 15:10

The Leopard (Il gattopardo)

Sun 1 Jan 14:10; Thu 5 Jan 18:40; Fri 20 Jan 14:00

Sunset Boulevard Sun 1 Jan 15:50; Fri 27 Jan 14:30; Mon 30 Jan 17:50

Metropolis Sun 1 Jan 17:55 (+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI Curator);

Sun 15 Jan 14:40; Mon 30 Jan 16:30 BFI IMAX

L'avventura (The Adventure)

Sun 1 Jan 18:05; Sun 22 Jan 15:20; Mon 30 Jan 20:15

Touki-Bouki Mon 2 Jan 13:40; Tue 31 Jan 17:40

The Red Shoes Mon 2 Jan 13:50; Tue 24 Jan 18:05

Once Upon a Time in the West (C'era una volta il West)

Mon 2 Jan 15:20; Sat 7 Jan 17:15; Sun 15 Jan 16:15 BFI IMAX

Get Out Mon 2 Jan 18:40; Fri 6 Jan 17:50

Pierrot le Fou Tue 3 Jan 18:10; Wed 4 Jan 20:30; Thu 19 Jan 20:30

My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro)

Tue 3 Jan 18:20; Sun 22 Jan 10:00 BFI IMAX; Sat 28 Jan 13:40

A Man Escaped (Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé)

Tue 3 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 20:30

Black Girl (La Noire de...) Tue 3 Jan 20:30; Thu 12 Jan 18:15 (+ intro)

Ugetsu Monogatari Tue 3 Jan 20:50; Tue 17 Jan 20:30

Madame de... Wed 4 Jan 14:30; Fri 20 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, Cultural Programme Manager)

Yi Yi (A One and a Two...) Wed 4 Jan 18:40; Sun 22 Jan 14:00 (+ intro by Hyun Jin Cho, Film Programmer, BFI Festivals)

The Shining

Fri 6 Jan 20:10; Tue 10 Jan 20:10; Sat 21 Jan 20:30 BFI IMAX

Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi)

Sat 7 Jan 12:10; Sun 22 Jan 12:30 BFI IMAX

Tropical Malady (Sud pralad) Sat 7 Jan 13:50; Mon 9 Jan 20:40

Histoire(s) du cinema Sat 7 Jan 16:30

Blue Velvet

Sat 7 Jan 20:30; Fri 20 Jan 20:35; Tue 24 Jan 21:00 BFI IMAX

Sátántangó Sun 8 Jan 11:15; Sat 21 Jan 13:30

Celine and Julie Go Boating (Céline et Julie vont en bateau)

Sun 8 Jan 14:45; Sat 21 Jan 17:00

Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)

Sun 8 Jan 18:20; Mon 23 Jan 14:30; Fri 27 Jan 20:50

Parasite (Gisaengchung) Mon 9 Jan 17:50; Wed 18 Jan 17:30 BFI IMAX

The Gleaners and I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse) + La Jetée

Wed 11 Jan 20:30; Mon 23 Jan 18:10

A Matter of Life and Death Thu 12 Jan 20:40; Sun 22 Jan 11:30

Chungking Express (Chung Him sam lam)

Thu 12 Jan 20:45; Tue 17 Jan 20:50; Sat 21 Jan 14:15

Modern Times Fri 13 Jan 17:45; Sun 22 Jan 13:10

A Brighter Summer Day (Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian)

Mon 16 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 16:00

Imitation of Life Wed 18 Jan 20:30; Wed 25 Jan 14:30; Sun 29 Jan 12:30

The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena)

Thu 19 Jan 18:00; Sat 28 Jan 13:50

Sansho the Bailiff (Sansho Dayu) Fri 20 Jan 17:45; Thu 26 Jan 17:50

Andrei Rublev Thu 26 Jan 18:40; Sun 29 Jan 17:20

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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