



NEW RELEASES

The Boy and the Heron

The Boy and the Heron (Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka)

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Production Company: Studio Ghibli

Producer: Toshio Suzuki

Screenplay: Hayao Miyazaki

Original Score: Joe Hisaishi

Japanese Cast:

Soma Santoki (*Mahito Maki*)

Masaki Suda (*Grey Heron*)

Ko Shibasaki (*Kiriko*)

AIMYON (*Lady Himi*)

Yoshino Kimura (*Natsuko*)

Takuya Kimura (*Shoichi Maki*)

Keiko Takeshita (*Izumi*)

Jun Fubuki (*Utako*)

Sawako Agawa (*Eriko*)

Karen Takizawa (*Warawara*)

Shinobu Otake (*Aiko*)

Jun Kunimura (*The Parakeet King*)

Kaoru Kobayashi (*Noble Pelican*)

Shohei Hino (*grand-uncle*)

English Cast:

Christian Bale (*Shoichi Maki*)

Dave Bautista (*The Parakeet King*)

Gemma Chan (*Natsuko*)

Willem Dafoe (*Noble Pelican*)

Karen Fukuhara (*Lady Himi*)

Mark Hamill (*grand-uncle*)

Robert Pattinson (*Grey Heron*)

Florence Pugh (*Kiriko*)

Luca Padovan (*Mahito Maki*)

Mamoudou Athie, Tony Revolori, Dan Stevens

(*the parakeets*)

Japan 2023

124 mins

Digital

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Toshio Suzuki (Producer and Studio Ghibli President/Co-founder) on 'The Boy and the Heron'

You and Miyazaki have spoken before about wanting each new film to betray audience expectations of Studio Ghibli, and while The Boy and the Heron has many familiar notes and even characters, it also involves a lot of strange twists and changes of tone. And while it may not be so surprising for Miyazaki to make a new film when he said he wouldn't, it is unusual to suggest you're adapting a book and then not really do so. How did the film start and how did it arrive in its final shape?

When he was going to make this film, Miyazaki told me he wanted to change his environment: no TV, no newspaper. He wanted to isolate himself from all outside information, to not know what was happening in the world. I was to inform him only if something big happened. So while he was working on the film, he wasn't really aware of the Covid pandemic, nor the Ukraine-Russia war. I had to tell him about these huge, awful topics.

He also tried very hard to forget his past films. He really wanted to start from scratch, from a blank canvas. He told me that was very important. By doing so, he felt, he would come to understand what he truly wanted to make in a film. So he and I would meet twice a week in the morning and chat for two hours. And through those meetings he said he would like to tell his own story in a way that he'd never done before.

He also told me that with many of his past works, the protagonists are girls. And it's easy for him to write stories about female characters because he is not female – so there is a mysteriousness that comes with the protagonist. Whereas a male protagonist, because Miyazaki is also a male, it makes it harder for him. The only way he could do it is to make it autobiographical.

So in writing a story about a boy – and it's essentially about himself – not everything that you tell can be all bright and good. You have to show the darker side of yourself too. The original novel, *How Do You Live?*, is about a child facing not only positives but also the negatives in the world. And in the film there is a scene where Mahito hits himself with a rock – self-harm, basically. So Miyazaki was trying to capture that element inside himself where he was trying to overcome his darker emotions. That was a big thing for him. What's interesting in what came out of that is that some of the film has some similarities with his past work, and it's not because it was a culmination or reflection of all his past work. Miyazaki was able to forget everything he had done, but he was doing what he was good at, so naturally you see some similarities with some of his past works.

In his proposal notes he writes about wanting to make a film that could anticipate changes in the world. It's also his second film in a row that takes us back to his own childhood and a time of war. Was there a sense he was distilling his memories and experience for future generations?

The film isn't about conveying a legacy so much as about introspection. Miyazaki wanted to look back at his life and his journey: to tell the story of him from child to adult and who he met, the people who made an impact on him.

NEW RELEASES

Priscilla (preview screenings)

Previews from Wed 27 Dec. Opens Fri 5 Jan

The Boy and the Heron (Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka)

From Wed 27 Dec

SCALA!!! Or, the Incredibly Strange Rise and Fall of the World's Wildest Cinema and How It Influenced a Mixed-up Generation of Weirdos and Misfits

From Fri 5 Jan

Werner Herzog: Radical Dreamer

From Fri 19 Jan

RE-RELEASES

The Red Shoes

From Fri 8 Dec

The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser

(Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle)

From Fri 19 Jan

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 15 Jan 18:20

Preview: The End We Start From

+ Q&A with guests tbc

Mon 15 Jan 20:30

Preview: All of Us Strangers

+ Q&A with Andrew Haigh

Wed 17 Jan 18:10

Rock 'n' Roll Cinema

Thu 18 Jan 18:15

In Conversation: Cartoon Saloon's

Tomm Moore, Nora Twomey and Paul Young

Sun 21 Jan 15:15

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

Your Fat Friend + Q&A with director Jeanie Finlay

and Aubrey Gordon

Sat 27 Jan 17:50

Shooting the Past 25th Anniversary + Q&A with

writer-director Stephen Poliakoff and actors

Lindsay Duncan and Timothy Spall

Sun 28 Jan 15:00

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Obviously he wanted to make an entertaining film too, but every time he makes a film, every character is based on a real-life person. When I look at them I can tell where the inspiration for the characters comes from. For instance, the mysterious grand-uncle in the film is based on Isao Takahata [the late co-founder of Studio Ghibli with Miyazaki and Suzuki], who was Miyazaki's senior, and a huge inspiration to him as an animation director. Are you too in this one?

I'm the heron. Every time Miyazaki makes a film, he writes these storyboards and will show them to me and ask me what I think. This time I was going through the storyboards and saw the grey heron, a key character and an interesting one, so I said that and asked who it was based on. Miyazaki's response was: 'No, no, no, it's not based on anyone.' But it's quite obvious. I've known him for 45 years; he cannot deceive me.

How did Miyazaki and his team find the style of the film, especially with its profusion of birdlife? Were there particular collaborators you needed to bring in to achieve that?

Miyazaki would come up with the storyboards, and he already has finished animation in his mind when he comes up with them. Usually he would serve as the supervising animator too, but on this film he had Takeshi Honda [a key animator on Gorō Miyazaki's *Tales of Earthsea*, 2006, and *From up on Poppy Hill*, 2011] in that role. So he didn't have to animate all the storyboards himself but in a way went further and drew some things he wouldn't have animated himself.

It was obvious from the storyboards that this film was going to take time to produce, with all of the birds and everything. I had a conversation with Honda about it so that he knew he had plenty of time, no deadline: he could move forward based on Miyazaki's storyboards. Apart from Honda, a lot of the animators were people who worked on Ghibli films in the past. So Honda would direct them, then take the results back to Miyazaki, and there would be some animation Miyazaki would like, some he wouldn't: it was based on his taste. But because he had Honda, Miyazaki just went full on with his vision in his storyboards. He was interested in seeing what Honda would come up with, and that was quite interesting to watch.

Joe Hisaishi's score is unusually minimalistic.

That came from Joe Hisaishi himself: he wanted to do a score based on minimalist music. As you know, minimalist music is based on loops and repetition, so it's not very dramatic. It's rare an epic film would have a minimalistic score. I personally wasn't sure we should go in that direction, and felt maybe in some scenes we should make it more dramatic. But Joe was pretty adamant, so we said, 'OK, let's try it.' And as a result we came up with a score of entirely minimalist music, which I think might be the first time for an animation film.

Do you have a favourite scene?

There's a lot of character animation in this film, but my favourite scene is where the middle-aged guy comes out of the bird. You couldn't really create that with CG, so that had a big impact on me.

Interview by Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2023-24