

MONSTER

怪物

(Original Title: Kaibutsu)

126 min / Japan / 2023 / 2.39:1 / 7.1ch+5.1ch

Director's Statement

Sakamoto Yuji, who I worked with for the first time on this film, is the screenwriter I mostly respect out of all other screenwriters who are still active today. I'm a bit older than him, but we lived through the same eras, breathing in the same air under the murky sky as he continued his storytelling. We wrote about neglect, criminal offenders, and pseudo families. Our stories have similar topics and themes even though we wrote them at different points

in time. However, we took our own distinct ways of delivering them. It was like inhaling the same air but exhaling it differently.

This time, Sakamoto and I made a movie by coordinating our breathing. The story portrays an incident involving children at a small school in a small regional city in Japan and the small sparks of fire that create a huge rift and divide among the people who live there. I joined the development of the screenplay in 2019 after an invite from Producer Kawamura Genki. It was before the world was turned upside down by the COVID pandemic, but I'm surprised that the story turned out to reflect the rift we now see between people, countries and ethnic groups around the world.

Working for the first time with this team of a screenwriter, producers, and Ryuichi Sakamoto, a musician who I'd always wanted to work with, we were able to make an amazing movie that makes me proud.

Director Kore-eda Hirokazu

April 21, 2023

Synopsis

When her young son Minato starts to behave strangely, his mother feels that there is something wrong. Discovering that a teacher is responsible, she storms into the school demanding to know what's going on. But as the story unfolds through the eyes of mother, teacher and child, the truth gradually emerges.

Crew Profile

Director: KORE-EDA Hirokazu

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

In 1995, his directorial debut, "Maborosi", based on the original novel written by Miyamoto Teru, won the 52nd Venice International Film Festival's Golden Osella. "After Life" (1998), distributed in over 30 countries, brought Kore-eda internationally acclaimed.

In 2001, "Distance" was selected in Competition at the Cannes Film Festival, and with his fourth work "Nobody Knows" (2004), Yagira Yuya garnered much attention for becoming the youngest person to ever 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, received high appraisals from around the world.

In 2009, "Air Doll" was world premiered at Un Certain Regard of 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 first directorial debut for TV series "Going Home". His latest film "Like Father, Like Son" (2013), winning 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 record of his past films in many territories.

In 2015, "Our Little Sister" premiered in Competition at the Cannes Film Festival, and received five awards including Best Film and Best Director at Japan Academy Prize, as well as the Jury Prize at the San Sebastian Film Festival.

In 2016, "After The Storm" premiered at Un Certain Regard of the Cannes Film Festival. In

2017, "The Third Murder" premiered in Competition at the 52nd Venice International Film Festival. In 2018, "Shoplifters" won the Palme d'Or at the 71st Cannes Film Festival, the Best Foreign Film at the 44th Cesar and many other awards, moreover it was nominated for the

91st Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. His first feature shot outside Japan "La Vérité" with two French film legends, Catherine Deneuve and Juliette Binoche, is the opening film in Competition of the 76th Venice International Film Festival. In 2022, his first Korean film "Broker" won the Ecumenical Jury Prize and also Song Kang-Ho the Best Actor Award, the first award for a Korean actor, at the 75th Cannes Film Festival.

He has also produced films for young Japanese directors. "Kakuto", directed by Iseya Yusuke, was premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam 2003. "Wild Berries" (2003) was written and directed by Nishikawa Miwa who later had her second feature "Sway" premiered at the Director ' s Fortnight at Cannes in 2006. "Ending Note: Death of a Japanese Salesman" (2011) by Sunada Mami brought tears to the audience around world.

Screenplay by SAKAMOTO Yuji

Born in Osaka in 1967. He made his screenwriting debut at the age of 19 after winning the 1st Fuji TV Young Scenario Award. He has written award-winning scripts for many popular TV dramas, including "Our Textbook", "Still, Life Goes On", "Matrimonial Chaos", "Mother", "Woman", and "Quartet", and many of his works have been remade overseas. His recent works include "Anone", "My Dear Exes", and "Love with a Case". His filmography includes "We Made

a Beautiful Bouquet" (2021) starring Masaki Suda and Kasumi Arimura, which was a big hit in Asian markets.

Music by Ryuichi SAKAMOTO

Ryuichi Sakamoto was a composer, producer, and artist born in Tokyo. Sakamoto's diverse re'sume' includes pioneering electronic works in the legendary techno group Yellow Magic Orchestra, producing pop albums and numerous classical compositions, two operas, and nearly 45 original film/TV scores.

As a film-score composer, he won the BAFTA Award for Best Film Music for "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence" (1983), and his music for "The Last Emperor" (1987) won him world-acclaimed music awards including the Academy Award for Best Original Score, the Golden Globe and Grammy awards. His major film score credits include "The Sheltering Sky" (1990), "High Heels" (1991), "Femme Fatale" (2002), "Tony Takitani" (2004), "The Revenant" (2015), "Rage" (2016), "The Fortress" (2017), "Your Face" (2018), "MINAMATA" (2020), and "After Yang" (2021).

On January 17th, 2023, his 71st birthday, Ryuichi released "12", his 15th solo album. The album is a collection of 12 songs selected from musical sketches recorded like a sound diary during his two-and-a-half-year battle with cancer. Ryuichi Sakamoto passed away in March 2023 at the age of 71. "Monster" was the last film for which he provided original score.

Cast Profile

ANDO Sakura as Mugino Saori

Born on February 18, 1986 in Tokyo, Japan. Ando made her film debut in her father Okuda Eiji's "Out of the Wind" in 2007. In 2008, Sono Sion's "Love Exposure" made its international premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival, and won her various national awards. In 2014, her performance in Take Masaharu's "100 Yen Love" and Ando Momoko's "0.5mm" won Ando many awards including Best Leading Actress at the Japan Academy Prize. Palme d'Or winning "Shoplifters" (2018) marked her first appearance in a Kore-eda film and her performance earned high praise from all over the world and brought her numerous awards including Best Leading Actress at the Japan Academy Prize. She also won Best Supporting Actress at the same prize for Ishikawa Kei's "A Man" (2022) which premiered at Venice Film Festival.

NAGAYAMA Eita as Hori Michitoshi

Born in Tokyo in 1982. He made his film debut in "Blue Spring" (2002) and played his first leading role in "Summer Time Machine Blues" (2005). His major film credits include "Dear Doctor" (2009), "Tada's Do-it-all House" franchise (2011, 2014), "Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai" (2011), "Train Brain Express" (2012), "SIX FOUR: Part 1 and Part 2" (2016), "The Ringside Story"

(2017), "Mixed Doubles" (2017), "My Friend 'A'" (2018), and "In the Wake" (2021).

KUROKAWA Soya as Muginō Minato

Born in Saitama in 2009. He made his acting debut in the NTV drama "Tokyo Alien Bros." (2018) and has since appeared in various TV dramas. "Monster" marks his first appearance in a film. His other TV drama credits include "Hanataka Yuuetsukan #104" (2018), "Emergency Interrogation Room" (2019), "Scary True Stories" (2019), "Mr. Frog the Serial Killer" (2020), "Kiyoshiko" (2021), "Yonimo Kimyou na Monogatari 'Skip'" (2021), and "Kenjusho: Mitsukuni Ko to Ore" (2021).

HIIRAGI Hinata as Hoshikawa Yori

Born in Kyoto in 2011. He made his acting debut in the ytv/NTV drama "My Murderous Intent Was In Love" (2021). He then appeared in "Dearest" (2021) and "Don't Call it Mystery" (2022), as well as in the NHK's drama serial "Come Come Everybody" (2022). He received attention for his performance as a boy suffering from heart disease in "PICU: Pediatric Intensive Care Unit" (2022). "Monster" marks his first appearance in a film.

TANAKA Yuko as Fushimi Makiko

Born in Osaka in 1955. Tanaka won numerous awards for her leading role in the 1983 film "Amagi Pass", including Best Actress Award at the Montreal World Film Festival, Blue Ribbon Award for Best Actress, Kinema Junpo Award for Best Actress, and Mainichi Film Award for Best Actress. In the same year, she portrayed the adult protagonist in the NHK drama series "Oshin" which achieved record-breaking ratings and gained worldwide popularity. In 1997, she voiced Lady Eboshi for Miyazaki Hayao's "Princess Mononoke". In 2005, her performance in "The Milkwoman" and "Hi-bi: Days of Fire" won her Kinema Junpo Award for Best Actress, Hochi Film Award for Best Actress, and Mainichi Film Award for Best Actress. She has also appeared numerous TV dramas including "Mother", "Woman", "Anone", and "Love with a Case" written by Sakamoto Yuji.

Production Notes

◇ Inception of the project

◇ Tag team of Kore-eda Hirokazu & Sakamoto Yuji

"I think it was 2019 when Producer Kawamura Genki contacted me."

Kore-eda Hirokazu recalls how he first learned of the project.

At the time, Producers Kawamura and Yamada Kenji had started developing a feature-length movie based on a long plot written by Sakamoto. Kore-eda was informed of this project when Sakamoto mentioned that he wanted Kore-eda to direct it.

Kore-eda and Sakamoto were in touch with each other before this. They started communicating on social media and had a face-to-face discussion for the first time in 2015, after which they met again in person a number of times.

Each time Kore-eda was asked which screenwriter he'd like to make a movie with, he always answered, "Sakamoto Yuji." Kore-eda says, "Obviously because I can't write a screenplay like his. And..."

"Ever since Sakamoto stepped into the limelight with 'Tokyo Love Story' (1991), he proceeded straight down the middle of mainstream TV drama. But I was surprised when I watched 'Our

Textbook' (2007). Despite being the industry's frontrunner for such a long time, he shifted the tone of his writing to that extent. I respected him for trying to evolve and challenging himself to new things. 'Still, Life Goes On' (2011) was what completely won me over. I was amazed by the way he brilliantly interpreted the difficult theme about an offender's family into a drama series. I've been a Sakamoto groupie since then (lol)."

This project was presented to Kore-eda just at the time when he felt he'd reached his limit in writing his own screenplays and characters. "Sakamoto has created many characters that I couldn't have. So I was very happy when they came to me with the project."

Kore-eda, who read the long plot and met with Sakamoto and the producers, decided to direct the film.

◇Screenplay

Kore-eda, Kawamura, Yamada, and Sakamoto met face to face numerous times and frequently exchanged their ideas through email as Sakamoto wrote the screenplay. The story more or less remained the same as the original plot, but the first draft of the screenplay would've made the runtime around three hours. Sakamoto repeated the process of omitting and reinstating parts of the story. He took his time to complete the final version amidst the

COVID pandemic that delayed its progress. He continued to work on it until right before the filming started in early 2022.

The casting was conducted at the same time the screenplay was being written. The choice of actors created more depth to the characters, and the screenplay became clearer and more solid. Kore-eda, who witnessed the process, was impressed by the way Sakamoto improved his screenplay. In particular, when Tanaka Yuko was cast as Fushimi, the elementary school principal, Sakamoto added new important scenes that created even more depth to the story.

It is Kore-eda's first time since his debut with "Maborosi" (1995) that he directs a film with a screenplay he didn't write himself. However, he joined the "scenario hunts" (to help develop the screenplay) to Suwa in Nagano prefecture where the story takes place, and because of the many months it took to finalize it, by the time the filming started, he says, "It didn't feel like someone else wrote it."

He comments about the difference between his own screenplays and the one Sakamoto wrote this time.

"This story is extremely solid with multiple chapters. The stories I usually write are slices of life. I portray a certain sequence of events in a character's life and have the viewers imagine what happened before and might happen later. I wouldn't call it storytelling. There are some scenes in this film that are supported by the power of presentation, but it's basically a

narrative film. The storyline is very sound and sturdy.”

◇Filming

The shooting script of a Kore-eda film often gets revised on the set, and printouts that indicate the revisions are handed out to the cast and crew. Sakamoto had told Kore-eda that he could revise the script and dialogues on the set if he wanted to, but the director took a different stance.

“I thought it’d be difficult to add a new dialogue that suddenly popped up in my mind during the shoot to Sakamoto’s screenplay. So there were hardly any script revisions on the spot. I ended up adjusting a part of the lines and some actions on the set, but I got Sakamoto’s approval before I made any changes.”

In addition to the fact that there were hardly any script revisions on the spot, the directions to the children were another thing that was different in this shoot. In previous Kore-eda films including “Nobody Knows” (2004), the script was not handed out to the children, who were verbally taught their lines on the set. Kore-eda says, “But I thought it wasn’t the right method for this screenplay.”

“The style of the dialogues was different from my screenplays, and the characters were more complicated, so I thought I had to change the way the children got into character. I considered

various approaches and realized something significant, which was the way they memorized their lines. During the audition, I tried verbally teaching them the lines like before, but it seemed like Kurokawa Soya and Hiiragi Hinata, the two stars in this film, were more comfortable reading the script beforehand to act their parts. I'm not trying to force my method onto every actor. Everyone has their own way to deliver their best performance, and this time I thought it was better to have them read the script in advance. I think it worked out well."

Kore-eda, who shot the film with a screenplay that wasn't his own, was able to calmly and objectively capture each scene.

"I constantly doubt my screenplay during a shoot, but with someone else's screenplay, the set looked so clear since I didn't have to relive the trials and errors of writing it. I had a lot of fun during this shoot, thanks to Sakamoto's outstanding screenplay."

◇Cast

Ando Sakura who plays Saori, one of the main characters, appears in a Kore-eda film for the second time after "Shoplifters" (2018).

"Ando is a bottomless actress. I didn't think I'd reached the very depth of her talent in 'Shoplifters', so I was waiting for the opportunity to work with her again. But I still can't see

the bottom (lol).”

Kore-eda says she brilliantly portrayed how a kind, devoted mother can't stop herself from displaying emotions she can't contain.

Nagayama Eita, who appears for the first time in a Kore-eda film, plays another protagonist, Hori, the homeroom teacher of Saori's son, Minato.

“I've always wanted to work with Eita. Hori's character was modeled after him. I think Eita was the only person who could've understood and conveyed Hori's creepiness with such charm, like he did in 'Matrimonial Chaos' (2013), a drama series Sakamoto wrote. He has a very deep understanding of Sakamoto's screenplays.”

Regarding Tanaka Yuko, who also appears in a Kore-eda film for the first time, he remarks, “She always had a special place in my heart.”

“She was amazing in Sakamoto's TV drama as well as dramas by Kuze Teruhiko based on novels authored by Mukoda Kuniko, but the one that left the strongest impression on me was 'Omoide Zukuri' (1981) written by Yamada Taichi. Since then, she's always had a special place in my heart in a different way from Kiki Kilin, so I was nervous working with her. Every gesture she makes and every pause in her lines are raw and relevant. Yet she delivers the humanness of her characters. It's mind-blowing.”

Kurokawa Soya who plays Minato, Saori's son, and Hiiragi Hinata who plays Yori, Minato's

classmate in elementary school, landed their roles in an audition.

“Kurokawa was extremely sensitive and used his emotions to get into character. On the other hand, Hiiragi memorized his lines as if he took a mental picture of them, so his performance didn’t change even if the situation did. They were two different types of actors who had great chemistry. Since they were so good, my only job on the set was to create an environment that naturally allowed them to deliver their understanding of **each other.**”

◇Music

“The collaboration I dreamed of for many years finally came true.”

Kore-eda speaks of Ryuichi Sakamoto, who composed the soundtrack. The director had been vying for a chance to ask Sakamoto for his music, which unfortunately never materialized. Until now.

In his previous projects, Kore-eda envisioned the musical instruments based on the music he was listening to at the time he was writing the screenplay. Then he requested the scores to a musician with the particular talent.

“This time, I had no certain kind of music in mind since I didn’t write the screenplay. But during the shoot and editing, I was listening to Ryuichi Sakamoto’s piano music in my hotel room and thought I couldn’t make this movie without it.”

Kore-eda sent Ryuichi Sakamoto a letter of request as well as roughly-edited footage with Sakamoto's music playing in the background. Sakamoto responded that he'll accept the job although he doesn't have enough energy to do the entire soundtrack, but he also said a melody or two had formed in his mind.

In the end, the soundtrack comprises two new tracks that Ryuichi Sakamoto composed specifically for this film, as well as those from his previous albums, including his latest, "12".

"If Ryuichi Sakamoto had turned me down, I would've had to change the fundamental concept of my direction. I'm ecstatic that the man whose music and other activities I respect provided his music for this film."

Credit

Directed and Edited by : KORE-EDA Hirokazu

Screenplay by : SAKAMOTO Yuji

Music by : Ryuichi SAKAMOTO

ANDO Sakura

NAGAYAMA Eita

KUROKAWA Soya

HIIRAGI Hinata

TANAKA Yuko

Executive Producers : ICHIKAWA Minami

OOTA Toru

Tom YODA

USHIODA Hajime

KORE-EDA Hirokazu

Co-Executive Producer : USUI Hisashi

Produced by : KAWAMURA Genki

YAMADA Kenji

Producers : BANSE Megumi

ITO Taichi

TAGUCHI Hijiri

Associate Producer : MATSUZAKI Kaoru

Director of Photography : KONDO Ryuto

Lighting by : OSHITA Eiji

Production Sound & Re-recording Mixer : TOMITA Kazuhiko

Supervising Sound editor & Foley artist : OKASE Akihiko

Production Designer : MITSUMATSU Keiko

Set Designer : SEO Hyeonsun

Set Decorator : SAHARA Atsushi

YAMAMOTO Nobuki

Costume Designer : KUROSAWA Kazuko

Stylist : ITO Mieko

Hair & Make-up Artist : SAKAI Mutsuki

Casting by : TABATA Toshie

Script Supervisor : OSHIDA Tomoko

Assistant Director : MORIMOTO Shoichi

Production Manager : GOTO Ichiro

Line Producer : WATANABE Eiji

Presented by : TOHO CO., LTD

Fuji Television Network, Inc.

GAGA Corporation

AOI Pro. Inc.

BUN-BUKU Inc.

Production by : AOI Pro. Inc.