

Under the Open Sky

(Original title: Subarashiki Sekai)



Length: 126min. / Release in Japan: Feb 11, 2021



**FESTA
DEL CINEMA
DI ROMA**
**OFFICIAL
SELECTION 2020**

SYNOPSIS

Mikami, an ex-yakuza of middle age with most of his life in prison, gets released after serving 13 years of sentence for murder. Hoping to find his long lost mother, from whom he was separated as a child, he applies for a TV show and meets a young TV director Tsunoda. Meanwhile, he struggles to get a proper job and fit into society. His impulsive, adamant nature and ingrained beliefs cause friction in his relationship with Tsunoda and those who want to help him.

INTERVIEW with Director NISHIKAWA Miwa

--How were you inspired by the novel that this film is based on?

Mr. Ryuzo Saki's novel, *Mibuncho* (tr. "Inmate Files"), is written like a documentary about an actual murderer's life after his release from prison. I encountered this novel around 30 years after its publication and was surprised at how rigorous the adventure is for someone to go back to a "normal life" once they step off the path. The social system has changed in the past 30 years, but people's thoughts and attitude toward ex-convicts have not to the same degree. Do we live in a society that gives us a second chance at life? I feel that everybody in Japan harbors an unspoken anxiety and suffocation by an unforgiving world.

--You conducted exhaustive research and took four years to write the screenplay.

It's my first time making a film based on a story written by another author and also about a real person, which is a huge responsibility as the director. I meticulously researched not only the man who Mikami is based on but also the lives of ex-convicts after their release as well as the world of the modern yakuza in order to convincingly adapt the social background of 30 years ago into today's environment. Through all my research, I was finally able to create the backbone of the movie with a story that's different from the novel.

*--Why did you title the film *Subarashiki Sekai* (tr. "Wonderful World," the original Japanese title)?*

I had a lot of trouble deciding on the title. They told me *Mibuncho* wouldn't sell (lol). I came up with various titles including ones that describe Mikami, but this is a story about the world and society as told through a man called Mikami. The title is ironic, and the story depicts the difficulties of living in society with all its traps and deceptions. Nonetheless, there are beautiful moments and connections in life and in the world. I chose this title for its broadness of encompassing both the good and the bad.

--What were your thoughts about the star, Mr. Koji Yakusho, as you were filming him?

I've been a huge fan of Mr. Yakusho since my teens. He was like an insurmountable mountain that took me by awe, and he still is. I think he's an actor who makes every effort to integrate himself and the character he's playing in each movie. I don't think he and Mikami have much in common personality-wise, but I'm sure he studied and analyzed Mikami's character to great lengths on his own instead of asking me about it. However, he came to me for detailed instructions about how to deliver his lines before we started the shooting. Mikami speaks in a mixture of standard Japanese and his hometown dialect of Fukuoka, which displays his roots and human nature with all its strengths and weaknesses. Mr. Yakusho thoroughly scrutinized Mikami's speech pattern. But that's it. From there, he relied solely on the screenplay and worked diligently on his own to infuse Mikami's characteristics, beliefs, and gestures down to the smallest details into his acting. I never asked him to, but he must have practiced the scene 100 times by himself before walking onto the set. When the set was ready for filming, Mikami was already there. All we had to do was roll the cameras. He had free rein in his acting no matter who was in the scene or what happened in it. Without having to say a word, his flawless, day-to-day performance showed us his deep commitment to the filmmaking. Everybody in the crew felt the joy of having Mr. Yakusho as a member of the team and was naturally motivated to set the stage for him. It was pure magic.

--It was your first time working with Mr. Norimichi Kasamatsu, director of photography.

Mr. Kasamatsu has a brilliant way of adding style and flavor to a scene. He has this ability to give a mysterious darkness and sensuality to the male characters. Director Sang-il Lee once told me how Mr. Kasamatsu would be great for the stories that I write. But I couldn't ask Mr. Kasamatsu to work with me for the longest time because I admired him too much. It was three or four years ago that I thought I'd ask him, given the opportunity to shoot a film with a solid theme that befits his talent. And this film is one that indeed portrays a distinctive, appealing male character.

--How will this film be classified in your filmography?

The Long Excuse is more or less based on my own experiences about being a writer and creator with nobody to turn to, a life without children, and my personal thoughts in general. A story based on myself at that point in time. With this film, I think I've entered a new phase. I now have the urge to portray society and the era and am shifting away from personal stories. That being said, I may have new personal stories to tell based on my experiences in the coming 10 or 20 years.

NISHIKAWA Miwa

Director / Writer

NISHIKAWA Miwa was first discovered by film director KORE-EDA Hirokazu (*“Shoplifters”*), working with him from *“AFTER LIFE”* (1999). After working with many veteran directors, she made her directorial debut with *“WILD BERRIES”* (2003). Her second film, *“SWAY”* (2006), was acclaimed at Cannes’ Director’s Fortnight, and her third film, *“DEAR DOCTOR”* (2009), also enjoyed great success at the box-office in Japan, winning various awards, including Best Screenplay Award at the 2010 Annual Japan Academy Prize. Her fourth film, *“DREAMS FOR SALE”* (2012), had its world premiere at Toronto International Film Festival.

Her novel *“THE LONG EXCUSE,”* nominated for the Naoki Literature Prize (2015) for the second time, was adapted into movie with NISHIKAWA as director (2016). She has been writing original stories for her feature films which also earned her literary prizes. The latest film *“Under the Open Sky”* is her first feature based on a novel *“Mibuncho”* written by SAKI Ryuzo.

Filmography

<i>“Wild Berries”</i> (2003)	-Vancouver International Film Festival
<i>“Sway”</i> (2006)	-Cannes Directors’ Fortnight
<i>“Dear Doctor”</i> (2009)	-Montreal World Film Festival -Winner of Best Screenplay for Japan Academy Awards
<i>“Dreams for Sale”</i> (2012)	-Toronto International Film Festival -Chicago International Film Festival
<i>“The Long Excuse”</i> (2016)	-Toronto International Film Festival -Busan International Film Festival -Rome Film Festival

ORIGINAL NOVEL

SAKI Ryuzo

Author of the Original Novel

Born in 1937. After graduating from high school, he was employed at The Imperial Steel Works of Yawata Iron & Steel Co., Ltd. (currently Nippon Steel Corporation). He left the company in 1964 to focus on his writing career, and in 1976, he won the Naoki Prize with *Vengeance is Mine* and the Itō Sei Prize for Literature with *Mibuncho*, the novel on which

this film is based. He passed away in 2015. He is the author of numerous fiction and nonfiction novels based on real-life incidents and people, such as Tsutomu Miyazaki, Kakuei Tanaka, Hirobumi Ito, An Jung-geun, and Norio Nagayama.

CAST

YAKUSHO Koji

as MIKAMI

Born on January 1, 1956 in Nagasaki, Japan. He swept the 1996 award season in Japan, winning 14 best actor awards for his leading roles in *Shall We Dance?*, *Sleeping Man*, and *Shabu Gokudo*. In 1997, he starred in Palme d'Or winner *The Eel* and won Best Actor at the Tokyo International Film Festival with *CURE*. In 2001, he won Best Actor at the Chicago International Film Festival with *Warm Water Under a Red Bridge*, which premiered in Cannes. He has also appeared in a number of international projects such as *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) and *Babel* (2006). In 2014, he was the first Japanese recipient of Best Actor at the Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia for his performance in *The World of Kanako*. He is an international actor respected across the globe who was presented with the Cinema Legend Award at the Singapore International Film Festival in 2017. His recent filmography includes *The Third Murder* (2017, Director Kore-eda Hirokazu) and *The Blood of Wolves* (2018, Director Kazuya Shiraishi) with which he won his third Japan Academy Film Prize Best Actor after *Shall We Dance?* and *The Eel* as well as Best Actor and Excellence in Asian Cinema Award at the 2019 Asian Cinema Film Awards.

NAKANO Taiga

as TSUNODA

Born in 1993 in Tokyo, Japan. He made his acting debut in 2006. His filmography includes *The Kirishima Thing* (2012, Director Daihachi Yoshida), *Tokyo Sunrise* (2016, Director Ryutaro Nakagawa), *Harmonium* (2016, Director Koji Fukada), *The Man from the Sea* (2018, Director Koji Fukada), and *Silent Rain* (2020, Director Ryutaro Nakagawa). He also stars in *Any Crybabies Around?* (2020, Director Takuma Sato) slated for release in the coming months.

CREW

KASAMATSU Norimichi

Director of Photography

Born in 1957 in Aichi, Japan. A cinematographer with an impressive filmography to whom the Japan Academy Film Prize has awarded Best Cinematography for *Unforgiven* (2013, Director Sang-il Lee) and Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography for *Aegis* (2005, Director Junji Sakamoto), *Tokyo Tower: Mom and Me, and Sometimes Dad* (2007, Director Joji Matsuoka), *Villain* (2010, Director Sang-il Lee), *Someday* (2011, Director Junji Sakamoto), and *Rage* (2016, Director Sang-il Lee).

MITSUMATSU Keiko

Production Designer

Born in 1972 in Chiba, Japan. She won Outstanding Achievement in Art Direction at the 39th Japan Academy Film Prize for *Our Little Sister* (2015, Director Kore-eda Hirokazu). She is also noted for her work in *Nobody Knows* (2004, Director Kore-eda Hirokazu), *Blood and Bones* (2004, Director Yoichi Sai), *Sway* (2006, Director NISHIKAWA Miwa), *Still Walking* (2008, Director Kore-eda Hirokazu), *Kanikosen* (2009, Director SABU), *Like Father, Like Son* (2013, Director Kore-eda Hirokazu), *The Long Excuse* (2016, Director NISHIKAWA Miwa), and *Shoplifters* (2018, Director Kore-eda Hirokazu).

HAYASHI Masaki

Music

Pianist and composer. While writing songs that he performs solo as well as with Ma wo Kanaderu, a quintet that he leads, he is involved in acoustic music projects with renowned artists such as Lisa Ono, Sadao Watanabe, and Naruyoshi Kikuchi. He enjoys international accolade for his exquisite performances and static compositions with his unique sense of humor that integrate various styles of music. He also actively participates in studio recordings by artists from a wide variety of fields.

CREDIT

CAST

YAKUSHO Koji

NAKANO Taiga

ROKKAKU Seiji

KITAMURA Yukiya

Hakuryu

KIMURA Midoriko

NAGASAWA Masami

YASUDA Narumi

KAJI Meiko

HASHIZUME Isao

CREW

Chief Executive Producers KAWASHIRO Kazumi
USHIODA Hajime
Tom YODA
TSUNODA Naotoshi
SUZUKI Takayuki
TSUTSUMI Tenshin

Executive Producers HAMADA Kenji
ODAKE Satomi

Based on the novel "Mibuncho" written by SAKI Ryuzo

Producers NISHIKAWA Asako
ITO Taichi
KITAHARA Eiji

Director of Photography KASAMATSU Norimichi

Lighting by SOH Kenjirou

Sound by SHIRATORI Mitsugu

Production Designer MITSUMATSU Keiko

Editors MIYAJIMA Ryuji
KIKUCHI Tomomi

Costume Designer OGAWA Kumiko

Hair & Make-up Artist SAKAI Mutsuki

Casting by TABATA Toshie

Line Producer OKU Taisuke

Assistant Producer IKENO Kana

Music by HAYASHI Masaki

Development supervised by BUN-BUKU

Production by AOI Pro.

Written and directed by NISHIKAWA Miwa