

Bester Film, Beste Regie, Bester Darsteller, bestes Buch  
10 Japanische Filmpreise

MASAHIRO  
MOTOKI

GEWINNER DES  AUSLANDS-OSCAR® 2009  
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RYOKO  
HIROSUE

TSUTOMU  
YAMAZAKI

# NOKAN

Departures - Okuribito  
Die Kunst des Ausklangs

Ein Film von Yojiro Takita

Verpassen Sie diesen Film auf keinen Fall! Er gehört zu  
den schönsten, die Sie in diesem Jahr sehen können!

NEUE ZÜRCHER ZEITUNG am Sonntag

NOKAN sprüht vor Lebensfreude!

LE MATIN

Ein ergreifendes Melodram von Yojiro Takita

Japan 2008, 130 Minuten

6 Mio. Zuschauer in Japan

GEWINNER DES AUSLANDSOSCAR 2009

Bester Film, Beste Regie, Bester Darsteller und  
weitere Auszeichnungen beim Japanischen Filmpreis

Bester Film, Beste Regie, Bester Darsteller und Bestes Buch,  
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Großer Preis der Amerikas, Montreal 2008

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## DARSTELLER

Daigo Kobayashi

Mika Kobayashi

Ikuei Sasaki

Yuriko Uemura

Tsuyako Yamashita

Shokichi Hirata

Masahiro Motoki

Ryoko Hirosue

Tsutomu Yamazaki

Kimiko Yo

Kazuko Yoshiyuki

Takashi Sasano

Cellist

seine Frau

Nokan-Chef

Assistentin

Bad-Chefin

Assistent

Jap. Filmpreis

Jap. Filmpreis

Jap. Filmpreis

## STAB

Regie

Buch

Bildregie

Schnitt

Licht

Ton

Musik

Ausstattung

Produzent

ausführend

Produktion

Yojiro Takita

Kundo Koyama

Takeshi Hamada

Akimasa Kawashima

Hitoshi Takaya

Satoshi Ozaki,

Osamu Onodera

Joe Hisaishi

Fumio Ogawa

Toshiaki Nakazawa

Yasuhiro Mase

Shochiku Company

Jap. Filmpreis

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Jap. Filmpreis

Jap. Filmpreis

Jap. Filmpreis

Jap. Filmpreis



## INHALT

Pechvogel Daigo hat seine Stelle als Cellist verloren und kehrt mit seiner Frau zurück in die Heimat im pittoresken Norden Japans. Auf der Suche nach einem neuen Job entdeckt er die Anzeige eines auf „Reisen“ spezialisierten Unternehmens. Der exzentrische Chef Sasaki engagiert ihn auf der Stelle. Daigo kann sein Glück kaum fassen, da eröffnet ihm Sasaki die wahre Natur seines Geschäfts: Er soll Verstorbene nach altem Ritual für die „Letzte Reise“ vorbereiten...

Von wegen Reisebüro! Daigo ist entsetzt. Aber ein Batzen Geld stimmt ihn um. Wofür er so fürstlich entlohnt wird - das behält er zu Hause lieber für sich. So nimmt das ländliche Leben im Rhythmus der Jahreszeiten seinen Lauf. Es ist ein Doppelleben: Tags weiht ihn der väterliche Feinschmecker Sasaki in die einzigartige Kunst des tröstenden Nokan-Zeremoniells ein, nachts blüht das Eheglück, findet er zurück in den Kreis der alten Freunde und weckt das Cello seiner Kindheit

Erinnerungen an Mutter und Vater, Gutes und Ungelöstes. Dann aber entdeckt seine Frau Mika die Wahrheit über seinen anrühenden Beruf. Immer hat sie zu ihm gehalten. Umso mehr verletzt sie nun, dass Daigo ihr Vertrauen brach. In einem leidenschaftlichen Ausbruch stellt sie ihn vor die Wahl: Hör auf damit! Oder ich gehe....

Tiefbewegend, humorvoll und von vier unvergesslichen Gesichtern hinreißend gespielt - Yojiro Takitas meisterhaft musikdurchwehtes Melodram über die Macht der Liebe, die Kraft der Familie, Hoffnung, Versöhnung und die Kunst des Abschiednehmens lässt kein Auge trocken!

MASAHIRO MOTOKI, DARSTELLER VON DAIGO,  
ÜBER DIE INSPIRATION ZU "NOKAN"

Als ich für fünfzehn Jahren durch Indien reiste, hat es mich tief bewegt zu sehen, wie dort Leben und Sterben zusammengehören - zwei gleichermaßen wertvolle Dinge. Zurück in Tokyo fiel mir auf, wie oft wir den Tod aus dem Alltag verbannen, als spiele er keine Rolle im Leben - wodurch wir das Leben nicht so schätzen können, wie es verdient. Als dann mein erstes Kind geboren wurde, war ich bei meiner Frau und begriff, wie nah beides beieinander liegt. Nie war ich glücklicher; ich spürte das Gleichgewicht von Geburt und Ende. Als ich dann noch die Memoiren eines buddhistischen nokan-shi, also Aufbahrers las, war die Idee zu NOKAN geboren!

YOJIRO TAKITA, REGISSEUR

Yojiro Takita, geb. 1955, gehört nach über 20 Spielfilmen in zwei Jahrzehnten, darunter schwarze Indie-Komödien, aufwendige Fantasy-Kassenhits und preisgekrönte historische Dramen, zu den großen Meistern des japanischen Kinos. An NOKAN reizte ihn die Herausforderung, sich an ein Thema zu wagen, von dem andere die Finger ließen - und es zum Erfolg zu führen. Eine wahre Flut von Auszeichnungen, sechs Millionen Zuschauer und der Auslands-Oscar als Krönung geben ihm Recht.





## MASAHIRO MOTOKI ÜBER “DEPARTURES”

Q. It has been said that you were the one who came up with the original idea of the film, DEPARTURES. Was there any event that inspired you?

A. When I went to India about 15 years ago, I was totally moved to see that in India life and death co-exist in harmony and in a very natural way. They are both regarded equally valuable in human life. Next to the people who are washing and grooming themselves in the river, there were people having a funeral and sending the dead bodies off. Death and life co-exists in balance there. I was fascinated and moved by the sight of these incidents. When I returned back to Tokyo, I felt that death was intentionally hidden away from the everyday life. People are just too busy running around and don't face or look at death as an important part of our lives. This in fact, also meant that in other words, we don't appreciate and enjoy “life” as much as we should. Since my travel to India, I always think about the meaning of life and death which lie side by side. When my child was born, I was there with my wife. Seeing my own child being born, I realized how close life and death were. I was so happy to see my child born and I couldn't be a happier man. But then at the same time I realized death carries the same importance as birth.

Q. Did you know the job of a “nokanshi” (= encoffiner / the person who works on the ceremonial preparations of the dead bodies before putting them in to the coffin; dt. “Aufbahrer und Einsarger”) from before?

A. The first time I took deep interest in nokanshi was when I read a book called “Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician” by Shinmon Aoki. I was deeply moved by the book. As I had started to take interest in the way of life and death, I was totally fascinated by the book and the job of encoffinment. I started to think about a movie based on the book from the first time I read the book.

Q. Did you actually study the encoffinment ceremony from someone, or attend the real ceremony?

A. When I was offered to do the character in this film “Okuribito” (DEPARTURES), I had to learn to be an encoffiner as you can imagine. I accompanied a professional encoffiner and learned how a professional encoffiner carry out the ritual. I tried to capture the elegance and the beauty that the ceremony conveyed as much as possible. I even secretly attended the actual ceremony, where a professional encoffiner was actually performing the ritual in front of a grieving family. As I looked and observed the ritual, it became more and more clear that the ritual of encoffinment was extremely artistic, just like the tea ceremony. It is peaceful and requires polished skillfulness. I was amazed that the ritual was done in complete silence. It definitely reminded me of the tea ceremony.



## YOJIRO TAKITA ÜBER “DEPARTURES”

(aus: FILMKRANT)

Q. Why were death and the way people deal with that such an important topic for you to make a film about?

A. I received the idea for this project from the producer. I knew of the job of a “nokanshi” (encoffineer, dt. Aufbahrer und Einsargler) through reading a book, but as I have never actually been in direct contact with them, there was too little I knew of the job.

When I read the script, I felt the content very familiar and close, and though the film will be dealing with death, I felt that the film would talk more of “life” and I would definitely be able to make an interesting film. The idea and the after feeling of reading the script was surprisingly uplifting. I never had any consciousness about the subject, but I felt that “sending someone off” (the Japanese title OKURIBITO means “send-off person”) was beautiful, and I also felt that one’s way of life may show in how one dies (and is sent off, to the next world). I wanted to show the contrast of the sadness of losing something important, but at the same time, feeling the warmth of people (although the dead people are not “warm” anymore) from the death and how the people left would realize this warmth from these deepest sorrows. I also think finding the charm and interest in themes that other people do not want to touch, is probably a habit to all directors.

Q. Did your original idea for the film have more to do with the culture of dealing with the deceased or more with people choosing their own way of life? I read that Japanese author Shinmon Aoki’s mortician memoir, “Coffinman” was the inspiration. Is that correct?

A. The original idea came from the main actor Masahiro Motoki, where he seemed to have received the inspiration of life and death through his travels in India, and also through Shinmon Aoki’s “Coffinman: A Journal of a Buddhist Mortician.” We were definitely more interested in the human being’s dealing with life. The ritual was just more of a symbolic figure to show connection with the death and life.



Q. The image I had from dealing with the deceased in Japanese culture was that it's totally accepted and incorporated in rituals. But you show that a lot of people don't actually want anything to do with it. Daigo is looked down upon for doing the job he has as nokanshi. Is this how many Japanese view death? As something they don't want anything to do with?

A. I was interested in the theme all the more because my experience with death was quite limited and somewhat distant to me. Although I participated in ordinary funerals before, I had never seen or thought about what was happening on the other side of the funeral and the people who were involved with this.

When I was small, “death” was actually closer. Funeral has often taken place inside each household, and death was somewhat a very close incident. However, whether or not I had actually realized what “death” was about at that time, is another story. While I was gathering information for the film, I suddenly felt the sense of realizing the presence of “death” right in front of myself, just as I felt in my childhood. What existed there was that the family, the relatives, did not despise nor detest “death” at all, and all there was the closeness. The film takes these feelings of fear towards “death” and tries to turn it into something more “close” as it should be. Life and Death exist side by side.

Any human beings have to face death at one point, but at the same time, they try to turn one's eyes away from death. However, through this film, many people must have recognized that death must be faced in one way or another, and if they must, this was how they would face it. I feel that the audience may have replaced themselves with one of the characters and tried to touch or feel their death through other people’s lives.

Q. I understand it wasn't very easy to get the film made in Japan and it took a long time to bring it to the screen. On the other hand there is the enthusiasm with the Academy voters who gave you the Oscar. Can you explain this contradiction?

A. It was difficult to attract interest from investors in the first place to a film so concerned with death.



Then, once it was made, it was hard to sell it to people. It took 13 months from completion to get it released, which was an unthinkable long time to wait as a director. Becoming frustrated and angry at the lack of progress, I was calling up the staff working on publicity for the picture, and shouting at them, "Why don't you just put it in for the Academy Awards?" although at that point no one truly thought it would even get a nomination. It's a good question as to why Japanese films have to get recognized abroad before people pay attention to them at home -- I'd like to know the answer.

Q. Why did you preserve such a prominent role for the music in the film? In middle aged paintings an instrument was usually a symbol for passing life and passing time, for the transitory. Does it have that same meaning in DEPARTURES?

A. I truly enjoy the importance of the music in this picture. Joe Hisaishi helped me to come up with this wonderful structure of music in the film. We knew from the start that the cello piece will have a major role in the film. We have discussed to create music with a theme of reconciliation and reproduction. The reason for having the cello play the lead was because of the wide range of tunes that the instrument was able to play, and we felt that this would express the complexity in the main character and the changes that he goes through.

In vinyl records (that the protagonist's father leaves him with), I wanted to express it as a symbol and convey a message of "feelings of warmth in something that is lost (or is about to be lost)."

Q. On what scale is this ceremony still being performed in Japan? And would you yourself call it a performance by the way?

A. This is somewhat a very unusual ritual, or a forgotten ceremony, in the Japanese culture. It is not common, and it was something very unique for me and for the audience as well. The most important for me was what "encoffining" actually was. The atmosphere and the great sensation that I felt when I

had experienced the ceremony of "encoffinement" backed up my attraction and confidence for creating this film. The experience also made me realize the wonder and beauty of sending off someone with respect.

Q. Somehow 'fate' is an important theme in the film. Can you explain why?

A. The film was probably very universal and told the importance of finding yourself, accepting the fate, forgiving the past and making a departure for the future, which gives a strong message at any situation in life.

## KURZBIOGRAFIE YOJIRO TAKITA

Geboren 1955. Takita wurde 1976 Regieassistent bei Hiroshi Mukais Shishi Productions und absolvierte 1981 sein Regiedebüt mit CHIKAN ONNA KYOSHI, gefolgt von etwa 20 weiteren Softpornos. Sein erster Spielfilm KOMIKKU ZASSHI NANKA IRANAI! (1986) fand großen Beifall auf dem New York Film Festival. In den folgenden Jahren entstanden u.a. die schwarze Indie-Komödie THE YEN FAMILY (1988), WE ARE NOT ALONE (1993), THE EXAM (1999) und SECRET (1999; Remake von Luc Besson). Im Jahr 2001 stürmte sein Special Effects Fantasy-Film ONMYOJI (THE YING-YANG MASTER) das Box Office, 2003 folgte das Sequel ONMYOJI 2. Sein historisches Drama WHEN THE LAST SWORD IS DRAWN fand im selben Jahr große Anerkennung bei der Kritik und gewann eine beeindruckende Zahl von Preisen, die 2004 in der Auszeichnung als Bester Film beim Japanischen Filmpreis gipfelte. Zu seinen letzten Filmen zählen ASHURA (2005) und das Baseball-Drama THE BATTERY (2007).



## PRESSESTIMMEN

Der Film beginnt damit, dass die Hauptfigur Daigo Kobayashi als frischgebackener nokanshi an einem höchst ungewöhnlichem Gegenstand tätig wird – einem jungen Transgender-Mann, der als Frau gestorben ist, während seine Verwandten es versäumten, Daigo und seinen Chef Sasaki über diese Tatsache in Kenntnis zu setzen. Daigos Entdeckung des wahren Geschlechts ist komisch in Takitas früherem Stil des schwarzen Humors – und deutet an, dass OKUBIRITO nicht leicht zu beschreiben ist. Ich werde es dennoch versuchen: Es geht darum, sein Glück zu finden, auch wenn die Welt findet, dass dein Glück pfui, igit und Gift für die Ehe ist. Es mag sein, dass der Film die Tätigkeit des nokanshi idealisiert, aber er liefert gute Argumente für den japanischen „way of death“. Besser für die letzte Reise von einem fingerfertigen nokanshi vorbereitet zu werden, der ein menschliches ikebana-Schaustück schafft, als im westlichen Stil wie eine Wachsfigur für Madame Tussaud aufgebretzelt zu werden. Zu schade, dass ich nicht dabei sein werde, um die Show zu sehen!

Mark Schilling, THE JAPAN TIMES

Dies ist ein Film, der in Amerika nie hätte gemacht werden können. Er flirtet nicht mit dem Tod als Wendepunkt oder Auflösung der Geschichte, sondern er ist von Anfang bis Ende gründlich in den Tod vertieft. Auch wenn er sanft darauf beharrt, dass Sterblichkeit normal und unvermeidlich ist und einen Sinn hat, entlässt er uns mit dem Gefühl, dem Tod so nahe gekommen zu sein, dass man anschließend fast die Hände waschen und Kleider wechseln möchte. Trotzdem ist leicht zu erkennen, warum der Film diesen Winter den Oscar bekam: Er entlässt uns wie verzaubert. Masahiro Motoki ist als Daigo so sympathisch – sanft, ehrlich, zurückhaltend und fleißig – dass man das eklige Geschäft vergisst, dem er nachgeht. Das ist der entscheidende Trick des Films: die Leute, die sich mit dem Tod beschäftigen, sympathischer zu machen als die Leute, die davon abgestoßen sind. Durch die Zuneigung der Zuschauer zu den schwarzgekleideten und gefassten Zeremonienmeistern der Trauer – im Gegensatz zu den bedürftigen, streitsüchtigen und manchmal ausfälligen Menschen, die ihre Dienste beanspruchen – verliert der Tod seinen Stachel.

THE WASHINGTON POST



Die Besetzung übertrifft sich selbst: Für einen Film mit vier Hauptrollen wurden vier Gesichter gefunden, die aufs Menschlichste verkörpern, was DEPARTURES über sie sagen will: Der ernsthafte, unsichere junge Mann. Seine Frau, die ihn liebt, aber von dem Gedanken abgestoßen wird, dass er mit Toten arbeitet. Der Chef, orakelhaft, weise, gutmütig. Seine Sekretärin, aufmunternd, aber mit einer inneren Traurigkeit. Alle diese Gesichter sind schön auf eine realistische menschliche Weise. In diesem Film enthüllen die Japaner – wie in Kurosawas großem IKIRU – eine tiefe und unspektakuläre Anerkennung des Todes. Dies ist keine Zeit für Tränen und Zähneklappern. Es ist die Beobachtung, dass ein Leben verlassen wurde, um von den Überlebenden bedacht zu werden.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

"What I always say of audiences in general," remarked Mark Johnson, chairman of the academy's foreign-language category, "and it usually holds true for the academy, is the emotional will always trump the cerebral. And so there were certain movies people thought would win, such as WALTZ WITH BASHIR and THE CLASS, and yet the voters clearly preferred DEPARTURES, which is a very emotional movie. You could see an American studio version." For his part, Takita is simply happy to shine a light on an aspect of Japanese culture that had been little known both at home and abroad. "I don't prefer to classify my films as either art or entertainment," he said. "My film dealt with universal themes and offered a general message of healing. Perhaps that's what left an impression with the academy."

Mark Cohen, INDIE FOCUS



## From ‘Pink Films’ to Oscar Gold

Mike Hale, THE NEW YORK TIMES

YOJIRO TAKITA has surprised American audiences before. In 1986, when he was known only as a director of the soft-core features called pink films, he broke into the Japanese mainstream with “Comic Magazine,” a low-budget guerrilla production about a self-loathing television reporter on the celebrity gossip beat. It snagged a spot in the New Directors/New Films series at the Museum of Modern Art; Vincent Canby, the critic for The New York Times, called it “scurrilously funny,” and it went on to a commercial run in New York.

So Mr. Takita was not coming entirely out of the blue on Feb. 22 at the Kodak Theater in Los Angeles, when he spoiled countless Oscar pool entries by snatching the best foreign-language film award for “Departures,” his melancholy drama about a man who takes a job preparing corpses for burial. So heavily favored were the Israeli and French entries, “Waltz With Bashir” and “The Class,” that Mr. Takita and his leading man, Masahiro Motoki, had to convince each other that they had, in fact, just heard their movie announced as the winner. (By the time the “Departures” delegation made it backstage, the news had sunk in sufficiently for a producer of the film to get off one of the night’s better lines: “I’m so happy. I could depart right now.”)

In the more than two decades between “Comic Magazine” and “Departures” Mr. Takita had established himself as a versatile and highly successful filmmaker in Japan, with three best-director nominations in Japan’s equivalent of the Academy Awards (he won this year for “Departures”) and a best-picture award in 2004 for “When the Last Sword Is Drawn,” an elaborate historical drama about the end of the

shogunate in the 19th century. But when his Oscar victory suddenly brought him to the attention of the rest of the world, the one section of his résumé that every article mentioned was his apprenticeship in pinku eiga, the pink films that were once a huge part of the Japanese movie industry.

“Yes, my career as a director did start out in pink films,” Mr. Takita said last month before the Tribeca Film Festival screening of “Departures” (which opens on May 29 in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago). It’s a background he shares with well-known Japanese filmmakers like Kiyoshi Kurosawa (“Tokyo Sonata”) and Masayuki Suo (“Shall We Dance”). “But frankly,” he added, “at my age I look back, and pink films, regular films, to me they’re all part of the movies that I made. And they all express the joy I feel in the privilege I have of making all the decisions that create a world called a movie.”

A youthful 53, Mr. Takita radiates the confidence required to make the myriad decisions involved in directing a movie like “When the Last Sword Is Drawn” or his 2001 hit, “Onmyoji,” a story of ghosts and wizards set 1,000 years ago in the Fujiwara court during the Heian period. (At a joint interview conducted through a translator at the Kitano Hotel in Manhattan, he and Mr. Motoki were also, as Japanese artists tend to be, more stylishly dressed and more polite than the American norm.)

After a string of movies that combined history and mythology, swordplay and sorcery and special effects, “Departures” was a change of pace. The idea for the film came from Mr. Motoki, who in his late 20s



(he's now 43) read a book written by a *nokanshi*, or encoffiner. (The film's Japanese title, "Okuribito," or send-off person, is another name for the same function.) For some Japanese funerals an encoffiner is hired to perform a ritual of bathing and dressing the body before it is placed in the coffin for cremation. Mr. Motoki was taken by "the world that the encoffiner was describing, where the baton of human life is passed from one generation to the next in this very moment in time during the encoffining ritual." "And so I thought maybe by squarely acknowledging that moment of death and the immediate moment after," he said, "it might be a way for a film to be made that could ultimately, sort of counter-intuitively, affirm human life."

Mr. Motoki's character, Daigo, is a cellist whose orchestra is disbanded without warning. Answering an ad for what he thinks is a job at a travel agency, he stumbles into his new career and is taken in hand by a master encoffiner (Tsutomu Yamazaki, familiar to American moviegoers of a certain age as the truck driver and gourmand Goro in "Tampopo"). Mr. Motoki's first challenge was finding the money for a film that mixed dead bodies and Japan's long economic malaise. "Well, I did pitch it to several producers," he said, "but they all felt that death was not actually a good idea for a movie, so it took a long time." Eventually a producer was found, and Mr. Takita came aboard, attracted, he said, by the challenge: "I figured probably nobody else would go for it, so I figured what the hell, I'll go for it. I'll get behind it. I really was genuinely fascinated with the world of the encoffiner and with that ritual. I tend to be interested in peeking up under the covers where most people prefer to let them lie."

To prepare for the film Mr. Motoki had to learn how to handle two things he had never touched before: a cello and a corpse. His training with an encoffiner included helping out during an actual ceremony, in which they prepared the body of a grandmother. "It was in February, and it was cold enough outside, but when I touched the cold corpse, I sort of was imbued with a sense of mission," he said, "to try to use as much human warmth as I could to restore this grandmother to a lifelike presence for presentation to her family."

Once the film was finished, another long wait ensued: 13 months passed before a distributor could be found. But the delay was a godsend, both men said. Mr. Takita conjectured that the worsening economic climate primed audiences for the film. "Is money the most important thing in life?" he said. "What is the most important thing in life? People certainly are in search of some kind of comfort, of safe haven, and whether they find that in music or in books or in films, it's pretty clear that people are looking for something."

After Montreal and a basketful of awards in Japan — including another best-film prize from the Japanese academy — the Oscar was "the icing on the cake," Mr. Takita said. And it was a flavor he could get used to. "I'll never forget how the audience looked from on top of that stage," he said. "Humans are naturally greedy, so once we have an experience like that, of course we want to have it again."

Mike Hale, THE NEW YORK TIMES