

Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 10th October 7:30pm

Perfect Days Japan
Pg 2hs 4 m

Director; Wim Wenders

Stars; Koji Yakusho, Tokio Emoto, Arisa Nakano

Hirayama [cleans Tokyo's public toilets](#) for a living, rising before dawn to gently water the seedlings he grows in his home and then drive off to begin his shift. On the way to work, he picks a cassette tape — Van Morrison, the Velvet Underground, Nina Simone — and listens while driving down the highway. [Tokyo's Skytree skyscraper](#) looms in the distance. Hirayama clearly derives enjoyment from performing his work well, but there's more to his life than labor, and more to this movie than a simplistic celebration of manual toil.



Wim Wenders on 'Perfect Days': 'Everything Feels Almost Holy'

The character of Hirayama was conceived during the director's visit to Japan to see the Tokyo Toilet Project; 'an art and social project', as he called it, where fifteen public toilets in Shibuya, central Tokyo, were extraordinarily designed by international architects. After seeing this project, an example of how Japanese people took care of their city after the lockdown, Wenders thought there was a story to explore here. 'Hirayama is the master of his life,' the German director continues. 'Everything he does, he does it because he wants to do it. Koji understood that, and there was no reason for us to film anything else than what lived out in front of us.'

Day in, day out, Hirayama's routine remains unchanged, only courting disruption in the form of a petulant colleague and a girl who thanks him for listening to one of his cassettes with a kiss on the cheek. On the rare occasions that he speaks, his few words express humbleness or appreciation for the given moment. 'I felt no uneasiness about the fact that there were only a few lines in the film,' Yakusho said, who was sitting by Wenders' side. 'Here I am, this is what I am thinking and feeling' is the simple philosophy the actor adopted to play the role of Hirayama.

It was not just the actors who embraced Hirayama's approach to life. Wenders explains to me that the film was originally called *Komorebi*, a Japanese word that describes the way sunlight filters through trees. But during 16 days of restless filming, *Komorebi* became *Perfect Days* after the director and co-writer Takuma Takasaki heard the Lou Reed song of a similar name play while filming a scene: without exchanging any words they both knew the name was just right.

Very little is said in the film, but much can be discerned. Although Hirayama's personal history is unknown to the audience, it's clear that class distinctions are at play when his sister arrives in an expensive car to pick up her runaway daughter. The sister expresses disbelief when she questions her brother about whether he *really* works as a toilet cleaner. Maybe Hirayama had it all at some point but chose to leave a life of luxury behind to reinvent himself in ways which are now more meaningful to him? Wenders leaves the details to our imagination: 'I wrote his story but I didn't want to say it. I wanted the audience to fill in the story [for themselves].' In a way, the audience is encouraged to approach the film the way Hirayama does life; leave the past behind and appreciate the current moment. 'That's what makes this film so rich,' Yakusho adds. 'I think every time you see it you'll have a different experience.'

The 'dream installations', as the director calls them, were filmed and edited by his wife, Donata Wenders, and are presented as black and white fragments of the protagonist's day. 'Through these scenes I realised that I dream in black and white,' Yakusho said. 'It made me wonder if any people dream in colour. Maybe Wim does.'

