

Wondrous Last Act for Hayao Miyazaki in ‘The Wind Rises’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 1, 2014 - 9:54am

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The master animator and film legend Hayao Miyazaki (“Howl’s Moving Castle,” “Spirited Away,” “Princess Mononoke”) announced his retirement after his latest film, “The Wind Rises.” He is often called “Japan’s Walt Disney,” but there is more to him than that, a soul and a mystery that is revealed in the stages of his animated art, and his contribution to artistic culture will continue to influence for generations to come. “The Wind Rises” is nominated for Best Animated Film at the 2014 Academy Awards.

“The Wind Rises,” although an odd subject for a final exploration, is still full of the Miyazaki wonder. The beauty of his design is all over it’s landscape, and it fulfills the energy of the emotions it conveys. The metaphor of airplane flight through the generations provides the often Miyazaki theme of duality, in this case war and peace. The distinctly drawn characters of the master animator’s universe cavort through the story with the same magic and fulfillment as his previous artworks, and provides a sense of both nostalgia and presence. There is something about Hayao Miyazaki that produces a well of feelings, that often have nothing to do with the story itself, and everything to do about our own reflective lives.

Jiro (voice of Joseph Gordon-Levitt in the English dubbed version) is a sensitive boy who dreams of flight, often coupled with dreams of fantastic airplanes, designed by the Italian flight master Caproni (Stanley Tucci). As Jiro grows into a young aeronautics student, he lives through the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. He meets a girl named Naoko (Emily Blunt) during the melee, and they are destined to meet again.



Jiro Strides into the History of Aviation in 'The Wind Rises'

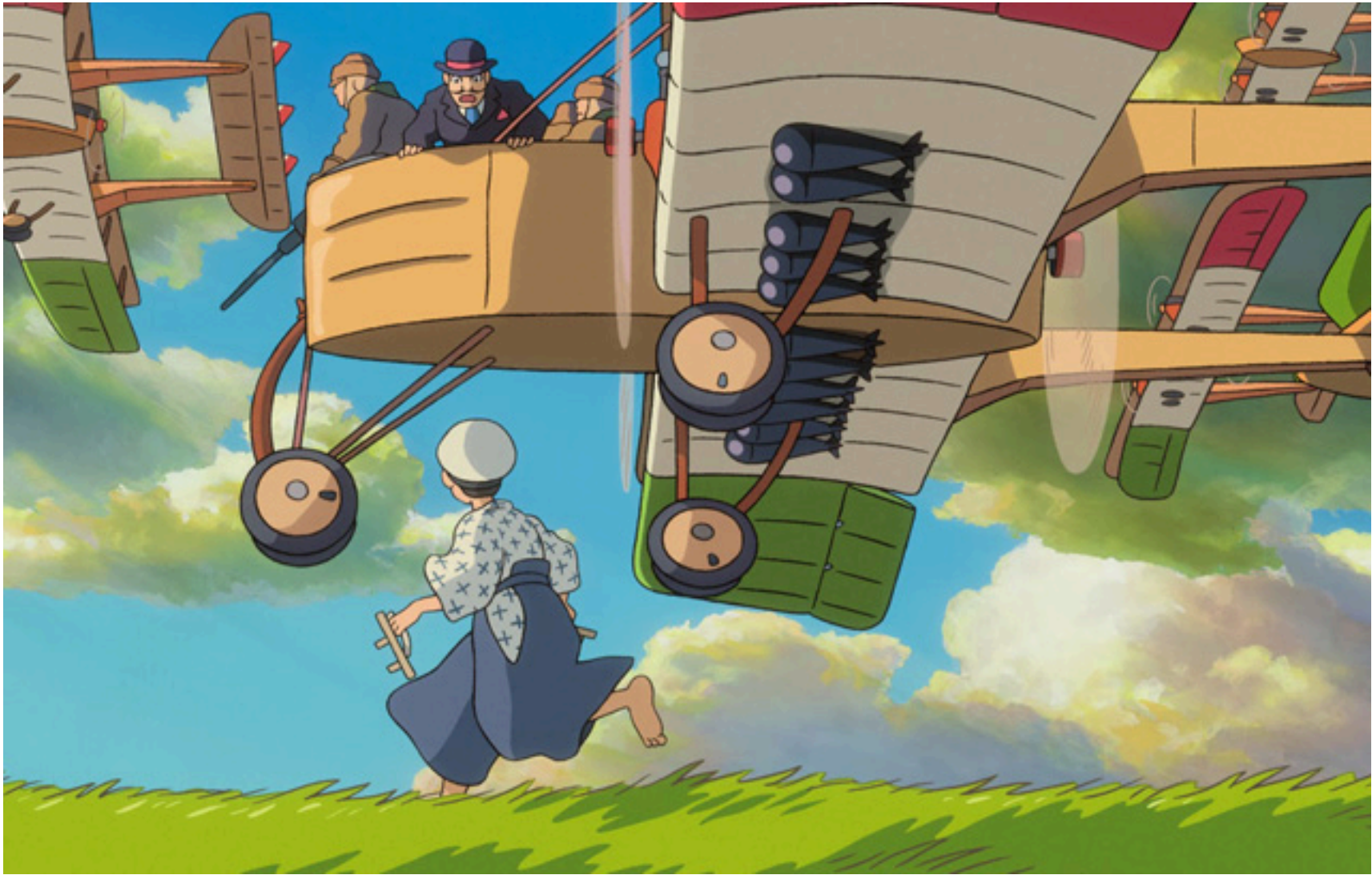
Photo credit: Touchstone Pictures

Jiro becomes a successful airplane designer, but goes through a series of triumphs and failures during the 1920s and '30s, and through it all his best friend is fellow designer Honjo (John Krasinski). He encounters Naoko again on a business trip, and their reunion ends up in marriage. Naoko has tuberculosis, and her illness and Jiro's eventual design of an aircraft that will be the main engine of Japan's war efforts during World War II intersect, to create the next phase of a remarkable life.

Jiro is based on an actual aircraft engineer, Jiro Horikoshi, and although the chronology of his airplane designs are true, his private life is made up, which is a truly Miyazaki-san conceit. Based on the master's own comic book, the story is a bit melodramatic and odd, but the rendering of it is a beautiful dream, including the actual dreams of Jiro and the Italian Caproni. As in many of Miyazaki's films, the comic effect of the characters like in their design, and Caproni and his vivid, Rube-Goldberg-like flying machines are the stuff of pure imagination.

It is the scenic design that the animator puts his mark on, and Miyazaki's worlds are wonder to behold. The earthquake sequence is refined power, as a whole town succumbs to a cartoon-like wave of shock and after shock. The delicacy of the resort at which Jiro and Naoko meet again is a perfect fantasy for lovers, and the filmmaker even adds a German man who plays cupid for the couple, symbolizing the impending war.

The themes that Miyazaki had commented upon in other films – nature versus technology, the power of dreams, resilient female characters – are all present in "The Wind Rises," and the distinct design of his characters maintain their air of delicacy and vulnerability. There is something about the way a Miyazaki character runs toward something, the movement is crafted as an almost heartbreaking transition – as if no matter how far we move, we always need to go further.



Dreamcraft: A Fantastic Flying Machine in 'The Wind Rises'

Photo credit: Touchstone Pictures

It is a testament to the Miyasaki-san legend that so many high level American and international celebrities are doing the English dubbing in the film. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Emily Blunt, John Krasinski, Werner Herzog, William H. Macy and Stanley Tucci, among others, can point with pride toward a career highlight that is true magic, the contribution to the final statement from Hayao Miyasaki.

As the master enters this stage of his life, the point of reflection and relaxation, my hope is that his dreams are visitations from all the characters he has created, expressing to him their gratitude for giving them life. Because that's exactly how I feel toward Miyasaki, a sense of profound gratitude.

"The Wind Rises" opens everywhere on February 28th. Featuring the voices of Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Emily Blunt, John Krasinski, Martin Short, Werner Herzog, William H. Macy, Mandy Pantinkin, Elijah Wood and Stanley Tucci. Written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki. Rated "PG-13"



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