



**7^e FESTIVAL
INTERNATIONAL
DU FILM**
DE LA ROCHE-SUR-YON

**APPROFONDIR
LE FILM**

OUR HUFF AND PUFF JOURNEY - Daigo Matsui



It's not about the destination in this Japanese road movie, even if that destination is a boy band.

OUR HUFF AND PUFF JOURNEY couldn't be stylistically further from Daigo Matsui's over-the-top 2012 debut, Afro Tanaka. Matsui has directed three other features in as many years since then, including Daily Lives of High School Boys and Wonderful World End. While the latter was based on several music videos (for Seiko Oomori), here Matsui combines the lives of school kids with a film that in some ways acts as an extended promotion for boy band CreepHyp.

Four female high school students on the cusp of adulthood decide to make the trip from Fukuoka to Tokyo to see CreepHyp. Recording their journey with a handheld camera, and hoping to generate social media buzz along the way, the girls make the 1000 km journey (or 621 miles) on their bicycles. What seems like schoolgirl folly becomes all-consuming, taking turns that force them to grow up faster than expected.

It's trite but true to say that OUR HUFF AND PUFF JOURNEY is all about the road less travelled, and not about the final stop. Everything about the venture seems innocent at first, from the fact that they run away still wearing their school uniforms to the daydreamy swooning over the band. Yet early on, one of the girls comments that the adventure is less scary than the first time she had sex, reminding us not to make assumptions. Uneasy moments sneak in with some of the single men they hitchhike with, although there's never any pervading sense of threat. It's only later, when they are forced to work as hostesses to pay for the final leg of their trip, that the film acknowledges the darker side of this single-minded journey.

Matsui thankfully avoids using the direct-to-handheld-camera technique for the whole film, with the most intimate moments shot from a distance, as if shot by an unseen fifth member of the group. In these scenes of singing or arguing, the heart of their characters is more readily exposed, as it is not the version they want to show to the world. Indeed, when one girl shares their poverty plight with a member of CreepHyp on social media, hoping he will feel responsible for them, the most dedicated of the girls flips out, terrified that the band will somehow think less of them when the trolls start mocking them. Here the film works at its best, a character-driven study of obsession, social media, self-image and the divisiveness it causes. As if to underline this point, one scene plays out silently, with conversations across a bus displayed entirely through text messages, forcing them to go offline to avoid telling one girl the whole story.

When the final destination is reached, the film falls back on some more familiar conventions, set against a live concert performance by CreepHyp. Unlike the singular goal that has driven the rest of the film, their fate is less certain at the end of the narrative than it was at the start, and Matsui doesn't give us the satisfaction of a happily every after. For some it will undoubtedly be a memorable moment of youth, while for others it will be the defining turning point in their personal history.

Richard Gray - July 23, 2016 - thereelbits.com

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