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RYUICHI SAKAMOTO: CODA

A FILM BY
STEPHEN NOMURA SCHIBLE



SYNOPSIS

One of the most important artists of our era, Ryuichi Sakamoto has had a prolific career spanning over four decades, from techno-pop stardom to Oscar-winning film composer. The evolution of his music has coincided with his life journeys. Following Fukushima, Sakamoto became an iconic figure in Japan's social movement against nuclear power. As Sakamoto returns to music following cancer, his haunting awareness of life crisis leads to a resounding new masterpiece. *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda* is an intimate portrait of both the artist and the man.

2017 / USA - JAPAN / 102' / COLOR / JAPANESE - ENGLISH

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR STEPHEN NOMURA SCHIBLE



I wanted this film to explore how Ryuichi Sakamoto's awareness of environmental, social and even his personal crises brought change to his musical expression. I had the title *Coda* in mind since the very beginning, as I wanted the film to land with a musical ending - with the birth of a new song. My hope is that those who journey with this film may find it to be like an opening of perception, allowing for a chance to imagine how Ryuichi Sakamoto hears the world, and to witness how he ultimately triumphs to find new musical expression in the end.



I began making this film in 2012, when the wounds of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster of Northeastern Japan were still relatively new. It wasn't long after I first learned that Ryuichi Sakamoto became a vocal anti-nuclear advocate back home in the wake of Fukushima. I suppose I intuited that there was a story to be told. I began shooting quite suddenly and impulsively. The varied economic interests in Japan that wield political control do not typically like popular artists who speak out about issues deemed taboo, particularly nuclear contamination. So his vocal stance wasn't without risk or friction. The mainstream Japanese media, which otherwise follows Ryuich's career very ardently, was reluctant to touch his activism in depth. So I saw a void to be filled. To my surprise Ryuichi graciously granted access, and that was the start of what became our five-year process. Fukushima made me feel like my world had been turned upside down, that nothing will ever be the same again. I sensed Ryuichi shared the same sentiment. I

never wanted to make a political film. More than anything, I wanted to know how this change would manifest in his art.

I grew up in Tokyo during the 70's and 80's. So I knew that Ryuichi once represented a certain technology-driven ethos during Japan's economic boom period through his work with the techno-pop band Yellow Magic Orchestra. I became interested in how he was taking a stance against the establishment, now driven by a remorseful concern about technology related to environmental deterioration.

There were unexpected turns of events despite such initial intentions, to the point where at times it seemed quite impossible to continue filming. The most significant challenge was Ryuichi's illness. When we learned our subject had cancer, our process became like a journey without a map or compass. All of us involved in the film had





to feel our way through, as we carefully improvised our way forward. Ultimately Ryuichi's composing process became our guide and brought us to the unique form that the film organically acquired. Overall, I wanted this film to explore how Ryuichi's awareness of crises had developed and how it has brought change to his musical expression. I wanted to gradually build towards a more musical cinematic language, using sound as a building block, to the point where the audience can hopefully feel the story through their ears as well as their eyes.

My hope is that those who journey with this film may find it to be like an opening of perception, allowing for a chance to imagine how Ryuichi hears the world, and to witness how he ultimately triumphs to find new musical expression in the end. Ryuichi believes all sound is musical - even environmental sounds that are typically not perceived as music. This philosophy inspired his current

compositions, and our own editing style. The sound of a broken piano, the wailing of Geiger counters, the sound of melting arctic ice, as well as Ryuichi's beautiful melody sketches - all were cut together as musical phrases of sorts. They were treated as artifacts of time, from which we carefully sculpted our film.



BIOGRAPHY OF RYUICHI SAKAMOTO



As composer, performer, producer, and environmentalist, few artists have as diverse a résumé as that of Ryuichi Sakamoto. Sakamoto's work has spanned vast musical territories, from pioneering electronic music as a member of Yellow Magic Orchestra to crafting globally inspired rock albums, classical compositions, a stretch of minimal/ambient music collaborations, and over thirty film scores. His work has been recognized with accolades including an Academy Award, two Golden Globes, a Grammy, the Order of the Cavaleiro Admissão from the government of Brazil, and the coveted Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from the government of France.

Sakamoto has collaborated with the likes of Alva Noto, Bernardo Bertolucci, and His Holiness The Dalai Lama. Since 3/11 in Japan, Sakamoto has been a strong advocate of support and aid for the

victims of the earthquake, tsunami, and anthropogenic nuclear meltdown in Fukushima, launching charity organizations and the music event, NO NUKES. In responding to the consumerism of the 21st century, his politically conscious dynamism has cemented his reputation as a renaissance man.

In 2014, Sakamoto was forced to take the first major break of his career upon his diagnosis with throat cancer. Thanks to rest, friends, family, and fans were able to witness his return in just over a year, and he closed 2015 with 2 film scores: a collaborative score with Alva Noto for Alejandro González Iñárritu's Academy Award-winning *The Revenant*, and Yoji Yamada's Nagasaki: *Memories Of My Son*. In 2017 Sakamoto released his 16th solo album, *async*, his most personal album to date.



BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN NOMURA SCHIBLE



Stephen grew-up in Tokyo and studied film at NYU. After serving as an AD to documentarian Kazuo Hara (*Emperor's Naked Army Marches On*), he worked as a producer's rep for Japanese films such as Shinji Aoyama's *Eureka* and Naomi Kawase's *Firefly*, and oversaw international co-productions such as *H-Story* by Nobuhiro Suwa. He was one of the producers for Sofia Coppola's Oscar-winning *Lost in Translation*, and was responsible for all Japanese aspects of the production. Stephen directed/produced the music documentary *Eric Clapton: Sessions for Robert J*, which aired on BBC and PBS. *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda* is his first feature film as a director.

BIOGRAPHY OF ERIC NYARI

PRODUCER

Eric Nyari is the International Representative for the renowned restoration laboratory Cineric and President for New Content. He has managed 4K restorations of Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu*, *Sansho the Bailiff*, and *A Story from Chikamatsu* with Martin Scorsese's The Film Foundation, as well as as Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring*. He has produced a number of feature films in Japan including Amir Naderi's *CUT*, Opening Film of the 2011 Venice Film Festival's *Orrizonti* section. He has also produced Naderi's *Monte*, an Italian-US-French co-production for which Naderi received the Glory to the Filmmaker Award at Venice in 2016. He is currently producing the portrait documentary *Ryuichi Sakamoto: Coda*.

CREDITS

PRODUCER: YOSHIKO HASHIMOTO

is President of Documentary Japan and a notable Tokyo-based producer. Her award-winning work includes Atsushi Funahashi's NUCLEAR NATION and NUCLEAR NATION II, Hirokazu Kore-eda's ISHIBUMI, and Tatsuya Mori's FAKE.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: NEO SORA

is a director, editor, and cinematographer born and raised in New York City. He studied film and philosophy at Wesleyan University. His feature film debut now in early production, AINU NENO AN AINU, explores Japan's indigenous Ainu people in Hokkaido.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM RICHMOND

has collaborated with directors Robert Altman on TANNER ON TANNER and Todd Solodz on PALINDROMES. He won Sundance's Cinematography Award for RIGHT AT YOUR DOOR and has been nominated three times of Independent Spirit Awards. He shot Schible's previous film, ERIC CLAPTON: SESSIONS FOR ROBERT J.

EDITOR: HISAYO KUSHIDA

is a film/video editor based in New York. Her work includes THE GREAT HAPPINESS SPACE: TALE OF AN OSAKA LOVE THIEF, which was nominated for an IFP Gotham Award, and MAD TIGER.

SOUND DESIGNER: TOM PAUL

is a two-time Emmy Award winning re-recording mixer (UNDER AFRICAN SKIES and CARTEL LAND) and highly regarded sound designer. Recent film include WEINER, the 2016 Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner, NUTS!, WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE, THE WOLFPACK, PARTICLE FEVER, THE SQUARE, DORIS, and ANESTHESIA. His re-recording and sound design credits also include the Academy Award winners THE FOG OF WAR and BORN INTO BROTHELS. A New York City native and son of an opera singer father and pianist mother, Tom's exposure to the power of music planted the seed for his passion and aptitude for all things sonic.

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