

The Wind Rises: An inspiring animation with a sophisticated soundtrack

Hayao Miyazaki's newest and final movie, *The Wind Rises*, is a Japanese animated film based on the events of Dr. Jiro Horikoshi, an aeronautical engineer who designed many of the Japanese fighters used in World War II. Being a historical drama, this film departs from Miyazaki's usual style of fantasy with surreal characters and storylines. However, frequent dream sequences fill this void with elaborate and unreal scenes of enormous aircraft, bulging in the weight of its jolly passengers. The animation is filled with contrasting emotions of inspiration and tragedy enriched by the soundtrack, which eloquently captures the mood through the subtle use of leitmotifs and defines the mood in many of the dialogue-less scenes. Additionally, many of the sound effects stand out – as they were created by voice actors – and add distinct character to many elements of the movie. The soundtrack to this movie, composed by Joe Hisaishi, greatly supports the strong visuals and enhances the deep emotions presented in this movie.

Jiro, the main character, is filled with inspiration. From a young age he became obsessed with airplanes and their designs, reading magazine after magazine on aeronautical developments in the world. As a boy he began to dream about his idol, the notable Italian airplane designer Giovanni Caproni. Beginning with this first dream sequence, the background music shifted from a piano theme to a light, blissful, accordion-mandolin theme reminiscent of Italian folk music. Throughout the movie he dreams of Caproni to get inspiration and to test his designs in the fantasy world, and once again this accordion theme reappears. Not only does this theme represent the dream-state and Caproni, it also represents Jiro's times of inspiration, since he was first inspired by the Italian designer. Halfway through the movie, Jiro is sent to Germany by the aeronautical company he works for to study the designs of the German airplane manufacturer. During this trip he drifts away from the group to look more closely at an advanced fighter design. Clearly inspired by this airplane, the background music once again shifts to a variation of the accordion theme. This theme was the most intriguing piece of music in the soundtrack as its use of the accordion made it distinct and clearly identifiable and each time it played it was a reminder of Caproni and his inspirational words. Many other scenes used music to create a stronger emotional connection to Jiro, and his wife, Naoko, who was slowly dying of tuberculosis through much of the movie.

The most significant moments of the film are devoid of dialogue, letting the music and animation speak for itself, highlighting the beautiful, flowing music, and the deep emotions. During one particular scene, Jiro launches a paper airplane off of the deck of a hotel. As it flies, the lighthearted piano music plays and its tempo gradually increases until it finally lands on the deck where Naoko stands. At this moment the music returns back to its original tempo. As this was before Naoko and Jiro began their relationship, this increase in pace foreshadows a budding relationship. Many other scenes lack dialogue, but the movie never feels like it is missing anything. The development of much of the movie is controlled by the animations and the music, not by the dialogue, as it is in Hollywood style animations.

While watching this movie, I noticed something that seemed different – some of the sound effects seemed more human than usual. It turns out that some of the sound effects were actually created by the human mouth, rather than normal sound effect clips. These sounds seemed to bring a distinct character to the environment and the vehicles that they animated. Two scenes clearly contained such sounds; the first was at the start of the film when Jiro dreams of flying through the town as a child. The sounds of the engine firing up and sputtering through the neighborhood are actually produced by human actors. If you listen closely you can hear that the booming sound as the engine turns over was created by a group of voices. Later in the film, the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake is represented with strong visuals depicting the towns in the horizons rippling as the pressure wave succumbs the area. In parallel with these animations are deep bellowing sounds that are both disturbing and memorable even long after seeing the film. These sound effects clearly displayed the horror and destruction that came of the earthquake. Upon rewatching this clip, it was apparent that these sounds were in fact created by voices, but its haunting effect persisted. The use of the human voice for sound effects works well in combination with the hand-drawn animations producing a unique effect that helps set this animation apart from others.

Despite the lack of fantastical elements of Miyazaki's normal style, this film is rich in inspiration and tragedy. As an engineer, I appreciate the romanticized view of aircraft development, and a peek into the emotional thoughts of the mind that designed them. The soundtrack has many beautiful pieces to match the vibrant world and emotional scenes between Jiro's two loves, Naoko, and his airplanes. Miyazaki's sparing use of dialogue mixed with the

leitmotivic use of the accordion theme highlight the inspiration throughout Jiro's life: the Italian designer, and his wife. The unconventional use of voice-based sound effects adds a more human element to the animation and brings the vehicles and landscapes alive to match the animation style. Overall, this movie is a fitting swan song for Miyazaki, ending with a film that both displays his fascination with airplanes and tells the story of one of the greatest aeronautical engineers through a beautiful and elegant animation.

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