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# INU-OH

## SYNOPSIS

From visionary director Masaaki Yuasa, hailed by IndieWire as “one of the most creatively unbridled minds in all of modern animation,” comes a revisionist rock opera about a 14th-century superstar whose dance moves take Japan by storm.

Born to an esteemed family, Inu-oh is afflicted with an ancient curse that has left him on the margins of society. When he meets the blind musician Tomona, a young *biwa* priest haunted by his past, Inu-oh discovers a captivating ability to dance. The pair quickly become business partners and inseparable friends as crowds flock to their electric, larger-than-life concerts. But when those in power threaten to break up the band, Inu-oh and Tomona must dance and sing to uncover the truth behind their creative gifts.

Featuring character creation by Taiyo Matsumoto (*Tekkonkinkreet*, *Ping Pong the Animation*) and awe-inspiring vocals by Avu-chan (Queen Bee) and Mirai Moriyama, *INU-OH* is a glam-rock ode to the power of music and a forceful statement on artistic freedom from one of animation’s singular talents.





## DIRECTOR BIO | MASAOKI YUASA

After graduating from the Department of Fine Arts at Kyushu Sangyo University, Yuasa joined Ajia-do Animation Works and studied under Tsutomu Shibayama. Later he worked as a freelancer. Yuasa was one of the primary staff for the TV series *Chibi Maruko-chan* and *Crayon Shin-chan*. His directorial debut, *Mind Game* (2004), won numerous awards including Best Film, Best Director, and Best Script at the Montreal Fantasia International Film Festival. He has also received many awards for television shows he directed, such as *The Tatami Galaxy* (2010) and *Ping Pong: The Animation* (2014). In 2017, he released two of his feature films, *Night is Short, Walk On Girl* and *Lu Over The Wall* in theaters. *Night is Short, Walk On Girl* won not only the Japan Academy Prize for Animation of the Year, but was also the first film directed by a Japanese director to win the Grand Prize for Best Animated Feature at the Ottawa International Animation Festival. His first original feature film, *Lu Over The Wall*, won the Cristal for Best Feature Film at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival.



Following the worldwide distribution of his two anime series, *DEVILMAN crybaby* (2018) and *Japan Sinks 2020* (2020) which won the Jury Award for a TV Series at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, Yuasa's works have become wildly popular not only in Japan but around the world. One of his most beloved shows adapted from Sumito Ōwara's manga of the same title, *Keep Your Hands Off of Eizouken!*, was named "one of the best TV shows of the year" by the New York Times. Additionally, his 2020 film *Ride Your Wave* won Best Animated Film at the Shanghai International Film Festival, as well as many national and international awards, including the Best Animated Feature Film at the Sitges - International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia. In *INU-OH*, his 5th full-length feature film, he took on the difficult task of creating a musical movie set in Muromachi-era Japan for the first time, as his love for challenges knows no bounds. The film debuted and earned Yuasa his first invitation to both the Venice Film Festival and TIFF. His unbridled imagination and dynamic drawing style have attracted attention both inside and outside the animation industry. Yuasa is one of the most notable and talented animation directors in the business today.

## QUOTE

"I'm happy to know that the story of Inu-oh and Tomona will be watched by many. Those two got out of the precipice they were in, and made a life for themselves by singing and dancing and rocking out during the Muromachi period. I'm certain this movie will get your heart racing just by watching it. It is full of elements that are not supposed to be present in that time period. There are many stories we don't know about. Their recognition and celebration is like a reward for those young people who dare to be true to themselves in every generation."

# CREW

**Director:** Masaaki Yuasa

**Screenplay:** Akiko Nogi

**Character Creation:** Taiyo Matsumoto

**Music:** Otomo Yoshihide

**Animation Supervisors:**

Yoshimichi Kameda, Satoshi Nakano

**Character Designer:** Nobutake Ito

**Assistant Director:** Fuga Yamashiro

**Animation Directors:**

Shuto Enomoto, Kenji Zemba,  
Tokuyuki Matsutake, Takashi Mukoda,  
Atsuko Fukushima, Yasuhiro Nakura,  
Hideo Harigaya, Toshihiko Masuda, Nobutake Ito

**Art Director:** Hideki Nakamura

**Color Coordinator:** Yuko Kobari

**Director of Photography:** Yoshihiro Sekiya

**Editor:** Kiyoshi Hirose

**Sound Director:** Eriko Kimura

**Sound Effect:** Katsuhiro Nakano

**Sound Recording:** Takeshi Imaizumi

**Historical Background Supervisor:** Yoshihiko Sata

**Noh Supervisor:** Keizo Miyamoto

**Noh Performance Supervisor:** Hirota Kamei

**Biwa Supervisor & Composer:** Yukihiro Goto

**Runtime:** 97 min

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# JAPANESE CAST

**Inu-oh:** Avu-chan (Queen Bee)

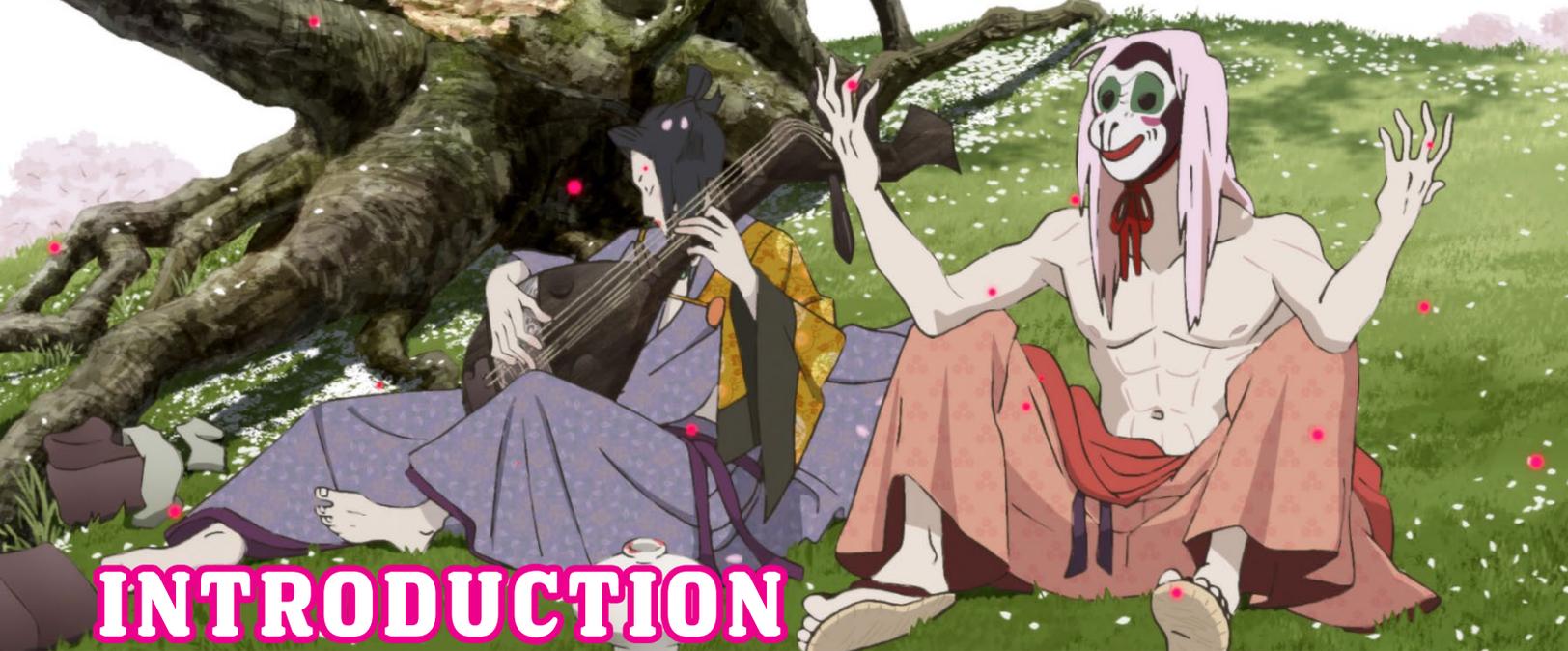
**Tomona:** Mirai Moriyama

**Lord Yoshimitsu Ashikaga:** Tasuku Emoto

**Inu-Oh's Father:** Kenjiro Tsuda

**Tomona's Father:** Yutaka Matsushige





Inu-oh is a Noh performer afflicted with an ancient curse, while Tomona is a blind biwa player and priest. The two of them meet in the Capital during the Muromachi period in Japan, and begin performing together. As their shows break all the rules of traditional arts, they become the pop stars of a brand new era and, before long, the crowds go wild for them.

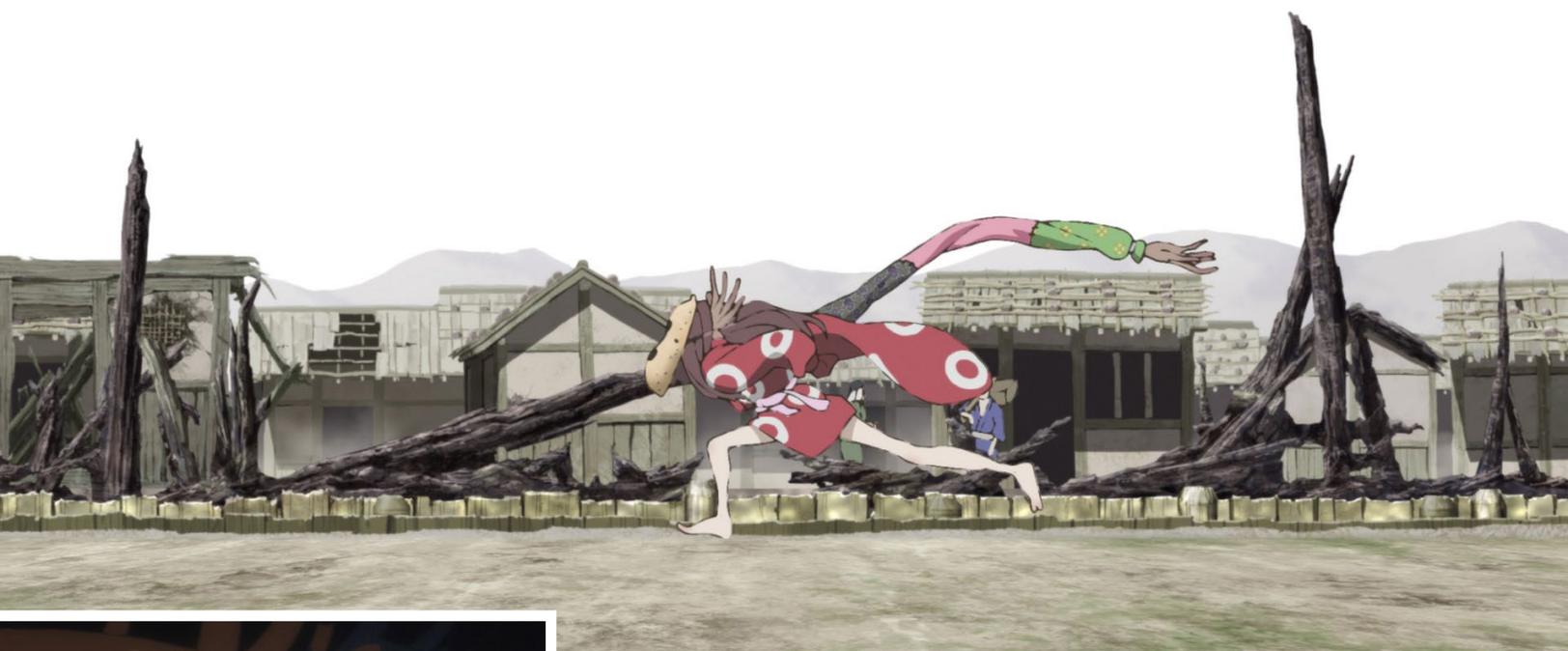
Hideo Furukawa's novel, "THE TALE OF THE HEIKE: THE INU-OH CHAPTERS", presents a bold interpretation of the enigmatic, real-life Noh performer, Inu-oh. Masaaki Yuasa, one of the greatest names of the animation industry, has now taken this story, adapted it to the big screen with his audacious imaginative touch, and created his version of *INU-OH*. Yuasa's *INU-OH* asks: What if hip-hop, rock, feverish outdoor music festivals, and engaging musical numbers all existed in 14th-century Japan?

Screenwriter Akiko Nogji rose to fame through her work on the TV series *The Full-Time Wife Escapist*, and the film *The Voice of Sin*. With *INU-OH*, Nogji takes on the timeless trope of the buddy movie, this time set in the Muromachi period. Manga artist Taiyo Matsumoto is credited with the character creation for the film and cover illustration for the original story. His most famous work *Ping Pong: The Animation* was adapted into an animated series by Yuasa in 2014 and carries similar themes to *INU-OH*, focusing on the tales of youth and friendship. While the former depicts characters expressing themselves through sports, the characters in *INU-OH* express themselves through music. Composer Otomo Yoshihide helms the musical landscape of this tale through his broad multi-instrumental background. His versatile use of classical instruments from modern rock to orchestral styling skillfully crafts a score that transcends genres and borders.

Voicing the endlessly talented, charismatic, and ambitious main character Inu-oh is Avu-chan, lead vocalist of the popular band Queen Bee, who brings Inu-oh to life through her incredible singing voice. The biwa-playing priest who will become Inu-oh's companion, Tomona, is played by Mirai Moriyama, a talented actor who has been studying dance from an early age and has performed in many musicals. The performance skills that both of these artists have developed on stage gives the film intense and unique liveliness. The accomplished supporting cast, including Tasuku Emoto, Yutaka Matsushige, and Kenjiro Tsuda, is also not to be missed.

At the 2021 Venice International Film Festival, *INU-OH* was the first Japanese 2D animation feature to be chosen for the Orizzonti competition, where it received much praise as a "rock opera". After a successful North American premiere screening at the Toronto International Film Festival, followed by screenings at the Busan International Film Festival, and the Tokyo International Film Festival, *INU-OH* was also shown at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. There, Yuasa's masterpiece became the first Japanese film to have both an exhibition and a screening at the same time.

Along with an extremely delightful story of success is a sad tale of impermanence, but the epilogue, not present in the original novel, makes *INU-OH* a relatable tale of friendship that transcends cultural and temporal barriers. It is, without a doubt, an animated musical film unlike anything else.



## INU-OH VOICE ACTOR BIO | AVU-CHAN (QUEEN BEE)

Avu-chan is most commonly known for being the vocalist of the band Queen Bee. The band made its major debut in 2011. They wrote and performed the theme song of the movie *Love Strikes!*, even appearing as themselves in the movie, which projected them to fame instantly. They also provided music for the animated series *Tokyo Ghoul: re* in 2018 and *Dororo* in 2019, making them a recognized entity in the animation industry as well. They performed their first concert at the Nippon Budokan, one of the world's most iconic music venues, in February 2022. In addition to activities as Queen Bee, Avu-chan, ever unstoppable, has appeared in the Broadway musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and composed music for artists of many different genres.



## QUOTE

I usually live my life as Queen, but this time I was given the opportunity to be a “King” (“Oh” in Japanese ) in *INU-OH*.

I can honestly say that taking part in this film felt like destiny to me, without a doubt.



## TOMONA VOICE ACTOR BIO | MIRAI MORIYAMA

Born on August 20th, 1984 in the Hyogo prefecture, Mirai Moriyama began studying various dance styles from the age of five and made his stage debut at 15 years old. In 2013, he spent a year as a Japan Cultural Envoy in Tel Aviv, Israel, working in various European countries with the Inbal Pinto & Avshalom Pollak Dance Company. Unbothered by categories, he expressed himself in various fields such as dance, theatre, or cinema. His most recent work includes the movie *Underdog*, NHK drama series *IDATEN The Epic Marathon to Tokyo*, short movies such as *Delivery Health* and *in-side-out* (which he directed), Akira Kasai's dance performance *Under the Cherry Tree*, the Kiyomizu-dera Temple dedicatory dance *Re:Incarnation* (directing of the performers and as a performer himself), theater plays such as *Unfulfilled Ghost and Monster* and *Nam-Ham-Da-Ham*, and much more. His most famous recent work is *We Couldn't Become Adults*. He describes his style as post-Butoh.

## QUOTE

“When Director Yuasa created the astounding animated film *INU-OH*, he based it on the fact that since its story is from a time when Noh wasn't as regulated art form as it is today, there was much more liberty of expression.

I play Tomona, a biwa priest who meets Inu-oh and starts performing with him, played by the astounding Avu-chan. Inevitably, recording for this movie turned out to be like a roller coaster at full speed.

I believe *INU-OH* will show how creative and full of possibilities Noh theater can be, which is said to be the world's oldest musical theater.”



## LORD YOSHIMITSU ASHIKAGA VOICE ACTOR BIO | TASUKU ENOMOTO

Born on December 16th, 1986, Tasuku Enomoto made his starring debut in the movie *A Boy's Summer* in 1945 in 2003. In 2018, he won the 73rd Mainichi Film Award for Best Leading Actor for his work in *And Your Bird Can Sing*, the 28th Japan Movie Critics Award for Best Leading Actor for *Dynamite Graffiti*, and also the 92nd Kinema Junpo Best Ten Award for Best Actor for *Lovers on Borders* and two other movies. In 2020, he won the 46th Hoso Bunka Foundation Awards for Outstanding Broadcasting Program for his performance in the television drama series *To Heal Wounds Of Heart*. As a voice actor, *INU-OH* will be his second role, after voice acting in the 2016 animated series *Erased*. His most recent roles include *To Heal Wounds Of Heart - The Movie*, *Peaceful Death*, *Sensei, Would You Sit Beside Me?*, *The Midnight Maiden War*, and *Anime Supremacy!*.

**QUOTE:** *I loved Mr. Taiyo Matsumoto's comic books when I was in high school. I never imagined the day I'd be able to bring life to his drawings. It was such an honor.*



## INU-OH'S FATHER VOICE ACTOR BIO | KENJIRO TSUDA

Kenjiro Tsuda was born on June 11th, 1971. He made his voice acting debut in the 1995 animated series *H2* as Atsushi Noda. He has voiced over characters in many other animated series such as *Jujutsu Kaisen*, *ID:INVADED*, *Golden Kamuy*, and *Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters*. In 2021, he won the Best Actor Award at the 15th Seiyu Awards. *INU-OH* is his second collaboration with Masaaki Yuasa, after he worked on *DEVILMAN crybaby*. He is also known for his dubbing and narration work, as well as acting, and his performance as a narrator in NHK's morning drama series *Yell* was a big hit. He has become a constant presence in animation, dramas, TV shows, and TV commercials, and most recently appeared in animated series such as *The Way of the Househusband*, *To Your Eternity*, and *Sonny Boy*.

**QUOTE:** *I never thought an animated movie would be made about Noh... and with Mr. Yuasa directing as well! I wonder what the movie will be like when it's completed. I am so excited about this unexpected movie, and it was such an honor to be a part of this project. The scenes I saw while recording presented Noh in a very entertaining pop-like style. I'm certain it will be a very interesting movie. Please do watch and enjoy it.*



## TOMONA'S FATHER VOICE ACTOR BIO | YUTAKA MATSUSHIGE

Yutaka Matsushige was born on January 19th, 1963 in the Fukuoka prefecture. After his stint at NINAGAWA STUDIO, he has worked extensively in film, television, and theater. His most recent work includes movies such as *Killing for the Prosecution*, and *The Hikita's Are Expecting!* among others. *What Happened to Our Nest Egg!?* is currently playing in movie theaters. His work in television series includes *Today's Nekomura-san*, *How to be Likable in a Crisis*, *Solitary Gourmet Season 9*, *Oliver na Inu*, *(Gosh!!) Konoyarou*, and much more. He also works as a radio personality on FM Yokohama on his show *Shinya no Ongaku Shokudou (Late-night Music Cafeteria)*, and he penned his first novel, *Kudou no Nakami* which was published in 2020.



## ORIGINAL WORK

### “THE TALE OF THE HEIKE: THE INU-OH CHAPTERS” BY HIDEO FURUKAWA

Hideo Furukawa is a novelist born on July 11th, 1966. He made his debut as an author with his novel *Jusan* in 1998. His 4th novel, *The Arabian Nightbreeds* (published in 2001) won him both the Mystery Writers of Japan Awards and the Japan SF Grand Prize. He also won the Mishima Yukio Prize for *LOVE* (in 2005), and he received both the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers and the Yomiuri Prize for Literature for *Onnatachi sanbyakunin no uragiri no sho* (in 2015). In 2016, he worked on a modern-day language translation of *Tales of the Heike* for Natsuki Ikezawa's Personal Editions' 9th book *Nihon bungaku zenshu*. *THE TALE OF THE HEIKE: THE INU-OH CHAPTERS* is what could be referred to as a spin-off of this work, and was published in 2017. His other works include *Mirai Mirai*, *Okina mori*, and *Zero F* among others.

## QUOTE

“This is a monster of a movie. I have probably never seen a screen growl so ferociously. What’s more, this “growl” sounded like pop music, tragic but thoroughly optimistic, in other words, a sort of exciting “rebellion of the oppressed”. It is not only about the animation. The music as well as the characters’ voices, they all writhe together. Even though I am supposedly the one who wrote the novel the movie is based on, this fact completely slipped my mind as I was watching it. I was simply stunned by the world depicted on the screen. But even then, my body was moving on its own accord and I found myself being swayed. I was being shaken. I honestly wondered what in the world was happening. And the response to my own question, I have written at the very top of this comment. This is a monster of a movie. This is a monster of an animated feature. This is a monster of an animated musical movie.”

## SCREENPLAY | AKIKO NOGI

Screenwriter. Among her most famous work is *The Voice of Sin, I Am A Hero*, and original series for television such as *Unnatural*, *MIU404*, and *Kotaki Kyodai to Shikuhakku*, among others. *Weakest Beast* won the 37th Kuniko Mukoda Award.

## QUOTE

“Director Yuasa’s genius is evident, I was astonished by it. I was completely stunned looking at the screen, and became one of the lucky ones who witnessed Inu-oh’s performances a long time ago. Avu-chan’s glamorous roaring brought tears to my eyes, Mr. Moriyama’s transparent singing resonated in my whole body, and the music was like waves of sound that made you want to listen to them over and over again forever. I can guarantee you will be singing “A huge, huge, huge whale” to yourself on the way home. I hope you will also be able to witness their lost story, the story that was taken away, and go see it in theaters so you don’t miss out and regret it later.”

## CHARACTER CREATION | TAIYO MATSUMOTO

Taiyo Matsumoto is a comic book artist, born on October 25th, 1967. He made his professional debut in 1987. His most famous works include *Hanaotoko*, *Tekkonkinkreet*, *Ping Pong, No. 5*, *Takemitsuzamurai*, *Sunny*, and *Cats of the Louvre* (all published by Shogakukan) among others. With *Tekkonkinkreet* and *Cats of the Louvre*, he won the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards two times, while *Takemitsuzamurai* won Manga Grand Prix at the 15th Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize as well as the Excellence Award of Manga Division at the 11th Japan Media Arts Festival, and *Sunny* was the winner of the 61st Shogakukan Manga Award in the general category and the also received the Excellence Award in the Manga Division of the 20th Japan Media Arts Festival. He is currently working on *Tokyo Higoro* (Big Comic Original / Shogakukan), and the series *Mukashi no hanashi* (Big Comic Superior / Shogakukan).

## QUOTE

“I hope Director Yuasa and everyone else involved in the project had fun while creating it, and if they did, I’m sure it will be received as an amazing animated film. As for me, I have done everything in my power to help them while staying out of their way.”



## MUSIC | OTOMO YOSHIHIDE

A musician born on August 1st, 1959, Otomo Yoshihide started his musical career in the 1980s performing overseas, producing music for movies and TV shows, and directing art festivals and other events. His work on *Ama-chan* won him the Special Award at the Tokyo Drama Awards in 2013, as well as Best Composer at the 55th Japan Record Awards, and many other awards. His other famous work includes *Journey to the Shore*, *The Town's Children*, *IDATEN The Epic Marathon to Tokyo*, and *We Made a Beautiful Bouquet* among many others. In 2012, he also received the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's Art Encouragement Prize in the Development of the Arts division for his work on PROJECT FUKUSHIMA! after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. In 2019, he worked as a director for the re-establishment of Fukushima's most famous summer festival, the Waraji Matsuri.

## QUOTE

“Honestly speaking, for three years, I was at the mercy of Mr. Yuasa’s absurd commands, while I never even knew whether he was being concrete or abstract, and the rough animation of his sketches, in which the uninitiated eye could not possibly decipher what was happening. But if I was just being messed with, I would have quit a long time ago. I have experienced again and again the immense excitement and joy of seeing his images come to life. And before I realized it, I was completely immersed in the world of *INU-OH*. It is an incredible piece of work. A masterpiece!”





## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MASAAKI YUASA

*What did you think when you were first offered to work on this project?*

I thought I should really focus on creating a good movie, rather than think of how it would sell. The first proposal materials I received had several posters and photos from live-action films on artists of many genres such as glam rock, punk, or hip-hop as inspiration. I thought it would be interesting to see Muromachi period people going crazy for the protagonists just like fans go wild for these artists nowadays... and it's with this simple thought that I accepted the project (laughter). As is usually the case, I began to see the theme of the work gradually as I was creating it, and then I knew what to delve deeper into.

*What appealed to you in Hideo Furukawa's novel, "THE TALE OF THE HEIKE: THE INU-OH CHAPTERS"?*

I felt the setting was similar to Tezuka Osamu's "Dororo," but the unique and interesting thing about the novel is how cheerful the character of Inu-oh is. He always seems so happy even though he grew up in difficult conditions, but that's what's great about him. Maybe I also felt like that because I was exhausted and depressed, very down mentally when I read the novel (forced laughter). Meeting the character of Inu-oh during such a time in my life, I felt like his light shined on me too.

*Were you able to immediately find elements in the story that could still be relevant today?*

I felt that the theme of "acknowledging someone else" is still very relevant today. The moral of the story is that even if they did not go down in history, Inu-oh was rewarded for having Tomoari (what Tomona names himself later on in the film), and Tomoari was rewarded for having Inu-oh. I hope that the viewers who watch their story now will also feel the importance of understanding the people around them. It's also about "shedding light on people who disappeared without being





noticed in their time”, I think it was one of the roles of the Noh performers and biwa priests, and it is also what Mr. Furukawa wanted to do when he shed light on the character of Inu-oh, about whom not many documents remain. I believe that making this story into an animated film is a very meaningful thing.

***Was it your original intention to interpret the story freely, without being overly constrained by the historical period?***

Knowledge is important, so it is a good thing to try to follow the historical research as closely as possible, but after I thought about it some more, I decided we could try to imagine some “other” things as well. I always felt that the interpretation of history as seeing the past as inferior and things only getting better as they evolve with time was not quite right. There may have been people with the same way of thinking as some people do now, or even more mature back then. I thought it would be interesting if people in the past had imagination and creativity beyond our current knowledge, so I decided not to create something based only on what we knew.

***How did you select your animation staff?***

I admit I was very busy at the time, so I pretty much left it up to the producer’s judgment. I only asked specifically for some people I regularly work with, and to the Art Director Hideki Nakamura with whom I have wanted to work ever since our collaboration on *Cat Soup*. But had I been able to choose every single member of staff by myself, our way of working would have been the same, as I always try to adapt my method to everyone’s styles and quirks, so either way it wouldn’t have been an issue. I wanted the younger in-house staff at Science SARU to see the process of making a film on-site, up close and personal, allowing them to absorb as much as they could, so I actively appointed them. I also thought I wanted to gather people that are as talented as possible, of course (laughter).

***The animation team is stellar, isn’t it?***

Yes, but there was so much work to be done, it was hard to go through it all on-site. Finding the manpower to perfect all the details was a difficult task. Since there were many details to pay attention to in the story, including historical research, conveying it to the people on board and having them understand it perfectly was a big challenge in itself. But even then, the whole team, including Animation Supervisor Yoshimichi Kameda and Satoshi Nakano, strived to draw everything up perfectly. Animation Director Shuto Enomoto was responsible for Inu-oh’s childhood scenes as well as the first dance scene, and Izumi Murakami was responsible for a majority of the most beautiful drawings. The work of veterans such as Yasuhiro Nakura and Atsuko Fukushima was also amazing, as I knew it would be. As for the shots from Tomona’s perspective, we had a whole different team colorize them in a particular way to make them stand out.

***Did you have a hard time drawing the music festival-like energetic dance and performance scenes?***

It was difficult to decide on a rough shape and flow, but once it was all decided, I would hand over all the materials I had and ask the animators to study them as they drew the scenes. As for dance styles, I wanted to have them evolve



during the course of the film, going from a more primitive style to more refined musical numbers like the ones from musical movies like *Singin' in the Rain*, with some shuffle dance thrown in, and even ballet towards the end. We referenced the movements of not only dancers but athletes of various other sports as well. We would find beautiful movements of both dancers and athletes and combine them in various ways. As for the band performance scenes, one of our Animation Directors, Kenji Zemba, was very knowledgeable in the field of music, so I asked him to closely watch all of the band scenes, to check how the band played their instruments.

*INU-OH has been described as a “rock opera” at overseas film festivals, but you have been experimenting with the compatibility of animation and music since your first feature film, Mind Game. You could say this movie is the result of your experiments in your past projects.*

I always wanted to work on synchronizing music and pictures as beautifully as possible. But actually, remembering the way we worked on this movie, it really surprised me it ended up as good as it did (laughter). I thought the best way to work on this would be creating the music first and then animate along to it, but I wasn't able to properly describe what I envisioned. Therefore, Otomo Yoshihide, who was in charge of music, told me he wanted to see the choreography first.

*Really?*

At first, I was dumbfounded as to how he expected me to create it without music, but I realized that if we didn't resolve this issue, the production would be stuck, so I had the artists provide storyboards for the scene and we created an animated mockup first. Something to show the rhythm at which the characters would clap their hands, what lyrics they would be singing, that kind of thing. I knew roughly what the scenes would be about, so I wrote suitable lyrics. For Inu-oh's song, I decided I wanted it to be on the theme of “never giving up”, so I took into account what I wanted the climax of the movie to be about, and I then came up with the lyrics for each part. I gave all of that to Mr. Otomo, and he composed the music. I was in completely unknown territory, but I really thought he was amazing. I thought it would take some adapting to fit the song to the film, but he created it to fit perfectly from the start. With this element, we were able to make a scene that fit in seamlessly in the overall story.

*That is amazing.*

Based on this, I asked Avu-chan to arrange the lyrics and singing style, and with Avu-chan's input as a singer and performer, we put it all together into its final form. Avu-chan tried various ways of singing on the spot and was very quick to judge whether it felt right or not. I was amazed and remember thinking “wow, so that's how artists record albums”.

*How did you direct Avu-chan and Mirai Moriyama as voice actors during the recording?*

I never asked for something specific. I would talk with Sound Director Eriko Kimura about the overall direction of the project, and I would only directly explain things

like situations and what the characters were doing in the scene. I just had them run through the scenes and if I found something I did not like, I would say something, but if I thought it could work, I wouldn't say anything in particular.

*It was Avu-chan's first performance as a voice actor, but Avu-chan was incredibly proficient.*

I had Avu-chan do some minor voice work in *DEVILMAN Crybaby* before, but this time Avu-chan was the main character and had more lines, so I did worry a little. However, I could see the motivation, because Avu-chan didn't mind performing repeatedly until I was satisfied with the lines. After that, I stopped worrying, and we actually did more retakes at Avu-chan's request than mine as Avu-chan insisted, "Let me do it another time, I want to get it right".

*It seems that Mr. Moriyama decided to actually start practicing the biwa, is that true?*

I asked Yukihiro Goto, who played the biwa as the master in the movie, if he would teach him and they rehearsed together. Mr. Moriyama actually got pretty good, that we even thought we could use his own biwa playing in the movie. He was modest and protested, saying he was "nowhere near good enough". He put his all into his role, and I believe that is how he could recreate the feeling of singing while playing the biwa so realistically.

*The story of Inu-oh and Tomoari's success and downfall as performers are also synchronized with the rise and fall of the Heike clan in "Tale of the Heike", isn't it?*

Exactly. They rise in fame just like rockstars. I envisioned a frenzy similar to the one the Beatles caused in their time. But as for the way it all falls back down, I did not mind it going either way, good or bad (laughter). Even if their story didn't go down in history, the most important thing is that they met each other at the right time and stayed beside each other, accepting one another.

*Is this a sentiment you also feel?*

For years, it has been my wish to work with people who think differently than I do, and I've done so time and time again. Working in such a way allows me to open my mind up, and it leads to personal as well as professional growth. But recently, I have started thinking it might also be good to work with people whose ideas are similar to my own, and that there might be something powerful to be gained by doing that. I especially thought so while working on "INU-OH".

## **- SPOILERS BELOW -**

*The epilogue that suggests that the hope of a never-ending friendship lies beyond the bitter end, really left a strong impression.*

I thought *INU-OH* could not end with a simple happy end like "the curse is lifted, hurray", it was not that kind of story. The original work also has an epilogue, but I changed it a bit for the movie. Things like why Tomoari's soul stayed after his death, and why Inu-oh did not notice it for 600 years. I thought it would be better to explain it plainly in the movie. Inu-oh gives up his dreams in order to save Tomoari, but Tomoari resists at the risk of his life and meets a tragic end. Tomoari probably thought he had been denied, and had even lost his own name and that is why he became a ghost. However, Inu-oh had no idea what state his friend was in. After Tomoari's death, he kept looking for a long time, but could never find him because he had no name. I think I had decided to end their story like this from early on. When they meet again, I thought they'll go back to the way they were back when they felt like they could be themselves the most.

*Do you have a message for the people who watch the movie?*

Much like Noh theater, I believe that at the source of music, there is the idea and excitement of singing and dancing, and offering something to God. I simply hope that everyone who watches *INU-OH* will bob their heads along and feel the rhythm of the music. I would love to see everyone dance in front of the screen!



## ABOUT GKIDS

GKIDS is the producer and distributor of award-winning feature animation for both adult and family audiences. Since 2010, the company has scored an astounding 12 Best Animated Feature Oscar nominations with *The Secret of Kells* in 2010, *A Cat in Paris* and *Chico & Rita* in 2012, *Ernest & Celestine* in 2014, *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* and *Song of the Sea* in 2015, *Boy and the World* and *When Marnie Was There* in 2016, *My Life as a Zucchini* in 2017, *The Breadwinner* in 2018, *Mirai* in 2019, and *Wolfwalkers* in 2021. GKIDS handles North American distribution for the famed Studio Ghibli library of films, one of the world's most coveted animation collections with titles *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke* and others; as well as the critically acclaimed television series, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Also, GKIDS is the founder and host of ANIMATION IS FILM, the annual LA-based film festival which embraces the highest aspirations of animation as a cinematic art form, and is a vocal advocate for filmmakers who push the boundaries of the medium to its fullest range of artistic expressions.

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