



FILM: **PERFECT DAYS**

FDG RATING: 4.2

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Wim Wenders: *director*
Kōji Yakusho: *actor, Hirayama*

DATE: August 18, 2024

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **PERFECT DAYS**

What began as a commission for a documentary about Tokyo's uniquely modern, artistically designed, public toilets, became a character study about an older Japanese man whose job is to clean these high tech toilets and who takes pride in meticulously shining every nook and cranny and the entire area inside the public bathrooms. We meet Hirayama (translates to peaceful mountain) in the shimmering early morning sunlight as he exits the door of his small, minimal, Tokyo apartment, and tilting his head towards the sky, soaks in every miniscule beauty shining down on him.

Hirayama lives a simple life with a simple daily routine. He has minimal possessions except for a long bookshelf stacked with books, (he is reading Faulkner's *Wild Palms*) and an enviable collection of nostalgic cassette tapes including Otis Redding, Patti Smith, and Lou Reed, that he plays as he travels to and from work in his van. Before he leaves for work each day, he religiously sprays water on his many sapling sprouts of Japanese maple trees spread out in paper cups on a low table.

It's so unusual that the film is continually engaging with a steady calm pace. No build-up to a crisis or conflict as is the customary formula in a film. No tension which is typically needed to keep a viewer engaged. But each day has a special moment that brings him joy such as finding a lost little boy in the bathroom and reuniting him with his mom who was frantically looking for him. The mother didn't show any sign of appreciation and quickly wipes off the boy's hand that Hirayama held. As he and his mother briskly walk away, the little boy turns and waves to him. On another day, he finds a small paper tucked in the bathroom wall crevice with the start of a tic tac toe game. He hesitates but then decides to add his mark before folding the paper back into the crevice.

His young male assistant, Takashi, adds a bit of humor as someone who is more interested in quickly getting the job done so he can have time for a young female he is attracted to. When Takashi pleads to borrow Hirayama's van to give the girl a ride since his motorcycle broke down, Hirayama reluctantly agrees so we see the boy in the driver's seat, the girl in the other front seat, and Hirayama squeezed into the space behind the seats, crowded against stacks of toilet paper rolls.

We know nothing about his previous life until, unexpectedly, his niece shows up to stay with him for few days after having an argument with her mother. Although this uncomfortably interrupts Hirayama's routine, we see he is very pleased to be with her.

When his wealthy sister comes to retrieve her daughter, driven by a chauffeur in a limo, she asks him to visit their father who is in a nursing home, but he shakes his head. She says it will be different so there must have been unforgiveable trauma in their relationship. When she leaves, they hug which is the first expressive emotion he has shown. He has momentarily glimpsed into his past but stands firm in his decision to let the past go. Now is now. As they drive away he breaks into tears.

We believe he was feeling what he had lost when he chose to leave his family. It was a glimpse into his past.

Though Hirayama hardly speaks in the film, so much is expressed in his face. A heartwarming performance by the esteemed Japanese actor, Kōji Yakusho, (*Tampopo*, *Shall We Dance?*, *Memoirs of a Geisha*), we are completely drawn into his zen life. Each day he takes photos of the shimmering patterns that the tree leaves make against the sky overhead. "Komorebi" is a Japanese word for the dancing shadow patterns created by sunlight shining through the rustling leaves of trees.

We unanimously gave the film high scores. One discussion participant said it was a beautiful touching film about a simple life that brought joy to Hirayama each day. Another participant loved it explaining that it was funny in a sweet way and beautifully filmed, with an amazing performance by Yokusho. The mystery of his background and family plus his goofy coworker and girlfriend added interest. It was fresh, original, unexpected, commented one discussion participant. Another noted that slowly, in small parts, we learned a little more about him but the film, when completed, was so much more than the sum of the parts. Profound in its simplicity was another comment. It's an unheeded message for humanity: a simple unburdened life can be beautiful, peaceful, and joyous. A published film reviewer said the film was "a poetic ode to simplicity and serenity, a gentle exploration of the beauty and dignity of a humble life."

We rated the 2023 Japanese film, Perfect Days, a shining 4.2 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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www.filmdiscussiongroup.com

FOOTNOTE: 16 world class architects designed these high-tech public bathrooms in Tokyo, in preparation for the 2020 Olympics

A co-production between Japan and Germany