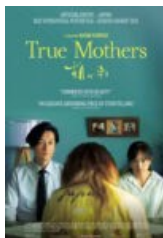




## REVIEW: TRUE MOTHERS

Richard Gray January 19, 2021 Film, Film Reviews



A modern master takes a measured approach to delivers another delicate character piece, filled with trademark beauty and lingering resonance.

If 2020 had turned out differently, [Naomi Kawase](#) would have been filming the Olympics and debuting this film at Cannes.

Of course, we all know how that year turned out. The Japanese filmmaker and novelist, who will join the ranks of Kon Ichikawa if and when the Tokyo Olympics go ahead, is best known recently for films such as [Hanezu](#), [Still the Water](#) and [Radiance](#). Often blending documentary techniques into her fictional narratives, she frequently evokes a kind of natural realism.

With TRUE MOTHERS (朝が来る), Kawase delivers another excellent character piece, filled with her trademark lingering shots of nature, objects and filtered light. As Japan's official entry for Best International Feature Film at the 93rd Academy Awards, it's safe to say she's working at the height of her game.



Image courtesy Kino Films + Film Movement

At its most basic level, Kawase's and Izumi Takahashi's script – based on a novel by Mizuki Tsujimura – concerns Satoko (Hiromi Nagasaku) and her husband Kiyokazu (Arata Iura) deciding to adopt a baby. Years later, Hikari (Aju Makita) comes forward as the child's birth mother.

The film then shifts perspectives, time jumping between the couple and Hikari's respective experiences. We see Satoko and Kiyokazu's difficulties in conceiving and their various heart-breaking decisions. Rarely has azoospermia been so frankly discussed on screen, let alone in Japanese cinemas. Meanwhile, we follow Hikari through her teen pregnancy, and the difficult journey that led her to reaching out to her child's adopted family.

The original title translates to 'Comes Morning' (or 'morning is coming' if you prefer), and viewing the film through this lens is arguably more rewarding than the more marketable western title. It vaguely evokes the biblical allusion to joy coming with the morning. It also speaks to the idea of happiness being just over the horizon, but not quite here yet.



Image courtesy Kino Films + Film Movement

Yet parenthood and memory are such an important part of the film as well. Indeed, with some subthemes of nature versus nurture, it would make an interesting companion piece to Kore-eda's [Like Father, Like Son](#) or even Nagasaku's own role in the thematically related [Rebirth](#) over a decade ago.

The entire cast is remarkable, but particular mention should be made of the young Aju Makita. Previously appearing in supporting roles in Kore-eda's [After the Storm](#) and Shintaro Sugawara's *Strawberry Song*, this is surely her breakthrough performance.

With all the naturalistic resonance of *Radiance*, here Kawase combines many of her themes for maximum impact. So, while last year may not have been the year she expected it to be, the wide release of this film has pointed 2021 in the right direction.

TRUE MOTHERS is playing at the [JICC festival](#) (22 January 2021), before making its theatrical debut in the US on 29 January 2021 from Film Movement.

2020 | [Japan](#) | DIRECTOR: Naomi Kawase | WRITER: Naomi Kawase, Izumi Takahashi (Based on the the novel by Mizuki Tsujimura | CAST: Hiromi Nagasaku, Arata Iura, Aju Makita | DISTRIBUTOR: Kino Films (JPN), Film Movement (US)| RUNNING TIME: 140 minutes | RELEASE DATE: 29 January 2021 (US)