



STILL WALKING (ARUITEMA, ARUITEMA)

Autumn
Season
2010

Review by David Jenkins, Time Out:

The tiny changes in human behaviour that occur when faced with loss is a theme that Japanese director Hirokazu Koreeda has consistently explored in his films. 1998's *After Life* (KFC spring 2000) speculated on how people come to terms with the loss of their own lives, 2004's *Nobody Knows* (KFF 2005) offered a group of children forced to muddle through adolescence without parents and this extraordinarily tender and consoling new ensemble comedy provides a glimpse into the lives of a lower-middle class Yokohama family on the day they come together to observe the anniversary of a loss in the family.

It's a summit of coiled emotion, a rare occasion on which parents, children and grandchildren can awkwardly air grievances while happily munching on sushi, eel and tempura. Despite the fact that every shot is loaded with anxieties about death (of family members, of tradition...), the tone remains warm and ironic. The way



Koreeda films – mostly discreet shots of the family's cramped suburban house – makes most directors look blind to the possibilities of locating ideas in mundane imagery, such as a drawer left slightly open, a butterfly entering the house, or cherry blossom blooming in the garden.

His beautiful dialogue, too, favours gentle naturalism over characters breaking down and blurting out feelings, giving it a subtle universality: we see reflections of people we know and love in these characters. Koreeda's almost sage-like understanding of what makes modern families tick places him and this wonderful film in the league of Japan's grand master, Ozu, and you can't ask for higher praise than that.

Review by Anton Bitel, Little White Lies:

"There's a ghost at night." So says young Mutsu (Hayashi Ryôga) of the house where his grandparents Toshiko (Kiki Kirin) and Kyohei (Harada Yoshio) live and where the whole family is gathering for an annual get-together.



Sure enough, while the house might be filled with the noisy presence of three generations, it is also haunted by several absences. For the gathering is to commemorate the anniversary of eldest son Junpei's death a dozen years ago – while Junpei's younger brother Ryota (Abe Hiroshi), a struggling art restorer from Tokyo who rarely (and reluctantly) visits, is only half replacing the late father of his stepson Atsushi (Tanaka Shohei). Meanwhile the grandparents, though still walking, are nearing the end of their own life's journey. without having resolved any of the tensions that they have with their

descendants, or indeed with each other.

Still Walking is also, of course, haunted by the spirit of Yasujiro Ozu's 1953 classic *Tokyo Story*, presenting perennial domestic themes in a composed style whose poetry derives from its plain simplicity. For while this film is full of all the bitterness, regret, jealousy, disappointment, deceit and awkward love that make up any family, it depicts these with a calm restraint and subtlety, excluding even the slightest hint of melodrama – or as writer/director Hirokazu Koreeda, who previously brought us *After Life*, *Distance* and *Nobody Knows*, has so rightly put it himself: "There are no typhoons in this film."

Instead all the cruelties, conflicts, cracks and continuities in family life are collapsed into an uneventful yet revealing period of 24 concentrated hours (plus a brief coda). And while Koreeda certainly prefers quietly observed, mundane details to grand gestures or shrill twists, it is his unflinching honesty that makes *Still Walking* so confrontingly painful and sad.