



Distance

Hirokazu Kore-Eda

JAPAN, 2001

132 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Distance**

Project Team

Producer: **Masayuki Akieda**
Screenplay: **Hirokazu Kore-Eda**
Cinematographer: **Yutaka Yamazaki**
Editor: **Hirokazu Kore-Eda**
Production Designer: **Toshihiro Isomi**
Sound: **Eiji Mori**
Principal Cast: **Tadanobu Asano,**
Arata, Yusuke Iseya, Yui Natsukawa,
Susumu Terajima

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Hirokazu Kore-Eda's third film recalls *Maboroshi*, his first. Like that delicate meditation, *Distance* seeks some basic truths about the aftermath of personal loss. Yet this new work is in fact more hermetic and difficult than either *Maboroshi* or his more accessible and famous film, *After Life*. Kore-Eda takes us on a painful journey with a group of damaged individuals; as so often in life, emotional yields are few and hard work is required to obtain them.

Four acquaintances make an annual pilgrimage to a secluded lake, where they go to honour their dead relatives, the victims – and perhaps perpetrators – of a massacre in the apocalyptic religious cult, the Ark of Truth. On the third anniversary of the tragedy, they encounter a young man (Tadanobu Asano) who was a cult member until the very moment the killing began. When their vehicle is stolen, the whole group is forced to spend an uncomfortable and ultimately life-changing night in the cult's former headquarters. The final resolution of the individuals' stories – flashbacks portray their relationships with their dead family members – was the subject of much debate at *Distance's* initial screenings. Suffice it to say that Kore-Eda feels that their cathartic night allows them little existential satisfaction – a chillingly honest proposition in our therapy-obsessed age.

Surprisingly, given its clear echoes of the Aum Shinrikyo debacle, the film's political anger is directed not at the maniac cult

leaders, but at the leaders of conventional society. For Kore-Eda, the sadness and isolation of these cult kids, most of them intelligent and passionate, is organic, sparked by a society that has no place for them and their internal struggles.

Such elusive cinematic material requires great actors and Kore-Eda's troupe obliges, with Tadanobu Asano giving a particularly subtle and nuanced performance. The depth of his grief, born from complicity as well as lost love, gradually overtakes the sublimated sense of loss felt by the victims' relatives. This effect is brought about in a performance marked by patient revelation. It confirms him as one of the finest actors of his generation.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Hirokazu Kore-Eda was born in Tokyo, Japan, in 1962. After graduating from Waseda University, he began making television documentaries with TV Man Union. Both of his previous features have won him international acclaim. Feature filmography: *Maboroshi* (95), *After Life* (98) and *Distance* (01).

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