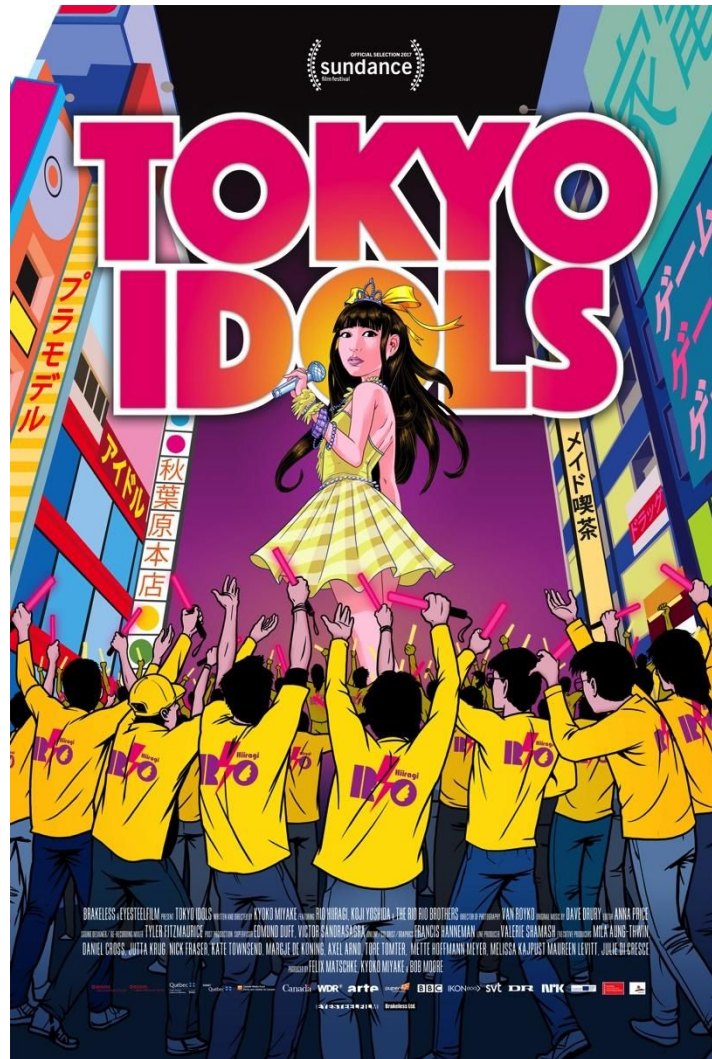


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TOKYO IDOLS A FILM BY KYOKO MIYAKE

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LOGLINE

Girl bands and their pop music permeate every moment of Japanese life. Following an aspiring pop singer and her fans, Tokyo Idols explores a cultural phenomenon driven by an obsession with young female sexuality, and the growing disconnect between men and women in hyper-modern societies

SYNOPSIS

“IDOLS” has fast become a phenomenon in Japan as girl bands and pop music permeate Japanese life. TOKYO IDOLS - an eye-opening film gets at the heart of a cultural phenomenon driven by an obsession with young female sexuality and internet popularity.

This ever growing phenom is told through Rio, a bona fide "Tokyo Idol" who takes us on her journey toward fame. Now meet her “brothers”: a group of adult middle aged male super fans (ages 35 - 50) who devote their lives to following her—in the virtual world and in real life. Once considered to be on the fringes of society, the "brothers" who gave up salaried jobs to pursue an interest in female idol culture have since blown up and have now become mainstream via the internet, illuminating the growing disconnect between men and women in hypermodern societies.

With her provocative look into the Japanese pop music industry and its focus on traditional beauty ideals, filmmaker Kyoko Miyake confronts the nature of gender power dynamics at work. As the female idols become younger and younger, Miyake offers a critique on the veil of internet fame and the new terms of engagement that are now playing out IRL around the globe.

FILMMAKER STATEMENT

Growing up in Japan as a girl was a confusing experience for me. Not being or acting cute was taken as a sign of defiance. I left Japan at 26, and began to understand things didn't have to be that way for me, so I decided not to return. A few years ago, when I became aware of the phenomenon called "Idols" during my visits back home, it felt like it had something to do with what made me uncomfortable about being a woman in Japan and I wanted to explore it.

I started this film to confront my insecurities by revisiting my failed girlhood. I'm aware that I grew up internalizing the idea that women can only shine by winning male admiration. Even though it's been 15 years since I left, I still struggle with these ideas- it takes a long time to undo this process! I wanted to confront what I'm trying to part with. But while making the film, I've realised that this story cuts deeper into what it means to be a woman or a man in a hyper modern society. It's about the disconnection between men and women, and about a society paralyzed by nostalgia for "good old days" when women knew where they belonged and when most men got a secure job and could become the sole breadwinners.

I knew that the Idols were a mainstream cultural phenomenon but I was still surprised to see so many Idol fans. If so many people feel this deep anxiety, a sense of alienation and the feeling that somehow they failed in their life, I thought that our scale - measuring our happiness and achievements in life - must be off.

I tried to be as honest as possible about my intentions when I spoke to the fans. Some of them didn't see the point of the film, but quite a few responded with a similar line with a smile; 'so you are making a film about how useless Japanese men are'? This kind of self-deprecating humor is not uncommon among those guys. It touched me and I felt warmer towards them because of it. On the other hand, some men who are seemingly more 'in power' were hostile to the film concept. One broadcaster, who is a self-proclaimed idol fan, told me that I was missing the whole point by seeing this as an objectification of women. According to him, idol phenomenon is "a girls' rebellion and their empowerment." I felt angry and thought it was typical mansplaining in Japan but at the same time, I thought there was some truth in it. For instance, Rio is like a little goddess to her fans, exercising an enormous amount of power on them. But I didn't want to lose sight of the wider context, the very foundation of this culture, which consists of a deeply sexist idea that women possess the most power and value when they are teenagers, - when they have the ephemeral quality of girlhood - innocence, fragility and virginity. When the shelf life expires, the girls 'graduate' from the band, leaving space to be filled by new and younger girls.

Talking to the mothers was very difficult. It was obvious that they were doing it with all the good intentions for their daughters. None of them was in it for the money as very few

people actually make much money from being an idol. Mothers I spoke to felt they were actually 'investing' in their daughter's future.

At the same time I felt that they were reminiscing on their lost youth and felt somehow pressured that they need to make sure their daughter would maximize their value as women while they can, because the mothers know what happens when you pass the best-by date. Including myself, women are very much complicit in perpetuating this system.

Sometimes, I felt frustrated at the mothers who seemed rather oblivious. But they and their daughters live in Japan where this kind of attitude towards women are not only confined to the idol industry but widely shared in society. They are living that reality, I am not. So I tried to keep my judgement to myself during the shoot. I felt conflicted throughout the filming though.

The film became as much about the fans as about the idols. Initially, our idea was to follow a few aspiring idol singers. The film ended up becoming as much about their fans - the men who have become increasingly disconnected from women of their age and shy away from real relationships.

While I don't condone their behavior, I now have a deeper understanding for why they act or think the way they do.

Idols are a mainstream phenomenon, an industry with a net worth of 1.3 billion dollars (up by 30% from last year) according to the report published this month.

The annual AKB election alone is estimated to generate around 25 million dollars. One worrying fact is that idols have been voted one of the most desired professions by five year old girls in a nationwide survey for nine consecutive years.

The social impact is huge. One of the leading newspapers in Japan - Asahi Shimbun - every year runs a series of articles with predictions in the run up to the AKB election. The event is aired on one of the biggest terrestrial channels during the prime time. When a very popular idol graduates, it is reported as breaking news across all media. Idol songs dominate the hit charts in Japan and Japan is one of the few music markets in developed countries where CD sales is still a dominant force thanks to idol CDs sold as merchandise.

While the idol culture is based on a very traditional notion of women - that they are there to provide care and comfort for men, their platform is very new. Internet is an important aspect. It seemed that the more connected you are online, the greater the need is to meet in person. Idol bands reach out to the fans through those two opposite means - digital and in person, often skipping the traditional middle grounds such as television. The business

model was successful because it fills the void and deep loneliness in the digital age. Idol phenomenon is as much about restoring failed manhood as about finding your peer group and searching for validation. It provides a virtual romance - where exaggerated femininity meets failed masculinity - as well as a homosocial community, like Rio Rio Brothers in the film. Many lyrics for instance repeat the same message - you are not alone and you are great the way you are. The idol business is all about communication. Handshaking, photo-taking. Every interaction is paid for.

The Idol culture is a fantasy world. Many fans go by their online names and don't know each other's real names even though they meet each other several times a week. It's a safe space where they can play in their alter ego, outside the unsatisfactory social/professional life.

The biggest challenge in making this film was to find the balance between the inside and outside perspectives. We wanted to have a critical look without judging negatively from a western point of view. It was surprising for us how quickly our initial sense of creep went away. After a few concerts, a sense of normalcy kicked in. Idol scenes are not seedy and we never saw a drunken person even though the venues often sold alcohol. It's actually very orderly and there is an unwritten rule of conduct. So for us, going back and forth between Japan and UK/Canada, was in fact, apart from logistical nightmares, very helpful. The physical distance helped us to restore our psychological distance and to keep remembering how uncomfortable we felt at the beginning while constantly asking ourselves how much we can accept and culturally sensitive while retaining our critical perspective? This balancing act was perhaps the trickiest part.

The audience might find this world alien at the beginning of the film but I hope they will find it familiar by the end of it. I feel that all the elements in the film - objectification, justification, nostalgia, internalization, disproportionate agism against women, emasculated men with macho ideas and so on - are happening around all of us. They are just magnified and taken to the extreme in Japan but there are definitely parallels everywhere. Recently, I was deeply disappointed to see the male locker room mentality gain a renewed validation. And yet it has ignited something in me. I want this film to serve as a mirror, an uncomfortable mirror to look at. And if it becomes part of the ongoing discussion and fight, I cannot be happier.

-Kyoko Miyake, Director

SUBJECT BIOS

Rio Hiragi

Rio is a 21 year old singer, songwriter and dancer who has been performing since 2011. She started to gain fame after competing and winning numerous competition. In order to actively interact with her fans around the world, Rio uses various internet sharing sites to broadcast herself online every single day. No matter how tired or ill she may be, she does not take a day off from webcasting for it has become a part of her life. Her current record stands at over 1100 consecutive days of daily webcasting. In 2015 Rio started a world tour, performing and visiting fans in over 12 cities worldwide. She has performed at the TOKYO IDOL FESTIVAL, the world's largest idol festival, and multiple other contests and festivals, winning Best Live Artist at the L1 Grand Prix. She had her record label debut in April 2015 and continues to be involved in choreography, songwriting and performing.

Koji

Koji is one of Rio's most loyal fans and dedicates most of his free time and money supporting Rio. Koji follows all her broadcasts and posts on social media, attends all performances and meet and greets, including ones outside Tokyo and abroad, and organizes special gatherings with other Rio fans centered around their loyalty for Rio. Koji has previously been in a long term relationship which ended when the girl became impatient that Koji didn't want to commit to marriage. Not knowing what to do with his free time and the money he had saved up secretly for an engagement, he started to support idols. For Koji, the idols always make him feel special, even if his physical interaction with the idols is limited to timed 1-minute paid meet and greet sessions where fans like him are allowed to hold shake the girls' hands. Looking back at his own life so far, Koji sums up his recent mid-life era as being "eventful and fascinating."

FILMMAKER BIOS



Kyoko Miyake, Director

Born in Japan, Kyoko Miyake studied history at Tokyo University and then moved to Britain to research the history of witchcraft at Oxford. Her film *Brakeless* won a Peabody Award after airing on PBS and BBC. Her first film, *My Atomic Aunt*, was supported by the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund, BBC, WDR, and NHK, and it was recently broadcast on PBS. *Hackney Lullabies* won the Berlin Today Award at the 2011 Berlin International Film Festival. Website: kyokomiyake.com



Bob Moore, Producer

Bob Moore is a Creative Producer and Co-President of EYESTEELFILM in Montreal, specializing in the creation of cinematic documentaries such as *Last Train Home*, *China Heavyweight*, *I Am the Blues*, and *Forest of the Dancing Spirits*. With partners Daniel Cross and Mila Aung-Thwin, Bob has produced films that have been recognized by international awards including the Emmys and Golden Horse, as well as numerous festival grand jury awards. Bob also oversees EYESTEELFILM's theatrical distribution company and its new Creative Reality Lab, which focuses on meaningful interactive and immersive storytelling. He has degrees in Philosophy, Fine Art, and Law, and regularly lectures at and consults with film institutions around the world.



Felix Matschke, Producer

Felix Matschke has experience in civil engineering and finance prior to starting to work in film. He has worked with director Kyoko Miyake on all her films, covering a wide range of roles from cinematographer to producer. *Brakeless* (2014) was coproduced with BBC, ITVS, DR, IKON and NHK and won a 2014 Peabody Award. In 2016, he has participated in Cannes Cinefondation's The Atelier with Kyoko Miyake for her first fiction project, *Femme Fatale*. He has been selected to participate in Documentary Campus 2013.

TOKYO IDOLS

Brakeless and EyeSteelFilm
Present
A film by Kyoko Miyake

TOKYO IDOLS

Written and Directed by
Kyoko Miyake

Produced by
Felix Matschke
Bob Moore
Kyoko Miyake

Executive Producers
Mila Aung-Thwin
Daniel Cross

Director of Photography
Van Royko

Additional Camera
Felix Matschke
Kyoko Miyake

Editor
Anna Price

Original music by
David Drury

Featuring
Rio Hiragi

Koji Yoshida
Rio Rio Brothers
Koichiro Mitsui
Rio's Family
P.IDL
Mitacchi
Ryoka Oshima Fans
Harajuku Story
Harajuku Story fans
Amore Carina
Amore Carina Fans
Itaru Tsurumi
Satoshi Hamano
Minori Kitahara
Hyadain
Akio Nakamori
Motohiro Onishi
Masayoshi Sakai
Dempa Gumi Inc.
X21
Up Up Girls
Bellring Girl Heart

Produced with the financial participation of

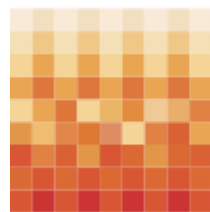
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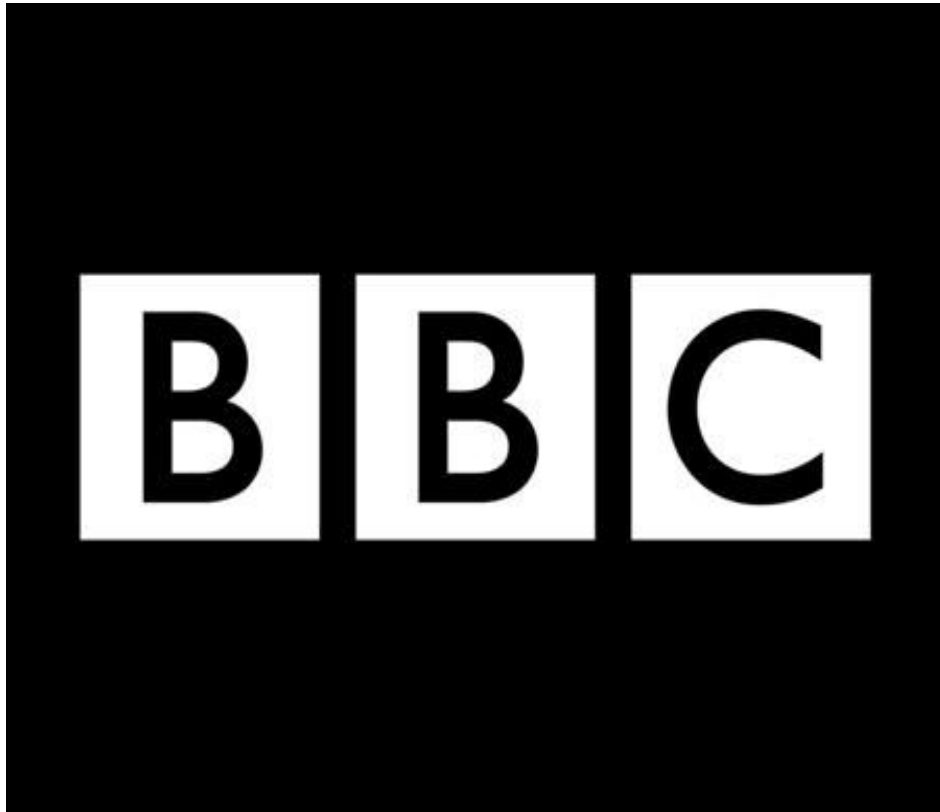
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Maureen Levitt

Julie Di Cresce

in association with



Executive Producers for BBC:

Nick Fraser
Kate Townsend

IKON DOCS >

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Margje de Koning

With the support of

svt

Executive Producer for SVT:
Axel Arno

NRK

Executive Producer for NRK:
Tore Tomter



Executive Producer for DR:
Mette Hoffmann Meyer

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Developed with the assistance of



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Production Manager
Marina Serrao

Music Supervisor
Edmund Duff

Music Clearances
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Re-recording mixer
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Erina Mano
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Juria Yanou
Mohohime Kiyono
Hideo Shinada
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Porsche Okite
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Rio Hirai
Tama Himeno
Mocchi
Tokyo Otome Daiko
Junya Hiramoto

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Candy Fruits
Tsuyako
Alice Project
Bandana
Shibuya Deseo
Zepp Tokyo
Shinagawa Stella Ball
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This film was pitched at IDFA Forum 2014

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Kino Library
Ivy Records
Miyashita Yasushi
AKS Co Ltd.

Music:

Seijun Philosophy 清純フィロソフィー

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Performed by: AKB48

Published by: AKS Ltd.
Courtesy of King Records

こちら、幸福安心委員会です。
Written by: Utata P うたたP
Performed by: Yaken
Published by: JVC Music
Courtesy of JVC Music

Worship Me 信仰してしろしやがれ
Written by: ZUN様
Arranged by: IKUTO様
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Published by: ZUN様
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

Happy Synthesiser ハッピーシンセサイザ
Written by: Betti
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Published by: Dwango Co Ltd.
Courtesy of Dwango Co Ltd & Rio Hiiragi

ルカルカ ナイトフィーバー
Written by: samfree (佐野貴幸 Takayuki Sano)
Performed by: ダイヤの原石 / Heart & Cupid
Published by: Tea Infinity
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

Denden Passion でんでんぱっしょん
Written by: Aki Aki / Tamaya
Arranged by: Shishi Sukei
Performed by: Dempagumi でんぱ組
Published by: Live Asia Inc.
Courtesy of Live Asia Inc.

Akiba Romance あきばロマンス
Written by: Maako Mikoshihba & Rio Hiiragi
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Published by: MCJP Inc.
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

Rinne no Koi 輪廻の恋
Written by: SHUN
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Published by: NICHION % Wixen Music Publishing Inc.
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

何でもない日バンザイ！！
Written by: Maro & Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Published by: MCJP Inc.
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

Future x Exceed
Written by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Published by: % JASRAC
Courtesy of Ivy Records

Run! Hashire 走れ!
Written by: Michitomo
Performed by: Harajku Monogatari 原宿物語
Published by: Millennium Promotion
Courtesy of Millennium Promotion

Please be mine
Written by: Maro
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柊木りお
Published by: MCJP Inc.
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

Let's go out レッツゴーアウト
Written by: Kengo
Performed by: Amore Carina
Published by: Nippon Columbia Ltd.
Courtesy of Nippon Columbia Ltd.

走ればきっと
Written by: Kengo
Performed by: Amore Carina
Published by: Nippon Columbia Ltd.

Courtesy of Nippon Columbia Ltd.

Love Hate Dystopia 愛憎ディストピア
Written by: Maro & Rio Hiiragi 柗木りお
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柗木りお
Published by: MCJP Inc.
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

視線の中だけI love U
Written by: Ikuto
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柗木りお
Published by: MCJP Inc.
Courtesy of Ivy Records Ltd.

BANZAI! BANZAI!
Written by: Hyadain
Performed by: Rio Hiiragi 柗木りお
Published by: MCJP Inc.
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