



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

HAPPYEND (12A)

Director: Neo Sora

Starring: Hayato Kurihara, Yukito Hidaka, Yuta Hayashi, Shina Peng
US/Japan, 2024, 1 hour 53 minutes, Japanese + English subtitles

Happyend is a 2024 Japanese-American drama film, written and directed by Neo Sora. It stars Kurihara Hayato, Hidaka Yukito, Ayumu Nakajima, Makiko Watanabe and Shirō Sano. It had its world premiere at the 81st Venice International Film Festival on September 2, 2024.

Best friends and aspiring techno musicians Kou (Hidaki Yukito) and Yuta (Kurihara Hayao) are about to graduate high school in a near-future Tokyo where the threat of a catastrophic earthquake pervades daily life. One night, they pull a prank on their Principal, which leads to a surveillance system being installed in the school. Between the oppressive security system and a darkening national political situation, Kou feels increasingly frustrated with the world while Yuta seems completely unaware. Finding an empathetic ear in a passionate student activist, Kou's political consciousness blossoms. Assuming that Yuta would never understand his newfound interests, Kou begins to avoid his friend. For the first time in their lifelong friendship, the two are forced to confront differences that they never had expressed before.

"Happyend amplifies the sociopolitical dynamics that already exist in Japan today. Despite the pressures of a right-wing government and nationalistic xenophobia, more immigrants have settled in the country, which means kids of all sorts of ethnicities and backgrounds get to grow up together. It's in this environment that the teen protagonists of Happyend come into their young adulthood. My two protagonists, Yuta and Kou, represent distinct but familiar attitudes in the face of political repression—one fights for radical change, and the other holds on to comfort while it lasts—which causes a friction between the best friends that they don't know how to express. Social and political issues, however, weren't so on my mind growing up: What was important was having fun with my friends, playing pranks, and being silly teens. I wanted to be true to that too. At its simplest level, Happyend is about the natural breaking up of friends, but it also explores how larger forces can unconsciously shape our lives and relationships. Raised in an atmosphere of anxiety, the teenagers at the center of Happyend all search for strategies to process their collective apprehension for the future. It is my hope that by peering into the speculative future and finding our uneasiness reflected there, we might be able to come to terms with the fears we feel today." (Neo Sora, Production Notes)

Notes compiled by Stephen Hopkins

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