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Podcast: DownloadSCR158: A book-loving girl, a violin maker, and a mysterious cat—Whisper of the Heart is a heartfelt Ghibli tale of love, dreams, and self-discovery. Patrick Mason, Jeff Haecker, and Victor Lams discuss its stunning visuals, timeless themes, and the magic of Country Roads.Get all new episodes automatically and for free: Follow by Email | Listen to this episode and subscribe on YouTube.Help us continue to offer Secrets of Movies and TV Shows. Won't you make a pledge at SQPN.com/give today?Links for this episode:Want to Sponsor A Show?Support StarQuest's mission to explore the intersection of faith and pop culture by becoming a named sponsor of the show of your choice on the StarQuest network. Click to get started or find out more.Thank you to Moon Shadow StudiosThis episode of The Secrets of Movies and TV Shows was edited by Patrick McCaffrey of Moon Shadow Studios. To have your own audio professionally edited by their web site MoonShadowStudios.biz. This community is private and only approved members can view and take part in its discussions. The film score of Whisper of the Heart was composed by Yui Nomi. At times during the film, Shizuku translates John Denver's song "Take Me Home, Country Roads" to Japanese for her school's chorus club. She writes her own humorous Japanese version of the song, called "Concrete Road," about her hometown in western Tokyo. What was the song Country Roads written about? "Take Me Home, Country Roads", is a song written by Bill Danoff, Taffy Nivert and John Denver about West Virginia. Where is Whisper of the Heart Set? Tama Studio Ghibli's "Whisper of the Heart"—that beautiful expression of genuine and innocent love—is actually set in the real city of Tama in the suburbs of Tokyo! Here you can relive, with all of your senses, this nostalgic tale where Shizuku Tsukishima and Seiji Amasawa follow their dreams and fall in love. Is Country Roads the anthem of West Virginia? The song "Take Me Home, Country Roads" by John Denver has long been considered the unofficial anthem of West Virginia. Friday, it became official. Lawmakers passed House Resolution 40 which declares Country Roads the fourth official state song of West Virginia. Do Shizuku and Seiji get married? At the movie's end, main character Shizuku and the guy she's fallen in love with, Seiji, watch the sunrise together. In a scene steeped in the romance that's developed over the course of the film, Seiji says he wants to marry Shizuku, and she accepts. Is Rocky Mountain High about drugs? The word "high," of course, is used to describe the feelings a drug taker can experience. But despite a few opinions suggesting young Johnny was smoking pot in the wilderness or even snorting some coke in the Rockies, the man himself was quite adamant. His "high" came from the beauty of nature. The opinions are false. What does stranger to blue water mean? "Miner's lady, stranger to blue water" implies that the water in Shenandoah River is never blue, at least in the Miner's lady's eye. How old are Shizuku and Seiji? He is a boy around 14 to 15 years old and a violin player attending the same school as Shizuku Tsukishima. Is Country Roads about WV or Virginia? The lyrics for "Country Roads" were written by Bill Danoff and Taffy Nivert, who were reportedly inspired by their drive along Interstate 81, which runs primarily through western Virginia. Why is Country Roads so popular? "It was a great song, it was sung well, and people can feel it. It's like classical music. People feel it even when they can't understand it," Ford said. Through countless adaptations, the enduring success of "Country Roads" seems to lie in its transcendent ability to evoke feelings of home and belonging. Who said anime was a mistake? animator Hayao Miyazaki The white-haired visage of legendary Studio Ghibli animator Hayao Miyazaki, emblazoned with a bold quote: "Anime was a mistake." And you may have asked, "Did he actually say that?" What is the message of Whisper of the heart? In the case of Whisper of the Heart, it's not a specific place that Shizuku longs for, it's a specific feeling. Shizuku's translation is about finding courage and belonging, following a personal destiny, even in the face of failure, rejection, and growing up. In that way, it speaks strongly to the emotional core of "Country Roads". Is Cary Elwes in Whisper of the heart? Nishi's musician friends, For the English dub, Cary Elwes reprised his role as the Baron from The Cat Returns: while The Cat Returns is a spin-off of Whisper of the Heart, its English dub was produced before the latter film saw an American release. Manga cover. Is Whisper of the heart a good movie? Whisper of the Heart is an underrated and underseen Ghibli movie, but this scene speaks to everything that's sweet, wise, and joyful about the studio — in this moment, at least Shizuku knows who she is, and she's found the place where she belongs. ...the father of manga? When was Whisper of the Heart released in Japan? Whisper of the Heart was released in Japan on July 15, 1995, as the first film in the studio to use the Dolby Digital sound format. It was shown alongside the music video On Your Mark for the song by Chage and Aska. May 25-30 is Studio Ghibli Week at Polygon. To celebrate the arrival of the Japanese animation house's library on digital and streaming services, we're surveying the studio's history, impact, and biggest themes. Follow along via our Ghibli Week page.Olivia Newton-John's cover of the John Denver staple "Take Me Home, Country Roads" isn't the most likely soundtrack for the opening scene of a soft animated slice-of-life movie about growing up in Tokyo. Yet as the opening sequence of Studio Ghibli's Whisper of the Heart rolls, with its sweeping nightscape scenes of urban Japan, Olivia Newton-John croons about the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah River. The song doesn't just set the tone for the opening montage, it also plays an integral part in the movie's storyline. Junior-high student Shizuku, an aspiring writer, is asked by her choir friends to translate the song because they want to sing it at an upcoming graduation performance. Shizuku knows she can't just literally translate it — after all, they live in urban Tokyo — so after penning a joke translation called "Concrete Roads," she struggles with trying to convey the specific feeling that "Country Roads" conjures. Her efforts to communicate the song's poetry weaves in with the movie's overarching theme of Shizuku trying to find herself during a tricky stage of adolescence. At first glance, it's a bit funny that a song so specifically about Appalachia fits so beautifully in Whisper of the Heart. But the way writer Hayao Miyazaki and director Yoshifumi Kondô use the song in the story speaks to a deeper understanding of "Country Roads" than the lyrics about West Virginia geography might suggest. "Country Roads" is one of John Denver's most popular songs. The lyrics are tailored to West Virginia, but the nostalgic longing for home that Denver imbues into the song is universal. The song has been covered by more than 150 different artists in 19 different languages. Some covers choose to adapt the lyrics to their own experiences — Hawaiian singer Israel Kamakawiwo'ole rewrote the song to be about West Mākaha, while reggae band Toot and the Maytals changed it to West Jamaica. Other artists sing it word-for-word, even when it's translated into other languages. In the case of Whisper of the Heart, it's not a specific place that Shizuku longs for, it's a specific feeling. Shizuku's translation is about finding courage and belonging, following a personal destiny, even in the face of failure, rejection, and growing up. In that way, it speaks strongly to the emotional core of "Country Roads". The thing about "Country Roads" is that it's not West Virginia Denver really yearns for, it's "the place I belong." Denver, who lived in Colorado most of his life, isn't even from West Virginia. Nor are the song's co-writers, Taffy Nivert and Bill Danoff. In fact, Nivert and Danoff based the song on a drive to Maryland, and picked West Virginia for the lyrics because they needed a state with four syllables. (Massachusetts, where Danoff is from, was a close runner-up.)When artists rewrite the lyrics, they aren't just making superficial changes to the song. They're painting a picture of the place they long for. The more specific details they put into the song, the stronger that feeling becomes. Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's cover, for instance, basically transplants the entire song to the beaches of his home, as he croons about the island sky and sunshine. The Whisper of the Heart version takes a different approach, stripping the song of any particular location, and instead focusing on the feeling of longing. To Shizuku, the song is so powerful because it's about belonging, and she doesn't feel like she belongs anywhere in particular. She's feeling the ache of growing up, as her sister moves out, her classmates move on, and she struggles to identify what she really wants out of life. To her, the song's longing is about so much more than a physical place. It's about navigating the uncertainty of adolescence and finding a road away from her hometown.Shizuku debuts her full translation of "Country Roads" to Seiji, the boy she keeps running into, while visiting his grandfather's antiques store. While she's initially annoyed with him for teasing her about her "Concrete Roads" version of the song, she's drawn to him and his passion for the craft of making musical instruments. When they sing her "Country Roads" cover together, along with Seiji's grandfather and his friends, it's a payoff for the film's wistful melancholy, and the song's nostalgia. Whisper of the Heart is an underrated and underseen Ghibli movie, but this scene speaks to everything that's sweet, wise, and joyful about the studio — in this moment, at least Shizuku knows who she is, and she's found the place where she belongs. See More: AnimationAnimeEntertainmentMovies Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. 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Whisper of The Heart is wholeheartedly a Japanese anime and yet learning John Denver's "Country Roads" holds a relatively substantial place in the theme of Shizuku trying to find herself during a tricky stage of adolescence. At first glance, it's a bit funny that a song so specifically about Appalachia fits so beautifully in Whisper of the Heart. But the way writer Hayao Miyazaki and director Yoshifumi Kondô use the song in the story speaks to a deeper understanding of "Country Roads" than the lyrics about West Virginia geography might suggest. "Country Roads" is one of John Denver's most popular songs. The lyrics are tailored to West Virginia, but the nostalgic longing for home that Denver imbues into the song is universal. The song has been covered by more than 150 different artists in 19 different languages. 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Whisper of the Heart is an underrated and underseen Ghibli movie, but this scene speaks to everything that's sweet, wise, and joyful about the studio — in this moment, at least Shizuku knows who she is, and she's found the place where she belongs. See More: AnimationAnimeEntertainmentMovies © 1995 Aoi Hilaragi / Shueisha - Studio Ghibli - NH We are always fleeing our hometowns. Or, at least, we are supposed to be. Everything we need to experience seems to exist at the edge of the towns we grew up in, just out of sight. It's all far enough away to ignite our imaginations, yet still feels within reach, if only we could leave our baggage behind. Past a certain age, the only thing waiting for us back home is frustration. I've ignored all of this for thirty years, sometimes through my own decisions and sometimes due to circumstances outside of my control. Whatever the reasons, I've been hanging around the same Jersey suburb since my family moved here when I was in first grade. I moved into my own place eventually, but kept the same zip code. I don't particularly love it here; it's complicated. I graduated from a local college three years ago. Some days, I'm grateful for the familiarity. Other days, I want to drive west until my car runs out of gas—hopefully near an airport or train station that can take me even further. Whisper of the Heart, Yoshifumi Kondô's sole directing credit before his untimely death in 1998, is something remarkable. Every beat of this Studio Ghibli film (written by Hayao Miyazaki) celebrates the communities, schools, and relationships we so often overlook out of familiarity. It is steadfast in its reassurance that it is okay to not be sure of your future, that there is a value in the places we've known since childhood, and that the effort made in trying is as important as any goal. And perhaps most impressively, it does all this with such nuance that it allows for an entire range of experiences, without ever condemning or shaming any of them. Shizuku is fourteen years old and discontented. She does well in school but is unsure of the path she wants to pursue. She feels suffocated by her city, Tokyo. But she loves reading and her openness to experience—initially through literature—soon sets her into motion: through the library's lending cards, she discovers that someone has been reading most of the same books she's read. She imagines a kindred spirit somewhere out there, and sets out to try and find him. What makes Shizuku stand out, and what makes her a far more mature and inspiring (and tolerable) fourteen year old than I ever was, is her wide sense of curiosity and her openness to new ideas. She can be stubborn, and she's afraid of making the wrong choices or failing at the right ones, but she always allows herself enough room to listen and to keep her eyes open. She follows a cat from the train station to an area of the city she's never been to before. She finds an antique store and converses with the owner, who tells her the stories behind some of its wares. This small taste of adventure inspires and refreshes her. She becomes more aware of her city, and the people all around her, and she never really knew. Shizuku's discovery of the antique shop is a definitive moment in her life. Not only does the shop amaze her, it also, eventually, leads her to uncover the identity of the person from her library mystery: Seiji, a boy from her school. He is an apprentice violin-maker, confident in what he wants to do with the next few decades of his life, and about to head off to Italy for a few months, or possibly longer. This is horrible news for Shizuku, especially since they've started to fall in love, and only serves to remind her of her own uncertainties about the future. School frames all of this in a way that will feel familiar to most of the film's audience. It's something always there, always present. There are standardized tests to prepare for and rigid schedules to work around. Shizuku's mother is finishing up her post-college education and feeling its stresses and financial burdens. Schooling permeates Whisper of the Heart in ways we all can recognize: homework, early mornings, sleep deficiency, test anxiety, classroom gossip—the daily routines of academic life. It's often difficult for a film to portray mandatory education, especially high school, in a way that's not either mostly tangential to the real plot, or just plain miserable. (Though perhaps I'm just projecting, based on my own middling high school experience.) There seems to be an assumption in popular culture that school is largely just an obstacle to overcome, something that gets in the way of the truly important things in life, like getting out and finally seeing the world for what it really is. Seiji has this opportunity, a chance for escape, while Shizuku doesn't. It's a very particular kind of frustration, one with which I'm intimately familiar. Shizuku, though, holds onto her curiosity for experience, and an eagerness to try new things. She decides to channel this energy into a writing project, something she's never attempted before, hoping to finish her first story before Seiji returns from Italy. She plans to present it to his grandfather, the man who owns the antique store. She is utterly terrified of failure but absolutely determined to finish the story. It's tough to access that kind of perseverance, especially when filled with so much doubt. A fear of failure looms largely over most any major choice we have to make. Maybe we don't know enough yet, or maybe we simply aren't good enough. Shizuku feels that same fear and embraces it—she knows she still has so much to learn, but never lets that stop her. She stays up late, researching and writing, while her grades take a dive. Her family becomes concerned, but she never intends to abandon school entirely; she simply wants to try something for herself, even if it means failing. It's a lesson I am still trying to learn. Shizuku ends up writing a wonderful story based on "The Baron"—a cat statuette from the antique store—filled with the type of fantastic environments and storylines often associated with Studio Ghibli films. The reason the story is wonderful, though, is not because it's perfect (it isn't, as Seiji's grandfather tells her), but because it shows such earnest effort, as well as a kind of wide-eyed ambition that is inimitable and intangible, things that seem to drive most any worthwhile endeavor. This is what Shizuku learns to value: trying—even when self-doubt exists—thinking, testing yourself, and persevering. Whatever the outcome, you will have learned. Over the course of the film, Tokyo itself appears new to her, as well. The film occasionally grants Shizuku a moment to witness a sunrise or a sunset, something that paints her old familiar streets in gorgeous new shades. Seiji shows her the magic of the jeweled eyes of the Baron statue—which illuminate when viewed with just the proper amount of sunlight—revealing an entirely different perspective on a character she already admired. Whisper of the Heart dares us, like it dares Shizuku, to look at our cities and surroundings with a fresh pair of eyes. This is a daunting task for anyone, especially if you've spent almost two decades in the same place. Our preconceptions usually dictate how we see familiar places, often before we ever really have a chance to realize they're taking hold. I take the same route to work every single day without being aware, eat at the same restaurants I decided I liked best however many years ago, speak to the same people I've always known. When I start paying attention, though, this town can still surprise me, even after twenty years. I find brand new things everywhere, like the used bookstore in the center of town filled with long out-of-print volumes; or the tiny Italian restaurant on the other side of the hill with the owner who stops by each table to ask everyone if they're enjoying their meal, or the small, independent movie theater tucked in right next to it, which shows the kinds of movies people might read essays about online. Throughout the film, Shizuku works on a translation of John Denver's "Country Roads", which her class plans to sing. She struggles to find the proper phrasing and a way to capture the spirit of a city that simply doesn't excite her anymore. Her coping mechanism involves writing a parody called "Concrete Roads" as well, with lyrics that swap the rustic idyll of the original for modern Tokyo's development and sprawl. She's mortified when Seiji discovers both versions of the song, embarrassed by her inexperience as a writer, but by the end of the film, she is proud of her work; by both translating it and adapting it, she's found her place in Tokyo all over again. I don't plan to stick around this Jersey suburb forever. I know there is a wealth of experience waiting for me beyond the borders of this place. There are so many things one can't learn at home, perspectives we can't be exposed to, people we can't meet. At some point, it's simply time to see what else is out there. But this doesn't mean that we have to forget where it is we've come from, or all the places we've been. Keeping our hometowns with us as we go out into the wider world only makes those new experiences more meaningful. It grants us a point of reference for everything else we'll ever encounter. It helps us appreciate our differences and try harder to relate with others. Whatever we can manage to hold onto will, if we're honest, stay with us wherever we go.