

WINNER, GRAND JURY PRIZE, SXSW FILM FESTIVAL
WINNER, AUDIENCE AWARD, SLAMDANCE FILM FESTIVAL
WINNER, BEST INT'L SHORT FILM, CLEVELAND FILM FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION, **TORONTO** INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

PAPER CUT FILMS
presents

hiro



STARRING

Hiro Kanagawa
Vicky Huang

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY

Matthew Swanson

Running Time: 20 minutes

Exhibition Format: 35mm

www.hiromovie.com

Contacts:

Producer

Oliver Lindsay
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Director

Matthew Swanson
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Selected "HIRO" press clippings

"A stylized, subtle, cleverly amusing take on Japanese gangster films... one of the most slickly produced, ambitious shorts in this year's Toronto International Film Festival."

- **THE GLOBE AND MAIL**

"A Japanese insect collector is involved in a kidnapping in Matthew Swanson's funny, imaginative, and stylishly shot spin on noir conventions."

- **SALT LAKE CITY WEEKLY**

(Named *Hiro* one of seven "must see shorts" in Park City 2006, including both *Sundance* and *Slamdance*)

"Very entertaining... *Hiro* is a smart, sweet comedy that's really a statement of how heroes aren't always a pre-conceived idea."

- **FILM THREAT**

"The best film in the mix is *Hiro*, Matthew Swanson's engaging Japanese gangster film / art film... takes familiar genre clichés and makes them seem fresh again, due to Swanson's obvious enthusiasm for the genre and its possibilities."

- **ZINECAT**

"The narrative-style shorts this year are remarkable, the best collection the festival has ever assembled for their quality, their complexity and their skill in telling stories... good examples of this form include Matthew Swanson's giddily eccentric *Hiro*, the misadventures of a Japanese bug collector..."

- **THE TORONTO SUN**

"Dreamlike..."

-**THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**

"Fast-paced and witty..."

-**THE MONTREAL GAZETTE**

"A well-executed and winning love story"

-**THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE**

INTRODUCTION

Hiro is a beautiful, unique short film about a Japanese insect collector who is forced out of his shell by a series of strange events. As funny as it is touching, *Hiro* draws inspiration from disparate sources to weave a unified tale of obsession, love, loss, and bad guys who *really* like their cars.

Hiro originally premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in the fall of 2005, and in January 2006 became the first Canadian film ever to win the Audience Award for Best Short at the Slamdance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.

ONE-LINE SYNOPSIS

After a chance encounter with a young girl, a shy Japanese insect collector finds himself thrust into a wild chase to recover a stolen beetle.

LONGER SYNOPSIS

HIRO is a shy, awkward Japanese entomologist who spends his time and money collecting rare insects. His obsession takes him to Canada, where he has arranged to purchase a rare beetle from a local insect smuggler. Things don't go exactly as planned - after a chance encounter with a young girl, Hiro's precious insect is stolen. Suddenly, he finds himself thrust into a wild chase to recover his beetle and rescue the girl he has just met from a gang of Yakuza mobsters. Forced to confront a situation far beyond his everyday experience, Hiro becomes a reluctant participant in a strange adventure he will not soon forget.

PRODUCTION NOTES & DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Background: A conversation with writer/director Matthew Swanson

Hiro was written the year writer/director Matthew Swanson graduated from Concordia University in Montreal. "I remember thinking, I want to write something that brings together everything I love about filmmaking. I want it to be soft, personal, funny, but at the same time kinetic and cinematic. I liked the idea of bringing together elements of genre and character that wouldn't typically be found in the same film. So I wrote

Hiro, based on brainstorming sessions between myself and my creative partner, Liam Maloney."



Language Barrier



The finished film manages to unify the contrasting elements of a character-driven human comedy about obsession and loss with lowbrow genre conventions, from oversized Japanese gangsters to car chases and miraculous escapes. “The challenge was to make sure the different elements of the film came together and functioned as a whole. For me, good films always strive to create their own unique logic. Hiro’s character in the film was created

from a very personal place – I’m extremely obsessive by nature. Hiro’s journey is based on his obsession, forcing him to act in a way he wouldn’t normally act, driving the film forward. This is very familiar territory for me. I knew his character needed to speak with a genuine voice or the film would fall flat. But I also wanted to create some distance between him and myself. So... I decided to make him Japanese.”

Swanson has had a long standing love for things Japanese, from literature and architecture to comics and film. “Hiro’s personality is kind of a Frankenstein built partly from of my own experience, and partly from characters created by (Japanese Novelists) Kobo Abe and Haruki Murakami. I’ve always been attracted to minor-key characters like him, outsider personalities.”

The original script was written in English, then translated into Japanese. “Part of my family is Japanese by marriage, so I was able to use some family connections here in Vancouver and found a wonderful translator to work on the Japanese script with me. The idea of directing in a language other than English was exciting. It really focused my attention on how the characters related to each other physically. I was more aware of the mood being created by the performances instead of the literal meaning of each line as it was read.”

The Insects

Insects play a key role in *Hiro*, and both the beetle and the ladybug featured in the film have their own stories to tell. The beetle, fantastic as it looks, is a real insect that was not touched up or painted in any way. Native to Africa, it is known as the "Jade Headed Buffalo Beetle," and it arrived on the set of *Hiro* just minutes before its first scheduled shot.



Production designer Laurel Bergman had searched for weeks in vain to find a beetle worthy of the script. Finally, with only two days left before the film went to camera, the Alberta Museum of Natural History returned Laurel’s call. Their biologists had a small colony of the beautiful Buffalo Beetle, and they offered to loan her one for the shoot. The

bug was carefully packaged and sent via courier to the set in Vancouver. It arrived just in time for its call and was in front of the camera less than half an hour later.

The ladybug also found its way into the film through fortuitous means. In an early draft of the *Hiro* script, writer/director Matthew Swanson ended the film with a scene featuring a ladybug. This ending was written out after several major revisions, and the script eventually reached a point where it needed some small, final detail to reach completion. As he sat at his writing desk, trying to figure out what that detail should be, Swanson was surprised to see a ladybug drop onto his writing pad and scuttle across the page. The message was clear, and the ladybug was promptly written back into the script. The insect featured in the closing shots of *Hiro* is in fact the very same one that appeared that day - Swanson trapped the bug and kept it alive for several weeks, letting it go free once all its scenes were complete.

ABOUT THE CAST

HIRO KANAGAWA as Hiro

Hiro Kanagawa's television credits include recurring and guest-starring appearances on *The X-Files*, *Millennium*, *The Outer Limits*, *Cold Squad*, *Smallville*, *Andromeda*, and most recently *Da Vinci's City Hall*. His feature film work includes notable roles in projects ranging from the indie hit *Protection* to wide releases such as *Best in Show* and *Elektra*. No stranger to animation, he has voiced a variety of cartoon characters such as the Foolish Magistrate on *Sagwa: The Chinese Siamese Cat* and Gihren Zabi on *Mobile Suit Gundam*. He is currently working on a major super hero in an upcoming series for Marvel Comics.

Hiro's theatre work has taken him across Canada and earned him a 1997 Jessie Richardson Award and a 2000 Betty Mitchell Award nomination. As a writer, he is best known for his play, *Tiger of Malaya*, which premiered at the National Arts Centre, Ottawa, and Factory Theatre, Toronto, in the fall of 2003. He is currently playwright-in-residence with Vancouver's Rumble Productions and writer/story editor on *Da Vinci's City Hall*.

VICKY HUANG as Vicky

Vicky Huang was born in Beijing, China where she spent her childhood immersed in literature. She moved to Vancouver, Canada, and went on to study theatre in Cork, Ireland before graduating from the University of British Columbia with a major in Integrated Drama and a minor in Theatre. Vicky has worked alongside veteran actors Rupert Graves, Rufus Sewell and Elijah Wood, playing roles that vary from a teen prostitute to a sadistic vampire. Vicky strives to approach each of her roles with openness and honesty, and hopes to take on more projects that help break cultural stereotypes for ethnic actors.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

MATTHEW SWANSON – Writer/Director

Matthew was born and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia, and graduated from Concordia University in Montreal. The short films he made while at school went on to screen at festivals in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Paris. Most notable was *Krova* (2001), a 10 minute mock-instructional film in Polish. It featured a cast of giants, dwarves, bodybuilders, ex-WWF wrestlers, and a herd of cattle. *Hiro* is his first post-graduate film.

OLIVER LINDSAY – Producer

Oliver was born in South Africa and raised in Vancouver. He began working in production in Vancouver in the late '90's and spends most of his time producing music videos. *Hiro* is his first dramatic film.

DON MACDONALD – Composer

Don Macdonald has composed music for some of Western Canada's most acclaimed filmmakers. His feature film credits include the Bruce Sweeney films *Live Bait*, *Dirty*, and *Last Wedding*, the Lynne Stopkewich films *Kissed* and *Suspicious River*, Scott Smith's *Rollercoaster* and Andrew Currie's *Mile Zero*. He scored all of Mark Sawers' short films, including *Stroke*, *Hate Mail*, and the 1999 Cannes Film Festival Award Winner *Shoes Off*, which was recognized as "one of the most compelling original scores attached to any Canadian film, ever....." (Vancouver Province). His evocative scores continue to gain special awards in the industry including three Leo nominations and one Genie nomination. This fall he will again be collaborating with Andrew Currie on the feature film *Fido* starring Carrie Anne Moss.

PHILIP LANYON – Cinematographer

Philip has been working in film and television in Vancouver for 10 years. His experience as a cinematographer includes short films, commercials, and music videos. Philip is a childhood friend of writer/director Matthew Swanson, and *Hiro* marks their first professional collaboration.

LAUREL BERGMAN – Production Designer

Laurel has been involved in the professional field of design since graduating in Sculpture/Installation from the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto. She began working in specialty design and prop fabrication for film and television, with credits including *I Robot*, *The Chronicles of Riddick*, *The Fantastic Four*, and *Battlestar Gallactica*. Laurel's production design and art direction credits include *The Zero Sum*, *Inconvenience*, *Insider Trading*, *The Tooth Fairy*, and *The Suspect*. She is currently designing the DGC Kick Start film *Birthdays And Other Traumas*.

CAST

Hiro	HIRO KANAGAWA
Vicky	VICKY HUANG
Insect Smuggler	WILLIAM SAMPLES
Motorcycle Man	DOUGLAS ROY DACK
Big Yakuza	SUGURU ASAOKA
Bigger Yakuza	DARRYL QUON
Pirate	ROB JOHNSON
Carmen Marx	VICTOR BRYAN
Pedestrian 1	PAUL KING
Pedestrian 2	MATTI PHILLIPS

CREW

Written & Directed by	Matthew Swanson
Produced by	Oliver-Barret Lindsay
Story By	Liam Maloney & Matthew Swanson
Director of Photography	Philip Lanyon
Production Designer	Laurel Bergman
Editor	Tony Dean Smith
Composer	Don Macdonald
Sound Designer	Brad Hillman
Casting	Sarah Edmondson
Precision Driver	Tony Morris, Jr.
Precision Rider	Dave Martins
Unit Production Manager(s)	Jaeny Baik Ahnee Boyce
First Assistant Director(s)	Steve Hedden Jon Morris
Script Supervisor(s)	Melissa Johnson Paula Bonucchi
Art Director	Dave Myatt
Props Master(s)	Al Nichols Tyler Page
Wardrobe	Steve Cass
Hair & Makeup	Madeline McGowan
Colorist	Claudio Sepulveda
Re-recording Mixer(s)	Brad Hillman Miguel Nunes