

**EYESTEELFILM**

and

**Brakeless Ltd.**

Present

**TOKYO IDOLS**



A film by **Kyoko Miyake**  
88' | UK and Canada | 2017 | HD

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## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

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.

## **STORY SYNOPSIS**

At a dingy bar in a side street in Shibuya on a Monday night, 19-year old Rio, an 'underground idol' is preparing for her performance. The venue hosts around twenty idol groups every evening who perform for 10-15 minutes each. The place is full of middle-aged men, many of them suit-clad, who've come straight from work. Standing at 149 cm, Rio is a head shorter than most fans, even with her trademark platform heels, though she looks taller on stage. She exudes charisma and an energy that cheers up tired 'salarymen'. She now performs solo, as the three-girl group she was part of broke up. Her fans, usually around twenty or so, dance and cheer her on.

The most important part of the evening comes after her performance, when she meets and greets each fan. The fans buy her memorabilia and CDs, though they already own multiple copies of each. This is how they show their dedication and support her financially so that she can rise above thousands of other idol girls and fulfill her dream of becoming a popular singer.

Rio calls everyone by name and casually chats about what they have been up to. One moment, she is like a mother inquiring about her son and the next, she behaves like a doll-like anime character with cute gestures and a high-pitched voice. Her effortless command of both personas is very impressive. Unfazed by the intense attention of her fans, she seems very much in control of the situation.

After performing for three years in small bars, Rio now faces a 'make it or break it' moment as she tries to break into the mainstream idol scene. It's a race against time, as the expiry date on idols comes quickly and abruptly.

Her fans come to nearly all of her concerts and support her by buying the same CDs, photos and tickets to meet with her at every concert. Koji, 43, spends almost all his free time and income on Rio. When his engagement to his fiancée fell through a few years ago, he started spending his savings on Rio. Though he "has never had so much fun before", he feels social pressure to settle down. He only gets a few hours of sleep between the nightly concerts and his early morning job. Yet, he cheers louder than anyone else in the crowd and is considered the leader of Rio's fans. For Koji, being Rio's fan has become a way of life. Koji sees Rio as a survivor, someone who continues to fight against all odds. Encouraged by her example, Koji decides to leave his secure salary man

job. The film follows his journey, within which he comes to terms with his life as a single man and embraces the community he has found amidst Rio's fans.

The narrative spine of the film is Rio's journey from obscurity to the cusp of her breakthrough, intertwined with Koji's story. The film IS interspersed with experts – a sociologist, writer, journalist, comedian – who will unpick and contextualise the rules of engagement and gender politics present at idol events.

It is the journey of hard-working and often astonishingly independent young women trying to find their place in a society that increasingly objectifies and commodifies their sexuality. What choices do they make to survive in an industry where being cute, immature and pubescent, are key elements to their fame, and whereby fans lose interest as soon as the performers outgrow these sought-after qualities? And ultimately, how does it affect the way they see themselves within the wider society?

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKER**

### **Kyoko Miyake, Writer, Director, Producer**



Born and bred in Japan, Kyoko Miyake moved to Britain to research History of Witchcraft at Oxford, having read History at Tokyo University. Kyoko Miyake's latest documentary film, *Brakeless*, was supported by BBC/ITVS/IKON/NHK/DR and won the prestigious Peabody Award 2014 after airing to great acclaim on BBC and PBS. *My Atomic Aunt* (aka *Beyond the Wave*) was supported by

Sundance Documentary Fund and was internationally coproduced by broadcasters including BBC, NHK and WDR and supported by numerous grants such as Sundance. It has been screened at festivals across the world, winning Gold Plaque at Chicago International Film Festival.

Several short documentaries Kyoko directed have been shown at festivals internationally, including Berlin, London, Sydney and SilverDocs. *Hackney Lullabies* won the Berlin Today Award 2011 at the Berlin Film Festival. Kyoko has been selected for prestigious schemes such as Berlinale Talent Campus, Japanese government's Artists Grant, Talent Campus Tokyo, Ties That Bind, Crossing Borders, Documentary Campus, and Pola Art Foundation Grant.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCERS

### **Felix Matschke, Producer**

Felix co-produced the 2014 Peabody winning *Brakeless* with Bungalow Town Productions, BBC, ITVS, DR, IKON and NHK.

He was selected to participate in Documentary Campus 2013 where he expanded his network of collaborators across Europe.

Born in Germany, having studied in Germany and France and worked in Britain, Felix has experience in civil engineering and finance prior to starting to work in film.

### **Bob Moore, Producer**

Bob is a documentary film producer based in Montreal. Together with his partners and collaborators at production company EyeSteelFilm, he's won many international awards and his films have shown around the world. He sits on the executive board of the Documentary Organization of Canada and regularly consults for institutions on film production, most recently as *First Appearance Jury President* at IDFA 2016. Bob has completed degrees in law and philosophy, managed artists, consulted for record labels, worked with social and political organizations, founded an art collective.

## CREDITS

Writer / Director	Kyoko Miyake
Producers	Kyoko Miyake, Bob Moore, Felix Matschke
Executive Producers	Daniel Cross, Mila Aung-Thwin
DOP	Van Royko
Editor	Anna Price
Music	David Drury
Production companies	Brakeless Ltd & EyeSteelFilm

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