

# Umi Ga Kikeru: A Review of I Can Hear the Sea

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Written by George Goodwin

Umi Ga Kikeru (I can hear the sea) is an older movie whose original story was done by Motoko Arai. The original story appeared in the magazine Animage and was turned into a T.V. special in 1993 by Studio Ghibli. Directed by Mochizuki Tomomitsu, Umi Ga Kikeru was Studio Ghibli's first television animation job and was the first Ghibli work not to be directed by Miyazaki or Takahata, the studio's most famous directors.\* Because it was premiered as a studio television series, it has not been picked up by Disney and should still be available fansubbed.

The story itself is about the coming-of-age of a number of students in a small town (Kouchi) in the Japanese countryside. The plotline contains a love triangle (a common theme in anime), but rather than using technology, wizardry or aliens to pull off the story, Umi Ga Kikeru focuses on ordinary people and ordinary emotions, in a fashion similar to Maison Ikkoku.

The story begins with Morisaki Taku, a college student in Tokyo who is flying back home to Kouchi for vacation. As he is flying, he is also thinking about the events that have happened to him in his last two high school years (presumably his previous two years). Accompanied by some wonderfully light-hearted flute music, Taku's thoughts zoom back to the moment when he just begins to miss his train. He has been contemplating a number of things, though nothing important in particular. Later, at work, he receives a phone call from his friend Matsuno Yutaka, who at that time is the Junior High class president. Matsuno tells Taku about the new girl he has just guided around the campus during a school tour, one of his duties as class president. Her name is Muto Rikako, a new girl who had just transferred from Tokyo to Kouchi. For Matsuno, Muto has become something of a love interest. For Taku, Muto is interesting and exotic, a being from far away.

Later, while on their class trip to Hawaii, Rikako introduces herself to Taku. Although she has already established herself as a star student as well as an excellent tennis player, she does not seem to fit in well with the people from Kouchi. She feels that people in southern Japan talk as if they were in an old movie. It takes her a little while to even understand the southern accent, let alone try to integrate herself into the southern social groups at the school. It is these difficulties that she has to overcome when speaking to Taku. When she mentions this to him, Taku becomes very

annoyed ("Everyone does not speak like a samurai," he tells her), but he is willing to forgive her when he begins to understand what she is going through.

Rikako certainly has her own problems. Her father has divorced her mother, which was why Rikako had to transfer to Taku's school in the first place. As Rikako speaks a little more with Taku, she convinces him to lend her some money under the pretense that she lost her own. She later uses this money to visit her father, but she does not go alone. Rather, Taku manages to accompany her. This trip begins causing trouble for them both as rumors begin to spread about their relationship. Worse, it brings Taku into a direct conflict with his best friend Matsuno, who is, after all, still interested in Rikako . . . .

This is where I will end the summary, so that I don't ruin the plot for those people who have yet to see the movie. In my view, here are a number of reasons to watch the show:

1. The animation is beautiful--the countryside around Kouchi is lavishly well-done (even without the aid of "modern" day computer animation techniques).
2. The characters are developed into individual beings; each has his or her own unique quirks and sensibilities.
3. The characters and the plot are very realistic--this is the type of anime that anybody should be able to relate to because the situations within the film could happen to them.
4. Finally (and most importantly) you won't get the ending from me, so you'll have to see the movie to find out the ending for yourself.

*\* This information was taken from somebody else's review of Umi Ga Kikeru.*