



RIZU TO AOI TORI (LIZ AND THE BLUE BIRD) is a projected future LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below you can find Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

16 of a possible 20 points

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**Japan 2018 color 90 minutes feature musical animation drama in Japanese with English subtitles / dubbed in English Kyoto Animation / Bandai / Namco Arts / Pony Canyon / Rakuonsha / Animation DO
Producers: Hideaki Hatta, Shinichi Nakamura, Eharu Oohashi, Shigeru Saitô, Riri Senami, Yoshifumi Yaramizu**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

2 Direction: Naoko Yamada*

Unit Direction: Tatsuya Ishihara, Taiichi Ogawa, Shinpei Sawa,

Yasuhiro Takemoto, Naoko Yamada

1 Editing: Kengo Shigemura

1 Animation Camera / Cinematography: Kazuya Takao

**Photography: Kohei Funamoto, Rika Kashiwagi, Teru Matsumoto,
Yoshiko Tanaka, Hiroki Ueda, Kazuki Ueno, Akihiro Ura**

1 Lighting: Naomi Ishida, Shigeyuki Toriumi

Special Visual Effects: Tetsuo Umetsu

**Animation: Saiichi Akitake, Kyohei Ando, Hidehiro Asame, Saeko Fujita,
Maiko Hado, Kunihiro Hane, Kayo Hikiyama, Kazumi Ikeda,
Nani Iwasaki, Miku Kadowaki, Chinatsu Kamo,
Hiroshi Karada, Noriyuki Kitanohara, Seiya Kumano,
Ami Kuriki, Chiharu Kuroda, Sumire Kusano, Nobuaki Maruki,
Tatsutaka Maruko, Aoi Matsumoto, Ryo Miyaki,
Shiho Morisaki, Ryouhei Muta, Yuko Myouken,
Futoshi Nishiya, Kohei Okamura, Fumie Okano, Aoi Okuno,
Yurika Oono, Tomomi Sato, Kôta Satô, Tatsuya Satô,
Shinpei Sawa, Sae Sawada, Rie Sezaki, Ryôsuke Shirakawa,
Sana Suzuki, Fumio Tada, Mariko Takahashi,
Hiroyuki Takahashi, Tamami Tokuyama, Yuki Tsunoda,
Yoshinori Urata, Sayaka Watanabe, Taira Yamaguchi,
Takuya Yamamura, Yuki Yokoyama, Momoyo Yoshizaki,
Minoru Ôta**

Character Design: Futoshi Nishiya, Nikki Asada (original character designs)

2 Screenplay: Reiko Yoshida* based on the original story novel

***Sound! Euphonium* by Ayano Takeda**

Music Supervision: Mashario Owada*

Music Recording: Hiroshi Kitashiro*

Chifumi Karasawa* (“Liz and the Blue Bird Suite”)

2 Music: Kensuke Ushio*, Akito Matsuda

2 Art Direction: Mutsuo Shinohara*

2 Sound Direction: Yôta Tsuruoka*

Sound Effects: Hiromune Kurahashi*

Sound Recording: Yashushi Nagura, Michael Schneider (English Version)

**Sound Mixing: Chifumi Karasawa, Hiroshi Kitashiro, Oscar Garcia*
(English Version)**

Voice Casting: Stephanie Sheh (English Version)

1 Voice Acting

2 Creativity

16 total points

Voices Cast: Atsumi Tanezaki (Mizore Yoroizuka), Nao Toyama (Nozomi Kasaki), Miyu Honda (Liz / Blue Bird), Konomi Fujimura (Natsuki Nakagawa), Yuri Yamaoka (Yuko Yoshikawa), Shiori Sugiura (Ririka Kenzaki), Tomoyo Kurosawa (Kumiko Oumae), Ayaki Asai (Hazuki Kato), Moe Toyota (Sapphire Kawashima), Chika Anzai (Reina Kousaka), Houko Kuwashima (Satomi Niiyama), Yûichi Nakamura (Mr. Masahiro Hashimoto, music teacher), Takahiro Sakurai (Noboru Taki), Ryan Bartley* (Ms. Niyama, music teacher), Wayne Grayson (Noboru Taki), Brittney Lee Hamilton (Additional Voices), Megan Taylor Harvey (Yuko Yoshikawa), Xanthe Huynh (Ririka Kenzaki), Laurie Hymes* (Mizore Yoroizuka), Cassandra Lee Morris (Sapphire “Midori” Kawashima), Mike Pollock* (Mr. Masahiro Hashimoto), Alyson Leigh Rosenfeld (Hazuki Kato / Flautist / Physical Education Teacher), Carrie Savage (Meiko), Michael Schneider (Additional Voices), Courtney Shaw (Liz / Blue Girl / Kumiko Oumae), Stephanie Sheh* (Nozomi Kasaki / Tsubomi), Cristina Valenzuela (Reina Kousaka), Sarah Anne Williams (Natsuki Nakagawa)

RIZU TO AOI TORI (LIZ AND THE BLUE BIRD) is another introspective examination of teen relationships from Kyoto Animation Studios, who also produced A SILENT VOICE. It maps subtle alterations in friendship between two high school senior band members.

Mizore is a painfully shy, musically gifted oboist. She’s a natural follower who has chosen to attach herself to outgoing, self-assured flautist Nozomi. Whatever the flute-player does is fine by her shadow, who tends to trail a few steps behind whenever the pair is together.

The girls have been assigned featured parts in a sensational showcase piece titled “Liz and the Blue Bird.” Its music corresponds to a German fairy story about a girl who lives alone and works during the daytime in a bakery shop. She’s attracted so strongly to a blue bird she observes that she wishes for its constant companionship. That fancy materializes when the bird metamorphoses into a dark-haired young girl in a blue dress who hangs around Liz during spring

and summer. It longs to migrate, though, as fall days herald approaching winter. Liz, in the story, permits the bird-girl to depart.

For Nozomi, the story's ending requires a change. It's entirely too sad. So she invents an alternative resolution reuniting girl and bird the following year. Otherwise, she's thoroughly enamored of that tale.

Mizore, on the contrary, only bothers to read the book after it's thrust upon her by an extroverted music partner. She passionately hates the published ending, unwilling to accept letting go of a loved one. Because for her, any hard-won comradeship is forever.

A younger embodiment of Nozomi chafed at this bondage, breaking free from band and Mizore for a year. However, as mutual graduation approaches, she returns to both. Though with some reservations.

Suppressing resentment about Nozomi's temporary abandonment, Mizore seethes in silence. She's unwilling to risk a second estrangement from her only friend.

Another aggravation in the lives of these pupils is student interests surveys they must fill out before graduation. What career plan does each intend?

Before she commits herself to completing it, Mizore wants to be sure Nozomi is headed to the same school.

Whoa. Wait a minute. Miss Perfection isn't so certain a music college is right for her. She isn't as gifted a musician as Mizore. The questionnaire poses a psychological hurdle for her too.

In order to mask an apparent gap in instrumental mastery between them, Miss Yoriozuka intentionally reins herself in during practices of their interwoven solos in the emotionally charged climax of "Liz and the Blue Bird." Everyone notices her restraint, from band director Hashimoto to junior brass players.

Mizore and Nozomi insist practice will eliminate the problem. Right. That doesn't address the issue satisfactorily. So long as neither is willing to share doubts and hidden fears, unspoken tension between them keeps bubbling out in rehearsals. That will never do if the band is to win a national competition.

Can the duo find a way to reveal dissatisfactions with each other without fatal injury to feelings of self-worth and partnership?

Probing further their parallel with Liz and her blue playmate, it becomes ever harder to determine which of them is more in need of liberation.

Director Yamada spins gold in this film about two conflicted adolescents afraid to disclose their primary concerns, fearful of mutual separation or rejection.

Each gesture, silence, look of longing, click of heels, or sway of ponytail communicates a mood and has its own special significance. As do Mizore's typical slouch and Nozomi's superficial chatter about neutral, mundane topics. Interpreting these is critical to fathoming what Yamada's ultrasensitive teens feel and think.

Mizore pours out emotions periodically to captive blowfish, comforted by their inability to respond meaningfully. That's okay in her book. Affirmation is the goal, not communication. There's no chance those small swimmers will scold or denigrate their feeder.

Nozomi prefers to duck difficult decisions involving social relationships. But letting matters slide and fester unaddressed only leads to anxiety. It takes quizzing by a sympathetic music teacher, Ms. Niyama, to finally penetrate through her habitual defenses and confirm she needn't humor Mizore's neediness when it conflicts with her own aspirations.

The art department wisely privileges delicate aquarelle pastels over harsher solids generated by computer imaging to convey this double rite of passage.

Sound effects and vocal tones are magnified dramatically to overarching proportions. They're backed by vaguely shifting harmonics undergirding melody lines that soar and twist through exotic tone colors.

When the camera moves, it follows characters, not objects. Backgrounds alter minimally. The outer world isn't important. It's the tumult within schoolgirls that matters.

This finds expression dynamically in Kensuke Ushio's melancholy suite, equally challenging to band and listeners.

Using as commentators in Greek Chorus fashion secondary characters within the music ensemble, Reiko Yoshida allows just enough verbal explicitness to satisfy audience questions about what is happening. She utilizes effectively a couple backstory insertions to bridge time gaps.

In the English dub, four vocal performances deserve unstinting praise: Stephanie Sheh's chatterbox Nozomi, Mike Pollock's low-key Masahiro Hashimoto who is seemingly the only male amid a sea of uniformed lively

lasses, Ryan Bartley's astutely compassionate Ms. Niyama, and Laurie Hymes's miserable Mizore, Japanese counterpart to Casper Milquetoast.

Notable softness of lighting preserves Kita Uji High School's fragile atmosphere of repression and mandatory politeness.

Edited with a meditative pacing seldom manifested in American animations, **LIZ AND THE BLUE BIRD** ambles along unhurriedly, which might try the patience of teens accustomed to perpetual screen motion.

For tolerant adolescents and mature adult viewers, it's a rare treat offering profound psychological insights seldom essayed by screenwriters.

There are no special features on the Eleven Arts dvd release. However, **LIZ AND THE BLUE BIRD** doesn't need any, being a completely self-explanatory revelation about the need to avoid unhealthy, suffocating relationships, both for jailor and captive.