

Hayao Miyazaki has a gripe against Japanese female voice actors

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Studio Ghibli is known for its beautifully crafted, touching, animated fantasy feature films, but at the helm of the lauded animation studio is a man with a famously stern demeanour — director and co-founder **Hayao Miyazaki**.

Over the years, the outspoken Miyazaki has ruffled feathers with some surprising comments, once saying that the anime industry's problem is that it's full of anime fans, and then revealing the kind of otaku he hates the most.

Interviews with the legendary anime director are rare, however, so sometimes the things he's said years ago pop up again to surprise a new legion of fans. That's what happened this week in Japan, when an article detailing **Miyazaki's feelings about female voice actors** resurfaced.

In the interview, given to the *Guardian* in 2005 ahead of the U.K. premiere of **Howl's Moving Castle**, Miyazaki was commenting on the foreign actors cast for the movie's dubbed version. When the discussion turned to Lauren Bacall, who voiced the Witch of the Wastes for the English-language dub, Miyazaki spoke approvingly, describing her as a "a fabulous woman". He then went on to say:

"All the Japanese female voice actors have voices that are very coquettish and wanting male attention, which was not what we wanted at all."

True to form, **Miyazaki knows how to throw shade at the anime industry like nobody else**. However, in this situation, the large majority of Japanese people who heard his statement for the first time, 15 years after it was first made, tended to agree with him.

"I totally understand — the flirty voices of female characters in late-night anime made me feel so uncomfortable I stopped watching them"

"I've been saying the same thing for years."

"Every character has the same high-pitched voice. It's so boring."

"I can't stand it — it's like they mass-produce voice actors with a template at training centres."

"The voices aren't natural but sadly, the viewer is accustomed to it."

"The voice acting is too exaggerated. It's ridiculous to think girls talk like that all the time."

There were some anime fans, though, who wanted to defend the high-pitched voices of anime girls.

“Nobody thinks it’s natural. Because it’s an anime character, it’s fictitious and extraordinary so it just meets the expectations.”

“A good voice actor should be able to act and change their pitch accordingly.”

And there was one commenter who had this to say:

“I think it’s the job of the director to control the sound of the characters, but I think Suzuki is obsessed with hiring famous entertainers to help promote the film.”

As one of Miyazaki’s closest friends and confidantes, Studio Ghibli co-founder and longtime producer **Toshio Suzuki** is one of the few people in the world able to **twist the director’s arm when it comes to creative decisions**. Back in the ’90s, for example, Suzuki convinced Miyazaki to put his pet project *Kemushi no Boro (Boro the Hairy Caterpillar)*, on hold in favour of *Princess Mononoke*, which turned out to be one of the studio’s most popular films to date.

That’s not to say Suzuki has total control over Miyazaki’s works, however, as **any decisions on casting would most certainly be the result of collaborative discussions**. So, if Miyazaki has an aversion to the coquettish voices of Japanese voice actresses, who played the original role of the Witch of the Wastes in *Howl’s Moving Castle*?

That would be Japanese singer, actor, and social activist **Akihiro Maruyama**, more commonly known by the stage name **Akihiro Miwa**.

In the clip above, Miwa says there’s nothing wrong with being gay, allowing a reporter to break the news to the public years ago, seeing as it’s “not like I killed someone or stole something”. Nagasaki-born Miwa started out as **a professional cabaret singer in Tokyo’s swanky Ginza district at the age of 17**, and was already a well-known, established performer before working for Studio Ghibli for the first time, in the role of **Moro**, the giant wolf in *Princess Mononoke*.

And who was the voice of **protagonist Sophie in Howl’s Moving Castle**? That role went to now-79-year-old actress **Chieko Baisho, who voiced both the young and old versions of Sophie in the film when she was 63 years old**.

Baisho started out as a singer in 1962 and became well known for playing the role of Sakura in the long-running film series *Otoko wa Tsurai yo*, commonly known as “*Tora-San*”, which ran from 1969-1995.

In fact, looking back at Ghibli’s catalogue of movies shows the lead female character of San in **Princess Mononoke** was voiced by Japanese actress and essayist Yuriko Ishida, and the character of Sen in **Spirited Away** was voiced by actress Rumi Hiiragi.

This desire to use **actors and singers** — and often well-known ones at that — over voice actors in Ghibli films does appear to satisfy both the creative desires of Miyazaki as director and promotional needs of Suzuki as producer. However, everyone can agree

that the tone and pitch of any character's voice is there to **help serve the story**, and a "coquettish", high-pitched voice just wouldn't suit the characters in a lot of Ghibli films, particularly when it comes to the feisty San or spirited Sen.

It's these small details that are a big part of what makes Ghibli films so great, and if you look at the studio's body of works, you'll find that Miyazaki doesn't just steer away from voice actors for a lot of his female roles, as some of the Ghibli dads weren't even actors at all.