

Support the Guardian

Fund independent journalism with \$5 per month

Support us →

The Guardian

[News](#)[Opinion](#)[Sport](#)[Culture](#)[Lifestyle](#)[More ▾](#)[Film](#) [Books](#) [Music](#) [Art & design](#) [TV & radio](#) [Stage](#) [Classical](#) [Games](#)

Review

Perfect Days review – Wim Wenders explores a quiet life in Tokyo



Bittersweet tale of an apparently contented toilet cleaner has an ambient urban charm, but feels a little too understated



📷 Subdued ... Perfect Days. Photograph: Mastermind Ltd



Peter Bradshaw

🐦 @PeterBradshaw1

Thu 25 May 2023 12.03 EDT

[Share](#)

Wim Wenders's new film, co-scripted by him with writer-director Takuma Takasaki, is a bittersweet quirky-Zen character study set in Tokyo which only comes fully to life in the final extended shot of the hero's face, drifting back and forth between happiness and sadness. There are some lovely magic-hour scenes from cinematographer Franz Lustig, shooting in the boxy "Academy" frame.

Hirayama, played by Koji Yakusho (from Shohei Imamura's The Eel) is a middle-aged man employed as a toilet cleaner, who drives around serenely from job to job in his van, listening to classic rock and pop on old-school audio cassettes: Patti Smith, the Kinks and of course, given the title, Lou Reed. At each location, he changes into a jumpsuit and with his brushes and mop matter-of-factly gets on with the job in hand.



With a hand-mirror, he has to check under the lavatory bowl and behind the urinals for ... well, never mind ... he never finds anything awful, and in fact the toilets are never remotely horrific. On his lunch-hour he reads and takes photos of trees and smiles acceptingly at everything that presents itself to his senses. He has a particular fondness for the city's "Skytree" tower. Hirayama has a goofy and unreliable young assistant whose purpose is to point up Hirayama's tolerant maturity and calm.

But who is Hirayama? His small and ascetic apartment is filled with books, music cassettes and boxes of his photos: he is clearly a very intelligent and cultured man who maybe once enjoyed great social status and has chosen this monkish existence for reasons of his own, in retreat from personal pain maybe? Answers appear to emerge when he peeps round the door of a certain bar, and also when his cool niece (Arisa Nakano) comes to stay and he is then confronted by this girl's mother, his sister, who tells him their father's dementia is still a problem and seems stunned by what Hirayama does for a living these days.

Perfect Days has a kind of ambient urban charm and Yakusho anchors the film with his understated wisdom and presence: rightly, Wenders doesn't reveal too much too early about his hero and doesn't try to tie everything up too neatly. But I found something a little too subdued in this film, though the evocation of Tokyo itself is very unclichéd, despite the emphasis on something that is the subject of so many touristy jokes: the loos. Not perfect, but engaging enough.

● Perfect Days screened at the [Cannes film festival](#) and is released on 23 February in UK and Irish cinemas.