



See You at Jackson's Cinema House!

MAEBASHI CITY COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (CIR) SEPTEMBER 2026
JACKSON BANNISTER'S ACTIVITY REPORT

Maebashi Cinema House, a mini-theater in Maebashi City. Jackson, a film-loving CIR, watches one hand-picked recommendation from the theater manager and brings you a review.
Movies transcend borders! See you at the cinema!



SEPTEMBER'S MOVIE

FUJIKO

2026 JAPAN 

Jackson Bannister

I work as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Maebashi City, Gunma Prefecture, engaging in activities to deepen mutual cultural understanding between Japanese and non-Japanese residents.



Films are another family

~Discover new cinema in Maebashi—connecting films, people, and the community.~



In order to foster bonds within the local community through film, we decided to open Maebashi Cinema House.

Although small, our theater shares a wide variety of films from the heart of Maebashi. Our program spans a wide range of genres, including high-quality independent and mini-theater films that rarely receive screenings, hit titles that have completed their runs at multiplex cinemas, family-friendly films that parents and children can enjoy together, and classic masterpieces from the past. Through this selection, we hope audiences will discover new films.

This is the kind of "Cinema House" we aspire to build.

MISSION

3F, Maebashi Plaza Genki 21 Annex, 1-16 Chiyoda-machi 5-chome, Maebashi City

FUJIKO

**Even against the odds,
life is rock and roll.**

**For August's issue, I had the chance to see *FUJIKO*,
which is currently playing at Maebashi Cinema House!**

*In an age of Japanese cinema where many films look and feel like commercials, accompanied by performances that can sometimes feel just as polished and inauthentic, *FUJIKO* feels like a much-needed breath of fresh air. *FUJIKO* doesn't revolutionize the story of the struggling single mother fighting against an unforgiving society. In fact, its premise is fairly familiar. What makes the film stand out is the way up-and-coming director Taichi Kimura approaches that familiar story: with energetic visuals, impressive performances, and a surprisingly playful tone.*

The film follows Fujiko (**Yuki Katayama**), a struggling single mother raising her daughter, Mari, in Showa-era Japan. Faced with opposition from her former in-laws, her own mother, and the expectations of the society around her, Fujiko refuses to accept that her only option is to depend on a husband and back down. Through her struggles, the film explores the sacrifices and strength that many single mothers would have had to endure in an era when support for single mothers was far less commonplace. At its core, *FUJIKO* is basically *Rocky*, except the opponent is society.

First of all, I'm not going to say that this film really "revolutionizes" cinema in any way. It's a fairly standard story about a "spunky single mother who fights against societal norms and expectations in order to succeed on her own terms." There are plenty of stories that have followed this basic formula before. However, being cliché does not detract from the film very much, because its execution makes for a genuinely entertaining and thought-provoking watch. Rather than trying to reinvent the story itself, Kimura finds interesting ways to bring energy and personality to it.

One of the clearest examples of this is Fujiko's relationship with rock music. Rock is more than simply a hobby that she inherited from her father, who was once a rock guitarist. It represents a part of Fujiko's identity that exists outside of the expectations placed on her as a mother and as a woman. Her love of rock becomes a rejection of the idea that she should simply conform to what her mother and in-laws expect from her.

This also connects Fujiko's personal struggle to the broader social environment of late-1970s Japan. The expectations placed on her aren't simply the result of a few unpleasant people in her life; they reflect a larger social order in which women were expected to follow a particular path. Rock, with its associations with rebellion and individuality, becomes a fitting symbol for Fujiko's refusal to follow that path. The connection between her father, rock music, and her own identity is established early in the film and continues to influence her throughout the story.

Despite its subject matter, which one might expect to produce a rather melancholic film, *FUJIKO* actually remains surprisingly upbeat.

No matter how many times Fujiko is knocked down, she finds a way to keep moving forward, largely because she is determined to provide for Mari. This optimism is important because it prevents the film from becoming weighed down by its own subject matter. Fujiko is struggling, but the film doesn't constantly demand that the audience feel sorry for her.

A large part of this works because of the performances. The cast does an impressive job of selling both the more serious aspects of the story and its lighter moments. Fujiko in particular needs to be believable as someone who is constantly being pushed around by the people and circumstances surrounding her while still possessing enough energy and stubbornness to keep fighting back. The performance gives the character a sense of momentum that matches the film's overall tone. Even when the story becomes heavy, Fujiko herself never feels completely defeated.

This balance between seriousness and playfulness is one of the film's greatest strengths. A story about a single mother facing poverty, family pressure, and societal discrimination could very easily have turned into heavy-handed

melodrama. Instead, Kimura seems more interested in keeping the film moving. The result is a movie that can discuss genuinely serious issues without constantly stopping to tell the audience, "This story is sad, please feel bad."

On a technical level, I found the film particularly impressive, especially compared to many of the other modern movies coming out of Japan. Animation is used multiple times throughout the film, creating a fun energy that you don't often see in Japanese live-action cinema. The combination of live action, animation, editing, and music gives the film a visual identity that feels deliberately constructed rather than simply polished. It is clear that the cast and crew were intent on making something that would stand out from the pack.

Cinematography is another major highlight. There seems to be a trend among newer Japanese productions toward making everything as sharp and clean as possible, from the cameras being used to the way the color grading is handled. While this can certainly look beautiful, it can also make some films feel more like television commercials than movies.

The film utilizes unusual camera angles, energetic transitions, animation, and a sort of bluish color grading that gives it a sense of “texture” and “weight.” Rather than striving for perfect visual cleanliness, Kimura allows the film to have some rough edges. For me, that makes it feel more cinematic. There is a sense that the visuals are being used to express the characters and the story rather than simply to make everything look as attractive as possible.

Ultimately, this is where Taichi Kimura proves himself to be a promising director. A film is a dish made up of a lot of different ingredients: the script, performances, cinematography, editing, music, and tone. *FUJIKO* could have easily ended up being marred by excessive melodrama, with every element of the production screaming at the audience about how sad the story is. Instead, Kimura manages to balance these ingredients surprisingly well. He gives the film an energy and playfulness through his creative decisions that make it an interesting watch from start to finish.

Overall, I think *FUJIKO* is a compelling film that highlights the struggles faced by single mothers in a society that can often actively work against them, while still managing to balance its heavier themes with humor, energy, and visual creativity. It isn't a particularly groundbreaking story, but I don't think it needs to be. What matters is what a director can do with the story they're given, and Taichi Kimura does quite a lot with this one.

I'd recommend *FUJIKO* to anyone looking for a story about someone struggling to succeed despite overwhelming odds, or to anyone interested in seeing a film that offers a different perspective on the expectations placed on women in Showa-era Japan. More than anything, *FUJIKO* reminded me that a familiar story can still feel fresh when the people telling it have something of their own to bring to the table.