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DOLCE

(DOCU - RUSSIA-JAPAN)

A Bereg Prods. (St. Petersburg)/Quest (Tokyo) co-production. (International sales: Ideale Audience Intl., Paris.) Produced by Vladimir Persov, Yuji Kogure.

Directed, written by Alexander Sokurov. Camera (color, Betacam SP), Koshiro Otsu; editor, Alexei Jankowski, Sergei Ivanov; music, Back, Bogoslovsky. Reviewed at Venice Film Festival (New Territories), Sept. 4, 2000. Running time: 61 MIN.

With: Miho Shimao, Maya Shimao.

Russian cult director Alexander Sokurov uses the Italian word *dolce* (sweet, tender) as a title for this delicate, experimental documentary, inspired by the life of celebrated Japanese writer Toshio Shimao but ultimately focused on his widow, Miho. Pic is an intimate meditation on mother-daughter ties that many may find too up-close to be healthy. Despite their protracted length, pic's minimalist scenes have such emotional intensity that one feels the director has lived through something similar. Yet compared with his abstract "Mother and Son" (1997), "Dolce" is far more accessible to fest and TV viewers thanks to the distance imposed by the Japanese subject.

A fascinating intro flips through family photos as a voiceover describes Shimao's precocious literary talent, his near-death as a kamikaze officer in WWII, his marriage to schoolteacher Miho and his own near-madness when she's put in a mental hospital. There follows a monologue by an aged Miho, who relives the pain she felt when her mother died. Next scene conveys her enormous tenderness toward her handicapped daughter, Maya, and finally her heartfelt prayers to become a still more loving mother.

— Deborah Young