



333 East 47th Street
New York, NY 10017
japansociety.org

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Media Contacts:
Allison Rodman
arodman@japansociety.org, 212-715-1205
Emi Marica
emarica@japansociety.org, 212-715-1283

Japan Society Announces Full Lineup for Hybrid Presentation of the 15th Edition of JAPAN CUTS: Festival of New Japanese Film

August 20–September 2 at Japan Society

North America’s largest festival of contemporary Japanese cinema presents a dynamic slate of 38 films streaming online throughout the U.S. and screening in-person at Japan Society in NYC, introduces New York Premiere of Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s *Wife of a Spy* and offers annual CUT ABOVE Award to star Yu Aoi



It's a Summer Film! © 2020 "It's a Summer Film!" Production Committee

New York, NY (July 20, 2021) – Japan Society announces the full lineup for the 15th annual **JAPAN CUTS: Festival of New Japanese Film**, the largest festival of its kind in North America, set for **August 20-September 2** as a hybrid **online and in-person event**. Continuing its annual mission of showcasing a diverse slate of the best and most exciting films coming out of Japan today, the summer festival will introduce a total of **27 features** and **12 short films** including 32

films available online throughout the U.S. and 14 screenings of 8 films on the big screen in Japan Society's auditorium.

"It's been a very difficult year for everyone, but we are so excited to finally open Japan Society's auditorium doors and welcome back audiences to watch films together," says K. F. Watanabe, Deputy Director of Film at Japan Society, who organized this year's festival with Japan Society Film Associate Alexander Fee and JAPAN CUTS programmer Joel Neville Anderson. "In addition to the robust online festival lineup, our in-person selection overall emphasizes a love for cinema and the joy of filmgoing—including the return of last year's standout title ***Labyrinth of Cinema***, Nobuhiko Obayashi's epic final film, which we just had to bring back to project on the big screen."

Festivities kick off on August 20 with the U.S. Premiere of Soushi Matsumoto's charming sci-fi and samurai-tinged celebration of filmmaking ***It's a Summer Film!***, one of two titles to be presented both online and in-person. The other film offered to both virtual and live audiences is the festival's **Centerpiece Presentation** title, Kiyoshi Kurosawa's Venice Film Festival Silver Bear-winning (Best Director) ***Wife of a Spy***—a masterful thriller and a dizzying tale of suspicion, betrayal and love during WWII—which receives its New York Premiere. The film's luminous star **Yu Aoi** is the recipient of this year's **CUT ABOVE Award**, the festival's annual accolade recognizing outstanding achievement in Japanese cinema. Barring an in-person appearance at the festival due to COVID-related travel restrictions, Aoi will accept her award via video greeting.

"Perhaps more than any other onscreen performer, Yu Aoi has been *the* face of Japanese cinema in the 21st century since her memorable debut in Shunji Iwai's *All About Lily Chou-Chou* in 2001," says Watanabe. "It feels exceptionally appropriate to celebrate her superlative two-decade career this year with Kiyoshi Kurosawa's latest film, in which Aoi is simply transcendent. Though we wish we could present this award in person, we look forward to finding a future opportunity to welcome Aoi to Japan Society."

Returning for its second online iteration is the festival's **Next Generation** competition, introduced last year, which offers a hand-picked selection of six independently produced narrative feature films by emerging directors. The festival's only juried section, Next Generation awards the **Obayashi Prize** to the most accomplished title as determined by a jury of industry professionals. This year's distinguished jurors are film scholar Kyoko Hirano; Brian Hu, Artistic Director of Pacific Arts Movement; and Japanese film subtitler and translator Don Brown. Last year's winner **Anshul Chauhan** (*Kontora*) returns to the festival with the World Premiere of his COVID-19 themed short film ***Leo's Return*** in the festival's online **Shorts Showcase** section, a vibrant selection of short form works that also includes the International Premiere of **Toshiaki Toyoda's** new samurai short ***Go Seppuku Yourself***, available worldwide except Japan.

Other festival highlights include the U.S. Premiere of ***The Great Yokai War: Guardians***, a big budget fantasy/adventure spectacle by **Takashi Miike** that follows up on the cult director's 2005 film; the International Premiere of ***Kiba: The Fangs of Fiction***, a whip-smart, all-star comedy about the publishing industry directed by **Daihachi Yoshida** (*The Kirishima Thing*); and the U.S.

Online Premiere of *Ito*, the latest by festival favorite **Satoko Yokohama**, which centers on a shamisen-loving high schooler in Aomori who attempts to overcome her shyness by working at a maid café. These films are presented as part the **Feature Slate**, the festival's main section, comprised of popular studio favorites and international film festival gems encompassing a wide range of genres and styles.

Also making their online premieres are a selection of otherwise impossible-to-see works within the **Classics**, **Documentary Focus** and **Experimental Spotlight** sections. Highlights include a 35th anniversary presentation of a 4K restoration of *To Sleep So as to Dream*, the debut film by Kaizo Hayashi (*The Most Terrible Time in My Life*) and a clever throwback to Japan's silent cinema era; *No Smoking*, a nonfiction portrait of legendary musician and composer **Haruomi Hosono**, founding member of the Yellow Magic Orchestra; Rotterdam selection *The Blue Danube*, a wry and painfully funny depiction of the absurdity of war and bureaucracy by **Akira Ikeda**; and an eclectic collection of avant-garde works—including the latest by Cannes film festival participant **Nao Yoshigai**—offered within the **Experimental Shorts Program**.

TICKETING

In-person screenings: Tickets go on sale Monday, August 16 at 11:00 am ET; Japan Society members receive priority access starting Tuesday, August 10. Tickets are \$15/\$10 members. Additional discounts available. **Online screenings:** All-Access Passes (\$69, limited availability) go on sale Tuesday, August 10 at 11:00 am ET. Individual film rentals go on sale August 20 at 11:00 am ET. Individual rentals range from \$1–\$10 with discounted bundle offers available. Members receive a 20% discount on all online rentals via promo code.

All online films available through film.japansociety.org, presented in Japanese with English subtitles within the U.S. from August 20-September 2 unless sold out or otherwise noted. Titles also available beyond the U.S. are noted below. Lineup and other details are subject to change. For complete information visit japansociety.org.

Screeners available for most titles. Please send all press inquiries to Allison Rodman at arodman@japansociety.org. Full slate of films listed below.

JAPAN CUTS 2021 FULL LINEUP

FEATURE SLATE

Comprised of popular studio favorites and international film festival gems encompassing a wide range of genres and styles, this main section of the festival offers a vivid snapshot of the contemporary Japanese cinema landscape. *Films listed alphabetically by title, including both online and in-person selections.*

***Aristocrats* (New York Premiere)**

Dir. Yukiko Sode, 2020, 124 min.

Whisked between social functions by private car, Hanako (Mugi Kadowaki, *Love's Whirlpool*) lives a cloistered life among Tokyo's wealthy elite. As she approaches her thirties, her family pushes her toward marriage and arranges dates with suitable bachelors. Meanwhile, Miki (Kiko Mizuhara, *Helter Skelter*) is making headway as an event planner after arriving in the city from her small town to attend a prestigious university only to drop out due to financial stress. When their paths cross over a man on a glide path to political power (Kengo Kora), these women recognize each other as individuals in the process of realizing their own passions and agency. Adapted from Mariko Yamauchi's novel, Yukiko Sode's dissection of class and gender comes alive with a fantastic cast including Shizuka Ishibashi (*And Your Bird Can Sing*) and Rio Yamashita (*Asako I & II*). *In-person only.*

Saturday, August 21 at 7:00 pm

Thursday, August 26 at 4:00 pm

Come and Go

Dir. Lim Kah Wai, 2020, 158 min.

Tourists, foreigners and outcasts converge on the streets of Osaka in this sprawling ensemble drama by Japan-based, Malaysia-born filmmaker Lim Kah Wai. Reminiscent of Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975) in its loose, multi-character structure and location specificity, Lim's eighth feature explores the lesser-known aspects of the Asian melting pot city through the eyes and experiences of a dozen characters who struggle to find their place in society—among them a Nepali refugee with dreams of opening a restaurant, a Burmese student struggling to make ends meet while working two jobs and a Taiwanese sex tourist who travels to meet his favorite adult video actress (amusingly played by Tsai Ming-liang muse Lee Kang-sheng). A fascinating, multi-faceted portrait of modern Osaka (specifically the Umeda district), *Come and Go* complicates the idea of Japan's homogeneity while not shying away from social criticism. *In Japanese, English, Mandarin, Korean, Nepali, Vietnamese and Burmese with English and Japanese subtitles. Online only.*

Company Retreat

Dir. Atsushi Funahashi, 2021, 135 min.

Following a widely publicized workplace sexual harassment incident at a well-known Tokyo hotel chain between female receptionist Saki (Saki Hirai) and her superior—which leads to a social media frenzy and online bullying for the victim—she joins a group of co-workers for a seaside vacation to decompress from the scrutiny. Before long, however, a debate erupts surrounding workplace gender dynamics and Saki's culpability, and clues are revealed regarding the mystery of who leaked Saki's personal information to social media. Based on a true story, this speculative drama draws from firsthand accounts of an actual sexual harassment case and utilizes documentary techniques to dig into the divergent Japanese reactions to issues at the center of the global #MeToo movement—something that has had trouble taking root in Japan, a country ranked 120th in gender equality according to the 2021 World Economic Forum. *Online only.*

The Goldfish: Dreaming of the Sea

Dir. Sara Ogawa, 2021, 80 min.

A poignant coming-of-age tale awash in lush naturalism, *The Goldfish: Dreaming of the Sea* follows Hana (Miyu Ogawa, *Special Actors*)—an 18-year-old raised in a group home since her mother’s imprisonment 10 years prior—as she watches over the home’s newest arrival, Harumi (Runa Hanada), a young, withdrawn girl who can’t get along with the rest of the group. As the pair become closer and Harumi starts to open up, Hana discovers Harumi’s history with physical abuse and recalls her own memories of trauma when she learns of her mother’s appeal for retrial. An exceptionally impressive debut theatrical feature by 25-year-old actress Sara Ogawa, *The Goldfish* introduces a brand-new directorial talent resembling Hirokazu Kore-eda (whose longtime director of photography Yutaka Yamazaki is shared by Ogawa) in her insightful observation, lyrical touch and eye for composition. *Online only.*

***The Great Yokai War: Guardians* (U.S. Premiere)**

Dir. Takashi Miike, 2021, 123 min.

In cult director Takashi Miike’s long-awaited return to the phantasmagorical realm of yokai, a vengeful mass of sea spirits arise in the Nagano region of Japan and transform into Yokaiju, a destructive force of nature that leaves nothing but calamity and devastation in its wake. Hoping to prevent the unstoppable Yokaiju from reaching Tokyo (and thus breaking a spiritual barrier that staves off the revival of a nameless evil), the yokai summon the long-forgotten descendent of legendary samurai and yokai hunter *Watanabe no Tsuna*—fifth-grader Kei Watanabe (Kokoro Terada). Struggling to come to terms with his extraordinary lineage, Kei reluctantly takes on his ancestor’s mantle in an effort to save both yokai and humankind. A gonzo, off-the-wall meld of grand adventure, slapstick humor and fantastical spectacle, Miike’s latest effort reintroduces the mythical world of Japanese folklore (including the return of fan-favorite Daimajin) to a whole new generation of viewers. *In-person only.*

Saturday, August 28 at 7 PM

Wednesday, September 1 at 4 PM

***It’s a Summer Film!* (U.S. Premiere)**

Dir. Soushi Matsumoto, 2020, 97 min.

Pop idol, actress and former Nogizaka46 member Marika Ito stars as a high schooler nicknamed “Barefoot,” a precocious *chanbara*-obsessed teen who spends her days poring over classic Raizo Ichikawa and *Zatoichi* films with her two best friends: kendo enthusiast “Blue Hawaii” and sci-fi geek “Kickboard.” Ready to finally produce her unrealized script, *Samurai Spring*, Barefoot jumps into action, resolving to make her dream come true over the course of one summer—and go head-to-head with her rival, the film club’s darling rom-com director—with her friends and a ragtag crew that includes a mysterious classmate whose love of samurai films matches her own. A charming girl group-focused coming-of-age comedy that at times recalls *Linda Linda Linda* (2005), *It’s a Summer Film!* offers an endearing tribute to the life-affirming power of cinema. *Online and in-person.*

Friday, August 20 at 4:00 pm

Saturday, August 21 at 1:30 pm

Ito

Dir. Satoko Yokohama, 2021, 116 min.

Ito (Ren Komai, *True Mothers*) is a high schooler in the small town of Itayanagi, Aomori Prefecture, withdrawn and still mourning the death of her mother while she was a young child. She's disinterested in her laidback Tokyoite professor father's (Etsushi Toyokawa, *Her Granddaughter*, JC 2018) research into the regional Tsugaru dialect, and rejects invitations to pick up the shamisen she once loved from her grandmother (played by expert of the instrument Yoko Nishikawa). Seeking to break out of her shell, she answers a help wanted ad in nearby Hirosaki City, and works part-time in a maid café, where she meets surprising characters from veteran cosplay servants to stoic baristas and nerdy patrons, allowing her an unexpected space to find self-expression connected to her cultural roots. Director Satoko Yokohama (*Ultra Miracle Love Story*, JC 2010 and *The Actor*, JC 2016) returns to her and star Komai's native Aomori in this heart-warming comedic drama. *Online only.*

***Kiba: The Fangs of Fiction* (International Premiere)**

Dir. Daihachi Yoshida, 2021, 137 min.

Amid a power struggle within major publishing company Kunpu, cocky industry operator Akira (Yo Oizumi) gets assigned to lead its failing culture magazine *Trinity* as editor-in-chief. Enlisting the help of earnest rookie editor Megumi (Mayu Matsuoka), Akira attempts to revitalize *Trinity* by securing the commitment of a celebrated author, breaking out new literary talent and taking risks—all of which are backed by a new CEO (Koichi Sato) who has his own ideas about Kunpu's future. Meanwhile, Megumi tries to track down a reclusive genius author while keeping up with the machinations of her crafty boss and their cutthroat industry. A whip-smart, twist-laden workplace comedy anchored by an all-star ensemble cast, the latest by Daihachi Yoshida (*The Kirishima Thing*, JC 2013) offers a comically cynical look at corporate culture that nevertheless celebrates the tenacity of the underdog. *In-person only.*

Thursday, August 26 at 7:00 pm

Saturday, August 28 at 4:00 pm

JAPAN CUTS 2020 ENCORE SCREENING

***Labyrinth of Cinema* (New York Premiere)**

Dir. Nobuhiko Obayashi, 2019, 179 min.

The final film by Nobuhiko Obayashi returns to JAPAN CUTS for a special theatrical presentation! *Labyrinth* finds the late director returning to the subject of Japan's history of warfare following the completion of his "War Trilogy," which ended with *Hanagatami* (JC 2018). On the last night of its existence, a small movie theater in Onomichi—the seaside town of Obayashi's youth where he shot nearly a dozen films—screens an all-night marathon of Japanese war films. When lightning strikes the theater, three young men are transported into the world onscreen where they experience the violent battles of several wars leading up to the bombing of Hiroshima. A breathless cinematic journey through Japan's past, *Labyrinth of Cinema* finds Obayashi using every trick in his book to create an awe-inspiring, visually resplendent anti-war epic that urges us to consider cinema as a means to change history. The culmination of an exceptional 60-year career worth celebrating. *In-person only.*

Thursday, September 2 at 7:00 pm

The Pass: Last Days of the Samurai (New York Premiere)

Dir. Takashi Koizumi, 2020, 114 min.

Following the end of Japan's Edo period in 1867—when governing power was relinquished by the Tokugawa shogunate and restored to the Emperor—a civil war erupts between imperial loyalists in the west and the remaining shogunate in the east. Caught between both armies, Tsuginosuke Kawai (Koji Yakusho, *13 Assassins*), chief retainer of the Nagaoka domain in Echigo, decides to remain neutral in order to safeguard the lives of his clan. When his attempts at brokering peace through negotiation fail, however, Kawai resolves to face the end of the samurai era with dignity. Directed by Takashi Koizumi (*After the Rain*, 2000)—assistant director on Akira Kurosawa's epic samurai masterpiece *Ran* (1985)—*The Pass* is a skillfully realized throwback to classic samurai cinema, replete with gorgeous period costumes and sets, epic battle scenes and even an appearance by legendary samurai actor Tatsuya Nakadai. *In-person only.*

Saturday, August 21 at 4:00 pm

Wednesday, September 1 at 7:00 pm

Talking the Pictures (New York Premiere)

Dir. Masayuki Suo, 2019, 127 min.

The latest film by celebrated director Masayuki Suo (*Shall We Dance?*) is set in the last days of Japan's silent movie era, when the real stars were not the actors on screen but live narrators known as *benshi* who dictated the action, voiced characters and transported audiences into the world of moving images. Hiding from the law in a small-town cinema after a burglary gone wrong, lifelong cinephile Shuntaro (Ryo Narita) seeks to change his ways and fulfill his childhood dream of being a star *benshi*—but before long, a cocky rival performer, a gang of criminals and a relentless detective threaten to undo everything. Filled with charming period details and visual gags, *Talking the Pictures* is a genuine love letter to Japan's golden age of silent cinema and a tribute to the magic of moviegoing. *In-person only.*

Friday, August 20 at 4:00 pm

Saturday, August 28 at 1:00 pm

CENTERPIECE PRESENTATION

Wife of a Spy (New York Premiere)

Dir. Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 2020, 115 min.

Satoko Fukuhara (Yu Aoi) lives with her import/export businessman husband Yusaku (Takahashi Issey) in the port city of Kobe, with Japan on the precipice of entering WWII with Axis powers Germany and Italy in 1940. Their pleasant cosmopolitan life constricted by rising militarism, the couple is surveilled by Satoko's admiring childhood friend who is now a steely military police officer (Masahiro Higashide). When Yusaku makes a trip to Manchuria where he witnesses colonial violence firsthand, and the mysterious woman (Hyunri) he returns with is discovered dead, Satoko questions allegiance and desire like never before, in a brave performance by Aoi. Co-written with his former students Ryusuke Hamaguchi and Tadashi Nohara (*Happy Hour*) and shot in 8K digital video for public broadcaster NHK, Kiyoshi Kurosawa's first historical drama eerily evokes horrors of the past in the visual register of our own terrifying times. *In-person and online (with limited availability).*

Friday, August 27 at 7:00 pm

Wonderful Paradise

Dir. Masashi Yamamoto, 2020, 95 min.

The latest by veteran indie auteur Masashi Yamamoto (*Robinson's Garden*) is a riotous and unpredictable low-budget comedy that makes the most of a single location. When Akane (Miyu Ogawa, *Special Actors*) and her family are forced to move out of their inherited luxury home on the outskirts of Tokyo, she tweets an open invitation to their house for one last goodbye party. Before long, Akane's estranged mother (Kaho Minami) shows up, followed by a steady stream of strangers—including a gay couple looking to celebrate their marriage, a cross country cyclist, Taiwanese tourists, and even a few ghosts. As the night goes on, the party becomes an increasingly surreal *matsuri* (local festival) celebrating life, death, love and second chances that culminates in a drug-fueled funeral, blood-spattered wedding and a coffee bean *kaiju* battle. *Online only*

NEXT GENERATION

This sole competitive section of the festival features a hand-picked selection of independently produced narrative feature films by emerging directors who offer a glimpse into the future of Japanese cinema. One film within the section determined as the most accomplished by a jury of film industry professionals will receive the inaugural “**Obayashi Prize**” in honor of the late filmmaker Nobuhiko Obayashi (1938-2020). *Films listed alphabetically by title.*

B/B

Dir. Kosuke Nakahama, 2020, 77 min.

Following the suspension of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics due to corruption and a failed attack by an Aum Shinrikyo-like cult, pop culture-obsessed high schooler Sana (newcomer Karen) is brought in for questioning by a psychiatrist and police detective in connection to a case known as the “Icarus Murder” after it is discovered that she knows the victim's son, Shiro. Inflicted by an extreme case of dissociative identity disorder, however, Sana's recollections are fractured by the multiple personalities inside her (12 in total), each of whom provide their own commentary. Nevertheless, as Sana gets deeper into her story, the troubling truth behind her relationship with Shiro is revealed. A highly imaginative debut marked by confident direction, audacious visual style and an impressive lead performance, *B/B* viscerally communicates youthful revulsion at an unjust world. *Online only. Available worldwide.*

Mari and Mari

Dir. Tatsuya Yamanishi, 2021, 91 min. With Kou Maehara, Hana Amano, Nao.

Soft-spoken casting agent Norio (Kou Maehara) leads a simple but happy coexistence with his longtime partner Mari, with whom he shares a small apartment. Returning home one day, however, Norio finds that Mari has vanished without explanation and in her place appears a strange young woman who claims to have the same name and no memory of how she got

there. With his girlfriend supernaturally “recast” in his life, Norio takes a sudden turn into the uncanny as he tries to reconcile the appearance of the new Mari with the disappearance of the one he thought he knew. Capturing an eerie sense of alienation reminiscent of Kobo Abe and a pervasive otherworldly dread that recalls Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Tatsuya Yamanishi’s debut feature is a deftly shot and directed drama that suggests the illusion of complacency. *Online only.*

My Sorry Life

Dir. Kozue Nomoto, 2021, 91 min.

TV producer Kei (Maki Fujiwara) and her recently retired comedian boyfriend Yoshi (Akiyoshi Okayasu) are working to conceive their first child as they consider marriage approaching mid-thirties—a process complicated by the fact that Kei has continued taking contraceptives. Annoyed by Yoshi relaxing into domestic life and slacking off at his part-time job, Kei has finally worked around her male colleagues’ obstruction to spearhead an innovative web series guest hosted by rotating everyday people. She invites Shiori (Yukino Murakami), a young trans man working for her office’s delivery service and moonlighting as a bartender at an LGBTQ-inclusive space, to kick off the program. However, as Kei pushes forward, she reaches a breaking point. A provocative critique of sex and gender, Kozue Nomoto’s feature debut follows her acclaimed shorts including *From the Bottom of the Vortex*, winner of the Grand Prize at the Tokyo International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival. *Online only.*

Sasaki in My Mind

Dir. Takuya Uchiyama, 2020, 118 min.

A chance encounter with an old high school friend thrusts Yuji (Kisetsu Fujiwara), a struggling Tokyo actor making ends meet by working in a factory, toward reliving experiences from his youth that sparked his now fizzled inspiration. For Yuji and his friends in their late twenties, this time was defined by the self-consciously rambunctious Sasaki (Gaku Hosokawa), who filled silences with gregarious banter, or—without warning—stripping nude and dancing to boys chanting his name before streaking across campus. As memories of Sasaki’s selfless encouragement of his acting craft come back, Yuji also discovers the many ways in which he failed to be there for this sad class clown, compelling him to push forward. This follow-up to Takuya Uchiyama’s 2016 Pia Film Festival Audience Award-winning film *Vanitas* is the result of collaboration with co-star Gaku Hosokawa, whose story this is based on. *Online only. Available worldwide except Netherlands, Japan and Poland.*

Spaghetti Code Love

Dir. Takeshi Maruyama, 2021, 96 min.

In this beautifully lensed, poetic and ambitious Tokyo-centric drama, 13 disparate young people connected by chance or circumstance intersect as they ponder their place in the world and deal with the pressures and heartaches of modern life in Japan’s busy capital. Among them are a singer-songwriter who gives up on her dreams, an escort who can’t seem to find love, a high school couple pondering suicide, a photographer desperate to make it big and a part-time worker hopelessly attached to a married man—each struggling to overcome their limitations, each intertwined by the same desire for love, understanding and connection. The first feature

film by popular music video director Takeshi Maruyama (whose one-shot music video for the 2017 hit "[Labyrinth](#)" by pop group MONDO GROSSO went viral). *Online only.*

Town Without Sea

Dir. Elaiza Ikeda, 2020, 105 min.

Best friends and members of the local taiko troupe drumming in their hometown's festival, Sho (Yuki Kura) and Taiga (Roy Ishiuchi) find themselves at a crossroads with high school graduation in sight. Taiga refocuses on studying and career prep, while Sho can't imagine pursuing anything beyond his daily life in Tagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture. When Sho's grandfather mysteriously advises him that he will find happiness when he sees one chimney overlapping with another, he sets off on a journey of discovery across the former coal mining town, meeting the guitar-toting Miyako (Nari Saito). Hailing from Fukuoka herself, actress Elaiza Ikeda insightfully directs her young protagonists in this sweet local coming of age story, with memorable performances by established and veteran actors such as Kiki Sugino and Lily Franky as Sho's mother and grandfather. *Online only.*

CLASSICS

This year's Classics selections offer two mid- to late-1980s classics of Japanese independent cinema by two of its leading lights: Masashi Yamamoto and Kaizo Hayashi. Starkly different in style, content and approach, they nevertheless exemplify a fertile period in Japanese cinema when the emergence of a new generation of independent filmmakers offered exciting alternatives to the otherwise stagnant mainstream cinema of bubble era Japan. *Film listed alphabetically by title.*

Robinson's Garden (Newly Remastered)

Dir. Masashi Yamamoto, 1988, 120 min.

Late one drunken night, drug-dealing slacker Kumi (Kumiko Ohta) stumbles upon a derelict warehouse in an abandoned industrial site on the outskirts of Tokyo overgrown with lush greenery. She returns to her newfound oasis with supplies and begins cultivating the land and painting the walls, inviting a cadre of hippies, artists, punkers and foreigners to escape from Japan's bubble era cityscape. Over time, Kumi's isolated attachment to her hidden garden begins to result in increasingly strange behavior, primarily witnessed by an equally strange child who always seems to be around. Directed by celebrated independent filmmaker Masashi Yamamoto (*Wonderful Paradise*) and shot on 16mm by Tom DiCillo (*Stranger Than Paradise*), *Robinson's Garden* emphasizes mood, texture and atmosphere over plot and characters, resulting in a hypnotizing and beautifully otherworldly cinematic experience. *Online only.*

To Sleep So as to Dream (4K Restoration)

Dir. Kaizo Hayashi, 1986, 80 min.

Born from the vestiges of some long-forgotten dream, Kaizo Hayashi's debut film is a hauntingly beautiful ode to the silent era that yearns for a distant past—back to an illusory world teeming

with new excitements, novel invention and cryptic riddles. Under the faint glimmer of an electric lamp, an aging silver-screen starlet seeks the aid of two steadfast detectives when her darling daughter, the ethereal Bellflower, is kidnapped for ransom. The sleuths find themselves caught in a heady game of cat and mouse as they journey deeper into a sleepless realm of *benshi* performers, archetypal villainy and never-ending serials. Transposing the silent era's cinematic language into a work that walks the line between antiquity and fantasy, dream and waking state, *To Sleep So as to Dream* casts a spell over the spectator in dream-like fashion, harking back to the magical, early days of cinema. *Online and in-person***.

****OFF-SITE SCREENING**

Le Petit Versailles (364 E. Houston St. New York, NY 10009)

Sunday, August 22 at 8:00 pm (doors at 7:00 pm)

Co-presented by Spectacle and Allied Productions, Inc. in cooperation with Japan Society. For more information visit alliedproductions.org.

DOCUMENTARY FOCUS

This selection of nonfiction films traverses the personal and the political with multifaceted and compelling examinations of contemporary life in Japan. Approaching art, politics, and human rights, the filmmakers in this section utilize a variety of techniques to capture the essence of their subjects in ways that suggest the diverse possibilities of documentary. *Films listed alphabetically by title.*

No Smoking

Dir. Taketoshi Sado, 2019, 96 min.

This intimate portrait documentary celebrates legendary musician and composer Haruomi Hosono—founding member of influential electro-pop group Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO) with Ryuichi Sakamoto and Yukihiro Takahashi—who candidly talks to the camera about everything from his childhood in the rubble of post-WW II Tokyo to his musical influences and history with Happy End and YMO. In addition to a treasure trove of archival photographs and personal artefacts interspersed throughout the film, *No Smoking* offers a rare backstage pass to a mini world tour of Hosono performances with concert footage from recent gigs in Yokohama, Taipei, London, Los Angeles and New York City. Featuring appearances by Kiko and Yuka Mizuhara, Van Dyke Parks, Tadanori Yokoo, Gen Hoshino and Mac DeMarco. *Online only.*

Ushiku

Dir. Thomas Ash, 2021, 87 min.

The Higashi-Nihon Immigration Center in Ushiku, Ibaraki Prefecture is one of the largest of Japan's 17 immigration detention facilities. Stories of Japan's restrictive immigration policies detaining visa overstayers indefinitely, and prohibitive refugee application recognition rates (below 1% in recent years) have long circulated in the news, however the stories of people lost in the system are less visible. In this urgent call for human rights Thomas Ash (*Sending Off*, JC 2020) utilizes hidden cameras to interview detainees at Ushiku beginning in late 2019, who

detail inadequate medical treatment, failure to recognize trans peoples' gender identity, physical abuse and hunger strikes, all as the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic rages in the background and Japan promotes a surface-level image of acceptance and inclusion in the name of the Tokyo Olympics. *Online only.*

Why You Can't Be Prime Minister

Dir. Arata Oshima, 2020, 119 min.

A graduate of the University of Tokyo working comfortably as a government ministry bureaucrat, Junya Ogawa's resignation and shift to running for political office in 2003 was a surprise for his friends and family in Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture. Pushing an expansion of social welfare as he fights for a seat in the Diet's House of Representatives in the ensuing years, he's caught in the splintering of opposition parties in a landscape dominated by the rightwing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Documenting the vicissitudes of Ogawa's trajectory over a period of 17 years, Arata Oshima (the son of director Nagisa Oshima and actress Akiko Koyama) provides a rare unvarnished inside view of a politician's life, raising important questions about the status of democracy in the contemporary moment. *Online only. Available in North America.*

EXPERIMENTAL SPOTLIGHT

Japan's rich experimental and avant-garde film traditions continue to expand in bold new directions. The vibrant feature-length works in this section feature filmmakers who push the limits of film form and defy categorization in their exploration of unconventional and evocative storytelling. *Films listed alphabetically.*

The Blue Danube

Dir. Akira Ikeda, 2021, 105 min.

In an imagined village, war with the neighboring town has become a matter of daily ritual, with volleys of shots traded over the river that separates them from 9 to 5. No one can recall how long the conflict has been going on, or bring themselves to question their sacrifice and enmity. When the soldier Tsuyuki (Kou Maehara, *Mari and Mari*) is transferred to play trumpet in the marching band running drills every morning, he begins practicing the Johann Strauss waltz which gives the film its title on the riverbank until he begins to wonder about the other side. Akira Ikeda (*Anatomy Of A Paperclip*) extends a spare Beckettian premise to both hilarity and insight, with star Maehara lending the profundity of Buster Keaton's deadpan gaze. *Online only.*

Double Layered Town / Making a Song to Replace Our Positions

Dir. Haruka Komori & Natsumi Seo, 2021, 81 min.

Following the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear catastrophe of March 11, 2011, filmmaker Haruka Komori and painter and writer Natsumi Seo moved to live and work in the devastated city of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture. Collaborating with workshop participants, this beautiful and utterly unique film presents four young travelers—all children a decade earlier at the time of 3/11—listening to local peoples' stories and reciting what they learned in staged dialogues. This

practice is braided together with a story written by Seo set another 10 years in the future in 2031, “Double Layered Town,” following the completion of land elevation work—creating a reflexive experimental documentary sensitive to the complexity of peoples’ lives while planting the seeds for new folktales. *Online only.*

SHORTS SHOWCASE

Among the most exciting and innovative works in recent Japanese cinema are those that come in short form. Explore a wide range of shorts of varying lengths, offered individually and as discounted Narrative Shorts and Experimental Shorts film bundles.

Experimental Shorts Program

Vibrant avant-garde works from Japan and beyond that defy categorization. *Films listed alphabetically by title. Online only.*

HONEYMOON

Dir. Yu Araki, 2021, 29 min.

In a playful critique of *Japanisme*, the craze for Japanese art and design in Europe in the mid-1800s often rife with misunderstanding and projection, *HONEYMOON* recasts the wedding scene of the opera and film *Madame Butterfly*. Joining Cio-Cio San (Qinhua Yang) is the photographer Adolf de Meyer (Taro Nettleton) and anthropologist Frederick Starr (Jack Mclean), kneeling seiza-style as broadcast commentators describe the action now set on the lunar base Nagasaki.

In a Mere Metamorphosis

Dir. Onohana, 2020, 9 min.

Featuring stirring imagery cycling through abstraction and quivering permanence, Onohana’s (*Ouch, Chou Chou* and *such a good place to die*, JC 2016) characteristically stunning animation was produced in collaboration with visitors to her past exhibitions in Shinjuku, Tokyo and Morioka, Tohoku, tracing her original illustrations.

June 4, 2020

Dir. Yoko Yuki, 2021, 4 min.

Yoko Yuki reflects on her experience at her family home in Aichi during the COVID-19 state of emergency prior to returning to Tokyo. The multimedia animation approach and innovative use of audio recordings in her previous works *100percentElectrical* and *A Snowflake into the Night* (JC 2019), and *ZDRAVSTVUIITE!* and *lost summer vacation* (JC 2016) are again on display in this moving work. *Available worldwide.*

Night Snorkeling

Dir. Nao Yoshigai & Hirofumi Nakamoto, 2020, 13 min.

Documenting the nocturnal sea life of Miura Peninsula, Kanagawa, Nao Yoshigai (*Across the water, Breathing House, Stories floating on the wind*, JC 2018 and *Wheel Music*, JC 2020) and Hirofumi Nakamoto also capture their fellow filmmaker's fascination with light and nature.

RED TABLE

Dir. Hakhyun Kim, 2021, 7 min.

Mesmerizing play with a toy train set blends with bloodthirsty greed in a young boy's playtime over a red tabletop in this whimsical animation. *Available in North America.*

Reflective Notes (Reconfiguration)

Dir. Koki Tanaka, 2021, 7 min.

The versatile artist Koki Tanaka, working across video, photography and site-specific installation, addresses isolation and existing social divisions in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in this sweeping essay film drawing on theories of collectivity and his personal archive of footage collected during the crisis. *Available worldwide.*

School Radio to Major Tom

Dir. Takuya Chisaka, 2021, 10 min.

Winner of the Entertainment Award at the venerable Pia Film Festival, Takuya Chisaka's short is set in the summer 1989 (and produced on small-gauge film to match the period), with the shy, space-loving student Eisuke recording a radio drama in his school's recording studio. When a girl attending night school begins recording responses, they create an imaginative audio relay that reaches the stars. *Available worldwide except Canada.*

ZONA

Dir. Masami Kawai, 2021, 15 min.

In a near future Los Angeles, drought has worsened and the water supply is cut off. Masami Kawai's visionary and atmospheric lo-fi sci-fi depicts an elder immigrant woman braving the sweltering heat and policed streets to procure water for herself and her disabled neighbor.

Narrative Shorts Program

Dramatic works by up-and-coming directors and seasoned veterans exploring the possibilities of short form filmmaking. *Films listed alphabetically by title. Online only.*

Among Four of Us

Dir. Mayu Nakamura, 2021, 20 min.

Old college friends reconvene over a group phone call one evening during Tokyo's COVID-19 state of emergency lockdown. Established documentary filmmaker Mayu Nakamura (*Lonely Swallows*, JC 2012) creates a drama that plumbs the depths of human sorrow and empathy in isolation using simple and ingenious tools to refract the contemporary moment. JAPAN CUTS Award Special Mention at the Osaka Asian Film Festival.

Born Pisces

Dir. Yoko Yamanaka, 2020, 30 min.

The director of *Amiko* (JC 2018) and *See You on the Other Side* (JC 2020), Yoko Yamanaka returns with a unique story of rebellious youth, intertwining the paths of a troubled young girl and boy breaking out of systems of control. *Available in North America.*

***Go Seppuku Yourself* (International Premiere)**

Dir. Toshiaki Toyoda, 2021, 26 min.

Completing Toshiaki Toyoda's politically urgent Resurrection Trilogy following *Wolf's Calling* and *The Day of Destruction* (both JC 2020), this electrifying short follows a man (Kiyohiko Shibukawa, *Lowlife Love*, JC 2016) tasked with assisting in the ritual suicide of a samurai (Yosuke Kubozuka, *Giri/Haji*) who won't die without condemning the corrupt powers that be. *Available worldwide except Japan.*

***Leo's Return* (World Premiere)**

Dir. Anshul Chauhan, 2021, 27 min.

Following a difficult shoot amid the COVID-19 pandemic, an aspiring actor returns home to a wife harboring a monumental secret. An atmospheric drama made during a moment of uncertainty in film culture, *Leo's Return* follows Anshul Chauhan's *Kontora*, winner of the inaugural Obayashi Prize at JAPAN CUTS 2020. *Available in the U.S. and Canada.*

IN-PERSON SCREENING SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, AUGUST 20

4 PM Talking the Pictures
7 PM It's a Summer Film!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 21

1:30 PM It's a Summer Film!
4 PM The Pass: Last Days of the Samurai
7 PM Aristocrats

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22

8 PM To Sleep So as to Dream**

THURSDAY, AUGUST 26

4 PM Aristocrats
7 PM Kiba: The Fangs of Fiction

FRIDAY, AUGUST 27

7 PM Wife of a Spy

SATURDAY, AUGUST 28

1 PM Talking the Pictures
4 PM Kiba: The Fangs of Fiction
7 PM The Great Yokai War: Guardians

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

4 PM The Great Yokai War: Guardians
7 PM The Pass: Last Days of the Samurai

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

7 PM Labyrinth of Cinema

****Off-site screening** at Le Petit Versailles, 364 E. Houston St. New York, NY 10009.

Co-presented by Spectacle and Allied Productions, Inc. in cooperation with Japan Society. For more information visit alliedproductions.org.

JAPAN CUTS: Festival of New Japanese Film

Founded in 2007, JAPAN CUTS is an annual film festival dedicated to screening the best of contemporary Japanese cinema. Organized by Japan Society in New York City, the festival is described as “New York’s premier Japanese cinema event” (*The Wall Street Journal*) and “an annual highlight of New York’s film calendar” (*The New York Times*). In addition to an exclusive slate of premiere film screenings, the festival offers free talk events and access to guest filmmakers and stars through post-screening Q&As and parties. Since its inception, the festival has attracted over 65,000 filmgoers, screened over 350 films and invited over 100 guests from Japan and beyond.

Japan Society

Japan Society is the premier organization connecting Japanese arts, culture, business, and society with audiences in New York and around the world. At Japan Society, we are inspired by the Japanese concept of *kizuna* (絆)—forging deep connections to bind people together. We are committed to telling the story of Japan while strengthening connections within New York City and building new bridges beyond. In over 100 years of work, we’ve inspired generations by establishing ourselves as pioneers in supporting international exchanges in arts and culture, business and policy, as well as education between Japan and the U.S. We strive to convene important conversations on topics that bind our two countries together, champion the next generation of innovative creators, promote mutual understanding, and serve as a trusted guide for people everywhere who seek to more fully appreciate the rich complexities and abundance of Japan. From our New York headquarters, a landmark building designed by architect Junzo Yoshimura that opened to the public in 1971, we look forward to the years ahead, which will be defined by our digital and ideational impact through the *kizuna* that we build. Our future can only be enhanced by learning from our peers and engaging with our audiences, both near and afar.

This year, Japan Society is celebrating our heritage through the 50th anniversary of our landmark building with the launch of a new distinct modern logo and visual identity. The “JS” monogram is

created via overlapping, interconnected lines and shapes, reinforcing the idea of *kizuna* and that Japan Society acts as a platform that connects across, cultures, people, and time.

CONNECT WITH US!

Follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/japansociety; [@japansociety](https://twitter.com/japansociety) and #japansociety on Instagram; and [@japansociety](https://twitter.com/japansociety) on Twitter. For further information, please visit www.japansociety.org

DIRECTIONS:

Japan Society is located at 333 East 47th Street between First and Second Avenues (accessible by the 4/5/6 and 7 subway lines at Grand Central or the E and M subway lines at 53rd St. and Lexington Ave.).

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