Japan Society Presents
Love Letters: Four Films by Shunji Iwai
Dec. 9-23, 2022

Featuring the U.S. Premiere of Newly Remastered Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or Bottom? and a Rare 35mm Presentation of All About Lily Chou-Chou!

New York, November 9, 2022—Japan Society is pleased to announce Love Letters: Four Films by Shunji Iwai, a weekend series celebrating the defining early works of filmmaker Shunji Iwai. One of the most original talents to emerge from Japan in the ‘90s, Iwai tapped into the dreams and lives of Japan’s youth with his lyrical meditations on the hardships of young adulthood, capturing pivotal and unforgettable moments of life. Balancing popular entertainment with arthouse predilection, Iwai’s exhilarating takes on the youth film provided a much-needed voice for the younger generation, offering delicate portraits of adolescence, ripe with poetic yearnings of grief, friendship, and young love. Iwai’s sumptuous visual style, coupled with his
affecting and underground appeal, opened a world of new possibilities in the '90s cinescape—marking him as one of the most accomplished and unique filmmakers of his generation.

A primer on the director’s essential works, **Love Letters** launches on December 9th with a screening of Iwai’s breakthrough **Love Letter**. An international phenomenon (even becoming a cultural touchstone in South Korea with its iconic line “O-genki desu ka?” meaning “How are you?”), Iwai’s achingly evocative and bittersweet debut launched the career of star Miki Sakai while cementing his trademark visual style, musical inclinations, and poetic leanings. On December 10th, following **Love Letter**, a double-feature pairing of two of the filmmaker’s most endearing and affecting works will be screened: **Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or the Bottom?** (presented in a new remaster and color grade) and **April Story**. Both ruminating on instances of new freedoms, independence, and innocent love, the two films offer poignant studies of adolescents facing new life changes and experiences. Concluding the program is a rare, archival 35mm screening of Iwai’s most enduring work, the transformative **All About Lily Chou-Chou**. In addition to in-person screenings, **April Story** will be available to stream across the U.S. at film.japansociety.org from December 9th through December 23rd.

**Tickets**: $15/$12 students and seniors /$10 Japan Society members.  
*Purchase tickets for all films in the same transaction and receive $2 off each ticket.*

**Online Screening**: $10 individual film rentals with a 3-day rental window go on sale December 9. Japan Society members receive a 20% discount on all tickets via coupon code.

Lineup and other details are subject to change. For complete information visit [japansociety.org](http://japansociety.org).

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**FILM DESCRIPTIONS**

*All films are in Japanese with English subtitles.*

**Love Letter**  
『Love Letter』  
**Friday, December 9, 2022 at 7:00 PM**  
**Dir. Shunji Iwai, 1995, 117 min., DCP, Color. With Miho Nakayama, Etsushi Toyokawa, Miki Sakai.**

Two years after the tragic loss of her fiancé, heartbroken Hiroko (played by pop idol Miho Nakayama) composes a letter, addressing it to his childhood home. As fate would have it, Hiroko’s “letter to heaven” is received by a former junior high classmate (also played by Nakayama) who shares his name, setting into motion a correspondence reveling in the quiet ruminations of the past. Unapologetic in its soft-focus lyricism, Iwai’s feature debut brims with flowing emotion, crafting a lovelorn tale of what might have been. A beautifully constructed melodrama, **Love Letter** evokes an intoxicating romanticism of lost love, recollection and grief—all amid a picturesque wintry setting.
**Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or the Bottom?**
『打ち上げ花火、下から見るか？横から見るか？』
**Saturday, December 10 at 5:00 PM**

**U.S. Premiere of New Color Grading & Remaster.** Originally broadcast as part of a Fuji TV anthology series in 1993, *Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or Bottom?* won the Japan Film Director’s Guild Newcomer Award that year—a rare achievement for a television film. Set during the last day of school as the imminent summer break brings the promise of freedom, adventure, and a much-anticipated fireworks display, Iwai’s unabashedly romantic and sentimental slice of life drama captures the day’s events through the eyes of a schoolboy. This shot-on-video feature brings forth a deluge of new experiences from youthful wonderment to first love—delivering an extraordinarily moving depiction of the occurrences of a single, unforgettable summer day. *Screens with April Story.*

**April Story**
『四月物語』
**Saturday, December 10 at 5:00 PM**
*Dir. Shunji Iwai, 1998, 67 min., DCP, Color. With Takako Matsu, Seiichi Tanabe, Kahori Fuji. Shy and meek Uzuki (pop star Takako Matsu) moves cross-country from rural, chilly Hokkaido to bustling Tokyo for college. Documenting the travails of settling down in a new environment that’s as equally liberating as it is overwhelming, *April Story* follows the quiet girl as she navigates the anxieties of making friends, creating a new home for herself, and managing her newfound independence—all for the yearnings of an innocuous crush. Shot in the peak bloom of cherry blossom season, *April Story* is perhaps Iwai’s most earnest depiction of first love, perfectly capturing a snapshot of life’s many wonders and mysteries. *Screens in-person with Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or the Bottom?. Also available to stream online from December 9-23 at film.japansociety.com.*

**All About Lily Chou-Chou**
『リリィ・シュシュのすべて』
**Saturday, December 10 at 7:15 PM**
*Dir. Shunji Iwai, 2001, 146 min., 35mm, Color. With Hayato Ichihara, Shugo Oshinari, Ayumi Ito, Yu Aoi.*

**Archival 35mm Presentation.** A portrait of outcasts, Iwai’s turn-of-the-millennium tale is his unmistakable masterpiece, a work of piercing cruelty and alienation that follows the lives of broken souls grasping for fleeting moments of beauty in a world of gray. Bullied teen Yuichi (Hayato Ichihara) finds solace solely in the transcendent music of ethereal pop singer Lily Chou-Chou (a fictional idol echoing Faye Wong), running an online internet message board devoted to her under the alias “Philia.” Yuichi’s school days are filled with constant harassment and torment, experiencing humiliation and suffering at the hands of a former friend as he becomes a reluctant participant in acts of blackmail and shoplifting. Weaving Debussy, overexposed cinematography, and the lush anthems of Lily Chou-Chou into his internet-age bildungsroman, Iwai delivers a haunting teenage dream of lonely spirits reaching out into the ether.
IN-PERSON SCREENING SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9
7 PM  Love Letter

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10
5 PM  Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or the Bottom? / April Story
7:15 PM All About Lily Chou-Chou

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About 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.

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