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All Kaiju Attack! 70 Years of Japanese Monster Movies
Wed 7 Aug — Wed 28 Aug



Destroy All Monsters, Japan 1968, dir Ishirō Honda

To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the first **Godzilla** film, Barbican Cinema looks back to a selection of the finest Japanese monster movies, featuring **Godzilla**, **Mothra**, **King Ghidorah**, **Gamera** and even a toxic smog monster called **Hedorah**; alongside ScreenTalks with authors, experts and kaiju enthusiasts introducing the films plus a live music performance.

In 1954, the first ever **Godzilla**, a dark, thrilling monster movie masterpiece, was released in Japan. It was a box office phenomenon and launched a franchise that has continued to this day. While these films featuring gigantic kaiju (literally 'strange beasts') have long been beloved in Japan, until recently the reception in the West has been inconsistent, with crude dubbing and savage edits to meet running times, often making the story-lines incoherent, which has led to mockery.

In recent years, as restored versions of the Japanese originals with English subtitles have become easier to access, these films have been met with greater appreciation, culminating this year when **Godzilla Minus One** became the first kaiju film to win an Academy Award. To mark Godzilla's anniversary, the Barbican, in collaboration with the **Japan Foundation**, is screening a selection of the wildest, more interesting Japanese monster movies across seven decades, with introductions from experts.

Alex Davidson, the season Curator says:

“I’ve longed to show kaiju movies in the cinema for years, but rights issues have made it near-impossible. While Godzilla films have been a mighty cultural force in Japan for decades, in the West, kaiju movies have had to fight hard for critical respect, despite the invention, imagination and sheer unbridled fun on display. I couldn’t be happier that superstars such as Godzilla, Mothra and Gamera will battle it out once again on our biggest cinema screen.”

The kaiju celebration kicks off with ***Mothra Vs. Godzilla*** (1964, dir Ishirō Honda), one of the best films of the genre, a battle royale between two of the most beloved giant beasts – a rampaging Godzilla against monster-God Mothra. This was the last of the early kaiju films to depict Godzilla as a villain rather than a hero and is both fun and fearsome. This screening will be introduced by **Jasper Sharp**, a writer and curator specialising in Japanese cinema.

In ***Destroy All Monsters*** (1968 dir Ishirō Honda), over ten monsters battle it out in an excitement-packed extravaganza, featuring King Ghidorah, Rodan, Mothra, Anguirus and, of course, Godzilla. The epic final battle is a blast, while the scenes of kaiju wrecking the world’s cities show off the fine model work so key to the early Toho monster films. This will be introduced by **Kazuko Hohki**, founder member of the pop/punk performance group **Frank Chickens** and the **Japanese American Toy Theatre of London**.

The season continues with ***Gamera: Guardian of the Universe***, **Shusuke Kaneko’s** 1995 blockbuster which trades the campy, kid-friendly surrealism of the earlier films for a darker, more realistic tone. The return of *Gamera* is packed with fun, action and great special effects, with several show-stopping set pieces. **Steven Sloss**, a fan and scholar of kaiju cinema introduces this film.

In 2016 **Godzilla** returned to the screen after an absence of over a decade in ***Shin Godzilla*** (dir Hideaki Anno). This ignores the previous films in the franchise, depicting the giant creature as a new monster, and takes a risk by reflecting on the government response to the 2011 tsunami. The film was a huge critical and commercial success in Japan, winning seven Japan Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. The author **Helen McCarthy** introduces this screening.

The cult film ***Godzilla Vs. Hedorah*** (1971, dir Yoshimitsu Banno) shows the Japanese monster movie genre at its most inventive, blending kaiju carnage, psychedelics and an eco-friendly message. Screening as part of Barbican’s **Outdoor Cinema** this summer, the eleventh Godzilla movie is one of the most exhilarating in the franchise and is rarely screened in UK cinemas, so this is a chance to see Toho’s most iconic kaiju stomping through urban Japan in the Barbican’s Sculpture Court, in the heart of the City of London!

The season closes with ***Mothra*** (1961, dir Ishirō Honda) with a live performance from **Frank Chickens**; this vibrant, day-glow monster movie introduces one of the most beloved kaiju to the world. The divine Mothra is an unusual beast, a rare female *kaiju*, whose city rampages are provoked not by malevolence, but in her desperate search for the Shobijin – her two kidnapped guardians – memorably played by **Yumi Ito** and **Emi Ito**.

Mothra has moments of humour, satirically swiping at the imperialist land of Rolisica, a thinly veiled parody of the US and the Soviet Union. But the exciting scenes of Mothra’s destruction of Tokyo landmarks and a city clearly based on New York, are played straight, and remain classic moments of kaiju fury.

Frank Chickens is a Japanese punk pop performance group with a cult following in the UK; they had an independent hit with *We Are Ninja* and won the Foster Comedy God Award in 2010. Their song *Mothra* is directly inspired by the 1961 film.

Programme:

***Mothra Vs. Godzilla* (12A) + introduction by Jasper Sharp**

Japan 1964, dir Ishirō Honda, 89 min, in Japanese with English subtitles

Wed 07 Aug, 6.30pm, Cinema 1

When construction on a housing development rouses a dormant Godzilla, leading to the destruction of the cities of Yokkaichi and Nagoya, humankind must call on the aid of benevolent monster-deity Mothra, the first female kaiju. Mothra is ageing and may not be up to the task, but she is humanity's only hope against the mighty foe.

Mothra Vs. Godzilla was the last of the early kaiju films to depict Godzilla as a villain rather than a hero, and features some of the best special effects work by the incomparable Eiji Tsuburaya and a rousing score from Akira Ifukube. Fun, fearsome and surprisingly moving, this is a delight from beginning to end.

***Destroy All Monsters* (12A) + introduction by Kazuko Hohki Kaiju assemble**

Japan 1968, dir Ishirō Honda, 89 min, in Japanese with English subtitles

Wed 14 Aug, 6.30pm, Cinema 1

It's the end of the 20th century and all of the world's kaiju have been confined and monitored on Monster Island. Peace is short-lived, however, when evil aliens invade and take control of the monsters and send them to attack the world's cities. Worse still, the aliens have a secret kaiju weapon up their sleeves. Is Earth doomed?

Despite their nefarious rampages in previous movies, here all the monsters, with one exception, are the good guys, battling to save Earth from invasion. The epic final battle, packed with monster mayhem, is a blast, while the scenes of kaiju wrecking the world's cities show off the fine model work so key to the early Toho monster films.

Kazuko Hohki moved to London from Tokyo in 1978. She is a founder member of the pop/punk performance group Frank Chickens and Japanese American Toy Theatre of London.

***Gamera: Guardian of the Universe* (PG) + introduction by Steven Sloss**

Japan 1995 dir Shusuke Kaneko, 95 min, in Japanese with English subtitles

Sun 18 Aug, 5.45pm, Cinema 1

Gamera, a gigantic turtle previously nicknamed 'the friend of all children,' was usually seen as playing second fiddle to some of the more famous kaiju, until this mighty reboot roared into cinemas. This is the first of a trilogy of 1990s Gamera films, still regarded today as among the best – and by some, the best – kaiju movies ever made.

Gamera is compelled to rouse from his hibernation when Gyaos, a rival monster resembling a grotesque pterodactyl, threatens the future of humanity. The film also boasts a strong performance from **Ayako Fujitani** (Steven Seagal's daughter) as a girl who has a connection with Gamera. Released two years after *Jurassic Park*, with which it shares some similarities, the return of Gamera is packed with fun, action and great special effects, with a number of show-stopping set pieces.

Steven Sloss is a fan and scholar of kaiju cinema, and has written on the subject for Arrow Films, FrightFest, Glasgow Film Festival, and others.

***Shin Godzilla* + introduction by Helen McCarthy**

Japan 2016, dir Hideaki Anno, Shinji Higuchi, 120 min, in Japanese with English subtitles
Tue 20 Aug, 6.15pm, Cinema 1

When a massive, gilled monster emerges from the deep and tears through Tokyo, the government scrambles to save its citizens. A rag-tag team of volunteers cuts through a web of red tape to uncover the monster's weakness and its mysterious ties to a foreign superpower. But time is not on their side—the greatest catastrophe to ever befall the world is about to evolve right before their very eyes.

Shin Godzilla ignores the previous films in the franchise, depicting the giant creature as a new monster, and takes a huge risk by reflecting on the government response to the 2011 tsunami. The film was a huge critical and commercial success in Japan, winning seven Japan Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director.

Helen McCarthy is a British author and editor of animé reference books including *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation*, *The Art of Osamu Tezuka: God of Manga* and *Leiji Matsumoto: Essays on the Manga and Anime Legend*. She talks about anime at venues all over the UK and US and is currently writing another book on Hayao Miyazaki.

Outdoor Cinema: *Godzilla Vs. Hedorah* (PG)

Japan 1971, dir Yoshimitsu Banno, 85 min, in Japanese with English subtitles
Sun 25 Aug, 8.30pm, Sculpture Court

The eleventh Godzilla movie is one of the most exhilarating and imaginative in the whole franchise. Here, everyone's favourite monster battles Hedorah, an alien life form that arrives on Earth and steadily grows by feeding on industrial waste. The film was intended to address the crisis levels of pollution in post-war Japan but despite its serious message, the film is never preachy, instead delivering an hour and a half of monster mayhem, ecological horror and psychedelia.

***Mothra* (PG) + live performance from Frank Chickens**

Japan 1961 dir Ishirō Honda, 101 min, in Japanese with English subtitles
Wed 28 Aug, 6.15pm, Cinema 1

Mothra makes an unforgettable debut in **Ishirō Honda's** vibrant, day-glo monster movie, introducing one of the most beloved kaiju to the world. The divine *Mothra* is an unusual beast, a rare female *kaiju*, who appears in three different forms over the course of her debut film – first as an egg, then a larva, before emerging from a chrysalis, built against the then new Tokyo Tower, as a giant moth.

Mothra has many moments of humour, casting comedian **Frankie Sakai** in the lead role and satirically swiping at the imperialist land of Rolisica, a thinly veiled parody of the US and the Soviet Union. But the exciting scenes of *Mothra's* destruction of Tokyo landmarks and a city clearly based on New York, are played straight, and remain classic moments of kaiju fury.

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Box office: www.barbican.org.uk

Standard ticket price: £13/ Members: £10.40/ Concessions: £11
Under 18s: £6, Young Barbican: £5

Godzilla Vs. Hedorah screens in **Outdoor Cinema 2024:**

Standard ticket price: £18/ Barbican Members: £14.40/ Corporate Members: £13.50/
Young Barbican: £10 / Under 14: £10.

Barbican press room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [the BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Entertainment](#).

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About Barbican Cinema

We connect audiences with a curated programme of international cinema; from celebrated filmmakers to ground-breaking and under-heard voices from past and present.

Our programmes are presented in Cinemas 1 in the main centre and Cinemas 2&3 on Beech Street.

Our programme ranges from thematic seasons that respond to today's world, to new releases, ScreenTalks, cross-artform collaborations, family events, access screenings and event cinema that presents the performing arts on screen. We showcase the work of emerging filmmakers, as well as less familiar work of exceptional filmmakers from the UK and around the world.

We champion the work of Barbican Young Programmers and give stage to emerging musicians in our ongoing film & live music series which includes our flagship collaboration with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

As part of a cross-arts centre, our cinemas are a cultural space for people to share the viewing experience. We strive to be inclusive in everything we do; providing platforms for the widest possible range of filmmakers and ensuring we are an open, welcoming and accessible venue for all our audiences.

About the Japan Foundation

Established in 1972, the Japan Foundation promotes international cultural exchange between Japan and the rest of the world by organising projects as well as providing financial support through grant programmes in the fields of Arts and Culture, Japanese Language, and Japanese Studies. The Japan Foundation currently has its Head Office in Tokyo, with offices and centres in 25 countries outside of Japan. For more information on our activities, please visit <https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/> (Head Office) or <https://www.jpf.org.uk/> (London).

If you wish to subscribe to our monthly e-bulletin or receive news on events the Japan Foundation London is involved in, including future film screening programmes, please visit <https://jpf.org.uk/registration/>.