

## PARTING SHOT

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



Children play under the light of the moon in July at Fort Stevens State Park.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

### ODDITY

## Godzilla — big in Japan

Director loves all Godzilla movies, even the bad ones

By YURI KAGEYAMA  
Associated Press

TOKYO — Radiation-breathing Godzilla destroyed so many cities and fought so many monsters, the original Japanese film series outgrew its budget and audience. So the filmmaker working on the revival will go back to the basics while still looking to the essentials.

Shinji Higuchi, the director and special-effects whiz chosen by Toho Co. for the made-in-Japan comeback, is hoping to one-up last year's Hollywood version, with not only the biggest Godzilla filmed ever, but one that takes up challenges previous ones haven't attempted.

"I'm confident I am among the top-50 lovers of Godzilla in the world. That's how much I love Godzilla," he told The Associated Press in a recent interview at a Tokyo office. "Maybe I'm not in the top 10, but definitely in the top 50."

Higuchi, 49, a burly unpretentious man with curly hair, swears he loves all the Godzilla movies, even the bad ones. He knows his Godzilla through and through, he said with a laugh.

"Godzilla had to deliver more and more, responding to calls from the audience, as well as creators," said Higuchi of the series' trappings.

Applying to Godzilla that

"Godzilla went through these stages, resetting itself, developing and then succumbing to exhaustion, until it just got so big it had to stop."

And so Higuchi plans to keep his Godzilla, in a sense, simple, stripped to the essentials.

#### A terrifying Godzilla

But presenting more of the same on the silver screen isn't for Higuchi, who built his career on "kaiju" or Japanese monster movies, such as the 1990s "Gamera" series and the 1984 "Godzilla."

Higuchi also directed the more somber 2006 "Japan Sinks," which used special effects to show temples and hills immersing into the sea.

Higuchi acknowledged he is under strict orders not to disclose details of "Godzilla," set for release next year. But he is promising the most terrifying Godzilla that Japan's cutting-edge special-effects movie-making can muster.

Shooting begins next month,

much of it at Toho studios in Tokyo. Animation master Hideaki Anno just finished the script and will help oversee direction.

Higuchi's special-effects techniques were amply demonstrated in "Attack on Titan," a new release received favorably in Japan.

The work combines computer graphics with manipulating a towering doll of rippling red muscle that resembles a giant biological anatomy chart, as well as special-effects filmmaking, using actors moving through miniatures, to depict grotesquely enlarged humans.

Applying to Godzilla that



In this photo taken on Dec. 12, 2013 and provided by Yuriko Nakao, Japanese director Shinji Higuchi poses in front of an abandoned apartment building during a location hunting for his film, "Attack on Titan" on Hashima Island, commonly known as Gunkanjima, which means "Battleship Island" off Nagasaki, Nagasaki Prefecture, southern Japan. Higuchi's special-effects techniques were amply demonstrated in "Attack on Titan," a new release received favorably in Japan.

kind of technology, which Higuchi calls "hybrid," has never been attempted in Japan. Higuchi is promising just that.

#### Budget buster

Toho made 28 films in the Godzilla series, but ended it when the budget spiraled out of control, despite a dwindling audience.

It took the popularity of Gareth Edwards' 2014 "Godzilla," which Higuchi praised as a masterpiece, to get the Japanese film industry back on board, to renew the series. Hollywood is planning its own sequel in 2018.

The story of the reptilian mutation began with the 1954 classic, in which an actor wearing a monster outfit stomped through a carefully crafted miniature of Tokyo's cityscape, to an ominously memorable score. Its sig-

nature screech was based on the sound of a cello.

The fire-spitting "gojira" — as it is pronounced in Japanese, combining "gorilla" and "kujira," or "whale" — emerged from nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean, making the dinosauric creature resonate with a universal pacifist message.

The man-in-a-rubber-suit crashed through more cities and fought various cartoonish monsters until the last Godzilla in 2004.

Higuchi insists his new Godzilla won't be the cuddly kitsch kaiju his generation grew up on.

The world has lost too much of its innocence after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., and the 3/11 tsunami and nuclear disaster in Fukushima, north-eastern Japan, with the arrival of

"the real monsters of the world," he said.

The happy-go-lucky monsters encapsulate a long-lost era, when the world had enjoyed relative peace, over the decades after World War II, especially in insular Japan.

"That's why I want to make a new Godzilla," Higuchi said quietly.

In movie after movie, people merely ran away from the stampeding monster, and no one tried to face up to the issue of accountability, he said.

#### High hopes

Film critic Yuichi Maeda said fans have high hopes for Higuchi's "Godzilla," because of the director's reputation for special effects, as well as for his love of Godzilla.

But Higuchi will need to

deliver wonders, given the limitations. Hollywood movies can count on million-dollar budgets, but even the most expensive Japanese films get only about a third of a million dollars, said Maeda.

"Godzilla is Toho's top content. To be the director of Godzilla is a great honor. And he is under pressure to live up to huge expectations," added Maeda.

Higuchi acknowledged he almost caved into the Godzilla-size pressure and declined the offer to direct.

"It's an imaginary thing taking a very primitive form. Just a giant lizard. But it's shoulder of Godzilla's awe-evoking powers.

"Perhaps we are all waiting for that horrible thing that's within us that we fear."

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From left: Peter Wong, Hillary Borrud, Mateusz Perkowski