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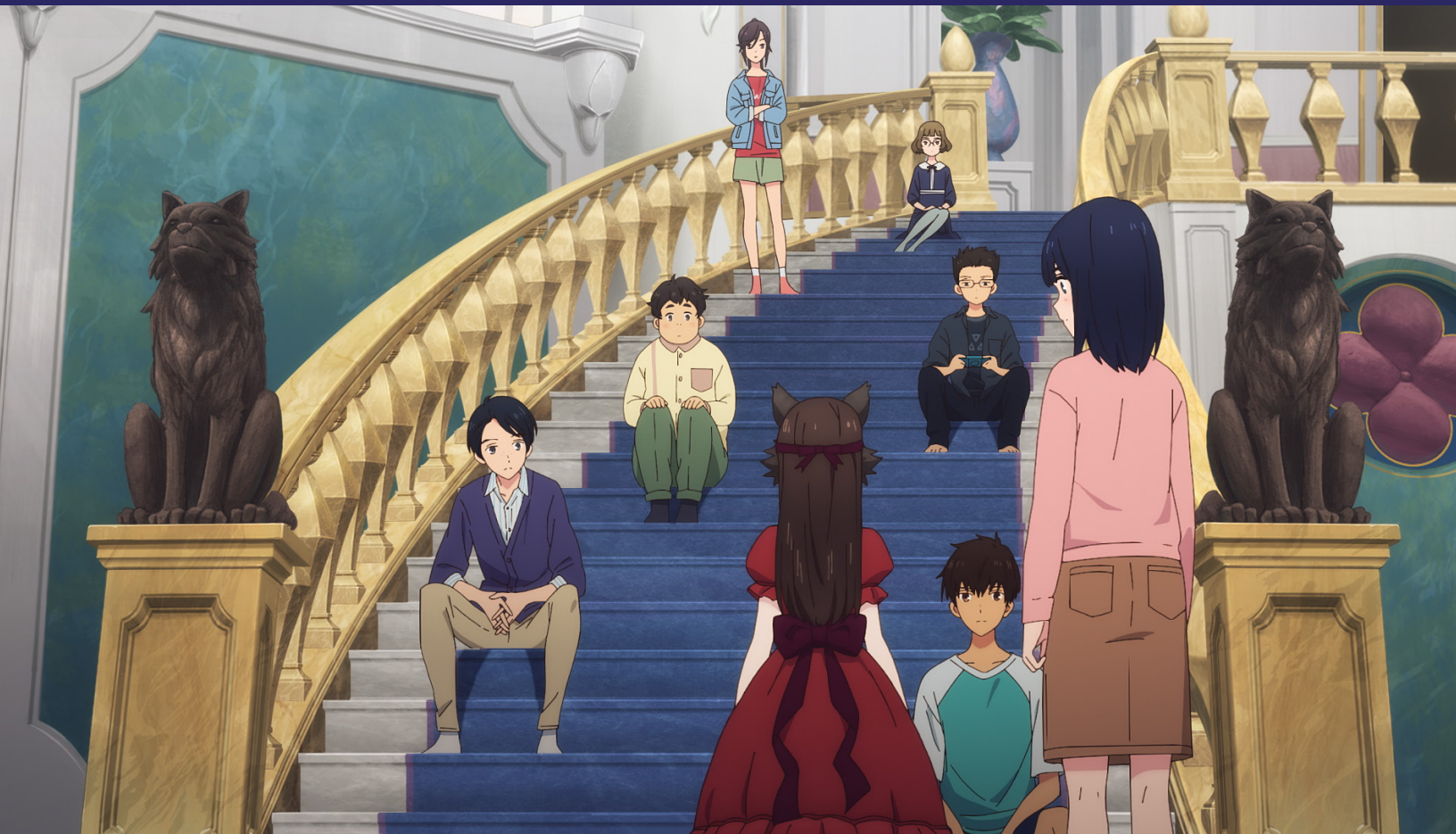


Lonely Castle in the Mirror

Synopsis

Shy outcast Kokoro has been avoiding school for weeks when she discovers a portal in her bedroom mirror. She reaches through and finds herself transported to an enchanting castle where she is joined by six other students. When a girl in a wolf mask explains that they have been invited to play a game, the teens must work together to uncover the mysterious connection that unites them. However, anyone who breaks the rules will be eaten by a wolf.

From acclaimed director Keiichi Hara (*Colorful*, *Miss Hokusai*) and based on the bestselling novel by Mizuki Tsujimura, *Lonely Castle in the Mirror* is a heartfelt drama about the pains of growing up and the unlikely bonds that can bring people together.





DIRECTOR BIO | KEIICHI HARA

Keiichi Hara was born on July 24th, 1959. Hara drew widespread praise for his irreverent feature *Crayon Shin-chan: The Storm Called: The Adult Empire Strikes Back* (2001), and won numerous awards in Japan for *Crayon Shin-chan: Fierceness That Invites Storm! The Battle of the Warring States* (2002) and *Summer Days with Coo* (2007). He subsequently became one of Japan's most globally revered animation auteurs for his body of work, including the Annecy International Animation Film Festival double award-winning *Colorful* (2010), *Miss Hokusai* (2015), and *The Wonderland* (2019). In 2018, he became the third animation director (following Isao Takahata and Katsuhiro Otomo) to receive a Medal with Purple Ribbon, awarded by the Japanese government to individuals who have made great contributions to artistic and academic fields. His work continues to be highly anticipated both at home and abroad.



KEY STAFF

Director: Keiichi Hara

Screenplay: Miho Maruo

Character Design/Supervising Animation Director:
Keigo Sasaki

Visual Concepts/Castle Design: Ilya Kuvshinov

Music: Harumi Fuuki

JAPANESE CAST

Kokoro: Ami Tsuma

Rion: Takumi Kitamura

Aki: Sakura Kiryu

Subaru: Rihito Itagaki

Fuka: Naho Yokomizo

Masamune: Minami Takayama

Ureshino: Yuki Kaji

Kokoro's mother: Kumiko Aso

Ms. Wolf: Mana Ashida

Ms. Kitajima: Aoi Miyazaki





INTRODUCTION

Lauded as author Mizuki Tsujimura's greatest masterpiece, the bestselling novel "Lonely Castle in the Mirror" enjoys a passionate and diverse fanbase spanning children and adults, who feel as if it was written personally for them. Since receiving a record number of votes for the Japan Booksellers' Award in 2018, it has won nine awards including the Da Vinci Book of the Year 2021 (paperback category), and over 1.6 million copies have been printed. Now this popular fantasy mystery has been adapted into an animated movie.

Director Keiichi Hara, has a track record for imbuing highly entertaining imagery with skillfully interwoven emotional subtleties, and creating enduring works that also resonate with adults, such as *Crayon Shin-chan: The Storm Called: The Adult Empire Strikes Back* (2001), *Summer Days with Coo*, *Colorful*, and *Miss Hokusai*.

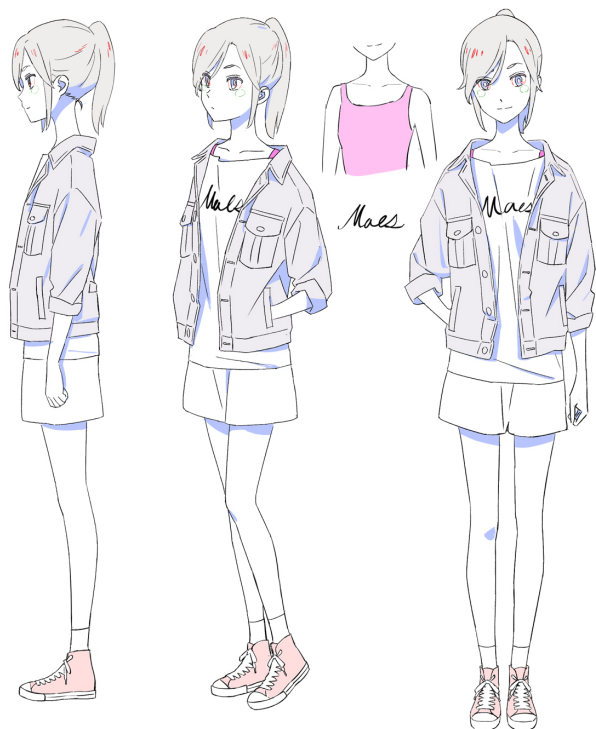
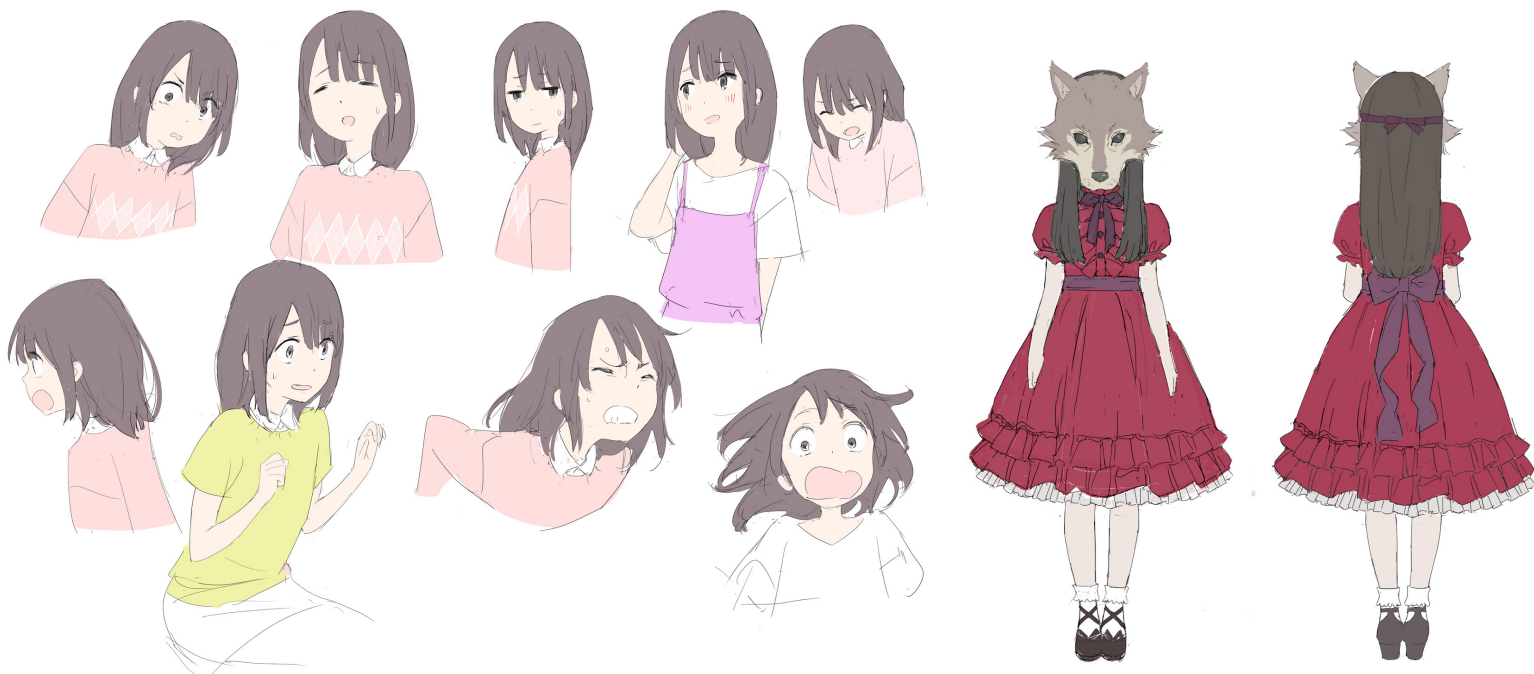
The animation production was handled by A-1 Pictures, a company known for its numerous high-profile coming-of-age ensemble stories, such as *Anohana* and *The Anthem of the Heart*.

Wanting somewhere to belong, but unable to adequately express your feelings... That adolescent uncertainty, captured adeptly by the novel, has been transferred to animation by an unprecedentedly illustrious team.

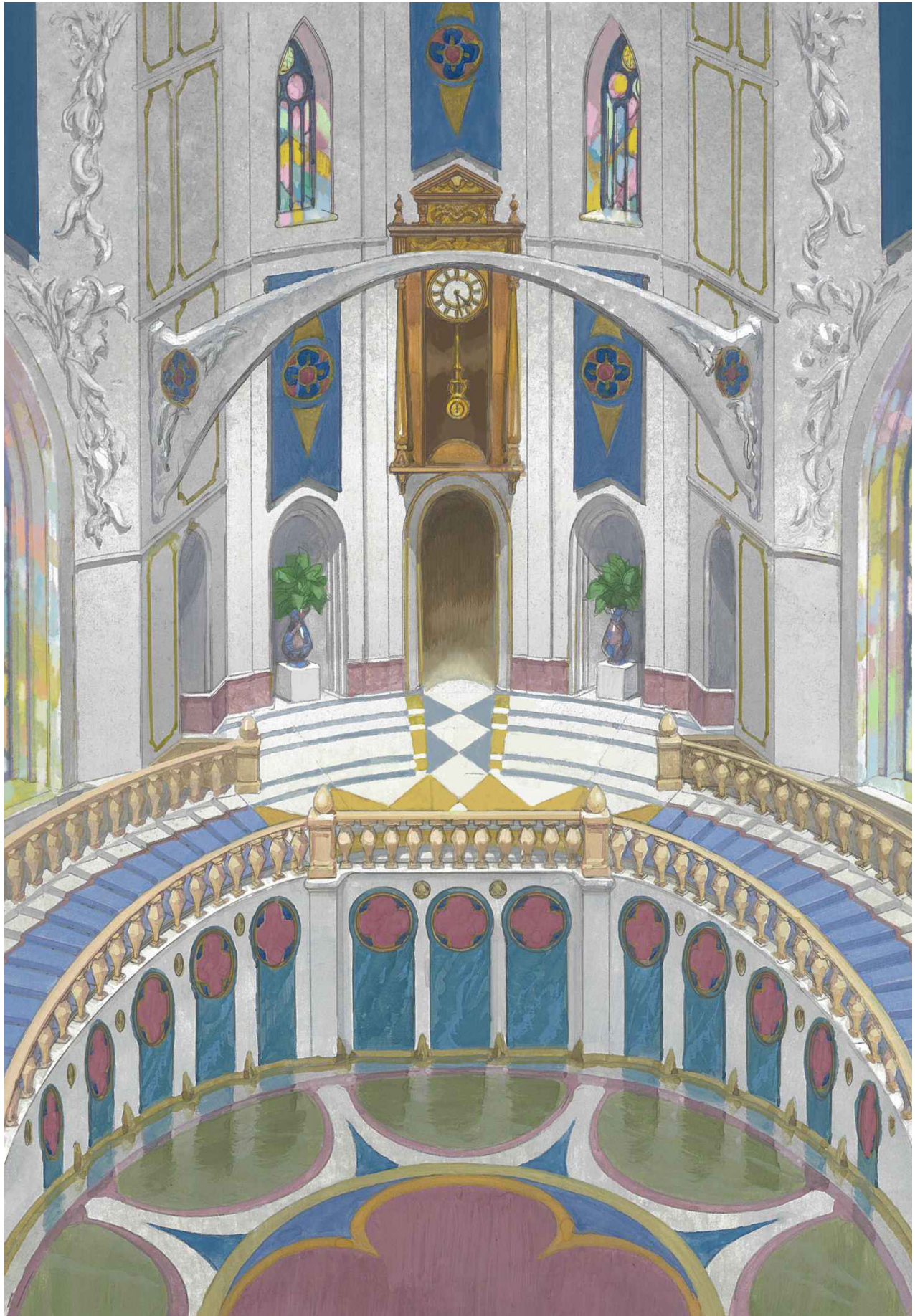
Over 1,000 actresses auditioned for the role of female protagonist Kokoro, which was ultimately won by Ami Tsuma, who inspired director Hara to say: "We've found our Kokoro." Playing her fellow castle explorers are a mix of young actors exuding abundant expressiveness and presence such as Takumi Kitamura, Sakura Kiryu, Rihito Itagaki, and Naho Yokomizo, combined with the compelling talents of veteran voice actors Minami Takayama and Yuki Kaji. Rounding out the esteemed and accomplished cast are Kumiko Aso as Kokoro's mother, Mana Ashida as the mysterious Ms. Wolf, and Aoi Miyazaki as teacher Ms. Kitajima, who holds the key to the story.

In addition, the film's theme song "Merry-Go-Round" has been specially composed by Yuuri, a new generation singer-songwriter who has gained a dedicated following for his songs that touch listeners' hearts, such as the massive viral hit "Dry Flower" which has won a staggering 48 awards from download and streaming services and other organizations. "Merry-Go-Round" is Yuuri's first-ever theme song for a motion picture.

CHARACTER ART



BACKGROUND ART



BACKGROUND ART





DIRECTOR'S NOTE | KEIICHI HARA

I'd say that *Lonely Castle in the Mirror* is loved by so many people because there are actually a great number of children out there, like Kokoro and her friends, who are struggling in their lives. The seven junior high students in this story have different backgrounds, and the reader can become emotionally invested in any one of these characters, while seeing themselves in them. The surprises planted throughout the story are intriguing as well. That being said, I get the feeling that the struggles depicted in the book are not limited to children, but rather are the kind that adults deal with too. Especially considering the state of our society over the last few years, we've been forced to spend more time cooped up in our own rooms, giving us more time to think long and hard about all sorts of things.

I found the novel itself to be an engrossing read, but I'd previously made *Colorful*, an animated film about junior high students in complicated circumstances, so my sole concern was that it might seem as if I was retreading old territory. I sought the advice of Mitsuhsa Ishikawa of Production I.G, and he was kind enough to read the book right away and tell me: "Hara, you absolutely must do this." I was already indebted to him for creating the opportunity



for me to make *Miss Hokusai*, and besides that, he played a central role in developing Production I.G into a globally-renowned studio. He helped me realize that I should trust my own instincts.

As I'd suspected, when we set about developing the screenplay, it became clear that compressing the novel's narrative down to a length suitable for watching in cinemas would be quite difficult (laughs).

Through discussions with screenplay writer Miho Maruo, we strived to make protagonist Kokoro's emotional journey more central to the story, without losing the novel's post-reading resonance. To put it another way, this movie is about a troubled girl called Kokoro and how she becomes a heroine. I knew that if we could depict that process effectively, we'd surely end up with something great.

I thought it would be best to have our protagonist Kokoro played by someone close to her age and vibe. We held extensive auditions, and ultimately found Ami Tsuma to be the closest match. I got the impression that she's not particularly outgoing, but on the flip side, you can sense she has an inner strength. Fresh-faced newcomers like her are often described as having a "transparency" to them, but in her case, I think the word "pure" is more apt.

When we recorded the voices, I was able to witness first-hand Ami's transformation into Kokoro, which was surprisingly moving. We started off with two days as a test run, and then recorded her performance for real about a month later. When you compare the test recordings to her actual performance takes, the latter are overwhelmingly better. They still feature the qualities Ami brought to her role in the beginning, but she's become more like Kokoro. For the climactic scene, I was on the edge of my seat, shouting in my head, "This is the moment when you become the heroine!"

Takumi Kitamura, who played Rion, was about 10 years older than his character, which was initially a little worrying, but he proved to be incredibly natural right from his first line of dialogue, instantly putting me at ease. He has an amazing ability to focus on his character, so even when he was asked if he'd like to take a break, he responded that he wanted to keep going. He was able to deliver his entire performance without ever losing sight of how Rion felt at any given moment. He has a standout scene towards the end of the film, for which I gave him some rather difficult direction, but he responded magnificently and helped turn it into a powerful set piece.

Ms. Kitajima, played by Aoi Miyazaki, is someone who's been through a lot in life and deals with troubled kids on a daily basis. For that reason, I asked Miyazaki to exhibit the kind of serenity



that makes others feel safe. She immediately grasped what I was aiming for, as I always knew she would.

Also, Mana Ashida, who plays Ms. Wolf, is a big fan of the book, and I was able to watch her perform without any concerns whatsoever. She kept producing usable take after usable take, so much so that I became concerned I might have too much to work with (laughs).

Additionally, our cast was made up of performers at various stages of their careers, from veteran voice actors such as Minami Takayama and Yuki Kaji, to fresh members like Sakura Kiryu, Rihito Itagaki, and Naho Yokomizo. At first, I was a little anxious that might lead to a lack of conformity, but on the contrary, their diversity made a vital contribution to bringing the seven main characters to life.

As for the animators, we had people I've worked with for years such as Toshiyuki Inoue and Norio Matsumoto, but also many other excellent professionals that A-1 Pictures assembled. It's my own fault for not being better informed, but I was pleasantly amazed to learn that there are still so many great animators who can convey nuanced performances.

With regard to the music, Harumi Fuuki's compositions are an absolute requisite for my films. She has an impeccable understanding of cinema, including classics. Plus, most importantly, she loves movies. I trust her instincts 100%.

The movie's crescendo is undoubtedly the climactic scene in which Kokoro, a girl who has gone through life without expressing or asserting herself, transforms into a heroine. I wanted to make sure that it doesn't disappoint readers of the novel, and that viewers who haven't read it yet will want to get their hands on a copy.

What's more, the message I want to get across through this film is that most hardships are surmountable. Movies might not be able to save our lives, but they can at least change the way we feel. I'm a firm believer in that, and that's the kind of movie I intend to keep on making.





ABOUT GKIDS

Celebrating its 15th anniversary, GKIDS is the producer and distributor of artist-driven and award-winning animation from around the world. The company has scored an astounding 12 Best Animated Feature Oscar nominations with *The Secret of Kells* in 2010, *A Cat in Paris* and *Chico & Rita* in 2012, *Ernest & Celestine* in 2014, *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* and *Song of the Sea* in 2015, *Boy and the World* and *When Marnie Was There* in 2016, *My Life as a Zucchini* in 2017, *The Breadwinner* in 2018, *Mirai* in 2019, and *Wolfwalkers* in 2021. GKIDS handles North American distribution for the famed Studio Ghibli library of films, one of the world's most coveted animation collections with titles *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke* and others; as well as the critically acclaimed television series, *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*. Also, GKIDS is the founder and host of ANIMATION IS FILM, the annual LA-based film festival which embraces the highest aspirations of animation as a cinematic art form, and is a vocal advocate for filmmakers who push the boundaries of the medium to its fullest range of artistic expressions.

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