



## Harmful Insect

**Akihiko Shiota**

JAPAN, 2001

92 minutes ■ Colour/35mm  
Production Company: **Nikkatsu Corporation**

Executive Producer: **Masaya Nakamura**  
Producer: **Hiroyuki Negishi,**

**Takashi Hirano**

Screenplay: **Yayoi Kiyono**

Cinematographer: **Tokusho Kikumura**

Editor: **Yoshio Sugano**

Production Designer: **Tashihiro Isomi**

Sound: **Masaru Usui**

Music: **Number Girl**

Principal Cast: **Aoi Miyazaki, Seiichi**

**Tanabe, Ryo, Yuu Aoi, Tetsu Sawaki**

Print Source/Foreign Sales Agent:

**Nikkatsu Corporation, 3-28-12 Hongo,**

**3-chome Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033**

**Japan. T (81-3) 5689-1026**

**F (81-3) 5689-1043**

**nobu@nikkatsu.co.jp**

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The last several years have seen a new movement of independent voices emerge in Japanese cinema. Crafted outside the control of the three major studios, these genre-savvy and cinematically sophisticated films capture the chaos and calm of contemporary Japan, maintaining a sense of detachment and illuminating a perspective that views history and tradition as exotic.

In his third feature, Akihiko Shiota – whose first film *Moonlight Whispers* focused on a teenaged couple engaged in a sado-masochistic relationship and earned him the best new director award from the Director's Guild of Japan – once again displays his talent for suggesting the complexity of human character and experience.

Sachiko, a twelve-year-old girl in junior high school, has a complicated life. When she was still an infant, her father disappeared with a young mistress. Her mother, who works in a bar as a hostess, is unable to live without outside assistance, which may explain why she always seems so secretive and mysterious. Longing for an escape from her dreary existence and lacking in any kind of wise or responsible parental guidance, Sachiko has a short-lived affair with her sixth-grade teacher, Ogata.

But fearing that his indiscretion might be discovered, Ogata moves to a town far away. Although he and Sachiko continue a written correspondence, soon the absence of her only real friend and confidant leads Sachiko into a deep melancholy. When her

mother attempts to commit suicide, the turbulence of Sachiko's life becomes too much to bear. After dropping out of school, she finds temporary solace in the company of others who have fallen through the cracks of middle-class society. But when she is forced back into the confines of her classroom, her long-dormant rage begins to surface and her life quickly spins out of control.

Like Shiota's virtually plotless *Don't Look Back*, *Harmful Insect* is ultimately founded on the small, almost imperceptible shifts of emotion in its young heroine. With this tale of youthful misadventure, Shiota further establishes himself as a master of subtlety in his portrayal of characters' thoughts and feelings, while never completely ignoring their inherent ambiguity.

■ **Noah Cowan**

**Akihiko Shiota** was born in Kyoto, Japan in 1961. While attending Rikkyo University, he met and made films with Kiyoshi Kurosawa, for whom he worked as an assistant director after graduation. He has also written numerous screenplays and directed videos and since 1997 he has taught at the Film School of Tokyo. Filmography: *Moonlight Whispers* (99), *Don't Look Back* (99) and *Harmful Insect* (01).

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