

26 February 2016
Tokyo, Japan

Dear Friends of Studio Ghibli:

Hello from Tokyo! It's Jeff at Studio Ghibli. Thank you for your tremendous and passionate support of Studio Ghibli! It means the world to us that you enjoy our films and share your enthusiasm with your friends and family.

It's almost time for Studio Ghibli International's 500th tweet, and we'd like to celebrate this upcoming milestone with... a request, to you, our dedicated fans.

Will you please help us spread the word about our newest film, *Only Yesterday*? Many of you know it well and have very kindly shared your enthusiasm on Twitter and elsewhere already. But... it may surprise you to know that not quite everyone is a Studio Ghibli fan just yet. And *Only Yesterday* is a great film for folks who might be more interested in the "real life" stories told by Studio Ghibli, but somehow haven't discovered us.

Here's what's happening.

Over the next few weeks starting this Friday, February 26th, a "new" Studio Ghibli film will begin to open in theaters in many cities across North America. The brand new English-language dub of Isao Takahata's *Only Yesterday* is here! We have a terrific voice cast, featuring the wonderful and charming **Daisy Ridley** ("Rey" in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*) and silky-suave-voiced **Dev Patel** (star of lots of cool things, including *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Newsroom*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, *Chappie* and *The Man Who Knew Infinity*), along with a genuine **Parade of Voice Actor Champions**.

During the recording for the new English version of *Only Yesterday*, the actors and crew all called this "Jeff's Passion Project". Creating the English version of *Only Yesterday*, and releasing the film in North America for the first time, has been my dream for almost five years, ever since I joined Studio Ghibli in 2011.

I could not have made this film without the support of many talented people. Now I invite you to share this wonderful film with your family and friends, and to spread that word that there is a beautiful film to discover in *Only Yesterday*.

This new version seemed destined never to be made. There were many starts and many hurdles. Getting it made, and to you, is the result of dedication, perseverance, passion and even some sacrifice. Yet everyone involved will agree – it has been entirely worth the effort!

Below I tell more of the story of how we made this new version of *Only Yesterday*. Please read on if you have a few minutes.

For now, I hope you will see the film and also share the good news – a very beautiful new film telling a warm and interesting story is about to enchant North America. *Only Yesterday* is here. Details about the release are available at onlyyesterdayfilm.com.

Thank you again for your support of Studio Ghibli. The International team here will keep on working hard to bring you chances to see our films on movie screens (they look great on screens!) and at home, with friends and family.

Gratefully yours,

Jeff

Chief, International
Producer, *Only Yesterday*
Studio Ghibli

More below on how we made the English-language version of Only Yesterday...

My connection to this film goes back to long before I joined the Studio. As we packed up for a family move from Tokyo to London in early 2008, my wife dispatched me to buy one specific Studio Ghibli film to have ready to show to our young daughters as they grew up – *Only Yesterday*. Coincidentally it was one of the Studio’s films with which I was most familiar – and a personal favorite. Not just a personal “Studio Ghibli film” favorite, but a favorite film of all the films I have enjoyed.

Fast forward to 2011 – I joined Studio Ghibli as the chief of the international division. Among the many things we do, we are responsible for getting the Studio’s films out to the world. I took inventory – what is being shown where. I was surprised to find that *Only Yesterday* had never been released in North America, and was the only Studio Ghibli film not to be dubbed into English.

So I started digging, asking at the Studio and to our distributor – why? Or why not? Most answers came in mumbles... “challenging legal issues”, “difficult problems”, “not quite sure but there must be a reason”. No good reasons, no clear reasons. Vague, vague, vague.

Even as we got busy with new films, I pushed to gain clarity and then forge solutions. The distributor of our films at that time confirmed that they would not be dubbing or releasing the film, and very graciously agreed to my request to let me have the rights back to try elsewhere. Very cool of them! Big hurdle #1 – cleared.

I consulted with my internal legal team. Turns out that the “challenging legal issues” were all about music and audio from TV shows in the film. “Would it solve our problems if I leave them in Japanese?”, I asked. The answer was an immediate “yes”. Big hurdle #2 – cleared.

In the summer of 2012 I was working on my first dub production, for *From Up on Poppy Hill*. I discussed the film with some production colleagues and there was interest. Around that time we had just finished reviewing and editing the subtitles for the Japan Blu-ray release of *Only Yesterday*. As the end credits began during one of the review sessions, I and two of my colleagues all said, at the same time, “*mottainai*”, which roughly translates to “what a shame, what a waste” – meaning that it seemed such a shame and such a waste that this beautiful film had not been shared widely with English-speaking audiences. I have always been and still am a believer in the power of a well-dubbed Studio Ghibli film, so non-Japanese speakers can watch the film rather than read the subtitles. And this was a film I really wanted audiences to watch, not read.

I decided to test whether something was true – whether one topic discussed in the film, oft-whispered to be a reason for the lack of a North America release, really was a problem.

At the end of September 2012, I held a private screening of the film at the facility where we were mixing the dub for *From Up on Poppy Hill*. The audience included adults young and old, and many kids. We only had subtitles then, of course. After the screening the audience stayed for a while and we talked about the film. Feedback and opinions were positive – the film was a hit. “Taboo” or “unspeakable” coming-of-age issues were not raised until I finally asked – “Was anyone uncomfortable?” There was laughter, actually laughter. The audience reminded me that the film addresses universal issues in a warm, honest and positive way. Nothing to fear here, they reassured. Big hurdle #3 – cleared.

I decided to wait a bit on releasing the Blu-ray version in our English-language markets. A producer in California committed to work up a release plan with a way to self-fund the dub. Time passed, deadlines passed, but a viable plan never materialized.

Undeterred, in 2013 and again in 2014, I confirmed the extraordinary commitments of our English-language distributors to support the English dub and release the film in theaters – GKIDS in North America, Madman Entertainment in Australia and New Zealand, and Studiocanal UK in the UK and Ireland. Three times they committed to pay more than is usually paid for an “old” film, and three times they agreed to release the film theatrically even though the film had been released on home video in some countries. They encouraged me and gave me strength to persevere. Very cool folks!

Three times I worked with Studiopolis, the recording studio at which we recorded *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* and then *When Marnie Was There*, to create a budget. Passion for the project grew, even as we found ways to reduce the budget without sacrificing any of our fundamental standards. Everyone was ready to give, or give up, something to make this happen – myself, the writer, the casting director, the director. But even as I worked up stricter and stricter budgets and schedules, the budget, or timing, or ... something ... never was right for the Studio, and I could not get the project approved here in Tokyo.

When rejected the third time, I faked that I was “giving up”. In a faux huff, I declared that I would “never ask again”. The Studio president, seeing right through me as he often does, smiled and said simply “never say never”. But in my heart I was losing hope. The Studio portfolio was going to have a big gap in its smile – I had failed.

We finished the last English-dub recording session for *When Marnie Was There* in early February 2015. The writer, the talented David Freedman, and I went out for dinner to celebrate. It was bittersweet. We were happy with *Marnie* but were sad that it could be our last Studio Ghibli dub together.

Midway through dinner I did something very unusual for me – I excused myself to have a look at e-mail on my phone. I felt something, that I needed to see something. And there it was – an e-mail from the Studio president. Subject: “Only Yesterday Resurrected”. I could picture the Studio president’s smile. Suddenly, we were on! The biggest hurdle of all – cleared.

Back in Tokyo I scrambled to rewrite and confirm the budget, get the script translation ready, hire the studio and the writer and the casting director, and gather the production materials. I wasn’t going to miss this chance! GKIDS, Madman and Studiocanal UK all reconfirmed their support, as did our long-time “rest of the world” distributor Wild Bunch. My colleague Evan quickly – magically! – secured some funding from a Japanese government program supporting the arts.

David wrote a wonderful script – polishes were a breeze, and the sync was looking really good.

Casting the film was a ball. First Daisy and Dev, then Alison and Ashley. Then Jamie Simone, our director, called in what I call his “parade of champions” – many of the most respected voices in the business.

Mid-summer we flipped the schedule on its head (Daisy in particular was getting busy with “another film”) and the pieces fell into place. I booked a flight, then an apartment in Studio City. I got the Brompton ready.

Back at Studiopolis for the second time that year, the recording sessions were joyous – full of laughter and hugs and passion. The beauty of the film and the appeal of the story were infectious. I had been warned that it would be tough voicing all those kids. Jamie was a wizard, fantastically extracting splendid performances, finding which kid was where in each scene (they kept changing their clothes!), and ensuring that each kid was voiced right everywhere.

Daisy arrived with the entire script marked up and highlighted. She had worked on it so much that the pages were ruffled, the entire script almost fluffy. And then Daisy and Dev dazzled us – sizzling with on-screen chemistry. Ten-year-old Alison Fernandez brought Young Taeko to life with wit and sass and style. I lost count of how many times our sound engineers grinned with amazement and uttered, “Wow, she’s really good.” Actors familiar to me from past dubs added their talent and voices, and over and over I was surprised to be thanked by the actors (they’re thanking me???) for the opportunity to be in this remarkable film. The voices and sync fit, the performances sang, the story was told.

Last-minute challenges were overcome, the film was made.

It’s been a long road to this new *Only Yesterday*. Now it’s time to share the film with you and your friends and family – and to audiences new to Studio Ghibli. This is my first personal plea. Please join the cast and crew in our efforts to bring the sheer joy and beauty of this film to new audiences. I hope you will spread the word – *Only Yesterday* is here!

I cannot thank enough the many people who helped us get this far, but they will tell you that I haven’t given up trying. And now I will thank you for your support.

With much passion and gratitude from Tokyo,

Geoffrey Wexler
Producer, *Only Yesterday*
Chief, International, Studio Ghibli