



**VISUAL STORY**



JOE HISAISHI AND ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY PRESENT  
STUDIO GHIBLI'S

# MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORÖ

Adapted by TOM MORTON-SMITH from the feature animation by HAYAO MIYAZAKI  
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Lighting Designer JESSICA HUNG HAN YUN | Orchestrator and Arranger WILL STUART | Sound Designer TONY GAYLE  
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Miranda Curtis CMG – Lead Production Supporter

**barbican**

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ENGLAND**



## ABOUT THIS VISUAL STORY

This visual story is written to help you prepare for your visit to the Barbican to see the RSC's adaptation of *My Neighbour Totoro*.

This resource will help you get to know some of the characters and explain what is happening in the play.

**Be warned, this does include some plot spoilers!**

If you are just looking for an overview, you can review the general content advisory on page 2.



This icon appears when the content might be sensorily overwhelming, particularly sound and light.



This icon appears in places that might be frightening or sad.

## ABOUT THE BARBICAN

You can find information and an Access Guide all about the Barbican [here](#), to help you know what to expect at our venue and to find your way around.

## ABOUT THE SHOW

This resource tells you about the show and includes information on characters and plot, so contains some spoilers. If you'd rather keep it a surprise, don't read those pages.

## OTHER SUPPORT RESOURCES

There are other resources that you might want to use to help you prepare for your visit; you can find these [here](#) – this includes a BSL video synopsis, a sonic story and an audio introduction.

This page also tells you about other assisted performances for *My Neighbour Totoro*.

Information about access at the RSC can be found [here](#).

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# GENERAL CONTENT ADVISORY

Live theatre is exciting. It can be loud, bright, shocking at times, and occasionally some of the effects we use, or the themes our productions explore, can be upsetting or surprising.

We know that you might appreciate detailed information on the content of our shows in order to make informed decisions and to prepare for your visit.

This production features:

- Puppets, some large scale that will interact with the audience.
- Themes of an ill parent in hospital.
- Insect-like creatures.
- Live music and sound effects that will be loud at times.

The running time is: 2 hours, 40 minutes including a 20 minute interval (a break in the middle of the play).

If you would like any more information or have any questions about these then please contact the Barbican Box Office on 020 7870 2500 or by emailing [tickets@barbican.org.uk](mailto:tickets@barbican.org.uk). The Barbican Box Office phone lines are open Monday to Friday, 12-4pm

<https://totoroshow.com/tickets/>



## SYNOPSIS (A SUMMARY OF THE STORY)

The story is set in the 1950s, in a village called Matsugo - a small farming community on the outskirts of Tokyo, Japan.


The play is about the Kusakabe family, who move out to Matsugo from Tokyo.

They are moving there to be nearer the hospital where the mother, Yaskuo, is recovering from an illness.

Satsuki and her younger sister, Mei, settle into the old house with their father. As they explore their new home, they encounter all sorts of magical creatures and the ancient protector of the forest they call 'Totoro' – they are to be the girls' neighbours. Before long the two girls are caught up in the creatures' adventures – transported to a long-forgotten world of spirits, sprites and magic.

## THE SET

When you come into the theatre, before the play starts, you will see the title on this curtain.

There is an announcement before the show starts, this might be quite surprising and loud. 

Once the play has started, the curtain will rise and you will see the set. The set represents the village of Matsugo, and the surrounding landscape.



At the front of the stage (nearer the audience) the set will change. It is sometimes a house, sometimes a hospital, a field, a road or forest.

Further back on the stage you will see platforms (like this) that have the musicians and singers on them.

For our relaxed performances there will be an onstage cast announcement before the performance begins to introduce you to some characters



## CHARACTERS - THE KUSAKABE FAMILY

### SATSUKI KUSAKABE

(left, in blue)

Satsuki is 10 years old and is the older sister. She is very smart and helps to look after Mei and her father.

### MEI KUSAKABE

(right, in pink)

She is 4 years old and Satsuki's youngest sister. She is very playful and also very wilful.



### TATSUO KUSAKABE, FATHER

He works at the University in Tokyo.

### YASUKO KUSAKABE, MOTHER

She isn't very well and is staying at the hospital.



# THE OGAKI FAMILY



## KANTA OGAKI

He is in the same school year as Satsuki – he is very shy.



## GRANNY OGAKI

She is very friendly and kind to Mei and Satsuki.

We also meet Hiroshi Ogaki (Father) and Tsukiko Ogaki (Mother).



Other characters we meet include:

Nurse Emiko and Miss Hara, The Teacher, as well as the Postman, Farmers and Villagers.

You will also see the singer. She is on stage and sings all the songs.

# PUPPETS

We don't want to ruin the surprise, so we are going to describe what the puppets look like to help you imagine. If you have seen the film, you might have an idea.

If you would like to attend one of the pre-show [touch tours](#), you will get an opportunity to meet some of the puppets before the show.

<b>SHOTOTORO</b>	Shototoro is the smallest forest guardian. He has white fur, has pointy ears and big eyes.
<b>CHŪTOTORO</b>	Chūtotoro is the medium sized forest guardian. He has blue fur and a white belly, with 3 blue dashes across the top. He has big eyes and pointy ears.
<b>ŌTOTORO (TOTORO)</b>	Totoro is the biggest of the forest guardians. He is very large. He has grey fur and pointy ears, with a white belly and grey dashes on it. He has long black whiskers, long black claws, round eyes and a very big mouth.
<b>SOOT SPRITES</b>	These are small, round, fluffy sprites. They are on the end of a long wire and moved by the cast members in blue costumes.
<b>CATBUS</b>	The Catbus is large – it has orange and yellow stripes, a cat's face and 12 legs. The Catbus has windows and a destination sign and bright headlights like a bus.

# BEFORE THE PLAY STARTS

The show takes place in the Barbican theatre – the auditorium looks like this inside.



For more information about the Barbican see [here](#).

Before the show starts, some of the actors will come out and welcome you to the relaxed performance.

After that the play will start.

Remember, it is ok if you need to move or make noise and you are welcome to leave the auditorium at any time, if you need to. You can always come back in again when you are ready.

You can leave and re-enter the Theatre at any point during the performance.



# THE PLAY

The play starts with a song ("Hey Let's Go") - the title on the curtain comes to life and bugs and insects walk across the curtain.

## ACT 1

We see a van, piled high with furniture driving across the field. Then the van appears on stage and we meet the Kasukabe family – Tatsuo, Satsuki And Mei. They are moving to a new home in the village, they used to live in Tokyo.



They meet a postman and then their neighbours, the Ogaki Family - Hiroshi, Tsukiko and Kanta. Kanta is very shy. The parents are very friendly and show the Kasukabe family how to find their new house.

The Kusakabes arrive at their new home. Mei and Satsuki run around looking at the house – it is large and old and a bit dusty.

One of the wooden supports in the house breaks – don't worry, the house is ok.

In this scene we learn that their Mother is at a hospital nearby. !

The girls continue to explore the house. They're a little scared but they are brave and keep exploring and meet the Soot Sprites. They are mischievous little spirits, they're a little bit like spiders; small, round, black and furry but they're friendly.

The Soot Sprites are small puppets played by people in dark blue costumes.

It might feel a little scary here. The girls follow the sprites around the house, Mei tries to catch one and they jump all over her and scare her.

She screams and the music is loud here. ☹️

Granny, one of the neighbour has come to say hello and introduce herself.

Mei runs downstairs, covered in soot from the Soot Sprites. Granny explains that the Soot Sprites are harmless house spirits who move into empty houses.



Song "Soot Sprites": We see the Soot Sprites dancing around the house whilst Granny, Mei and Sastuki try to clean up.

Kanta comes to give a basket of food from his mother and tells Satsuki that the house is haunted. Granny reassures them and then leaves them alone to have their supper.



The evening gets dark, the trees shake and the owls are hooting – it is a little scary. Satsuki goes out to collect wood from the woodpile and she trips on the way back but she's ok.

Satsuki and her dad have a talk about missing the old house in Tokyo. She feels a little scared but her dad tells her to laugh and then things don't seem so scary anymore. Satsuki watches as the Soot Sprites dance away into the night.

The next day, the sun rises and we see the villagers planting rice and the Kusakabes on their bicycle on the way to the hospital to visit their mother.



She has a bad cough and isn't well. The doctors are worried about her but her family are hopeful that she is getting better.

They tell her all about the house and the Soot Sprites.

The doctors say that she has to stay in hospital a little bit longer.

Song "Mother". 😞



The next day, Satsuki goes off to school and Mei stays at home with her father.

They play shop and Mei goes exploring in the garden. She finds a piece of ceramic that she shows to her father and then goes back to the garden to find more.

She follows a trail of acorns and then she meets Shōtotoro & Chūtotoro. They are small puppets controlled by a puppeteer.

Mei follows them into the forest and comes to the big camphor tree and follows them into the roots, she falls and lands with a bump. She is a little frightened (but she'll be ok, don't worry). 😞



At the bottom of the tree she meets a sleeping giant...it is Totoro.

Totoro is very big and his snoring is very loud.

Mei and Totoro talk and shout and roar. It is loud.

They both fall asleep. !



Later that afternoon Satsuki comes home from school and can't find Mei.

They call out for Mei, she wakes up at the base of the tree and they come to find her.

She tells them all about Totoro and their father tells them about the ancient spirits of the forest.

The next day before school, Kanta is in the yard feeding the chickens. Satsuki comes to say hello and he is too shy to talk again.



Granny and Mei are doing the laundry together. Mei tells Granny about Totoro and about her mummy, who is sick. They also talk about Granny's sister who died a long time ago.





Granny gives Mei Kanta's toy aeroplane to play with but Mei wants to go to the forest to find Totoro.

Granny asks her to stay and Mei runs off.

Satsuki is at school and talking to her teacher after class when Granny and Mei arrive.

Granny explains that Mei won't stop crying so she has brought her to school so that Satsuki can comfort her.



On the way home it starts to rain heavily, Satsuki and Mei take shelter in a roadside Shinto shrine.

Kanta comes past and ignores the girls at first, but then he offers them his umbrella.

When Kanta gets home he is very wet and his mother scolds him. Granny comes in and tells Kanta his plane is broken. She doesn't tell him that it was Mei, though.

Satsuki and Mei come to the door to return Kanta's umbrella and say thank you for lending it to them.

Then they carry along the road to wait for their father's bus to arrive.



Satsuki and Mei wait at the bus stop for their father. It is still raining.

The bus arrives but their father doesn't get off – he has missed his connection.

Mei begins to get tired and Satsuki is getting worried. Mei climbs on Satsuki's back to sleep. They wait and wait.

There are thumps in the darkness (this might be a little scary).



Totoro appears slowly through the fog (the thumping is his feet as he walks). Satsuki is scared but you don't have to be. He is very big.

Satsuki gives Totoro the umbrella to try and keep himself dry. Totoro plays and jumps in the rain. His heavy landing causes all the branches of the trees to shake and all the water falls. This makes Totoro **laughs very loudly**. !

Suddenly a meowing comes from the distance, headlights appear and then the Catbus comes around the corner.

The Catbus is large, it has orange and yellow stripes, a cat's face and 12 legs. The Catbus has windows, a destination sign and bright headlights like a bus.

Totoro gets on the Catbus and leaves. !



Then the normal bus arrives. Their father gets off and the girls are really pleased to see him.

Later on we are at the hospital with Yasuko. Nurse Emiko brings her a letter from Satsuki.

Satsuki is telling her all about Totoro and how they have planted the seeds that he gave them to make her a garden for when she comes home.

Yakuso (the girl's mother) has a coughing fit so they have to stop.



Back at the house it is bedtime. Mei is impatient that the plants haven't grown yet.

The girls go to sleep and the spirits come out to play. Totoro and his friends come from behind the house and start to perform a dance to conjure the sprouts.

Satsuki and Mei wake up and join in. Sprouts and seedlings begin to appear and grow until they become really big!

There are lots of lights and music and sound effects in this part. Totoro roars loudly!



As the curtain comes down, Totoro flies out over the audience.



**INTERVAL:** This is a 20 minute break where you can go and get a drink and go to the toilet.

## ACT 2

The second half starts with cardboard versions of Satsuki, Mei, ŌTotoro, Shōtotoro and Chūtotoro sitting in the trees. They are playing ocarinas.

Then we see the sprouts pop up.

Tatsuo is asleep at his desk. He wakes up and sees the sprouts and wakes up Mei and Satsuki who are also really excited. Tatsuo realises he is late and has to rush off to catch the bus to work.

The girls wave him off and then have some fun pretending to be Totoro and roaring.



Later that day, Kanta and his father are fixing a bicycle and talking.

The postman comes to the door with a telegram for Tatsuo. They decide that Kanta will take it to Satsuki and Mei.



Granny is with Mei and Satsuki in the allotment picking tomatoes and corn. They pick some for their Mum's visit at the weekend. Mei keeps a special ear of corn for her.



Kanta arrives with the telegram. Satsuki decides to open it in case it is important.

The hospital wants her father to call the doctor. The girls are upset as they are worried that this means their mother has become more unwell.

They go to Kanta's Aunt's house on the bicycle to telephone Mr Kasukabe.



Mei wants to go too and tries to catch up with Satsuki and Kanta. Granny can't keep up and Mei runs off on her own.

Kanta and Satsuki make the phone call and reach her father. He says he will call the hospital. Satsuki is worried.

Mei is running through the village, she is lost and scared. 😞

Her shouting has disturbed a sleeping goat. The goat wakes up and slowly walks towards her. Mei is a bit frightened of the goat.

The goat is a little bit scary, but don't worry, he is friendly he just wants to eat the corn. !



Satsuki and Kanta arrive and are happy to have found Mei.

Satsuki explains that their mother is sick again and that she won't be able to come home for the weekend. Mei gets very upset, so does Satsuki. They are very worried and say cruel things to each other. Kanta tries to comfort Mei. 😞

Later, they are at home. Granny is helping hang up the washing, Satsuki and Mei are dejected and worried.

Satsuki tells granny that she is really worried that their Mother is going to die. Granny tries to comfort Satsuki.



Mei overhears this conversation and decides to go and see her mother – she slips out of the back door without telling them where she is going.



Satsuki and Granny realise Mei is gone and begin searching for her – they can't find her anywhere and become increasingly worried. They all begin to search and call for her. Satsuki runs in front of a car, but don't worry she is ok. 😞

This bit is quite worrying as no one can find her. They look everywhere and ask everyone they meet but can't find her. !

The drums and music are quite loud here.

They even search in the village pond in case there has been an accident. Satsuki begins to despair. 😞

Don't worry, it will be ok.

Satsuki runs in to the forest – she is desperate and scared. She calls out for Totoro to come and help her. The forest is dark and a little scary.

Shōtotoro and Chūtotoro appear and show her the way to Totoro's layer.

Satsuki enters and calls out to Totoro again. !

He appears and roars – it is **very loud** and she is a little frightened. He does it again, **even louder**.

There is a meow from the distance and then suddenly the Catbus appears!

The bus is loud and bright. Satsuki boards the Catbus, who will take her to Mei.

Totoro waves her off and roars.



We find Mei next to a Jizu statue. She is cold and scared. (This is a statue that protects the souls of children and travellers.)

Some Soot Sprites come to watch over her. Suddenly the Catbus appears and Satsuki jumps off.

They are happy to see each other.

They climb aboard the Catbus, who is going to take them to see their mother.

We see them go on a magical journey across the fields and villages.

This is a busy scene with lots of music and lights and noises.



The Catbus drops them off at the hospital.

Mr and Mrs Kusakabe are talking. They are a little sad but then Mr Kusakabe tells her about Totoro and they laugh.

Mei leaves the corn on the window sill for their mother and they decide to go home.

Everything is going to be alright.



Then the play is over – all of the actors and puppeteers will come on to stage and dance and bow.

You will hear one last very loud roar from Totoro. 

You can clap and cheer now if you'd like to.





Written for the RSC by A Relaxed Company, December 2023

[www.arelaxedcompany.com](http://www.arelaxedcompany.com)

Miranda Curtis CMG – Lead Production Supporter of the original production and the 2023 production of My Neighbour Totoro

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