

EVENT REPORT: PACIFIC MEDIA EXPO 2005



CORRINNE MAY

PHOTO (L-R): Corrinne May performing at PMX, PMX Attendees learning how to make origami.

Pacific Media Expo 2005 (PMX) was a unique experience. Rarely would you find an event that would combine Asian pop culture with the interesting fun aspects of an anime convention all into one event.

For the event's second year, PMX would take place during September 3-5 in Long Beach, Calif.

In order for us to give a report on PMX 2005, it is important to recap the event's first year.

PMX 2004: YEAR ONE

Pacific Media Expo has come such a long way since its first year when it took place in Anaheim, Calif., in May 2004.

The event featured a well-attended concert featuring JPOP artists T.M. Revolution and Nami Tamaki in joint connection with Sony Music Entertainment Japan and its distribution label, Tofu Records.

Also, performing was popular J-ROCK cosplay group, Psycho Le Cemu.

PMX was promoted as an Asian pop culture event, not as an anime event. Although, it would incorporate certain things you would see at an anime convention with anime guest of honors, anime vendors and cosplayers.

We felt that the potential of an event like this was remarkable. Especially with the experience of chairperson Mike Tatsugawa and other staff members who are known for their involvement with the Southern California-based Japanese animation event known as Anime Expo, which started as a 2,000-attendee convention back in 1991 and later became the enormous and highly attended (25,000+) event that it is today.

Needless to say that Mike Tatsugawa and the staff bring a lot of their experience to Pacific Media Expo.

This left no doubt in my mind that this group can very much

pull off an Asian pop culture event and take on the variety of challenges that they will face.

But part of the problem with Pacific Media Expo 2004 was that a large portion of attendees that came out to the concert on opening day, did not stay for the remaining event.

Those who came out for an Asian pop culture event felt that PMX was more of a Japanese pop culture event.

And with the large area at the Anaheim Convention Center and the hotel, made the event look quite empty.

Although we were busy covering the musical guests of the event, outside of interviews and covering the concerts, there was really not much to do at the event.

Our review of the first year of PMX was unfortunately not too positive but we knew that this was only the first year. And we held on to our belief in the potential of Pacific Media Expo.



PHOTO: (top) Sounday music artist, Kumiko Kato (bottom) Lemon Drop Kick

EVENT REPORT: PACIFIC MEDIA EXPO 2005

PMX 2005: YEAR TWO

For nearly a year, I have been curious about what kind of progress Pacific Media Expo would make in 2005.

A major concern that I had for the event was how PMX would rebound after an expensive first year.

From a telephone conversation I had with Mike Tatsugawa last year, he indicated the direction PMX would go was to feature more independent artists.

I was very supportive of this decision but at the same time, reserved because if people came out last year for T.M.R., Nami Tamaki and Psycho Le Cemu, names well known in the Japanese music industry, would they come to PMX 2005 without a major music headliner?

2005 has been a big question mark on why many anime cons have scaled back in bringing major name artists or bands. And the answer is costs.

It's evident that many anime conventions have talked about the financial risk of bringing in big-name Japanese artists.

For a first-time event such as Pacific Media Expo, I have no doubt in my mind that the T.M. Revolution and Nami Tamaki concert at the Anaheim Convention Center was a very expensive attempt at bringing major Japanese artists to California.

Where major anime conventions can always rely on their 10,000-20,000+ attendees as financial support, for Pacific Me-



PMX attendees dance up close to the performance of PINE*am.

dia Expo being a first-time event last year, it was a financial risk and loss.

But you have to learn from those mistakes and, fortunately, Pacific Media Expo staff learned a lot from their first year.

One thing was abundantly clear, PMX 2005 would feature Asian pop culture with artists from different countries and different types of musical backgrounds. Also, the event would bring in as one of the guests of honor, a popular and talented Filipino American comedian Rex Navarrete.

Knowing that PMX is going to attract the anime/cosplay crowd and also the crowd who will come for the music or Asian pop culture features of this event, it was going to be interesting to see how audiences would react.

Because PMX is bringing in a diverse audience, many

attendees would have never before seen cosplayers common to anime conventions.

As one friend who received a flyer for Pacific Media Expo at Anime Expo explained the surprise to see an anime guest of honor and a Filipino American comedian as guests being promoted, I knew that there will be many people who understand what PMX is trying to do. But at the same time, there would those who won't.

These people who would be disappointed that PMX was straying away from all-Japanese pop culture or taking away the J-ROCK-ness that PMX catered to them in 2004.

But the reality is that if you are going to call yourself an Asian pop culture event, there better be other Asian cultures represented and PMX 2005 accomplished that.

EVENT REPORT: PACIFIC MEDIA EXPO 2005



PHOTO (L-R): PMX performances featured YouseiTeikoku, Dig Jelly, Jane Lui and Random Ninjas

With the promotion of Asian pop culture, they brought in Jane Lui from Hong Kong; Corrinne May from Singapore; Filipino comedian Rex Navarrete; Japan's PINE*am and Kumiko Kato, Asian import race car model and music artist, Kaila Yu; and bands such as Dig Jelly, Lemon Drop Kick, Next Phaze, Random Ninjas, Yosuei Teikoku and Zoo Hero.

Despite early technical problems during the PINE*am concert, PMX brought in a sound engineer with experience which is very important.

For anime fans, PMX brought in notable anime industry names as guests such as Daisuke Moriyama, Koichi Ohata, Naoko Matsui and Seiji Mizushi.

With the popularity of gothic lolita cosplay, an event focused specifically on this for those cosplayers.

The cosplay festival was run by experienced cosplayers and

organizers.

The exhibit hall improved from last year's event and featured not just anime vendors but vendors that cater to the Asian American crowd and more.

Also, returning was the wrestling in the exhibit hall with the addition of a vendor selling boba (bubble tea). For this type of event, even these small things were a big plus.

In addition, it was a major improvement over last year. We enjoyed the diverse vendors brought in and I feel that more would have come in, if there not as many competing events.

Also, I think it was very smart to see certain aspects of San Diego Comic Con being brought to PMX.

As SDCC has had success with exclusive comics or toys for an event, Pacific Media Expo brought in a vendor that provided a for PMX-only exclusive vinyl toys.

This was another example of willing to go outside of the box and introduce different things to this event.

PMX also featured a karaoke competition, martial arts demonstration, artists market, anime and Asian film video programming and much more.

And I emphasize how proud I was of Pacific Media Expo staff. Experience does pay off and it showed.

Also, the weather and the location was also a major contributor for enjoying Pacific Media Expo.

The Long Beach Convention Center and hotels being in real close proximity and walking distance to restaurants and having it in September when the weather is much cooler was a major plus.

For members of the J!-ENT press staff, we could tell when an event is going well, usually when each staff member is busy.

Last year, featured a lot of

EVENT REPORT: PACIFIC MEDIA EXPO 2005

waiting and nothing to do, that we spent too much time in the hotel room.

This year's PMX brought in many guests that it was important to prepare many writers, photographers, videographers to cover this event.

With podcasts and videocasts being uploaded online for our listeners and viewers internationally, it was a challenge but the location of the event and PMX staff was very helpful to us in covering this event.

Outside of the music performances, the karaoke rooms were active and for nighttime events, there was a dance via Club PMX.

Everything looked very positive for Pacific Media Expo 2005

but as we write about the positives, we also have to write about the negatives of the event.

The most unfortunate situation to have happen at this year's Pacific Media Expo was the attendance.

There were factors and two major factors was Hurricane Katrina (especially how it jumped gas prices to an enormous rate) and several events happening around the country.

Talking to associates who attended these other events, Hurricane Katrina hit these events hard.

Estimated attendee numbers for Pacific Media Expo have fluctuated but it was around the 2,000+ mark.

The next negative that we heard from people was the lack of headliners at this year's Pacific Media Expo.

Sure, it's one thing to go to an Asian American based music event in Los Angeles or the Bay Area and see these independent artists but PMX does better than that and brings a diverse number of talent from the U.S. and also Asia.

But I do not disagree with the people who want headliners.

Headliners do bring people in. The question is how do you make these people stay for the whole event rather than just that performance?

This is one major factor that hurts Asian music festivals and



PHOTO: Southern California-based band ZOO HERO performs at Pacific Media Expo.

EVENT REPORT: PACIFIC MEDIA EXPO 2005

events. Whereas anime conventions can draw the people from their main event to attend their own music events, non-anime focus events such as New York-Tokyo Music Festival and California's Pacific Media Expo cannot solely depend on that.

This appears to be the main criticism of Pacific Media Expo. The lack of people attending the music events.

You would think that an event that brought in around 2,000 people would have several hundred people filling up the seats for the concert.

The most well-attended performance were Rex Navarrete's comedy performance and anime music cover band, Random Ninjas.

Many of the performances we attended had around 50-100 people with around a dozen who would go stageside and get into the music, but many just sat in their seats

I felt that the room to hold the performances may have been too big and too wide.

But a big question asked after PMX was over is why didn't people attend the music events?

You literally had two types of audiences. Those who attend anime conventions and were there to cosplay and those who were there for the Asian pop culture experience.

For the cosplayers, some were interested in checking out the music artists and comedy performance but were amped for the cosplay masquerade.

But some felt that they would have had a better experience if



PHOTO: Music artist and model Kaila Yu talks to the media regarding her upcoming album at her PMX press conference.

there was a well-known Japanese artist or rock band (visual kei style) that was performing.

We heard several times from people of their friends who did not come to the event because there were no J-ROCK bands performing.

Remembering the hundreds of J-ROCK fans waiting in the long lines at PMX 2004 for Psycho Le Cemu, with no significant J-ROCK band in 2005, I feel that Pacific Media Expo needs to bring back J-ROCK in 2006.

The J-ROCK fans are vocal, enthusiastic, they buy a lot of merchandise and they come in large numbers (from all over the United States).

It is very important that PMX tries to bring these attendees back.

On the other side are the fans who came to this event and have never seen a cosplayer in their lives.

Some felt that PMX was a hybrid sci-fi, anime event with Asian

music bands.

But interesting enough, they found it pretty cool and exciting to see this happening.

But what failed is the necessary grass roots marketing and promotion that these Asian and Asian American bands needed.

I noticed the marketing effort on the anime and cosplay sites but rarely did I see any marketing on Asian/Asian American online resources or publications.

This is very important and we were surprised to not see this happen.

The Asian American community in my experience is very supportive of events and the people behind the events who work hard in promoting Asian cultures.

PMX needs to tap into this resource so that these people can do the grass roots marketing and start an amount of synergy to get people hyped for this event.

By knowing the dates way

EVENT REPORT: PACIFIC MEDIA EXPO 2005

early in advance, free advertisement on Asian American college publication or Websites, flyers posted on college campus information areas and music stores are all outlets PMX can take advantage of for the future..

Various publications, may they be Asian or non-Asian, that will promote the event, it takes a little bit more work to promote independent bands.

As for the evening events, such as Club PMX, this is a very difficult situation.

Again, anime conventions can tap into thousands of attendees attending the event, PMX cannot.

I feel that Pacific Media Expo can benefit by adding a video game element to the event.

Video gaming is big with all communities and if there are tournaments, if planned well, can bring thousands of people to an event and bring these people to the other events of the convention.

In the East Coast, New York-Tokyo Music Festival has been experimenting with the "Gamers Nite Groove" events and they have succeeded by bringing in an audience and also plenty of sponsors.

I feel that Pacific Media Expo can possibly do a collaboration with the VGO Network (creators of the largest competitive gaming event, "Evolution") or tap into that same audience.

The karaoke segment of a con has been a staple of evening programming and I'm happy to see it at PMX.

If there is one last suggestion for Pacific Media Expo is to have press conference rooms in a dif-



PHOTO: Audience reacts to local anime cover band Random Ninjas.

ferent room not too close (or next door) to the concert or cosplay masquerade.

But all in all, Pacific Media Expo 2005 was a blast. This year's event had more to offer to attendees and no waiting around like 2004.

I would imagine that the third year of Pacific Media Expo is the final test to learn if this event can continue on and successfully make the income needed to fund further events.

California has many Asian culture specific-based events but Pacific Media Expo is a unique event that is trying to incorporate all the things that we are passionate about — Asian culture.

It's very important for Pacific Media Expo staff to take the successful elements from their first two years and continue the creativity in the third year.

It is also important that they continue to emphasize the diversity of Asian cultures for music performances, despite many attendees

wanting more from Japanese pop culture. There must be a balance or way to please the different audiences that PMX attracts.

Last year I talked about the potential. This year I saw progress and even greater potential.

Next year's event will be challenging. I feel that this year will determine if Pacific Media Expo will have a future or not.

I feel that PMX has things going well in terms of communication with anime fans and cosplayers. I feel that PMX needs to bring back the J-ROCK fans, inclusion of video gaming and a way to pack the seats for performances of the independent artists and bands.

I'll definitely be curious to see what PMX has in store for 2006 and I hope to see more progress from what they've learned from the last two events.

As for 2005, it truly was an awesome, entertaining event and I look forward to what PMX has in store for 2006. ■