

nt2099 EVENT COVERAGE



PACIFIC MEDIA EXPO, THE ASIAN POP CULTURE EVENT DEBUTED IN ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA IN MAY WITH OVER 3,000 ATTENDEES BUT YET SOME OF US ARE CONFUSED. IS PMX A TRUE ASIAN POP CULTURE EVENT?

BY DENNIS A. AMITH

I SPENT MY FINAL WEEK OF MAY contacting fellow editors and journalists of Asian American publications to check out the debut of an Asian Pop Culture event in Southern California. I even decided to contact several Asian American actors, musicians and models to attend this upcoming event. I even went on Friendster.com and posted a bulletin for all Asian Americans to pass the word on about “Pacific Media Expo”. I told them it was going to be huge, “off the hook!”, an event with tremendous potential and most of all, to support this event. Because this is an event that many people wanted. An event which would feature the best of Asian pop culture. An event that would possibly bring uber talent from Asia and possibly team them up with talent here in America. Right?

Photography by **GARLAND GEE & EDWIN MACARAEG**

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nt2099 EVENT COVERAGE

Pacific Media Expo (PMX) was held on Memorial Day Weekend 2004 in Anaheim, Calif. and attracted around 4,000 people to the Friday night concert and about 3,000 people to the actual event.

I have to admit. For the past few months, I have been rather skeptical and a bit curious about how a major event promoting Asian pop culture would turn out in California.

Let me first explain what I mean by me being “skeptical” of this event.

When I first heard that Pacific Media Expo was hosting a concert featuring Japanese performers and that attendees were being charged at around \$30, I immediately felt that this was not going to work.

In 2001, New York City was the host of New York-Tokyo Music Festival. An event that brought mainstream and well-known underground artists from Japan as well as DJ's and many performers from the East Coast for an exciting four day event.

Several hundred people attended but it would appear that the majority of the audience were quite selective of who they wanted to see.

As for the hundreds of people that showed up on opening night, many were there only to watch Avex artist and popular Korean pop star, BoA, perform. And sure enough, after her performance, many of them left the venue, leaving very few people for the actual event on opening night.

In 2003, GakuFest, a music festival that coincided with the anime convention, Fanime, was a major

flop.

The event featured American, especially Asian American artists and a Japanese rock band.

The admission fee was around \$25. For most performances that are held at anime conventions, the fee is usually free.

Over 5,000 attendees were at Fanime but to our dismay, only several dozen people were there to watch the majority of artists. And over a hundred people came late to watch the Japanese rock band, Blood, perform.

So, with two paid music events that didn't fare to well, I wasn't expecting Pacific Media Expo, a first-time event that really didn't do too much to publicize the event, bring in hundreds or even thousands, of people to their concert.

They proved me wrong.

The concert brought in around 4,000 people and the concert was indeed a success.

But although the concert was a major feature and success of Pacific Media Expo, the most important review was the event as a whole.

As an Asian pop culture event, was the actual event worth the \$45 dollar admission cost?

This is where I will explain what I mean by “curious.”

Frankly, the majority of Asian music events or festivals in California are targeted towards a Asian demographic. For years, I have been anticipating an Asian pop culture event that would be a host for an Asian inspired music festival, film festival and take things from other Asian-related

festivals to create a unique Asian pop culture festival...

An event that would feature contemporary, mainstream Asian talent as well as Asian American talent.

Knowing that the background for the people responsible for Pacific Media Expo were behind the creation of one of the most successful and largest Japanese animation events (Anime Expo) in the country, it was a no-brainer for me to see mostly Japanese guests and see a dominant Japanese theme for the first year of PMX.

PMX FACTS

The first Pacific Media Expo brought in around 4,000 people for the Friday night concert. 3,000 people for the overall event held on Memorial Day Weekend. The cost to attend PMX for an adult was \$45, \$20 for children under 12.

PMX GUESTS OF HONOR

Japanese Music Stars:
T.M.Revolution and Nami Tamaki

Manga Artists:
Yasuhiro Nightow and Daisuke Moriyama

Character Designers:
Takahiro Yoshimatsu and Shino Masanori

nt2099 EVENT COVERAGE

This is where the confusion begins. Talking to other editors of Asian publications, the fact that the guests were all Japanese, there was a strong anime, manga and cosplay theme and the website reflected a lot of that, many felt it wasn't a true Asian pop culture event but literally another Japanese animation event.

Fortunately, there were a few who gave the event a chance and it was quite interesting to see them in awe during concert night.

What they saw at the concert were thousands of people, young and old, of different ethnic backgrounds enjoying a concert featuring music artists singing in Japanese.

For some of these professionals, they have seen this before, most recently in Los Angeles

*** Hundreds of attendees flocked to Anaheim Convention Center to show their consumer pride at the PMX Exhibit Hall.**

when thousands of people came out for KSCI-TV's "Asian Lunar New Year Parade" in 2003 which featured Filipino artist Gary V. and Korean pop group Baby V.O.X. The crowds wanting to see these Asian artists were of different cultures, of different age groups but most of all, enjoying music sung in a language that many didn't understand.

After the concert, there was a lot of talk about the potential PMX has to be an event to bring together artists from Asian countries that can be beneficial to not just fans of Asian pop culture but perhaps in the near future for Asian American performers and filmmakers.

"I think that in my opinion, I have a vision that PMX will be an event that covers a multitude of Asian cultures," said J. Lee, producer and founder of the US Asians website.

"This event starts within the Japanese culture and will extend

to other Asian cultures as the event progresses. I think this event is an excellent place to start."

As the event continued throughout the weekend, those who came for the Asian pop culture experience were a bit surprised of what the event had in store for them.

The things that you would expect at a Japanese animation event were in full force: the cosplayers (people who masquerade as popular Japanese anime or video game characters and Japanese music performers), the anime viewing rooms, the karaoke rooms where fans were singing their favorite anime theme songs and also a lackluster video game room.

One of the highlights of the event is the exhibitor's hall featuring many vendors selling Asian and Japanese merchandise, as well as promotional booths such as *Yolk Magazine*, a section featuring import race cars and a wrestling ring where people had a chance to watch live matches of Japanese pro wrestlers.

For those going for the Japanese pop culture experience, Pacific Media Expo definitely gave attendees a sample of that.

Many people attending the event strictly for an Asian pop culture experience or even an anime event, were a bit confused and disappointed.

So, the question that was asked repeatedly by many attendees was "What kind of event is Pacific Media Expo?"

There is only one way to find out what PMX really is about and that is to talk to the PMX con chair, Mike Tatsugawa.



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DENNIS: *What was the inspiration of starting PMX?*

MIKE: After more than a decade of promoting anime at Anime Expo, we felt that anime was at a point of maturity that no longer required active promotion. We wanted to continue our vision of creating creative communities between Asia and the United States and we quickly realized that there was no reason why we had to settle on one form of media for our next major undertaking. Thus the idea of a convention dedicated to Asian lifestyle and pop culture was born.

DENNIS: *Is the direction of PMX for the near future to incorporate many aspects of Asian pop culture? And will we see more Asian cultures and entertainers featured at PMX in the future?*

MIKE: Our networking is somewhat limited at the moment. Anime was more pronounced at the first PMX because that is where we had the strongest contacts. Other areas like music, which have ties to anime, were not as difficult to bring in. You could also see that new areas like cars, wrestling and Asian cinema were also piloted in the first year. We still need to do a lot of tuning and bring in new partners, but over time, we imagine that we can only succeed.

DENNIS: *This event brought two types of crowds. Those who normally attend an anime convention and those who attended*

strictly for the Asian pop culture experience. I know it's difficult to please both crowds but how much of a challenge was this for the event?

MIKE: One of our initial goals was to measure the size of the JPOP market. That's why we split admission to the concert off from the admission to the convention. Our initial expectation was that fans of Japanese music would be interested in staying for the other events relating to the musicians at the convention. We were wrong. The serious fans were willing to pay for both, but more mainstream fans picked one event or the other. Now that we have a better feel for the market, we can make adjustments to the pricing structure to better integrate the groups. This won't be a problem that can be solved in a year or two. This will probably be an evolutionary process with a lot of hits and misses.

DENNIS: *With events such as New York-Tokyo Music Festival and GakuFest which were paid events and only bringing in several hundred attendees, were you confident that PMX could do better and the fact that the event would attract thousands of paid attendees.*

MIKE: PMX wanted to try to bring in more mainstream performers to reach out to a wider audience. Once established as a major music event, we want to provide lesser-known bands an opportunity to gain exposure in the United States. New York-Tokyo Music Festival did very well as the first major music event in the United

States. However, I believe that it may have been too ambitious for its first year and that hurt its viability in the following years. New York is too big a market to ignore and my feeling is that sooner or later, New York, San Francisco and Vancouver will all have major Asian music festivals.

Part of the success of the event was just having great partners like Tofu Records and Sony Music International. With their impressive stable of performers coupled with their marketing muscle, we felt that this first experiment was worth the risk of undertaking. The result was America's first JPOP arena concert.

DENNIS: *Were you impressed with the large turnout of JROCK fans?*

MIKE: The interesting twist to the music scene is the JROCK market. The fans for this genre are quite vocal and I think are a very good market to continue developing. These fans are remarkably loyal to their favorite bands and seem to be the most willing to cross between conventions and actual music concerts.

DENNIS: *Would PMX ever include Asian performers from other cultures as well as Asian American talent in the near future?*

MIKE: Our initial goal is to bring over the best elements of Asian pop culture. We are looking at tying in Asian American and Asian influenced artists into future Pacific Media Expos.

In the long term, as a member of the Asian American creative community, I would like to see PMX use its profits to offer grants to young artists in the Asian American creative community to help sponsor their projects. It's almost a crime that movies like "Better Luck Tomorrow" didn't get made due to lack of funding. Somebody has to promote the Asian American creative community and once we become more settled, we are willing to see if we can start to step into that role.

DENNIS: *Would PMX consider showing Asian American films in the near future?*

MIKE: As the Asian Cinema portion of the convention starts to mature, we would expand the breadth of films to include unreleased Asian films and additional Asian American works.

DENNIS: *What kind of vision do you have in store for the second event?*

MIKE: We've tested a few concepts to see what works and doesn't work. We've found that the older market isn't as interested in watching videos and we might start to tune for more interactive programming.

For music, we will still work on bring musicians from Japan, but we will probably scale it to have more performances by more performers in smaller venues. This reduces the complexity greatly. We've also seen that some concepts relating to fashion unexpectedly caught on well.

The role of cars will probably grow and we've received a lot of input on how much people loved the wrestling.

We are going to launch about three new ideas each year, with some of the plans for 2006 being fairly radical. We intend to break the mold that we first created 13 years ago with AnimeCon/Anime Expo.

The comments from Mike Tatsugawa definitely show a promising future for PMX.

As mentioned earlier, this year's PMX featured several awesome concerts but to look at the event as a whole, what they accomplished their first year was better than I expected.

I do feel that the scheduling conflict with other events may have hurt PMX's attendance.

This year, PMX had several events to compete with in terms of attracting the fans of Japanese pop culture. Fanime also had its music festival on a different day as PMX, but their event was held on the same weekend.

Also, the event was not too far off the date of the larger California anime con, Anime Expo, which may have hurt vendors this year at PMX who are used to a packed exhibit hall for a convention weekend.

Fortunately, PMX recently announced its date for next year's event to be held on Labor Day weekend which should resolve scheduling conflicts with other similar events.

I would definitely like to see more of a variety of panels and

workshops. There were many viewing rooms but not everyone comes to these type of events just to watch anime or movies.

We would like to see the karaoke room have the ability for attendees to sing a variety of music, other than Japanese. Unfortunately, karaoke staff was not equipped to handle other forms of karaoke media used by certain Asian cultures.

As for the video game room, it was one of the weakest video game rooms we have ever seen at an event.

I believe that PMX should always include anime and cosplay at future events because many of these fans have a high interest in Japanese and Asian pop culture. These fans will definitely provide the buying power that vendors want to see at the exhibit hall.

The inclusion of wrestling, import cars and non-anime vendors was definitely nice to see at the exhibit hall.

The future of PMX is indeed promising and the challenge to promote the event to different crowds will always be a challenge but it is possible.

The potential of PMX is exciting and we hope to see more entertainers from Asia as well as a broad promotion of Asian pop culture, not just Japanese in the near future.

We also hope for PMX to work with Asian organizations, APA groups, publications and entertainers in the near future because the potential of this event is too high to ignore. ■

nt2099 EVENT COVERAGE

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT PMX?

nt2099 talks to PMX attendees about their thoughts of the event and find out if they thought of Pacific Media Expo as an Asian pop culture event or an anime event? We asked the following questions:

What was your highlight and what was your low point of PMX?

Was PMX an Asian pop culture event or an anime event?

What would you like to see more at Pacific Media Expo?



IZZY

> My highlight for PMX was the Psycho le Cemu concert, if it wasn't for them, I don't think PMX would have been as memorable. The low point would be on how disorganized the times were for the anime/movie showings, everything was random so we never got to see any specific movies.

> With the concerts being the main events, I felt it was more of an Asian pop culture event.

> I would love to see more Japanese singers and rock bands, especially my favorite group, Asian Kung-Fu Generation.

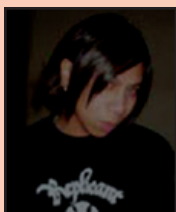


CHERYLL

> Highlight: Psycho le Cemu! Anything and everything that was related to them that weekend was a highlight. Low point: If it wasn't for PLC, I would've been extremely bored that entire weekend. Programming seemed to be a little on the light side... and the huge amount of space for the con made the whole thing feel extremely empty.

> I'd say it was a pretty good mix of both. From my experience, the programming they offered was a good blend of music and typical anime con stuff. I wouldn't necessarily say it was an "Asian" pop culture event, but more of a "Japanese" pop culture one.

> More diversity in programming. If they want to continue creating an event that brings talent from overseas, then they shouldn't try to limit themselves with just Japanese artists/guests. There's talent all over Asia that's waiting to be discovered and the audience that PMX caters to would be open to it, I think. However, for a first year con I think they did well and I expect nothing but bigger and better things for them as they continue to grow.



EDWIN

> The best parts of the convention would be seeing T.M.Revolution, Nami Tamaki and Psycho le Cemu. A low point about PMX is that this event does not live up to its name. I was really hoping to see more Asian pop culture. It just seemed like the typical anime convention with a few concerts.

> Even though this event did promote Asian pop culture, it felt more like an anime event.

> For PMX I would definitely like to see more artists. I would like to see more of an Asian entertainment crowd alongside the already overwhelming anime crowd.



JENNIFER

> The highlight of the convention for me was attending the T.M.Revolution and Psycho le Cemu concerts and events. T.M.Revolution has been my favorite artist for the past five years and Psycho le Cemu was my favorite band. Being able to attend their concerts and events were amazing experiences.

The low points of PMX for me were schedule conflicts. Also, PLC's management was very friendly towards the fans, but I felt TMR's was not. I politely asked if I could give Nishikawa Takanori a hug and even though he stood up to give me a hug, his translator snapped at me and told me it wasn't allowed. I'm not sure if that person is really exactly related to PMX staff though.

> Yes, I do feel that PMX was more of an Asian pop culture event than an anime event. Even though I am a big fan of anime I was very pleased to attend a different type of event. I definitely had the most fun at PMX than any other anime convention I've ever attended. Having TMR and PLC there was wonderful. I hope they have them back again in the future.

> I would definitely love to see T.M.Revolution and Psycho le Cemu again as well as other Asian artists and bands.

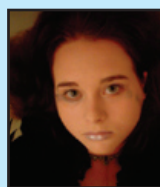


TALAYA

> My favorite part of the convention was the Psycho le Cemu concerts and getting my picture taken with them. My lowest point of PMX was waiting in line. Though sitting in a line for six hours you do meet a lot of cool people and make up lovely games!

> I'd say more Asian pop culture, and that's cool. I'm getting more into Japanese music now instead of anime. It was by far my favorite convention I've been to.

> The dealer's hall was pretty empty, so more dealers please!



ELISA

> The concerts were definitely the high point for me. PMX seemed to have a lot of disorganization problems, so that was a minus.

> An Asian pop culture event.

> Better organization and tighter-run schedule. Also, make sure that staff knows what is going on because there was a lack of communication that I noticed.



EDDIE

> Highlight was the PLC concert, definitely. Low point had to be the Bandai panel being canceled due to a lack of attendees.

> Pop culture event. The anime showcases were weak and few.

> More movies and merchants.

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MOCHI

- > My highlight was PLC and getting pics with the PLC kids. Ooooh yah! My low point was blowing all my money when I promised myself not to. Well, after all its a highlight.
- > It seemed like PMX was giving Japanese pop culture, which includes anime, the majority of attention, other than the rest of Asian culture. But, hey, I'm not complaining.
- > More J-rock!!!!



JEN

- > The two PLC concerts. Low point: Lack of the feeling of a convention. Many times it seemed as if we were just walking around the Hilton on some random day. PMX seemed very desolate of people. I went to Anime Singled Out and it was basically canceled since no one showed up.
- > I felt PMX was more of an Asian pop culture event because of the concerts and all the girls dressed up as gothic lolitas. There weren't as many anime cosplayers like at other conventions.
- > The same caliber of musical guests. More attendees. The video rooms to play what the schedule says they are playing. More dealers in the exhibit hall.



DAN

- > The PLC concerts were the high points. The constant disorganization were the ever going low points.
- > I thought PMX was more of a Asian pop culture than an anime event.
- > I would like to see more anime related events and better organization at Pacific Media Expo.



MEGUMI

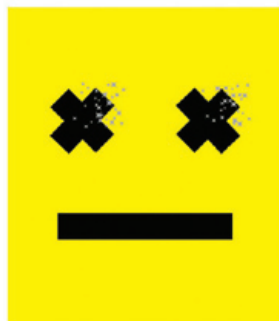
- > Friday night was my high point for PMX. I came to watch T.M.Revolution and Nami Tamaki and I was very impressed by how many people attended. It was very exciting! My low point was that there was not much to do on Sunday. It was so boring!
- > Definitely an Asian pop culture event. But I like what they are trying to do. I'm not an anime fan, so this kind of event, I enjoy much more.
- > I hope they will bring more music performers and have more events to go to. I don't want to watch videos, sit around or stay in my hotel room because there is nothing to do. They need to have more things happening throughout the day.

A J!-ENT PLUG

A J!-ENT SHOUT OUT! PROMO AD:

L'Arc~en~Ciel

SMILE!



6.29.04

For more information, please visit:
www.tofurecords.com

