

# ...Splurge

**J!-ENT HAS COVERED PUFFY AMIYUMI SINCE 1996 AND IN OUR LATEST INTERVIEW WITH PUFFYAMIYUMI, WE TALK ABOUT THEIR LATEST ALBUM "SPLURGE" AND CELEBRATING TEN YEARS WITH THE JAPANESE MUSIC DUO. BY DENNIS A. AMITH**

**PUFFY AMIYUMI.** It's hard to believe that it has been ten years since the duo exploded onto the music scene.

I look at my old post that I made on the J!-ENT mailing list describing my first time of watching the duo on television:

[May 7, 1996]

*I'm currently watching a Star Search-like show called "POP STOCK" which is filmed at the Nikko Hotel in Tokyo. Nagase Tomoya and Swing Out Sister are among the guests but there appears to be a new group featuring these two girls in jeans and t-shirts. Fun to watch and their song (Asia no Junshin) is definitely appealing. But I think they need a choreographer."*

Several weeks later, the duo (known as PUFFY in Japan) were performing on various music and variety shows. Even being parodied on the popular show "SMAPxSMAP" as SMAP members Masahiro Nakai and Shingo Katori copying the duo's dancing style and fashion as SMUFFY.

It didn't take long for PUFFY which consists of Yumi Yoshimura and Ami Onuki to become a household name. With hit after hit, the women had a special chemistry and a sound that was unique.

Their first CD single "Asia no Junshin" sold over a million copies and their singles that followed their first continued the trend.

The duo were appearing on commercials, magazine ads and were working with popular artist Rodney Greenlat (known to many people in the US for his characters in the PlayStation video game "Parappa the Rappa") for the covers of their CD singles.

The duo had a chance to star in their own drama special titled "PUFFY no Wild de Ikou: Born to be Wild" and then landing their own TV series "PA. PA.PA. PUFFY" a year later.

The way I saw their popularity, I saw it at the time where electronic and R&B music were all that you heard from Japan, PUFFY was the alternative.

While many singers were aligned by a mega-producer, had the choreography and dancers, creat-

ing the latest fashion trend in mini skirts and large boots (a.k.a. the "Amuraa" trend inspired by Namie Amuro), PUFFY was the anti-thesis of what was the norm of Japanese music.

Here are two beautiful women and here they were sporting t-shirts, blue jeans and sneakers. Their hair was wavy and puffy and they definitely were not dancers. Their look and their sound were different.

Being different was a catalyst to their popularity in Japan and also worldwide.

The group was gaining popularity outside of Japan as evident with their Mandarin version of another million-plus selling CD single "Kore ga Watashi no Ikiru Michi" and also a solo album which the women had a chance to experiment with different music genres.

But with the many hit songs that continued with their second album "JET", during a trip from Tokyo in 1999, during my morning perusal of "Space Shower TV" and VIBE (now known as MTV Japan), I was surprised to see the duo experiment with different music with their song "Puffy de Rumba".

And for those who asked how is it that these two women have survived the Japanese music industry for ten years. Personally, I believe that the two women reinvent themselves. They collaborate with well known names from Unicorn's Tamio Okuda, Jellyfish's Andy Sturmer, Pizzicato Five's KONISHI, Malcolm McLaren, Fantastic Plastic Machine and many, many more thus producing a different sound.

Like Madonna who can take on different musical challenges, Puffy AmiYumi does just that.

Not many Japanese music stars venture outside of the music they are known for. Some who have, have risked the challenge and have suffered from it.

The music sound of PUFFY within the past five years has matured and experimentation of different musical genres have been the key of longevity for the duo.

Ten years later, they are known worldwide with accomplishments both in Japan and the U.S. not seen since Japanese artist Kyu Sakamoto's Japanese song "Ue o Muite Aruko" (I'll Walk with My Head Up) was #1 for several weeks on Cashbox Magazine



***Puffy AmiYumi***

***Celebrating their  
10 Year Anniversary***

and Billboard Magazine back in the 60's.

Ten years later, the duo has an animated show titled "Hi! Hi! Puffy AmiYumi" on the Cartoon Network, merchandise and even video games based on their likeness. The duo even performed at the 2005 Macy's Thanksgiving Parade.

Yes, ten years later and the duo are singing more songs in English, performing at more concerts around the U.S. and collaborating with more talented musicians and to make things even more sweeter for their ten year anniversary, the group has released a new album titled "SPLURGE" from Tofu Records.

In this latest album, Puffy AmiYumi got to work with indie icons such as Jon Spencer of Blues Explosion fame, Dexter Holland of the Offspring and Butch Walker, writer-producer of Avril Lavigne and Pink.

And Puffy AmiYumi wouldn't be the same without power-pop genius Andy Sturmer (formerly of Jellyfish) and Japanese rock star Tamio Okuda (formerly of Unicorn and also co-wrote many of the duo's early hits).

So, with all the collaborations on this album, expect a variety of different genres from rock and blues and many more. If you have been a fan of the

duo's experimentation of music, you are going to love "SPLURGE".

With a mix of English and Japanese tracks, you go from the classic PUFFY sound of "Call Me What You Like" (and critical fans of their English songs will find it comforting that their English is much better in this album) and "Nice Buddy" to Dexter Holland injecting bouncy rock/ska to the song "Tokyo, I'm on My Way" to the awesome Jon Spencer rockabilly guitar style of "Go Baby Power Now" and "Radio Tokyo" which Butch Walker gives the group a Mott the Hoople-style influenced song.

A very well done and with the various music styles represented, gives fans a new refreshing look at the duo and the future of their music.

Ten years later, another album featuring familiar and yet different type of music but yet Puffy AmiYumi is still going strong.

In the past decade, we have had the pleasure of covering Puffy AmiYumi and interviewing them at different stages of their career.

Recently, J!-ENT had the opportunity to interview Yumi and Ami during their U.S. tour in the East Coast regarding their new album "SPLURGE" and their tenth year anniversary.



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**“ We’ve been blessed with people that we’ve worked with. Musicians, staff members, fans and we wouldn’t have been here if it wasn’t for them.”**



**With this year being the tenth year anniversary since the debut of PUFFY in Japan, how would you sum up these incredible ten years as a music duo?**

**YUMI:** We've been blessed with people that we've worked with. Musicians, staff members, fans and we wouldn't have been here if it wasn't for them.

**Did you imagine 10 years ago that PUFFY AmiYumi would be like who you are today?**

**AMI:** No, not at all.

**When the song "Puffy De Rumba" was released in 1998, it was clearly a start of a different musical take on PUFFY AMIYUMI's music. I believe this is where PUFFY began to attract more listeners (outside of Japan) who listen to Japanese music because of your willingness to try something different musically. Many Japanese artists usually do not try to change their style of music but for PUFFY AMIYUMI, you have experimented with different types of music as a duo. Do you both enjoy doing different types of music versus the musical style you did on your first two albums?**

**AMI:** "Anything goes" is our style. It's free style. Tamio (Okuda) let us try various musical genres and "Puffy De Rumba" was created by a composer that Tamio trusts and we enjoyed making this single. We will keep exploring new style and I think that's Puffy AmiYumi is all about.

**Is it difficult for you to try different styles?**

**YUMI:** We never considered it as a challenge. I think it's the same for everyone but you would get bored if you keep doing the same thing for 10 years. We try different styles simply because it's fun. It's nothing strategic.

**With the upcoming release of "SPLURGE" in the United States from Tofu Records, this album is highly experimental in terms of PUFFY AMI-**

**YUMI utilizing different musical genres from rockabilly, classic, to rock and a little of the original PUFFY AMIYUMI style of music and more. How was the experience for you both in creating this album?**

**AMI:** I feel very fortunate that our favorite artists have agreed to provide songs for this album. They're not just composers but artists who could sing themselves and have established their own style. As is the case with Tamio and Andy Sturmer, we were determined to make the songs that those artists create for us, sound as our own, and it was a challenge. But when we completed the album, we felt such great sense of accomplishment and that lead to confidence. I think we've made an album that's hard for us to live up to. (aughing)

**In "SPLURGE", you both are singing more English songs. Do you both feel comfortable now, singing in English?**

**YUMI:** Obviously, it is harder than singing in Japanese. Paying close attention to the pronunciation is not an easy thing to do but when we listen to our finished songs, we felt that all our efforts were rewarded. We will keep singing English songs as long as we release music in America, so people can understand what we sing about. But if I answer this question simply, it's hard. (laugh)

**In "SPLURGE" you had the opportunity to work with Jon Spencer, Butch Walker and Dexter Holland. How was that experience?**



**YUMI:** I was really happy that those artists provided their music to us. I was also impressed how nice those people are. They're all really sweet and down-to-earth. I'm convinced that that is why they're loved by so many people. The music they gave us are great and that motivated us to make a good album. The song they made for us is so good that we felt a bit nervous about making sure that the finished songs are great. But everybody told us that the finished songs we great, so we felt relieved.

**I remember in one of your older concert videos "TOUR! PUFFY! TOUR!", I believe it was Ami who sung a little sample from the OFFSPRING. Knowing that you are a fan of their music, it must have been a blast to work with him in "TOKYO, IM ON MY WAY".**

**How was that experience?**

**AMI:** They're my favorite band so of course, I was very happy.

**Now how was that experience of being the first Japanese music artists to perform on the "Macy's Parade" in New York on National TV?**

**AMI:** I was surprised that there were so many people out there!

**YUMI:** Honestly, since there is no Japanese equivalent to Thanksgiving, it made me wonder.

**AMI:** Everybody in America watches the parade on TV, right? I think that parade gave us a great opportunity for us to introduce our music but I felt a bit embarrassed that so many people were watching us. (laughing)

**We have seen you perform a variety of times in the United States and it was very surreal to see young children at your concert last year. I always wondered how you felt about seeing a younger audience who enjoy your animated series "HI! HI! PUFFY AMIYUMI" at your concerts?**

**YUMI:** I'm very happy about the fact that those children wanted to see the

## j!-ent **Totally Hot** selection!

real us, not just animated us. What we hope for from the cartoon show is that it gives a chance to people to listen to our music and they like it. So in that sense, I feel very happy to see children at our show because of the cartoon. I did worry about the live sound being too loud for them, though.

**You've experimented with many musical genres but what other musical genres would you both like to experiment with in future albums? Possibly reggae, electronic, drum n bass, etc?**

**AMI:** There is no particular genre that we have in mind right now. Since we're a duo, we will keep experimenting with sound that we both are interested in. Whatever the genre of

a songs is, it would be Puffy AmiYumi sound once our voices are on it.

**Before we go, I felt it was very cool that you worked with Okuda Tamio in "SPLURGE". He's been there for you in the beginning and he continues to work with you today. But one thing I have always wanted to ask you both, will we ever see a PUFFY AMIYUMI rendition of Okuda's UNICORN Songs "Daimeiwaku", "Peke Peke" or "I'M A LOSER"?**

**YUMI:** We've actually done it before. It's a song of UNICORN called "Yuki ga Furu Machi". We both respect Tamio so much and sing his song at concert sometime.

**Any last words for the J-ENT fans?**

**AMI:** I'm very happy with our new

album and that it gets released in our 10th anniversary year. So I hope you will pick it up and listen to it. Also, if we come to perform near you, please come and post your comments on [puffyamiyumi.com](http://puffyamiyumi.com)

**YUMI:** We're only playing 8 shows on this tour but we will come perform in different places as long as you support us. So until then, please listen to Splurge and wait for us to come! ■

*For more information on Puffy AmiYumi, please visit their Website at [www.puffy-amiyumi.com](http://www.puffy-amiyumi.com) and to get more information on their latest album "SPLURGE" from Tofu Records, please visit [www.tofurecords.com](http://www.tofurecords.com).*



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