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2013 event coverage

PART 1
78

ANIME EXPO 2013

PART 2
465

EVENT PICTORIALS FOR 2013:

• WONDERCON 2013 (ANAHEIM, CA)
• JAPAN NITE 2013 (San Francisco, CA)
• SAKURA CON 2013 (SEATTLE, WASHINGTON)
• TOKYO ANIME FAIR (JAPAN)
• ANIME CONTENTS EXPO (JAPAN)
• SILENT FILM SCREENING @ FOX THEATER (HANFORD, CA)
• PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA)
• BOTCON 2013 (SAN DIEGO, CA)
• CLASH AT CLAIREMONT 7 (SAN DIEGO, CA)
• FRESNO OBON FESTIVAL (FRESNO, CA)
• ANIME EXPO 2013 (LOS ANGELES, CA)
• SAN DIEGO COMIC CON 2013 (SAN DIEGO)
• J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 (SF, CA)
• ANI-JAM 2013 (FRESNO, CA)
• D23 EXPO 2013 (ANAHEIM, CA)
• RAMEN YOKOCHO FEST (TORRANCE, CA)
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FOR THIS SPECIAL EDITION, ALL OF OUR ADS & LINKS ARE CLICKABLE! AND WILL TAKE YOU TO THEIR WEBSITE!

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They rocked Los Angeles at Anime Expo 2013 and now J!-ENT interviews PORNO GRAFFITI’s Akihito Okano and Haruichi Shindo about their US debut!

HOME MADE KAZOKU makes their return to the U.S. with a performance in Baltimore for Otakon and to celebrate their 10-Year anniversary. J!-ENT was there to interview the trio.

He’s one of the top VPOP music artists and with a new album release for October, J!-ENT goes one-on-one with AQ Entertainment’s Andy Quach.

With a new EP and balancing a music career in Japan but also releasing English covers in the U.S., J!-ENT interviews Kylee about life, college and music.

He has composed hit songs for AKB48 and many other artists. J!-ENT interviews musician Hiroshi Uesugi.

They had one of the biggest music turnouts for their concert performance at Seattle’s Sakura Con 2013 and J!-ENT was there to interview Aoi Eir and Luna Haruna.

Q&A with Ayumi Fujimura, voice actress of Audrey Burre/Mineva Lao Zabi in the popular hit animated series “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)”

Q&A with PSYCHO-PASS Executive Director Katsuyuki Motohiro, Director Naoyoshi Shiotani and producer Joji Wada.

Q&A with anime studio BONES co-founder Toshihiro Kawamoto.

Q&A with Reki Kawahara, the creator of “Sword Art Online” and “Accel World”.

Neon Alley celebrated its first year anniversary and they have big plans for their second year. J!-ENT interviews Neon Alley Programming Director, Kevin Kleinrock.

Featuring interviews with cosplayers: Shae from France, a followup interview with USA Musume’s Kimi Pasamonte and interview with Katnip from the Philippines.
STAFF & CONTRIBUTORS
FOR THIS SPECIAL FEATURE

DENNIS A. AMITH
WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER
Multiple Articles

DENNIS A. AMITH is the Editor-in-Chief and founder of entertainment and pop culture website J!-ENT. He is also the owner of the multi-disciplinary communications and design business, nt2099 media and entertainment. Graduating from California State University, Fresno with an educational background in mass communications and journalism, Dennis A. Amith has interviewed and featured many talents and industry professionals all over the world and is recognized for promoting the entertainment and pop culture of different countries to an International audience. Currently residing in California.

GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER
Multiple Articles

GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO joined J!-ENT back in 1995. Realm is a jack of all trades. He has covered film and photograph events photographing celebrities, sports figures and models. Realm graduated from the Art Institute of California-San Diego, receiving his Bachelor of Science degree from the Media Arts & Animation program. Realm is also a proud member of the “Knights of the West Coast” car club and the security firm, “Kuya Protection”. When not on the road attending events, Realm likes to spend time with his girlfriend, family, watch movies, draw, play basketball, read, listen to records and dance. Realm currently resides in San Diego, CA.

MICHELLE TYMON
WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER/TRANSLATOR
Multiple Articles

MICHELLE TYMON, has contributed to J!-ENT since 1996 as a translator of Japanese music lyrics and her promotion of Johnny’s Jimusho groups. Michelle’s work includes her involvement as a translator, writer and photographer for J!-ENT. Michelle has interviewed bands, talents and industry professionals. Michelle currently runs media operations in the Northwest region of the US for J!-ENT and is a graduate of the University of Washington. Michelle grew up with both cultures, living in Japan and the US. She grew up watching Japanese TV shows and anime and listening to Japanese music and has been a fan of Japanese entertainment all her life. Other than translating, her interests include writing, art, music, and entertainment. Michelle’s dream is to one day live in Japan.

EDWIN “BANGZ” MACARAEG
WRITER
“THE DISAMBIGUATION OF ASIAN-AMERICAN CULTURE”

EDWIN “BANGZ” MACARAEG has been an entertainment writer for J-ENT since 1997. Edwin’s coverage with the group has ranged from EVO fighting game championships to meeting and greeting popular artists throughout Asian pop culture. Despite his interests in writing, Edwin is an oil painter who inspires to become an art instructor someday. He lives in Clovis, California and loves to spend time with his family.

ANGELO DELOS REYES
PHOTOGRAPHER
Event Coverage

ANGELO DELOS REYES joined the J!-ENT family in 2004 and in the Philippines, was a professional concert and celebrity photographer and also a personal photographer for the country’s top celebrities. Angelo now resides in San Francisco working in the tech industry and is a freelance photographer.

ADAM CORREIA
WRITER
Video Game Reviews

ADAM CORREIA joined J!-ENT as a video game reviewer in 2013. Adam is a college student majoring in Computer Programming and is an avid MMORPG player. He is an enthusiastic LoL and WoW player. Adam currently resides in California.

KEN ERIC CHEN
WRITER
Cosplay Interview

KEN ERIC CHEN (TRAN) joined J!-ENT in 2013. He graduated from UC Santa Barbara with a degree in Asian Studies and was a staff writer for Giant Robot magazine. In his spare time, Ken enjoys collecting action figures, listening to live music, keeping up with Japanese idol culture, and assembling outfits for cosplaying.
NERGENE ARQUELADA
PHOTOGRAPHER
“A Look Back”

NERGENE ARQUELADA joined J!-ENT as a photographer in 2004. He is known to many as the anime convention and cosplay photographer “Super No. 1”. Nergene has photographed bands, talents and industry professionals for J!-ENT. He is an avid fan of Japanese and Korean music and dramas. Nergene graduated from the University of Southern California with a degree in Aerospace Engineering. In his spare time, he enjoys exercising at the gym and attending local cultural festivals. He currently lives in the Los Angeles area.

DEREK ORCHARD
PHOTOGRAPHER
“Ani-Jam 2013 Pictorial”

DEREK ORCHARD is featured for the first time on J!-ENT with his photos from ANI-JAM 2012. Derek is a photographer from the Central Valley in California. After studying Mass communication in journalism at Cal State University in Fresno, he graduated with a degree in Computer Arts, Combining his love of art, computers and photography. When he is not running his family owned ranch you might find him shooting pictures at San Diego Comic Con, WonderCon and Ani-Jam to name a few. Derek is always looking to create an image with impact, bringing to life thoughts and ideas that were only a dream before.

ANTONIO AIROSO
PHOTOGRAPHER
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure/Event Coverage

ANTONIO AIROSO is the president and owner of the Fresno-based anime convention ANI-JAM and a man passionate about Japanese culture. “Antonio’s Otaku Adventure” is a special contribution for this J!-ENT special feature.

WYNNE IP
WRITER
INTERVIEWS/ARCHIVES

WYNNE IP joined the J!-ENT family in the summer of 2004 and has contributed as an interviewer and a writer with a focus in Japanese rock music. Born in Hong Kong, Wynne has had classical piano training for 10 years until she was 16 years old. Having been exposed to J-rock for the first time in the late 90s while studying in the US, Wynne has since developed a love for this genre of music. Wynne graduated from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a Computer Science degree and is currently based in Los Angeles, CA.

MIMI KO
PHOTOGRAPHER
ARCHIVES

MIMI KO first joined J!-ENT in 2006, where she found the perfect opportunity to combine her photography with her passion for J-rock. An editorial and portrait photographer, Mimi’s work was recently selected for Group Show 23 of the Humble Arts Foundation, and the 14th Juried Exhibition at the Griffin Museum of Photography. Originally from Hong Kong, she currently lives and works in New York City.

GARLAND GEE
WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER
Best Memories

GARLAND GEE has contributed to J!-ENT from 1999 to 2006. His work included words and pictures, covering the subjects of movies and music. Garland graduated from California State University of Fresno with a degree in Mass Communication and Journalism. He is formerly a copy-editor and page designer for numerous Fresno Bee and Los Angeles Times publications. Garland has also coordinated the music events for Pacific Media Expo for the past 8 years.
J•POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2014
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The J-POP SUMMIT Festival is a large Japanese pop culture event held every summer since 2009 in San Francisco, CA. Come and checkout the latest on J-POP music, fashion, film, art, games, anime, food and more!

J-POP.COM

Photo: Japanese fashion icon KYARY PAMYU PAMYU at Union Square x J-POP LIVE 2013
Photograph by Terrence Taylor
FROM THE EDITOR

It's hard to believe that J!-ENT is celebrating its 20th Year Anniversary.

I have had the opportunity to grow with J!-ENT when it first started as the Neo-Tokyo 2099 BBS and when it first went online via the Internet.

Of course, a lot has changed since J!-ENT first started. Back in 1993, the BBS covered various niche entertainment. Coverage which included Japanese pop culture, sci-fi and Euro demos, but our focus at the time was the coverage of J-Pop, anime and manga. We were one of the few press sites at the time covering the event.

In 1996, J!-ENT became an actual website and quickly became one of the major Asian entertainment news sites in English. We collaborated with Bonsai's J-Pop Page, managed various J-Pop and Japanese drama mailing lists.

During my college years, I was the Editor-in-Chief for Asian Pacific Review and during my tenure, we would not only receive recognition from college Asian American publications nationwide, I was presented an award that year for my work. But how it would affect J!-ENT was that it opened my eyes to other Asian cultures and as J!-ENT was Japanese-centric, it would now become more about Asian pop culture and by 1999, as major publications were merging with major Asian portals. We would become part of AsianConnections.com at one point.

But the experience I received from APR was a blessing as my coverage on campus would expose me to music I would have never known. I was able to watch Japanese programming via Japanese video rental stores, my Korean friends introduced me to S.E.S., H.O.T. and Turbo. My Chinese friends introduced by to Faye Wong, Leslie Cheung, Sandy Lam and my Filipino friends were introducing me to Eraserheads and other rock music.

So, musically, I was getting introduced to a lot of great music from different countries and because of that, it eventually led me to discover music from other non-Asian countries.

As for interviews, back in the ’90s, it began with an interview with artist Akemi Takada. Best known for her illustrations for “Kimagure Orange Road” and “Maison Ikkoku”, by the mid-to-late ’90s, I went from coverage of anime, to interviewing a young Filipino comedian named Rex Navarrete, groups like Kai and Pinay, for actors, I was interviewing Asians who starred in major Hollywood films, such as John Cho who just had his first starring role in “American Pie” and would later become part of the “Harold and Kumar” and the recent “Star Trek” films. Interviews with Chef Martin Yan, Amy Hill, Margaret Cho, Michelle Krusiec, Jason Tobin, to name a few.

And as the years passed, J!-ENT eventually grew in terms of news coverage. Our hardwork eventually has led our staff to cover many events around the country and the world. Things were looking up for J!-ENT until the economy went south in 2008, not just in America but worldwide. Many companies we worked with in the US and Asia had shut down. We saw advertising go down and for the first time, I really felt the uncertainty of where J!-ENT was going to be.

And it didn’t help that a lot publications that we loved, also began to stop putting out magazines.

But there was one thing that we were recognized for continually and that is our appreciation of different cultures and sure enough, we were asked by major companies if we were interested in expanding our coverage and cover entertainment worldwide.

It was a hard decision, considering J!-ENT had worked so hard covering Asian entertainment and pop culture for so long. I also felt that it was time for us to grow. We have done what we did for so long, it would be good to accept change. And so in 2010, we made that change to cover entertainment worldwide. Although, there was one thing that I would not change and that was the fact that despite how much American, European or any entertainment we would cover around the world, our coverage of Asian entertainment and pop culture will still be part of J!-ENT.

We respect our roots of where we came from, how we started and so covering Asian entertainment and pop culture will still be part of our coverage. And since 1993, we haven’t stopped. We just evolved.

So, this 20th Year Anniversary special annual for J!-ENT is about remembering our roots. We remember our past, acknowledge the present but to show that as we covered Asian pop culture since 1993... We’re still doing it in 2013.

So, we thank those who have been part of this long journey and continue to support us. And for those of you who have discovered us recently... Welcome to the J!

DENNIS A. AMITH
This Fall, the eagerly anticipated conclusion of Hasbro Studios’ Emmy® Award-winning series will finally unleash in a special TRANSFORMERS PRIME original feature presentation for home entertainment. On October 8, 2013, Shout! Factory, in collaboration with Hasbro Studios, invite kids, families and loyal fans to further venture into the awe-inspiring world of TRANSFORMERS PRIME when TRANSFORMERS PRIME BEAST HUNTERS – PREDACONS RISING debuts as a special original feature on Blu-ray™+ DVD combo pack and on DVD.

Brimming with spectacular CG animation, a captivating storyline and unforgettable characters from the TRANSFORMERS PRIME lore, this 90-min epilogue to the final season delivers entertaining cinematic adventure the whole family will enjoy. Wrapping up the series that chronicled the epic battle between the DECEPTICONS and the AUTOBOTS, the Blu-ray+DVD combo pack and DVD edition contain insightful bonus content, taking viewers behind-the-scenes. Available in stores everywhere, TRANSFORMERS PRIME BEAST HUNTERS – PREDACONS RISING is an essential home entertainment collection for TRANSFORMERS fans of all ages. The deluxe Blu-ray+DVD combo pack is priced to own with a suggested retail price of $24.97; and $16.97 for the DVD.

TRANSFORMERS PRIME BEAST HUNTERS – PREDACONS RISING Synopsis:
A resurrected UNICRON has taken over the now-lifeless body of MEGATRON to seek vengeance on the AUTOBOTS and ultimately, the destruction of Cybertron. This formidable enemy forces an unlikely alliance between the AUTOBOTS, DECEPTICONS, PREDAKING and two new PREDACONS, who come together in an epic battle to help protect their newly restored planet.

Hey there, True Believers! The Topps Company and Stan Lee’s Comikaze Expo are teaming up to bring MARS ATTACKS to Los Angeles! Topps, setting up shop at Stan Lee’s Comikaze Expo for the first time, will bring an exclusive MARS ATTACKS trading card featuring Stan Lee himself facing off against their iconic Martian invader! Limited to just 2500 cards and fully painted by Joe Jusko, the card entitled “Stan Strikes!” will be given away FREE on a first-come-first-served basis and available ONLY at Comikaze!

“In 1962 when Mars Attacks was making its mark on the world of trading cards, Stan and his stable of sensational superhero stories were transforming the landscape of comic books,” said Topps’ Adam Levine. “I can't think of any better match-up than these two pop culture icons to face off in the most outrageous, out-of-this-world trading card crossover we’ve ever seen!”

Topps will be on hand at Stan Lee’s Comikaze this Nov 1-3 to promote the release of Mars Attacks: Invasion, the modern revival of the classic card series and the first all-new story based MARS ATTACKS card series in more than half a century! The set boasts all-new art by some of the most renowned illustrators in the industry, including Jusko, Earl Norem, Glen Orbik, Greg Staples, Alex Horley, Sanjulian, Dan Brereton and many more! A limited edition print featuring Joe Jusko’s stunning painting will also be available for sale at the Topps booth, signed by the artist, while supplies last!

For more information on Comikaze, Stan Lee’s Comic, Sci-Fi and Horror Convention, visit www.comikazeexpo.com

For more information on Mars Attacks, visit www.facebook.com/MarsAttacks

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Disney's heartwarming family comedy, “PLANES,” revved up with high-flying action and adventure, lands in homes and mass retailers nationwide on November 19th. This endearing underdog story about a crop dusting plane named Dusty with sky-high dreams touches down on Blu-ray, DVD, Digital HD and On-Demand featuring a cargo hold full of exciting bonus features. Guaranteeing hours of fun, “PLANES” is the perfect gift for “ladies and gentle-planes” of all ages this holiday season.

Directed by Klay Hall (“King of the Hill,” “The Simpsons”), produced by Traci Balthazor-Flynn (“Return to Never Land,” “Bambi II,” “The Little Mermaid: Ariel’s Beginning”) and written by Jeffrey M. Howard (“Tinker Bell,” “Tinker Bell and the Great Fairy Rescue”), “PLANES” flew to the top of the U.S. box office this summer, holding altitude as the #1 family movie in America four weekends in a row.

“PLANES” is propelled by a star-studded voice cast that includes Dane Cook (“Louie,” “My Best Friend’s Girl,” “Dan in Real Life”) as Dusty, Stacy Keach (“The Bourne Legacy,” “Nebraska”) as Navy Corsair Skipper, Teri Hatcher (ABC’s “Desperate Housewives,” “Coraline”) as say-it-like-it-is mechanic Dottie, Julia Louis-Dreyfus (“Veep,” “The New Adventures of Old Christine,” “Seinfeld”) as Rochelle, Priyanka Chopra (“Barfi!”) as Ishani, John Cleese (Monty Python, “A Fish Called Wanda”) as Bulldog, Carlos Alazraqui (James Garcia on Comedy Central’s “Reno 911”) as El Chupacabra, Roger Craig Smith (Captain America in Disney XD’s “Marvel’s Avengers Assemble,” voice of Sonic The Hedgehog in “Wreck-It Ralph”) as the world champion racer Ripslinger, Val Kilmer (“Batman Forever,” “Top Gun”) as Bravo and Anthony Edwards (TV’s “ER,” “Top Gun”) as Echo.

On November 19th, “PLANES” will be available as a Blu-ray 3D Combo Pack (Blu-ray 3D + Blu-ray + DVD + Digital Copy), a Blu-ray Combo Pack (Blu-ray + DVD + Digital Copy), a DVD (DVD + Digital Copy), Digital HD and On-Demand.International), will Executive Produce. Roven produced the original film.

Terry Matalas & Travis Fickett are represented by Manager Brian Lutz.

Syfy is greenlighting “12 Monkeys”, a drama series based on the 1995 Universal Pictures film directed by Terry Gilliam, to pilot. The 60-minute cast-contingent pilot is being produced by Universal Cable Productions and Atlas Entertainment, producer of the original Bruce Willis-Brad Pitt theatrical.

Based on the classic hit film, “12 Monkeys” follows the journey of a time traveler from the post-apocalyptic future who appears in present day on a mission to locate and eradicate the source of a deadly plague that will eventually decimate the human race.

Production is set to begin in November with Terry Matalas & Travis Fickett (Terra Nova, Nikita), who wrote the pilot script, serving as Co-Executive Producers. Atlas Entertainment’s Charles Roven (American Hustle, Man of Steel, The Dark Knight Trilogy) and Richard Suckle (American Hustle, The International), will Executive Produce. Roven produced the original film.

Terry Matalas & Travis Fickett are represented by Manager Brian Lutz.
Ken Liu’s short story, “Mono no Aware,” collected in the anthology THE FUTURE IS JAPANESE, has won the 2013 Hugo Award for Best Short Story!

Haikasoru is first imprint in the U.S. dedicated to offering some of the most compelling contemporary Japanese science fiction and fantasy in translation for English-speaking audiences.

“I’m very, very grateful to the voters who have conferred this honor on me,” says author Ken Liu. “I wrote ‘Mono no aware’ because I loved the characters and the ideas that motivated them, and I’m glad to see these resonated with readers.”

“We are thrilled Ken Liu’s story, Mono no Aware, won the Hugo Award,” says Masumi Washington, Haikasoru Editor-in-Chief. “Succinctly illustrating the Japanese concept of mono no aware through the eyes of Hiroto, a man who was just a child when the world ended, the story is a wonderful introduction to this talented author. We invite readers to explore it along with a dozen other fantastic science fiction, fantasy and cyberpunk tales that are contained in THE FUTURE IS JAPANESE.”

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This October, Robot Chicken returns to Blu-ray™ and DVD in all of its stop-motion – and Emmy® Award-winning – glory in the latest release from Adult Swim. Robot Chicken Season 6! The top-rated, animated television series from co-creators Seth Green and Matthew Senreich continues to bring pop-culture parodies to life in the modern take on the variety/sketch show format that has become its trademark. Featuring all 20 episodes from the series’ latest season on Adult Swim, the Robot Chicken Season 6 Blu-ray and DVD boasts a treasure trove of behind-the-scenes footage and insider-access content – enough to satiate any fan of the series, Adult Swim, and pop culture. It will be available on Blu-ray and DVD on October 8, 2013 for the suggested retail price of $39.98 and $29.98, respectively.

Emmy® Award-Winning Stop-Motion Parodies Are Back in the New Adult Swim Blu-ray™ and DVD

Robot Chicken Season 6

Available October 8, Animated Series Lampoons Pop Culture Icons on Blu-ray and DVD in Bonus Feature-Heavy Home Video Release
**IP MAN: THE FINAL FIGHT**

The Martial Arts Action Drama

Debuts on Blu-ray™ and DVD

November 12th

The legendary teacher and Wing Chun grandmaster returns to the screen for the action-packed martial arts drama **IP MAN: THE FINAL FIGHT**, available on Blu-ray™ and DVD November 12th from Well Go USA Entertainment.

The film depicts a realistic account of Ip Man’s later life in Hong Kong as he struggles against the vicissitudes of life: his pursuit of a romance with a young singer after his wife’s death (against the wishes of his disciples); his relationship with his elder son; and his thoughts on Bruce Lee, who would become his most celebrated student.

Directed by Herman Yau (The Legend Is Born: Ip Man), **IP MAN: THE FINAL FIGHT** stars Anthony Wong (White Vengeance, Infernal Affairs), Eric Tsang (Infernal Affairs), Jordan Chan (White Vengeance), Gillian Chung (The Midas Touch), newcomer Marvel Chow, Anita Yuen (Thunderbolt), Xiong Xin-xin (Shaolin, Tai Chi Zero) and Wong Cho-lam (Beauty and the Seven Beasts). Bonus materials include a “Making of” featurette and interviews with the cast and crew.

**DEAD IN TOMBSTONE**

**AVAILABLE OCTOBER 22, 2013 ON BLU-RAY™ COMBO PACK WITH DVD & DIGITAL INCLUDING ULTRAVIOLET AND ON DEMAND FROM UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME ENTERTAINMENT**

A ruthless outlaw returns from beyond the grave to avenge his own murder in **Dead in Tombstone**. The latest in Universal Studios Home Entertainment’s groundbreaking DVD Originals™ series, **Dead in Tombstone** features a star-studded cast including Danny Trejo (Machete, “Sons of Anarchy”), Anthony Michael Hall (The Dark Knight, “Warehouse 13”), Dina Meyer (the Saw franchise, Piranha, DragonHeart) and Oscar® nominee Mickey Rourke (The Wrestler, Iron Man 2). **Dead in Tombstone** will be available on early Digital October 8, 2013 as well as on Blu-ray™ Combo Pack with Digital including UltraViolet™, on DVD and On Demand on October 22, 2013, from Universal 1440 Entertainment, a production entity of Universal Studios Home Entertainment. Includes unrated version.

Straddling the thin line between life and death, **Dead in Tombstone** is a fiery tale of greed, revenge and atonement set in a Gold Rush boomtown populated by thugs, drunks and unlikely heroes. **DVD Originals™** veteran Roel Reine (The Marine 2, Death Race 2, Scorpion King 3) directs from a script by Shane Kuhn and Brandon Cowles (Scorpion King 3).
BREAKING BAD: THE COMPLETE SERIES set arrives on Blu-ray November 26th

The Ultimate Breaking Bad Experience Comes to Blu-ray Nov. 26
Collector’s Edition Full Series Set Features an All-New, Two-Hour Documentary and More Than 55 Hours of Special Features in a Collectible Replica Barrel with Commemorative Memorabilia from Creator Vince Gilligan

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment cooks up a full batch on Nov. 26 when BREAKING BAD: THE COMPLETE SERIES comes to Blu-ray™ in its entirety. One of the most explosive series ever to air on television, the 16-disc set is this year’s must-have gift for the holiday season, complete with all 62 episodes and more than 55 hours of special features. Starring three-time Emmy® winner Bryan Cranston (Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series) alongside two-time Emmy® winner Aaron Paul (Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series), the critically acclaimed drama from Sony Pictures Television boasts one of television’s most radical storylines, giving viewers a glimpse into the life of how far a man might go in order to take care of the ones he loves. Bryan Cranston is still turning in a transformative, unimpeachable performance as Walt, who remains one of the greatest dramatic creations ever to grace our TV screens, hails USA Today’s Robert Bianco.

Fans who are addicted to the series and itching for another hit can now indulge in more than two-hours of never-before-seen footage in a ground-breaking series documentary exclusively in the box set, which comes packaged in a collectible replica barrel representing part of Walter White’s dark legacy. The all-new documentary chronicles the making of the final season, from filming the first table read to the very last day on set and everything in between, including Bryan Cranston inviting the camera in to his Albuquerque living room for the first reading of the final script with Aaron Paul. The box set also contains all bonus features from previously released seasons (including retail exclusives formerly only available in select stores), a Los Pollos Hermanos apron and a collectible booklet with a letter from Gilligan, as well as a commemorative Breaking Bad challenge coin designed and created by Gilligan exclusively for this set as a token of appreciation to fans for making the Breaking Bad journey.

In addition to releasing the complete set on Blu-ray, SPHE will release BREAKING BAD: THE FINAL SEASON on both Blu-ray and DVD with UltraViolet on Nov. 26. The final season includes the series final eight episodes and is loaded with special features, including all-new featurettes, cast and crew commentaries, deleted scenes and more. Episodes include: Blood Money, Buried, Confessions, Rabid Dog, Tohajiilee, Ozymandias, Granite State and Felina.
Composer Lorne Balfe (Salinger, Assassins Creed III video game) took the Spanish crowd by storm! On September 7th he headlined the Playfest concert with a 30 minute set of his music including a sneak peak at the music for the upcoming release of BEYOND: Two Souls, and his now award winning music for Assassin's Creed III. After the performance, the organizers of the festival presented Balfe with the prestigious GoldSpirit Award for Best Video Game Soundtrack 2012.

“I am so proud to have won the GoldSpirit Award for Assassin's Creed III,” said Balfe. “It means especially a lot to have been given the award by the fans and to have the game's music recognized at such a fantastic festival as Playfest with a very special concert was a wonderful experience. The score to Assassin's Creed has been a fantastic part of my life and so it was a wonderful achievement for the music to be recognized.”

Balfe is not only a highly sought-after video game composer -- he is a Grammy award winning and BAFTA nominated film composer from Inverness, Scotland. Lorne is known for composing the scores to the Dreamworks' animation “Megamind” and Ubisof's “Assassin's Creed III.” Balfe earned his first Emmy nomination for the BBC and Sundance Channel mini-series Restless.

Balfe’s recent solo projects have kept him hard at work in the UK, composing for “Ironclad”, “The Sweeney”, and the upcoming films, “Not Another Happy Ending” (starring Karen Gillian of Doctor Who), “Side by Side”, the documentary “Salinger”, and “The Frozen Ground”, starring John Cusack, Nicolas Cage and Vanessa Hudgens. In collaboration with composer, Rachel Portman, Lorne has just completed the music for 10×10's feature documentary, Girl Rising, directed by Academy Award nominee, Richard E. Robbins that features narration by actresses such as Meryl Streep and Cate Blanchett.

Balfe’s ability to travel between the two worlds of film and video games is a perfect fit for the upcoming PlayStation® 3 release, BEYOND: Two Souls, which Playfest audience were able to hear a sneak preview of at the September 7th concert. The game and soundtrack will be available on October 8, 2013.

For more information, visit: www.lornebalfe.com

SYFY ACQUIRES NEW ORIGINAL WEREWOLF DRAMA SERIES “BITTEN” FROM ENTERTAINMENT ONE

A new breed of werewolves is coming to Syfy with the acquisition of the first season of the new Canadian scripted series Bitten from leading independent studio Entertainment One (eOne).

Season 1 of “Bitten”, consisting of 13 one-hour episodes, will premiere on Syfy in 2014.

Based on the New York Times best-selling Women of the Other-world novels by Kelley Armstrong, Bitten is an emotionally charged supernatural thriller starring Laura Vandervoort (Smallville, Ted) as Elena Michaels, the lone female werewolf in existence.

Desperate to escape both a world she never wanted to be part of and the man who turned her into a werewolf, Elena (Vandervoort) has abandoned her Pack and taken refuge in a new city. There, she works as a photographer and hides her werewolf existence from her new boyfriend. When bodies start turning up in her Pack's backyard, Elena finds herself back at Stonehaven, the werewolves’ ancestral domain. Torn between two worlds and two loves, she quickly realizes that – when push comes to shove – she’ll stop at nothing to defend her Pack.

“Bitten is a fantastic blend of supernatural action, intense thrills, smouldering drama and a tortured love story that artfully adapts characters beloved for more than a decade by millions of readers around the world,” said Chris Regina, Senior Vice President, Programming, Syfy. “It’s an excellent complement to our roster of programming and we cannot wait to share Elena, her Pack and their stories with the Syfy audience.”

Bitten also stars Greg Bryk (A History Of Violence, Rookie Blue) as werewolf Pack “Alpha” Jeremy Danvers, Greyston Holt (Alcatraz, Durham County) as Elena’s werewolf ex-boyfriend Clayton Danvers, and Paul Greene (The Client List, Wicked Wicked Games) as Elena’s current beau, Philip McAdams.
Emergency Tiara embodies today’s cosmopolitan, sultry and glamorous woman. Classically trained in vocals and piano, she utilizes her musical talents to connect with and uplift her audience. She is the personification of “girl power” and is an experience that gives soulful pop/rock music proper residence in the 21st century. Emergency Tiara has a low-fi surfer vibe similar to Best Coast combined with the fashion and pop potency of Gwen Stefani. Her upcoming EP will be released on November 12. Check out Emergency Tiara’s singles “Downtown Boy” and “Poison” at: http://www.emergencytiaramusic.com/

From Roland Emmerich, director of Independence Day, The Day After Tomorrow and 2012, comes the hard-hitting, non-stop thrill ride WHITE HOUSE DOWN, available on Blu-ray Combo Pack, DVD and Digital on Nov. 5 from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. Two of Hollywood’s most sought-after actors, Channing Tatum (21 Jump Street, Magic Mike) and Academy Award® winner Jamie Foxx (Best Actor, Ray, 2005), team up in this explosive action thriller about a capitol policeman (Tatum) trying to protect the U.S. President (Foxx) during a hostile takeover of the White House. Featuring breathtaking action sequences and special effects, WHITE HOUSE DOWN also stars a top-notch supporting cast, including Maggie Gyllenhaal (The Dark Knight), Jason Clarke (Zero Dark Thirty), Richard Jenkins (Jack Reacher), Joey King (The Conjuring) and James Woods (Casino).

The Blu-ray disc comes with over an hour of bonus features, including an exclusive gag reel, along with nine exclusive making-of featurettes, taking audiences behind the scenes to see what it took to bring the high-adrenaline adventure to the big screen (more details below). Both the Blu-ray and DVD come with four additional behind-the-scenes featurettes (more details below), chronicling the on- and off-screen chemistry between the dynamic leading duo, their willingness and desire to train for and perform their own stunts, a look at Emmerich’s vision for the film and how he was able to achieve it, along with a spotlight on the star-studded supporting cast.

On September 10th, “Lumpia 2” was on its final day in Kickstarter and short $17,000 (needing a total of $50,000) in order to have “Lumpia 2”, the sequel to Patricio Ginelsa’s hit indie Filipino-American film made. In 22 minutes, over 300 backers donated to the Kickstarter fund and eventually raising over $52,000. Director Patricio Ginela wrote, “After all was said and done, 721 TOTAL LUMPIA LOVERS backed the project... LUMPIA 2 has been GREENLIT and more importantly, it was funded by YOU!”. The webcast was featured on YouTube when the group made their goal. You can view the webcast by clicking here.

© Image courtesy of Sony Pictures Home Entertainment
Sci-Fi, Action-Thriller from the Director of District 9

ELYSIUM

Starring Academy Award® Winner Matt Damon & Academy Award® Winner Jodie Foster

Available Dec. 17 on Blu-ray Combo Pack, DVD & Digital

Combo Pack includes Blu-ray, DVD & Digital HD UltraViolet

From Academy Award® nominated writer/director Neill Blomkamp (2010, Best Adapted Screenplay, District 9) comes the visionary sci-fi action thriller ELYSIUM, available on Blu-ray combo pack, DVD and digital HD UltraViolet on Dec. 17 from Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. The Blu-ray combo pack comes with hours of bonus materials, including an extended scene, and six behind-the-scenes featurettes that give an in-depth look at the making of the film, including the performances, production design, visual effects and the technology of ELYSIUM.

Synopsis: In the year 2154, two classes of people exist: the very wealthy, who live on a pristine man-made space station called Elysium, and the rest who live in an overpopulated, ruined Earth. Secretary Delacourt (Foster) will stop at nothing to preserve the luxurious lifestyle of the citizens of Elysium™ but that doesn’t stop the people of Earth from trying to get in by any means they can. Max (Damon) agrees to take on a life threatening mission, one that could bring equality these polarized worlds.

ELYSIUM was produced by Bill Block (District 9, Vanilla Sky), Neill Blomkamp, and Simon Kinberg (Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter, X-Men: First Class), and executive produced by Sue Baden-Powell (The Box, The Invention of Lying). The film’s run time is about 109 minutes and it has been rated R for strong, bloody violence and language throughout.

OKA! Based on the Memoir by Louis Sarno

Filmmaker Lavinia Currier’s Critically-Acclaimed Drama.

Starring Kris Marshall, Isaach De Bankole, Will Yun Lee and the Bayaka of Yandombe debuts on Digital, Blu-ray™ and DVD October 22nd

Based on the true story of Louis Sarno, an American ethnomusicologist who finds himself trying to record and preserve the music of the Bayaka Pygmies, the thoughtful drama OKA! debuts on Digital, Blu-ray™ and DVD October 22nd from Well Go USA Entertainment.

25 years ago, Sarno traveled from New Jersey to the forests of Central Africa to record the music of the Bayaka Pygmies. He fell in love with the people, their music, their lifestyle - and a local girl. Despite his failing health and the harsh realities of life in the village, he follows the Bayaka into the heart of the forest.

Directed by Lavinia Currier (Passion in the Desert, Heart of the Garden), the film stars Kris Marshall (Love Actually, Easy Virtue), Isaach De Bankole (Casino Royale, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly), Will Yun Lee (The Wolverine, Total Recall) and the Bayaka of Yandombe.

GET YOUR FILL OF CHILLS AND THRILLS DURING

ABC FAMILY’S 15TH ANNUAL “13 NIGHTS OF HALLOWEEN” HOLIDAY PROGRAMMING EVENT AIRING OCTOBER 19-31

Special Episode of “Pretty Little Liars” and the Series Premiere of “Ravenswood” to air on October 22

ABC Family scares up the 2013 “13 NIGHTS OF HALLOWEEN” celebration, with programming filled with scares and frights as you countdown for Halloween. The popular programming event, now in its 15th year, starting Saturday, October 19th, and concludes on Thursday, October 31st, features a brand new episode of “Pretty Little Liars” and the highly anticipated premiere of spinoff series “Ravenswood.” The stunt will also include the ABC Family feature film premiere of “Men in Black,” the network premiere of “Disney/Pixar’s Toy Story OF TERROR!,” and a ghoulish mix of Halloween-themed programming airing for the 13 nights leading up to Halloween.
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF SHAUN OF THE DEAD AND HOT FUZZ COMES AN OUTRAGEOUS NEW COMEDY ABOUT OLD FRIENDS, BEER . . . AND TOTAL ANNIHILATION

THE WORLD’S END
ON BLU-RAY™ COMBO PACK INCLUDING BLU-RAY™, DVD AND DIGITAL HD WITH ULTRAVIOLET™, DVD & ON DEMAND

FANS CAN ALSO TAKE HOME THE ULTIMATE THREE FLAVORS CORNETTO® TRILOGY COLLECTING SHAUN OF THE DEAD, HOT FUZZ and THE WORLD’S END

ALL AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 19th, 2013

Five middle-aged friends set out to relive a beer-fueled odyssey from their youth, and end up in an epic battle to save humankind in the outrageous comedy The World’s End, available on Blu-ray™ Combo Pack, including Blu-ray™, DVD and Digital HD with UltraViolet™, DVD and On Demand on November 19, 2013, from Universal Studios Home Entertainment. Now fans can truly watch The World’s End anywhere, on any device!

Directed by Edgar Wright (Shaun of the Dead, Hot Fuzz), The World’s End’s irresistible humor has made it the toast of film reviewers across the nation. Labeled “sheer comic perfection!” by Peter Travers of Rolling Stone and called “Hilarious!” by Entertainment Weekly’s Chris Nashawaty, The World’s End stars Simon Pegg (Star Trek Into Darkness, Paul) and Nick Frost (Snow White and the Huntsman, Paul). This is the third and final film in Wright’s The Ultimate Three Flavors Cornetto® Trilogy, which also features hits Shaun of the Dead and Hot Fuzz starring Pegg and Frost, available exclusively on Blu-ray™ November 19th.

The World’s End also stars Paddy Considine (The Bourne Ultimatum), Martin Freeman (The Hobbit), Eddie Marsan (Sherlock Holmes), and Rosamund Pike (Jack Reacher). The Blu-ray™ Combo Pack serves up more than two hours of bonus content, including a gag reel, feature commentary with Simon Pegg and Nick Frost, and an insider’s look at the making of the funniest reunion picture ever made.

Disney Channel’s Popular Animated TV Series “Gravity Falls Arrives” on Disney DVD October 15th

Over 2 Hours of Hilarious Adventures, Irreverent Humor and Unforgettable Characters. Plus Free Exclusive Mystery Book: Journal #3

In this animated adventure comedy riddled with mystery, twin brother and sister Dipper and Mabel are sent to spend their summer vacation with their great uncle. Upon arrival, their great uncle, also known as Grunkle Stan, enlists the siblings’ help in running The Mystery Shack, a fun tourist trap he owns that overcharges unsuspecting customers. While Dipper has a hard time getting used to his new surroundings, Mabel’s upbeat optimism comes in handy in her quest to find true love. When Dipper stumbles upon an elusive book, he discovers that it is the key to unlocking the town’s mysterious secrets, and the brother and sister duo soon realize they must rely on one another to navigate the unfamiliar place.
YouTube Fans Rock Out With First-Ever YouTube Music Awards

Lady Gaga, Eminem, and Arcade Fire to headline global event, created by YouTube and Spike Jonze, hosted by Jason Schwartzman and live-streamed around the world on YouTube

On Sunday, November 3rd, YouTube will host the first-ever YouTube Music Awards, a celebration of music honoring the artists and songs that YouTube fans have turned into global hits over the past year. Unlike traditional award shows, this event will present performances by Eminem, Lady Gaga and Arcade Fire alongside other top artists and some of YouTube's biggest stars including Lindsey Stirling and CDZA. The YouTube Music Awards will also feature musical events from Seoul, Moscow, London and Brazil, culminating in a live awards celebration at Pier 36 in New York City. Presented in partnership with Kia Motors Corporation, renowned filmmaker and music-video visionary Spike Jonze will be the creative director and acclaimed actor Jason Schwartzman will host the event with VICE Media and Sunset Lane acting as executive producers.

The YouTube Music Awards celebrate YouTube as the world’s go-to destination for music. From Eminem breaking records with “Love the Way You Lie” to Arcade Fire’s innovative “Here Comes the Night Time” variety special and Lady Gaga reinventing the music video, established artists are connecting with hundreds of millions of people on YouTube who now define what the world is listening to. To celebrate this global music community, the YouTube Music Awards will be powered by the fans themselves. In this first-of-its-kind event, nominations will be announced October 17 based on the videos that the world watched and shared over the past year, and judging will happen in full view as YouTube fans determine the songs and artists honored by sharing across social media.

“YouTube is home to both established artists and the next generation of musical talent,” said Danielle Tiedt, YouTube’s Vice President of Marketing. “From catalyzing careers and pop culture phenomena to propelling a song’s rise to #1 on Billboard’s Hot 100, our global community’s influence is felt across the music industry. We’re thrilled to celebrate our fans and the music they love with a whole new kind of awards show –the first-ever YouTube Music Awards –judged by you.”

“We’re setting out to create a night that’s all about making things and creativity in the spirit of everyone that uses YouTube,” said Spike Jonze, filmmaker and creative director of the YouTube Music Awards. “As well as giving out awards, we’ll be making live music videos. The whole night should feel like a YouTube video itself. We’re getting together a group of amazing artists and filmmakers to do this live – tune in to see what happens live.”

“The YouTube Music Awards will be a first in digital and music entertainment and Kia is proud to be the presenting sponsor of this event,” said Soon-Nam Lee, Vice President of Marketing, Kia Motors Corporation. “Digital media has played a pivotal role in how we connect with our customers, and with more consumers going online every day to engage with content, it is only natural that we lead the way with this YouTube sponsorship.”

MAN OF TAI CHI
IN THEATERS ON NOVEMBER 1st

Set in modern Beijing, MAN OF TAI CHI marks Keanu Reeves’ directorial debut. The film, also starring Reeves, follows the spiritual journey of a young martial artist (played by Tiger Chen) whose unparalleled Tai Chi skills land him in a highly lucrative underworld fight club. As the fights intensify, so does his will to survive.
SYFY’S SIXTH ANNUAL 31 DAYS OF HALLOWEEN SCARE-A-THON UNLEASHES 600 HOURS OF BLOODCURDLING PROGRAMMING

Ghost Hunters and Naked Vegas holiday episodes original horror movies zombie night, scarecrow and grave halloween

Syfy’s sixth annual 31 Days of Halloween will unleash nearly 600 hours of bloodcurdling programming throughout the entire month of October, led by Halloween-themed episodes of Ghost Hunters (October 30) and Naked Vegas (October 29), a Scare Tactics marathon (October 28) and a trio of original horror movies including Zombie Night (October 26) starring Darryl Hannah, Anthony Michael Hall and “Mrs. Partridge,” Shirley Jones!

31 Days of Halloween will include the Syfy premieres of Psychosis (October 5) and Night of the Demons (October 10), an evening of Nicholas Cage flicks – Drive Angry and Ghost Rider (October 27) – as well as marathons of the series Being Human (October 18), Friday the 13th: The Series (October 11), Ghost Whisperer (October 10) and Forever Knight (October 4).

Highlights of Syfy’s 31 Days of Halloween (all times ET/PT)

Despicable Me 2 on Blu-ray 12/10

On December 10th, Universal Studios Home Entertainment will release DESPICABLE ME 2, the $863 million worldwide box office phenomenon and the year’s #1 comedy, on Blu-ray™ and Blu-ray 3D™ Combo Packs, DVD and Digital HD including UltraViolet™! Bonus features include three all-new mini-movies featuring the mischievous but lovable Minions, deleted scenes, a closer look at the evil minions and much more!

TWILIGHT FOREVER: THE COMPLETE SAGA AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY DISC AND DVD ON NOVEMBER 5, 2013

Timed to celebrate the fifth anniversary of The Twilight Saga’s original theatrical debut, fans are invited to relive the immortal love story with Twilight Forever: The Complete Saga, available as a 10-disc Blu-ray (plus Digital HD UltraViolet) set and as a 12-disc DVD (plus Digital UltraViolet) set debuting November 5, 2013 from Summit Entertainment, a LIONSGATE company. Whether Team Edward or Team Jacob, the passion of Twilight fans hasn’t dissipated with the final film, continuing through fan fiction, pop culture and the constant engagement of over 166 million fans in Twilight’s online network. Twilight Forever: The Complete Saga encompasses all five films, over 2 hours of brand new exclusive content and over 10 hours of every special feature ever created for the multi-billion dollar franchise. Twilight Forever: The Complete Saga is the ultimate collector’s set, an immersive experience for every Twilight fan to recapture and relive the most epic romance of the century.
**E! AND WWE’S HIT SERIES “TOTAL DIVAS” RETURNS AT A NEW TIME ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17 AT 9PM WITH SIX ALL-NEW EPISODES**

Six new episodes of “Total Divas” debuts on Sunday, November 17, when season one of E!’s breakout hit series continues to take viewers inside the lives of the biggest female names in WWE: Nikki and Brie Bella (WWE Divas “The Bella Twins”), Nattie (WWE Diva “Natalya”), Trinity (WWE Diva “Naomi”), Ariane (WWE Diva “Cameron”) and WWE Divas-in-training Eva Marie and JoJo. The action will pick up with some newlywed drama for Nattie as her new husband has trouble seeing his wife in the ring with WWE Superstars for a living. Nikki will be moving in with John Cena, who just suffered an injury, and is surprised with a “co-habitation agreement,” while her twin sister Brie is having trouble finding common ground with her WWE Superstar boyfriend Daniel Bryan. Meanwhile, Ariane’s health issues escalate, which means her tag-team partner Trinity has the opportunity to prove she has what it takes to be a strong solo Diva. The newbies will continue their climb in the business of WWE with Eva Marie pushing buttons with every step she takes.

The first eight episodes of season one, which concluded in a dramatic mid-season finale on Sunday, September 15, averaged 875K A18-49 and 1.4 MM total viewers, making it E!’s most-watched freshman series since Summer 2011. The highly buzzed about new series also ranked as the #1 most social reality show on Sunday night. Season one continues Sunday, November 17 at 9 PM.

The mid-season finale of “Total Divas” on Sunday night showcased the rocky road to the alter for WWE Diva Nattie and her WWE Superstar husband Tyson Kidd. An appearance by a blast from Nattie’s past delayed the nuptials but after a few tears and heated exchanges, the duo tied the knot in front of their closest friends and family – with the exception of Nikki Bella who chose meeting her boyfriend John Cena’s family for the first time over the wedding of her close friend. The tension between the two Divas over wedding attendance was put to rest during the ‘Total Divas After Show’ when Cena apologized for making Nikki choose him over Nattie. Meanwhile, viewers also saw Trinity rush Ariane to the hospital for some inexplicable stomach issues and the feud between the WWE Divas in training, Eva Marie and JoJo, came to an all-time high that ended with the girls moving out of their new apartment. Their growing resentment opened the After Show when Eva Marie called out JoJo for being a “child” and claiming that taking care of a little girl was not what she signed up for. “Total Divas” second half of season one picks up on Sunday, November 17 at 9pm ET/PT on E! with six new episodes that will continue to explore the lives of the biggest female names in the WWE. Check out a sneak peek of what else to expect when E!’s “Total Divas” returns http://eonli.ne/18pVXTT

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**Kino Lorber Releases Andrew Bujalski’s Computer Chess on DVD**

Kino Lorber is proud to announce the DVD release of Computer Chess, the fourth film from acclaimed indie auteur Andrew Bujalski (Funny Ha Ha, Mutual Appreciation, Beeswax). Set during a weekend-long computer chess tournament circa 1980, Bujalski’s funny and observant comedy depicts a group of programmers engaged in a game of man vs. machine, and their chance collision with another subculture of aging New Agers in a touchy-feely encounter therapy workshop being held in the same hotel.

Now, this acclaimed comedy comes to DVD with a street date of November 5th, and a SRP of $29.95. The DVD comes packed with special features including an audio commentary by computer scientist Murray Campbell, the programmer of Deep Blue – the computer chess program that made history by defeating world champion chess player Garry Kasparov in 1997. Also included is a bonus commentary by “an enthusiastic stoner”, the crowdfunding plea video, a Sundance Film Festival promo, 4 Computer Chess reference games, trailers, and a tutorial on the 1969 Sony AVC-3260 video cameras which were used to shoot Computer Chess. To top it off, the DVD case comes packaged with a retro 1980s VHS-style cover design.

Computer Chess won the prestigious Alfred P. Sloan Award at the Sundance Film Festival, honoring a film whose theme is science or technology. It was also previously awarded a Tribeca Film Institute Sloan grant in 2012. The film had its international premiere at the Berlin Film Festival and was presented at the South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas before its national theatrical release by Kino Lorber this past summer.
TOKYO STATUS
Halloween Saturday October 26th

DOORS OPEN 8 PM
COVER $10 / $15 21+

COSTUME CONTEST
KARAOKE BATTLE
DANCE-OFF
VJS AND MORE!

RAY OF LOLITA DARK PRESENTS

TOKYO STATUS
Halloween Saturday October 26th

DIGJELLY Black Crystal & OTHER LIVE PERFORMANCES!

NIRVANA BAR & GRILL 314 E 1st ST, LOS ANGELES 90012
facebook.com/TokyoStatus facebook.com/NirvanaBarandGrill
Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You” was the #1 song of 1993.

Ace of Base’s “All That She Wants” dominated the charts in June 1993.

Depeche Mode’s album “Songs of Faith and Devotion” was their first album to reach #1 in the UK!

People were jamming to Janet Jackson’s “That’s the Way Love Goes” which dominated the charts in 1993.

Nirvana’s “In Utero” was the band’s third and final studio album. Certified platinum five times and an album that has sold 3.58 million copies.

"Jurassic Park" was the #1 film in the box office in 1993!

"Sleepless in Seattle was the #1 romantic comedy of 1993 and the #5 in box office earnings in 1993!"

1993 and your only way to go online was via BBS and your slow 2400 baud modem, unless you paid top dollar for a faster modem at the time.

“DOOM” from id Software showcased a first-person shooter with advanced 3D graphics for its time.

“Mortal Kombat” was released on video game consoles, meanwhile those downloading the PC demo had to wait nearly five hours for a 4MB file via a 2400 baud modem.

“Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers” from Sierra On-Line was a highly anticipated game in for PC gamers in 1993.

While “60 Minutes” was the #1 show on television, for non-news, “Roseanne” and “Home Improvement” were the top sitcom shows of 1993.

“Depeche Mode: Songs of Faith and Devotion” was their first album to reach #1 in the UK!
In June 1993, J!-ENT was first established on the NT2099 BBS. A niche alternative BBS originally created on VBBS 6.14 and later to Wildcat v4. The BBS covered Asian pop culture, Euro demoscene, sci fi, video games and more.

After loving issue #0 of "Animerica", the first issue of the magazine was released in March 1993 which featured "MS Gundam 0083", while Protoculture Addicts issue #1 featuring "Nausicaa" and anime soundtracks was released in January 1993. We did our best to buy each issue, if we could find them at a local magazine shop.

J!-ENT staff was watching "Police Story 3" starring Jackie Chan and Michelle Yeoh and any films featuring the two.

J!-ENT staff covered the Euro demoscene, "Assembly 93" featured competitions in demo and intros for the Amiga, PC and C64.

J!-ENT staff was learning Japanese and reading a lot of Mangajin that year!

Members of J!-ENT staff become fans of the "Power Rangers" show, especially J!-ENT staff member Gilbert "Realm" Aquino.

J!-ENT staff was heavily into Sierra OnLine games such as "Police Quest", "Space Quest", "Kings Quest" and "Leisure Suit Larry" games.

Graviton City BBS SysOp Drew Webber introduces J!-ENT staff to Mr. Children, Wands and B’z.

J!-ENT staff were shocked at seeing Batman’s back broken by Bane in “Batman” #497 and waiting forever for various “Deathmate” issues to arrive at the local comic book store. Seeing Magneto rip Wolverine’s adamantium out of his body and to read awesome stories coming from Valiant and Ultraverse!
nt2099 BBS was popular for hosting files such as the early anime zine, Anime Stuff.

The primary mode of transportation to events was the Surf Mobile.

Disposeable income went to funding Laser Disc purchases. Where one episode of an anime would cost $39.99 on LD. The first LD purchase was a Pioneer refurbished from "The Good Guys" store which turned out to be a lemon and carving our LD's, somehow. Which led us to upgrading to a Magnavox LD player.

J!-ENT purchases its first anime CD soundtrack "らんま1/2 音楽道場" (Ranma 1/2 Ongaku Doujou)

J!-ENT purchases its first J-Rock CD, LINDBERG's "Extra Flight 1"

The X-Men animated series was a big discussion topic on the nt2099 BBS.

J!-ENT discovers the Japanese drama series, "Asunaro Hakusho", which would lead to staff creating "The Asunaro Club", three years later.

J!-ENT's Dennis A. Amith would acquire hundreds of classic photos from a closing business of early Hollywood stills which would introduce him to silent and golden age of cinema.

J!-ENT staff was watching Season 6 of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" was coming to a close and the final two episodes were "Timescape" and "Descent".

A lot of anime cassettes were purchased at the time as well.

HOW J!-ENT LOOKED LIKE IN THE PAST...
“Your Most Memorable J!-ENT Experience Was...”

A few J!-ENT staff members chime in on their most memorable J!-ENT experience...

For me, it was meeting SUZIGO and Red Bacteria Vacuum. In 2008, after shooting photos of SUGIZO in concert, he asked if he can look and have the photos I took and next thing you know, I’m riding in a car with SUGIZO and other band members to a restaurant and eating with SUZIGO as he was going through the photos I took. Red Bacteria Vacuum was back in 2004 and they were awesome band that I enjoyed meeting!

— ANGELO DELOS REYES, J!-ENT PHOTOGRAPHER

My most memorable experience would probably be covering the “Taste of Chaos Tour” at the Long Beach Arena. Concert photography was always something that I wanted to do when I started to get into photography as a hobby. It’s always nice to get great bands to shoot and some great venues. It was amazing to shoot a concert in a sports arena, and in particular, the Long Beach Arena, which has been the venue for so many legendary concerts. Some of the biggest acts in rock history have played in this venue and it was a thrill to be able to shoot a show here.

It’s nice to have a very spacious photography pit where you can move around and try various things. There were some big name rock bands in this show, so I was in the photo pit with some of the best concert photographers in the business. It was a very easy concert to shoot because everybody in the photo pit was so respectful of others. From the photo pit, it’s amazing how loud the crowd can actually get when they’re all yelling and screaming. It was also incredibly hot!

— NERGENE ARQUELADA, J!-ENT PHOTOGRAPHER
The most memorable experience with J!-ENT for me would probably be going to the X-Japan concert in Hollywood. That was probably the best concert I've been to my whole life. Other great memories would include meeting Olivia Lufkin, T.M. Revolution and Nami Tamaki. Overall, I think the best thing would be traveling with our friends and meeting people who have the same interests.

— EDWIN “BANGZ” MACARAEG, J!-ENT WRITER

That's a hard one. I mean, each event has its moment you know? PMX with Olivia was awesome. I knew nothing of her yet it was an amazing experience to meet her. The San Diego Comic-Con only gets better each year, no knowing who I'll run into, so it varies. The funny thing about these annual shows is, what stays the same is the booth location of each vendor. The only thing that changes is the number of attendees and the guests.

— REALM AQUINO, J!-ENT PHOTOGRAPHER/WRITER

There have been many exciting things that I've gotten to experience since doing coverage for J!-ENT. But out of all of those experiences, my most memorable experience so far has to be the fact that in the six years I have done coverage for J!-ENT at Sakura-Con, I had the opportunity to meet and even interview so many of the seiyuu I had looked up to since I was a child. I've always been a seiyuu nerd, but since I've lived in Washington State for the past 20 years or so, I never thought I'd ever have the chance to see, let alone meet any of my favorite seiyuu.

I am eternally grateful that because J!-ENT has given me the opportunity to cover Sakura-Con the last few years, I have met seiyuu legends and even had the opportunity to sit down and interview a few of them. Over the past few years, I have met Yamaguchi Kappei, Sasaki Nozomu, Tanaka Mayumi, Mitsuishi Kotono, Morita Masakazu, Fujimura Ayumi and Horikawa Ryo. Not to mention, I've also gotten to interview various directors, producers and other amazing people who work in the anime industry.

As a whole, meeting so many of the seiyuu I love has been great, but if I had to choose one memory specifically, I'd have to say it might be the fact that I had asked Horikawa Ryo if I could do an interview with him. Usually, and understandably, the answer would have been no because they're usually extremely busy. But despite his busy schedule, he quickly agreed and I got to do a one-on-one interview with one of my favorite seiyuu of all time and he was extremely kind and overall a great person.

— MICHELLE TYMON, J!-ENT WRITER/ TRANSLATOR/ PHOTOGRAPHER

Meeting and interviewing Akko of My Little Lover.

— HIROSHI TAGAWA, J!-ENT (CHIEF OF OPERATIONS IN JAPAN)
I have a lot of memorable experiences but I think my favorite experience was working with the once famous velfarre club in Japan to do the final English feature in 2007 and to feature their early beginning up to their closing of the club. Because J!-ENT grew up with the music of TRF, MAX, Namie Amuro, globe, etc., I knew the influence of velfarre and it was an honor to be given the opportunity to work on that project. The second would be my first 500-page book on Tohoshinki back in 2008. Because the group took their time during their tour for the interview and it involved fans from 38 countries. It was the largest project that I have ever worked on and through this project, met amazing people all over the world. It was an awesome experience and in the end, it was very successful with over 3 million downloads to this day. And of course, my first interview for J!-ENT and that was with Akemi Takada back in 1994. It was also great to get the 15th anniversary interview with TRF, the 10th year and the final year interviews with m.o.v.e, the return of My Little Lover, interview with Toshinobu Kubota interview with Maki Goto and 15 years of interviewing with PUFFY multiple times. For American-based interviews, interviews or Q&A with Pixar staff or those involved in Disney films are also fantastic. But too many to list and every interview is special in their own way!

— DENNIS A. AMITH, J!-ENT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

My favorite J!-ENT moment was from 2006, when I was given the chance to interview the Japanese super star HYDE, who came to Anaheim, California for the first stop of his first U.S. tour. It was the opportunity of a life time, considering I was a huge fan of his solo music and the mega rock band L’Arc-en-Ciel, of which he was, and still is, the lead vocalist. During the interview, HYDE was genuine and responded carefully to my questions, contrary to his wild and explosive stage presence that I had in my mind. He was thoughtful with his answers, and I remember sharing a small laugh with him. The interview only lasted 30 minutes, but it was 30 minutes of my life that I would not easily forget.

— WYNNE IP, J!-ENT WRITER

It’s been an honor being a part of such a legendary endeavor. I wanna say that, by far, my most memorable experience thus far was getting the opportunity to see the backstage shenanigans of the numerous celebrities which we have been allowed to interact. One singer, Kumiko Kato, specifically comes to mind. It was a highlight both in my eyes and in hers to partake in a group interview with this budding newcomer. Her eyes seemed to glimmer and glow as we asked probing questions on how she is enjoying her sudden rise to fame. I treasure the hand signed CD single she personally handed to me. If she somehow sees this column, I want to wish her the absolutely very best. You continue to move me.

— PETER PASTOR, J!-ENT PHOTOGRAPHER
WATCH COPPELION
THE SAME DAY AS JAPAN
SIMULCAST STARTS OCTOBER 2ND

From the team that brought you A comes the new sci-fi action series COPPELION, a story of three youths who vow to save the lives of those forsaken by the rest of the world.

In the not-so-distant future, a catastrophic event has turned the old capital of Japan into a wasteland, forever changing the lives of its people. Decades later, three schoolgirls set foot into the now forsaken city. They are the Coppelions, genetically engineered humans created by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force to operate under the lethal conditions of the contaminated city. Trained since birth, the girls must use all of their skills and resources to carry out their one and only mission: to rescue those left behind.

WATCH THE SIMULCAST ON VIZANIME.COM AND HULU.COM WEDNESDAYS
For this latest installment of "AND WE SAW IT ON YouTube", IKE, BARRY, KIXI, REY and BANGZ must watch five random YouTube videos that we present to them and they must rate them from 1-5 (1=terrible, 5=great). Plus, they must give their opinions on each video.

To access the video, click on the YouTube video image.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Title</th>
<th>IKE</th>
<th>BARRY</th>
<th>KIXI</th>
<th>REY</th>
<th>BANGZ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NIGAHIGA - NARUTO THE MOVIE! (THE OFFICIAL FAKE TRAILER)</strong> NIGHIGA &amp; friends + YouTube Japan personalities parody &quot;Naruto&quot;.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Haha, the “fake” Naruto Trailer was entertaining, just not as much with NigaHiga’s voice as Naruto. I would like to see more of Rock Lee though. Overall, really cool." /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="I’m throwing money at my computer screen but nothing!" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Hilarious and so smartly done! I love that every single shot of the clip is a well done joke. The quality of the trailer is amazing too! I’ve only seen the beginning of Naruto, but all the jokes made sense to me. Serious props for him for making such a great video." /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="I can’t say I’ve ever gotten into Naruto but the trailer actually looks friggin’ topnotch. I’d probably watch it if it were a real movie." /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="What an awesome rendition of one of my favorite cartoons. The main character looks really good as Naruto even though he should wear blue contacts or something to make it even better. The video editing was quite awesome. If this was actually made into a real movie, it would be a hundred times better than &quot;Avatar: The Last Airbender&quot;." /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AKB48 PUCCHO COMMERCIAL</strong> AKB48’s most controversial commercial. So, controversial that a conservative group tried to block AKB48 from coming to perform in the U.S. because of it.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="I’m kinda mad that I can’t rate higher than 4. Need I say more?" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="I honesty can’t tell what they’re advertising but now I want one!" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="I love how different the reactions were to the boy vs girl groups, but overall only half the comments while they were watching the videos were interesting. The second half with the reviews was a lot better. They all had good input!" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="This was a bit uncomfortable." /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="What can be more cute than girls in their school uniforms? Japanese commercials like this are what makes their culture so interesting. The commercial seems to captivate its audience through exploitation of the fetish. Innocent and erotic at the same time. Would westerners ever put these things together in a Hollywood commercial? Probably, but not as deliberate." /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTUBERS REACT TO K-POP</strong> FINE BRO. are back with another video on YouTubers React to K-POP</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="“I need Google Translate”... The Youtubers reactions were really funny. The video would of gotten a better score but K-Pop was watched and it’s very ridiculous." /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Watch out! The K-Pop invasion is on the rise!" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="I love how different the reactions were to the boy vs girl groups, but overall only half the comments while they were watching the videos were interesting. The second half with the reviews was a lot better. They all had good input!" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="It’s fun to see people react to something they’re not normally accustomed to. But I thought this one went a little too long." /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="The “Where the Wild Things Are” cast quote is hilarious. Yes, it is every character in Final Fantasy and it is something like a video game. This is pretty much what Asian pop style is these days. I feel that most of the time, they notice how strange their style is. They did not fell anything to the music, which makes it mediocre in quality. I like the personalities of the watchers. They are pretty spot on when it comes to the politics of how Korean music is generated." /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Title</td>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Review</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>Jeremy Lin - You’ve Changed Bro!</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jeremy Lin with other YouTubers were fun to watch.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Megwin - Street Fighter II</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not sure what I really watched, but since I’m a Street Fighter fan, it was ok.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Taemi Throws an Amazing First Pitch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Again I can’t rate higher than a 5. Not as “curvy” as Shin Soo-ji’s pitch. But it will do!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insert meme here!</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not a bad effort, but he needs to put a little more into those special moves, lol!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure what I really watched, but since I’m a Street Fighter fan, it was ok.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fit, cute and does taekwondo? What a catch! The pitch wasn’t all too bad either!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m an NBA blogger so I appreciated this very much. Jeremy Lin has a good sense of humor about all of this.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interesting concept and super nostalgic! The awkwardness of the fight is what makes it good, but overall it’s weird because they’re fighting each other while they’re basically helping him too so it’s hard to follow who’s hurting who.</td>
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<td>I’ve seen many Street Fighter II video types but this one just didn’t do it for me. One “funny move” is one thing but throughout the video? Nah. Pass.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>This video being a news clip makes it’s pretty simple so an average rating. Her throw was very cool, and I probably would have been more interested if I could understand Korean <em>laugh</em>.</td>
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<td>One of the biggest things professional athletes have to go through is living up to expectations. I feel Jeremy Lin wanted to make this to express this a bit. It must be tough being one of the biggest Asian-American athletes in sports history. The overall video was very funny. The scene with Steve Nash was my favorite.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>That was sexy!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hilarious! Psycho Crusher ftw! I grew up playing Street Fighter since the 90’s. Recognized all the movements including the backwards dash.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Get a beautiful girl to go in front of a men’s spectator sport audience to do something insanely difficult with extreme talent. This is where I am supposed to be impressed right? Not really. I guess people are too easily entertained by the obvious.</td>
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SAKURA-CON

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Every month, Tune in Tokyo has been showcasing club events and rock showcases spotlighting J-Pop, K-Pop and Asian Rock music in the Los Angeles area. From club parties, concerts, fashion shows, convention appearances, retail and art openings and more. As the group prepares for a new direction for their business, J!-ENT recently interviewed TUNE IN TOKYO’s Greg A. Hignight, Del, Tora and Allyson Floyd.

Before we begin, I know the four of you are DJ’s. Can you please introduce yourselves and what you do for

Tune in Tokyo and what type of music you specialize in?


TORA: My name is Nhu also known as DJ Tora. I love spinning Japanese and Korean indie, rock, electro and pop.

ALLYSON: DJ Ally. I play mostly J-Pop and K-Pop, but sometimes might throw in a little J-Rock, Top 40 or techno remixes.
For our readers not aware of your role in Tune in Tokyo, can you please tell us your business model and is it Los Angeles-based or are plans to go national as well?

GREG: Tune in Tokyo is based in the Los Angeles area. We’re in a focal point for Japanese and Asian music in the US. So much begins here and flows out to the rest of the country, so it’s a good place to be. Tune in Tokyo originally began as a monthly dance party and we expanded to hosting concerts and showcases, fashion events, and providing promotional and production support for Japanese concert tours, TV productions, film screenings and other events. We have a team of four DJs—Del, Tora, Ally and myself. We’ve all been there since the beginning, and each have a different vibe to our sets. We all work collectively as deejays and promoters, with me and Del leading the projects.

DEL: We are a Global Pop night for the masses.

How long have each of you been in the business and when did you get your start?

DEL: I started as a rotating resident DJ at the legendary LA Brit/Pop Indie club Cafe Bleu. When the club closed – I continued with residencies at indie nights Club Trash and Shakermaker. Also worked behind the scenes as a promoter and event coordinator with dance/electronic music event promoters Club Giant and Pure Sounds. I also opened for The Killers when Club Giant threw their first downtown LA New Year’s Eve event in 2005.

GREG: My background is actually in corporate and cross-cultural communications, and I began deejaying and promoting around six years ago. I initially picked up experience working with my business partner and Tune in Tokyo co-founder Del Martin, who’s been a DJ and promoter in the LA Indie scene for over a decade. Prior to Tune in Tokyo, he threw a global Indie night called International Pop Conspiracy—it was also where started working with DJ Tora—and it laid the foundation for what we do now.

TORA: I’ve been spinning since 2007 with the International Pop Conspiracy group along with Greg and Del.

ALLYSON: I’m primarily an actor/writer, but met Greg at a mutual acquaintance’s party in 2008. We started talking because we were both interested in J-Pop/J-Rock music. He mentioned that he and Del were planning a J-Pop spin-off of their club event International Pop Conspiracy (IPC). Since I had such an extensive collection of Japanese popular music, he suggested that I come learn how to use the turntables and give being a DJ a shot! Five years later and counting, here we are.

Can you tell us about the name “Tune in Tokyo” and how did you come up with the name.

GREG: “Tune in Tokyo” sounded catchy. It’s a kitschy name, and also evokes a vintage “radio” idea.

With the name “Tune in Tokyo”, some may think that it’s a Japanese business but the fact is that you promote all forms of Asian pop culture?

GREG: When we started, our emphasis was split between J-Pop and J-Rock, but the influence of International Pop Conspiracy was already there, and our sound quickly went more global, particularly with the coming of the Hallyu (Korean Wave). DJ Tora’s early sets introduced a lot of K-Pop into the mix, and as the Hallyu movement grew in popularity we found ourselves including more. When it comes down to it, we’re a dance club and K-Pop’s where it’s at. The hip hop / electrohop foundation behind K-Pop and chore-
ography, etc.-- it’s easy to get the floor moving! But there’s something bigger going on here as well, our attendees and followers represent the truly Pan-Asian makeup and vibe of SoCal. The boundaries aren’t there. We’re in this wonderful place where different cultures come together through music, fashion and entertainment, and it’s this nexus that’s our playground. So, it’s lead to us working beyond our original model of being a Japanese music focused event. We do work with a number of Japanese companies, but we’ve got a diverse range of partners and clients.

**What kind of events have you had or artists have you promoted so far?**

**GREG:** There are three areas where our efforts are focused—promoting local/LA-based artists, supporting Indie artists from Japan looking to perform in the US, and providing assistance to major Japanese tours and entertainment events looking for “boots on the ground” in Southern California. We’ve supported shows including VAMPS, Miyavi, May’n, the Japan Nite tour, DJ SiSeN and JAM Project, collaborated with NHK World’s J-MELO and Tokyo Kawaii TV, in addition to running our own ongoing events showcasing many of the great Jrock-influenced and Asian-American LA-based rock and Indie bands here. We had a residency at Royal/T, the maid cafe and art gallery that was a focal point for the Japanese subculture scene from around 2008-2012, and it gave us the opportunity to host some really fun parties with themes and inspirations like video games, Lolita and Gal fashion, doll gatherings & meetups, Sukeban (girl boss movies), anime and more. In addition to promoting our own events, our DJ unit also books out for gigs. This has allowed us to work with conventions like PMX, Anime Expo and KCON, and other clients.

**ALLYSON:** We’ve had band nights promoting local artists with Asian origins or influence as well as the themed nights I mentioned before. My personal favorite events that we’ve had so far are our K-Pop nights and our holiday events with a Japanese flavor, such as “Gal-oween,” which celebrated the Gyaru fashion subculture. Convention dance events can also be a lot of fun!

**How many projects are you all working on any given time?**

**TORA:** I’m always researching for new music to spin, and to write about and share on NekoPOP.com and Jrock247.com. If I am not writing CD reviews, I also interview musicians on both music sites.

**ALLYSON:** As a group, we are always cooking up ideas for new events that are a step up or branch out from what we’ve done before. Individually, I think we also tend to look for opportunities that we can cross over with our TnT activities. As an actor, that I DJ Japanese and Korean music in general, it’s a fun fact that helps me to stand out, especially if someone turns out to be familiar with the subject. How many projects, though? It’s hard to put a number on it!

**GREG:** We’re usually involved in about 2-3 events a month, either our events that we’re producing and promoting, or projects we’re doing for external clients.

**What strategies do you employ for promotion for your events or music artists?**

**DEL:** Word of mouth, social media, media out/reach PR.

**GREG:** Social media plays a big role, although we back that up with print (posters and flyers) for select events, press releases too. We’re always looked at this world that we belong to as a definitive counter-culture with a lot of community-building going on—networking, inviting in photographers and journalists, bloggers, other promoters etc. We’re all big advocates of curating our shows—we promote the showcases as a package and then put our resources behind the bands, because we want them to benefit from having shared our stage—make new fans, connect with the other bands on the playbill, develop their fanbase. We’re averse to the model that you see in many live houses where a band takes the stage and then is quickly forgotten after their set. We want our attendees to know an artist before, during and after their performance.

**Which promotional mediums do you find to be the most effective for Tune in Tokyo? And who is your key demographic?**

**GREG:** Social media is definitely the most effective, particularly with a visual component, so we’ve always placed an emphasis on playbill-style flyer design. And these things change and evolve. We developed our initial following through MySpace—now its Facebook, twitter and tumblr. Our key demographic is around 18-25, from all walks of life. It’s people who love and are inspired by Asian entertainment—music, fashion, anime, gaming and also all things glam and counter-culture. We see a little bit of everybody at our events. It’s a creative and sometimes very punk rock
crowd.

DEL: Our demographic is constantly changing . . . because his or her tastes are constantly changing. At this very moment, our key customer is probably at home watching K-Pop videos online!

ALLYSON: Social media is the one that I personally see as having the most impact. Things get around online fast these days. As for the demographic, as Del said, it does always seems to be changing with the times. I think there is a lot of crossover between the people we started out with and the people we see at events now, but there are new people too. We used to get a lot of anime and J-Rock fans, but almost everyone seems to be enthusiastically into K-Pop now, including us! It was really interesting to observe that gradual transition over the last couple years. I don’t necessarily think people have fully lost their interest in those other areas, but K-Pop is the exciting thing that really draws in the crowds now.

Where would you like Tune in Tokyo to be five years from now?

DEL: At the forefront – bringing the best Global Pop, from Asia, Europe and parts beyond to LA and other cities around the world.

GREG: Our vision is to expand our services as event promoters and producers. I want to see a larger presence for Japanese and Asian music and entertainment here in the US, particularly in SoCal as its such a friendly and accommodating environment for it. And I want to continue to be behind the decks, being immersed in the music as DJ is incredibly rewarding, and I think it keeps me connected to the what motivates and interests our attendees, knowing what they’re listening to and want to hear.

What upcoming projects can you discuss or plug at this time?


GREG: We are launching a new monthly event, HEMISPHERE at Nirvana Bar & Grill on October 12th in Little Tokyo. It’s a dance party featuring the Tune in Tokyo DJs and a guest band—October features pop punk band Apocalipstick. Our sets will primarily be J-Pop and K-Pop, and we’ll folding in more world electro and Indie. The theme is “Global Music for the Masses”. What we’re doing here is creating and event that plays to the sensibilities of J-Pop and K-Pop fans, but also opens the door to people who may be curious about Asian music and would like to experience a sampling of the most catchy or interesting stuff going on right now. Expect dance and Indie from Europe, and other countries in Asia too. We’re also supporting TOKYO STATUS, a monthly rock showcase at the same venue, Nirvana, produced by our friends Lolita Dark, who are a really cool Japanese/American progressive and hard rock band.

Where can people go to look for more information about your company and events? And also, where people can follow each of you and your upcoming DJ events?

GREG: We’re on Facebook, tumblr and twitter – just look up TuneInTokyoClub. You can also follow each of our DJs – myself, Tora, Del and Ally, on twitter by clicking on our pics at TuneInTokyoClub.com. Our website also features a lot of great photos from previous events that people can check out.

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Casio Releases G-SHOCK New Era Collaboration Model

Casio Computer Co., Ltd., is celebrating the 30th anniversary of its G-SHOCK brand of shock-resistant watches in a third collaborative release with globally renowned headwear manufacturer New Era. The new limited-edition model, GA-110NE-9A also celebrates the deep heritage of performance synonymous with these iconic brands.

This second New Era collaboration with G-SHOCK exemplifies the long-standing performance ethos and athlete following of both heritage brands: 30 years for G-SHOCK and more than 90 years for New Era.

With a design based on the hot-selling GA-110 analog/digital model the New Era GA-110NE-9A pairs a resin watch band in G-SHOCK classic black with a gold accent watch case and band corresponding to the iconic black-and-gold sizing sticker of New Era’s classic 59Fifty cap. With functionality and durability in mind, this shock and water-resistant watch also sports the magnetic resist technology of G-SHOCK. To commemorate this significant collaboration, the watch’s collectable packaging has been designed in the form of a New Era cap.

Casio Releases New G-SHOCK RANGEMAN Tough Watches Designed to Help in Survival Situations

Casio Computer Co., Ltd., announced the release of its RANGEMAN watches, the latest addition to its G-SHOCK brand of shock-resistant watches. These tough watches are equipped with triple sensors whose rich functionality provides support for the wearer, even in survival situations.

The RANGEMAN GW-9400 watches are the latest additions to the “Master of G” series and provide functions, construction and operability designed to support the wearer, even in survival situations. The new watches incorporate triple sensors to measure compass bearing, altitude/atmospheric pressure, and temperature—a first for a G-SHOCK watch. Users can check compass bearing information in situations with limited visibility for orienting, or use barometric information to forecast sudden changes in weather, making these G-SHOCK watches reliable partners in situations where there is little room for error.

The RANGEMAN watches are equipped with a dedicated triple-sensor button that can start measurement with a single press. This is useful in situations where every second matters, such as rescue operations and ranger duties. Each sensor mode can be set to have a unique notification sound, so the user can confirm the triggered sensor mode in the dark, without looking at the watch face. The stopwatch and time stamp function, which records the time, can also be activated with one press of a button.

The case design features a newly developed cylinder structure to guard the sensor button, enhancing shock-resistance and making the button easier to press.
OH, SO KAWAII!

San Francisco’s J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL incorporated Harajuku Kawaii style to its event with an appearance by J-Pop artist Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, 6%DOKIDOKI’s Sebastian Masuda and the Harajuku Kawaii models.

By Dennis A. Amith

The J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 was host to several thousand people to Japantown in San Francisco on July 27 and 28th.

For its fifth year, organizers of the event brought Harajuku Kawaii culture to its event.

During a media event to showcase the Harajuku Kawaii Pop-Up Shop grand opening, introduced at the event were J-Pop star Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, 6%DOKIDOKI fashion designer Sebastian Masuda and the Harajuku Kawaii models.

For those who have not been to Japan, Harajuku is a district in Shibuya ward, Tokyo.

Since the 1970’s, the city was an attraction for the youth who loved fashion. While during the ‘80s, Takeshita Street, where most of the shops are located, became popular and by the ‘90s, many fashion stores would open in the area. Unlike other areas of Tokyo, it’s a city where people can dress anyway they want without scrutiny.

Where Ginza fashion is more upper class and Shibuya is more about trendy fashion, Harajuku is an area where you will find people sporting different types of fashion and literally anything goes.

One of the people who was instrumental in bringing the colorful fashion boom to Tokyo was Sebastian Masuda and his Harajuku Kawaii designs have caught on with people all over the world thanks to pop star Kyary Pamyu Pamyu who became an icon of Harajuku Kawaii culture and exposed it to people overseas in her “PONPONPON” music video. But even before Kyary Pamyu
Pamyu, as Tokyo fashion enthusiasts who loved Masuda's work thanks to “FRuIts” magazine.

Sebastian Masuda talked to the media about bringing Kawaii culture to America. Masuda said, “When we started, it was a niche market. Now that (Kawaii) has grown to a mass appeal, we wanted to move forward and try something new and convey this Kawaii culture to more and more people.”

Despite having traveled the world, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu explained to the press that this was her first time visiting San Francisco.

Kyary Pamyu Pamyu told the media, “As you already know, I have been to Los Angeles and New York on tour. This is my first time in San Francisco and I have yet still to walk around the city but I want to see the fans in San Francisco. And the message I want to make is that we have been working hard in putting together this dream project because we wanted to bring the experience of shopping in Harajuku to San Francisco.”

When discussing her reaction to her growing international fanbase, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu said, “I was quite surprised about the reaction overseas, because when we made those music videos, we were making them for the Japanese audience. But when it went up on YouTube, reaction was coming from all around the world. I was very surprised but it makes me very happy!”

After the press conference, many people who have waited in line to get into the Harajuku Kawaii pop-up store were excited about the merchandise inside the New People building.

Felicia Gonzalez of Cerritos, California traveled all the way north to the J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 with a group of her friends, dressed in their lolita outfits. A regular attendee to the event for the past three years, Felicia was excited for the event to see Kyary Pamyu Pamyu and the Kawaii models but also as a fan of Sebastian Masuda’s work.

Felicia told J!-ENT, “I love Kyary Pamyu Pamyu’s fashion sense. She inspires many people around the world and today, me and several of my friends are hoping to shop at the New People store. Each time we come here, we end up spending a lot but this is an event that me and my friends are really excited about! I’m still surprised that Kyary and Sebastian are here at this event! I hope I can meet them.”

For more information about Harajuku Kawaii culture, please visit:  
http://h-kawaii.jp/

For more information about J-Pop Summit Festival, please visit:  
http://www.j-pop.com/2013/
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A glimpse from our past J!-ENT Art Related Coverage

Pepita: Inoue meets Gaudi
By Takehiko Inoue

If anything, this book was born from Takehiko Inoue’s passion for Antonio Gaudi’s work and wanting to know how people viewed him? How did that affect his view of others? Who is Antonio Gaudi? And for an illustrator such as Inoue, the best way to convey and understand Gaudi’s work is by sketching his works one by one with his own hand, the best approach for him to take. I felt that Hiroshi Teshigahara’s “Antonio Gaudi” gave us a look at his appreciation of Gaudi’s work from the late ’50s and revisiting it in the ’80s but a perspective from a filmmaker. With “Pepita: Inoue meets Gaudi”, we have a Takehiko Inoue, a popular illustrator and a man who was captivated in the ’90s by Gaudi’s work but revisits Barcelona to be captivated once again by his work in 2011. And here we are in 2013, and I am amazed about what is included in this book. This is a passionately written book by Takehikou Inoue that does not necessarily focus on illustrations, but includes his illustrations along with photos and information from his experience in Barcelona. Overall, Takehiko Inoue’s “Pepita: Inoue meets Gaudi” is a fantastic book for anyone who appreciates Inoue’s work but also is passionate for Gaudi’s work as well. Beautiful illustrations, detailed information with photos and just an overall entertaining book of one man’s passion of Antonio Gaudi’s work. Highly recommended!

THE NEW YORKER: ON THE MONEY - The Economy in Cartoons 1925-2009
Introduction by Malcom Gladwell, Edited by Robert Mankoff

The New Yorker magazine has always been a source for well-written articles for over 80 years and but also, the publication has also been a great source to find the latest cartoons on various situations happening in American culture. May it be politics, religions and also the economy. From the economy starting out in 1925 and the Great Depression of 1929 to the recession of 2009, with “The New Yorker – On the Money: The Economy in Cartoons (1925-2009)”, you get over 250 pages of cartoons from various decades. Personally, one of the most intriguing parts of the book that I was look forward to was to see how the economy during the 1920’s was depicted in the publication. “The New Yorker – On the Money: The Economy in Cartoons (1925-2009)” is one of those books that is like a time capsule of how things are in America and how the public felt about the economy at that time. The book is quite entertaining and pictures are nice and large, text easy to read and for the most part, the book is straightforward in its showcase of cartoons from 1925-2009. Definitely recommended!

AVATARS AND ANTIHEROES: A GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ARTISTS
By Claudia Albertini, Kodansha International

When it comes to books covering contemporary art, there are a few things that I look for and that is variety. Showcasing various artists with different art styles and showcasing the various creativity of the individuals featured. I love to see many artwork pieces of that individual but also featured nice and big if possible. The other thing that I look for is how much research goes behind the artist’s background but also interviews are a plus as well. But how it’s written must be able to communicate to the reader as easily possible and not make one feel you are reading a thesis on art. Words selected for creativity is great but when used too much that it becomes cerebral, I tend to have a disdain for those art books. I can tell you right now that “AVATARS AND ANTIHEROES: A GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ARTISTS” is a well-written, enjoyable book and Claudia Albertini did a spectacular job in bringing these painters, photographers, sculptors, performance artists, video artists, fireworks artist from China and through good selection, really showcasing the beautiful and eye-catching artwork of these individuals. To see this artistic revolution in China and how some are communicating their artwork despite whatever restrictions they may have in the country. This book is definitely recommended!
Throughout time, the events in history are being told to us through different media from the textbooks in our classrooms to the monitors of our computer screens. In an attempt to form a better understanding of these events in our own individual histories, one must challenge the self in discovering a more sympathetic approach to these stories. Through the use of photographs, we may witness only one aspect of their experiences presented by the architect of the image.

As we become aware of these events, we immediately begin to feel or recreate emotions in our minds and develop a unique perception. Despite the amount of information we gain as we live throughout each day, I believe that there is a more personal and sympathetic interpretation, which may reappear through the creation of marks of each individual.
As an artist, I will use my ability to manipulate these images to create another layer of information which may redefine significant events imperative to the development of our history as a nation.

Through intuition we find ways to create experiences that enrich our understanding of these histories as well as the human psyche.

By creating this body of work I am calling "The Disambiguation of Asian-American History" , I discovered that there is a longing for discovering truths about certain events in history. In order to truly understand an event one must be free upon bias and understand the possibility of politically skewed interpretations.

We live in a progressive, fast-paced world of technology, where we can learn about a subject at almost any given time. Despite these luxuries of boundless information, there is something more fulfilling, and more human to hear and experience the story from the hearts of individuals.

With "The Disambiguation of Asian-American History" , I feel that I was not only able to recreate these events on canvas, but also re-establish an interpretation of the event in the imagination of the viewer.

-- Edwin Macaraeg

For booking or contact info:
edwinrm05@gmail.com
Image List:

1. *Vietnamization and Result* (detail A) Oil on Canvas 2012
2. *Vietnamization and Result* (detail B) Oil on Canvas 2012
3. Images from Solo Exhibition, October 25, 2012 (bottom right - bottom left)
4. *Chinese Fisherman in Monterey* (detail A) Oil on Canvas 2011
5. *Chinese Fisherman in Monterey* (detail B) Oil on Canvas 2011
6. Images from Solo Exhibition, October 25, 2012 (bottom right - bottom left)
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FOR THE SAKE OF ART

For animator/director ATSUKO ISHIZUKA (“Nana”, “Supernatural: The Animation”, “Sakura-so no Pet na Kanojo”), she was never interested in anime but more interested in music and graphic arts. But how did this artist end up in the anime industry and become employed by Studio Madhouse?

By Dennis A. Amith & Michelle Tymon

In Japan, most of the time when you meet an animator or director of anime series, those in the industry were big fans of anime or are very familiar with the genre.

For animator/director Atsuko Ishizuka, she is the opposite.

Studying at the Aichi Prefecture University of the Arts, Atsuko never watched anime and her interest was more in music and graphic arts. And how she would work in the anime industry was not for an interest in anime but for the sake of art.

While at art school, Ishizuka would create short animated films tied to music. One of these animated shorts titled “Gravitation” was featured in the 2005 Tehran International Short Film Festival which would capture the attention of NHK and Madhouse.

Madhouse would offer Atsuko a chance a job as a production assistant, while NHK would contact Atsuko to animated a video segment for their “Minna no Uta” program, which highlights upcoming independent animators and musicians. But because she was already employed by Madhouse, the studio allowed her to work with NHK and in the process, she created her first professional film titled “Tsuki no Waltz”.

This video would give attention to Atsuko Ishizuka and not long after working for Madhouse, getting her chance to work in the animated series such as “MONSTER”, her first assistant director role for “NANA” followed by “MapleStory”. Then episode director for “Top Secret ~The Revelation” and
“Moryo no Hako”. And in a few years, she was directing two episodes for “Aoi Bungaku”, co-directing for “Supernatural: The Animation Series” and in 2012-2013, her major directorial role for “Sakura-so no Pet na Kanojo”.

On April 1st, Atsuko Ishizuka attended her first anime convention in the U.S. in Seattle as a Guest of Honor for Sakura-Con 2013 to promote her work for “Supernatural: The Animation” and “Sakura-so no Pet na Kanojo” and took part in a media press conference.

The following is a transcript of the press conference with Atsuko Ishizuka which J!-ENT took part in.

J!-ENT: Before we discuss your career, let’s get to know you a little better. I read that you didn’t watch much anime growing up but you listened to music and were into design. Were there any designers that inspired you?

ATSUKO: I don’t have any awareness of any specific thing or artist that inspired me. I attended a technical school, so the things that I saw and heard there inspired me. So, I built experience overtime of things that I made myself and saw how they turned out.

Because of your different background in art and music, how does that education and background in graphic design affect animation. Especially styles and concepts since they are different from animation.

ATSUKO: When I entered the company, at first I thought it would be a weakness because of my unawareness of animation. But now that I have progressed in my career, I now consider that as a strength. So I can create these new experiences and adventures with a point of view of one who hasn’t had exposure to anime and I think it was best expressed in the “Tsuki no Waltz” short film that I did.

Building upon that, of all art forms, which is easier for you to work on now?

ATSUKO: I think the easiest for me is expression through animation. I did try my hand once in live action, but it turned out that the things that are in my head can only be realized through fantasy and pictures, so for me it’s drawing of what I am imagining is the easiest way for me to realize my vision and realize what I wanted to do. So, for me it’s not limited to a certain particular genre.

What challenges did you face in creating the “Aoi Bungaku” series for which you were director, writer and storyboard artist?

ATSUKO: She strived for vivid and clear images, not so much old looking but something fresh and vivid and clear for the images and backgrounds.

As you have never watched anime growing up, now that you work in the field, do you now have a favorite?

ATSUKO: For anime, even now that I am part of the industry, I don’t watch much anime. I do for study but not really for just a hobby. I personally think that there is a lot of people in the anime industry who don’t really watch much anime when they are creating it. At some point, you won’t be able to enjoy it for its own merits.

J!-ENT: In 2010, you had the opportunity to co-direct
“Supernatural: The Anime Series” with Shigeyuki Miya. Because the series was based on an American drama series, were there strict rules that you had to face on working on the anime adaptation and how was the experience to work on this anime version?

ATSUKO: For the “Supernatural the animation”, there was a great deal that I left to the scenario writer. In an overseas drama outside of Japan has very dense scripts and 45 minute plus running times. In Japan, we have only 20 minutes, so it was very difficult that the scenario writer faced many challenges. But I gave the person my full support and told them to do their best.

Being a person in the industry who wasn’t a fan before and even now of anime, are there any series or any franchise that you really want to work on now as an animator?

ATSUKO: “Doraemon”. Please promote that I would love to work on a theatrical version of “Doraemon”. I think it’s a great work with real vision!

Are there any works in classical literature that you want to work on?

ATSUKO: Works by Kogo Abe, to read his stories and novels, I would think those would be great visual works.

Since you don’t necessarily watch anime, do you read manga or friends and family who reads manga and suggest titles for you to work on? Or possibly reading manga that you get ideas in your head of wanting to create an anime?

ATSUKO: One in particular was Chie Shinohara’s “Sora wa Akai Kawa no Hotori: Anatolia Story”, which is a very unusual work that I would love to revisit some time.

J-ENT: Is this your first time as a guest at an anime convention in America? Now, that you are in America. Is there a certain food that you are excited to visit? Or certain shops that you are excited to visit?

ATSUKO: This is my first convention as everything up until now has been more interviews and events. This is a world that I can not enter, it’s all people who know much more about animation than me. I feel I should apologize, even though I am an animation director. As for food, in Seattle, clam chowder which was recommended by Takahiro Yoshimatsu (character designer and animation director for the “The Slayers” and “Future GPX Cyber Formula” films), who is a regular of Sakura-Con and he recommended to try the clam chowder. So, I tried the clam chowder and it was great!

You worked in a lot of horror genre and supernatural. Even your first “Minna no Uta” video was creepy but in a good way. Is that a genre you would like to continue working in?

ATSUKO: People ask me that a lot. Maybe it’s because of “Tsuki no Waltz” because it has that supernatural style to it. I do think it’s a genre that I’m good at. But it is something that when I pursue the supernatural world, it feels I am pursuing the art world almost. And it can be very exhausting. I feel that sometimes I am trying to wring something out of myself, that maybe I don’t have enough of. So, I want to continue doing it from time-to-time, but it’s very draining if you continue to do it. Recently, I started to think that maybe I should continue to pursue this kind of warmth which is only possible through anime with works such as “Pet Girl of Sakurasou” and in between pursue areas that I’m good at in regards to art and fantasy.

I really loved your episodes of “Aoi Bungaku”. Would you ever consider possibly doing “Yotsuya Kaidan” or classic kaidans?

ATSUKO: Japanese horror is very interesting. I think it would be interesting to try and express the fear and horror of Japanese classical horror through these visual works because there is no reality, it would be a challenge! Very good question…thank you!

What are your future goals as an animator?

ATSUKO: There is a lot of people that hoped that I would create supernatural worlds but I’m currently searching for my next project and I think it may diverge away from the art world, for kids or some other genre where I can use my strengths. So, one thing I am aware of recently is to not fully pull out from my own work. To really go into areas and not do things that I have done in the past.

How have you evolved as an animator from the beginning to where you are now. And what lessons have you learned?

ATSUKO: So, my career actually started not as an animator but part of production of Madhouse. It was actually
through “Tsuki no Waltz” which was through a personal connection at NHK, a producer, that I was able to realize and move on to my current direction. I’ve learned so much. So, when I was faced the challenge to work on a storyboard, I didn’t know how to approach it, so I took Masayuki Kojima’s storyboard, because he’s such a good creator and set it down right next to mind and created what he had done in the past. I really have built my experience by imitating other work of people but I always love drawing. So, I’ve always loved drawing and there is no special direction, so I’m good at drawing illustrations. The quickest shortcut is to imitate people.

**Has there been an artist that you imitate the most?**

**ATSUKO:** Not really so much of an artist but Morio Asaka, the director. I really find myself looking at his works. And also Aya Furuichi at that area for influence for storyboards. And it seems that from time to time and I see something that I need. So may it be photos or movies, I’ll gradually build experience from the things around me and once that new world has been created inside of me, that’s when I begin production. And so I will build up so much information so quickly that there will be movies that I will see that I don’t remember the title, the cast or director of the film but I will absorb it. And so there are things in films that I have to capture all this information, but I forget what the title is, so I will not be able to see it ever again. My folder is full of images and my PC is a total mess.

**Because you have all these ideas, if you have an unlimited budget and wanted to create something you really like, what message would you like to convey? It may be difficult to achieve, but it’s still back in your mind?**

**ATSUKO:** So, thinking about the viewer, I think that 90 minutes is long enough to do anything I want to do. Or a TV series that will go on forever and will be 30-minutes long. And as far as the content, the hero must be energetic and maybe a touch of fantasy, psychic powers or supernatural elements. And I think the story would be a hero who is helping people and following his own dream. A hero following the straight path. So, the viewer would protect him in his journey and grow along with him. So, this is something that I want to do, so I will do my best to create this original work. I don’t think it would be an expensive project or something flashy but something that is well loved for a long period of time. If you have high production values, then it will go 3D (laughing) and end up being a very popular and using actor that would be motion-captured and put real into a visual work. Another aspect of animation is that it’s not done in real time or live, but it would be great to create animation that feels like it’s live but in order to do that, it’s better not to expect too much from it. Animation from live painting maybe?

**Do you drink anything to get you through a deadline? What is the longest that you have not slept?**

**ATSUKO:** Caffeine. I continue to take in caffeine. After consuming your caffeine, then you don’t sleep, so you can stay there for days and not take any breaks. My maximum is three days, if I go more than three days, really strange images start to appear. Like with “Tsuki no Waltz”, that was a state I was in, so that’s why the world looked like that.

**If there was one word you can describe yourself, what word would that be?**

**ATSUKO:** I wonder… (thinking) I absolute have no idea. What am I really? I can say with conviction that I am an Earthling.’

**Your next anime can be “What am I?” and a character that takes a lot of caffeine.**

**ATSUKO:** Yeah, you can really make something unique and strange.

**Do you have any final words?**

**ATSUKO:** I will try to find myself through making a lot of new animations, so I thank you so much for your support!

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For more information on Atsuko Ishizuka or to see her work and illustrations, please visit her website at:

http://aa0xx.loliop.jp/web/
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for our second cover-age of the Blu-ray and DVD release of Disney/Pixar’s “UP”, this time J!-ENT and members of the media took part in a roundtable with “UP” story supervisor Ronnie del Carmen.

Ronnie joined Pixar Animation Studios back in 2000 working as a story supervisor for “Finding Nemo” and also did the production design for “One Man Band” (featured as an animated short with the “Cars” Blu-ray and DVD release).

Ronnie grew up in the Philippines and fell in love with animation at an early age. His first major work was a painter on the set of the film “Apocalypse Now”.

Ronnie attended the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines and earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Advertising and worked in print and television campaigns but knew his passion was for film making.

Ronnie moved to the United States in 1999 and served as the storyboard artist for “Batman: The Animated Series”, followed by becoming a story supervisor for DreamWorks.

Ronnie recently directed the animated short “Dug’s Special Mission” (included on the “UP” Blu-ray and DVD release).

Here is a transcript from our roundtable Q&A with Ronnie del Carmen.

**What interested you the most about Dug’s character?**

Ronnie del Carmen: Dug is such a sweet dog; his heart is out there. Because of that, he also gets taken advantage of. In a pack of soldier dogs, he is definitely out of place as the cuddly, lovable one. You empathize with him right away. Also, the voice characterization of Bob Peterson gives us that Dug persona that instantly makes you love the character.

With “Dug’s Special Mission” included with the upcoming Blu-ray/DVD release, would you like to see a sequel or some sort of storyline with Dug or perhaps even Russell and Dug, or Russell and the other dogs, in the future?

**Ronnie del Carmen:** I definitely would love to do the continuing stories of Dug. I had a scene in the original storyboard of...
Dug harkens back to classic comedians like Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton and Stan Laurel. How much of that was intentionally scripted, and how much of it did Bob Peterson bring to the performance?

Ronnie del Carmen: We love Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Stan Laurel movies. As animators we gravitate to communicating visually and through behavior, so this is where we love to play. Bob Peterson, as one of the writers of the movie, created and wrote most of Dug. We threw in other ideas from the crew here and there, but it was primarily Bob Peterson. During recording he would improvise and experiment, and a lot of that we used because, well, that man is funny! For “Dug’s Special Mission” I wrote the story and dialogue, and Bob Peterson came to the rescue, bringing his Dug performance and advice. I’m a lucky man.

What’s your favorite scene from “Up”?

Ronnie del Carmen: My favorite scenes were the silent ones: “Married Life,” where we tell the whole life story of Carl and Ellie, and the scene at the end of the second act where Carl sits in his empty house at Paradise Falls to leaf through Ellie’s adventure book. I tend to get the dramatic

Did you work on “Dug’s Special Mission” with Pete Docter and Bob Peterson?

Ronnie del Carmen: I did work with Pete Docter and Bob Peterson on “Dug’s Special Mission.” Their involvement was crucial since the three of us were always part of telling the larger story of the movie. It made sense to go to them for advice. Pete Docter could see other potentials in the idea, and Bob Peterson could instantly give me the character of Dug – and his funny nuances. It was a dream. I’m so hooked on working together with these guys, and I hope to get together with them again on another project soon.

What was your favorite part of directing “Dug’s Special Mission”? And what was the toughest part of the gig?

Ronnie del Carmen: Well, I got to tell a story that was intriguing to me while making the movie. Dug is such a great character, people involved in the short film loved working on it. I got to work with Pete Docter and Bob Peterson on the story while we were still finishing “Up.” John Lasseter weighed in and gave me awesome advice. I got to work with great people who were there to find creative solutions to the story I was trying to tell. And as for the tough part, well, it’s always the story that’s tough, but also working with the time constraint of making a film that’s only 4.5 minutes.

When did you start working on “Dug’s Special Mission,” and how long did it take to finish?

Ronnie del Carmen: I had the idea for the short as soon as the movie was in production, right around the layout phase. I storyboarded a rough version quickly and pitched it to Jonas Rivera and Pete Docter around late spring 2008. I figured that I would be finished with story duties and could jump on a short. But the third act of “Up” lingered on our plate for a while, and I had to do double duty. (I also took on illustrating the book, “My Name Is Dug.” I am a glutton for punishment.) We got approval for “Dug’s Special Mission” from Disney by January 2009 and got into production right away. We finished in June of this year.

“Dug’s Special Mission” that had him flying an airplane. We cut it because of the length, and it seemed out of place with the other gags. But I still want to see him in a plane someday. There are stories in my head that tell how he got into Muntz’s pack. Dug in that pack looks like a mistake – an oversight. I would love to tell that earlier story of how he got there. Certainly Muntz and Dug, Russell and Dug... Carl and Dug too!
and what kind of resources (people, time, money) are necessary to make sure Pixar continues to deliver such critically acclaimed stories? Particularly in terms of story development, not the animation side of the process...

Ronnie del Carmen: All our stories take a long time. By the time a director even pitches the story he will have been living with that story all by himself for a while. After that pitch, John Lasseter guides the story with the director/storyteller. Andrew Stanton also weighs in and gives it another layer of insight. We draw reels, write scripts and make story reels, over and over again. Then we screen it for the company so we get the entire studio’s notes. After that, we have the Brain Trust (comprised of directors, heads of story, the executive team and more) give their feedback to help the reels. Then we also have a test audience watch it and we ask them what they thought of the movie. It’s a long, long journey.

In what way did your work as an artist help you with the work on the movie?
Ronnie del Carmen: I do production design, write and direct; all skills that are good to have for the job of being a story person. When we started we had no job demarcations, we just started trying to solve creative problems. That means I’d draw, design, do camera plans, write and illustrate. It helped all of us touch on all parts of the movie at once. Ricky Nierva, production designer of “Up,” and I would sit next door to each other and we’d discuss production design problems as well as complete story sequences. Throughout production I would draw up solutions and do designs on the fly, from editorial to layout, as well as help writing. It was a blast! I miss it.

How tough was it to tell “Dug’s Special Mission” in under five minutes?
Ronnie del Carmen: I had many tortures and challenges for Alpha, Beta and Gamma. My favorite, and one that I held on to for a long time, was the moment where Dug falls into an airplane and flies it down to the other dogs, dive bomber style. It had to go. There were many lines and quips that Bob Peterson did during recording that I could have used but had to leave out. Every frame of animation was crucial. Another layer was the ending, in which Carl and Russell’s dialogue and acting was lifted from “Up”. We could not change any of it, as it would have been expensive and troublesome. We also could only use the genius work that Michael Giacchino made for the movie. No new music. All these constraints actually helped make the short even better. I loved working on it and would love to do it again.

How much development goes into a Pixar project in terms of the story, and what kind of resources (people, time, money) are necessary to make sure Pixar continues to deliver such critically acclaimed stories? Particularly in terms of story development, not the animation side of the process...

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Among the books published in conjunction with the movie, you illustrated the book “My Name is Dug” - tell us
Ronnie del Carmen: That trip was tremendous help for us. It would have been easy to just go by pictures and videos of the Tepuis but we're sure to default to places we know from experience. Otherwise it would be a let down and we'd never be able to correct it later. We wouldn't know the truth of being there.

Ronnie del Carmen: That trip was a tremendous help for us. It would have been easy to just go by pictures and videos of the Tepuis but we're sure to default to places we know from experience. Otherwise it would be a let down and we'd never be able to correct it later. We wouldn't know the truth of being there.

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We needed to know how Carl would behave on top of the Tepuis and we could only represent that without reservation if we experienced it ourselves. And what a unique place those Tepuis are. They are like no place on Earth, beautiful and dangerous. It was compelling and foreboding at the same time. We climbed one of them, Roraima, and we walked all over on top. We went to Angel Falls, the actual falls on which we based “Up’s” Paradise Falls. The sights, sounds and emotions we felt on that expedition helped us create Carl’s experience during his journey.

“Up” is Pixar’s 10th feature film, and has received great reviews, some of the best Pixar has had on a film. What elements of the story do you think have led to the success of “Up?”

Ronnie del Carmen: Pete Docter had wanted a story about an old man holding a bunch of colorful balloons. None of us could have even dreamed of how well the movie would be received. Back then we had our concerns about telling a story about an old man flying his house to fulfill a promise. Being part of the creative team that created the movie, I’m rather too close to be objective but here it goes: I think it’s because of the emotional truth of Carl’s journey. The fantastic elements, the funny moments and dialogue, all deliver an enjoyable and thrilling experience but we all walk away feeling we’ve felt something true about the journey.

Is Dug the smarter Pixar equivalent of Disney’s long tradition of funny animal sidekicks, or do you see him more as a character in his own right?

Ronnie del Carmen: Dug was created very early in the development of the movie idea, even earlier than Russell. There was a talking dog and we didn’t know why or how he spoke, he just did. He was always there as a supporting cast member. It was always going to be Carl’s story. Although after developing Dug into such a lovable character he does seem to merit his own set of stories, doesn’t he? That’s the reason I wanted to tell his story in “Dug’s Special Mission”.

Were there any elements of “Up” that you particularly championed and/or fought to keep in?

Ronnie del Carmen: Between Pete Docter, Bob Peterson and myself we all tended to tackle aspects of the story that we felt close to. Our collaboration is all over the movie. I gravitated towards the drama and emotional weight of scenes and moments. The third act also had many challenges that I helped to chisel away at over the course of making the movie. Muntz’s story was particularly troubling because he shows up so late in the movie. We also tried many ways to end the movie. I had made sequences that explored viable endings that I really believed in. They worked, but in the end we had to pick just a few elements from these explorations and put them into the ending you see in the movie. You will have a chance to see some more of those explorations in the Blu-ray and DVD.

How much of an impact did your trip to Venezuela make on the movie, and do you think the film could have been as...
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Tara Inskip
Revisiting the J!-ENT ARCHIVES
A glimpse from our past J!-ENT Cooking Related Coverage

nobu miami: THE PARTY COOKBOOK
By Nobu Matsuhisa and Thomas Buckley, Kodansha International

The Nobu cookbooks are always well done. I really like how he introduces the dish, gives a recipe, sometimes adding a little more background on the dish or its ingredients but Matsuhisa writes a little about his past experience as a cook, his restaurants and a few pieces that are quite inspirational, especially for those who are inspired by his cooking and wanting to become a chef. Photos are large and beautiful, text is easy to read and you get your money's worth for the content featured. With that being said, compared to other cookbooks out there, one may wonder how they can even make this food if they live in another part of the country or world and don't have access to certain ingredients featured in this cookbook. For those who are passionate about cooking and enjoy looking for alternate ingredients, that is great but for those who can't find the ingredients in their local area, I'm sure that this book can be difficult for them. Some spices can be purchased online but depending on your geographic area, the dishes featured on this cookbook may be too difficult for some to recreate. Especially for those wanting the same taste. The book comes off like a beautiful food photography book that I wouldn't be surprised if someone kept on their coffee table. It's not just a cook book but it can be admired because of its overall presentation and beautiful photography. So, the quality of the book matches the quality of his food.

HAUTE CHINESE CUISINE FROM THE KITCHEN OF WAKIYA
By Yuji Wakiya, Kodansha International

Yuji Wakiya's book is fantastic in that he reveals how his dishes are created. The overall presentation of photos in "HAUTE CHINESE CUISINE FROM THE KITCHEN OF WAKIYA" are colorful and his in-depth knowledge of food experimentation is what many chefs come to admire about his cuisine. And for those who really want to attempt delicious food, those touched by his cuisine and want to recreate it, the techniques featured in this book are the for the taking. You can start cooking like Yuji Wakiya, although maybe not all of the techniques are accessible as some require certain slicing of fins and preparation of cuisine that resembles of what an alchemist can come up with all the unique and different ingredients. This book is by no means for the beginner. From the ingredients used to the ideas of cooking certain dishes requires some knowledge of food and the ingredients themselves. May the book be used to recreate the dish or as a reference to recreating a dish but improvising with different ingredients. Wakiya is a true craftsman. And if you are willing to learn, then this book is recommended!

SUPER-CHARGED SMOOTHIES
By Mary Corpening Barber and Sara Corpening Whiteford, Chronicle Books

From the authors of "Smoothies, Super Smoothies" and "The Bride & Groom First and Forever cookbook" comes "Super-Charged Smoothies" from twin sisters Mary Corpening Barber and Sara Corpening Whiteford. Along with food and nutrition expert Alison Eastwood, RD and photographer Jenifer Altman comes a vibrant and delectable book featuring 60 recipes on how to make delicious smoothies that are nutritious, healthy and can lead to shiny hair, luminous skin and also a healthy immune system. In our household, we tend to experiment with making smoothies and for the most part, it has succeed or fail for me as I have tried various experimenting to see if I can come up with something delicious. Unfortunately, it has been more towards failure and that's what I get for not looking at a recipe and messing around on my own. So, fortunately I have a wonderful resource on how to create smoothies that would be healthy and delicious. "Super-Charged Smoothies" features easy recipes but also some recipes with full color photos. Each recipe features information on the smoothie, what it can do healthwise for the drinker, the recipe itself and what to do with the ingredients and a few that have factoids. Included is a segment called "Binders and Other Key Ingredients" which provides details on fruits and nuts, so if you wanted to know what the following ingredients such as "Acai", "Boba" or "Cacao Powder" is, there is an explanation for it. And also is a nutritional information chart for each recipe is provided with calories, protein, carbohydrate, fiber, total fat, saturated fat, sodium, cholesterol and nutrition bonus are included.
It was one of J!-ENT’s most popular segments in the late ‘90s and early 2000’s and for years, many have asked us to bring back the “Celebrity Got Rice?” segment. Granted, it was not easy to bring the segment back because J!-ENT has changed significantly since we first featured it. But for our 20th Anniversary, we figured why not bring it back once again, one final time. The following is a collection of 15 years of our J!-ENT “Celebrity Got Rice?” with newer and revised entrees for 2013. Enjoy! By Dennis A. Amith

As I stroll through the local grocery store, I see on my list that I need to buy some rice. There are so many different kinds of rice available. I’m not sure if I have tried every brand.

Dr. Shawn Hung told “Giant Robot Magazine” (way back in Issue No. 10) that the pickiest rice eaters are Japanese who demand high quality. Chinese and Korean are second. Filipinos just want food to eat.

As a Filipino American with many Asian friends, I have been subject to so much variety of rice. May at be at at friend’s house, party or whatever I felt like buying at the time or what was on sale. At the time of writing the original “Got Rice” segment, my Asian friends told me that I must be more picky when it comes to rice.

And at the time, it became an interesting watercooler discussion with friends.

It may seem strange to others but for Asians, when the discussion is about rice, you better believe that some may school you on the type of rice, the brand of rice cooker or better yet, what food is best to eat with your rice.

When the original “Got Rice” article was released, it was a popular article for its time. And for nearly 15 years, people have kept asking for me to bring it back. Especially now that more people are concerned about carbs but others who are...
curious to find out what people eat.

Do they buy Uncle Ben’s? California Brown Diamond? Calrose? Kokuho Rose? Or are they concerned with carbs now that don’t eat rice as much?

So I figured, why not bring back the “Got Rice?” segment one last time for 2013. I ask celebrities and professionals the following five questions:

Q1: What kind of rice cooker do you use?
Q2: How many days of the week do you eat rice?
Q3: Which method do you use to measure the rice (the finger, palm, thumb, knuckle, cup, rice cooker mark or some mysterious superhuman ability)?
Q4: What do you like to eat with your rice?
Q5: What brand of rice do you eat?

(*) Are original answers from our previous “Got Rice” feature (1998-2004) and not revised for 2013.

John Cho, Actor *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I use Zojirushi.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I eat rice almost everyday.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the finger method.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: What do I eat with my rice? I guess I eat about anything.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Calrose

Michelle Krusiec, Actress

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I use Zojirushi.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I actually rarely eat rice these days. And if I do, I eat brown rice. Am I losing my roots for my California palette?

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the cup. Although, I wondered about the finger method (laughs). I don’t trust myself with the finger method. I’m just not well-schooled on that one.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I generally like Asian cuisine with rice. Actually, I eat Korean Tofu Soup with rice. I dip a spoon full of rice into the soup. It’s very comforting. I also do love sashimi with rice.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Right now, I’m trying Pulmuone organic white rice.

LONG GRAIN, MEDIUM GRAIN, SHORT GRAIN - WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

According to the USA Rice Federation, there are 120,000 varieties of rice. But for those shopping at the local grocery store and want to know which version they should get, the main thing that you should remember is that LONG GRAIN RICE will fall apart than stick together but it’s the cheapest rice that you would find at the grocery store. MEDIUM GRAIN RICE features softer and moister rice and the most preferred rice in many countries although the price for medium grain has went up in price in the past few years. SHORT GRAIN RICE - Sticky and soft rice. JASMINE RICE is long-grained Thai rice that clings when cooked but less sticky and has a nutty aroma.
Chris Chan Lee, Director

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I have a Zojirushi that plays music while cooking and makes it perfect every time!

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I eat rice probably 4 days out of the week on average. Enjoy the carbs. A lot of non-Asian restaurants prepare rice mixing with different oils and adding vegetables/seasoning etc., because rice is a gluten-free carb, but I prefer just plain steamed white rice by far!

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? The Zojirushi comes with a proprietary measuring cup, which worries me because if I lose it I’m going to have trouble taking proper measurements. But when I used to use other rice cookers (or a regular pot) I’d use the palm method which my mom taught me, when in doubt. But I think I have the hang of it enough that, under pressure, I could eyeball it.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I like kimchee and dried seaweed with my rice. I also like to put it into korean soups like sulangtang (bone soup). It kind of goes with anything... stir fried vegetables, fish, steak, haha.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Daipoong Gold per my mom who says that’s the best rice available here at most Asian markets. Occasionally, I have brown or jasmine rice which I buy in bulk from Whole Foods. The rice at Korean restaurants, who knows where that comes from!

Lynn Chen, theactorsdiet.com/lynnchen.com

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Stovetop

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): .25

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Measuring cups

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Everything from salad dressing to sugar and cream.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I like to try a lot of different types, so there’s no brand loyalty!

Martin Yan, Chef *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Aroma

B: HOW MANY TIMES YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Almost everyday.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the finger method.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I do a lot of one dish meals. Basically anything.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I normally combine the regular long grain rice with Thai rice. The best combination is 50% Thai long grain rice and 50% Calrose rice. Both of these have a nice aroma.
Parry Shen, Actor

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: The same small Westinghouse one referred to before. I did inherit a large Oster for large batches I need to make.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Once every other week. I’m getting old and am on television -- I eat a lot of salad and chicken breasts these days. But it’s always comfort food to me when I do.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? The finger and the knuckle method.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Bulgogi. But I recently also threw some into a salad and it was pretty decent! Gave it a chewy texture.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Botan No. 1, Extra Fancy

Margaret Cho, Actress & Comedian *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I have two rice cookers. One is an orange Goldstar. The other is a white Panasonic.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I don’t eat rice that often. Possibly a few times a month.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the hand thickness method. I press down on the rice and the water level should be the thickness of my hand. I like it little wetter.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I like to eat rice with kim chee, pickled pollack roe, seasoned seaweed paste, tuna and red bean paste, kal bi and octopus.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I am strictly a Calrose girl.

motsu (m.o.v.e/ALTIMA), Rapper/Producer

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I use a Toshiba IH RCK 10-DSC.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I eat rice everyday. Three times a day as I try to eat limited amounts of rice with vegetables and protein.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the marker inside of the cooker.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: If I were to not consider maintaining my health, I have the faint daydream of getting full on just something like squid shiokara or kimchi and a ton of rice, but as I am hung up on remaining a singer, I realize that this is a dream that cannot be realized (laughing).

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I get rice directly sent to me by the bale from a farmer acquaintance of my parents. I think it’s a farm in Gifu. I don’t know the brand, but the rice is significantly more expensive than what you can regularly buy. Since I eat very little at one time, I want to eat the best things I can.
Calvin Jung, Actor
A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Rival
B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): 3-4 Days a Week
C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Eyeball water level.
D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Anything with taste, leftovers.
E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Cheapest short grain brown rice I can find.

Amy Hill, Actress
B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Three days a week.
C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the finger method.
D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Salty, shoyu-y stuff, curry, pickled vegetables.
E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Organic short-grained rice.

Andy Quach, Singer
A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I use Zojirushi.
B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I eat rice every-day.
C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the Rice Cooker Mark Method.
D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I eat my rice with everything.
E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I prefer Jasmine Rice.

Gina Hirazumi, Actress/Singer
A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Zojirushi, I think.
B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): 2-3x a week.
C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Rice cooker! Easier and simpler the better. I hardly even have time to cook, so I dont need complicated methods!
D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Still the same, still the same. Ochazuke mix or maybe spam musubi hawaiian style.
E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Brand? Not sure of what brand. But I’m starting to mix brown rice and white rice, which makes a delicious mix.
Moonberry, Creative Director (www.moonberry.com)

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:  Panasonic Mini Rice Cooker

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):  1-3

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?:  Finger

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:  Usually greasy food.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:  Kokuho Rose

Anderson Le, Director of Programming - Hawaiian International Film Festival

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:  TIGER brand. It’s great because I also make jook (rice porridge) with it.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):  How many days of the week do you eat rice? Everyday!

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?:  Everything. I like to eat it with furikake (seaweed), many times with banchan (Korean side dishes).

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:  Calrose rice, usually. Sometimes, I buy Jasmine rice from the Thai market.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:  Organic short-grained rice.

Kathy Baylor, Entertainment Consultant

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:  Been planning on buying a Panasonic for about two years, but haven’t gotten around to it. With my schedule, I’m lucky I have time to eat period! LOOOOOVE the commercials on Fuji TV though...“Smart! Cute! Versatile! Panasonic, you’re the one for me!”

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):  At least one, sometimes 3 or more. I order it in from local restaurants. It’s one of the many benefits of living in New York (plus they've perfected the technique, which I most definitely have NOT).

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?:  When I cook it (in a garden-variety pot), I use my superhuman estimation ability. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t -- see comment in parentheses from question 2.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:  Any and everything. Sometimes it’s as simple as Japanese pickles or scrambled eggs, sometimes it accompanies an entire Korean meal, sometimes take-out Chinese. Depends on my mood, I suppose. My mom cooked rice for almost every meal when I was a kid, so I feel like it goes with everything.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:  Goodness, I have no idea. Well, I know I DON’T eat Uncle Ben’s or any of that instant crap. Other than that, whatever is on sale when I hit the Asian grocery store.
Lela Lee, Actress *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Zojirushi

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Hardly. Maybe only once a month.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the finger and palm method.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Now I eat everything and no rice. I miss it!

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Kokuho Rose.

Jim Stoeber, Music Producer/Musician

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I use a nifty microwave rice cooker.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Two to three times a week.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the rice cooker mark.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Adobo and anything else that happens to be there.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: No-name, generic rice.

Rayko Dig, Music Promoter/Musician

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: It’s got to be Zojirushi! The elephants RAWK!!

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Almost every day, with a cut off time of 7pm!

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Mark of the cooker and then some for the mushy-ness.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Believe it or not, Natto!! Sooo good for you!!

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Any organic brown rice will do! :)

Rey Moralde, NBA Blogger

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Panasonic

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Every single day. I can’t remember the last time I missed a day of eating rice. I’m pretty sure that’s not entirely good.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Rice cooker mark. Definitely.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Pretty much anything and everything. Fried chicken isn’t as delicious without rice.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Golden Panda Milagrosa Rice. My mom told me a folk tale about Milagrosa a long time ago. I’ve stuck with it through my entire life.
Rex Navarrete, Comedian

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Sunbeam from Target

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I do eat rice about 3-4 days out of the week.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the eyeball technique of washing and cooking rice, no longer having to actually touch it. I’m good.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I do like hot adobo over cold rice, with both pork and chicken.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: The brand I eat is mostly jasmine long grain or short grain if I’m lucky.

Linda Wang, Actress *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I have been using “TATUNG TAC-8G,” for close to 5 years, which was “Made in Taiwan.”

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): (Laughter) This Chinese gal gotta have it at least once a week!

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the enclosed “Plastic Rice Cooker measurement kit.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Mostly Asian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese (Sashimi) dishes.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Usually Asian “sticky” self steamed/cooked/boiled/fried “Calrose” rice and/or Taiwanese “Pong Lai” Rice.

Elson Trinidad, Singer/Musician

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I don’t really use a rice cooker anymore, I just cook rice in a pot on the stove. Same deal, huh? I also learned a quick and dirty secret: If you use scalding-hot water from the faucet instead of cold water, it takes less time to get to boiling temperature, and thus it speeds up your cooking time!

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I don’t really eat too much rice, maybe once or twice a week. Carbs, man.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use a cup or a mug, scoop up the rice to a desired level, repeat if necessary, then add the same amounts water, then add a bit more.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I usually cook rice to make sushi, I know how to make my own rolls, I do it for fun or for special occasions, Everyone likes it because, hey...free sushi. Other than that, adobo, dinuguan, sisig or anything curry-ish.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Not too particular with a brand, whatever’s the best deal. For sushi/short-grain rice, it’s usually Kokuho Rose brand.
Anna Tse, Model *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Aroma...like the old one with the black and white but the newer version.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Everyday

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?: Palm Method

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Chinese food with gravy in it. I like what my mom cooks with this ground pork or beef with Tofu. “Anything with gravy in it. I like to ‘mush’ things together with rice. My mom makes this great dish of ground pork with tofu in oyster sauce. That goes real well with steamed rice.”

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I don’t have a favorite brand of rice, but the one we’re eating now is called ‘Golden Phoenix; Super Special Jasmine Rice.

Evan Tsai, Artist

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I use a cobalt blue Sampo rice cooker (it looks identical to the classic Tatung rice cookers).

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Lately, I don’t eat a lot of rice because I’m trying to lose excess body weight from excess carbs. I used to eat rice everyday, but I try to avoid white rice if I can.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?: I use a cup to measure rice, but I typically just eye it when it comes to putting the right amount of water.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I’m pretty simple. I hate soggy rice, so some pickled vegetables, furikake seasoning and some sauteed meat, when available.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: This I’m not sure of. It depends on my mood, because some days I want jasmine rice, and others I want Japanese sticky rice. I don’t stick to a particular brand, I just see what’s available and try it out. I’m flexible.

Moulann Qi Ang, Singer/Musician

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I still used the same zojirushi rice cooker -- it’s ancient and reliable.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I eat rice twice a week.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?: I use the eyeball method

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Back to basics: rice with toasted seaweed is my guilty pleasure.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Organic rice from Taiwan, in white, brown and a black wild rice mix. I usually throw in some quinoa too.
**Roger Fan, Actor/Producer *\**

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** Zojirushi, medium size rice cooker with cherry blossoms all around it.

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** I eat rice probably in the average....WOW! I don’t eat enough rice!

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** I use the knuckle method.

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** I like to eat everything with rice. I even tried it with peanut butter.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** Kokuho Rose.

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**Mia Crowe, Actress/Model *\**

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** Aroma. It was a gift from my Mom bought at a store in K-Town (Korea Town). It was a XMAS gift from 2 years ago to replace the mini-cooker I had all through college. This one is medium (no comparison to the giant one my Mom has) but a definite upgrade from the one I had before.

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** I cook rice once a week and it lasts me a few days. I usually cook it when I know I have something to eat with it.

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** I sometimes just eyeball what looks to me like a centimeter of water......or I do the one knuckle method by sticking my index finger in the pot. This isn’t very scientific though and a shame to the great cooks of the world because sometimes it is too mushy and wet -or too dry and hard. I usually eat it no matter what though! (Gross probably to most people)

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** I eat anything from Furikake sprinkles (Japanese --which is seaweed, sesame seeds, salt, and bonito flakes) to Kalbi (Korean beef ribs), Adobo Chicken (Filipino style chicken), and kimichi chige (Korean Kimchi stew). I also loved to do something that my Korean uncle taught me when I was little- use the microwave to melt a slice of kraft cheese on top of a bowl of rice. It is awesome! I also eat butter melted on rice if I have nothing else to eat in the fridge with the rice.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** Calrose. I buy the big giant bag that I have to get someone to help me carry!

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**Chris Tashima, Actor**

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** Zojirushi

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** Hmmm. These days < 3

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** Eyeball a finger amount.

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** Ketchup-fried with bacon & green onions – with a fried egg.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** Lately, whatever brand is served in the restaurant.
A.J. Callomay, Producer/Editor of Xylophone Films

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I’m not sure on the brand but it’s shiny and silver, looks modern. Growing up, I swear my parents used the same rice cooker for 23.5 years.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Probably 2-3 times a week, definitely has gone down the past few years

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I lick my finger, close my eyes and hold it in the air to feel the humidity in the room. then I throw a 1:1 ratio of water and rice in the cooker.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: There are just some meals you CANNOT have without rice, what else will absorb the sodium?! -- adobo, sinigang and Filipino bistek!

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Uncle Ben’s. lol jk. Used to be Calrose, now we get it in a smaller plastic clear bag that’s supposedly healthier.

Arika Sato, Model/YouTube Host

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Zojirushi! duh! My parents have Tiger though. Anything Japanese is good! haha! I’m a little biased!

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I wish I could eat it everyday because I love it so much! Probably once a week! Sushi is one of my favorites and curry rice!

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the cup to measure the rice and finger to measure the water! lol Is that cheating? I use two methods! lol

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: like to eat fish with rice, traditional Japanese style!

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I love Hikari, I grew up eating that, now we get it in a smaller plastic clear bag that’s supposedly healthier.

Eric Hanes, Creative Director for Asian Film Festival of Dallas

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: It is so old the label is worn off, its the standard small white one with flowers on it.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): 1 or 2 days a week at home.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Eyeball it, the same amount everytime.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Spam and eggs, kimchi.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: We ran out and they don’t have it at the market anymore, some Jasmine rice with two red dragons on it.
Stefhen Bryan, Writer/Playwright/Actor

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Zojirushi rice cooker

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): 3x a week.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use a little plastic cup.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Being Jamaican, I love rice and peas, which is cooked with coconut milked. When I first moved to Japan it was difficult to get used to their becha becha (all clumped up together) rice. In Jamaica, we cook our rice pasa pasa, (not sticky and all clumped together) as we don't use a rice cooker and consider becha becha rice a sign of no culinary skills. But I love, love, love, love, rice pudding, its my favourite dessert at Indian restaurants. In Jamaica we have it warm for breakfast: rice porridge.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Sukoyaka Genmai, that's the rice I eat.

Sachiko Uchida, Entertainment Writer/Translator

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I actually still use the same rice cooker that I brought from Japan. It still works. But I am seriously thinking of getting another one LOL

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I probably eat rice 2-3 times a week. It's not a lot. I live in Hawaii now, so people here eat a lot of rice. So it's easy here to access to my rice needs.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I still practice how my mom would make rice. I just put my hand in it, and just enough to cover the top of my hand, I put the water, and just push that cook button.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Again, this is still the same after all these years. I love my rice with ikura... my mom makes the best kind still. Everyday I go back to Japan from Hawaii, she always has ikura ready for me. I love my mom and dad. They are the best.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: I live in Hawaii so I am limited to the kind of rice I can get here. I eat Tamaki rice, I think it's fairly good. I love eating rice from Niigata where my mom is from every time I go back to Japan. You don't need anything to eat with your rice...it's that good.

Goran Topalovic, New York Asian Film Festival Co-Founder

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Pressure cooker

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): It varies, but my wife and I tend to eat more rice, when we're less busy with work and have more time to spend at home.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the measuring cup.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Samgyeopsal, bulgogi, fried eggs and vegetables with oyster sauce.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: These days, Sekka medium grain rice. But we also like to mix rice with barley, or beans, Korean style.
**Masayo Kawaguchi, International Broadcaster/Actress/Singer**

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** I have the National (Panasonic) “fuzzy-logics” smart rice cooker. The square shaped one.

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** Almost everyday.

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** Cup. But it depends on the type of rice. When you have a “shinmai” new rice, you use less water, because new rice tend to be more moist.

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** “Chirimen Jako” small fish.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** Tamaki’s “Shinmai” green label. But I try to bring back koshihikari whenever I go back to Japan.

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**THE MOUNTAIN BROTHERS, HIP HOP TRIO**

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** Styles: I use a large family-size stainless steel workhorse of a rice cooker. Peril-L: Old school one where you put the pot inside and put water around the pot. Chops: The old cooker with the frayed power cord finally called it quits, so I got a smaller-sized Westinghouse.

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** Styles: Lately, not as often as before but at least twice a week. Peril-L: 3 TO 5. Chops: More recently, I found a cheap and delicious food truck nearby.

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** Styles: Palm method. Peril-L: A clean yogurt container wash rice three times before cooking. Chops: Knuckle with a regular pot, but the cooker came with a cup that works ok.

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** Styles: Anything as long as it has lots of tasty sauce. Peril-L: Lop cheung char siu bulgogi or anything else. Chops: Spare ribs and black bean sauce! Actually anything with black bean sauce.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** Styles: Elephant brand Jasmine rice. Peril-L: Kokuho Rose short grain rice. Chops: Uncle Ben’s... just kidding. Regular enriched long grain or Jasmine.

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**PUFFY AMI YUMI, MUSIC GROUP**

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** Yumi: I use Tiger. Ami: I really don’t know.

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** Yumi: We eat rice but we eat out a lot, so we don’t eat it everyday.

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** There is a cup that accompanies the rice cooker and so I mostly use the cup.

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** Yumi: I like to eat rice with miso soup. Ami: I like to eat sugiko (salmon roe) with rice. my rice? I guess I eat about anything.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** (laughing hard) Yumi: I like Akita komachi. Ami: My relative is married to a rice farmer and they always send me rice from their farm.
Kristine Sa, Singer *
A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: The kind that’s been in my house for as long as I can remember. I don’t know what kind it is. I just use it.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Eight.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I started out with my index finger but as I grew as a rice-cooker, it’s just instinct now.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Everything. Usually with the accompaniment of soy sauce or fish sauce.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: My mommy buys it, I don’t know. I do remember one brand that came with a little gold seal thingy.

Esther Hwang, Model *
A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Zojirushi

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I probably eat rice four times a week.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the finger method.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I love to eat Kimchee with my rice. I like hot soup. I like anything spicy.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Korean sticky rice.

Katsuhiko Jinnai, DJ/CEO at Jinnai Visual
A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Tiger Co.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Everyday for dinner

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Rice cooker mark

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: BBQ or veggies

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Calrose
Jason Tobin, Actor *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: National SR-MK 10N it’s the “Porsche” of rice cookers. It was two hundred bucks!!! You can’t find it anywhere unless you go to a ‘Yaohan’ or an Asian store like that. Man, it cooks the best rice. It keeps it fresh for 24 hours and has a preset timer so that the rice is done at a certain time. It has a rice hardness selector.. normal soft hard.. and it can make sushi rice, glutinous rice, and best of all it makes ‘juk’ (congee, rice porridge) can you tell I love this rice cooker?

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Everyday. I can’t live without it. It makes me feel like i’m home.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the the cup it comes with and the measuring marks in the pan but sometimes I can’t be bothered so I use the highly effective method of guessing.. “yeah, that looks about right”.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Everything but my favorites are kimchee, tilapia, and steak.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Nishiki. only because the girl at yaohan had a nice smile and said it was her favorite rice.

Jessica Ly, Managing Director of Vietshowbiz Entertainment

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: I have the Zojirushi brand.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I eat rice about once a week.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? When I cook rice, I usually use the knuckle method. But sometimes I use the rice cooker mark method depending on the rice batch… when the knuckle method doesn’t work..hihi

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I eat a lot of veggies (steamed) or salads with my rice along with fish or beef dishes…

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: No particular brand favorite – I just buy the Thai Jasmine rice..know. I do remember one brand that came with a little gold seal thingy.

Brad Yuen, Filmmaker *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: It’s a small stainless steel pot I bought at the 99Ranch Market in the San Fernando Valley. The rice doesn’t seem to stick to it.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): I’d say about 4 to 5 days out of the week.

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? I use the first knuckle on my middle finger, the “upside-down flip a bird” method.

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: It depends on what I’m cooking. I mostly cook Chinese food, but sometimes I cook Americana. I don’t eat potatos for starch.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Mostly Texas Long Grain.
Tetsuki Ijichi, CEO & President of Tidepoint Pictures

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Iron Pot

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): 4 to 5 times per dinner for the week

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Cup

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: Nattou and Broiled fish, Sukiyaki!

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Nishiki

Sheila Burgel, Writer/DJ

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: For Japanese Rice: Zojirushi/For Persian Rice: National

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): 4 times

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Rice cooker mark method

D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE: I love to put fresh torro on top of Japanese rice. And I make a good kimchi & beef & rice dish.

E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: For Japanese rice: Kokuho Rose / For Persian Rice: Lalquill Indian Basmati.

PROTOCULTURE, BAND *

A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE: Ed Quan: A National, naturally! Just kidding…it’s a Sunpentown. Jeff Jang: A National, it’s a small one. I think we got it as a Christmas present from my parents.

B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week): Ed: At least a few times, otherwise I go crazy! Jeff: 3 or 4 days/week

C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE? Ed: Rice cooker or the finger method. Jeff: I use a measuring cup. The finger thing never worked for me. I’d never have enough water. I don’t know. Maybe I have weird fingers.


E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT: Ed: Kokuho Rose and various brown rice types. Jeff: Some brand that sounds Japanese but is probably made in Texas.
And how have things changed...

Having revisited some of the people I interviewed for this segment many years ago, a lot of them have since changed their answers. Many who have cut down their carbs and now have less rice in their diet, while others still eat rice multiple times per week. But do I still eat a lot of rice? Do I still look for the best rice to eat?

Dennis A. Amith, Owner/Editor-in-Chief of J!-ENT (1999)

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** A new Zojirushi with neuro fuzzy logic that cooks the ultimate rice. Jason Tobin has the “Porsche” of rice cookers, I have the umm...the Nissan Skyline of rice cookers. Of course, I had to graduate from the old school styles of black and white rice cookers...the pinto or Chevy Nova of rice cookers.

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** Once or twice. You see...it depends how lazy I am after I get out of work. You have to go through the process of washing and rinsing it a million times before cooking. Of course, I have the problem of overcooking and end up sticking it in the fridge and then the next day, you notice that the stickiness is no longer there. You put one spoon through it and all the rice becomes separated and when you bite into it, you end up cracking a tooth. J/k!

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** I was born with a talented gifted finger that helps me cook rice with accurate precision.

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** Eggs, spam or corn beef. HAHA! I’m laughing because I know many others who are eating the same exact thing with their rice. Of course, I like sushi, adobo, donburi, chicken, fish, Stove Top stuffing, spam, corn beef, eggs with tomatoes and patis. Tuna, onions with soyu sauce. Samparado. My gosh, I think I’ll eat anything with rice except if there is too much sauce.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** I have to tell the truth. I really don’t know. As long as it’s cooked rice, it’s white and clean or fried and I put my soyu on it, I’ll eat it.

Dennis A. Amith, Owner/Editor-in-Chief of J!-ENT (2013)

**A: TYPE OF RICE COOKER YOU USE:** The same Zojirushi with neuro fuzzy logic that cooks the ultimate rice. Over a decade and it’s still cooking rice perfectly. It’s a brand that doesn’t let you down!

**B: HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU EAT RICE (Days in the week):** This is going to sound bad but I don’t eat much rice. Maybe once, twice or three times a month at the most. I really cut down the carbs, so I hardly eat any rice and pasta.

**C: WHICH METHOD DO YOU USE TO COOK RICE?** I was born with a talented gifted finger that helps me cook rice with accurate precision and I still have that magic touch!

**D: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO EAT WITH YOUR RICE:** Curry, chicken, fish. I still like the eggs, spam and corn beef but I rarely eat those as much anymore, maybe once a year. Sometimes plain with soy sauce but most often I have rice seasoning such as noritamago furikake or salmon furikake or with toasted seaweed.

**E: WHICH BRAND OF RICE DO YOU PREFER TO EAT:** My choice of rice that I buy often is Nishiki and Calrose Shirakiku Rice Extra Fancy. But I will be truth, I’m not as picky as I was before because my average for eating rice is once or twice a month and I also eat more brown rice than white these day. Also, whenever I can’t purchase rice at an Asian grocery store, I’ll make a drive to Wal-Mart or a grocery store and pick up a $5.00 pound of long-grain rice. As disappointing it may sound, my rice consumption has gone down considerably.
Gurren Lagann
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It was another busy year for event coverage, and as our convention schedule comes to a close, we showcase some of our photo coverage at events we covered in 2013! This is part 1 of our event coverage!
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: March 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT WONDERCON 2013 IN ANAHEIM, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: March 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT WONDERCON 2013 IN ANAHEIM, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: March 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT JAPAN NITE 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA) by ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: March 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT JAPAN NITE 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA) by ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: March 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT JAPAN NITE 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA) by ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: March 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT JAPAN NITE 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA) by ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our JI-ENT Event Coverage: March 2013

JI-ENT COVERAGE AT SAKURA-CON 2013 IN SEATTLE, WA - PHOTOS BY MICHELLE TYMON
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

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OCTOBER 2013
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO

[Images of cosplay attendees at Phoenix Comicon 14]
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO

[Images of people dressed as comic book characters at a convention.]
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO

[Images of costumes and attendees at Phoenix Comicon 14]
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO

[Images of cosplayers at comic con event]
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: May 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT PHOENIX COMICON 14 (PHOENIX, ARIZONA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: June 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT BOTCON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO

MORE PHOTOS FROM BOTCON CONTINUED ON PAGE 495
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: June 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT CLASH AT CLAIREMONT 7 (SAN DIEGO, CA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: June 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT CLASH AT CLAIREMONT 7 (SAN DIEGO, CA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: June 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT CLASH AT CLAIREMONT 7 (SAN DIEGO, CA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO

[Images of skateboarders and event coverage]
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT THE FRESNO OBON FESTIVAL (FRESNO, CA) BY DENNIS A. AMITH
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT THE FRESNO OBON FESTIVAL (FRESNO, CA) BY DENNIS A. AMITH
J!-ENT Archives: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2012

J!-ENT COVERAGE FOR FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST MOVIE: THE SACRED STAR OF MILOS RED CARPET PREMIERE IN LOS ANGELES, PHOTOS BY NERGENE ARQUELADA
J!-ENT Archives: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2012

J!-ENT COVERAGE FOR FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST MOVIE: THE SACRED STAR OF MILOS RED CARPET PREMIERE IN LOS ANGELES,
PHOTOS BY NERGENE ARQUELADA
J!-ENT Archives: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2009

J!-ENT COVERAGE FOR LAYN ROCKS (LOS ANGELES, CA) - PHOTOS BY NERGENE ARQUELADA
J!-ENT Archives: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2009

J!-ENT COVERAGE FOR LAYN ROCKS (LOS ANGELES, CA) - PHOTOS BY NERGENE ARQUELADA
J!-ENT Archives: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2006

J!-ENT COVERAGE FOR FAST & THE FURIOUS: TOKYO DRIFT (LOS ANGELES, CA) - PHOTOS BY GARLAND GEE
J!-ENT Archives: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2006

J!-ENT COVERAGE FOR FAST & THE FURIOUS: TOKYO DRIFT (LOS ANGELES, CA) - PHOTOS BY GARLAND GEE
J!-ENT Archives: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 1999

J!-ENT COVERAGE FOR J-POP MEETUP IN SHIBUYA & HARAJUKU - PHOTOS BY DENNIS A. AMITH
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Upon the 10th Anniversary of the film Kill Bill, this will be a rare opportunity to catch the electrifying performance of the iconic theme song's original composer. Hotei will be joined by drummer Zachary Alford, most recently in the spotlight for his work on David Bowie's latest album, and the acclaimed New York-based British bassist, Tony Grey. Hotei and the band will play in New York as part of a circuit including Berlin, London, Osaka, and Tokyo.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE PERFORMANCE, PLEASE CLICK HERE:
http://highlineballroom.com/show/2013/11/14/hotei/
PORNO GRAFFITI

AVAILABLE NOW on iTunes USA
PORNO GRAFFITTI has been releasing hit songs in Japan for nearly 15 years. With a few of their hit songs featured as theme songs on anime series such as "Bleach", "GTO", "Magi" and many more, Porno Graffitti made their U.S. live debut at Anime Expo in Los Angeles this past summer. J!-ENT's Dennis A. Amith interviewed Porno Graffitti’s Akihito Okano (vocalist/guitar) and Haruichi Shindo (guitar/background vocalist) about their performing in Los Angeles and more!
Before we talk about your music, let’s get to know more about Porno Graffitti. How did the group come up with the band name?

HARUICHI SHINDO: Boston rock band Extreme’s 2nd album was titled “Porno Graffitti.” When we were amateurs, we wanted to stand out as much as we could and find a name with impact. Then we remembered Extreme’s album titled “Porno Graffitti” which we listened to while we were in high school and we used it as the band’s name.

When you were younger, were there any music artists or bands that inspire you to become a music artist?

AKIHITO OKANO: A lot of American bands such as Guns & Roses, Skid Row and Aerosmith.

Curious, if I was to take a peek in each of your MP3 players, which artists, song or album would I catch you listening to?

AKIHITO OKANO: Fun and Bruno Mars

HARUICHI SHINDO: From last summer I have really been listening to All City Steppers.

Coming to America... Was there anything you really wanted to eat or something you really wanted to buy here in America?

HARUICHI SHINDO: In and Out burger and a burger from Father’s Office.

AKIHITO OKANO: Pink’s hotdogs

You performed at Anime Expo in Los Angeles. How exciting was it to perform in front of an American audience?

AKIHITO OKANO: We really don’t know what to expect until we open the lid and in that sense we are excited to see fans reactions. We were able to communicate a little with the American fans (at Anime Expo), so we don’t have much anxiety and were looking forward to it.

I know that many international fans discovered your music through “Hitori no Yoru” featured in the anime series “GTO,” but the first time I saw Americans singing your music was back in 2001 at a J-Pop karaoke competition and the winner of the competition sung your song “Agehacho”. But how does it feel to know you have fans outside of Japan who love your music?

HARUICHI SHINDO: Up until now, we were mainly focused on our activities back in Japan and we had never done anything overseas. So, it was hard to have a sense of...
our international fans. Once in a while we get comments on Twitter from international fans but coming here (Anime Expo) and actually meeting the fans, it made us very happy.

As you near your 15th year anniversary since the release of your first major label single, let’s now talk about your music but let’s start from the earlier years of Porno Graffitti. I’ve read that Porno Graffiti was first founded back in 1994. But back then you were in the high school band “No Score” which eventually led to Porno Graffitti. For each of you, what was your precious memory when you first started the band?

AKIHITO OKANO: When we were in high school, our school was located in the country side and there was not a culture for bands to get excited. We would perform and the atmosphere was more that the students would sit and watch in silence. So, we are really surprised that we were able to come this far.

HARUICHI SHINDO: Originally we named it “No Score” because we didn’t want to be tied to playing from a music sheet. It wasn’t because we wanted to be rebels but because no one knew how to read a musical score.

You made your debut with “Apollo” in 1999, followed by your first anime theme song “Hitori no Yoru” for GTO but in September 2000, you had your first #1 Oricon single “Saudade” which also sold over a million copies. Because that single was the first to be at #1 and then you had two more consecutive #1’s with “Saboten” and “Ageha-cho”. Looking back at that time, with three consecutive #1’s, was there a lot of excitement during that time and was there a lot of pressure to perform at a higher level because the band became successful?

AKIHITO OKANO: Maybe this is the country side of me but we thought we won’t be tricked! I knew that this streak wouldn’t last forever. At that time we had to keep our composure but of course it was a very exciting time and we were very happy.

Another fan favorite was your 21st CD single “Winding Road”. An awesome song! Can you please tell us your memories of the making of this song and anything you can share with our
When we wrote this song, our feeling was that we wanted to make a great song. Much like John Lennon’s famous song, “Image” we wanted to have the same feeling in creating a famous song like that. I don’t think that this song is on the same level (laughs) but that was our thought process.

Your music has been featured on “Ayakashi Ayashi”, “Bleach” (movie and TV), the live-action movie version of “Gyakuten Saiban” and most recently your single “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” was featured on the anime series “Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic”. So, for the anime and manga fans who are reading this interview, I have to ask the question, do you watch anime or read manga today?

AKIHITO OKANO: I grew up watching the original Gundam series. I am a hardcore fan of the original so when I see the newer Gundam series I cannot accept it. That is the kind of Gundam fan I am. (Laughing)

AKIHITO OKANO: I do read a lot of History based manga, I am currently reading a manga called “Kingdom”.

From 1999-2013, your music has been consistent and still does well on the Oricon Singles and Album Charts. But here is an interesting question for both of you. What is the biggest difference musically and also as individuals between the Okano Akihito and Shindo Haruichi of today vs. the version of Okano Akihito and Shindo Haruichi of 1999.

HARUICHI SHINDO: I think it has changed. When we debuted we worked alongside our producer.

When creating songs in Japan, we had a feeling that we wanted to create a sound that many Japanese people admire in Western music. Of course, we still like Western music, but now we would like to create a sound that is unique to Japan, a new kind of rock n roll.

HARUICHI SHINDO: I feel the same as well. Our style has involved into a “mixture rock” which we like to incorporate the best parts of JPOP, Western Music, Latin America and other music into our sound. I feel that is the biggest difference.

For more information on PORNO GRAFFITTI, please visit:

http://www.pornograffitti.jp/
Rock band Porno Graffitti (which consists of vocalist/guitarist Akihito Okano and guitarist/background vocalist Haruichi Shindo) are no strangers when it comes to having theme songs used for anime series. The band which debuted back in 1999 and have had countless number of hit singles and albums have had songs such as “Melissa” used in the anime series “Fullmetal Alchemist”, “Hitotenu Yoru” for “GTO”, “Winding Road” for “Ayakashi Ayashi”, “Koyoi, Tsuki ga, Miezu Tono” for the third “Bleach” film and “Anima Rossa” for the “Bleach” anime TV series.

And with their first live performance coming to Anime Expo in Los Angeles in July 2013, it’s good timing for the band as they have released their 37th single “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” (which translates to “Twinkling Under the Stars”), used for the anime TV series “Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic”.

It’s important to note that there are two versions of “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” that were released. One featuring the duo on the front cover and a limited edition “Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic” single version with the characters on the front cover. The limited edition is the version of “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” that I will be reviewing.

The single features a total of four tracks and each song does have some connection to “Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic” in terms of the situation happening in the anime/manga series and the main track “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” has the main connection as the opening theme song for the anime series.

The single kicks off with “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” is an upbeat rock track with lyrics that do match up with the anime series which takes place in desert. The song about standing in a place nothing but desert and seeing a young girl in his dreams, with the person being a prince riding up on a white horse. And if you look up in the sky there are stars twinkling and under those stars, you are thinking about someone. And within that cold heart, a fire is ignited.

The second track is titled “Gokujou Landing” (which translates to “Best Landing”) and is an upbeat rock track with a mid-eastern Arabic touch to its introduction. An upbeat fun rock track about flying away with the countdown now finished, where would you land? You hold the hand of a person that is so cold but you want to melt the coldness within that person.

The third track is titled “Mukaiawase” (which translates to “Face-to-face”) and is a slow ballad with a beautiful arrangement. The song is about finishing one long journey and asking oneself, where do I go next? What have I found? Is there someone that I will fall in love? But there are many more places to see and it will be time again to leave and go back on another trip and without turning back. But it’s the wanting to go out to meet and see the happiness and love on people’s faces.

The fourth track is the anime version of “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” which is not the full song but a shortened version, primarily the theme song with a duration of 1:34.

Overall, Porno Graffitti’s “Matataku Hoshi no Shita de” is a solid single from the band. And after all these years, the band shows no signs of stopping nor signs of waning in popularity. They are still a popular band releasing catchy rock music.

If you are a fan of Porno Graffitti or “Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic”, the single is definitely recommended!  ****

— DENNIS A. AMITH
T.M. Revolution made his return to OTAKON 2013 for a spectacular show making it 10 years since his debut performance in the U.S. at OTAKON 2003.

To commemorate his appearance at the 20th OTAKON, T.M. Revolution released a special anime tie-in compilation album titled “Geisha Boy (Anime Song Experience)” in which limited numbers of copies were sold exclusively at OTAKON 2013 and SOLD OUT on the first day of the convention.

Due to popular demand, T.M. Revolution has just released this special album on iTunes! As a bonus, the iTunes version of the album also includes concert footage of “Flags” “Sword Summit” and “The Party Must Go On”, from Inazuma Rock Fes. 2012.

Inazuma Rock Fes is a music festival that Takanori Nishikawa organizes every year as the Cultural Ambassador for his hometown in Shiga prefecture.

“Geisha Boy (Anime Song Experience)” can be purchased on iTunes in the U.S., Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Peru, Australia, and New Zealand.

T.M. Revolution continues to build his momentum all over the world!

[Track list]
1. HEART OF SWORD -yoakemae- ("Ruroni Kenshin" ending theme song)
2. INVOKE ("Mobile Suit Gundam SEED" opening theme song)
3. Meteor ("Mobile Suit Gundam SEED" insert song)
4. Zips ("Mobile Suit Gundam SEED Kokuu no Senjou" insert song)
5. ignited ("Mobile Suit Gundam SEED DESTINY" opening theme song)
6. vestige ("Mobile Suit Gundam SEED DESTINY" theme song)
7. resonance ("Soul Eater" opening theme song)
8. SWORD SUMMIT ("Sengoku Basara: Samurai Kings" opening theme song)
9. Save The One, Save The All ("Bleach: Hell Verse" opening theme song)
10. FLAGS ("Sengoku Basara: The Last Party" opening theme song)
11. The party must go on ("Sengoku Basara: The Last Party" ending theme song)
12. Preserved Roses ("Valvrave the Liberator" opening theme song)

AVAILABLE NOW ON iTUNES USA - CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD!
THE RETURN OF HOME MADE KAZOKU

HOME MADE KAZOKU is one of the well-known Japanese hip hop acts to gain international recognition for their music and now they are back in the USA for their second performance in the US to kick off their 10th year anniversary.

By Dennis A. Amith

The hip hop trio, HOME MADE KAZOKU (which means “family” in Japanese) has been tearing up the charts in Japan for several years. But what is amazing is the fan following worldwide that the trio, which consists of MICRO, KURO and DJ U-ICHI, continues to grow. Growing popularity due toongs such as “Thank You!!” (used as the ending theme for “BLEACH”), “SHONEN HEART” (used as the opening theme for “Eureka Seven”), “Shooting Star” (used as an ending theme for “NARUTO”) and “No Rain No Rainbow” (used for the “NARUTO SHIPPUDEN the MOVIE - Kizuna-“).

The group which hailed from Nagoya also has American ties as both vocalists, MICRO and KURO had lived in the United States. MICRO spent his childhood in Kentucky while KURO lived in Chicago through the age of 12.

The trio performed at Otakon in 2010, which J!-ENT interviewed them for the very first time about their US debut. With a return for the 20th anniversary of OTAKON in 2013 and a new single titled “Kimigaitakara” (now available on iTunes USA and Amazon USA), J!-ENT recently interviewed MICRO, KURO and DJ U-ICHI for a second interview to discuss....

Welcome back to Baltimore and happy 10th Anniversary!!!! Last time you performed at OTAKON in Baltimore, one of the OTAKON staff said that line to your concert was one of the longest lines he has seen in 17 years! Looking back at performing at OTAKON, how was your experience performing in front of an American audience?
HOME MADE KAZOKU: When we first came here, we did not know how our music would be received (in America) and were a really nervous. But the performance went really well, and it was a great memory for all of us.

Having performed at Otakon before, does it make it any easier to perform for American audiences? Or do you still get a bit nervous?

HOME MADE KAZOKU: We always get nervous. When we had our first overseas performance, it was more of an anxiety of the unknown but this time it is a nervous feeling of whether we can have a great show. It’s a different type of nervousness.

You will be at Otakon along with T.M. Revolution. Both you and TMR were among the most popular guests at Otakon and it’s great to see both of you sharing the same stage. Micro, I know you worked with Nishikawa-san for Abingdon Boys School’s song “Lost Reason”, but is this the first time Home Made Kazoku shared the same stage as T.M. Revolution?

HOME MADE KAZOKU: This was the first time HOME MADE KAZOKU and T.M. Revolution shared the same stage and it would be great if we can both come back to Otakon again.

Last time I interviewed you guys, I asked if I looked in your MP3 player, what songs/artists bands would I catch you listening to. In 2010, Kuro was listening to Eli Paperboy Reed and Ben Loncle Soul. Micro, you were listening to Kubota Toshinobu and U-ICHI, you were listening to Alicia Keys. But for 2013, if I looked into your MP3 player, what artists/songs would I find you listening to lately?

KURO: I love ElectricEmpire and Hocus Pocus.
MICRO: Bruno Mars
U-CHI: Before we came to OTAKON, JAY-Z’s new album was released, so I’m listening to JAY-Z. We were all able to catch his live concert while we were here and it was amazing!

HOME MADE KAZOKU has had a good number of collaborations in the past with Makihara Noriyuki, KOME KOME CLUB and for your 23rd single “Love is...” with Ms. OOJA. What was it like to work with Ms. OOJA for that track?

HOME MADE KAZOKU: Back in Nagoya we used to do activities together. We all get along so working with each other went smooth. We’ve known each other for a long time, so this time we were able to create a more grown up love song. Her voice is amazing.

You recently released your 24th single “Kimi ga ita kara” (Because of You) to celebrate your 10th anniversary, can you guys tell us more about your new single?

HOME MADE KAZOKU: This will be our 10th year since we debuted and we wanted to compose a song expressing our gratitude to those who supported us throughout the years. We first started out as a trio and we would not have made this far without everyone’s support.

Your seventh and your latest album released was “3RISE” which is available on US iTunes. How was the experience of recording this album for each of you? And how long did it take to work on this album?

HOME MADE KAZOKU: After “AKATSUKI” (which translates to dawn) we wanted to show a new side to us since after dawn it is sunrise. In terms of how long it took to work on the album, ideas were always inside our heads all the time, so it felt as if we created it in our minds.

Of all the songs included in “3RISE” which track was the most challenging song for each of you?

HOME MADE KAZOKU: "Signature Sound". We wanted to create this as HOME MADE KAZOKU’s “signature sound”. We composed it in a way in which 3 of our styles mesh together and the scratch solo part was a first for the group. For our live performance of this song, there...
“This will be our 10th year since we debuted and we wanted to compose a song expressing our gratitude to those who supported us throughout the years. We first started out as a trio and we would not have made this far without everyone’s support.” - HOME MADE KAZOKU

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** Having fun and goofing off with each other. By doing so, we can obtain hints for our next sound/song and new material is born.

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** It’s fun to see those so we want fans to keep on doing it. We think musicians actually like to check out those mashups and rapping, singing, more than fans think.

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** For each of you, which song on the “3RISE” album is your favorite and why?

**MICRO:** “World is mine”

**U-ICHI:** "Signature Sound"

**KURO:** “Signature Sound”

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** I saw on your ameblo blog showcasing the HOME MADE KAZOKU 10th Anniversary t-shirts and concert towels are pretty awesome as well! But I have to ask, 10th anniversary…what has been the secret of HOME MADE KAZOKU as a group to continue to be strong together as a team but also creatively?

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** We wanted to create a track with a swing and jazz aspect to it. With the percussion break to it, we ended up with a fun song. If you love this song, you will probably like “RUSH” from our album “HOME”.

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** We have a good number of performances lined up with the Tokai Summit 2013, Bounce in the Hall, Otodama Sea Studio 2013, Otakon in the USA, MUSIC LIFE 13 and the “two timez one night tour” 2013 followed by the KAZOKU FES in October. Definitely a busy summer for HOME MADE KAZOKU. Since July, you have been busy on live performances…how has the experience been for HOME MADE KAZOKU in 2013 so far? Any memorable highlights from your 2013 live performances so far?

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** With this being our 10th year, we are starting on many different things. We are also thinking about a huge live performance to commemorate our 10th anniversary. In terms of memorable highlights from 2013, it is definitely OTAKON 2013!

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** Speaking of fans, what do you think about the fans who have been creating YouTube mashups such as “Will Smith vs. Home Made Kazoku – My Jiggy Hearto” or a mashup featuring HOME MADE KAZOKU and 2Pac. Or fans who record videos of themselves rapping/singing to HOME MADE KAZOKU songs?

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** It doesn’t matter how fans discover us, we are happy that they do! We think even in Japan, there are probably many people who discover us through anime. When people come to our concert, more than their image of us through anime, we hope that they love the HOME MADE KAZOKU world that we create.

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** I need to ask this question for the fans who discovered your through these anime series. Do any of you watch any current anime or read any manga now and if so, what are your favorite titles?

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** “Naruto” and “Bleach”!

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** Whenever you are not busy making music, what hobbies do each of you like to do in your free time?

**MICRO:** Photography. I like taking pictures of the sky.

**U-ICHI:** Video editing. I like to make HOME MADE KAZOKU off shoot videos of our tours, so check them out.

**KURO:** Jogging. Sometimes I run marathons.

**HOME MADE KAZOKU:** Back in 2010, I asked you guys of what is your reaction to have people all over the world who love your music. And at the time, it was hard for you to even imagine having fans outside of Japan. A few years have passed since then, but how does it feel to know that there are people all over the world who love you HOME MADE KAZOKU’s music? **HOME MADE KAZOKU:** It is often said that there are no boundaries in music, coming to the U.S. and performing, all of us realized what that truly means. If there are people who want to listen to our music, it doesn’t matter what country they are in, we want to go there and perform!
In our last interview, we did a J!-ENT word play. This time, I’m going to give each of you five sentences and you fill in the blank with your answer.

a. When I come to America, the food I always have wanted to try is _____________.
HOME MADE KAZOKU: Hamburgers!

b. When it’s very hot and humid in Japan, I always _____________.
HOME MADE KAZOKU: Never turn off the AC.

c. My favorite music video that I enjoyed filming is _____________.
HOME MADE KAZOKU: “fantastic 3”

d. The last movie I watched in the theater is _____________.
HOME MADE KAZOKU: “Monsters University”

e. I love to see the audience reaction when I perform the song ___________ in concert.
HOME MADE KAZOKU: “Itoshino mic check 1, 2”

What would you like to say to your fans all over the world?
HOME MADE KAZOKU: Thank you for your continuous support. We feel very happy to have fans that live far away from Japan who listen to our music. It is often said that music has no boundaries, but we were often in doubt about that phrase until we actually performed overseas. Being able to perform in Baltimore twice and interacting with fans, we were deeply moved. We will promise you that we will continue to create amazing music. One day we want to be able to have a worldwide tour. Even though we are apart and we are not related by blood, we are all family (KAZOKU)!

For more information on HOME MADE KAZOKU, please click on the following websites below:

- OFFICIAL Website
- OFFICIAL Blog
- MICRO @ Twitter
- DJ U-ICHI @ Twitter
HOME MADE KAZOKU

01. キミガイタカラ (Kimigaitakara)
02. SUMMER BORN!!!!!!!!!!
03. Sun Shade Love
04. N.A.M.A.

Home Made Kazoku returns with their 24th CD single “Kimigaitakara” (Because of You), the 10th anniversary single, now available on iTunes USA and Amazon USA.

And what great timing as the group which consists of Micro, Kuro and DJ U-Ichi performed their latest summer single at Baltimore for OTAKON 2013.

Best known outside of Japan for anime theme songs such as “Thank You” for “Bleach”, “Shonen Heart” for “Eureka Seven” and “FREEDOM” for “Naruto Shippuden”, the trio has come a long way since they formed the group back in 1996, performed at clubs throughout Nagoya before receiving their first major label single release in 2004 with Ki/oon Records.

For those not familiar with Home Made Kazoku (which translates to “Home Made Family”) is a vocal/hip hop group that has evolved in their music within the last ten years.

“Kimigaitakara” is a single in which Micro told J!-ENT, “This will be our 10th year since we debuted and we wanted to compose a song expressing our gratitude to those who supported us throughout the years. We first started out as a trio and we would not have made this far without everyone’s support.”

An upbeat summer track, with a relaxing combination of rhymes and vocals, with a summer, breezy style.

“Kimigaitakara” is a love song which the group sings about their personal feelings about being reborn and how they are strong because of the person they love or appreciate. And knowing the meaning of life and how their heart is beating for that person who has given them that life.

But most importantly words of wherever that person is, they will never forget that person and how they are appreciative of the love they feel.

The summer theme continues with the second track “SUMMER BORN!!!!!!!!!!”, an upbeat, happy and catchy track about not being shy during the summer, take it off and go topless, have fun and be free.

The third track is “Sun Shade Love” and is another catchy summer song about secret love and wearing matching sunglasses, while going out to the sea, going on vacation with the person you love.

The track has horns and a cool, happy beat.

The fourth track is “N.A.M.A.” and has an old school ‘80s synth with tight beats. Love the rhymes for this song and its probably the track that gets a lot of play because I dig the rhymes and vocals.

From the verse to the chorus about “Old School, New School, No School Rules”, great harmony, it’s catchy and definitely one of my favorite HMK songs!

The song is pretty much about the group, crafting their lyrics and rhymes and hearing MICRO giving some props to the venues and clubs they have performed at such as OZON, JB’s, LUSH and CIPHER.

I actually dig this song because in the old hip hop videos on YouTube from CIPHER the UNDERGROUND, you can see videos of HMK back in 2002.

Overall, “Kimigaitakara” is an upbeat summer single for Home Made Kazoku but also a song that was created for their fans to show their support as the group celebrates their 10th anniversary.

While all three summer songs are upbeat and fun, for me it’s hearing the style of HMK with the firece lyrical flow as exhibited in “N.A.M.A.” that I really enjoyed a lot!

If you are an HMK fan, “Kimigaitakara” is recommended! ****

—DENNIS A. AMITH
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There is no spokesperson with a catchy phrase to remind the driver to slow down, stop eating, quit messing with the radio or pay attention to the road. There’s Only You. Speak Up.
He has come a long way since his musical debut, but Andy Quach has matured and has become one of the biggest VPOP stars that is based in the United States.

From his exciting, beat-driven dance tracks “Hua - Promise” and “Em Da Quen - Forgotten” or belting out romantic ballads such as “Nho - Missing You” and “De Em Ra Di - Letting You Go”, the pop star has shown how much he has evolved as a music artist but also a businessman with AQ Entertainment.

And for his upcoming duet album, the singer teams up with AQ Entertainment’s newest star, Ngo Nhu Thuy for “Forever Love”.

J!-ENT recently had the opportunity to interview Andy Quach regarding his musical career and also his upcoming album.

Before we get into discussions about your music, let’s get to know more about you. Reading your bio, you were born in Saigon, Vietnam. You are now living in the US but having visited Vietnam, what do you miss the most each time you come back to the US?

ANDY: Well to be honest, I left Vietnam at a very young age. I’ve been back to visit only three times, so I don’t really know much about Vietnam. But, if I have to pick what I miss most, I’d say the food.

What kind of person were you back in high school? The party guy? The Musician? Artist? Athlete?

ANDY: Athlete. Because I loved to play soccer & basketball. I was one of the high school all-stars for soccer.

Who did you listen to a lot when growing up?

ANDY: At a young age, I listened to the Four Kings of Hong
Kong (Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Leon Lai and Aaron Kwok). Once I got older, I focused more on K-Pop artists like Bi-Rain and Seven.

**If I was to look into your MP3/CD player right now, which artist or song would you be listening to at this moment?**

**ANDY:** Ne-yo. Because I love his voice and songs. Most importantly, his song writing skills are really inspiring.

**While growing up, at what age did you know that you wanted to pursue music as a career?**

**ANDY:** At age 20. That was when I joined a local band and started to believe that I could make it professionally. But then again, even with talent and hard work, we still need a lot of blessing, so I thank God for granting me my 21st Birthday’s wish of becoming a professional singer.

**Let’s talk about your music. Back in 2007, you released your debut album “K.O.”. Every first album is a learning experience. When you look back on your first album, what memories come to mind?**

**ANDY:** Well, the “K.O.” album was a special and really good learning experience for me. It was my first solo album. After splitting with Vpop (a boy band that Andy was a member of), I decided to go a different route, which was Hip-hop & R&B. At that time, Hip-hop and R&B were still very rare in our Vietnamese music. But, I followed my heart and took a chance. It paid off. After my “K.O.” album, I was established as one of the first Vietnamese Hip-hop & R&B artists.

You had a solid collaboration with Cat Tien on that album, you also worked with Linda Chou. Musically, what was it like to work with these two talented individuals?

**ANDY:** It was really wonderful working with them. We had great chemistry musically due to our close friendships. In addition, Cat’ Tien and I used to be together, so our hit songs were about our break up, and you know fans always love painful break up songs. A broken heart is something that almost all of us could relate to. As artists, we have to be willing to be transparent with the matter of the heart sometimes. As for Linda Chou, she’s like my little sister. I introduced her to Vietnamese Music industry. She knew very little Vietnamese in the beginning, because it wasn’t her first language. But, she’s always been very talented, hardworking and a fast learner. Therefore, she picked up the language quite quickly. I really enjoyed working with her. Seeing her establishing herself as a well known artist makes me very proud.

**In 2008, you released your second album “Showtime”. It featured a good number of Asian pop songs rewritten in Vietnamese. But it was also an album that people criticized because they wanted to see more originality from you as a musical artist. Was this part of the reason why you made a switch to a new label to achieve creative freedom?**

**ANDY:** Yes, that was a big reason to why I made that switch. The first two albums, “K.O.” & “Showtime”, were produced by Van Son Entertainment, one of the big labels that I signed with at the time. I was still very new to the industry, still learning and especially still being controlled by the label. And even though those two albums helped establish my name, it also
made me realize that I needed to make a transition from being just a performer to being an artist. At this time, I really started to understand the difference between a performer and an artist. So I stepped up my game by writing my own songs and getting ready to produce original material to build up the artist side of me. When my contract was fulfilled, it was an easy call for me to make that move—for the sake of complete creative freedom. That was how AQ Entertainment was born.

In 2010, your album “AQ3” was released. Let’s first discuss the move to AQ Entertainment and you starting your own label. How difficult was that for you?

ANDY: It was an easy call for me to go independent and have my own label. I wanted full creative freedom, and followed my vision, which is raising VPOP to the next level. But, as to any new and meaningful ventures, it’s extremely hard to be on my own with new label. Nothing is easy especially when we want to make a difference in this business. I can tell a lot of people don’t believe in my goals and vision, which is okay. It takes time and perseverance to instill belief, of which I am willing to invest. Thankfully, my family, friends and especially my entire AQ Entertainment team always push me, keep me on track, and keep things moving forward. When the glass feels half empty, it’s good to be reminded that it’s actually half full. “Teamwork makes dream work”.

Your music for “AQ3” focused on originality, what was the experience of working on this album?

ANDY: It was a huge challenge. We had to prepare for an entire year, which is quite rare for a Vietnamese album. From writing, instrumental productions, hours and hours of studio time, making music videos, working out seven days a week to get the magnificent physique. (Laughing) The entire team worked really hard on it, because we all believed that when “AQ3” dropped, AQ Entertainment would be represented as a label for new music and Andy Quach would be re-introduced as an artist, not just a performer. So, it was the making-a-statement album, and thank God our hard work didn’t go unnoticed.

The production quality for the album was very good and the collaboration with Huynh Nhat Tan and rapper Thai Foon was also great. What was it like working with these two?

ANDY: Mr. Huynh Nhat Tan is considered a big brother to me. He took me in and guided me through this arduous musical path ever since I got into the business. In my heart, I believe he’s the best producer; therefore, all my albums were executive produced by him. There would be no AQ (Andy Quach) today if it wasn’t for him. As for Thai Foon, hands down, he’s a talented rapper. I love the fact that whenever I gave him different tracks to write to, he’d always come back with multiple artistic flavors to compliment them. Besides Mr. Huynh Nhat Tan and Thai Foon, I have to give credit to my other teammates as well. My god-brother & co-founder of AQ Entertainment, Vinny Vo. If it wasn’t for his influence, his vision and his advice, AQ Entertainment wouldn’t even exist. Mic Vo & Timothy Wynn from FCI (First Class International), Long & Bill from Possessed Beats and Liby V for making me crazy beats. In addition, thanks to two other rappers who go by the names of...
After “AQ3”, you released the compilation album “Chinese Melodies” and a remix album “Play Me”. First, let’s discuss “Chinese Melodies”, how did you become interested in Chinese music and what was your concept for this album?

ANDY: That’s a great question. I’m both Vietnamese/Chinese, so Chinese music was also a major part of my growing up. I knew that a lot of our older Vietnamese audience are familiar with and love those classic Chinese love songs. So, I thought I should show my appreciation and do something for these particular fans, while showing my Chinese side through the half Viet & half Chinese songs in the “Chinese Melodies” album. And the other meaningful incentive is that the album covers most of my and my parents’ favorite Chinese love songs. It was also dedicated to my parents. It still is their most favorite album by me (smile). So as you can see, I had great and wonderful reasons to do this project, as a performer.

And for “Play Me”, what was it like to make your first remix album and what talent was involved for the remixes?

ANDY: As for “Play Me”, that was simple because it’s a remix album of all my top hit songs. I just wanted to reintroduce them in a new and dancing light. I purposefully chose the title “Play Me” to keep it fun. It’s just a playful project dedicated to the fans who prefer to dance and go crazy a bit before the stress get them crazy, opposite of the “Chinese Melodies” album so to speak. In terms of talent, I had young producers from Vietnam Trung Hieu, Europe Jay Wang and our own AQ Entertainment producers FCI, Possessed Beats & Liby V to add their own flavor, creativity and perspective. Also, a great chance for us all to connect internationally through music.

In 2012, you released “Crossroads”. Two years in the making... What was the biggest difference in the making of this album versus “AQ3”?

ANDY: For every album, we always aim to raise the bar or take it to the next level. And because music always evolves with time, we want every album to be better than the last. The difference between the two albums was the combination of everything from the beats, the songs, the production, and especially the direction. For the beats, we had more producers for “CrossRoads.” I believe my song writing skill had improved by then, therefore the material sounded more mainstream. So the challenge was and is always about giving the fans what’s now—the sound of now. Cannot come out with new albums and only have old material on them all the time—sometimes is okay due to the nature of our industry, but not all the time. As mentioned, at some point, after much soul searching, I have to make a decision to transition from being a performer to being an artist by promoting originality. It’s not an easy decision, matter of fact it’s extremely hard in our industry but not all the time. As an artist by promoting originality. It’s not an easy decision, matter of fact it’s extremely hard in our industry and I understand it’s not for everyone. Therefore, I feel completely blessed to be able to transition into that artist side of me—becoming that true me.

I have to say that “Hua - Promise” was an exciting, upbeat track and your live performance and music video definitely showcased a good amount of choreography. But I’m curious about the song, how long did it take you to create and also for you and the dancers to get the choreography down?

ANDY: Yes I agree, this song was pretty interesting. I heard this song in my sleep, then popped up and finished writing the song within an hour. I knew it would be a hit, so I went ahead and released it before the album was even out. We also shot a music video for it and it was quite a big production that we put in. The challenge was the dancing. It’s a cool hip-hop song, so I had to dance. And as you all know, I’m not a dancer. But thanks to Christopher Cuenza for his awesome choreography and extra sessions, I was able to get all the moves down. So the whole process took about 2-3 weeks. I consider this track as one of my top five hit songs. I even got to perform it in Vietnam on a very special big live show. Loving it so much, I even released a remix version of it. You can find it on my youtube channel www.youtube.com/andyquachmusic.

I noticed a big difference in the production quality of your music videos from “Hua - Promise”, “Em Da Quen – Forgotten” and “De Em Ra Di – Letting You Go”. With many artists, they leave it up to the director to come up with the video but with your music videos, do you have creative input?

ANDY: Since it’s important for me to have control over my own artistic image, I got involved from beginning to the end of every project. For all the songs that I wrote, I always pictured myself in the storylines, so most of the ideas and concepts for the videos always started with me, then
the director added on his input and vision.

In the making of “Crossroads”, what was the most challenging song to make in the album and why?

ANDY: I have to say “Hua - Promise” because of the big production that we put in. It was financially and time consuming. But the effort was worth it because we all knew it would be a hit.

Your upcoming album to be released this year is “Forever Love.” Can you tell us more about this album and what can fans expect?

ANDY: The “Forever Love” album is a very special album for me and Ngo Nhu Thuy, our newly signed artist with AQ Entertainment. It will be my very first duet album and it’s the first debut for her as well. With this album, fans get to hear and see a softer side of me due to a good number of ballads. It’s a different approach compared to all my solo albums; this will be more fitting and suitable for fans of all ages.

With the creative freedom you have as a music artist, what is your approach to how you deal with music now. Are you a perfectionist when it comes to the lyrics or sound of your music?

ANDY: Yes, I’m a perfectionist, and that’s why all of my albums take longer to be released. I have to pick the right lyrics, the right sound and especially the right flavor for me and the fans. Sometimes I frustrate people in my team just because of the details in every little thing. Not because I am being difficult, but more along the line of my love and respect for the art. But thanks to their patience, hard work, and especially their understanding that my goal is to produce the best material for our fans. The fans deserve the best from me, individually, and from our team, collectively.

For the music video “Forever Love”, you introduce Ngo Nhu Thuy. A stylish music video and a song with cool beats and a pretty solid duet. I noticed that there are a few songs on the upcoming album in which you are working with Ngo Nhu Thuy. How was the music collaboration between the two of you?

ANDY: As I mentioned, Ngo Nhu Thuy is our new artist, so I took her under my wings and tried to guide her with the best of my ability. I know if she’s presented in the right light, then she will make the AQ Entertainment family look good and vice versa. Her musical direction is a new challenge for me as well, because in addition to being an artist myself, I have to take on the role of a producer. So far, everything has gone well and I’m really happy with her progress.

As 2014 is around the corner, with the new album coming out, seeing how your career has progressed since your first album, what is the biggest difference between Andy Quach now versus the Andy Quach when you released your first album? And what has been the biggest learning experience you have learned overtime of being a pop star?

ANDY: The biggest difference between the AQ back then and the AQ now is wisdom and maturity. Time has taught me to be patient, work hard, keep pushing the bar, never give up, gotta have love and
respect, and above all, stay humble.

Let’s get to know more about you outside of the music industry, what are your interests or hobbies?

ANDY: Outside of the music industry, I'm just like any other regular guy. I love sports, video games, movies and enjoy having dinner with my friends.

If you have one word to describe yourself, what word would that be and why?

ANDY: “Fighter” because I don’t quit.

In my interviews we do a fun fill in the blank rapid question, I’m going to give you five sentences and you fill in the blank:

c. The last movie I watched in the theater was ___________.
ANDY: “World War Z”

d. The music video that I really enjoyed filming was ___________.
ANDY: “Hua - Promise”

e. If I have to share a guilty pleasure that my fans do not know about, it would be ___________.
ANDY: Playing a video game late at night. That is my relaxing time.

I know you have a few projects lined up to promote your upcoming album. What projects or events would you like to plug?

ANDY: Since my new duet album “Forever Love” has just released, we have plans to go on tour to promote the album. Our first stop will be in Sacramento on Oct. 18th and more will follow. So I hope that all my fans will come out, support, and get to hear me & Ngo Nhu Thuy perform live all the new songs from the album.

What would you like to say to your fans?

ANDY: For this, I would like to address my fans directly. I like to thank every one of you from all over the world for your love, support and acceptance through all the past years and the years to come. Out of appreciation, I promise I’ll keep on fighting and improving to give you my absolute best. AQ & AQ Entertainment will not disappoint you if great and original music is what you’re expecting. Lastly, I would like to thank J!-ENT for giving me a chance to connect with all my fans, Vietnamese and non Vietnamese alike. From my heart, I appreciate you!

For more information on Andy Quach, please visit his Facebook page here:

www.facebook.com/andyquachmusic

To view Andy Quach’s music videos, please visit:

www.youtube.com/user/andyquachmusic
The “Forever Love” album is a very special album for me and Ngo Nhu Thuy, our newly signed artist with AQ Entertainment. It will be my very first duet album and it’s the first debut for her as well. With this album, fans get to hear and see a softer side of me due to a good number of ballads. – Andy Quach
COOL ANDY QUACH VIDEOS ON YouTube

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- FOREVER LOVE
  ANDY QUACH & NGO NHU THUY

- HUA - PROMISE
  ANDY QUACH

- I MISS YOU
  ANDY QUACH

- EM DA QUEN - FORGOTTEN
  ANDY QUACH

- NHO - MISSING YOU
  ANDY QUACH

- DE EM RA DI - LETTING YOU GO
  ANDY QUACH

- "HUA - PROMISE" LIVE PERFORMANCE
  ANDY QUACH

- "HUA - PROMISE" REMIX
  ANDY QUACH
  Remix by DJ Huy & Big D from Denmark

- GIAC MO MOT CUOC TINH (REMIX)
  FT. THAI FOON
  ANDY QUACH

- "EM DA QUEN - FORGOTTEN"
  BEHIND THE SCENES
  ANDY QUACH

- "HUA - PROMISE"
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CROSSROADS
California-based J-Pop star Kylee has managed to have a career in Japan but now also has her sights set on making it big in the United States.

By Dennis A. Amith

When we last interviewed Kylee, she was about to start her senior year in high school, while releasing hit singles in Japan. Fast forward to 2013 and the Stanford student continues to release music in Japan but now she is releasing music in the U.S. in English and releasing cover videos on YouTube. J-ENT talks to Kylee about her music career in Japan and the U.S. and more.

Hi Kylee, it's been about two years since I last interviewed you. Before we get into discussion about music, let's talk about you. From Arizona to California, how are you enjoying the California life?

KYLEE: I love living in California! The weather is pretty different from Arizona but definitely in a good way! I have always wanted to live in California and I feel so lucky to have the chance now.

I know there are a few Japanese pop stars who lived in America, studied at a university. Hikaru Utada attended an Ivy League college at Columbia and you are studying at one of the top universities in the country, Stanford. What made you choose Stanford and curious, what was your second and third choices for college?

KYLEE: Stanford was my dream school from the start. The diversity amongst the students and the variety of the classes offered really appealed to me. I am someone who has a lot of different interests and wants to explore several different studies and Stanford truly is a place that lets you do that. To be honest, I didn't want to go to any other university but Stanford. However, I was also considering the international programs at universities
in Tokyo as well as some UC schools in California.

During our last interview, I asked what kind of music that you are listening too and it was Avril Lavigne’s “What the hell”. So, I’ll ask the same question two years later, if I took a look at your MP3 player, what artist or songs would I catch you listening to right now?

KYLEE: Demi Lovato, Kelly Clarkson, Ellie Goulding, Avril Lavigne, Pink and Miley Cyrus are some artists that I listen to a lot now.

Now that you are in the Bay Area, are you still rooting for the Arizona Diamondbacks?

KYLEE: I am not much of a sports person but I definitely have a connection to Arizona teams since most of my life was spent living in Arizona. But since I do live in the San Francisco area now, I also support a lot of the San Francisco teams. I’ll root for both! You can do that right? (Laughing)

In Japan, earlier this year, you released your seventh single “Daisuki Nanoni” which is used as the theme song for the anime series “Zetsuen no Tempest”. That is one deep breakup song. How long did it take to record the actual song?

KYLEE: Typically, a song takes about three to four hours to record with breaks and all that good stuff included. I can’t recall how long exactly for that song in particular but I’m pretty sure it was somewhere between that time of three to four hours.

The music video for “Daisuki Nanoni” was also pretty sad and deep. What was it like shooting the music video?

KYLEE: Shooting this music video was one of the most frustrating and exhausting and emotional music videos I have ever shot! We shot the video in the winter when it was freezing. My wardrobe for the video just happened to be shorts and a thin, white, long-sleeve top.

The CD single cover for “Daisuki Nanoni” was very cool with a touch of melancholy. But I must ask you if you can divulge the behind-the-scenes tale of the photo shoot for that cover image. So, here is the big question.... Is that a real tear? Or did you pour some eyedrops before the photoshoot?

KYLEE: No, those are real tears! (Laughing) I just tried to think of all the pain that I felt in this one relationship with a guy that I met the summer before.

I’ve noticed that you have more fans from all over the world, you even performed recently at the huge Japan Expo in France! How was that experience performing in France?

KYLEE: The Japan Expo was a great experience. I had never been to Europe until then so it was a very special trip for me. France is absolutely beautiful and I hope to go again soon.

How different was it performing in France versus Japan or even the United States? on this album and what you enjoyed about making this song?

KYLEE: Performing in France was very
much like performing in Japan, the audience was very energetic! They would jump up and down and dance with me which made the show so much more fun.

Recently at the J-Pop Summit Festival in San Francisco, you actually performed more English songs than Japanese. I know that you told me in our last interview of your desire to do more projects in the U.S. Will this be the big transition of focusing primarily on an American-driven career or do you plan to have a dual music career in the U.S. and Japan?

**KYLEE:** I think my career is starting to go into a different direction than I anticipated: one where I will be focusing more on English-based songs. But even though I go to school in the states now, I definitely don’t want to lose touch with my Japanese side. I started a YouTube channel recently so hopefully this will allow me to do both Japanese and English music and stay in touch with my fans in Japan.

You mentioned at J-Pop Summit Festival that you want to do more American covers. How are you planning the covers and will you be considering fan requests for songs to cover?

**KYLEE:** I am definitely considering fan requests for song covers. I love hearing from them personally which songs they would like to hear me sing. In addition to that though, sometimes I pick songs that I think a lot of people would be familiar with. Other times I choose songs that I just have a connection with.

I saw your cover for Selena Gomez’ “Come and Get It”. I actually like the editing for the video, it’s not your average YouTube cover of a person singing in their bedroom/living room there was actual cool and professional production that went into this.

**KYLEE:** Thank you. The “Come and Get it” cover was my very first cover for my YouTube channel so it really was just kind of my first baby step into this whole YouTube cover space. I definitely want to explore and try different things out with who I produce the covers with and who I work with on the music videos too. So overall, I’m still really new to this but I’m hoping to create a really fun music channel that people can be inspired by!

You worked with Sam Tsui and Kurt Schneider in a cover of Pink’s “Just Give Me a Reason”. How did that collaboration come about?

**KYLEE:** My manager and Kurt’s manager just happened to meet and talk and it was all extremely random. It wasn’t a really pre-planned thing at all. Once our managers talked, I met with Kurt. After meeting Kurt, I told him which song I was interested in covering and we met up in LA one weekend and recorded the song on one day and shot the music video the next day.
One thing I noticed is that you have your fans of your Japanese music are wondering why the different choice of music direction for your YouTube USA. Personally, I actually like to hear this different side of your music that is more American-driven. In our last interview, you mentioned your influence of Avril Lavigne, Green Day, My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy and watching you and your band jam live with more rock-inspire tunes, I really dig it! But is it your goal to keep Kylee USA and Kylee Japan separate in terms of what type of music is presented?

Kylee: I think Japan’s music market is completely different from the US market so there would definitely need to be some differences. I think I want to bring out that same American side in my music in Japan but in addition to that I would want to incorporate more of a Japanese style. This could be by taking songs that are all in English and changing the lyrics to all Japanese or changing just some of them to Japanese.

A lot of things have changed since you first entered the music industry six years ago with “Vacancy”. What is the biggest difference about the Kylee now versus the Kylee back then?

Kylee: My age plays a huge factor in all of this. When I started in Japan I was really young and easily influenced. I just loved to sing and I had a lot of interests in different genres. Now, I am getting closer and closer to figuring out what works best for me and what really makes me happy.

We mentioned how you saw Avril Lavigne as an influence but is there a singer your age or around your age that you really like listening to right now?

Kylee: I am really inspired by Demi Lovato as well as Katy Perry. When it comes to Demi, I love the power and emotion in her songs. Katy Perry’s story really inspires me to not give up on that search for that style that brings out the best of me.

I know a few years ago, you were hardcore into photography and you always had a camera with you. Are you still into photography or are you more of an Instagram user?

Kylee: Now a days I use both my iPhone and my camera. I use both because the quality and portability of the iPhone just makes it easier to take pictures wherever I am but cameras are always more adaptable.

Sigourney Weaver, Tiger Woods, Chelsea Clinton are among the few well-known names you see rooting for Stanford during a sports game on television. Have you also become a big Stanford sports fan now?

Kylee: To be honest, I’m not a huge sports fan but I am still a fan of Stanford’s football and basketball team. I have a lot of friends that play both sports and I love going out to the games and cheering them on.

Have you had a chance to sing the national anthem at a Stanford game yet?

Kylee: I have yet to sing the national anthem at a Stanford game but I definitely think I’ll be looking into that!

In our last interview, we did a J!-ENT word play. This time, I’m going to give each of you five sentences and you fill in the blank with your answer.

a. One thing that Arizona has that California doesn’t is _________.
   Kylee: My amazing family

b. The most geekiest thing about myself that people don’t know is that I like ____________.
   Kylee: Doing homework.

c. My favorite music video that I enjoyed filming is _____________.
   Kylee: “Vacancy”

d. The last movie I watched in the theater is _____________.
   Kylee: “The Great Gatsby”

e. I love to see the audience reaction when I perform the song _____________.
   Kylee: “Crazy For You”

What would you like to say to your fans?
fans all over the world?

KYLEE: Thank you for always supporting me! Your support means the world to me. I am still on this road to discovery and reaching for my dreams and knowing I have you guys is what helps keep me going! Let me know what cover songs you want to hear whether it’s via twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or just on YouTube!

With love,
Kylee

For more information on Kylee, please visit her official website and social media pages here:

http://www.kylee.jp/
https://www.facebook.com/kyleeofficialfanpage
https://twitter.com/kylee_official
http://www.youtube.com/user/KyleeSMEJ
I think my career is starting to go into a different direction than I anticipated: one where I will be focusing more on English-based songs. But even though I go to school in the states now, I definitely don’t want to lose touch with my Japanese side.” - Kylee
It doesn’t seem that long ago when Kylee released her first indie single “Vacancy” back in 2008.

By 2010, Kylee would eventually break into the Japanese music industry after signing with DefStar Records and releasing her first single “Kimi ga Iru Kara”, which was used as the theme song for the film, “Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac”.

A big fan of Avril Lavigne at the time, her music was a balance of J-Pop with elements of rock.

The focus of her music suited her distinct vocals that were unlike other teenage solo artists in Japan which many sported a more sweet, sugary pop style or R&B style but Kylee’s music was different. Her vocals and her music had an edge and a Western influence.

The edgy style was much more evident in her second single “missing” which was used as the theme song for “Heroman” and also on the other track “IT’S YOU” (which was used for Nissen’s commercial promoting Karina’s collection).

Kylee would gain attention with music fans with her third single “Everlasting”, a more mellow rock track, which was used for the anime series “Mobile Suit Gundam Unicorn”.

The single would be the first from Kylee to be released on iTunes USA and the song was also co-written by Kylee and Akiko Watanabe.

She would return with a more catchy pop/rock track with her fourth single “Never Give Up” in the summer of 2011 and by October 5th, she would release her fifth single “CRAZY FOR YOU”, which would receive 500,000 downloads online and was featured as the theme song for the “Nissen loves you” commercial which definitely brought attention to her music.

And as six of her songs from her five singles are featured on the “17” album, there are other songs from the album that are just as notable.

“BRAND NEW WAVE” feat. Orianthi, the Australian musician and singer/songwriter in which Kylee collaborates with the musician, who plays the electric guitar on the track.

The song “MUSIC” is another exciting rock track on the album with guitar arrangement that I found addictive and made it one of the songs I have listened to often on my playlist.

“17” also features two English tracks, “UNNOTICED” is rock track featuring lyrics, music and arrangement by Matthew Gerrard and Bridget Louise Benenate and “Yours Truly” featuring lyrics and music by Kylee.

With “UNNOTICED” featuring fun vocals and melody. “Yours Truly” on the other hand is a track that I have been wanting to hear from Kylee.

Back in 2011, with my first interview with her, Kylee expressed wanting to write her own songs and at the time, was learning to play the guitar and she did a great job with the overall track, especially the heart felt dedication lyrics.

But to hear a song that she created in English on her Japanese album was nice to hear and would signal a new chapter in her life, as she tries to balance her music career in Japan and also creating songs in English in the U.S.

Overall, “17” is no doubt an album that shows maturity in Kylee’s music and I look forward to seeing where her music takes her in the next chapter of her life as an adult. “17” is a well-done album that compliments Kylee’s vocals and her edgier rock style! Recommended! ****
Kat McDowell’s  
3rd Mini Album  
“Hope in you”  

Born in Tokyo and raised in New Zealand, Kat has always loved music. While she draws inspiration from artists including Foo Fighters, No Doubt, and Jason Mraz, Kat’s sound is definitely her own. She mixes acoustic guitar-led melodies with emotionally transparent lyrics that are delivered in a blend of Japanese and English.

In 2011, both New Zealand and Japan were profoundly changed by large-scale natural disasters. In the aftermath of 3/11, Kat regularly traveled to Northern Japan to play for the people of Tohoku. Then, after visiting Christchurch at the start of 2012, she felt she ought to capture some of the stories she’d been privileged to hear in her two home countries. Her newest mini-album, “Hope in you”, presents songs of empathy, encouragement, and redemption—and a couple just for fun...

More info on www.katmusic.jp  twitter: @katmcdowell  facebook: katmcdowellmusic
Hiroshi Uesugi may be known for his hits songs which he composed for AKB48, but this musician, has created beautiful music for many artists and groups in Japan. J!-ENT interviews Hiroshi Uesugi regarding his compositions, arrangements, touring as a musician and more!

By Dennis A. Amith

In 2012, it was major news when AKB48 member Atsuko Maeda announced her graduation and it became nationwide news in Japan. Many got to see her sing her graduation song “Sakura no Hanabira ~ Maeda Atsuko ver.” on television and it played on the news. And as far as the song goes, hearing the beautiful composition, it was a song first created before AKB48 was formed by a man named Hiroshi Uesugi.

And there are numerous songs by Uesugi that were hits or well-known to fans of different musical genres.

I was recently surprised when I was looking into Uesugi’s musical career and found out that he was responsible for the arrangement of “Love Wing” for the anime OVA series “Idol Defense Force Hummingbird” and the insert song “Setsunai Omoi”.

Suffice to say, because of the number of songs I have heard from Hiroshi Uesugi, I had to learn more about his career and his musical work.

Here is my recent interview with musician, Hiroshi Uesugi.

Were you brought up with a strong musical influence from your family?

HIROSHI: My father loves music. He doesn’t play any instruments at all, but he had a stereo component and small collection of records of classical and popular music. I loved to listen to them very much.

What was the first instrument that you got hooked on as a musician and what was your first instrument?

HIROSHI: Electronic organ. I started to play the electronic organ when I was six. My first instrument is acoustic reed organ. I first played it at age four at kindergarten.

How long ago did you decide that you wanted to make music a career than a hobby?

HIROSHI: It was about 27 or 28 years ago, when I was an engineering major college student.

Which artists or bands did you listen to a lot while growing
up? And was there any artist, musician or composer that inspired you??

HIROSHI: I learned the electronic organ from ages 6 to 9. At that time, my favorite was a series of music books and demonstration records for electronic organ. The arranger of the music books himself performed in the demonstration records just as his music books with a drummer. They contained various types of music such as movie themes, Latin, Jazz, American or European Folk songs, The Beatles, Burt Bacharach, Paul Mauriat and other pop songs. I wasn't good at reading music but I enjoyed playing “Yesterday” with the book, using the ‘sound’ of the demonstration record as a guide, though I had never listened to the original The Beatles version. When I was a high school student, I started to play the piano. My favorite pianist at that time was Bill Evans. I was very impressed and shocked by his amazing piano playing and sound.

Curious…If I was to look into your MP3/CD player right now, which artists or song would you be listening to at this time?

HIROSHI: Maybe Bill Evans, Chick Corea, or Keith Jarrett.

You run a Japanese and English blog. What I enjoy about reading your blog are some of the things you acquire for your music. When I read your blog in 2010, you were using Windows 7, Vienna Ensemble Pro with cubase 5. For 2013, what is your primary OS and software that you like to create your music right now?

HIROSHI: I use a PreSonus Studio One 2 with Windows 7 64 bit version running on the PC I built. I also use Native Instruments Komplete 9, MASCHINE, Universal Audio’s UAD-2, Waves Mercury and many other VST plugins. I don’t use Cubase now.

One thing I must ask. When I interviewed T. Kimura (m.o.v.e) years ago and asked him if he collected instruments or keyboards, he said he often buys from eBay. Are you the same? Do you collect vintage keyboards or try to get the latest in technology?

HIROSHI: No, I don’t use and have any vintage keyboards. All of my tools are software. I have a Yamaha grand piano, but it’s not vintage.

How did you get involved in the music industry? Did you send out demos or did you audition?

HIROSHI: I auditioned for keyboard players just after my college graduation in 1987. The audition was held by a famous producer Takebe Satoshi-san’s company, and it was not for a particular tour of a particular artist. They looked for young musicians who are able to work with them. Fortunately, I made the audition, and I started my career as a keyboard player in summer in 1987.

Are you aware that many people around the world have listened and enjoyed the music that you have created?

HIROSHI: Yes. I want to say thank you very much to the people all over the world who enjoy the music I have created.

What was the first album you worked on as a professional musician, composer or for arrangement?

HIROSHI: My first arrangement work was Yuko Kotegawa’s album “Bonté” released in 1991. I arranged two songs in this album, “Suifuyou” composed by Takao Horiuichi and “Kujaku” composed by Shinji Tanimura. My first composition work was Tomomi Nishimura’s VSD single “Hanadorobou” released in 1991. This song was contained in her album “Vingt ans” also released in 1991.

Let’s talk about the artists you worked with. You have worked with Yuki Saito, many of us know Saito-san from her music on “Maison Ikkoku” and “Sukeban Deka”. But how was the experience for you in working Yuki on her concerts but also having worked with her on the album “Love” and for “Nanimokamo Kawarutoshitemo”?

HIROSHI: Saito Yuki-san is a great actress and singer. I listened to her album “Chime” when I was a college student and was very impressed by her singing, the songs by great composers and superb arrangements. The most memorable work with her is the recording of the album “Love”. On the recording of the album, I spent a lot of time in the studio trying to meet her requests for the arrangements. I didn’t have much experience as an arranger at that time, but I made it. I’m so glad that the album got a good reputation.
You have also done compositions for anime and drama soundtracks such as “Katekyo Hitman Reborn”, “Kamisama Dolls”, “Sacred Seven”, “Blood Lad”, “Papa no Iukoto o Kikinasai!” and your song “Ashitae” for the album “Anime Sengoku Otome character album”. How is the experience for you to work on anime/drama songs?

HIROSHI: On anime or drama soundtrack songs, my musical approaches or techniques don’t change from any other works. My aim is always to make good music and sounds.

I remember reading your blog post in regards to the anime “Papa no Iukoto o Kikinasai!”, which you were working on the music and you mentioned that you read the novels to learn about the characters. Do you usually watch the anime or read the manga or novel before making the music for an anime or drama series?

HIROSHI: No. I usually get only the information that what type of music is required. Sometimes I receive character design documents, scripts or storyboards.

You have performed on tour with Hiromi Iwasaki multiple times. For her concert in 2012, I know you arranged the string quarter parts of the song and also did a piano trio. As a musician, taking on these big challenges, how has it improved yourself as a musician/composer?

HIROSHI: I joined Iwasaki Hiromi-san’s band since 2007 as a pianist and an arranger. We have played with piano trio and string quartet format since 2011 until now. Touring with a string quartet is a precious experience and playing the piano with the piano trio requires very sensitive skills. I love to play with this band very much. It improves my piano playing skill. And in the past three years, I made a lot of arrangements for a string quartet. It is definitely a good opportunity to improve my arrangement skill.

You have worked with a good number of idol groups. Of course, many people are familiar with your songs with AKB48. But you have also done work with Berryz Kobo for the song “Seishun Gekijou” for the album “Ai no Album 8” and songs for Rhodanthe*. But what is your approach when you produce or compose music for an idol group?

HIROSHI: On AKB48 songs, I have worked as a composer. On the other hand, I worked as an arranger with Berryz Kobo and Rhodanthe*. When I work as an arranger, I need to meet the requests from a producer or a director. But as I mentioned above, my fundamental approaches are always the same. I always want to make good sounds.

You did the arrangement for the Peaberry (which consists of S/mileage member Ayaka Wada and Morning Musume’s Riho Sayashi) song “Cabbage Hakusou” and I absolutely love arrangement of the music in this song especially the brass and strings. What was the most challenging aspect for you in the making this newer arrangement of the song?

HIROSHI: Thank you very much. This song was originally released in 2012 with the arrangement done by another person. The Mozart phrases are already used at the intro part and chorus part on the original version, and I was also requested to use the phrases on my new version.
Plus, I got another request to insert a Japanese traditional song “Furusato” at the middle part of this song. “Furusato” has a totally different meter, tempo and style from “Kyabetu Hakusho”, so it was a very challenging arrangement. I made a new interlude part also inspired by Mozart for this new version and I love it.

For the idol group, Yumemiru Adolescence, you produced, composed, arranged, recorded, mixed and mastered their songs. How was that experience for you outside of just creating the music but having more responsibility?

HIROSHI: It’s so difficult but so fun. I think I need to improve skills of mixing or mastering. Because I have an environment (DAW) that I can do those and I want to use it to my best advantage.

One thing that I love about your music is the emotion you bring to a song. You arranged the song “Kotonoha” which was on Nanase Aikawa’s album “Konjiki”. I have many Aikawa Nanase albums and I don’t think I have ever heard her perform with this type of arrangement before. How was the experience for you outside of just creating the music but having more responsibility?

HIROSHI: It’s so difficult but so fun. I think I need to improve skills of mixing or mastering. Because I have an environment (DAW) that I can do those and I want to use it to my best advantage.

I saw your blog posts about your use of the iPad but how are you using the iPad for your musical work?

HIROSHI: I installed Splashtop’s XDisplay app on my iPad and used it as a second monitor on Windows 7. So Studio One was running on Windows 7, not on my iPad. But after a while I stopped using XDisplay. I don’t use my iPad as a monitor now.

What are your hobbies when you have freetime away from music?

HIROSHI: I love reading with my Kindle. I’m learning English on the Internet for years, and I also love to read some books written in English on my Kindle, even though I can understand about 60 percent. Recently I joined a gym to keep myself fit.

On your blog, as you put attention to your music and your dog Berry, your photos are pretty awesome. Is photography another hobby for you?

HIROSHI: Thank you very much. Yes, I love photography. I use Canon. In your blog, you dedicated so much to your canine friend, Berry who recently passed away. I really enjoyed your posts these past few years because like our dog, I also have two small and now aging Shitzu’s. So, I am really sorry to read about your loss. Have you ever created a song for Berry?

HIROSHI: Thank you for your comments about Berry. I composed a solo piano song “Sweet Little Eyes” for her. This song can be listened to on my Soundcloud and contained in my mini album “Spring Is Here”: https://soundcloud.com/uesugihiroshi/sweet-little-eyes-piano-solo and https://itunes.apple.com/album/spring-is-here-ep/id413213907

If you had one word to describe yourself, what word would that be and why?

HIROSHI: Otaku.... I think I have an inquiring mind.

In every J!-ENT interview, we do a J!-ENT Word Play...I give you a sentence and you fill in the blank:

a. The last movie I watched in the theater was _______.

HIROSHI: Michael Jackson’s “This is It”

b. If I can own any instrument, that instrument would be _______.

HIROSHI: Steinway D (It’s too big for my house)

c. The most difficult song that I have ever created would be _______.

HIROSHI: Orchestration of DREAMS COME TRUE’s “Mikaduki and Yasasii Kiss Wo Shite” for Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra

d. Before going out live in a concert performance, I _______.

HIROSHI: Clip my nails

e. If I have a dream music collaboration, I would love to work with _______.

HIROSHI: Steve Gadd

Do you have any upcoming projects coming up that you can mention?

HIROSHI: I’m going to play the piano on Iwasaki Hiromi-san’s next year’s tour.

What would you like to say to fans of your work?

HIROSHI: Thank you very much for your great support. I’m going to keep making good music.

Follow Hiroshi Uesugi on his English blog at: http://uesugihiroshi.wordpress.com/
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Earleir this year, J!-ENT sat down with Aoi Eir and Luna Haruna to discuss their musical career and their experience of performing in front of an American audience for the very first time at Seattle’s Sakura Con.

By Dennis A. Amith and Michelle Tymon

or many anime fans, Aoi Eir (note: Eir is her first name but for the label, Aoi Eir is used) is a name that many remember for her songs featured on “Mobile Suit Gundam AGE”, “Fate/Zero” and most recently with “Sword Art Online”.

But what is fascinating is how Aoi became a music star.

Originally hailing from Sapporo, Hokkaido, Aoi was first noticed through her music videos posted on the Nico Nico Douga video sharing site.

As a person that has been interested in music at a young age, in high school, Aoi used to have a high school band. After graduating, she continued to pursue music and by 2011, she released her debut single “Memoria” that was used on the series “Fate/Zero”.

By 2012, she would have two hit anime theme songs with “Aurora” which became the fourth opening theme song for “Mobile Suit Gundam AGE” and her third single “Innocence” was released in November 2012 and was used as the second opening theme song for “Sword Art Online”.

For music artist, Luna Haruna (note: Luna is the first name and Luna Haruna is used by the label), she is an anime fan and loves gothic lolita.

Her song “Overfly” was featured as the second ending theme to “Sword Art Online” and recently debuted at #7, a pretty solid showing since her debut single “Sora wa Takaku Kaze wa Utau” (which was used for anime series “Fate/Zero”).

A big anime and music fan, by the time she entered junior high, she became obsessed with gothic lolita manga characters and Western clothes. By the third year of junior high, Haruna Luna was auditioning for the Internet radio program of “Renta Magica” and won the opportunity to perform the opening theme.

And from that point on, her life would immediately change. Haruna Luna would become an imoto-kei amateur model for “Kera” fashion magazine and modeling for “Marui” but with anime as her passion, she would become popular for competing and becoming a finalist for the fourth All-Japan Anime Song Grand Prix. With this newfound popularity, she was signed to SME Records.
For both Aoi Eir and Luna Haruna, with their work on “Sword Art Online” and “Fate/Zero”, both performed in concert in April at Sakura Con in Seattle. Their very first performance in the United States.

J!-ENT had the opportunity to have a brief interview with both Aoi Eir and Luna Haruna:

J!-ENT: Many people are probably wondering how your stage names came about. Can you please tell us?

AOI EIR: “Eir” is actually the name of a Norse goddess. It has always been my childhood dream to become a singer, but there was a time that I had given up on this dream. And at that time, I thought about becoming a nurse. I had even started studying to become a nurse and so I became very fond of the goddess Eir, who was the goddess of medical skill and healing. So I got “Eir” from that, and as for “Aoi”, I had always been very fond of the name “Aoi” or “Aoi-chan” and always thought it was cute, and my username on the computer had always been “Aoi”. So it’s always been a nickname that I liked a lot, so I combined the two and came up with “Aoi Eir”.

LUNA HARUNA: As for me, I have always admired the name “Luna” since I was a child. And I have always liked the moon, so I chose “Luna”. I was also using the name “Luna” while I was a magazine model (dōkusha model) and got the name “Haruna” added when I started singing. The head of my agency was the one that came up with “Haruna”, because I thought it was would nice for people to refer to me as “Luna Luna” someday, so that’s how we got “HaLuna Luna”. Also, the kanji for “Haruna” means good luck, and that was another reason it was chosen.

Did you know there were many people in the US who listen to and are fans of Japanese music? And are you pretty surprised to see the support that you are receiving from fans around the world?

AOI EIR: I had heard about it, but I had never seen it until now. I was able to experience their love of anime up close. There was a person that said they had learned Japanese through anime, so I felt their love for anime very strongly. I go to Winter Comi and Summer Comi quite often and had seen people from overseas there, so I had known that it was popular to some point. But I had never imagined the love was so very deep as I found out here… I’m very moved and I felt that I had to step it up a little myself.

Is there any American food you’d like to try or places you’d like to visit while you’re in Seattle?
AOI EIR: Starbucks is really famous, so I had some Starbucks coffee. I'd like to walk around as well, but haven't had the chance to just yet. I'm hoping we'll be able to do that tomorrow, and then I'm hoping to enjoy various American style foods. I was rather surprised to hear that it's very common to eat sandwiches and potato chips together, so I'd love to do that.

LUNA HARUNA: I love Subway, and I really love their oven potatoes (Note: they're like french fries and not available in the US) and I'm wondering if they're different in the US. I eat them all the time in Japan. So I'd love to try the US version if they're available. I'd like to conquer that. I heard that it's the biggest fast food chain in the US, and that there are even more Subways than McDonalds.

What kind of students were you in high school? The artsy student? The book worm? The prankster? The athlete?

AOI EIR: I wasn't the smart kid at all (laughs). I played basketball quite a bit, but I also loved music and had started getting more interested in it while I was playing basketball in high school. But I never really explored it until I got into high school. In high school, I formed a band. I started playing the guitar in junior high school, and then in high school, I started a band, doing the vocals and playing guitar. I even studied the bass guitar a little bit. So it was in high school that I really started to explore music.

LUNA HARUNA: By the time I was in high school, I was already a complete otaku. The thing was, everyone in my class was an otaku. Not to mention, it was an art class, so everyone was really good at drawing and everyone was able to draw manga. So it was completely normal for everyone to be reading manga during class. You pretty much couldn't find text books in our desks… so it was a very interesting class. We were able to express ourselves to the max, so it was a very fun high school life.

Both of you had the opportunity to have your songs featured on two popular anime series. How was that first experience when you heard your song on an anime series?

AOI EIR: It didn't feel like it was real at all at first… So every week, I would be watching the episodes just to confirm that it was real. Yet still, I felt, “Is this really happening?” Now I’m a little more used to it, so now I concentrate on what I can do to repay all of my fans and how I can express myself even more.

LUNA HARUNA: I feel the same way. When I first saw the anime footage going along with my own song, I was so moved. My overall goal in life is to become one with the anime world, so I felt that I had come closer to that goal, and I took a picture of the footage with my phone… Even though you can't hear it.

AOI EIR: I did that, too! (laughs)
LUNA HARUNA: And then, I uploaded that to my blog.

AOI EIR: I took a picture of when my name shows up in the credits.

If there is one word to describe yourself, what word would that be and why?

AOI EIR: I think the word “fun”. I’m always having fun. I’m having fun when I’m performing, and singing. I’m having fun all the time.

LUNA HARUNA: It’s not one word, but rather one phrase: anime otaku. I really believe that anime is my life. I believe that anime is the only way that I can truly express myself. So I intend to keep pulling through as an otaku.

Aoi, I know you are a big video game fan, what video games are you playing right now?

AOI EIR: I mainly play FPS’s. For example, I love “Left 4 Dead” and “Gears of War” very much. Well, I guess “Gears” isn’t technically a FPS, but I also like “Call of Duty” as well.

Luna Haruna, what do you enjoy doing?

LUNA HARUNA: I’m very much an anime otaku. I love watching anime and walking through Akihabara. I go to a lot of events and even get on the first train to do so, so I’m very passionate about being an otaku. Anime is my everything.

Before performing to an American audience, was it a bit stressful, scary, exciting? How were you feeling when you found out that you would be performing in America?

AOI EIR: I was a little nervous, but the people of Seattle are very passionate and there are many people who are very good at having a great time. So, I was also able to have a great time and perform. In the end, I was a little nervous, but my feelings of excitement were much, much greater.

LUNA HARUNA: I was also very nervous and excited at first. This is my first time anywhere overseas, so I was very excited about what kinds of environments I would see. And last night, I was able to perform at the concert and it almost felt like it wasn’t the first time I was here. Everyone welcomed me so warmly and I was very happy that I came.

For more information on Aoi Eir, please click here:

http://www.aoieir.com/

For more information on Luna Haruna, please click here:

http://www.harunaluna.jp/
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In Japan, AKB48 has become a merchandise juggernaut. They are featured on television, radio, movies, newspapers, magazines and they continue to break sales records for their music single releases, making it into the Guinness Book of World Records and attracting an international following.

By Dennis A. Amith

I have to personally admit that I never imagined AKB48 to become a musical powerhouse in Japan when they first debuted back in 2006.

My first experience with AKB48 was back in 2007. I was working with various Japanese music labels on promotion of many idol artists and groups that year. And at the time, I was presented by one label to check out AKB48. The group was releasing their Team A and Team K 1st Stage albums and finding information on the group was quite difficult aside from the fact that they had stage performances in Akihabara daily and the fact that the creator/producer behind the idol group was Yasushi Akimoto, the person behind Onyanko Club.

While I was familiar with Onyanko Club (especially with member Shizuka Kudo) and that he had written songs for many other artists and groups in Japan, I was more in tune with his large female idol group Checkicco which was formed in 1998.

During my stay in Japan in 1999 for idol shopping for Morning Musume but also discovering Hikaru Utada and Ayumi Hamasaki, I was able to catch Checkicco’s “Dakishimete” playing on the big screen and suffice to say, I became a fan. But as quickly as I became a fan, the group would break up after a year of activity.

From the period of 1999 to 2009, I have covered many idol groups, idol singers and interviewed them, but I saw a waning trend at the time in terms of CD sales and while there will always be the wota (hardcore idol fans) community, commercially, I wasn’t sure if AKB48 would become a success.

Around 2007, I was working with Japanese labels and cov-
ering a lot of Japanese idol groups. Many who have not achieved much success on the Oricon Daily or Weekly Charts. And I was starting to see the K-Pop wave starting to grow in popularity musically in Japan.

So, in 2007, I received my Team A and “Team K 1st Stage Party ga Hajimaru yo” review copies and I have to be truthful and say that I wasn’t too excited about them at first.

Aside from the tracks “Skirt, Hirari” and “AKB48”, I really didn’t know too much about the group, other than the fact that AKB was short for Akihabara and the group had daily stage shows and they were produced by Yasushi Akimoto.

And at that time, after the failed experiment with Checkicco, and the fact that many idols that I was covering were barely making any impact in the industry, I wasn’t sure if AKB48 would ever become successful.

From what I listened to from the 1st Stage albums, I felt the music was cute and sweet but I just wasn’t feeling the excitement at the time. Especially compared to the music I was hearing from other idol groups at the time.

But as with all idol groups I have listened to and covered, I wanted to see success. The problem was that the music industry in Japan was not in its best shape.

Dwindling sales, very few are able to sell a million copies. In fact, it was becoming a rarity to see a single debut with over a million copies sold. You could only hope that an artist or band would sell over 100,000 copies or more.

But one thing that producer Yasushi Akimoto had in the industry is respect and experience which goes outside of the realm of just music.

He was the producer of the popular music show “Utaban” hosted by popular Tunnels comedian Takaaki Ishibashi and SMAP leader, Masahiro Nakai.

Akimoto would produce an animated film titled “ICE” in 2007 which would feature the ICE from AKB48 song “Aisareru to iu Koto for ICE” and would feature AKB48 member Erena Ono, Tomomi Kasai, Yuko Oshima and Natsuki Sato as voice actresses.

AKB48 members would make their live action debut in film in horror flick “Densen Uta”.

And AKB48 would receive a past midnight variety show titled “AKB1:59”, then “AKB0:59” followed by “AKBingo!” on NTV and “AKB48 Nemousu TV” on cable TV via Family Gekijo. Aside from Morning Musume and Idoling!!,

the major labels could only hope to get their members featured on television, let alone having their own TV show and here is AKB48 now getting quite a bit of media coverage in television and film.

Meanwhile, musically, the group who was originally signed to Def-STAR Records was dropped from the label, so their 9th single “Baby! Baby! Baby!” was the only AKB48 single released by AKS Rebel via digital release only.

The group would eventually be signed with King Records for their 10th single “Ogoe Diamond”. And while songs such as “Aitakatta”, “Bingo” and “Ogoe Diamond” did catch my attention, it wasn’t until I listened to “Iiwake Maybe” in which I felt there was tremendous potential.

The production quality of the music I felt was getting better and the music videos were becoming much more entertaining to watch.

Prior to “Iiwake Maybe”, the group had its first election single with “Namida Surprise!” and earned the group their first single to sell over 100,000+ copies.

And Atsuko Maeda was crowned as the ace center for their 13th single.

But it wasn’t until the end of 2009, when “River” was released, and immediately, I felt that AKB48 had received some type of spark musically that I was
absolutely captivated by their music.

The group would have their first #1 single on the Oricon Daily Charts and would have their largest selling single with nearly 178,000 copies sold.

In fact, I was amused by this point in time as I saw Yasushi Akimoto and management taking a fascinating marketing push to bring AKB48 to international community by bringing AKB48’s Team A to Japan Expo on the same day that Morning Musume was performing at Anime Expo in Los Angeles.

Immediately, I was receiving calls from various people in the industry about the scheduling of two major idol groups on the same day but in different countries.

And as the news articles and YouTube videos started popping up from the two events, you saw the restrictive-ness from management for Morning Musume, while AKB48 was seen visiting various shops, meeting people and showing a more casual presence.

Behind-the-scenes, myself and others in the industry were fascinated by the bold move from Akimoto and the management crew. As one industry person told me, “it was a game well played.”

AKB48 would add another show that members would be starring in titled “Shukan AKB” on TV Tokyo and members would take part in the drama series “Majisuka Gakuen”.

That same year, AKB48 made their U.S. debut at a concert at Webster Hall in New York City and by the summer of 2010, they were performing in Los Angeles for Anime Expo.

And it did not stop there.

The group continued with AKB48 representing Japan at the 7th Asia Song Festival in Korea, at the Japanese Pop Culture Festival in Moscow and the Anime Festival Asia X in Singapore.

Suffice to say, 2010 was great marketing year for AKB48. The group was releasing their 15th single “Sakura no Shiori”, the group was surpassing 200,000 in sales by its first day and over 300,000 copies sold in the first week. It would also be the group’s first single to reach #1 on the Oricon Weekly charts.

And with their 16th single, “Ponytail to Shushu”, the group would achieve their first 500,000+ sales in one week.

The sales jump would be attributed by the fact that fans would have the chance to vote for their favorite member to be the ace center for their 17th single “Heavy Rotation”.

Yuko Oshima would be crowned ace center, while Atsuko Maeda would drop to #2.

But what “Heavy Rotation” was able to show not just fans but those following the music industry that the group could continue to sell over 500,000 copies without it being an election single.

Granted, “Heavy Rotation” would capture controversy for showcasing the members in lingerie in their music video but as risky as the video was for Yasushi Akimoto and his management staff, a little controversy didn’t help as the video would garner international attention for the group.

And to the anime crowd, a side-unit known as Team Dragon from AKB48 would sing the theme song “Kokoro no Hane” for the popular HD series “Dragon Ball Kai”.

And by the end of the year, the group would come back with full force with their biggest selling hit song yet, their 18th single “Beginner”.

Not only did AKB48 have their biggest selling singles in its first day with over 568,000 copies sold but in one week, over 826,000 copies were sold. Giving the group their first single to sell over a million copies.

But the management had another plan up their sleeve to please AKB48 fans and that was to host the first Janken Taikai tournament. The ace center for the 19th single “Chance no Junban” wouldn’t be determined by popularity but whoever wins the rock-paper-scissor tournament would become the ace center. And sure enough, unranked member Mayumi Uchida would become the ace center.

And as their musical career was becoming successful, AKB48 would have even more TV shows with “Ariyoshi AKB Kyouwakoku” on TBS, “AKB-Kyu Gourmet Stadium” on Sukachan, “AKB 600” on NTV, “AKB to chome chome!” on Yomiuri TV.

In 2011, the year would be seen a year of immense growth. From the release of their 20th single “Sakura no Ki ni Naro” receiving the best first day sales at over 655,000 copies sold, their 21st election single “Everyday, Katyusha” would surpass AKB48’s first day sales with 942,000+ copies sold.

And the group’s 22nd single “Flying Get” would become the first single by AKB48 to sell over a million copies on its first day of release.
The group would achieve another million seller on its first day with their 23rd single “Kaze wa Fuiteiru” and another Janken Tournament was held and the eldest member of AKB48, Mariko Shinoda, would win and become the ace center for the 24th single “Ue kara Mariko”.

And 2012 would kick off the year with AKB48 members learning to play instruments for their single “Give Me Five!”. While in 2012, their election single and 26th single “Manatsu no Sounds Good” would become their highest first week combine selling single with over 1.8 million copies sold.

But the year would be emotional with the graduation of Atsuko Maeda, the crowning of new ace center Yuko Oshima who would become ace center for the 27th single “Gingham Check” and “UZA”.

Another Janken tournament would be held and the winner would be Team 4 member Haruka Shimazaki, who would be the center for the single “Eien Pressure”.

The group would also be entered in the Guinness Book of World Records for the most musical talent to be featured in a video game with the release of “AKB 1/148 Renai Sosenkyou”. The group currently holds the record for being the largest pop group in the world.

In 2013, with talk that AKB48 would not be unable to sustain its sales of over a million copies for the week as there were signs of decline with first day sales, while their 30th single “So Long!” sold over a million copies. In its first week, the group beat their sales record with their 33rd single “Sayonara Crawl” which would become their biggest selling single with over 1.4 million copies sold in its first day and over 1.7 million copies sold for its first week.

And since 2011 with their 20th single “Sakura no Ki ni Naro” through 2013 with their 32nd single “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”, the group has surpassed a million copies sold (during a time when most singles barely sell over 100,000 copies in Japan) and every single since 2011 reaching #1 on the Oricon Daily and Weekly Charts.

With the release of “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”, AKB48 has now become the first group to have 13 consecutive #1 singles that sold over a million copies its first week, tying them with the rock band B’z.

There is no denying that what AKB48 has been able to accomplish right now in Japan is rare.

Members appearing major TV shows, dramas, radio, magazines and public appearances plus their daily performances at the various theaters, there is so sign that the AKB48 fame will end anytime soon.

And to help continue that interest among fans is especially in different areas of Japan and also in Asia was to create sister groups and side groups, as well as giving AKB48 members a chance to release solo albums.

For AKB48, a few members have taken part in sub-units such as Chocolove, no3b (no sleeves) Watarirouka Hashiritai, Queen & Elizabeth, Team Dragon, French Kiss, Not Yet, DiVA, No Name and Team Surprise.

AKB48 members such as Manami Oku, Megumi Ohori, Tomomi Itano, Atsuko Maeda, Mayu Watanabe, Rino Sashihara, Misaki Iwasa, Tomomi Kasai,
Yuki Kashiwagi, Minami Takahashi and Asuka Kuramochi have released solo singles. While pianist Sakiko Matsui has released an album.

And that’s not it. For the fans of the theater performances, AKB48 is broken down into four teams: Team A (more pop oriented), Team B (more idol oriented) and Team K (more dance oriented) and recently reinstated Team 4.

As far as sister groups are concerned, the first AKB48 sister group created was Nagoya-based SKE48.

As for solo singles, SKE48 Forever Kenkyuusei Kaori Matsumura will be releasing a solo single.

The second sister group was SDN48. An adult idol group that would perform at the AKB theater at 10 p.m. on a Saturday Night (hence, the SDN name) and would feature a few of the older AKB48 and SKE48 members and those who auditioned.

The group was signed to Universal Music Group Japan’s Nayutawave.

While the group did well on the Oricon Weekly Charts placing at #3 and once at #2, the sales never surpassed 75,000 copies for first week of sales.

After five singles, the group was disbanded in 2012.

But SDN48 still has a presence even in 2013. At the 2013 Request Hour, their song “Kodoku na Runner” was voted by fans at #18 and also led to the group having a one-night reunion concert last March at the AKB48 Theatre.

In May 2013, it was announced that former SDN48 members Juri Kaida, KONAN, Mana Ito, Haruka Umeda, Megumi Imayoshi, Mami Kato and Miyuu Hosada will be forming a new music group known as 7cm.

The third sister group is NMB48, with their theater based in Namba (where NMB is derived from), Osaka.

The group is signed to the label, laugh at loud/R and C and belongs to the Kyoraku Yoshimoto Holdings Co., Ltd.

The team which made its debut in 2010 is broken down to three teams: Team N, Team M and Team BII.

The group has also benefited from the success of AKB48 and since their single debut in 2011 with “Zetsumetsu Kurokami Shojo”, nearly all singles have reached #1 on the Oricon Weekly Charts (their fourth single “Nagiichi” was #2, yet the single was their best selling single in 2012 with over 375,000 copies sold during the first week).

In 2013, their seventh single “Bokura no Eureka” became their best selling single with over 481,000+ copies sold in its first week.
In 2013, after watching AKB48 and SKE48 perform at NHK’s “Kouhaku Utagassen” (NHK’s Red and White New Year’s Eve special), the group has campaigned to be part of this year’s lineup. The fourth sister group is HKT48 has a theater based in Hakata-ku (which HKT is derived from), Fukuoka but the group’s theater is actually located in Hawks Town Mall in Chuo-ku, Fukuoka. The group is signed to Universal Music Group Japan’s Universal Sigma label. The group is led by former AKB48 member Rino Sashihara who was reassigned to the group after a scandal in 2011 but in 2013, shocked AKB48 fandom when she beat Yuko Oshima by a large number of votes at the senbatsu general election and becoming the ace center for AKB48’s 32nd single “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”.

Their debut single “Suki! Suki! Skip!” debuted at #1 with over 250,000 copies sold for its first week and recently, their second single “Melon Juice” was released and sold over 220,000 copies for its first day.

Yasushi Akimoto wanted to bring the AKB48 concept to other countries and so he teamed up with Global Mediacom CEO Harry Tanoesoedibjo to create JKT48.

The group was formed in Jakarta, Indonesia with a theater based in fx Sudirman.

Currently, JKT48 has a total of 51 members and have released a total of three singles. AKB48 members Haruka Nakagawa and Aki Takajo are members of JKT48.

Akimoto also created a 3rd international group (note: TPE48 in Taipei, Taiwan has not made their official debut at this time), the Chinese female idol group known as SNH48 in Shanghai China.

The group has a total of 26 members and two AKB48 members Sae Miyazawa and Mariya Suzuki.

The group have released two singles and have a new a theater which opened this past summer in Shanghai.

And while not an AKB48 related group, Nogizaka46, which was dubbed as the rivals of AKB48 has started to become more integrated with the AKB48G (AKB48 groups) in 2013 on television. Especially as Nogizaka46 and AKB48G members have appeared on each other’s shows.

Nogizaka46 is named after the Sony Music Entertainment Nogizaka building.

The group have also shared in the similar success as the AKB48 sister groups as their singles have nearly all debuted at #1 on the Oricon Weekly Charts and in July 2013, their sixth single “Girl’s Rule” received its best single sales with over 337,000 copies sold in its first week.

Also, the group have multiple shows including “NOGIbingo!” which is shot in the same set and have nearly the same activities that are featured in AKB48’s “AKBingo!”.

While the AKB48 machine continues to thrive, 2013 was a major indication of changes within the group.

Longtime members such as Mariko Shinoda, Tomomi Itano, Sayaka Akimoto and other AKB48 members have since graduated.

The year also began with Team 4’s “Hashire Penguin” knocking of AKB48’s “Heavy Rotation” in the 2013 Request Hour and evidence showing that fans taste are starting to turn towards the more younger members of the group.

And even the AKB48 shows are starting to give more of a spotlight to the younger members of the group, while AKB48 continues to be featured on the daytime and primetime music and variety shows and also for public events.

In fact, in November, a new winter event will take place that is similar to a baseball draft for rookies, a draft for kyuusei will take place, ensuring that new members will continue to fill roster spots left open by graduating members.

There are some on the Japanese AKB message board that wonder if 2014 will be the final year for some of the longtime members of the group.

In fact, producer Yasushi Akimoto has said he would retire in a few years from now.

While no one knows what’s in store for 2014, the fact is that as long as the fans are their to continue and support the AKB48 groups and that sales continue to remain high and interest remains to be high, there is a very good chance that AKB48 can remain strong.

One can look at the other side with the boys band of Johnny’s Entertainment and see how SMAP has literally been in the media spotlight for nearly 22 years, they still are TV, hosting TV shows, starring dramas and films and have shown that idols can have longevity in the industry.

Anything is possible.

And so far, AKB48 have shown that they are an idol group that have made things that seemed impossible... possible.
## AKB48 DISCOGRAPHY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tracks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1. 桜の花びらたち (Sakura no Hanabiratachi - Indie) 2. スカート、ひらり (Skirt, Hirari - Indie) 1. 会いたかった (Aitakattai - first major label release)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2. 制服が邪魔をする (Seifuku ga Jama o Suru) 3. 軽蔑していた愛情 (Keibetsu Shiteita Aijo) 4. BINGO! 5. 我の太陽 (Boku no Taiyou) 6. 夕陽を見ているか? (Yuhi wo Miteiru ka?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>10. 大声ダイヤモンド (Ogoe Diamond) 2009 11. 10年桜 (10nen Sakura) 12. 涙サプライズ (Namida Surprise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>13. 言い訳Maybe (liwake Maybe) 14. RIVER 2010 15. 桜の某 (Sakura no Shiori)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**NOTE:** Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.
AKB48 DISCOGRAPHY

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2010
18. Beginner
19.  チャンスの順番 (Chance no Junban)

2011:
20.  桜の木になろう (Sakura ki ni Narou)
21.  Everyday、カチューシャ (Everyday, Katyusha)
22.  フライングゲット (Flying Get)
23.  風は吹いている (Kaze wa Fuiteiru)
24.  上からマリコ (Ue kara Mariko)

2012:
25. GIVE ME FIVE!
26. 真夏のSounds good! (Manatsu no Sounds good!)
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2012: 26. 真夏のSounds good! (Manatsu no Sounds good!) 27. ギンガムチェック (Gingham Check) 28. UZA 29. 永遠プレッシャー (Eien Pressure) 2013: 30. So Long! 31. さよならクロール (Sayonara Crawl) 32. 恋するフォーチュンクッキー (Koisuru Fortune Cookie) 33. ハート・エレキ (Heart Electric)

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ALBUMS:
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17. team B 5th stage シアターの女神 -studio recordings コレクション- 18. ひまわり組 1st stage 僕の太陽 -studio recordings コレクション- 19. ひまわり組 2nd stage 夢を死なせるわけにいかない -studio recordings コレクション- 20. team 4 1st stage 僕の太陽 -studio recordings コレクション- "AKBIDOLING!!!" 2009: 1. チューショウゼ! (Chuu Shiyouze!) 2009: 1. 強き者よ (Tsuyokimono yo) 2010: 2. 青空片想い (Aozora Kataomoi) 3. ごめんな、SUMMER (Gomen ne, SUMMER) 4. 1,2,3,4,ヨロシク! (1! 2! 3! 4! Yoroshiku!) 2011: 5. バンザイVenus (Banzai Venus) 6. パレオはエメラルド (Pareo wa Emerald) 7. オキドキ (Oki Doki) 2012: 8. 片想いFinally (Kataomoi Finally) 9. アイシテラブル! (Aishiteraburu) 10. キスだって左利き (Kiss Datte Hidarikikii)
SKE48 DISCOGRAPHY

ALBUMS:
1. この日のチャイムを忘れない (Kono Hi no Chime wo Wasurenai)  
2. 手をつなぎながら (Te wo Tsunaginagara - SKE48 Team S)  
3. 手をつなぎながら (Te wo Tsunaginagara - SKE48 Team KII)  
4. 制服の芽 (Seifuku no Me)  
5. ラムネの飲み方 (Ramune no Nomikata)  
6. PARTYが始まるよ (Team S 1st Stage “PARTY ga Hajimaru yo”)  
7. 会いたかった (Team KII 1st Stage “Aitakatta”)  
8. パジャマドライブ (Team E 1st Stage “Pajama Drive”)  
9. 逆上がり (Team E 2nd Stage “Saka Agari”)  

SDN48 DISCOGRAPHY

SONGS:
1. GAGAGA  
2. 愛、チュセヨ (Ai, Chuseyo)
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SDN48 2012: 3. MIN.MIN.MIN 4. 口説きながら麻布十番 duet with みの もんた (Kudokinagara Azabu Juuban duet with Mino Monta) 2012: 5. 負け惜しみコングラチュレーション (Makeoshimi Congratulation) 5. 負け惜しみコングラチュレーション (Makeoshimi Congratulation) ALBUM: 1. NEXT ENCORE

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NMB48 2013: 5. ヴァージニティー! (Virginity)  6. 北川謙二 (Kitagawa Kenji)  7. 僕らのユリイカ (Bokura no Eureka)  8. カモネギックス (Kamonegik-kusu)
ALBUM: 1. てっぺんとったんで！ (Teppen Tottande)  HKT48 2013: 1. スキ！スキ！スキップ！ (Suki! Suki! Skip!)  2. メロンジュース (Melon Juice)
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

JKT48 2013/ALBUM
1. Heavy Rotation

SNH48 2013:
1. 无尽旋 (Heavy Rotation) 2. Flying Get

NOGIZAKA46 2012:
1. ぐるぐるカーテン (Guru Guru Curtain) 2. おいでシャンプー (Oide Shampoo) 3. 走れ! Bicycle (Hashire! Bicycle)
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

NOGIZAKA46  2012: 4. 制服のマネキン (Seifuku no Mannequin)  2013: 5. 君の名は希望 (Kimi no Na wa Kibou)  2. ガールズルール (Girl’s Rule)
CHOCOLOVE FROM AKB48 DISCOGRAPHY

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CHOCOLOVE: FROM AKB48 2007: 1. 明日は明日の君が生まれる! (Ashita wa Ashita no Kimi ga Umareru!) 2. メールの涙 (Meru no Namida)
6. Answer 7. 2011: 唇 触れず… (Kuchibiru Furezu...) 8. ペロリとペペロ (Perori to Pepero) (digital version - not pictured)
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

no3b 9. ペディキュアday (Pedicure Day) 10. キリギリス人 (Kirigirisu Jin) ALBUM: 1. ノースリーブス (No Sleeves) WATARIROKA HASHIRITAI 2009: 1. 初恋ダッシュ／青い未来 (Hatsukoi Dash/Aoi Mirai) 2. やる気花火 (Yaruki Hanabi) 3. 完璧ぐ〜のね (Kanpeki Gu no ne)
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2009: 1. 完璧ぐ〜のね (Kanpeki Gu no nei) 2010: 4. アッカンベー橋 (AkKanbe Bashi) 5. 青春のフラッグ (Seishun no Flag) 6. ギュ (Gyu) 2011: 7. バレンタイン・キッス (Valentine Kiss) 8. へたっぴウィンク (Hettappi Wink) 9. 希望山脈 (Kibo Sanmyaku)

ALBUM: 1. 廊下は走るな! (Rouka wa Hashiru na!)
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

Queen & Elizabeth 2010: 1. Love♡Wars
Team Dragon 2010: 1. 心の羽根 (Kokoro no Hana)
French Kiss 2010: 1. ずっと前にから (Zutto mae kara)
2011: 2. If
3. カッコ悪い I love you (Kakko Warui I Love You)
4. 最初のメール (Saisho no Mail)
2012: 5. ロマンス・プライバシー (Romance Privacy)
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

2011:
1. 週末Not yet (Shuumatsu Not yet)  
2. 波乗りかき氷 (Naminori Kakigori)  
3. ペラペラペラオ (Perapera Perao)

2012:
4. 西瓜BABY (Suika BABY)

2013:
5. ヒリヒリの花 (Hirihiri no Hana)  

DiVA 2011:
1. 月の裏側 (Tsuki no Uragawa)  
2. Cry

DiVA 2012:
3. Lost the Way
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

NO NAME  2012: 1. 希望について (Kibou ni Tsuite)  2. この涙を君に捧ぐ (Kono Namida wo Kimi ni Sasagu)  3. 重力シンパシー (Juuryoku Sympathy)  4. 水曜日のアリス (Suiyoubi no Alice)  5. そのまま (Sono Mama De)  6. 涙に沈む太陽 (Namida ni Shizumu Taiyou)  7. 君のc/w (Kimi no C/W)  8. 1994年の雷鳴 (1994-nen no Raimei)  9. 思い出す度につらくなる (Omoidasu Tabi ni Tsuraku Naru)  10. お手上げララバイ (Oteage no Lullabye)  11. キンモクセイ (Kinomukusei)  12. 素敵な三角関係 (Suteki na Sankaku Kankei)  13. AKBフェスティバル (AKB Festival)  14. キミが思ってるより (Kimi ga Omotte Yori)  15. ハートのベクトル (Heart no Vector)  16. 女神はどこで微笑む? (Megami wa Doko de Hohoemu?)
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

TEAM SURPRISE 2013: 16. 女神はどこで微笑む？ (Megami wa Doko de Hohoemu?)  NOT YET: 2011: 1. 週末Not yet (Shuumatsu Not Yet) 2. 浪乗りかき氷 (Naminori Kakigori) 3. ペラペラペラオ (Perapera Perao) 2012: 4. 西瓜BABY (Suika Baby) 2013: 4. ヒリヒリの花 (Hirihiri no Hana)

Megumi Ohori 2008: 1. 甘い股関節 (Amai Kokansetsu) 2011: 1. Dear J 2. Wanna Be Now (Digital Release) 3. Ai ni Pierce (Digital Released) 4. ふいに (Fui ni) 2012: 5. 10年後の君へ (10nen go no Kimi e) 2013: 6. 1%
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

**ATSUKO MAEDA (前田 敦子) DISCOGRAPHY**

1. **Flower**
2. **君は僕だ (Kimi wa Boku da)**

**MAYU WATANABE (渡辺 麻友) DISCOGRAPHY**

1. **シンクロときめき (Synchro Tokimeki)**
2. **大人ジェリービーンズ (Otona Jelly Beans)**
3. **ヒカルものたち (Hikaru Monotachi)**
4. **ラッパ練習中 (Rappa Renshuu-Chuu)**
RINO SASHIHARA (指原 莉乃) DISCOGRAPHY

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Rino Sashihara  2012: 1. それでも好きだよ (Sorademo Suki da yo) 2. 意気地なしマスカレード (Ikuji Nashi Masquerade) with AnRiRe
Misaki Iwasa  2012: 1. 無人駅 (Mujin Eki) 2013: 2. もしも私が空に住んでいたら (Moshimo Watashi ga Sora ni Sundeitarai)
Yuki Kashiwagi  2012: 1. ショートケーキ (Shortcake)
NOTE: Multiple covers for AKB releases are for CD-only and DVD releases. Some singles have up to eight different variations (For example: Three CD+DVD types with regular and limited edition covers and one theater release, which is CD-only), so singles may have up to eight different covers.

SAKIKO MATSUI (松井咲子) DISCOGRAPHY

TOMOMI KASAI (河西 智美) DISCOGRAPHY

MINAMI TAKAHASHI (高橋 みなみ) DISCOGRAPHY

ASUKA KURAMOCHI (倉持明日香) DISCOGRAPHY

He has composed several of AKB48’s memorable hit songs. J!-ENT talks to musician and composer, HIROSHI UESUGI about the music he has created for AKB48.

By Dennis A. Amith

When Atsuko Maeda performed her song “Sakura no Hanabiratachi” for her graduation, for long time AKB48 fans, they will remember when AKB48 made their debut. The song will always be special for AKB48 fans, especially for fans of Atsuko. And the person responsible for composing the song is musician Hiroshi Uesugi.

A longtime composer for many musical artists and idol groups, he had crafted AKB48 hits such as “Sakura no Hanabiratachi”, their hit graduation song “Sakura no Shiori”.

Uesugi also worked on the song “Maria (DiVA version)”, Misaki Iwasa’s “Kikyou” and the AKB48 Team Surprise tenth single “Suteki na Sankaku Kankei”.

J!-ENT recently had a chance to talk to Hiroshi Uesugi in regards to the AKB48 songs that he had worked on.

You have composed some of the most memorable AKB48 songs. The song “Sakura no Hanabiratachi” is an important song for AKB48 as it was their debut single and it was also Maeda Atsuko’s graduation song. And what memories do you have of making this song?

HIROSHI: AKB48 did not exist when I composed this song in 2001 and I couldn’t imagine that such a great idol group came out at all at that time. After several years, I heard that Akimoto-san chose this song as the debut single of a new group AKB48, and I was so excited by the news. Because I was very impressed by a lot of his works with 80’s idols when I was a college student.

You composed AKB48’ 2008 digital single “Baby Baby Baby” (2008). For this single, can you give us an example of how this song was created. Do you usually work with the original composition first or do you work after Akimoto-san’s lyrics were created?

HIROSHI: I usually work with the composition first. On all AKB48 songs I composed, Akimoto-san wrote the lyrics afterwards. When I create demos of my songs, I usually play the melody part on a synthesizer. I love the arrangement of this song done by CHOKKAKU-san.

You composed the song “Sakura no Shiori” (2010), which many feel was a major turning point for AKB48 because it was a graduation song that remains the most unique, non-pop single that AKB48 has released so far. How did the song come about and was it always planned for it to not be a pop song?
HIROSHI: I had been requested to compose a school chorus style song very long time before it was released. But I didn’t know about details. I was very surprised and pleased when this song was released as a single.

You worked on Iwasa Misaki’s “Kikyo”, a song that was performed at AKB Theater for many years. But how did you feel to hear Wasamin singing “Kikyo” especially since she is being marketed solo as an enka singer?

HIROSHI: I personally don’t feel that Iwasa Misaki-san sings “Kikyo” in enka style very much. But she is a very good enka singer and also a very good pop singer. I love her version of “Kikyo”.

Last December, your song “Suteki na Sankaku Kankei” for Team Surprise was released as a single. It had a feel of an American ragtime style song which I absolutely loved. How did the idea come to make a ragtime style of song?

HIROSHI: This song is my favorite. In 1970s, when I was a child, there were many Japanese pop songs influenced by American pop style music and I loved and were impressed by them. I didn’t have much comprehension about ragtime, but I wanted to make a pop song like a ragtime for AKB48. I’m very glad that this song released as a single of Team Surprise.

Of the songs you have created for AKB48, what is your most memorable or favorite song so far and why?

HIROSHI: “Sakura no Shiori”. As you indicated, this is a unique song for AKB48 and also a unique song for myself. I know this song has been sung by many school students at their graduation ceremonies or chorus festivals. I can find many videos of covers of this song on YouTube. Sheet music books of this song arranged for chorus are released. When this song was released I received a lot of words of praise from my musician friends. They are really fantastic.

How does it feel to be part of AKB48 history through the music you created?

HIROSHI: Of course, it is a great honor to be a part of AKB48 history. I’ll keep up my efforts.
A LOOK AT AKB48 FANDOM

All over the globe, there are fans who show their love for AKB48 in their own way. As we spotlight various AKB48 fandom worldwide, we kick things off with the AKB48 SoCal Fan Club in the U.S.A.

By Dennis A. Amith

The AKB48 SoCal club is possibly one of the more active AKB48 groups that I have discovered globally.

From a private Facebook page full of AKB48 fans who discuss the various groups and members’ latest activities but also helping other fans and scheduling frequent get-togethers.

The club features fans, may they be men and women, people of various ethnicities, people with professional backgrounds or are college students to people brought together for their love of AKB48 and the related groups.

Wanting to know more about the AKB48 SoCal Fan Club and its early beginnings, I recently interviewed FilipinoMarco, a co-founder of the club.

The AKB48 SoCal Fan Club has received a lot of attention in 2013 with the senbatsu and the “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” fan video but let’s discuss the early beginnings of the club. How did the club begin and how did the recruitment go back when you first started?

FilipinoMarco: Hmm... I was listening to AKB48 since 2006. I didn’t know until 2009-2010 that there was an actual AKB48 online forum. At that time I read and saw so many fans posting and talking about their favorite members so I gave it some thought of making a fan club here in Southern California. I’ve created an account in Stage48 in 2010 and posted an invitation to SoCal Stage48 members if people want to meet up at a place, talk about AKB48 and start a fan club. Basically a simple meet and greet. At that time, nobody seemed interested.
guess in the U.S., it seems shady to hold such events like this. It was pretty funny because I had no replies for about almost a year until one person actually replied to my post. I didn’t get to read that reply until late-2010 and I was shocked/surprised that someone was actually interested to get together to make a fan club for Southern California. So, I quickly messaged him right after reading his reply post. And that’s how we got together and talked about starting the fan club.

Could you remember your first meeting? How many people showed up and what was your best recollection of what happened during that time?

FilipinoMarco: Yes I do! (Laughing) The first meeting was with a guy named Yuu, who replied to my almost-year old post and wanted to start the fan club with me. We met at a mall and he brought a friend with him. So, I believe there were only 3 people in the first “meeting”. We talked about who our favorite members were at that time and ate at some ramen place next to the mall. After that, Yuu decided to just hang out at his house and make our 1st official fanclub recruiting video. We didn’t get to finish until about 1-2 o’clock in the morning. (Laughing)

I noticed one thing that caught my attention with the club is that you have many food parties and karaoke events. But for those who are interested...What happens at an AKB48 SoCal Fan Club party or meeting?

FilipinoMarco: (Laughing) Yeah! We do have lots of food parties and the occasional karaoke. Hmm... if it’s a food/potluck club meeting, we always meet up at our fanclub headquarters. We watch a lot and I mean a lot of AKB48 or other sister groups videos/gameshows and play some video games if we feel like it. The best part of the whole day is when we do our “Black Market Trading” sessions. “Black Market Trading” has nothing to do with anything that is illegal. It’s actually our code for photocard trades among members. Everyone in the club brings out their collections of tradeable and non-tradeable photocards. Some bring their entire collections cards, photos, books, lightsticks, fans, stickers, DVD’s, games, etc). We barter on what can be traded and or if you have nothing to trade, members can also sell their photocards as well.

When it comes to karaoke meets, we usually meet up at a location, usually in Little Tokyo in Downtown LA and hang around for a bit, grab a bite to eat, go to Kinokuniya to buy AKB48 related books or magazines and then go to the karaoke place. We usually always end up at the fanclub headquarters right after karaoke and do the black market trades to end the day.

Is it a potluck? Or do members split on the costs for the food?
FilipinoMarco: Most of the time it’s a potluck, but if we decide on eating out at a restaurant or order pizza, we split the costs.

When AKB48 blew up in the charts, I would imagine that the membership started to rise. When did you start to see a big difference in the growth of the club?

FilipinoMarco: I instantly noticed a huge growth since our second official club meet back in May 14, 2011 when a few more AKB48 fans wanted to meet up. After that meet, we made a Facebook fan page and it seemed like we kept getting 1-3 new members every month and now we are up to 60+ members!

Now I know it’s not a club with a president, vice president, treasurer, it’s more of a social hangout club on Facebook, where people can discuss their passion for AKB48 and related groups. But is there any moderation in the club’s Facebook group page just in case you get a member that gets a bit to unruly?

FilipinoMarco: Yep, there are no rankings other than club member officer, which are the 1st & 2nd gen members and or moderators/administrators on Facebook. Yes, our admin. officers always monitor our Facebook fanpage and see if there is an “unruly” member. Like I said, one of our major rules in the club is Respect, and it’s like a zero policy rule in our club. You’ll get kicked out instantly for trying to cause cyber fights/bullying or just plainly being disrespectful to other members. But thank goodness we don’t have any members that are unruly. We definitely kick out those members who are inactive for several months. For example, not posting anything and doesn’t attend the club meets. Those who haven’t attended the club meetings but are always active posting or commenting on our fanpage are safe from being kicked out.

From personal observance, one of the things that I saw about the club is how respectful the members are. There is no dissing of each other, people are very helpful towards each other and for the most part, not rude. Was the tone always like that for the club?

FilipinoMarco: Yes, the club has been always like this. Of course, we will joke around at times but not to hurt another members feelings. One of our major rules in the club is “respect”. If you don’t have that, you won’t be able to join the club. We love to help each other out especially those members who are new to AKB48 (or other sister groups) and want to learn more about them.

For those in California who are interested in joining the AKB48 SoCal club, please visit their Facebook page, by clicking on the following link below:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/118974618171602/
TUONG HUYNH @ BUDOKAN

AKB48 FANDOM WORLDWIDE
Collecting

AKB48G PHOTOS

AKB48G photo collecting is big business in Japan, as fans spend hundreds to thousands of dollars trying to acquire photo sets or rare photos of their favorite members. But like in Japan, fans all over the world have also caught the collecting bug. J!-ENT tries to learn from the AKB48 SoCal Club more about the hobby of AKB photo collecting.

What is the most that you have spent on photos?

CAREY LEUNG: Sakuratan’s normal monthly average of photo sets are $80 each and the most I’ve spent on a single photo is probably around $300 for a rare BLT of Mayuyu.

TUONG HUYNH: The most I spent on photos for one purchase was the $650+ on my Matsui Rena collection. I bought a ton of them from this one shop in Akihabara when I was there in May. I have spent around $400-500 a few times using proxy services like FromJapan or Noppin but those were for multiple auctions.

SHIOKA: It was from “Hatsu-koi Butterfly”, the Murashige Anna photo. On average, buying that complete set has cost me $20+ per photo. For 16 photos, I’ve spent over $500 on that set.

LovelyGaki: The most I ever spent on...maybe, like $100 in total for a pack of like 15 photos. The most I ever spent on for a single photo...$15-17.

RICHARD JENKINS: The most I’ve spent on a photo is $16.

KIXI CHAN: $10 on a single photo.

JESS: It’s very common to spend a lot on rare photos in Japan or Asia because supplies of photos are huge and rare ones become hard to collect and there comes the competition. I think most of the AKB fans including me don’t mind collecting rare photos as long as we can afford it. We say it’s a spirit that you collect everything that member has, as it is a way of showing your love to her.

FilipinoMarco: All I can say is that, it’s a pretty expensive hobby to get into especially if you don’t live in Japan.
How many photos do you own at this current time?

SHIOKA: Mine is fairly small, probably 75 photos or so, I’ve only been collecting for 2.5 months. I jump on any HKT, Miorin and Paruru photos I see.

KENNETH UY: Exactly 174 photos.

CAREY LEUNG: If we’re just talking about photos I keep, around 800 would be my estimate? Sorry, I can’t give an exact count, it’s too much. If we’re talking about all the many, many extras for trade that I have amassed over the years, it definitely breaks 1,000.

TUONG HUYNH: I currently own around 2,200 photos, not including my 60 Nogizaka46 photos.

KIXI CHAN: 73. I have to admit, I don’t prioritize photo collecting though.

FilipinoMarco: Oh, I’ve counted my TOP7 photo card binder and here are the results: Natsun (Kojima Natsuki): 94 total photo cards; Tanochan (Tano Yuka) which I barely started collecting her photos: 9 total; Hirarii (Hirata Rina): 12 total; Michä (Nonaka Misato): 40 total; Paruru (Shimazaki Haruka): 12 total; Aaya (Moriyuki): 11 total; TOP7 Binder: 222 photo cards total and 83 tradeable cards.

LovelyGaki: Total number of photos: 396. Yikes!

RICHARD JENKINS: Currently, I own about 565 photos.

In the realm of AKB48 photo collecting, is there a “Holy Grail” photo(s) that people are after?

SHIOKA: There’s always a holy grail, there is always that extremely rare thing. I am intentionally avoiding knowing Miorin’s holy grail, otherwise I’d chase it! Back when I was an HIP fan, I spent around $4,000 procuring the holy grail of my HIP oshi.

CAREY LEUNG: The older BLT’s (photos that were only available from BLT magazine, which is what AKB photos USED to be part of until 2009) are quite rare and sought after now. Especially the SP (Special) ones. The $300 Mayuyu group shot is one was one of those. They used to go for like Y8,000 yen maximum when I started collecting in 2008. But because they are so old and rare they’ve now started commanding super high prices.

JESS: For photos, probably the signed photos or the reprinted photos. For Mukaida is around 10,000 yen.

TUONG HUYNH: As for “Holy Grail” in the AKB48 photo collecting, that has to be the really early photos. The ones from 2006-2008. The BLT or the early Gaccha photos. Those are extremely rare to find and even rarer to find full sets of them. I did get some “holy grails”. I have some of Kitahara Rie’s Gaccha photos and one of Matsubara Natsumi’s Gaccha photo from 2006. I can’t tell if it is real or not since I don’t know what the photos look like back then.

Now if the person is high in senbatsu and are very popular, should I assume those are the ones that are fairly easy to get at a cheaper price or is it the other way around?

C.L. Other way around. Senbatsu will always be the most expensive. If you’re aiming only to collect unpopular members, it’s not too hard to expect to find a full set of 4 (a monthly set) for about 500 yen - 1000 yen. Versus people like say, Mayuyu or Milky, which will run you around $50-$60 for a full monthly set. And these are already the “most common” photos, the monthlies.

So, Sashihara ones would be expensive right now?

CAREY LEUNG: No, it depends on the member and their fans.

KENNETH UY: Photo collection and their appraisal is a tricky process. It’s kind of like a pseudo stock market.

CAREY LEUNG: Like... Mayuyu fans are known for being a bit crazy, so I’ve seen a really weird anomaly where a single photo sold for around $750, I believe. That was signed, but still, signed photos don’t go for that much normally. HKT48 members also tend to be more expensive in general for theater sets because there’s not a lot of them printed, while AKB48 theater photos are printed in bigger quantities. NMB48 theater sets are the cheapest because their official store actually sells them by member sets, so you don’t have to go around collecting too much.

So, you can tell if someone has spent a lot on photos by looking at their cards. If it’s a top senbatsu member, they probably spent a lot of money on the photo sets?

TUONG HUYNH: Yeah, there are certain girl’s who’s photo are super expensive. So, the members collecting there photos are the high rollers. In our group, that’s C.L. All of the member’s he collects are super expensive right now? So, even if a member is ranked high their photos may not be that expensive. For instance someone like Tomochin who was in Kami8, her photos were not on the expensive side. They were in the middle where as someone like Mayuyu who is also in the Kami8 is super expensive and at the top side. Then there are those who aren’t even in the Senbatsu and are expensive. Up until the most recent election Milky was not in the Senbatsu but her photos are super expensive. Same with Paruru. Where as other members like the HKT...
girls Meru, Sakura, Haruppi are fairly expensive with Meru and Sakura being more expensive than Haruppi. It really depends on how hardcore of a fan base the girls have. The more hardcore, the more their photos will be expensive because their fans will want to buy them. Regardless of rank.

**Are there many female fans that collect photos?**

**JESS:** There are many female collectors at the trading area. There are also kids, elementary or middle school ages as well as parents. Sometimes even grandpa grandmas.

**Now, looking at the photos from the club meeting. How does that work out, I see people breaking out their cards (are these extras they get) or do people purchase extras to trade? How does that work out? Or do you sell cards at the meetings?**

**C.L.** Some of those photos come from like the DVD/Blu-ray sets that we buy. Most of those sets come with five random photos, so if there’s a big release coming out (like that 1/149 game where we all had 10 photos each) then we can all trade for our favorite members. It’s a mini-version of what goes on in Japan. Generally, I don’t go for extras, because my favorites are already too expensive so I just buy what I want.

Oh, something I want to highlight that’s really cool within the SoCal group and I think a bit unique - these are some of the nicest people I’ve met. A lot of people just give away stuff to other members of the club. I never thought about that, always just selling. But when I saw people just giving away stuff, I thought that it was really, really cool, so I started doing it somewhat too. For example, someone will have a certain oshi, and if another person has extra photos of that girl that they don’t want, they’ll just give it away.

**I notice that many people mention purchasing from Yahoo! Auctions Japan for their photos. Is it accessible and easy for non-Japanese speakers to access?**

**CAREY LEUNG:** No, YAJ is actually quite hard to access for foreigners. Everyone that buys there is using a deputy service to buy for us. The deputy service is a company that buys things on our behalf, we pay them commission and then they ship the items to us.

**How much of a commission do they take?**

**KENNETH UY:** A lot. (laughing)

**CAREY LEUNG:** It’s because most sellers on there don’t deal internationally, and even those that do have limited English. The cheapest is from japan.co.jp, they charge a base 200 yen fee + 5% of the item price. This is not including bank transfer fees and domestic shipping. So if I was buying a 5000 yen set, it’d be 200 yen base fee, probably another 200 yen for domestic shipping, 250 yen for bank transfer and 250 yen for commission (the 5%).

**KENNETH UY:** So, when shopping for photos of this nature, you can’t afford to get carried away or else one would be spending a ton of money. I remember the first time I bought photos for the first time on YAJ in 2010, I got too carried away and spent nearly $400 for just 16 photos.

**SHIOKA:** (Laughing) That sounds familiar. I avoid YAJ because of that.

**CAREY LEUNG:** And this is the “cheapest”. (laughing) Other sites like noppin, charge 500 yen base, so it’s even worse. But because YAJ is the only place most of these photos get posted, we have no choice but to go to deputy services.

**Do the official AKB48 shops replenish older photos or are those older**
photos first come, first serve?
CAREY LEUNG: There’s a set date and
time each month which is announced on the
AKB48 official blog, so people go line up at
those times for photos.
You’re allowed to buy up to five packs at
once, with any mix of teams. So, for ex-
ample, you can buy five for Team A or three
for Team A and two for Team B. Each pack
comes with four random photos of members
from that team and one random kenkyuusei.

Wow! I didn’t know that so it’s a com-
petitive hobby for those in Japan. You
miss out on a lineup, your somewhat
screwed?
CAREY LEUNG: Most of the time, the only
way these sets are completed is the people
who trade right after buying packs. So peo-
ple walk around asking “Do you have so and
so?” and then trades are conducted.

What is the identifying factor that the
photos are legit and are not fake?
KENNETH UY: Usually, there is a print on
the pack which shows where it was printed
(for example, FUJIFILM, etc.) or a time-
stamp.
CAREY LEUNG: Unfortunately, you can’t.
Not for the early ones, at least. There were
few scammers back then, so normally people
didn’t have to worry about that. When AKB
got popular, the counterfeits came out in
droves. Now management prints them on
special photo paper usually identifying the
set there’s from. So, for example, like a set
from the July monthlies would say July 2013
Theater on them. It’s a very recent thing
though and counterfeits are still abound on
Yahoo! Auctions Japan, which is the main
place to buy photos.

And actually, the counterfeiters got smart.
At some point, AKB started printing on spe-
cial photo stock, but then the counterfeiters
bought the same photo stock and printed
them similarly, so it was pretty much impos-
sible to tell. That’s why management started
using the current system which utilizes the
special photostock and prints the name of
the set on the back.

TUONG HUYNH: There are some signs that
a photo is fake. The first one, usually the
quality of the paper the photo is printed on.
The second will be the identification mark
on the back. Also, the non-identification
mark on the back is a sign as well. Most
photos that get process will have some sort
of marking on the back of it from where it
was printed. Also, lastly if it is photos that
don’t have a bar on the bottom or the @AKS
logo is a sign too. The easiest ones to spot
are the obvious ones that someone took
from say a photo book or something. Unfor-
tunately I have to say I own a few of these
fake ones. Some of my early mistakes from
buying photos.

The other thing you will need to know is
when photos got the identification marking
and when they didn’t. Photos before a cer-
tain date in 2009 did not get identifications,
unless it was the BLT which will have the
BLT and month/year on the back. Anything
after 2009 will usually have a identification
of some sort.

I know many people collect the photos
but what about the cards, especially
those that come with the CD’s?
TUONG HUYNH: Some people will collect
those also. But mostly the photos since
AKB puts photos in theirs. The sister groups
AKB48 FANDOM WORLDWIDE

But for HMV/Lawson AKB48G photos, those tend to have no markings in the back, so those must be difficult to tell if they are real or fake right?

**TUONG HUYNH:** Yeah, the bonus photos will not have any marking on the back. The only identification is the @AKS marking on the front. Also, sometimes the photos you get in the CD don’t have any markings on them either. Some of the monthly photos will not have any markings on the back also, like the SKE monthly photos I own do not have markings on the back. Also, not having a marking on the back is also a way to identify the photos. If you find one with a marking on the back then it is a fake.

**Along with the photos, are you buying original AKB48 binders/folders as well?**

**KENNETH UY:** I’m not going out of my way to buy official AKB photo folders since you would have to pay quite a bit of cash and it holds less photos. So, I just bought some black 1.5 inch binder and decorated it. For photo holders, I purchased the C-Line Top-Loading Clear 3-1/2 x 5 photo holders at Staples.

**TUONG HUYNH:** The white, purple, brown photo albums, I bought at the AKB48 store in Akihabara, so I guess it is official. The other photo albums I got from people whom I purchased photos from. They sent me their albums. The large black photo album, smaller red one and the small red and black ones I bought from Target. You can tell they are not formatted to fit Japanese photos. The sleeves for the photos I buy separately. The photos themselves come in a sleeve but they don’t fit the albums, so you have to bend/fold the sleeve to fit. Oh and the photos you buy from the random packs don’t come in sleeves.

**CAREY LEUNG:** I definitely have bought Japanese photo binders. For NMB48. It’s convenient since their online store actually sells official photo binders.

Do you ever receive criticism that your hobby for collecting photos is worthless or a waste of money?

**JESS:** The reason why that most of the oversea fans especially the ones in states think that collecting expensive photos are useless is because the environment. No access to the photos and no where to trade. There is no market, so that people think its “pointless” to collect rare photos. It’s complete different in Japan, China and other Asian countries.

**TUONG HUYNH:** I have not had any real criticism really about my photo collecting being worthless. I don’t share my hobbies with anyone other than friends and family and they all understand why I collect them. I explain to them my photo collecting is like when I was collecting basketball cards.
In Indonesia, there is no doubt that AKB’s popularity has reached the country and with their sister group JKT48 doing well, on YouTube, you can find a good number of cover dance groups who emulate the dance moves of AKB48 and the other sister groups. One group that I have discovered in Indonesia is FIB48. I recently interviewed the group to discuss their music videos and why they enjoy performing AKB48 songs in public.

Can you please tell me more about what FIB48? How many members are in the group and how did you come together?

FIB48 is a dance group from Malang, Indonesia which covers 48 family’s dance. The name of FIB48 is taken spontaneously. All of the members are from the same faculty, that’s why we choose FIB, short name of Fakultas Ilmu budaya (Faculty of Culture Studies). and 48 because we cover 48 family’s dance. The other abbreviation FIB is “Flower is Blooming”. We consider the members as Blooming Flowers, which has a meaning that we are still in a growing process.

Can you please tell me how the idea of FIB48 became a reality? Were you watching a music video and all of you decided to make a group? How did the idea happen?

FIB48 was formed in 2011. The idea came from a member who likes the dance style of AKB48. At that time, AKB48 was not popular as today in Indonesia and in Malang, dance cover groups for AKB48 were rare. Then, finally she wanted to show something different by making a dance group which covers AKB48’s dance. She invited one of her friends who is an expert in dancing to form the group. They were finding other members to join the group until the group was filled with 5 members. FIB48 made their debut performance in an annually Japanese Culture event which is called “Isshoni Tanoshimimashou” in campus. Since then, we continue to perform until now and even we join in dance competitions in some Japanese Culture event.

I know that JKT48 is very popular in Indonesia but is AKB48 very popular?

Yes, they are watched by a number of AKB48 fans in Indonesia.

One positive about JKT48 is how people all over the world have their eyes on the group and leading others to discover AKB48 fans/dance cover dance group like FIB48. How do you feel that people in other countries are watching your dances?

We didn’t expect that our video would be watched by people
overseas. Of course, we are very excited.

I was watching your video from 2011 for the Brawijaya University “Isshoni Tanoshimashou 6”, your first performance at the yearly event. How was your first experience dancing in public for a large audience?
Surely, we were very nervous. That was our first performance and we had not had an experience to perform dancing before. Also, actually at that time we were a little bit worried, because one of our members was sick. However, we tried to perform our best.

Looking at your video, the dance performance of AKB48’s “Beginner”, NMB48’s “Kitagawa Kenji” and SKE48’s “Gomenne Summer” was well-done. I noticed it was held at GJUI-19, what was it like to perform the dance cover competition and how long did it take?
At first, we participated in the competition and sent the video just for fun, but unexpectedly we passed and even became the runner up. We learned the moves and trained for 2 weeks.

You reached second place at the Dance Cover Competition GJUI-19 in July. Congratulations!

In Indonesia, are dance cover competitions very competitive? And do people compete for cash prize or is it for merchandise?
Thank you! Yes, it’s very competitive. That competition is participated by not only Jakarta participant, but also by participant from various cities. Many of them are already professional. For the prize, there is a cash prize, but we don’t know what people compete for, because it depends on each group.

Of all the AKB48-related songs that you have learned, which choreography was the most challenging to learn?
“UZA”. That song has scorpion movement.

I noticed a performance on May 13th and heard wota fans screaming for your group, which is great! Do you work with the Wota fans for the cheering or do they show up and are there to cheer you on at events?
It makes us flashback for a moment to our first performance in 2011. In that period, JKT48 hadn’t made their debut yet and the wota were just a small number of people. Just a few people that knew about AKB48, so they just silently watched us. There was no yelling or wota’s screaming. The situation really different now, and as you said.. that’s really great when we finally can hear their screaming because it kees our spirit up. We don’t work directly with the wota, but in every event that we are going to perform, we always notify people of our.
upcoming performance via social media. Then, unexpectedly they always come to cheer us. There was a moment, when our performance in a culture event was delayed because of rains, so that our performance would be shown at 8 o’clock. All of the members were hopeless and thought that there would be no one who watch our perform, since it delayed too long and people would think our perform had canceled. But surprisingly, wota came together, surrounded us, then yelling out while holding their lighstick to support and cheer us. That left a big impression on all of the members of FIB48. Wota’s scream can increase our power in dancing, because it means they are enjoying our performance and we should do our best and dance for them.

Watching your videos, it’s very cool how you are able to have costumes like AKB48G. Is it very expensive for everyone to coordinate the same outfits?
No, it happens that we know where to sew clothes for a low price. Sometimes we sew the costume by ourselves. And about the costume, we want to show an image like AKB48 which is cool and cute with their costume style.

What kind of upcoming projects can we expect to see from FIB48 in the near future?
In the near future, we will cover “Majisuka Gakuen”, but we also thinking about to show something different later.
CHRIS KUNODY (CRISTAFARI) is one of the mega AKB48 fans in the United States. One of the first AKB48 bloggers but also one who has been featured on television in Japan multiple times for his love of AKB48. J!-ENT recently had the opportunity to interview Chris Kunody regarding his involvement of AKB48 fandom and being recognized in Japan as a mega-fan!

You are one of the few Americans who have appeared on Japanese television shows multiple times because of your passion for AKB48. How did you get discovered by the Japanese?

I am not exactly sure, but I think it had something to do with my blog. At first many of us weren’t even sure it was legitimate. Then there was the matter of where exactly it would be filmed. Originally, it was supposed to take place in LA or New York. The discussion of recording the show in Japan came later. Unfortunately, for me they were so intrigued by my car that they decided to film me in the states, so both times I missed out on the free trip. Of course, not too many fans can say they have had Fukuza-wa Akira in their passenger seat.

Curious, do you visit Japan during each AKB48 CD single release? Or do you visit Japan every other month?

I have been going twice a year for the last six years. Usually in the spring and fall, when the weather is best. I am the US version of a “salaryman”, so I can only take off when my work schedule permits. I have always tried to schedule my trips around hand-shake events, as I feel they are one of the best parts of being an AKB48 fan.

As one of the American mega AKB48 fans, does your family or friends know of your passion for AKB48?

I think my friends know a bit more than my family does, since my immediate family live in a different part of the country. Over the years, I have learned which friends I can talk about AKB with, and who finds the subject annoying. Obviously, with the amount of time I have spent in Japan, my family knows something’s up, so it isn’t exactly a secret either.

Your blog “Chuo Dori” was one of the first English AKB48 personal blogs out there. And you actually were writing about AKB48 vox blog in early 2008. How did you first discover AKB48 and what made you become a big fan of the group?

It was quite accidental. I stumbled across a couple of J-pop PVs on YouTube, and was completely intrigued. I never knew the idol world even existed until that moment. I had made friends with a couple of fellow J-pop fans, one of which was a girl who liked to send me videos of different idols. One day she sent me the video of a relatively fresh idol group. It was the PV for “Aitakatta” and I loved it. But at the time they were just one of the many idol acts that I enjoyed. It wasn’t until I made it to Japan and paid my first visit to the theater that I really fell in love. The entire concept completely blew my mind. The intimacy of the theater, being so close to the girls. Being able to interact with them. Not to mention the camaraderie of the fans. Back then the AKB48 Theater was almost like a club. You could spend all day up there interacting with other fans. It wasn’t nearly as difficult to win a show, and there were no restrictions on watching the monitor in the lobby. In fact, the first time I went to Tokyo, I won three shows in a week. The next trip, I won six times in two weeks. So it was the intimacy of the theater experience that hooked me more than anything else.
CLOCKWISE: Chris' car which was featured on Japanese television, Chris with AKB48 theater manager Tomonobu Togasaki, Chris with former AKB48/SDN48 member Megumi Ohori, Chris with former SDN48 member Nachu and another photo with Chris and Megumi Ohori.
CHRISTOPHER KUNODY (USA)  AKB48 FANDOM WORLDWIDE

in love with Wasamin from the first time I saw her, and have been following her ever since. I remember in the beginning she always seemed surprised that some random foreigner was so interested in her. In fact, I will never forget that day at G-Rosso when we could pick one girl to meet on our way out of the venue. As I came down the line she sort of looked at the floor as if to say “there is no way in hell this guy is picking me”, and the way she lit up when I actually did. That is one of the big reasons why she is my oshimen, in those early years she always seemed completely surprised and appreciative that I actually liked her. I remember for a while I had a tough time coming to terms with the fact I was “oshihenning”. I couldn't bring myself to say that Meetan was no longer my Kami-Oshi. But it was true. Meetan was in the twilight of her idol career. And as much fun as I had with Ohori at handshake events and high-touch, Wasamin seemed to touch my heart in a way no other members came close to. Even today, after so many handshakes there is still an “electricity” every time I meet her. It is unlike any experience I have ever had with any other idol. But at the end of the day I still support both of them.

You attended the AKB48 Festival and Senbatsu Sousenkyo at Nissan stadium. Please describe your experience of watching the general election live?

I was so happy to have the opportunity. I had won the Google+ contest in 2012 to attend the previous year's event, but had to turn it down due to some personal commitments. Winning that contest, and having to give up the grand prize was my most painful experience as a fan. So winning a ticket this year was a “healing moment” for me. Nissan Stadium is a huge venue, and I had nosebleed seats. So, from that standpoint it was not nearly as intimate as the handshake events and theater experiences I love so much. But sharing the experience of the election live with my fellow fans was a lot of fun. This year I was sincerely worried about Wasamin’s potential ranking position, and I was relieved when her name was called. Even if it was a significant drop in rank. We knew this year would be tough, and just wanted her to be able to stand on that stage and hold an award. But this year's Top 16 was great fun. It was great to see Suda Akari make it. I loved that the Top 2 from NMB broke through. But the best part was the how polarized the audience was when it came to Sasshi, as well as the other new representatives. While quite a few fans groaned at the drops in rank by some of the older senbatsu, there were many of

Your California license plate shows your love for AKB48. Do any fans approach you because of it?

Surprisingly, it has only happened twice in the five years I have had them. Random people walking by while I was getting out of my car.

I’m guessing Megumi Ohori was your original oshimen? And Misaki Iwasa is another you are a big fan of. But curious, who is your oshimen (idol) at this current time?

I love that you asked me this question, as it took me a long time to figure out who my oshimen really was. My first true oshimen was indeed Meetan, and I loved being a Meetan fan given her unique role within AKB. AKB48’s oldest member, kind of “pervy”, great comedy chops. She was almost the “anti-idol”. Her fans were great too. I enjoyed hanging out with them, drinking before and after SDN shows. But I pretty much fell
us pumping our fists as we knew it meant more new blood at the top. Then when Yuko was announced at #2...it was amazing. Cheers, jeers, fist pumping, people walking out in disgust. I had fans high-fiving me. It was an amazing moment.

It was great to be in the audience for such a momentous occasion. I also got to witness Sae rejecting her concurrency and Mariko's graduation announcement. The best part about the big events are the memorable events in AKB history that you get to see. And let’s not forget, I got to see Hasute and Wasute live!

You have a good number of photos taken with Togasaki-san and other members. But can you explain to those not familiar with the 2-shots, how does one get the opportunity for that? And what advice do you have for those who want to try to obtain a 2-shot learning from your experience?

In the old days, AKB48 had a lot more opportunities to obtain 2-shots. The theater 2-shots were the best, the girls even decorated the photo for you. These days it doesn’t happen nearly as often. HKT48 recently offered 2-shots with their first single. The last time AKB48 did it was for “1830m”. As for the Togasaki 2-shot, management offers different unique opportunities to interact with the group managers during handshake events. Not only two shots, they even have group discussions. You usually need to get there pretty early to obtain a ticket. 2-shots are a lot of fun, although you really don’t get to say much to the member aside from discussing what pose you are going to do. The photos are an excellent keepsake, not to mention conversation piece. They aren’t difficult to get. You just need to know in which events they are offered. The t-shirt I am wearing in my photo with Togasaki. That was the birthday shirt from Wasamin’s birthday committee. I was so excited when they asked me to be part of the committee, although I was more of an honorary member since I couldn’t really participate in all of the preparations since I don’t live in Japan. But I was honored that they thought enough of me to ask.

Another thing about your experiences as an AKB48 fan that I enjoyed reading and seeing is going beyond the usual shops but to visit locations such as the lighthouse where “Aitakatta” was shot, the beach were “Bingo” was shot, visit-

ing the schools or restaurants they attended. What was your favorite location that you have visited so far?

That would have to be when my friend took me to Chiba to see the neighborhood where Meetan grew up. It wasn’t lost on me that Wasamin is also from Chiba. So, getting to see the neighborhoods where my two favorite idols had spent their childhood was almost a spiritual experience. In a way it made me feel even closer to them.

Let’s talk about the handshake events you attended. Any surprises? And any experience that stays in your mind as one of your favorite handshake moments with an AKB48 member?

There are countless moments I hold dear in my memory. Most of them involving Wasamin. The third time I met her was at the “Sakura no Shiori” event, and when I walked in, she said in English, “I am so happy to see you again”. It blew my mind that she had remembered me. But there have been so many funny moments involving other members. Noro Kayo daring me to jump the line into her queue. Sato Amina exclaiming “Eat Me!”
in reference to a necklace she was wearing. Suda Akari barking at me. Witnessing Oba Mina’s apology to the fans after her earlier scandal. But the funniest and most memorable moment happened on my most recent trip. It involved three rather feisty SKE48 members.

I had queued up for Matsumura Kaori, who is one of my favorite girls to meet despite her aggressiveness during handshakes. Since my Japanese isn’t very good, I spent my time in the queue rehearsing what I am going to say. But this time I could not concentrate because Yakata Miki and Saito Makiko were desperately trying to get my attention in the adjacent lines. They were practicing their English on me, asking me questions and wanting to hear me speak Japanese. I was so distracted that I hadn’t realized I was next in queue. Kaotan grabbed my hands and I had nothing to say. Then she asked me what I liked about her. As I struggled to come up with an answer she began screaming “WHY? WHY? WHY?” Then “I LOVE YOU I LOVE YOU I LOVE YOU!!” I looked up long enough to see Mikitty cracking up as the guard pushed me out of the booth. But it wasn’t over. Kaotan leaned out of rear of her booth to continue yelling “I love you” at me. Other fans were laughing, I was completely embarrassed.

**What is the most number of CD singles you purchased for a handshake event or for voting for the general election?**

As for how many copies I have purchased? The most was probably 32 for “Sakura no Ki ni Narou”. Usually for AKB singles, I buy between 20 and 30 copies when I go to the events. For SKE, I usually purchase between 10 and 15.

**What do you do with all the CD’s you purchase? Give them away or sell them on ebay?**

It depends on how I receive the CDs. In many cases I have them delivered somewhere in Japan. When that happens I pick up the CDs, tickets and photos when I arrive. As I’m sure you know, the airlines can be strict when it comes to the weight of your luggage. So, I am sorry to say that I dispose of many of them before I fly home. But not all, and I have a couple of boxes filled with duplicate merchandise. That includes theater version CDs. This is where my online shop comes in. I have never used ebay, although I probably should. Instead I keep a shop (click here) on the Stage48 Website. It is also there for photo trading.

**You have a lot of photos! How many do you think you have?**

I have over 1,500 photos, but more than 1,000 of those are of my 10 favorite members. That includes over 400 Wasamin photos. Luckily, for me, almost all the members I collect are not among the top Senbatsu. So collecting them is quite affordable compared to other girls. The most I ever paid for a photo is $35 for an autographed Meetan B.L.T. But to be honest, I think you can count on one hand how many times I have spent more than $10 for one photo.

**You have a wonderful shrine at your home for AKB48, so let’s talk about the merchandise. What is your most precious AKB48–related merchandise or anything related to AKB48 that you own and are proud of?**

There are quite a few. My autographed Kojiharu B.L.T. that I pulled out of my 2009 calendar was the first unique AKB item I ever owned. Speaking of
Kojiharu, when I went to AKB’s US debut in New York, I was lucky enough to win an autograph ticket. And when I met Haruna, I kept calling her by her character’s name from the show “Mendol”. So, underneath her autograph she signed a second time as the character. I thought that was really sweet. I think the most unique item I have is an autographed uchiwa from SDN48’s Hatakeyama Chisaki. What made it so unique was the fact that she dripped sweat all over it. The sweat stains are still there to this day.

I was so happy to be able to get one of the special “densha” covers for Wasamin’s first single. They were given away exclusively at a special event. But my all-time favorite item is the autograph board where Wasamin actually wrote my name. Obviously, you can see I love autographed stuff. In fact I have collected autographed items from other idols too, including Idoling!!!, Momoiro Clover and Danceroid.

You have followed other idol groups before, but having followed AKB48 and having the experiences that you have had as a major fan, If there was any important advice to give to a fan wanting to experience AKB48 for the first time in Japan, what advice would you give?

First of all, by all means GO! The concept of AKB48 is “Idols you can meet everyday”. Without meeting them, or experiencing the theater, you are missing a key component of the AKB experience. But be prepared to be humbled. I remember how overwhelmed I was the first time I saw AKB48 at Shibuya AX. I was amazed by the fans as well as the girls. Being there, in Japan is so completely different from anything you can experience online or at an overseas appearance. I am so happy that I developed a network of friends back then that helped me navigate the sometimes confusing world of J-pop and AKB early on.

As for advice? To begin with have a realistic plan. Whether it be a concert you have won a ticket to or a handshake event, make sure there is at least one event on your itinerary that you are assured of experiencing. I have seen so many people depend so much on winning a theater show, or seeing one particular member perform. They later went home disappointed because it didn’t happen. These days it is especially difficult to win a theater show. Even if you are lucky enough to win, there is a huge chance you will not be seeing your oshimen. Case in point, I haven’t seen Wasamin perform in the theater for three years.

Next, have a backup plan. There are plenty of J-pop idol groups in Japan, and they perform all the time. I have enjoyed countless other idol (and non-idol) groups over the years. Most of them are a lot easier to obtain tickets for than AKB. And let’s not forget that Japan is an amazing country with tons of stuff to experience. Don’t forget to check out the other incredible things Japan has to offer. Regardless of how much AKB48 stuff you get to do, make it an awesome trip anyway. Unless you are staying for an extremely long period of time, there is no way you are going to get to experience everything AKB has to offer all in one trip.

Finally, do your best to immerse yourself in the experience. Don’t try to stand out just because you are a foreigner. You already stand out as a foreigner. But attempting to use it as some sort of currency, or as some call it “playing the gaijin card” comes across as quite arrogant. To me its a lot more fun to try to “live as a local”, and I think the Japanese appreciate your effort.

Visit Christopher Kunody’s blog at: http://www.intlwota.com/chuodori/
Melody Dassance was one of the guest commentators on the YouTube AKB48 32nd Single Senbatsu Sousenkyou (General Elections) YouTube live streaming special back in June. Melody who is based in France, has appeared on various television shows showcasing her as a big fan of the Japanese idol group, AKB48.

While commentators voiced their opinion (which was dubbed in English for viewers at home), it helped to see Melody’s emotions come out during the election as some of the emotional speeches really affected her at times during the live streaming and it added to the emotional element of the AKB48 32nd Single General Election.

J!-ENT recently had a chance to speak to Melody hours after the live streaming event ended.

You have been on Japanese television prior for shows showcasing international AKB48 fans. How were you discovered in Japan?

Well, it was different each time... first time was that I passed a sort of casting for Fuji TV’s “Iine JAPAN! Nippon Daisuki Gaikokujin No.1 Kettensei” that was posted online, looking for foreign fans. This time, it was more private, producers contacting several people about it in a very short amount of time. But that wasn't related at all!

You’re from France and how was communication with the guests? Are you fluent in speaking Japanese?

I am not fluent at all but I have been communicating with them in English. Some of the staff didn't speak English either though so I was struggling with my own Japanese (very basic) skills, but I think it went okay overall!

How was the experience to take part in such a major AKB48 event?

It was amazing! It was my first AKB48 concert so I was kind of nervous, but everyone was very welcoming and it was an amazing experience. Being able to witness both a huge concert and the senbatsu sousenkyo ceremony was incredible!

You have seen many AKB48 performances but how was the experience of watching their concert before the elections? And did they hook you up with great seats?

It was great! It was my first AKB48 concert and it was such an awesome way to experiment it. We watched it from the studio corporate boxes up the stadium with the staff members.

What was the most moving speech for you at the AKB48 General Election?

I think it was showing on my face but Miyazawa Sae's speech moved me. I was feeling very proud she managed to convey her true feelings without hiding anything. I am very glad she's so determinate about SNH48. Shinoda Mariko's speech was also both heartbreaking, but it is a beautiful way to announce her graduation.

When the announcement was that it was either Yuko or Sashihara going to be #1...before Yuko's announcement, how was everyone inside the room? Was it tense? And how did you feel? Were you expecting Sashihara to take #1 because of how well she did during the preliminary votes?

Honestly, everyone was making different predictions and seeing how surprising the rest of the ranking was, everything could happen! I was more thinking Yuko would get #1 because she is Oshima Yuko, you know. She has this huge mainstream appeal and image that I didn't picture Sashihara having. But it was very interesting and everyone's
reaction, girls and commentators, was great!

**What was the biggest surprise for you in terms of members dropping or members moving up at this year’s elections?**

I think Shibata Aya being totally new in rank this year and ranking center for the undergirls was the biggest good surprise! But I’m very happy, I like this girl a lot and I hope this will get her the chance to shine more in SKE. Kuramochi Asuka ranking so low was kind of a bad surprise too, but it feels she’s on the same roll as Akimoto Sayaka and all of these old generation members who are getting less and less love from management as months go by.

**After the elections, did you get to go back-stage or did everyone go home?**

Everyone went home. We just walked across Nissan Stadium’s buildings to get our car. We ran into Maeda Atsuko and theater managers Togasaki-san, Yuasa-san and Shibasaki-san though.

**Did you get a chance to meet Atsuko and Togasaki?**

I just saw Togasaki from far away but he seemed rather busy! We ran into Maeda Atsuko after the election ended but she looked busy too, I think she was meeting Mariko upstairs. I only told her “thank you” and “good job, good night” though, nothing special. She sure is a gorgeous lady!

**While watching Sashihara give her speech and how worried she was as being the new ace center, I know that Yuko found it very interesting to have Sashihara in the center position.**

This is definitely going to be interesting! As Sashihara told Yuko, “This is going to be a weird song”! Everything is unexpected and this is great to look forward to it. Change feels good!

**Who is your oshimen (favorite member) and having been on several shows about AKB48, have you had a chance to meet her yet?**
My oshimen is Takahashi Juri and unfortunately I have never met her! I hope I will be able to take part in a handshake event one day!

**Having seen how the elections went and seeing how we are starting to see the transition of older members leaving and younger members now starting to get their notice and ranking much higher. As a longtime AKB48 fan, what is your feeling of seeing this transition?**

I think it’s a good thing. Older members can’t stay in AKB forever, they have to live their own lives too. This changing feeling has been going around for the past year and it feels great. They are different parts of AKB48 history, and it is very interesting to watch the process. Next generation looks promising, with such caring and determinate senpai!

**Right when Sashihara was riding the float after her speech, you were given a chance to talk about this year’s elections but the audio cut out during the live streaming. Can you tell us what you said? So, people will know what you were explaining to George during that portion.**

I was saying that even if I got kind of cold towards Sashihara after her scandal, we could see tonight she is a modest and honest girl who does her best and everything she can for HKT48. She’s very hard-working and such a caring senpai. HKT girls still need someone to lead them forward and Sashihara is doing a perfect job so far. I am very happy for her!

**Now, I’m hoping they contact you for the Janken Taikai. If they called you to take part in another YouTube streaming AKB48 live show, would you do it?**

I totally would! That was an intense trip! To go there and go back to Bordeaux in three days only, but it was amazing! Really worth the tiredness coming after!

**You also are part of an AKB48 podcast. Can you tell me more about it?**

I actually co-host a French podcast about the 48 groups with 3 other French fans and we met at Japan Expo to record live a special episode and meeting up with people who listen to our podcast. That was really fun to finally meet fans IRL! Our podcast also has a Facebook and a website, we’re called podcast48.com and it’s in full French.

**I was happy to see you in an AKB48 outfit. Did anyone recognize it when you attended Japan Expo? It’s interesting because you find AKB0048 cosplayers, but they are not AKB48 fans.**

Our group obviously had to recognize it because I teased them on Twitter before hand. But other fans and even Nico Nico’s live show hosts recognized it! I kind of got to go on stage because Nico Nico’s French host, Vincent Ricci, is a big fan of AKB48 and wanted me on stage after seeing the enthusiastic Nico Nico live comments from Japan.

**Was your cosplay outfits made by you or did you commission them?**

The “Iiwake Maybe” AKB48 “bland” skirt and jacket were the ones Fuji TV gave me during the first show, I just added everything else and customized these two a bit more! The “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” that’s in progress, though, is 100% made by myself.

**Curious, do your friends listen to AKB48?**

Not at all! (Laughing) I got one of my classmates this year into them because she already loved Japanese culture but she changed schools. Only my little sister does, but she’s more into Vocaloid than AKB48. So, I’m kind of always an alien at school when I talk about my main hobby. (Laughing)
I know you are a member of the AKB48 So Cal Club. How long have you been a fan of AKB48?
Since 2011. However, I hated them before that. The whole concept and what songs I heard from before then didn’t really grab my attention until Kard’s remix of “Heavy Rotation” totally grabbed me and made me give it a second listen. After that, it was a long slippery slope into the fandom. Shortly after I did my first remix of AKB48 by doing “Flying Get”. I was a fan of Tomochin’s solo work before I even knew she was in AKB48 though. I came across her first single during my regular J-Pop music hunting, and immediately was hooked. I thought she was the next Amuro Namie, and wanted in on the ground floor. I thought her dance music centered sound was very fresh at the time.

For those not familiar with your work, you are an American Trance/Electro-House Music producer, composer, remixer and DJ that specializes in Japanese and Korean pop music. You’re also one of the few DJs I know in the United States that specialized in J-Pop and have gained a worldwide following. I know when I talk to DJ’s, they tell me that doesn’t really happen but you made it happen! How does it feel to be recognized worldwide for your work?
It’s unbelievable. A lot of the work that goes into the production of the remixes I use in my DJ Sets is very solitary, and personal work. So, to see that other people enjoy what I’m doing is really surprising because I’m just making something that I

First, let me just say that your AKB48 3+ hour DJ mix on YouTube is awesome! 38 AKB songs mixed... How long did that take to create?
That was all mixed live on my USTREAM channel. Someone uploaded the archived video to YouTube. If I remember right, it was prior to the election that year, and was just a chance to play nothing but my favorite 48 group related remixes produced by myself and other remixers in one set to get hyped for the festivities. The tracklist wasn’t planned, so I was just playing my favorites off the top of my head for as long as I could. It was recorded live, so it took as long as the mix is to do. There are several great 48 group remixes produced by other artists included in the mix, as opposed to my RMX48 Remix compilation series that’s solo produced by myself.

DJ AMAYA is becoming well-known worldwide thanks to his J-Pop DJ mixes and also his musical work featured on his website (djamaya.com), YouTube and on SoundCloud. Originally residing in Southern California, DJ Amaya recently moved to Japan to further his music career. Aside from being a J-Pop fan, DJ Amaya is also a an AKB48 fan who wowed international fans with his three-hour AKB48 DJ mix. J!-ENT recently had the opportunity to interview DJ Amaya about his work.
like, so I don’t expect other people to like it. With audiences in the U.S.A. (and outside Japan) it’s more about sharing new music with people. With the Japanese audience it’s more about showing my love for the source material and I think that feeling comes across in my work.

I saw the photo of you at NarCon in Sweden with the AKB0048 cosplayers. That’s awesome. What was it like performing in Sweden and how different is it from performing in the US?

NarCon had a very familiar feeling to anime conventions in the USA. However, I think the audience in Sweden were more educated on the source material than the younger kids in the USA are. There’s Swedish DJ’s like Meji there that really help spread the word about the underground Japanese EDM scene and are more open to different things.

I know that you are the first international member of the Japanese net-label Marginal Rec. and most recently, you left California to live in Japan. How are you enjoying Japan so far?

I’m having the time of my life. I was here last year for a gig and it was the first time seeing for myself how wide-spread my remixes are over here. It’s still quite overwhelming for me to think that so many people appreciate what I’m doing. Going from an “oddity” to a “commodity” is quite a change for me.

If you’d have told me I’d be in this situation 10 years ago when I did my first Ayumi Hamasaki remix, I’d have said you were crazy. The whole concept and what songs I heard.

I know you are busy in Japan with your music work but curious if you have been able to check out anything AKB48-related since you moved to Japan?

I’ve been to the Cafe & Shop several times. Last night, I was part of the mob outside the Theatre for Tomochin’s last stage. She was even more amazing in real life. Next month, I have a gig in Fukuoka, so I plan on making a trip to the HKT48 theater. Other than that, it’s mostly been business since I got here.

For more information on DJ Amaya, please visit: http://www.djamaya.com

CHECK OUT DJ AMAYA’S MUSIC! (Click on image)

AKB48 – Flying Get (DJ Amaya vs. Groovebot Remix)


The Sacrifice (Original Mix)
LEA (AUSTRIA) AKB48 FANDOM WORLDWIDE

While AKB48 dance covers are numerous on YouTube, LEA (Blossom Rainbow) from Austria has attracted many viewers for her dance videos receiving comments from fans in Japan but also around the world.

J!-ENT recently interviewed Lea about her dance covers on YouTube.

You are from Austria and I'm curious, are there a lot of people that you know of in your country that listen to AKB48 or J-Pop in general?

There are a lot who listen to other types of Japanese music, J-Rock for example. Sadly, I only know a handful of other girls, who listen to J-pop and they mostly listen to Morning Musume.

You video was among the first AKB48 dance choreography from Europe that I saw on YouTube. What made you decide to start uploading videos of you dancing to AKB48 and other idol group songs?

Well, when I first got into AKB48, I really wanted to dance along to their songs, so I started learning the choreographies of my favorite songs. Then, I saw other people doing dance covers, I thought, “Hey, I could do that too!” And yeah, that’s how it started.

For AKB48’s “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”, how long did you spend learning the choreography for the song?

“Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” is not a very hard dance, the choreography was made in such an easy way so that fans can dance along. I spent about two hours learning it.

I really enjoy the work that you put into learning the dance moves but of the many
dance videos you have created, what is your most challenging dance video that you have done so far?

Thank you for your compliment! Well, the hardest choreography was AKB48’s “Beginner.” But from the editing and filming of the video, the hardest was “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”, also from AKB48, because I filmed it from different angles.

As a Japanese music fan, who are your favorite artists and your favorite songs?

Well, I think it’s not a big secret that I love AKB48. But I also love all the sister groups like SKE48 and NMB48. But I also really like Hello Project Groups like Morning Musume. My favorite songs are all from AKB: “Iiwake Maybe”, “Heavy Rotation”, “Ponytail to Shushu” and “Koko ni ita koto”.

What upcoming dance projects do you have coming up?

There are a lot of Youtube dancers who join dance groups and then do dance covers together, but I do not think that I will join such a group. I love doing things on my own, and I think doing dance covers is a challenge for me. I really want to do dance covers of as many AKB48 songs as possible, and my next covers are going to be AKB48’s “Sayonara Crawl” and “Nagisa no Cherry”.

Lea’s AKB48 dances on Youtube

Lea dancing to “Manatsu no Sounds Good”

Lea dancing to “Beginner”

Lea dancing to “Gingham Check”

Lea dancing to “Ue Kara Mariko”

Lea dancing to “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”
OTHER COOL AKB48 DANCES ON YouTube

NEW SCHOOL KAIDAN
AKB48 - Koi Suru Fortune Cookie
FAN Ver.

AKB48 WRAPUP
AKB48 - Koi Suru Fortune Cookie
Worldwide Fan Version

JASMINE HIN
HKT48 - Hatsukoi Butterfly

BEKAH
AKB48 - RIVER

CANDYPOPS
Overture + UZA + River!
@ J-Trends in Town 2012

NIJI DANCE GROUP
Beginner - Kaze wa fuiteiru -
Everyday kachuusa dance cover
(Manga Festival 28.07.2013)

SUGARIC
Gingham Check
@ J-Trends in Town 2013

SAMANTHA THAVASA STAFF
AKB48 - Koi Suru Fortune Cookie

PROJECTCHU
AKB48 - Heavy Rotation

JAPANESE SCHOOL STUDENTS
Heavy Rotation Male Dance Cover

WHITE-MINT
NMB48 - Oh My God!

kis48
AKB48 - KAZE NI FUITEIRU
PHILIPPINE AKB48 FANDOM

In the Philippines, unlike the U.S. or Europe which fans had the opportunity to watch AKB48 perform, FilWota48 of hopes that AKB48 will one day perform in their country. As an active club dedicated to AKB48 in Southeast Asia, J!-ENT recently interviewed Carmichael Soria of FilWota48 about their club.

By Dennis A. Amith

or those not familiar with FilWota48, can you please describe the group and it’s history?

CARMICHAEL: Philippine AKB48 fans are scattered before... Way back in 2007-2008. There were only two major AKB48 forums then and I settled on the crazier forum instead. Eventually in 2009 after deciding that I wanted to dedicate myself to supporting AKB48 that we scheduled to have our very first meetup in Mall of Asia. I already knew Youko and cisumecchan at that time, and other local AKB48 fans. Most of them I only talk to online and have never met yet face to face.

Like the first AKB48 fans, there were seven of us then in that meeting inside Mall of Asia. It was fun sharing our first idol goods and showing AKB48’s early stage shows to some who were not that yet oriented in the way AKB48 operates. During then we have not yet decided on what name we will take on.

I eventually settled on Facebook with the group name Kome48, trying to associate with members in AKB who liked rice a lot like Sayaka Akimoto and Rumi Yonezawa. Though when we consulted the Japanese wota, they expressed the name sounded weird. But since I was too lazy to change the name, we just agreed that the forum will have a different name instead. It was then that we held in 2010 a contest to give us a name for the group. It was then that we decided to take the name FilWota48. It meant Filipino/Filipina wotas who were dedicated to AKB48 and their sister groups.
As for our own forum I really don’t check on it too much nowadays, but before we do get a thousand hits in a day a year ago. I mostly concentrate now in Facebook as most of the fandom has shifted to easy posting of images, videos, and ideas to share. But the old forum is still alive, I still check on it from time to time.

I read that Youko Kurama and Cis-umechan started the group around 2007.

CARMICHAEL: Ah about this, there is some correction. They did not start the group around 2007 but they were already fans during this time. I wasn’t a fan yet but I’ve been seeing AKB48 in some YouTube videos and some Japanese idol pages.

Youko is the only Filipino VIP in the Akihabara theater. But for Youko, what does the VIP status give a fan? CARMICHAEL: As far as I know, one will get a VIP status once you attend the theater shows a hundred times and get your name posted in a large board along the hall leading to the theater. This wooden board used to be situated across the portrait of the girls. As part of the benefits, you will get three to four 2-Shots with your kami-oshi (most favorite member in AKB) with her signature and dedication to you plus a group shot with the team of your kami-oshi. Your kami-oshi will be beside you in the group shot.

Not sure if there are other benefits but that is what I remember him telling and showing me his pictures with Team B.

I have interviewed fans of idol groups before in the Philippines but it was primarily for a boy bands. But how are things in terms of the fandom in the Philippines for AKB48? Are there a lot of fans? And does AKB48 receive any TV or radio play in your country? CARMICHAEL: AKB has a lot of fans here, mostly people with backgrounds in anime (due to “AKB0048”), tokusatsu (“Kamen Rider W”) and those who are current Johnny’s Entertainment fans due to the collaborative TV show “Bakaleya”. But the state of the local AKB fandom during 2005-2009 we didn’t get a lot of influx of fans then. Mostly they were silent fans and had no knowledge that there are others like them. Starting in 2010 they started to come in when I started featuring AKB48’s activities in Singapore, these articles got shared a lot and I noticed the slow but steady climb of likes in our page. Now I can say that AKB has a lot of fans in the Philippines, though mostly are casual fans. I gauge that most are casual by the number of attendees that go in our meetups. The highest that we had are about 30 people attending out of those 2,600+ that liked our page. Granted, some of them may be located far from Metro Manila or may also be foreigners just liking the page, a small fraction attending tells a large picture of the fandom. I mean we already scheduled meetups on
Sundays and there is still only a small set going.

**Have AKB48 or any of the groups come to the Philippines before?**

CARMICHAEL: If you are referring to idol groups and the point where we met Sayaka in Cebu, nope. No other groups has come here before. There was an explosion of Japanese songs translated to Filipino during the early part of the 90s and a Japanese singer did come over and had a collaboration with a popular local dance group but that was it. But as of this month after Sayaka, a small idol group named Star Marie just performed in the Best of Anime 2013 event. I am hoping this is the start of something good for idol groups in the Philippines.

**Let’s talk about your club meetups? Can you please tell us more about what takes place at FilWota48 meet- ings?**

CARMICHAEL: There are two kinds of meetups we do: Social and karaoke events. We mostly do the social meetups where we gather and talk about our favorite idols and conduct transactions doing buying and selling of official AKB48 items including those from their sister groups. As for the karaoke events mostly we do those for special occasions especially when some of overseas Filipino fans come home. There have been instances that we did karaoke with no special events but just for the heck of it. We do have a print out of the song lyrics especially made for those who can’t read hiragana and katakana in a karaoke PV.

**You were in Singapore for AFAX back in 2010. How was that experience for you?**

CARMICHAEL: Mind-blowing. Because for the first time, I don’t just get to meet AKB48 with my own eyes, I also get to meet fellow fans that I talk to from online forums: Singaporeans, Indonesians, Malaysians, Thai, Vietnamese, etc., you name it. Melon-san, one of the legendary “First Seven” AKB48 fans from Japan, also came over to watch them perform in AFAX. Although I did not personally talked to him outside the concert hall, I recognized him because I saw him participating in AKBINGO before and was interviewed in another TV show about AKB48.

It was really fun waiting for AKB48 to arrive. Mostly the Singaporean crews were monitoring their blog posts on what time they were leaving Japan and making a guess on which terminal their flights would be landing. Talk about hi-tech stalking! (laughing) The second largest group were the Indonesians and were also present in Changi Airport. Only two of us were Filipinos there, the other person is the 4th founding member of our group who is known as White Knight.

The waiting paid off eventually. Unfortunately I tried shouting in Filipino, but
I guess Sayaka wasn't able to hear since there were a lot of fans shouting also when they started walking with their luggages out of the immigration area onto the bus. It was all fun and the girls star-struck everyone.

I know that a big project of the group is your subtitling crew, MajiSubs. What do you subtitle in Tagalog? The music videos or TV shows?

CARMICHAEL: Most of the subs that we did are some PVs and stage songs. Though some were not posted publicly and was kept only available for forum users. As for TV shows we did try subbing “Majisuka Gakuen 2” but due to schedules and sometimes lack of manpower we eventually stopped. We only got to sub 4-5 episodes of that series. There was no sense of subbing the 1st season because a lot of Filipinos do understand English, re-subbing it in Filipino did not make sense. For the PVs they were all done in karaoke using Tagalog, we translated it 98% close to what the Japanese version says (there were few words that have no direct equivalent). you can actually sing it in Tagalog and still retain the rhythm and meaning. That is the good thing with Filipino syllables, all are flat vowel sounds like Nihongo, so it was not very hard to match the song.

The first major foray was the members having the one-on-one meeting with Sayaka Akimoto in Cebu. Can you please tell us how this event came to be and your experience?

CARMICHAEL: If one will not count my forays with White Knight to Singapore where they performed and when I interviewed them, then yes it is technically the first major foray of our club members besides from the group administrators. This particular event eventually happened due to taking care of our relationship with Sayaka and her mother. I did know Sayaka’s mom for years already, almost four years. We promoted Sayaka back then as much as we can during her stay in AKB48. Also, whenever Sayaka had some major issues out in the Japanese media (for example, her interviews in which the answers were twisted and exaggerated), I made sure I talked to her personally and got her side of the topic. I translated her messages and reactions, then posted it in our forum in rebuttal to those issues. In a way I was an outlet of her family’s frustration on some entities in the Japanese media industry.

During those years I would literally bug her mother through messages in a popular social network platform to get Sayaka to come to the Philippines. The only problem was that it was already the time that they were busy and very popular that visiting her hometown was a far possibility. They were supposed to take a vacation earlier during March 2012 but it didn’t materialize.

I did other attempts to bring AKB48 with Sayaka and I already went as far to have an actual, initial discussion with the cultural center of the Embassy of Japan in Manila. But the time, sponsors and money needed to have a concert here forced us to shelve the idea. They gave us the asking figure from AKS and it was big.

More than a year later, luck came in when she already announced her graduation. Her mother told me that they were coming over on September for a shoot. She didn't know then for what it was but she said it was final. I got the confirmation a few days after that it will fall on the 1st week of September. I did a series of “surveys” directed to local fans, dropping hints on who will be coming over. From a volunteer of 30 fans, it scaled down to 15, to 10, and then the final count of 5. The reason was not just because of the money involved to go to Cebu and stay there but also the schedule involved. Her shoot will be done on weekdays. Since the major exams were bumped also on the 1st week of September due to a recent storm, a lot couldn’t make it.

Things were coordinated with her cousin who was staying in the Cebu region at that time. Her other relatives assisted us and we separated from them. Oh, how it felt to be taken care by her own relatives! It was surreal and we did feel as if we are part of her family. Imagine eating where Sayaka used to stay around. We saw a lot of rare Sayaka items you wouldn't thought would even find themselves there, including Sayaka’s personal pics when she was small. There are other are AKB48-related stuff which I will not speak in detail about since they’re already bordering on the personal side. Her relatives also took us around their island and beaches, it was beautiful! But seeing how simple her relatives lived makes us appreciate her upbringing as her heritage did not get lost even when she grew up in Japan.

Eventually we met Sayaka on September 4. The wait was pure torture though.
She was doing photoshoots in Cebu city before she went to her hometown in the afternoon. I was laughing inside when I got introduced by her mom saying “Papa Kome” and pointing to me. Sayaka said “Papa Kome?” Ahhh!” and waved at me. I was a bit embarrassed at her shouting my codename. Believe me, I would have preferred to be introduced using my real name instead of some online name I thought of. I kind of felt old also, co-fans call me “PapaKoms”. I guess her mom reads exchanges between me and them. Somehow it got passed to her too. (Laughing) We had a small one-on-one talk with her, all in English, asking about her and how she has been doing. It was revealed that she had two choices to go to for her photobook shoot: Spain or the Philippines. Spain was the first choice to explore the roots of her mother’s surname which had Spanish origins. The second choice was where she alternatively grew up, the Philippines. Sayaka came to the Philippines quite frequently back then when she was about 10-12 years old before joining AKB48. They would come here regularly during Philippines holidays and Japan holidays to have a vacation. Naturally, she chose the Philippines. For those Sayaka fans out there, you would recall where she blogged about “going back to her roots” in her post. That was the hint that she would be going home to Cebu.

All the while this was taking place, her manager was taking pics of us and the staff was shooting a video. We don’t know where it will be used. Some future video in a TV show, or maybe a DVD insert in her photobook, or maybe some shots in her photobook itself. The meeting was about 30 minutes technically besides from us talking to her. She was also busy meeting and greeting relatives. After that, we followed her around as she visited her old play grounds in town. She did some video and camera shots outside the local church. We were supposed to have some private party besides from that. But it didn’t push through because of her unpredictable schedule. I mean, let’s look at it also realistically... She was there for work. Having our meetup was only for a spare time which she didn’t have much of.

**With Sayaka being half Japanese/Filipino, did she speak Tagalog and was she aware she had AKB48 fans in the Philippines?**

**CARMICHAEL:** Yes she still understands Tagalog and even Visayan. She spoke Visayan words for some time but usually single words and very short phrases. Yes, she has been aware even before they started visiting Singapore in 2010. I had Youko attend her handshake events in Japan and show her pictures of our meetups. Youko sent our pics through fanmail and she eventually got them. During our 2010 foray into Singapore, I brought also fan mails and gave it to her manager. She eventually read through them with the help of her mother doing the translations since most were written in English. White Knight also helped by asking him to personally greet her for me during a handshake event in Singapore when I couldn’t go.

**For FilWota, what are the most popular, most discussed idol groups?**

**CARMICHAEL:** Almost all 48-Sister groups are discussed in FILWOTA, even Nogizaka46 since we all recognize that even though they are “official rivals”, they are technically another sister group just a bit different in format. AKB48 is still the most popular followed by SKE48 and NMB48. Battle for attention between HKT48 and Nogizaka46 is still going on among club members though.

For those in the Philippines or interested in the activities of FilWota, please visit their Facebook page, by clicking on the following link below.

https://www.facebook.com/Kome48
In zerozero, a few club members of FILWOTA48 in the Philippines had the opportunity to meet recently graduated AKB48 and DiVA member Sayaka Akimoto.

Sayaka is among one of the half Japanese and half Filipino members of AKB48 and for years, the club has been trying to have Sayaka and AKB48 to come and visit their country.

In fact, the coordination to have Sayaka come to the Philippines has been an ongoing discussion for almost four years and at times, didn’t seem possible. But with the help of Sayaka’s family and her management, the club’s dream to have her come to the Philippines became a reality when the singer had plans to have a photoshoot for her latest photobook in the Cebu region.

While the meeting was brief due to Sayaka’s busy shooting schedule, a few of her fans were thrilled to finally be able to meet with her but also were surprised with the gifts given to them by Sayaka. The following are photos with their meeting with Sayaka in the Philippines.
Liz Italiaander has been featured on Japanese television and a magazine for being a fan of AKB48, especially a big fan of her oshimen, Sayaka Akimoto. J!-ENT recently had a chance to speak to Liz about her AKB48 experiences while living in Japan.

Greetings Liz. Before we discuss AKB48, I have to say that your photography from Japan are absolutely beautiful. Are you a photographer? Thank you, that means a lot! Photography’s just a hobby, but it’s really important to me as a way of documenting memories, important times and precious people in my life. I hope to keep improving!

You lived in Japan for awhile and now you are back in the U.S. What do you miss the most about living in Japan?

I was really lucky in my year there to meet lots of wonderful people, who were passionate about the same things I was and extremely kind to me as a foreigner, so there are a lot of folks I miss. It was also amazing to be so close to the idols I support, and to be able to express love for them in person as often as I was able to was really incredible.

How did you become an AKB48 fan?

My girlfriend, a long-time idol fan who converted me in 2007, and I were planning to go to New York ComicCon in 2009, and decided to check out this idol group who were going as guests… by the end of their Webster Hall concert, we were completely hooked on AKB48, and I’d fallen in love at first sight with Sayaka Akimoto!

As a fan, do you own a lot of merchandise and if so, what is your favorite AKB-related merchandise that you own?

We’ve collected lots of photos, photobooks and magazines featuring our girls over the years, and I was able to find lots of great goods of my oshimen last year that I really treasure! But even so, I think what I treasure most are the autographs I got from Sayaka when I first met her in person at Anime Expo 2010, which was a really incredible weekend.

So, how was your first time visiting the AKB48 Café or Shops?

The first time I went, I met up with a Sayaka oshi friend from Sweden who was also studying abroad in Tokyo… I can’t even lie, I totally teared up when I saw the café in person. (Laughing) It was very soon after I’d arrived in Japan and it really cemented that I wasn’t just dreaming. And it was a perfectly fitting place to meet my friend for the first time, too!

You are a big fan of Sayaka Akimoto and you had the opportunity to take a picture with her. How
LIZ ITALIAANDER (USA)  AKB48 FANDOM WORLDWIDE

How did you react when Sayaka announced that she was going to graduate?

I found out about Sayaka’s graduation while having a picnic in Long Beach with a bunch of my closest friends. Everyone there knew how much she means to me and was really understanding, so I was really lucky. It was something I’d tried to prepare myself for for a long time, but even so I had to take a few minutes to sit by the water, cry a bunch, then dry my eyes and be like, “okay, let’s do this.” I used to be really scared that it would mean I’d never meet her again, but she’s made it clear that she intends to keep meeting her fans, which is a huge relief.

Now that Sayaka is no longer with AKB48, curious.... Do you have a new oshimen?

There are other idols that I love, but I don’t think it’ll ever get to Sayaka-level again. She’s still my kamoshi. I have a lot of love and support for Miyazawa Sae and Oshima Yuko, two of Sayaka’s closest friends, but it’s a different feeling, haha. I also love SKE48’s Nakanishi Yuka, but as she’s my girlfriend’s kamoshi, I’d prefer to help her support Nishishi than try to do so independently, as she’s done the same for me with Sayaka for the past four years.

I know that Japanese media tends to focus on the male AKB48 fans, but as a female fan, when you went to the events, did you see a lot of female fans?

There’s definitely a male majority among 48 fans, but the presence of female fans should not be understated! We are a dedicated and powerful force in our own way, haha. I usually hung out in the girls’ seating section during downtime at handshakes, and made lots of really great friends! Especially with DiVA’s lineup unfortunately losing a member, I’m really glad I was able to see them perform together then.

As a Sayaka fan, you attended the DiVA concert at Zepp Tokyo? How was that experience?

I did! I feel really fortunate that I was able to see Sayaka perform in a unit that is perfectly tailored to showcase those four members’ unique strengths and performance styles, and being surrounded by other fans who support Sayaka and the other DiVA members specifically was a great feeling. Especially with DiVA’s lineup Unfortunately losing a member, I’m really glad I was able to see them perform together then.

was that experience?

During the handshake events for AKB48’s album, for every handshake ticket you had, you drew a ticket out of a pile for a chance to win a picture with your idol. I had several handshake tickets for Sayaka that day, but I was having really bad luck and none of them yielded a two-shot. I had pretty much given up hope by the time I entered her handshake line with my last two tickets, but sure enough, I managed to draw not one but two two-shots! Sayaka seemed happy for me too.

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girls, so I never felt particularly out of place. You were featured on the Japanese television show “ZIP!”. How did that come about?

A staff member approached me while I was walking with an AKB store bag in Akihabara and asked me if I had voted in the election, and when I told her I voted for Sayaka 20 times, she asked if they could film me watching the election in my apartment.

Japanese music is not for everyone but how does your friends or family feel about you listening to Japanese music, especially AKB48 music?

It’s not much to my dad’s tastes, but my mom enjoys any music that’s fun and upbeat, so she doesn’t mind idol music at all! She even put her favorite song on her iPod (“Dreamin’ Girls” from Himawari-gumi’s first stage.) My parents will even watch the occasional AKB-related video with me, and my mom is always willing to listen to my updates about Sayaka and has been really understanding about why I support her. I’m really lucky! As for friends, we’ve made a few converts to the 48 fandom, and being able to share something you love with friends you love is a great feeling! But for the most part, I’m just glad to hear friends say things like, “I don’t follow idols at all, but it makes me happy how much you love them!”

What are your favorite AKB-related memories while living in Japan?

AKB-related memories are some of my most treasured memories from my time there, so it’s really hard to choose! Of course, every handshake experience was incredible, being remembered and treated with kindness by the idol you support most is the most rewarding feeling as a fan.

I also really treasure my memories of seeing Sayaka starring in the play “Roman Holiday.” Even long before she announced her graduation, I was worried about how sad it would make me to not see Sayaka as an idol anymore. But seeing her giving 200% on a non-AKB stage and absolutely sparkling made me realize that even though her time as an idol was coming to a close, she would go on to shine even more in her post-idol career. Even though I won’t meet her as an AKB48 member again, I’m really looking forward to supporting her in everything she does in the future, because I know she’ll do great!!

Besides that, I had a handful of pretty ridiculously lucky in-public idol sightings, like SKE48 members at Tokyo Disneyland and Matsui Sakiko on her way to piano lessons in the town where I was living last year. Even though I live in LA now along with tons of American celebrities, seeing idols was a much bigger deal to me!
LIVING IN AN AKB WORLD - PHOTOS BY LIZ ITALIAANDER
LIVING IN AN AKB WORLD - PHOTOS BY LIZ ITALIAANDER
In Vietnam, a dance group that has been getting a lot of attention for their AKB48 and J-Pop dance choreography is **Niji Dance Group**. Featuring a membership of 20 people including members, trainee and staff, I recently interviewed Niji Dance Group about their inspiration for their AKB48 and J-Pop performances.
Can you please tell me more about what Niji Dance Group is? Is it a dance school or a group of friends who have got together to dance?

Our dance group started from two friends who love J-Pop and want to dance and sing along with the songs. Since J-Pop isn't so popular in Vietnam, we decided to gather other friends who love J-Pop like us and then create Niji Dance Group. We're just a group of friends who have got together to dance.

One thing that caught my eye about your videos is that not only do you cosplay as the group, everyone is choreographed quite well and can dance. Where did the idea come to cosplay as AKB48 and to learn their dance moves, come from?

Actually we do not cosplay AKB48, we just make the outfit to follow AKB48’s. Our main activity is cover dance and as you see our AKB48 projects, we wear the AKB48 outfit to fit with the choreography.

Is AKB48 popular in Vietnam?

J-Pop is not very popular in Vietnam but it's becoming more and more popular than before and we think AKB48 is one of the most popular groups among J-Pop fandom in Vietnam.

Looking at your video, the dance performance of "Beginner", "Kaze wa Fuiteiru" and "Everyday Kachuusa" was fantastic. I noticed it was held at a manga festival, was this a competition or does Niji Dance Group get opportunities to perform in front of a live audience?
Vietnam has so many Japan – Manga festivals each season, we usually attend as a candidate but sometimes we are invited. For this Manga Festival, we still attended as a candidate, but we were really happy when we saw the reaction of the audience. They cheered for us, so much.

**How long did it take to learn the choreography for this performance?**

It took about three months to learn and complete the choreography for this performance. And of course we had many problems but glad that we have solved them all.

**Watching your choreography for "Koi Suru Fortune Cookie", it’s cool to see the crowd all around the group while you were performing the song. How was that experience?**

Actually the “Koisuru Fortune Cookie” dance was our “idea in a minute” when we practiced for the event. Yes, it was a flashmob. We wanted everybody to sing and dance along with us but maybe the song is new and not many people knew it. But the crowd all around and still cheered for us. They were clapping their hands, some people were dancing along with us, it was really amazing! Our dancing was not perfect but we could feel the love from the audience and we really appreciate them for supporting us.

**Niji Dance Group has also done the choreography for Perfume, Morning Musume, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. How do you all come up with a decision of what songs to dance to?**

We chose NIJI as our group name because it means Rainbow. We wanna bring a “colorful style of J-Pop cover dance” to audience not only AKB48 but also other groups and an artist’s choreography, through dance and spread J-Pop widely. At first, we choose the song we love among popular J-Pop groups, then we discuss with other members which song we can all dance and eventually decide the songs to dance. It’s really simple because we all have the same hobby: J-Pop!

**What kind of upcoming projects can we expect to see from Niji Dance Group in the near future?**

For the upcoming projects, we still focus on doing AKB48 choreography. Otherwise, we still have more project such as Morning Musume, Perfume and especially, we’re working on a Johnny’s Entertaiment male group cover dance project which we have never done before. Which group is it? Please wait for our next performance! Thank you very much!
**FRANK SEWALD (USA)**

Possibly one of the few people in the world who had been featured on television for being an AKB48 fan and even taking part in a special featuring non-Japanese vs. Japanese AKB48 fans, Sewald is a hardcore AKB48 fan!

**You are one of the few Americans who have appeared on Japanese television shows multiple times because of your passion for AKB48. How did you get discovered by the Japanese?**

I guess it comes down to being in the right place at the right time.

In 2011, I won tickets to the election results show at the Nippon Budokan. While it's definitely a big event for the AKB48 fandom, I was surprised to discover that it was all everyone was talking about in Tokyo that week. The newspapers, the magazines, and the morning news shows were dominated with stories, speculation, and predictions on the Election and the results.

I filmed a quick video before the show and posted it on YouTube. Then, because the place was crawling with reporters and TV crews, I ended up getting asked for a few interviews. Only one of which made it onto TV - but it was a surprise to see myself on TV the next morning.

Then a year later I got an email out of the blue from a production company. They had seen my YouTube video from the previous year, and wanted to know if I would be interested in participating on a show about AKB48. I did some filming at the 2012 Election for them, and then was selected for the first show. I was later asked to tryout for the second show too.

**Curious, do you visit Japan during each AKB48 CD single release? Or do you visit Japan every month?**

I go to Japan about 5-6 times a year, though not only for AKB48. I have friends and co-workers who live there, and there is other sightseeing or concerts I want to do.

I usually go out at the end of the year for the holidays and seeing Ayu's Countdown Live, and then in Spring for cherry blossom season. Then if there were AKB48 events, I try to get tickets for them too.

I decided that 2013 would be the “Year of the Handshake”, and I adjusted my schedule to better coincide with the HS events. My first event was “UZA” in March, and I’ve gone out for each single since then. Though “So Long!” and “Sayonara Crawl” were easy because they scheduled events back to back on the same weekend, and I was already going for “So Long!” My next trip will be for the “Koisuru” event, and I’m in the process of getting tickets for the next single’s event on Thanksgiving weekend.

**As one of the American mega AKB48 fans, does your family or friends know of your passion for AKB48?**

Yes, I don’t see any reason to be embarrassed about what I’m passionate about. My family knows I’ve been fascinated with Japan since I was young, and I was listening to Japanese music and watching Japanese TV since the mid-80’s. At work I have a
lot of decorations/souvenirs related to Japan, and things related to AKB48. I don’t know if everyone necessarily understands why. But in the end it’s no different than my passion for auto-racing or video gaming either.

You’re a big fan of Yui Yokoyama of AKB48. Your license plate is dedicated to Yui but what was it like for you to meet your oshimen at the UZA handshake event earlier this year?

It was an amazing experience, but at the same time it’s a little bittersweet.

For two years, I had been trying to see her in the theater, but without any luck. So there was a lot of build-up and anticipation. Just seeing her from a couple of lanes over earlier in the day had been nerve-wracking.

When it was finally time to meet her, it felt like a whirlwind. It was an amazing experience and she was wonderful. But when it was over, I felt a little odd. It was nearly everything I had expected, but at the same time it felt like something was missing.

It’s really hard to explain if you haven’t been to event. Sometimes the handshake experience seems to ‘click’, and the conversation and interaction is effortless and flows naturally. Even though I’ve seen Yui several times since then, and she is still one of my favorite members, I haven’t had that moment with her yet.

With the last three senbatsu of Yui looking as if she is going to pass out, as one of her biggest fans, when you watch Senbatsu, is it nereracking for you to see her so stressed out?

Not really, because I understand this is her typical reaction. She got emotional at her promotion and first Team K show, and it’s one of the things that I found so endearing. She doesn’t have the attitude that its something she “deserves”. She works hard and always tries her best, but is still genuinely surprised when it shows in the results. Though I am glad that she’s getting better at it.

But I noticed you have become a Natsu-ki Uchiyama fan. Has she now become your #1?

If you had asked me six months ago, I would have told you that there was no way I would ever oshihen (note: A term used when you grow out of favor for your favorite idol for another). I’ve always followed multiple members, but Yui was always by far my favorite.

Nakkii was someone who caught my eye immediately when she debuted. I remember when they posted the profiles and her smile completely took me by surprise. I followed her through the Theater LODs and her G+ posts. I nearly had the chance to see her perform in December, but just missed out on the wait list. But I was lucky enough to win a KKS show in April. I got to meet her briefly in the hi-touch line, and then follow it up with a handshake event the next day. It was one of those experiences where there was a definite “click”, and that pretty much made me think seriously about oshihen. I decided to wait until the next handshake events in June, but it was inevitable. She managed to completely redefine my understanding of what it meant to have an oshimen.

The best part is I was able to tell her in person at the event, and that experience, along with her reaction, will be something I’m never going to forget.

You are one of the few Americans who have had the opportunity to meet the members of AKB48
FRANK SEWALD (USA)  

AKB48 FANDOM WORLDWIDE

several times. Who was your favorite people to meet at a handshake event or any other event thus far? Members that really stand out to me.

Kuramochi Asuka (Mocchii) has always been one of my favorites, and that moment when she came out on the TV show was amazing. After we were done filming the TV show, she spent several minutes talking to all of us. She was so down-to-earth and genuine. Ever since then, when I’ve seen her at either the theater or a HS event, she always remembers me and treats me like a friend she hasn’t seen for a long time.

I’ve been a fan of Hirata Rina (Hirari) since she debuted, and have seen her several times in the theater, including one of her first shows as a kenkyuuisei and one of her last shows as a kenkyuuisei. I was a bit hesitant to meet her. She’s so very American, I thought it would be a bit awkward at first. But that has never been the case. Every time I’ve met her, we just start chattering away in English. She always manages to surprise me in some way. Whether it be mentioning that she saw the show, or calling me by name, or saying that she saw me in the crowd at a concert.

Most importantly, Uchiyama Natsuki (Nakkii). I may be a tad biased because she is my oshimen, but she’s definitely very engaged at the handshake events. She makes sure every person has her full attention and literally doesn’t want to let you go. To the point that her staff has to literally shove people out of her booth, nearly dragging her with them. Then there are the things she has done that were completely unexpected. Like nearly popping out of her booth to talk with me when I was walking by in the exit lane. She even asked other fans if they knew I was going to be coming, because she had brushed up on her English the night before to surprise me.

But it’s more than my experiences with her alone. It’s also having the opportunity to hang out and participate with the other members of her fan community. They go to a lot of effort to support her, and it’s really nice to be part of that too. It makes the entire experience more meaningful, when you can share it with others.

I think this is what makes handshake events and the concept of “Idols you can meet” so special. It takes the fan experience to an entirely different level. It lets you get a little closer to the members that you are used to watching from far away, and can end up unexpectedly changing your perception and perspective.

Also, I’m curious of the handshakes you have done, which ones tend to remember you for coming back the most?

I feel it’s more likely that you’ll be remembered by the non-senbatsu members. The senbatsu and more popular members have many more time slots and their lanes are always jam packed. Their ushers are much more aggressive in keeping the lines moving, so you barely get 10 seconds with them, before they move onto the next fan.

But popular or not, I think it’s kind of hard for them to remember all the fans, even the foreign ones. Mocchi remembers me from the show, and Hirari and Miori both saw the show and recognized me. But Yukirin didn’t recognize me at all, and I’m still not certain if Yui remembers me.

Wasamin is getting pretty used to seeing me at this point, and I’m hoping that Nakkii will remember me the next time I see her.

One experience that really stands out was Ishida Anna. I had an interesting hi-touch experience with her at a Team KII show in December, which made me decide to get handshake tickets for her the first chance I could, which was June. Imagine my surprise when she remembered me half a year later.

Reading your blog, I noticed that you have had good luck in getting inside the AKB48 Cafe for the show "NOTTV — Anta Dare?". And was reading how the MC’s literally gave you some props for someone overseas attending. How
was that experience?
AnDare is a lot of fun to attend. It’s a live show broadcast on the DoCoMo cellphone network, so it’s kind of like watching a filming of “AKBingo!” or a variety show. At every show during the warm-up, they ask who isn’t from the Kanto-area. They’ll pick one or two to chat with a little. The last show I attended was with Chris Kunody, and they talked to us because we were both from San Francisco. Then it kind of got worked into the show at a few points.

I think it’s important to mention that these instances are usually few and far between. It’s not like I’m getting singled out or preferential treatment simply because I’m a foreigner. The majority of time, nobody even pays a lot of attention to the fact we are there, even the fans. I’ve had a few conversations because people remember me from TV, but nearly half of those were other foreigners. For the most part the Japanese fans treat me like anyone else. I think of lot of people presume I’m already living in Japan, so when we do strike up conversations, it’s not usually in regards to me being from overseas. It’s the same things I talk about with the other English-speaking fans, which members we like, show experiences, and other idol-related things.

What is your most precious AKB48-related merchandise or anything related to AKB48 that you own and are proud of?
My ticket stubs, wristbands and other memorabilia from the events that I’ve attended. While I have a fair number of photos and other pieces of merchandise, these are things anyone can get. But to having the experience of being at the theater, going to an election show or being on TV with another member, definitely makes these things more unique.

The things I treasure the most are from my very first show. The ticket stub, the wristband and especially the instructions, lightsticks, and uchiwa’s for Oya Shizuka and Oota Aika’s birthday’s, that their committees put together for the show. Because without that one theater experience, I probably wouldn’t be the fan I am today.

I have to ask...What is the most number of CD singles you purchased for a handshake event or for voting for the general election?
For handshake events, I average 25-30 CDs, because I want to make a full day of the event. For “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”, I ended up with 50 CDs. I wanted to spend more time talking with Natsuki, and they also introduced unassigned tickets for this event. Normally every ticket is assigned to a specific member. But now you can get tickets that can be used on any member who isn’t sold out. Which is nice because there are often many members with very short queues or even empty lanes. This time, instead of standing and wishing that I could go say “hi” to them, I’ll be able to actually do it. Who knows, I may find a new “regular” to see in the future.

Your blog “The Quiet Geek” has been very useful for AKB48 fans who are looking for information in buying concert tickets and for shopping for AKB48 goods in Tokyo. But how has your luck been for getting theater tickets? I know people from the U.S. Who have been fortunate but many who applied earlier with no success. Is it very challenging?
I’ve had relatively good luck in getting theater tickets from time to time, but I’ve also gone on trips where I haven’t won anything. While it’s chal-
Handshake events are the easiest and most guaranteed way of meeting members in person. If you only want to meet your oshimen or a specific member, go the “Theater Edition” route. If you want to meet a random selection of popular members and see a mini-live, go the National Handshake route. Either way it’s easy to get the tickets you want, it’s more of a matter of finding dates that will work into your schedule.

Concerts and special events, especially at the larger venues, are the next easiest way. I’ve had relatively good luck in winning those, but it’s still not a guarantee. For example, I couldn’t win even one day for the Tokyo Dome show in 2012, but this year with the exception of the final day it seems to have become much easier. The bigger the venue, the better your chances.

Theater shows are going to be the hardest, and I never plan a trip with the expectation that I’m going to win. There is no guarantee that you’ll see a show in the theater, and they treat everyone equally. The most important thing you can do is not be selective. If I had only tried for Team K and Team A shows with Yui, I still would be waiting to have my first theater experience today. You need to apply for every show you can, and if you have a railpass, consider trying for SKE48 at the least, if not NMB48 too. Although, you’ll need to book a hotel for a night in Osaka. The theaters are so intimate and special, it doesn’t matter which one you are at or which show you see, it will be something that you will never forget.

Even if you don’t win any of the above, it doesn’t mean you still can’t have a great AKB48 experience while you are in Japan. You can visit the theater and watch a show or two on the live monitor. You can go to the AKB48 Shop and Cafe. You can try to get into an “AnDare” taping, or see what mini-live events are going on around the city. Go out with some friends, or even on your own for karaoke, and sing AKB48 songs. Watch “AKBingo!” or your other favorite shows live on TV, or go to record stores and resale shops and buy CDs, DVDs, photos, and more.

Sometimes the best AKB48 experiences, can be the ones you didn’t plan.

I know you are a big fan of Hamasaki Ayumi but who are other J-Pop artists, groups or bands that you enjoy listening to?

Ayu was the artist who got me back into Japanese music after many years away, and in a way it’s because of her that I ended up seeing AKB48. The trip where I decided to apply for AKB48 tickets, was primarily to attend Countdown Live for the first time.

My tastes run more mainstream than Idol. My favorite non-AKB48 concert was YUI at the Budokan, though the Dreams Come True show in LA is also pretty high on that list.

I’m really into Ikimonogakari, Spitz, Monkey Majik, and Perfume, and hope that I can see them perform live someday. I also want to see Southern All-Stars now that they’ve reformed. I’m not so much into Johnny’s Entertainment, but I would definitely go see Arashi if I could somehow win a ticket.

If there was any important advice to give to a fan wanting to experience AKB48 for the first time in Japan, what advice would you give?

Patience, persistence, and politeness.

Frank Sewald’s photo of a big line outside the AKB48 Cafe & Shop in Akihabara.
In the Philippines, SUGAR48 is an “AKB0048“ cosplay dance group wowing audiences and taking home the award for group cosplay. Featuring cosplayers Mika Mikachu as Mayu Watanabe, Rin Akiyama as Yukirin, Miu Aihara as Kojima Haruna, Mina Monina as Tomomi Itano, Meiji Purin as Sae, Pam Ola as Sayaka Akimoto, Catherina as Yuuko Oshima and Katnip as Takahashi Minami.
pictures we used. I'm so proud that Mayuyu made her own costume, kudos to her.

**How did the cosplay come together?**

**RIN:** We decided to cosplay “AKB0048” because we are a fan of AKB48 and we are all dreaming of becoming an idol someday just like the characters in “AKB0048”. But then I met Katnip and Miu by chance and we found more and more people who liked AKB and showed interest in the anime ‘til we filled up all the main characters. We didn’t want to hurry with it because as much as possible, we wanted people to join because they were interested in it, not just because it’s a group cosplay or because the design is cute.

**MINA:** Actually, Mika and Miu’s idea is why we’re here. (Laughing) I don’t even know or who knows about AKB48, but then, when I saw Miu’s post about searching for other members for an “AKB0048” cosplay, i did not hesitate to joined their group, because i idolize “AKB0048”.

**Were a lot of people familiar with AKB0048 at the convention?**

**MEIJI:** Not a lot of people in the convention knew about “AKB0048”. A few people recognized us cosplaying as “AKB0048” idols. Everytime someone recognized us, I felt happy because i know this person knows AKB48 whom we idolize. I hope in the next convention i will attend, more and more Filipinos will recognize and admire AKB48.

**Did you work with the same designer/outfit creator in order to keep things consistent?**

**MIKA:** We wanted to, but our schedules and budgets wouldn’t really allow it to happen. As much as we would have wanted to have the same tailor and same fabrics used, we ended up getting different tailors. The rest of the girls had their stuff tailored, while I made mine.

**MIU:** Nope, like what Mika said, we ended with different tailors. Though we have different cloth also, we made sure that the designs of our costumes are the same with the reference.
What was the most challenging part of your AKB0048 cosplay? And what is your favorite part of your cosplay.

MIKA: The most challenging part would be practicing and finding time to get together. We would be a mess without our super-manager Katnip, who, despite her busy work duty would find dance studio, so we could all afford at places that were accessible to us equally. So far we've only had 3 practices worth roughly 2 hours each? To add, learning the dance was hard for everyone because none of us dance. We were all struggling from beginning to end, even now it's not perfect, but we really want to give it our best. My favorite part would be my wig? It's really hard to dance with it because it has twintails, and they get in the way when I'm dancing, covering my face and stuff. But I love it a lot because the hairstyle is “iconic” for my character, so it helps me to feel like I am her. But more than my wig, being
there are fans that are waiting to see you perform”. So I did! But the saddest part was when Meiji was not able to make it on time for our performance.

RIN: The most challenging part was the dance practice because not all of us can dance and some do not have their free time since some of us are working and students. But with the help of our team captain, we made it and became an idol even just for a day. My favorite part of cosplaying is our performance because even though not all the audience know AKB, they still support and cheer us.

MIU: The most challenging part for me is the dance lesson. I love to dance but I’m no good in dancing. So I’m thanking our sensei Takamina and Mayuyu for teaching us the steps, and also to Sayaka who helped me in clearing some steps. The most favorite part, when we danced on stage. I almost cried while dancing, sorry for being emotional, and when I saw those people watching us and loving our performance, thank you guys! (Crying)

KAT: Most challenging part would be dancing with my wig on! It was so hard because I was afraid it is going to fall of my head. And my favorite part would be dancing and performing with my my groupmates and being able to see those people who doesn’t know AKB48 become fans. I remember when we were dancing “Aittakata” as I was waving at the audience they were waving back at me~ and I wasn’t expecting that really since only a few know AKB48. And another thing is the Fil WOTAs who supported us all the way! They gave us the strength and courage to be able to perform and give it our all! ■
In Thailand, there are many cover dance competitions and there are a good number of female idol cover dance groups. One group that has been featured on television in Thailand and shown in Japan is the group CandyPops. I recently interviewed CandyPops about their various performances and competitions as AKB48.
Can you please tell me more about what CandyPops is? Is it a dance school or a group of friends who have got together to dance?

CandyPops is a cover dance team of friends and some people that are interested in AKB48. We have 15 members now, most are friends and known each other before. Few members we got from announcements for an audition to be member of CandyPops because AKB48 have a lot of Senbatsu members. Our friends are not enough, so we have to find other people and we choose them from a dance audition.

Watching your videos, it's very cool to see your costumes like AKB48. Is it very expensive for everyone too coordinate the same outfits?

We look at a lot of their performances, official photos and magazines. One of us would create the pattern for a week and we'll go to find the material and accessories by ourselves, then go to a tailor's shop. The cost for all outfits was depending on the pattern and it would be around THB2,000-3,500 ($62-$108 US).

Can you please tell me how the idea of CandyPops became a reality? Were you watching a music video and all of you decided to make a group? How did the idea happen?

We became CandyPops, I think 2 years ago. Most of the members have come from other cover dance teams before. Some members cover J-POP, some member cover Johnny's Junior, so yeah! They cover male idols (laughing)! But we are friends that know each other by our social interest in covering Japanese dances. Some of them have great ideas to do special projects for all of us to dance together including "Heavy Rotation" by AKB48 which was the most popular song during that moment in Japan. We decided to cover AKB48 for a special project but when we watched AKB48 more and more, we became in love with AKB48's style because this girl group his interesting, they're cute but at the same time they performances are so amazing. They dance so strong and so hard, it's not only a cute style but nice song, great choreography, pretty costume and of course, AKB48 member! When we practice AKB48's songs, we are happy to do this thing together and thereafter we decided to make a AKB48 cover...
dance team with the name “CandyPops”. “Candy” is from Candy. “Pops” is from popular. So, CandyPops in our meaning it’s like ‘Some Candy that is so popular at the moment and everyone loves it and wants it”. We know everyone likes candy!

Is AKB48 popular in Thailand?
In my opinion, other people in Thailand know AKB48 is an Idol group from Japan. They don’t know that the group has many members and they don’t know about the theater or election. But socially, people love Japan, J-pop, anime, manga and idols! So, they do know AKB48 as well. I think socially, people who are interested about Japan, it’s about 30% of the population in Thailand. But last year, the AKB48 Janken tournament was shown live at a cinema in Thailand and also on some Thailand TV programs, they talk about AKB48, too.

Looking at your video, the dance performance at the Thai–Japan Anime & Music Festival, you have the WOTA (hardcore idol fans) fans screaming for you. I’m always curious if that is coordinated and planned by CandyPops or they see that you will be performing AKB48 songs and they all show up and start cheering for you?
For sure! They’re AKB48 fans but WOTA in Thailand, there are two types. Type 1: They cheering like they would cheer for AKB48 but do not follow the cover dance group. They cheer because they see people danc-

ing to an AKB48 song. Type 2: They are cheering and follow your cover dance team, activities and support us.

In our fan page, we always announce when we have an upcoming performance. We sell our team stuff like T-shirts, towels and make an event to create a relation with other people that support us. There are some WOTA who just meet us in the day that we have a performance and they cheer. But some of them talk with us on our fan page, buy our stuff and join with our events such as a New Year’s party event, play games, exchange the gifts between CandyPops member with people support us.

We’re so happy that everyone is cheering for us when we are on stage. But we do appreciate that some people always support us, even those who aren’t able to cheer for us. So, we want to say thank you so much!

I was watching the Japan Festa in Bangkok 2012 video (Audition Cover Dance of the Year 2012). Is this common in Thailand for competition of cover dances and is it very competitive? And for those who win the competition, do you win awards and is their media coverage that comes with competing in these events?
Yes, this is very competitive and important for all cover dance groups in my country because Mainichi group and their partners are a very big sponsor of cover dances in Thailand, especially in Bangkok. For the winner of this competition will get the trophy around THB25,000.00 ($834 in U.S. currency) and will be the ‘Cover Dance of The Year’. Many media comes to the event as well as magazine and TV programs about Japanese fashion and culture. They do a lot of photoshoots and interview with many cover dancers and cosplayers.

I’m curious how long it takes you to learn the choreography. For example, your "UZA" performance at the Japan Cover Dance Cosplay Festival. How long did it take for your group to get the choreography down?
The members in our team each have a responsibility for different roles. Some members do the graphics and multimedia, someone takes care of the fan page and the Youtube channel. Some of them manage the money and budget for our costumes. For the choreography, we have two members to plan the choreography of an AKB48 song. One member for a cute song and one member for hard song like “UZA”. What song do we want to dance? We must ask all members in our team to vote and then when we have the result, we start to focus on it. For example, for “UZA”, the member that does the choreography part, must learn from the AKB48 performance. They try to dance the same and watch many live performances to find the different dance roles of each member because we want to dance exactly like AKB48. On Saturday (we practice every Saturday), that member will teach other members to do the dance. Everyone must to learn from her because her dance skill is the best in our team. That’s why she must focus on the choreography. For the emotion for the AKB48 member’s dance part, all members must learn those emotions and facial expressions on their own. They must watch AKB48’s live, listen to the song and do the movements and expressions like an AKB48 member would, when they cover their part.
As for "UZA", it took two weeks to learn the UZA choreography and two weeks to learn the other parts completely. But it took one month for UZA because the choreography was difficult. Our members have different levels of dance skills, so we have to adjust and dance in the same direction. But for a cute song like "Sayonara Crawl", it took one week for the choreography and blocking, one week to learn the emotions/facial expressions completely.

**What kind of upcoming projects can we expect to see from CandyPops in the near future?**

CandyPops is make for AKB48 cover dance team. I think we still dance AKB48 as long as we can. Because before we were in CandyPops, we covered other idol pop groups in Japan. Some member have been doing cover dances for 7-8 years. Maybe CandyPops is the last coverdance life for many members in CandyPops because some members have jobs, some of us study in the university and some are nearing graduation and a few members are in high school. If another member wanted to do other things more than dance AKB48’s song. It's OK but not using the CandyPops name of course! I don’t know about the future but for now, we still love AKB48 and want do dance with all our members together. We want to practice, we want to have a great performance for everyone and for someone to support us. We’ll do our best! Maybe we'll make an AKB48 sub-unit like DiVA, no3b, Not Yet for special occasion because we have never done it before, so please stay tuned!
In Japan, the super hardcore mega fans are seen on television. Often spending so much money in order to get the most rare photos, many handshake tickets or rare items.

In the United States, there are fans who spend a lot of money on their AKB purchases and travel to Japan often. But during my research with a few hardcore AKB mega fans, a name has been mentioned quite often in various circles, and that name is the mega fan known as Jess.

**Jess** is a female SKE48 fan from the United States who is known for uber-spending on AKB48 related merchandise.

J!-ENT had the chance to interview Jess about her AKB adventures in Japan and more about how much she spends on AKB-related merchandise.

**You are considered by many mega AKB48 fans in the U.S. as one of the AKB48 high rollers. In 2013 alone, how much do you estimate have you spent on AKB48 merchandise?**

I never counted the totals. I’ve already been to Japan twice this year for about four months. With purchasing all the DVD boxes, CD’s, handshake tickets, concerts and related goods, I guess that’s quite a lot. Probably in the five figures.

**In 2013, what has been your highlight moment(s) as a fan for anything AKB48 related?**

It would probably be running late for any 48G related events. In Japan, transportations are always delayed or stopped due to weather, earthquake, and other reason, and you cannot predict. I frequently travel between cities, for example, when I was staying at friend’s house in Osaka and going to Nagoya to see an SKE theater performance on day of Typhoon. It is really frustrating because Shinkansen was delayed and I was worried whether if I can make it. I went to all 5 domes, and in between, I still went to all the SKE open recordings, lives and other events. It’ll be something like, yesterday I was in Osaka, and today I am in Tokyo, the next day I will be in Nagoya. So, it’s devastating not be able to be on time and stuck on the train and there is nothing you can do but to wait, and you never know when is going to be up running again. If you miss one, then it’s all gone.

**Curious, do you visit Japan during each SKE48 CD single release?**

I have to say, I’m a dedicated SKE48 fan. So I visit Japan every time if SKE48 releases a single, so roughly every 3 to 4 months. Within the time frame if other 48 groups have events as well, I’d also be going, but SKE48 is my priority.

**As one of the American hardcore AKB48 fans, does your family or friends know of your passion for AKB48?**

My parents know my passion for AKB48 groups, my mother likes Maeda Atsuko very much. We would watch the concert DVDs together if we have spare time. She financially contributed for me to go to her graduation concert at Tokyo Dome last year. My mother also went to Japan with me this summer for vacation. She went photo trading with me at NMB48 Teppen Tottende’s Handshake Event and NMB48 East Japan Tour Concert. She would look for photos that I am searching and other fans (in Japan) would trade with me easily because they see that the parents are contributing to the 48 group as well and they felt honored being a 48G fan. She thought it was interesting how fans can be
close friends because of the common interest and how much we treasure the photos. She's an understanding mother that would always like to learn something new from the young generations. Sadly, we did have a chance to see a theater performance together.

**What is the most number of CD singles you purchased for a handshake event or for voting for the general election?**
I’ve voted 140 votes for Kasai Tomomi back in the 27th Election and contributed about 600 votes during the 32nd Election. I'd say most CDs that I've purchased were KFC, about 180 Theater CDs and most handshake tickets were dedicated to Mukaida Manatsu, Yakata Miki and Ishida Anna.

**What do you do with all the CD's, since it would be too heavy to bring them back to the US on a flight? Do you bring them to a used CD shop?**
I trash them. It’s about 10 yen each over there (at a used shop), not worth taking a taxi and going over there to drop six boxes of CDs, I just throw about 400 CDs away before I’m heading back to the U.S. and still have about 200 CDs here in the states.

**When you purchase merchandise, is there a certain type of merchandise that you are after?**
I collect every photo and most of the goods that Manatsu, Mikiti and Sayannee that I don't have if they are within my budget. I also collect Miyupon and some other SKE48 members if I like the photos or goods. I’m not much of a fan on clear files, posters or sticker sets or fans. But I love towels, badge sets, key holders and charms.

**You own a lot of merchandise, but is there anything out there that you are still trying to find and want to purchase?**
I'm currently looking for Mukaida Manatsu’s cafe coasters, ate at the cafe many times but never got one. Yakata Miki's mega badge, as I missed the release date and it is so hard to find right now. And two shots! Shook hands with Mukaida and Yakata over 200 tickets but never actually got a chance to take a picture with them. This is what I want the most right now.

**Let’s talk about the handshake events**

SKE48 merchandise purchased in 2013 by Jess and the number of voting tickets from the hundreds of CD's that she had purchased in 2013.

Well, there are not always good times. I used to argue with Mukaida Manatsu a lot. it was a special handshake experience, but now we are close now. She would say hi to me if she sees me and would enjoy the jokes with me. Manatsu might look like she could care less, but she isn't. One time, I accidentally ate tomatoes that I am allergic to, she would check on me to make sure I felt better. She would suggest some of the food to help me recover. She would request me to rest more during the handshake. She would tell me what is okay to do, what is not in order to
recover faster. She was very concerned and was very serious. This is why I love Manatsu.

One thing that shocked me was Takayanagi Akane, who still remembered me after months apart. “Long time no see, how was the flight?” They usually ask me. They asked if I rested well from the long flight or how am I doing in Japan so far. They do care about their fans. One time I was sick, as was Matsui Jurina. She asked me to take care of myself not recover faster! I told her “you need to do that do yourself first!”. We both laughed! That was quite funny conversation between two patients.

I joked with Sayanee once. I asked her to go back to States with me. She said, yes she would after handshakes. Later, I told her I’m going back to States soon and cheered her up by saying I will visit her next time. She paused, felt sad and seriously questioned me, “Aren’t you taking me?”. This is what I called “Go Fishing”.

It’s not always where you can ask members the questions. When it gets to a point, members became interested in you, at that point members start to ask you questions. Ishida Anna had a lot of them. She asked me a lot of personal questions, private but not intruding. She would comment and share some of her experience if I mentioned something that she has in common. It’s a nice way of getting close together.

It’s all about the handshakes. The more you show your understandings toward them and the more they care about you. It’s a two-way communication.

**Curious, with the many merchandise you purchase in Japan, how do you bring it all back?**

(Laughing) No doubt, every time my luggages are overweight. My friend stores my newly purchased 48 group items. I either personally pick them up in Japan or he send them to me in packages. It’s funny that SKE48 members even asked me this question, they said I should thank him in special and I did.

**You have a lot of AKB48G photos, what is the most you have ever spent on a photo? And how many photos do you own?**

I’d say the most I spent were Mukaida Manatsu’s signed photos, which is around 35,000 yen per photo. I also collect Mukaida Manatsu and Yakata Miki’s Fukkoku Version (reprint) photos. They can be costly but not as much as the signed ones. I only collect Manatsu, Mikiti and Sayanee’s photo and occasionally collect Miyupon and other SKE members. In total, they sum up to about 1,000. But considering all 48 group photos that are currently in my possession, it’s probably going to be around 3,000 photos or maybe more.

**If there was any important advice to give to a fan wanting to experience AKB48 for the first time in Japan, what advice would you give?**

Definitely go see one of the theater performances; it is truly the soul of the 48 Group. It is completely different than what you hear on the iPod. Everybody would fall in love with these stages. I recommend the Kenkyuuusei’s performance even if you might not know any of them. Their performance is the most energetic and you can see through the performance how much effort the next generation has put in, just amazing.
Hilarious talk about wanting Itano to eat sweaty socks.

Regular people having fun performing always deserve a perfect score!

Yuko’s cheesy kung-fu scene, man!

Ricchan should start fabrezing her foot. What a nasty graduation gift to Tomochin.

Aki-P should have been in the video, but other than that I loved it!

This parody sketch of the Senbatsu elections is awesome. I would love to see a part 2 with Sasshi.

OMG hahahaha! Funny way to end the episode making Tomochin smell Riichan’s foot! What’s up about eating socks? Is that even possible? Lmao! xD

Hahaha!! Awesome video! Its great that the Staff took part of it as well especially the managers(props to them for wearing the uniforms!). Too bad Aki-P couldn’t be in it, it would of been hilarious!

OMG, THAT FACE at 0:12!! Creepy and hilarious at the same time! Great video although some parts aren’t hilarious enough to give it a 5.

Ariyoshi + Tomochin = WIN! Must watch for any Tomochin fan.

Awesome! This is what made us want to do the fan video. I love seeing the staff having fun dancing to KFC.

Good idea for the skit. Just bad execution I think. It was interesting but not as funny as I think they were intending it to be.
AND WE SAW IT ON YouTube

GACHIGASE: AKB48 vs. EXILE
AKB48 vs. EXILE in the dancing video game “DANCE EVOLUTION”

YUKIRIN WINKS
How many winks can AKB48’s Yuki Kashiwagi do during the song “Aitakatta”?

ARIYOSHI AKB KOJIHARU vs. SASHIHARA
Who is more popular...Kojiharu or Sasahihara?

Dancing games are fun but not super exciting when just watching.

Really cute but just watching 20 winks isn’t awesomely entertaining.

Idol Otaku more popular than Beautiful Model is always lulz.

Honestly I found this one pretty boring. It reminded me of when you hang out with friends and you’re playing something like DDR... it’s only fun when you’re the one dancing (at least, that’s how I am). I like Yuki and Tomochin, but since neither of them are my oshis, I didn’t really care to see them dancing to the thing. Heck, even if it was one of my oshis I probably wouldn’t care, to be honest. I found myself wanting to fast-forward a lot of it. Both girls did a good job though!

I was surprised at how much I enjoyed it. Playing it twice was overkill, I was able to count them the first time. But Yukirin’s charm really came through on this one. For anyone interested in Yuki, this is a great video. Otherwise, it’s entertaining, but forgettable. Like something you’d watch and enjoy if you’re browsing around bored, but not something I’d actively go looking for.

I loved this video. Sashhi, as always, is outstanding and hilarious. Kojiharu’s “eh, nande?” in the beginning when Murashige changed to Sasshi was also really funny, just the way she delivered it. Both girls are great in comedy, and their comments and reaction to the HKT girls were great. Those two were the stars, even though it was probably supposed to be promoting the HKT girls. The flashback to Kojiharu’s monoboke made me laugh so hard. Everything about this was entertaining.

Love Yukirin’s reactions! I figured Tomochin was a better dancer than matsu-san.

Hard to resist Yukirin’s winks. Kawaii!

I wish Sashsi was still on this show. I like how Sashsi can make fun of herself.

Lol it was awesome seeing them do a dance-off but got boring after a minute and a half. It seems that it would be more fun to watch it live then watching it on the computer screen.

OMG, what can I say, a cute video of Yukirin winking at me for almost 3 minutes to the tune of “Aitakatta”. Made me smile for every wink she did. It’s deadly effective especially for those who’s a Yukirin fan.

Pretty hillarious, especially with Sashsi goin at it with Kojiharu, and when Ariyoshi asked the other girls that which of them admired Kojiharu when they joined and no one raised their hand but her own made me laugh so hard it made my stomach hurt LOL.

I was paying more attention to the bottom right corner that shows the game than the people dancing.

Cute the first go around. A bit too much the second time around with the counter.

Ariyoshi is funny as always. Sashsi’s reaction to the AKB KKS picking her 3 out of 5 was great.

For this latest installment of “AND WE SAW IT ON YouTube”, SERRINA, EMILY, TOM, FILIPINOMARCO, TUONG and.... must watch five random YouTube videos that we present to them and they must rate them from 1-5 (1=terrible, 3=average and 5=great). Plus, they must give their opinions on each video.

To access the video, click on the YouTube video image.
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Rock band ONE OK ROCK announced that they will be performing in the U.S. for the first time on February 2014.

**Purchase Tickets for the LA Concert (Click Here)**

On February 7, 2014, the band will be performing at Club Nokia in Los Angeles and in New York at the Best Buy Theater on February 9th.

**Purchase Tickets for the NYC Concert (Click Here)**

Tall, striking, orange-clad manga and game otaku Renji Ruhara will graduate with FUDANJUKU's latest single, “Dansou Revolution” (released on Sept. 18).

A member of the popular cross-dressing Japanese idol group since 2008, Ruhara left this summer’s national tour “FUDANJUKU Ranbu TOUR 2013 -12 locations nation-wide Ichi Dozen Time-” due to physical illness and was hospitalized for some time.

Ruhara announced his feelings on FUDANJUKU's official blog. (excerpt)

Hello. This is Renji Ruhara.

I have decided to graduate from FUDANJUKU.

Everyone, thank you so much for supporting me for a long time.

I am so much better now. I am well enough to have no problem in daily life. However, the doctor has stopped me from strenuous physical activity for my current condition, and the situation makes it very difficult for me to perform at live shows.

I can still have a normal life, but this situation of “not being able to participate in live shows” equals to losing the core essence of my participation in FUDANJUKU. I’ve made this decision after much thought, and this is my true feeling.


Ruhara was absent from the filming of FUDANJUKU's music video for “Dansou Revolution,” but participated in the recording and is present on the single's jacket art.

Ruhara was popular with FUDANJUKU fans from the start after surviving a televised, multi-stage audition. All members of FUDANJUKU are otaku of various kinds, and Ruhara's revealed himself to own over 13,000 volumes of manga, over 7000 games, and over 1000 limited edition anime DVDs. Often playing the part of the group's brooding bad-boy, his comedy contributions and strong stage energy will be missed.

Fans can leave message of support on FUDANJUKU's Official Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/fudanjukujapan

AKB48’s YUKO OSHIMA & HARUNA KOJIMA APPEAR IN “BLURRED LINES” PARODY MUSIC VIDEO

AKB48’s Yuko Oshima and Haruna Kojima joined Robin Thicke in a parody music video of “Blurred Lines” released by Universal Music Japan on YouTube.

The music video features the two AKB48 members watching the “Blurred Lines” music video and the two are then surprised by an appearance of Robin Thicke and his dancers who show up behind them.

You can watch the video by clicking here

Image courtesy of Universal Music Japan
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: WYNNE IP INTERVIEWS HYDE

J!-ENT: In the song "SEASON’S CALL", you wrote "yume ni egaku sekai wo kimi no me no mae ni hirogetai". Can you describe to us this world that you wanted to paint in your dream?

HYDE: That would be a world of peace. When I think of the important people that I love in my life, I don’t want them to see the evil side of the world. So that would be a world of peace.

J!-ENT: Why did you have angel wings tattooed on your back?

HYDE: I wanted to become an angel. (Laughing) People always want things that they don’t have. I wanted something I don’t have, which was the wings, so that I could become an angel.
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH INTERVIEWS TRF

J!-ENT: Let’s talk about the beginning of TRF. Back in 1993, a lot of popular music in Japan at the time was dominated by rock music and idol pop music. TRF’s music was so different from what was popular in Japan, did you feel that your music would gain any popularity in Japan at the time?

YU-KI: Many lyrics of our songs were in English. So I was wondering if Japanese people would accept TRF. But all I could do was do my best.

CHIHARU: I had no confidence that we would be popular.

ETSU: I couldn’t afford to pay attention about how people felt about TRF but I was concentrating only how I would perform.

DJ KOO: First, I thought music in a music program on TV and music at a disco club were totally different. So, I couldn’t imagine our music getting popular or used even for karaoke!

SAM: I didn’t think TRF would be so big, but when I listened to “EZ DO DANCE”, I thought this song would be a big hit.

J!-ENT: You released “EZ DO DANCE” and it was an amazing song. Both the song and also the music video was awesome and definitely introduced something fresh in Japan. Looking back at that song today, what is your impression of that song?

YU-KI: I’m very glad there are many people listening to this song now. I enjoy performing this song too.

CHIHARU: When I see excited fans at a live performance, I can feel this song is awesome again.

ETSU: I don’t feel it’s old even now. That was a wonderful song everyone accepts.

J!-ENT: Looking back at your career from when you first debuted to now, what has been the biggest learning experience that each of you have experienced as a member of TRF?


CHIHARU: To never forget appreciation.

DJ KOO: Making music while thinking of the listeners’ heart.

J!-ENT: Not many groups have had lasted as long as TRF, what’s the secret to your chemistry of staying together as a group?

YU-KI: To believe in each other and good teamwork.

ETSU: Our family, fans, and staffs helped TRF a lot and we are one.

DJ KOO: Do without gain or loss. Ambition.
Take us back to the moment when you once again stepped on stage as a member of LUNA SEA again. How did it feel?

SUGIZO: It was so fantastic. I came back here, and all my feelings also came back to me. I felt at home. LUNA SEA is not over yet. We are alive! That feeling was my first impression.

J!-ENT: What made you want to do a show like that, after so many years, after not being together for such a long time?

SUGIZO: I think it’s very natural. It’s the natural way. LUNA SEA has of course made so many fans. We needed to play a show for just us, but our audience is like members of LUNA SEA. We needed to play for all our members. It’s very natural.

J!-ENT: What was the moment you remembered most from last year’s show in Tokyo Dome?

SUGIZO: Every moment was very important for me. I’d say, the first moment, with “Loveless”. That first scream from the audience was a very big moment, and then, I’m gone... to space... into the cosmos. There was a natural vibe on stage.
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH INTERVIEWS HITOMI SHIMATANI

J!-ENT: Let's go ahead and talk about your music. We will talk briefly about the earlier years to your recent release. I've read on the Internet that when you first debuted, you were an enka singer. Is that true? And if so, how was that experience?

HITOMI: Yes, that is true. It was born from just a TV project. I was listening to Enka when I was a child and enka is part of Japanese traditional songs. So, I enjoy the music very much. Now, I don't sing Enka songs anymore but I've learned a lot of skills from following enka.

J!-ENT: Were you aware that you have so many fans of your music worldwide and how do you feel about so many international fans listening to Japanese music?

HITOMI: No, I didn't know I had fans listening to my music all over the world. I'm very happy to know there are many people listening to my songs! I listen to a lot of foreign songs, so I would like people outside of Japan to listen to Japanese music.

J!-ENT: As you look back from the very first experience of releasing your CD single (Osaka no Onna) back in 1999 to the present time with the last release of “Shinku/Ai no Uta”, what has been the significant shining point in your musical career that you will always be grateful for (or will always remember)?

HITOMI: For me, the most significant thing point in my career would be the release of “Amairono Kami no Otome”.

J!-ENT: One thing that I enjoy about your music is that with each CD single, it's always a surprise and you never know what to expect. With “Destiny” it was more symphony-based, with “Pasio”, it incorporated a Spanish style of music, “Dragonfly” was a rock song and “Neva Eva” featured a lot of brass horns/ska like feel. But do you get hassled by a lot of fans who wish your musical style didn't change so much?

HITOMI: I like to try and experiment with new genres of music but on the other hand sometimes I go back to an original style. I always listen to my fans voices carefully.

J!-ENT: Do you feel that because your music embraces musical styles from different countries and different genres, it helps distinguish you from the many female solo lingers from Avex and makes your music very unique?

HITOMI: Personally, for me, I don’t want to stay within one musical category and I want to keep challenging myself and try to do several different things.

J!-ENT: Let's go ahead and talk about things outside of music. Whenever you are not busy working, what do you like to do in your free time? And do you have any hobbies?

HITOMI: I love talking and spending time with my friends. So, I enjoy talking with them at a café for several hours.

J!-ENT: Curious... Have you ever sung your own songs at a karaoke and do you ever get a perfect score?

HITOMI: My friends often ask me to sing my songs during karaoke. My best score singing my song at karaoke is an 82.
J!-ENT ARCHIVES
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2006

J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH, WYNNE IP & EDWIN MACARAEG INTERVIEWS OLIVIA

J!-ENT: You attended the Okinawa Actors School where well-known talent such as Amuro Namie, MAX, SPEED came from. What was the vibe at the school seeing that a lot of the top talent in the mid-90’s were coming from Okinawa and from the school that you have attended?

OLIVIA: All I know that there was something at that school that was amazing. There was magic and ambitious girls coming together and doing these amazing shows. It’s a great school.

J!-ENT: As many of us know, you were selected with AVEX along with AYA and CHIKA to form the unit known as Dance & Dream (D&D). Looking back, how was that experience for you?

OLIVIA: Well, I grown so much now as an artist. When I look back, I look at how I was so young, so ambitious,. It’s a little embarrassing but it was a step for me but I’m glad I did it. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t be here now. So, it was quite nice. I had a really good time.

J!-ENT: Let’s talk about your recent work with the “NANA” animated series, “a little pain” reached the top 10 on the Oricon charts which was awesome. “Wish” and Starless Night” were used for both opening and ending themes. But how was your feeling to be part of something this huge. The “NANA” manga, anime, the film, the music... it’s huge!

OLIVIA: I was very excited. I didn’t know about the comic at first. But looking at my staff’s faces, oh my goodness, I could tell it was huge. I read the comic and I’m so excited because the part that I got... Reira is a lot like me and I can relate to her in many ways and I knew I can really do it and make the music.
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH & HIROSHI TAGAWA
INTERVIEWS AKKO OF MY LITTLE LOVER

J!-ENT: How did my little lover form as a band originally?
AKKO: Kobayashi was trying to make a unit whose main vocal would be a woman. And Fujii, a guitarist was already decided. Kobayashi chose me fortunately from some candidates. Then before the release of 1st album, “EVERGREEN”, Kobayashi joined in MLL as a unit member.

J!-ENT: How did the group come up with the name “My Little Lover”?
AKKO: In those days, before our debut, we were making our songs in a suite at a hotel. I found a booklet in which I read a poem written by a pregnant woman. The title of the poem was “My Little Lover”. I can’t clearly remember the poem, but it’s about taking or holding something dear and sweet. It was written in English. We loved it so much that we decided on our band name, My Little Lover.

J!-ENT: Was there a certain moment in your life when you were younger that you felt that you wanted to become a singer?
AKKO: When I was young, I liked to sing songs very much. Passion toward music was much bigger than other things. I hoped and wanted to be a singer. If it was impossible, I wanted to do a job that had something to do with music. I have been playing the piano for a long time. And I graduated from Kunitachi College of music (Note: A famous music college in Japan). So, I was thinking about music all the time. But I was playing rhythmic sport gymnastics for 6 years, during junior high school and high school. And I really enjoyed and loved it. So actually, I was wondering which college to go to and what to focus on. May it be music or PE. But even when I was doing rhythmic sport gymnastics, I was interested in the music which was used in it. So, I felt I preferred music than gymnastics.

J!-ENT: When My Little Lover released the cd single “Man and Woman” and also your first album “Evergreen”, not only did it become a hit in japan but you also developed a large group of fans in america and europe. Were you aware of the impact of your music outside of japan? [Follow up question]: were you aware that you had many fans in america?
AKKO: When I was in NY, I was glad to see My Little Lover CD’s at Tower Record. Also, when I attended an English conversation school, a Korean student asked me “Are you from My Little Lover?” I was surprised and felt so happy. I didn’t know I had fans outside of Japan. I might not have noticed it if I didn’t live in New York.

J!-ENT: What i enjoy about my little lover is “innovation”. Madonna is known for experimenting with different styles of music and is credited for innovation. My Little Lover has experimented with different styles of music and fans also comment of My Little Lover’s “innovation” and “experimentation”. Many bands in japan stay with a certain style, My Little Lover is able to experiment and change things up with the music. How do you feel about that?
AKKO: We are a very free unit. Kobayashi always gives us many ideas and my voice is a little different and strange so that we could make different types of world, music. I enjoyed it very much. Not recently but basically Japanese are conservative, so listeners like to listen to a certain world-view on a band. And they are waiting for it all the time. My Little Lover anticipated it but we betrayed it intentionally. Especially the gap between “Animal Life” and “Private Eyes” was very big and was the best I think. Especially you could see the gap through the music video (promotion video) of “Animal Life” and “Private Eyes”. In “Animal Life”, we made an all-female band wearing pink hairpieces and wearing the same costume, on the other hand in “Private Eyes”, we show the view of the techno world in Morocco. We could show several view of the world by encountering great art directors.
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH INTERVIEWS TOSHINOBU KUBOTA

Toshinobu Kubota. Image courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment Japan

J!-ENT: You are regarded as a contributing pioneer of soul/R&B in Japan and now we are seeing Japanese artists and groups bringing Japanese soul/R&B to the masses in Japan. Do you feel that your music played a key role in opening the gates for these Japanese artists?

TOSHI: There is certainly a big movement in Japan that is continuing to bring about J-R&B, soul and hip-hop in a big way. I don’t know if I am the foundation of this movement, but I think that I am a part, at least. I actually haven’t really thought or was even conscious about being a “pioneer” or as the foundation that has resulted in many other branches. Since I encounter so many new R&B, hip hop artists who respect me and my work, once you run into and hear and see that sort of thing enough, you start to believe it after all. Well, in other words it’s a very happy thing for me to hear such things that, after I hear them I think, “all right” and want to work hard again.

J!-ENT: How did the Japanese music industry accept your style of music when you first debuted?

TOSHI: When I debuted in Japan, the Japanese music industry was a little skeptical of me. Would soul music translate into sales, would it connect to business; from this perspective it’s easy to understand why one would be skeptical. But to those who understood the music, there was a part in them that said “It’s come, it’s come.” To those that could not understand what exactly had come, the music was probably not understandable. But once I put it out there, people sort of liked it more than I thought they would; all sorts of different people liked it. I didn’t really think that deeply about it at the time. I was just thinking, “Wowowow, this is so great!”

J!-ENT: I’m not sure if you are aware of this but many people outside of Japan know of you through your popular hit “La.La.La Love Song” (the theme song of a popular Japanese drama, “Long Vacation”). Many Americans who listen to Japanese music own that CD single and it also is a popular hit for karaoke by your American and also International fans. You go to a karaoke event where fans are singing Japanese songs and always, there is a group of people who want to sing “La.La.La Love Song”. What do you think about that?

TOSHI: Thank you very much. People that aren’t American tend to gravitate towards songs that tend to be very pop-feeling songs, specifically since the type of place that a karaoke arena is; but in the case of “La.La.La Love Song,” even among those kinds of songs, I think it stands out. I am very grateful that people who are not Japanese want to sing that song. It’s a very happy thing for me. I feel the phrase, “Music is a universal language” come to me in these moments, and I hope that these moments will continue to grow and grow. But in regards to this specific instance, I am simply very thankful.
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH INTERVIEWS MAKI GOTO

J!-ENT: Are you aware that you have fans all over the world?
MAKI: When I went to Korea and Beijing for work before, the people there all welcomed me with open arms. That’s when I learned that I had so many people to cheer me on and I was very moved.

J!-ENT: You stayed in Los Angeles for lessons. How was that experience?
MAKI: I wasn’t in LA for a very long time but it was a very fulfilling. Of course I had my lessons, I went shopping, clubbing and I had a lot of fun in my private time too. I ate quite a bit of American food too. But I had a little bit of a hard time ordering a Caramel Macchiato at Starbucks though. (Laughing)

J!-ENT: OK, if you went out for karaoke, do you sing your own songs and if so, what score did you get?
MAKI: I don’t really get to sing my own songs at karaoke so I don’t really know. (Laughing) However, I have gotten 100 points before. (Laughing)
J-ENT: Let’s First Start Of With A Few Basic Questions. After The Super Monkeys, How Did The Group Come Up With The Name “M”
LINA: The name of MAX came from Musical Active Experience, but actually it came from a middle name of Mr. (Max) Matsuura, President of AVEX.

J-ENT: Your fanbase has become global and continues to grow. Has that changed your perception as performers who has japanese fans but knowing now...Your fans are all over the world?
LINA: I’m very happy to hear that there are many fans outside of Japan. When I read the messages such as “Please come to the USA to perform live” on a website, I felt very glad that people treasure MAX and I feel that we share music beyond the wall of language around the world. I had a few live performances in the US, China and Taiwan so far. I really want to do live performances in many countries, therefore in our last album “Jewel Of Jewels”, I wrote an all-English song (It’s time to “Shine”!). In our future album I want to try to make another English song, a Chinese song and so on.

J-ENT: Let’s talk about MAX going worldwide. Let’s first talk about the United States. How was your first experience performing in the U.S.?
REINA: The first work in America was for a TV program. I sang at live house performance in New York and I was worried that people might not warm up to us, but everybody got moving. I was moved because through our music, people enjoyed it despite our language barrier.

Do you keep in touch with others from the Okinawan Actors School such as Amuro Namie or any members of SPEED?
NANA: When our schedule works out, we do meet each other and go out to dinner with members of Okinawa Actors School. We have a blast even though we don’t meet often because we spend a lot of our time singing and taking dance lessons.
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12. Bad Communication E. Style
13. Calling
14. さまよえる蒼い弾丸

In Japan, there are many rock bands but not many have achieved the success of B’z. Since their debut in 1988, guitarist and producer Takahiro “Tak” Matsumoto and vocalist Koshi Inaba have dominated the charts and what best to celebrate their 10th year anniversary than to release a compilation album, “B’z The Best Pleasure” featuring 14 of their major hit songs!

The brand new best album has already broke records as it sold over 2.7 million copies in its first week alone.

It’s important to note that as the band has released a total of 18 singles, 13 of them are featured on this album.

The album kicks off with the band’s 18th single “LOVE PHANTOM”, the theme for “The X-Files” in Japan.

One of my favorite songs from B’z. Great intro, great transition to a catchy rock track with awesome guitar playing by Tak Matsumoto.

The second track is the band’s 17th single “Love Me, I Love You”, the band’s 10th million selling single and their 10th consecutive million-selling single. A catchy, upbeat love song.

The third track “Easy Come, Easy Go!” is the band’s sixth single and this is the single version, not the “Risky Style” version that was featured on the album.

The album would feature some of the bands earlier best selling hits such as their fourth single “Be There”, their fifth single “Taiyou no Komachi Angel” (which was the first song from B’z to reach #1), their eighth single “Lady Navigation”, ninth single “Alone”, their eleventh single “Zero” and their 13th single “Hadashi no Megami”.

Their twelfth single “Ai no mama ni Wagamama ni Boku wa Kimi dake o Kizutsukenai” is the single that I first discovered B’z thanks to my friend Drew who introduced me to their music and was the theme song for the drama “Saiyuki”.

One of my favorite tracks, “Don’t Leave Me”, the 14th single from B’z is also included and features one of the best guitar playing from Tak Matsumoto.

The 13th track is “Calling” which has become my current favorite song from the band. It’s used on the drama series “Garasu no Kamen” (Glass Mask) and is a song that features wonderful arrangement, awesome guitars and piano from Tak Matsumoto. Just a wonderful song!

The album ends with the band’s 24th single “Samayoeru Aoi Dangan” and another awesome upbeat rock track with one of the coolest chorus sung by Inaba.

The album comes with a slipcase and a pretty thick booklet with photos and lyrics for the songs featured on the album.

Overall, “B’z The Best Pleasure” is a fantastic best album and for those who have been wanting to purchase a B’z album, this is the one to get! *****
In 1986, Pizzicato V released their first album “Pizzicatomania!” through Haruomi Hosono’s Non-Standard label (a sub-label of Teichiku Records Co., Ltd.).

Ten years after the group formed and released their first album, “Pizzicatomania!” is being re-released by Non-Standard, despite the group having changed a lot in the last 10 years.

Back in 1986, there were five members of Pizzicato V, which consisted of members Yasuharu Konishi, Keitaro Takanami, Ryo Kamomiya, Shigeo Miyata and lead vocalist Mamiko Sasaki.

While Shigeo quit the group, the four would continue as Pizzicato V and would be signed to a major label later in the year and release their second album “Couples” in 1987, which was a failure.

Lead vocalist Mamiko Sasaki and Ryo Kamomiya would leave the group, leaving only Konishi and Takanami before recruiting Original Love vocalist Takao Tajima as their new vocalist.

Unfortunately, their next three labels were commercial failures leading to Tajima to leave the group. Pizzicato V now became Pizzicato Five and by 1990, they would have a new vocalist named Maki Nomiya who is currently the main vocalist of the group today.

Five with Nomiya as the main vocalist, I happen to spot “Pizzicatomania!” at the aisle in our local Tower Records and I had to give the album a try, considering it was one of the cheaper P5 albums available.

And immediately this CD is all I have been listening as of late.

The CD comes in a thin jewel case with a quad-fold insert with the song titles in English and Japanese.

The first track “The 59th street bridge song” is a cover of Simon & Garfunkel’s popular song with a gentle beat, captivating bass and bell synth sounds. I love the sync between Mamiko and I’m guessing Konishi and their vocals in this track.

The second track definitely has the ‘80s synth but a smooth and catchy track and playful vocals throughout.

Possibly my favorite song on the entire album is “from party to party” (or the real Japanese title “Party! Party! Go! Go! Go!”) which has a catchy melody and addictive bass line. I Love Sasaki’s vocals in this track!

“Action Painting” is another fun track on the album with synth brass, but it’s a fun track with is “Action Painting” vocals.

I found the ending song “what’s new, pizzicato?” to be an interesting medley of ten-second clips of other Pizzicato V songs and made me wonder why they didn’t include those other songs in this short album.

But if you are a Japanese music fan looking for a taste of a different style of Japanese music and not so commercial, “Pizzicatomania!” is an album worth listening to! ****
I can remember when I first saw Puffy members Yumi Yoshimura and Ami Onuki performing on a Japanese music show and what caught my attention was that they were not of the norm in terms of female Japanese performers. These girls sported sneakers, t-shirts and jeans and also puffy hair. Needless to say, they easily distinguished themselves from other Japanese music groups.

So, I had to make a call to a friend in Japan and get the lowdown on Puffy and their music and several days later, I now have the duo's first (mini) album in my hands.

Their debut album "amiyumi" contains seven songs produced by Unicorn front man Tamio Okuda and one of those songs is their big hit, debut single "Asia no Junshin".

The album kicks off with the Okuda-esque track "Tokusurukarada". A song that translates into "advantage body" which is a fun, enjoyable rock track.

The second track is titled "Usagi Channel" and features a song written and sung by Ami. A slow-tempo, acoustic and electric guitar driven track. Pretty cool song.

The third track "Sakurasaku" which means "Blossom Blue" and a song with a country music kind of sound. While the fourth track "Simple" is a rock-driven track along the same lines as "Tokusurukarada".

The fifth track “Naga iki Shite ne” is a song written and sung by Yumi. A slower tempo track which is bass guitar driven.

The sixth track "Asia no Junshin" is the duo's first CD single and literally a very popular, catchy song. Some may call it Okuda genius but for the most part, the song is pretty cool and really doesn't make any sense if you are listening into the lyrics.

The final track "Puffy no Hey! Mountain!" has a classic 80's rock flavor. Slower tempo but a pretty cool track.

The CD booklet features photos of Puffy and contains the lyrics to the songs on the album.

For the most part, I would imagine that "amiyumi" was an album created in order to showcase the various musical styles that we can expect from Puffy. Rock, country, pop, etc.

But I am surprised that they didn't wait to have more singles before releasing this album. But then again, it appears that "Asia no Junshin" has made a strong impression in Japan and now Puffy is seen on television and magazines quite often. So, hopefully they can take advantage of this opportunity and release more catchy songs.

Overall, the album is OK, not the greatest if you are expecting tracks to be similar to "Asia no Junshin".

I do like the Okuda-influence on the album, I dig the non-traditional style of seeing Puffy's Yumi and Ami in t-shirts and jeans, which is the total opposite of what we are seeing right now with the more-driven Amuro-esque big boot, Shibuya-trendy style right now.

But I do think that perhaps that PUFFY has more to give musically but with only one single in their belt for now and now one album, I definitely look forward to their second single and hearing more from this group. ***
The pop trio S.E.S. (which are the first initials of the three members Sea, Eugene and Shoo) is a group that helped introduce me to Korean pop music.

I was literally in love with this group when my friend from Korea let me listen to their first album and discovered their music videos.

I would visit Korean music shops for the latest releases and purchasing magazines that featured any photos of the three members.

I have to admit that the music video of “LOVE” was one of the primary reasons for me buying this album. Loved the music video and loved the song and eventually it was a must-purchase.

The third album for S.E.S. is different compared to the previous two that it features a number of talking tracks before and after each song. So, with 27 tracks on this album, 12 of them are music tracks.

The talking tracks is quite calming as it features the women talking with piano or jazzy brass piece with sound effects of birds chirping, giving a sense of an outdoor type of feel. The talking tracks last anywhere between a minute to 3 minutes long.

Some of the talking tracks feature the trio talking with each other and sometimes it plays out like a narration from a drama series. So, in a way, it was definitely a nice touch and addition to the overall album.

But of course it’s the music on this album that makes “S.E.S. 3 – LOVE” truly shine.

The first music track “Twilight Zone” is just an awesome dance track that experiments with a vocalizer on some of the vocals but the song features an awesome groove, S.E.S. pop vocals combined with rap and a performance by B. Rock.

The next track features “LOVE”. What a wonderful track with a cool melody and overall cool arrangement by Yoo Young Jin who provides the synth and chorus as well as rap along with Mr. KAT.

The other track that caught my attention and definitely had many rotations on my CD player was “Tell Me” which is an elegant slow jam. A beautiful track!

You get a good balance of upbeat tracks such as “Taming a Playboy” features the three rapping and songs like “Sugar Baby” and “Show Me Love” which are reminiscent to songs on their first two albums. And then you find some surprises as the mellow but yet catchy track “Wait” and “샤랄라” which are cool tracks. Overall, a good balance of upbeat tracks and a few mellow songs and an elegant ballad featured on “LOVE”.

The CD insert booklet features lyrics of the songs on the album and also pictures of Sea, Eugene and Shoo.

Overall, this is a classic S.E.S. release featuring a good balance of Korean pop music and talk segments.

Recommended! ★★★★
“007 - Gold Singer” from SMAP, an album that has stayed in my playing rotation and has become one of my favorite albums to own by the group.

Featuring a jazzy style also marked a departure from SMAP’s typical idol pop to utilizing a more live house feel and a change of musical direction. Is that a good thing or bad? Depends on the listener but this is a more mature direction the group is heading towards.


As mentioned earlier, the songs were given a more jazzified, funky musical approach than the pop music that SMAP was doing in the previous years and the first track “KANSHA Shite (wah wah version)” is a reference to guitarist Wah Wah Watson.

Watson’s guitars can be heard in various formats with the picks and wah’s throughout the song and also the horn section is quite pronounced in this version.

The song “Ame ga Yamanai” (which translates to “The Rain Doesn’t Stop” features the vocals of Mori Katsuyuki and Kimura Takuya. One of my favorite songs on the album and when Mori and Kimura sing together, it becomes a much better vocal track on a SMAP album.

The fourth track is “Shiyouyo (Let’s do it)” and possibly the only single on the album that is very close to the original CD single version and unlike the other tracks which featured a variety of musicians, the majority of the instruments were done by Chokkaku. A very cool song that had impressive choreography and is just ageless. As fresh today as it was back then.

The fifth track “Setsunasa Itai” (Bigger is pain) is a song sung by Kimura Takuya and Nakai Masahiro. Very smooth song and Nakai Masahiro does a great job, while Masahiro Nakai does a decent job.

The seventh track is SMAP’s other hit “Tabun Orai” and features a longer tenor sax solo by Bob Berg. An awesome song and I can never get tired of listening, singing and dancing to it. One of my favorite SMAP songs to listen to!

The CD booklet features lyrics and various solo pictures of each member with a written note on the side of each photo.

The release of “007 - Gold Singer” is a significant release for SMAP.

The group is definitely going through a mature phase and a new musical direction with a more live band feel and somewhat ditching the SMAP pop sound that they have been known for. But if you are a fan, “007 Gold Singer” is an album worth checking out! ****
Various Artists
Ranma 1/2 Uta Koyomi Heisei 3-nendo-ban
Pony Canyon
PCCG-00195
DURATION: 51 Minutes
RELEASE DATE: October 21, 1992

1. この世でいちばん、お正月が好き (Kono yo de ichiban, oshougatsu ga suki)
2. バレンタインに黒バラを (Valentine ni kurobara wo)
3. たっかい、いい娘になれない (yasashii, ii ko ni narenai)
4. 今夜はエイプリル・フール (Konya wa April Fool)
5. 猫飯店メニュー・ソング (Neko hanten menu song)
6. おとうさん (Otousan)
7. 思い出がいっぱい (Omoide ga Ippai)
8. 魅惑のリンボーダンス (Miwaku no Limbo Dance)
9. 拝啓、あかねさん (haikei, Akane-san)
10. よーい・どん! (yo-i don!)
11. November Rain
12. キャラクターズ・クリスマス (Characters’ Christmas)

In my ongoing quest to find songs that I enjoyed from the “Ranma 1/2” soundtracks and information quite difficult to find on the BBS, I figured I’m crazy enough to spend the $30 for a CD in which I know nothing about but the fact that it is “Ranma 1/2” related.

As I have seen this soundtrack at the store, I figured that I should make splurge in order to provide whatever information I can for the “Ranma 1/2” fans.

The album that I purchased is titled “Ranma 1/2 Uta Koyomi Heisei 3-nendo-ban” which literally translates to “Ranma 1/2 Song Calendar - 1991 Edition” and the 12 songs presented are literally songs that pertain to a certain month in the calendar.

The album kicks off with “Kono yo de ichiban, oshougatsu ga suki” performed by Nabiki Tendo. A song about Nabiki enjoying New Year’s Day and as one can guess, it’s because she gets money.

The second track “Valentine ni Kurobara wo” featuring the dangerous Kodachi who sings about her “Black Rose Valentine”. Each time I can hear voice actress Saeko Shimazu sing as Kodachi, it’s always a treat, especially with Kodachi’s trademark laugh with the matador Spanish-style arrangement.

The third track is a hard rock Akane track titled “Yasashii, li ko ni narenai”) in her ticked-off moment singing how much of an idiot Ranma is. Possibly my favorite track on the album that I listened to the most because it’s so odd, wild and crazy!

The fourth track is “Konya wa April Fool” and is a ballad sung by male Ranma. Probably one of the better Ranma (Kappei Yamaguchi) sung songs.

The fifth track is “Neko hanten menu song” features Shampoo singing about the food on the menu of her restaurant. A friend of mine absolutely loves this song because of Shampoo’s kawaii vocals.

The sixth song is a sweet daughter and father track “Otosan” with Kasumi Tendo and her father and no doubt a track that Kikuko Inoue fans will love.

The seventh track is DoCo (the main female members of “Ranma 1/2”) singing CoCo’s “Omoide ga Ippai” track (which was used as an opening theme for the series) and there are two versions of this song performed by DoCo and in this version it is Rei Sakuma in her regular voice and not her Shampoo voice.

The eighth track is “Miwaku no Limbo Dance” by Happousai and Koron and is more of a fun gag song.

The ninth track is a Ryoga song “Haikei, Akane-san” as Ryuga bares his soul for Akane.

The tenth song “Yoi don!” is a hilarious track as the ladies compete for Ranma’s affections.

The eleventh song is a sad female Ranma song titled “November Rain” which will appeal Megumi Hayashibara fans.

The final twelfth track is “Characters’ Christmas” and is a 10+ minute song with the first three minutes with dialogue until it gets to the main Christmas song sung by the cast of “Ranma 1/2” and is actually pretty cool and a fun anime Christmas song that fans will love!

Overall, I’m glad I purchased this album. Hilarious, crazy but cool songs performed by the cast of “Ranma 1/2”. Recommended! ****

< CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR WITH RANMA 1/2
An enjoyable “Ranma 1/2” album with songs for each month of the New Year.
I can remember when I first saw SPEED. It was actually before the quartet released their first album and it was on the karaoke variety show “Yoru no Hit Parade” which starred fellow Okinawa Actors School artists Amuro Namie and MAX.

The ladies brought the next talent from the school which consisted of vocalist Eriko Imai and Hiro Shimabukuro and background dancers and vocals Takako Uehara and Hitoe Arakaki.

The quartet when they debuted were quite young with Hiro only 12-years-old and the others around 14 and 15 and here they are coming out in Japan which at the time was dominated by the TK family and here were these young spunky girls singing and showcasing choreography.

SPEED released their first CD single “Body & Soul” in 1996 and I just remember how the song just took off on the charts and the ladies were just dominating the airwaves, magazines and CM’s not long after.

SPEED’s “MOMENT – THE BEST ALBUM” is the quartet’s first best album and it would feature 8 CD singles and coupling songs and a non-single from an album that would become a fan favorite. The album would start off with the group’s beautiful ballad “White Love” (their fifth CD single released back in 1997). I was just in love with this song. The lyrics were utterly sad of wanting to be with a love one during the Winter time and promises broken. Each time I listen to this song, I can literally feel the sadness through the vocals. An excellent song!

The third track “STEADY” is the group’s second CD single released back in 1996. After the group’s first CD single, I was definitely going to buy the second CD single and I could easily remember watching Uehara Takako and Arakaki Hitoe’s dancing and how it caught my eye. The song was used for a drama titled “Itazura na Kiss” and is a fast-paced, energetic song which the group featured cool vocals and cool choreography. Just awesome!

The fifth track “ALIVE” (rel. this year) is a song that was used for their film “ANDROMEDIA” and if you watched the film and know how the lyrics relate, you just literally want to cry. Because it’s quite sad. The song just really made an impression on me and demonstrates how love is truly alive. A wonderful ballad and a song that I consider my favorite SPEED song of all time.

The eleventh track “my graduation” was another powerful ballad and the group’s sixth CD single that would continue their trend of selling over a million copies. It was a powerful song that I will remember for hiro’s vocals but also the lyrics for those graduating from school and eventually separating from the person they love as they begin the next stage of their lives.

The twelfth track features a “Christmas Standard” version of “White Love” and feature more of a string arrangement and the thirteenth track is the karaoke version of their hit song.

The CD insert booklet would feature lyrics to every track but also include a lot of pictures of the group in the snow, riding on a sled and having fun.

The packaging was quite interesting as the cardboard box opened up on all four sides and fit into a plastic sleeve.

This best album is fantastic as it features their chart topping hits from 1996-1998.

There are simply too many awesome hits on this album to ignore and it’s highly recommended! *****
During the early 90’s, pop music was primarily dominated by idol pop.  
May it be WINK or Hikaru Genji, the scene was dominated by rock music.  
But I always kept my eyes for groups that featured great music and great choreography and there was ZOO (which featured dancer Higashi Hiroyuki who went on to create and become leader of the R&B group EXILE) and there was trf.  
The group which stood for “tetsuya komuro’s rave factory” featured vocalist YU-KI, DJ KOO and dancers and background vocalists SAM, CHIHARU and ETSU.  
When the group first began, as seen on the cover of the “EZ DO DANCE”, there were more members of the group who were dancers and thus may have been seen as a large R&B/dance troupe like ZOO.  
At the time, avex trax was promoting a lot of their acts with the Juliana’s Tokyo nightclub which would bring popular DJ’s from UK and at the time techno rave was quite popular.  
Mega producer and musician Komuro Tetsuya wanted to bring together the music of the night club scene together with a music group and trf was born.  
In February 1993, trf released their first CD single “GOING 2 DANCE, OPEN YOUR MIND” (AVDD-20036) but their second CD single “EZ DO DANCE” (AVDD-20042, rel. June 21, 2003) was the song that would turn many listeners attention to the new group.  
Used as a CM song for “Sea Breeze”, the CD single broke the Oricon top 20 debuting at #16 and when the album “EZ DO DANCE” came out, their second album would reach #4 on the Oricon charts.  
What made this album even more special was that the album continued to sell well two years later and still on the Oricon Album Charts top 100 (at #62) in Jan. 1995.  
I can easily recall the music video for “EZ DO DANCE” turning heads as the women would dance wearing daisy duke shorts and the guys jamming with awesome choreography.  
At this time in Japanese music, nothing was close to what trf was doing.  
The group’s music would be entirely synth based which was no surprise since the songs were written and composed by Komuro Tetsuya.  
Although not complete techno rave in the sense of what people in the US and UK were listening to at the time, the music was definitely inspired by it.  
Playing the album for the first time, the song would start off with the group’s hit song “EZ DO DANCE” which was just irresistibly catchy.  
Featuring TK’s music, DJ Koo’s rapping and YU-KI’s agile and warm vocals, the group had struck a unique balance.  
The second track “ROCK IT ON!!” seemed like a dance-inducing song as the group would repeat three phrases over and over again but feature more of Koo’s hipster banter (which all rap parts were not included in the lyrics booklet).  
The third track “ISLAND ON YOUR MIND” was simply an innocent pop song featuring everyone singing the chorus.  
I found the song so addicting that even to this day, I can never get enough of it.  
The fourth track “ON MY WAY” would be a TK song that had a certain sound that would be recognized in future TK songs.  
It’s also a song that would feature YU-KI and KOO rapping together and hear a lot of Komuro’s background vocals which was prevalent throughout this track.  
The fifth and sixth track “ONE MORE NIGHT” (used on Fuji TV’s “RAVE’N ROUGE”) and “RAVING ZONE” would be the groups English songs in an effort to help cross-promote a Japanese rave group in different countries.  
The final two tracks “EZ DO DANCE (UK DANCE VERSION)” and “ONE MORE NIGHT (UK DANCE VERSION)” would feature YU-KI and KOO performing in English.  
The group’s music (in English) would be featured in several European techno/rave dance compilations (sold in Europe and the US) and trf would be on the sole group from Japan promoted on this compilations.  
“EZ DO DANCE” will continue to be an album that I can never foresee myself letting go.  
This was my first fore into the music of trf and what turned me on to the group.  
This album is definitely a J-POP classic.  

**THE DYNASTY BEGINS...**

trf’s second full-length album becomes the spark that will help create the synergy for many years to come.
Mr. Children

Atomic Heart

Toy's Factory
TFCC-88052
DURATION: 55 Minutes
RELEASE DATE: September 1, 1994

1. Printing
2. Dance Dance Dance
3. ラブ コネクション (Love Connection)
4. innocent world
5. クラスメイト (Classmate)
6. CROSS ROAD
7. ジェラシー (Jealousy)
8. Asia (エイジア)
9. Rain
10. 雨のち晴れ (Ame Nochi Hare)
11. Round About 〜孤独の肖像〜
12. Over

I recently discovered Mr. Children through Graviton City BBS SysOp Drew Webber, who wanted me to listen to several Japanese rock bands that he’s into at the moment.

And currently in Japan, Mr. Children is tearing up the Oricon Charts with their hit fifth single “innocent world”.

For those not familiar with Mr. Children, the rock band consists of vocalist Kazutoshi Sakurai, drummer Hideya Suzuki, bass player Keisuke Nakagawa and guitarist Kenichi Tahara.

The album features both “innocent world” (which was used on the “Aquaerius Ioshisu” soft drink commercial and their fourth single “Cross Road” was used for the Japanese drama “Dousoukai”.

And while the single was not a hit, the song began to linger in the charts and next thing you know, months later, it became a hit single selling nearl 2 million copies.

But the strength of this album is through its solid production by Takeshi Kobayashi and the songwriting and vocals of Hidetoshi Sakurai.

The melodies are strong, well-performed, memorable and catchy.

While songs such as “innocent world” and “Cross Road” are magnificent singles, the non-single tracks on the album are just as wonderful.

The second track “Dance Dance Dance” is a catch, upbeat rock track but unlike their other songs that are more on the rockside, “Dance Dance Dance” is a track that makes you want to simply dance. A fun, addictive track!

Meanwhile, “Love Connection” is a song that is rock-inspired with churning guitars and a song that has a western feel but an enjoyable track that I have listened to a number of times!

And the catch rock melodies continue with the 11th track “Round About” and “Asia” with its smooth track combining guitars, percussion with strings. A nice balance and a solid track!

There are interesting tracks that also border near experimentation such as “Jealousy” which tries to incorporate sampled beats.

While a track such as “Ame Nochi Hare” has a more funky beat and a more mellow track overall.

While the album features primarily rock tracks, Sakurai has penned two ballads with the romantic ballas “Classmate” with good use of brass, while the sad “Over” is a breakup song.

Overall, there is no doubt that 1994 has been a wonderful year for Mr. Children, a band that has been around since 1988 but are starting to tear up the charts with their addictive melodies and this album is an example of great music from Mr. Children.

Possibly the best album I have listened to in 1994 thus far! Highly recommended! *****

< THIS IS NO DOUBT THE YEAR OF MR. CHILDREN!

This is probably one of the best albums I have purchased and listened to in 1994. Fantastic!
It's been a little more than a decade when "FACES PLACES", the second album by globe was released.

Their last self-titled album "globe" raked in 4 million in sales and of course, during this time was the heyday of the TK family with globe, TRF, Amuro Namie, hitomi and a few others leading the charge by chart topping hit one after the other.

The album would feature their chart topping singles "Is this Love" (6th CD single), "Can't Stop Fallin' In Love" (7th CD single), "FACE" (8th CD single) and "FACES PLACES" (9th CD single).

As I replay the album again, I recall the TK-related albums beginning and sometimes ending with an instrumental by Komuro Tetsuya.

The second track "DEGENERATE" had that TRF and dance club feel. The song is an all English track featuring Marc Panther with supporting vocals by KEIKO.

The third track "FACES PLACES" is just an awesome song. I remember watching the music video for the first time and seeing that KEIKO dyed her hair blonde and here they were performing and going to foreign countries and the fans going crazy for them. Just an awesome globe song!

The fourth track "Is this love" was a track that I remember slipping right past me. I was purchasing all the CD singles but I remember watching it on "HEY! HEY! HEY! Music Champ" and being a college student at the time, not having the funds to purchase so many other CD singles but watching the music video of the group singing in the middle of a desert and the colors so vibrant, I somehow ended up getting the CD single albeit a little late. A very cool globe song!

The fourth track "Is this love" was a track that I remember slipping right past me. I was purchasing all the CD singles but I remember watching it on "HEY! HEY! HEY! Music Champ" and being a college student at the time, not having the funds to purchase so many other CD singles but watching the music video of the group singing in the middle of a desert and the colors so vibrant, I somehow ended up getting the CD single albeit a little late. A very cool globe song!

The fifth track "Because I LOVE the NIGHT" was a track that was another one of those fun globe songs where you just keep singing "Because I LOVE the NIGHT!" and a song that I can imagine people singing it loud during a concert performance.

The eighth track "Anytime smokin' cigarette"... Wow! I just loved this song to death and played it over and over and over during my commute to college. The concert performance was just uber-cool and sure, it was a bit pro-smoking but just the concert performance and seeing KEIKO in a constant flow of cool vocals, Marc Panther chiming in and smoking his cigarette and TK just jamming. Awesome song!

The ninth track "Watch the movie?" was more of an instrumental song than vocal. You would have KEIKO humming and singing in the background it's more of an instrumental song with TK showcasing his keyboards and electric guitar playing.

The tenth track "a picture on my mind" was a song that the music shows kept playing over and over on television in Japan when showcasing this album. A cool song and I dig the music!

The eleventh track "FACE" was a CD single a powerful globe track and I just remember wondering why they had two CD singles with the word "FACE" in it.

The twelve track "Can't Stop Fallin' in Love" was a song that received a lot of airplay. It was a cool track and made me wonder if KEIKO could sing this song perfectly during a live performance.

The following track was a piano solo of that song.

The final track "FACES PLACES (REMIX)" is more of a forgettable mix, mainly an instrumental with Marc Panther rapping and a the vocals from KEIKO used at the end.

As for the CD insert booklet, the booklet featured the lyrics and photos of the group. Even ten years later, I still feel that "FACES PLACES" by globe as one of the coolest albums as it was a big part of Japanese pop culture during the mid-90's and was a product of the TK-family hype that dominated Japan.

"FACES PLACES" is an album that I can listen to with as much enjoyment that I had back then and still feel that same feeling today. "FACES PLACES" is classic TK and globe that I recommend! *****
I remember watching Faye Wong in the Wong Kar-Wai film “Chung King Express” and instantly fell in love with her music and her spunky personality.

Her songs showcased her awesome vocals, her songwriting ability and also cool music but most of all, not settling with a certain singing style, she did things her way. Especially how she is known for her yodeling (she even participated in a Cocteau Twins track where she yodeled who she collaborated with in other tracks).

Her music has attracted fans around the world and she has been designated the title of tianhou (heavenly queen) and of course, attracted many International fans through her “Final Fantasy VIII” song “Eyes on Me”.

But back in 1994, I made my first Mandopop purchase with “Sky”. At the time, the album was among her few Mandopop albums released but also received rave reviews for her artistic expression.

The first track “Sky” was a song I first heard in the film “Mermaid Got Married” starring Ekin Cheng and Christy Chung. A beautiful ballad.

The second track “Chessman” is a song that I just love because of its musical arrangement and Wong’s vocals. I just love that orchestral feel of the song.

The third track “Angel” was the ending theme for “Mermaid Got Married”. I used to listen to this song a gazillion times in my car. I just fell in love with her vocal style in this song and very stylish and how she sings throughout the song in the background, it’s just a Faye Wong style that I just love!

The fourth track “Shadow” was a track featuring another well sung track that utilized acoustic guitar and percussion.

The fifth track “Sky (unplugged)” features a different version of the first track which was more ballad and had an earthy, symphonic feel. This version features more acoustic guitar, harmonica and bongo drums.

The sixth track “Miss” is another track that has an orchestral feel and a beautiful ballad.

The seventh track “Fixedness” is more or less a rock instrumental with Faye Wong humming for the first half and then nearly two minutes into the song, we hear Faye Wong singing.

The eighth track “Reserved” is awesome! The song just starts out with only Wong’s beautiful vocals. No music until the second verse. This is probably my favorite ballad from Faye Wong. Just wonderful!

The ninth track “Break Loose” is an awesome song that I actually fell in love with after I heard her sing this song live. Awesome! I loved how traditional instruments were used in the song and just a very beautiful song.

The CD insert booklet is actually quite stylish. One thing I love about Faye Wong albums is the use of photography and this booklet features cool photos and the lyrics are handwritten. Very stylish presentation.*****
It doesn’t seem so long since I was watching Namie Amuro on Music Station with her fellow dancers, The Super Monkeys (who have changed their name to MAX).

I think it was inevitable that Namie Amuro would pursue a solo career and what better than to team up with super producer TK who appears to have the Midas Touch with his accomplishment with trf, Ryoko Shinohara, Tomomi Kahala, hitomi, Yuki Uchida, Alisa Mizuki and his newest dance group, globe.

After the recent performance at TK Dance Camp, Namie’s addition to the TK Family Dance Camp has solidified the TK Family as this dominant force in the Japanese music industry.

Since the release of “Body Feels EXIT”, Namie has continued to churn out hit after hit with “Chase the Chance”, “Don’t Wanna Cry”, “You’re My Sunshine” and her latest single “SWEET 19 BLUES”.

She has been featured on every magazine cover, appearing on Japanese television and radio and has literally become the top pop star in Japan that has even created a trend in Shibuya with women trying to have a similar hairstyle and high boots.

With the release of “SWEET 19 BLUES” to commemorate Namie’s 19th birthday, her newest album sports four different covers and comes with a slipcase.

As the album contains five of her TK produced singles, those hoping that they can avoid purchasing the singles may want to think again. The album contains remixed versions of her hit songs with the exception of “SWEET 19 BLUES”.

For those new to purchasing Japanese music CD’s, especially with TK releases, in Japan, CD singles are the primary focus, so if you want the original, you go for the single versions of the song. But TK likes to remix songs for the album and so “Don’t Wanna Cry (Eighteen’s Summer Mix)” is given a jazzy, upbeat remix. “Chase the Chance (CC MIX)” receives a somewhat different arrangement and chorus treatment. “You’re My Sunshine (Hollywood Mix)” has a new instrumental jazzy brass opening before it gets to the main song and “Body Feels EXIT (Latin House Mix)” receives an injection of Latin-style music.

But the other songs on the album are quite catchy and enjoyable. “LET’S DO THE MOTION” and “I’LL JUMP” are both catchy upbeat pop tracks, “present” is a jazzy ballad that is smooth and captivating and you get the “Interlude-Joy” featuring a short collaboration with Namie and M.C.A-T.

And while there appears to be many tracks on the album, a few are interlude tracks and instrumentals.

Overall, “SWEET 19 BLUES” is a solid second album for Amuro, while I think there are those who will purchase this album thinking they are getting all five original versions of her hit songs. But her second album is very good, just slightly padded with shorter tracks to make it bigger than it really is. ****
There has been a lot of hype around Kyoko Date, the virtual idol singer.

News clips have featured Kyoko Date singing in the studio, interacting with humans and news of Kyoko Date has been reaching news sources all over the globe.

Kyoko Date is the creation of three-man computer graphics team from HoriPro, Inc.

The goal is to have Kyoko Date appear on a live TV show and while I am a bit skeptical on the technology for now, I suppose I can’t really say much without give Kyoko a try and seeing for myself of what Kyoko Date is all about.

So, J!-ENT purchased her latest CD single “Love Communication”.

The first thing you will notice is that the single comes with a CD Plus Windows program.

The contents feature a video of Kyoko Date introducing herself and a music video for “Love Communication”.

In the music video, we see sound engineers at the studio, while Kyoko Date is singing in the studio, dancing and walking through New York.

The movements of the character look promising and the footage of her singing in the studio look even better, as with the motion capture used for the dance scenes.

But I think that Kyoko Date appearing on a television show and it looking convincing for viewers is still quite a ways off, but I do like the concept and I think many of us who have watched an anime such as “Macross Plus” and hope that within our lifetime, we will see a virtual idol performing in front of the masses will someday come true.

But whether or not Kyoko Date will take off and become a hit, I guess it remains to be seen where HoriPro, Inc. takes her after this single.

As for the single, “Love Communication” is a catchy, pop track.

The synth-inspired dance track is standard J-Pop, nothing groundbreaking but it made me wonder who is the real person behind the voice of Kyoko Date. A real pop star or someone unknown?

As for the second track of “Love Communication (Acoustic Heart Mix)”, the song features an acoustic guitar track added to the arrangement and it actually blends in quite well.

The third track is an instrumental back track of “Love Communication”.

Overall, Kyoko Date’s “Love Communication” is a fascinating experiment and if it works, that would be great.

For the first single, I thought it was great to include a video introduction and music video to Kyoko Date, so you are getting your money’s worth with this single.

I know some may not agree, but I do feel we are still not there year in terms of technology of blending computer generated idols with real humans on television.

But I do like the concept and I suppose we’ll see what HoriPro, Inc. has plans for this virtual idol and if they intend to commit to it.

“Love Communication” is worth checking out! ***
FIN.K.L

White
DSP Entertainment Ltd.
DVCD-1085
DURATION: 50 minutes
RELEASE DATE: May 13, 1999

1. 영원한 사랑
2. Waiting For You
3. The Beginning
4. 서랍속의 동화
5. Oh! Boy
6. I’m Right Now
7. 그래서 우린
8. 자존심
9. Still In Love
10. Kiss Me? Alright!
11. 유리
12. 나의 기도

At J!-ENT, I know that we have been biased towards S.E.S. and Baby V.O.X., prompting our viewers to write in and ask us “What about FIN.K.L?” And sure enough, with the recent release of “White”, it gave a chance to sit down and listen to their first album and this latest album.

For those not familiar with FIN.K.L, the group stands for Fin Killing Liberty and the group’s stance against any oppression of all freedom.

The group features members Lee Hyori, Ock Juhyun, Lee Jin and Sung Yuri.

The first track “영원한 사랑” (Eternal Love) is the first track I discovered online through a remix. But the version presented is catchy and upbeat, love the arrangement for this fun dance track and absolutely love Ock’s vocals in the track.

The second track is a song I saw a clip of a performance from a show in Korea. But love the beats and what I enjoyed the most about this track is that it showcased each of the members vocals clearly. But the vocal performance in this song is well-done.

The third track is “The Beginning” is a fantastic slow jam and it’s a dreamy track that I have been listening over and over. Ock and Hyori do a wonderful job in this track!

The track “서랍속의 동화” is a fun, catchy upbeat track with cool beats and fun vocals that also showcase Lee Jin and Sung Yuri but all four sound great!

The fifth track “Oh! Boy” is an upbeat dance track and sounds. Catchy, breezy track.

The sixth track “I’m Right Now” is a mid-tempo track in which Juhyun sounds magnificent.

The seventh track is a smooth upbeat ballad “그래서 우린” but love the beats for this song.

The eighth track is probably the song that hooked me onto FIN.K.L. thanks to it’s fun music video. The track “자존심” (which translates to “Pride”) is just a catchy, addictive track that I probably listen to the most in the entire album. I just love the vocals and I find it catchy and I’m addicted to this song!

The ninth track is “Still in Love” and is a smooth upbeat ballad featuring great vocal performances from Juhyun but the tenth track is “Kiss Me? Alright!” is probably the weakest song in the album.

The eleventh track on the album is “유리” (Glass) and it was n OK track. Sometimes the vocals seemed off at times.

The final track on the album is “나의 기도” (My Prayer) and is a fantastic ballad that is an all Juhyun track. A slow jam that showcases her beautiful vocals and just letting her go off and do what she does best and hitting those high notes.

The album features a 16-page booklet with lyrics and photos of each member.

Overall, I felt that FIN.K.L’s second album is fantastic. Comparing the first and second, this second album featured a better chemistry with each of the members but also an album which gave each a pretty good chance to show off their vocals, especially Juhyun who sounds fantastic on this album.

Thanks everyone for making me a FIN.K.L fan! “White” is recommended!

****
Morning Musume
First Time
Zetima
EPCE-5002
DURATION: 44 Minutes
RELEASE DATE: July 8, 1998

1. Good Morning
2. サマーナイトタウン
3. どうにかして土曜日
4. モーニングコーヒー
5. 夢の中
6. 愛の種
7. ワガママ
8. 未来の扉
9. ウソつきあんた
10. さみしい日

I have been watching the Japanese variety show “ASAYAN” and seeing how they try to find and start up new talent. We have seen TK and Cozy Kubo with “d.o.s.” (Dances of Sound) and their failed experiment with L.I.S.

But this time around, it was Sharan Q’s turn to create his own group with a talent search for his “Josei Rokku Vocalist Audition” and the result was Morning Musume.

When they first debuted, it was only five female members (Yuko Nakazawa, Aya Ishiguro, Kaori Iida, Natsumi Abe and Asuka Fukuda) but now it has since grown to eight with the addition of Mari Yaguchi, Kei Yasuda and Sayaka Ichii.

When they first debuted with “Ai no Tane”, I had a sense that this group had the potential to be the next big female group since Onyanko Club, moreso when they released “Morning Coffee”.

While there was the Tokyo Performance Doll which featured Ryoko Shihohara and Yuri Ichii (East End x Yuri), it was during the time where female groups were not as popular (while the opposite was different for the the Johnny’s groups as SMAP, TOKIO and later V6 were doing very well).

Sure, SPEED is very hot right now but they along with MAX and other groups from the Okinawan Actors School are more about R&B songs, dance choreography and not sugary idol sweetness.

But there is something I see with Morning Musume that quite possibly, they may be the next big thing.

For their debut album “First Time”, the album kicks off with “Good Morning”, an upbeat, piano-driven track.

The second track is “Summer Night Town”, the group’s second major label single.

When I caught a glimpse of the music video on the music shows, loved the way it showed off the group’s choreography but I really enjoyed the song for its vocal arrangement and edgy idol presentation.

The third track “Do ni ka Shite Doyobi” (Do Something about Saturday) is a pretty fun track because its ’70s style of arrangement. I love this song!

The fourth track features the group’s first major label single “Morning Coffee”. I love the song, especially the stylish music video!

The fifth track is “Yume no Naka”, a jazzy track featuring breezy and beautiful vocals!

The sixth track is the group’s first single when they were an Indie group, but a song also featured on the “Morning Coffee” CD single. The song that pretty much introduced Japan to Morning Musume via Asayan.

The seventh track is “Wagamama” and is the rock-inspired track on the album. While the eighth track “Mirai no Tobira” is the beat-driven track. It’s an OK track but tends vocals tend to sound a little off or buried at times.

The ninth track is “Usotsuki Anta” and my favorite non-single track on the entire album. I love the vocals in this track! Catchy, addictive and a lot of fun.

The album ends with the sad ballad, “Samishii Hi”, which is an all-piano track.

As for the album, the album features a 30-page booklet with lyrics and a photo of each member individually and as a group.

Overall, as a first album for Morning Musume, it’s a good album. And the fact that “Summer Night Town” has done well on the Oricon Charts, I look forward to seeing if Morning Musume can keep it up for their next single.

“First Time” is recommended! ****
When Namie Amuro focused on her solo career and began her collaboration with mega producer Tetsuya Komuro, there was a lot of discussion of what would happen to the members of the Super Monkeys.

For Mina, Nana, Reina and Ritsuko, it gave the former Okinawa Dance School students to show that they also have vocal talent and are not just background dancers.

And the result is MAX (Musical Active eXperience). And with a collaboration with the Velfarre dance club, known for its playing of Euro dance music, MAX would incorporate the dance music to their style and they would be classified as a J-Euro group.

In 1995, in conjunction to promote their performance at the new club, MAX released their first single “Koisuru Velfarre Dance”, followed by a second single titled “Kiss Me Kiss Me, Baby”.

While the singles were not as successful, the group had two things going for them. As Amuro’s popularity skyrocketed in the last year and as the four still performed alongside Amuro on stage, the group had a major boost thanks to Amuro. But also, the group would replace Amuro on the popular karaoke show “Yoru no Hit Parade”, have a new movie titled “Ladies MAX” and a hit song, a cover of Domino’s “Tora Tora Tora” and the song would thrust the group to the top 20.

With the success of “Tora Tora Tora”, the group continued to do another Japanese cover for their fourth single “Seventies” and the single would become MAX’s first song to break into the Oricon Singles Charts at #7.

And just a few months ago, the group released their fifth CD single “Get My Love”, another Japanese cover for the artist Dolly and the song debuted at #4 on the Oricon Charts, their best debut thus far.

And here we are now with their debut album “MAXIMUM”, just right on time before the holidays.

Featuring a total of 13 tracks including their five singles, the album features a lot of Japanese euro covers with collaborations with the Grooversurfers, Tiger Boys, Hinoky Team, Syrups and more.

For the most part, all tracks are J-Euro tracks known for its upbeat, synth dance tracks and there is not much deviation from that. It's all fast, upbeat dance songs for those who enjoy the Euro or Hyper Euro Dance music and so far, it’s a formula that has worked rather perfectly for MAX.

In fact, the album debuted at #1 on the Oricon Weekly Charts thus showing that there is a lot of interest in MAX because of this new musical direction.

As for the insert, you get a 24-page booklet with the lyrics to each song and photos of each member as a group or individually.

Overall, I’m enjoying the music from MAX so far and I enjoy this album a lot, but I do hope we see more variation from them and possibly original songs that are not covers. But I suppose if it’s working for them rather well, so why deviate from it?

If you loved MAX’s music so far, then you’ll love “MAXIMUM”! ****
Various Artists
Kimagure Orange Road: Singing Heart
Futureland
LD32-5061
DURATION: 51 Minutes
RELEASE DATE: December 25, 1987

1. 夏のミラージュ
2. オレンジ・ミステリー
3. ふり向いてマイ・ダーリン
4. ジェニーナ
5. NIGHT OF SUMMER SIDE
6. もうひとつのイエスタデイ
7. Again
8. ブレイキングハート
9. サルピアの花のように
10. 危険なトライアングル
11. 悲しいハートは燃えている
12. この胸に ONE MORE TIME

When it comes to anime soundtracks, I have the most difficult time finding information on the BBS of which ones to buy. And it happened against recently while I was trying to purchase whichever “Kimagure Orange Road” album had the music for “Kimagure Orange Road” OVA Series.

So, I decided to make the purchase for “Singing Heart”, not knowing anything about it but the fact that it was available and it was expensive (which was no surprise considering the “Ranma 1/2” albums were quite expensive as well). But upon listening to “Singing Heart”, I realize that the music was for the TV series which is cool because that was my next plan was to find which album would have “Orange Mystery” and “Natsu no Mirage” and sure enough, this was the album.

While I didn’t get the album with the songs from the OVA series or the movie, I’m still thrilled that I have purchased this album. “Singing Heart” has a total of 12 tracks.

The album begins with Wada Kanako’s “Natsu no Mirage” which was the ending theme to “Kimagure Orange Road”. A song which Kanako sings beautifully.

The second track is “Orange Mystery” performed by Nagashima Hideyuki and this was the opening theme for Kimagure Orange Road and possibly the song that fans of the series know about the most.

The third track is “Furimuite My Darling” sung by Minako Fujishiro which was a song that was used in the episode that introduced Kazuya.

The fourth track is for “Janina” and performed by Kanako Wada and was used when Kyousuke was saddened that Madoka was planning to study abroad in America.

The fifth track needs no introduction. “Night of Summer Side” by Masanori Ikeda is the opening theme for Kimagure Orange Road and possibly the song that fans of the series know about the most.

The sixth track “Mou Hitotsu no Yesterday” is performed by Kanako Wada and another beautiful song but not sure which episode it was used, as well as the seventh track “Again” by Minako Fujishiro, but it’s an mid-tempo pop track.

The eighth track is titled “Breaking Heart” and is a rock track performed by Yuiko Tsubokura.

The ninth track “Salvia no Hana no you ni” is performed by Kanako Wada and is a catchy, upbeat pop track used on the 22nd episode.

The tenth track is “Dangerous Triangle” performed by Masanori Ikeda and is an upbeat pop track used on the eleventh episode.

The eleventh track “Kanashii Heart wa moete-iru” and is performed by Kanako Wada and this was the second ending theme for the TV series.

The final track on the album is “One more time in my heart” and is performed by Hideyuki Nagashima.

The insert comes with a booklet with lyrics and production credits plus a sketch of Madoka by Takada Akemi.

Overall, if you are a fan of “Kimagure Orange Road” and love the music from the first half of the TV series, “Singing Heart” is a soundtrack I highly recommend!
Mr. Children - 抱きしめたい (Dakishimetai)
Toy's Factory / TFDC-28014 / DURATION: 15:00 / RELEASE DATE: December 1, 1992
1. 抱きしめたい  2. 君の事以外は何も考えられない  3. 抱きしめたい (Instrumental)

I have become addicted to the music of the band Mr. Children. I have found myself trying to purchase their singles such as "Cross Road", "Replay" and most recently, their second single "Dakishimetai" (which translates to "I Want to Hold You"). What's surprising is that while the band is known for their chart topping hits and million sellers, for "Dakishimetai", it only sold 60,790 copies when it was released and was ranked at #56 on the Oricon Charts. Suffice to say, it's a song that gained popularity after its release and to the point that it has become a popular song to be played at Japanese weddings. But what I love about Mr. Children is not just the music but the songwriting of Kazutoshi Sakurai. It's like reading poetry or a well-thought out short story. With the first track "Dakishimetai", the title of "I Want to Hold You" makes you think of longing for someone to hold in your arms. A ballad with beautiful arrangement, Sakurai's vocals are top-notch, but it's the song that captivates you.

The second track is "Kimi no koto igai wa nani mo kangaerarenai" (which translates to "Except that you Can Think of Anything Else") and is a mid-tempo rock track and about a person who can’t sleep after midnight because he keeps looking at the stars that night. Thinking about a fairy tale that was told to him and having someone near them always and being around forever ever after. A fun song! The third track is the instrumental of "Dakishimetai". Overall, "Dakishimetai" is one of those songs that has the making of becoming that awesome ballad that people will find themselves returning to years from now, decades from now because it's so beautiful and a song that captures the beauty of love in a relationship. I have listened to this song, I don't know how many times now… but it's so awesome of a song that for me, to have this song and its instrumental track is important. This song is really epic and destined to become one of the most unforgettable love songs ever created. I really do believe that.

Mo'Ning Musume (Morning Musume) - ザ☆ピース! (The Peace)
1. ザ☆ピース!  2. でっかい宇宙に愛がある  3. ザ☆ピース! (Instrumental)  4. でっかい宇宙に愛がある (Instrumental)

Morning Musume is back with their 12th CD single titled "The Peace!". The single was another #1 hit for Morning Musume (since their eleventh CD single "Ren'ai Revolution") and sold over 682,000 copies for its first week and would feature fourth generation member, Rika Ishikawa as the center. The insert features the picture of all nine members with a yellow background sporting their gold outfits, while the reverse cover features the entire group in their gold outfits with a black background. Inside the 2-page insert are the lyrics to the two tracks and production credits and also a survey card. Featuring music by Dance Man and the Band Man, the song would feature brass courtesy of the Horns Man Brothers and chorus by Tsunuku. Catchy and upbeat, the song is unlike any Morning Musume track that I have heard before. Great underlying bass groove, cool vocals and a finale with multiple false endings, the song has quickly become my favorite Morning Musume song yet! One of the most unforgettable love songs ever created. I really do believe that. The coupling track is titled "Dekkai Uchi ni Ai ga Aru!" (which translates to "There's Love in this large Universe") and is an upbeat track that utilizes a Hammon organ courtesy of Daisuke Kawai and percussion and electric guitar. The next two tracks are the instrumental versions of "The Peace!" and "Dekkai Uchi ni Ai ga Aru!". Overall, there is something about "The Peace!" that makes me want to listen to it over and over. It's catchy, addictive and I find myself listening to this song more than any other Morning Musume track, and that's considering that I have listened to "Love Machine", "Koi no Dance Site" and "Summer Night Town" like crazy when they were first released. Catchy, addictive and just all out fun! Morning Musume’s 12th CD single “The Peace!” is a fantastic single from the group and is highly recommended!
**ZARD - 永遠 (Forever)**


1. 永遠 2. I can’t let go 3. 永遠 (Instrumental) 4. I can’t let go (Instrumental)

I am such a big fan of ZARD's music and a true believer that lead vocalist Izumi Sakai has this ability to calm and soothe any listener when a song of theirs is being played on the radio, on TV or via CD. For me, it's been like this for the longest time now. But there has been one song that I fell in love with last year and it was ZARD's "Eien" (Forever). I absolutely love this song, Sakai's vocals and the musical arrangement. It's a fantastic song and I have looked everywhere around the United States to purchase this single to no avail (that is trying to buy it without having to spend an insane amount for it). And fortunately, during my trip to Japan, I found this single calling out for me at a local rental shop that was selling older CD's. And sure enough, I found "Eien", albeit used with a rip cover and the RIAJ rental sticker (as you can see from the image) but nevertheless, I have found this wonderful single. And what a wonderful single it is. "Eien" is just a song that brings one hope. It's such a wonderful ballad that it's easy to fall in love with it. The coupling track "I can’t let go" is another solid ZARD track that is pretty cool. I dig the brass on this song and also Sakai's vocals. Overall, "Eien" is a perfect song and a wonderful single... Highly recommended!

**DEEN - Teenage Dream**

B-Gram Records / JBDJ-1001 / DURATION: 17:30 / RELEASE DATE: March 27, 1995

1. Teenage Dream 2. Run Around 3. Teenage Dream (Original Karaoke) 4. Run Around (Original Karaoke)

In 1992, the band known as DEEN was formed. Currently consisting of band members Shuichi Ikemori on vocals, Koji Yamane on keyboards, Shinji Tagawa on guitar and Naoki Uzumoto on drums, the four are part of the B-Gram Records Family and took the music charts by storm with their debut single "Kononama Kimidakewo Ubaui Saruitai" and led the group to a "Brand New Artist Award" in 1993. The band has collaborated with another B-Gram Records band ZARD and their lead singer Izumi Sakai in the past (she did a Bossa Nova cover of their first single) and similar to ZARD, DEEN rarely makes any live appearances. But in 1995, it was DEEN's turn to do a cover of a ZARD song and this time it was Izumi Sakai's "Teenage Dream" (which was featured as a coupling song on ZARD's "Ai ga Mienai"). Needless to say, "Teenage Dream" was a major success. The song would be #1 on various charts and become one of DEEN's top singles ever. "Teenage Dream" which featured lyrics by Izumi Sakai and music by Setichiroh Kuribayashi and arrangement by Takeshi Hayama, is a song about having a friend and the dreams shared with that friend of going to a big city and becoming friends forever. If anything, the song is an encouraging song for those graduating high school or college and taking their first steps alone as an adult and going after their own dreams. But no matter what happens, your friend will be there for you, even if you succeed or if you fail. The song features an awesome musical arrangement and is definitely one of my favorite DEEN songs ever. The coupling song "Run Around" is written by Shuichi Ikemori and an arrangement by Takeshi Hayama. The pop song is good but in many ways, it sounds more like a song that seemed like it would be appropriate in 1989-1990 due to its older synth pop sound that was typical of music at that time. But it's a good DEEN pop song but may sound a bit too old school for some people. Overall, "Teenage Dream" (and its karaoke track) are probably what the listeners are probably are going to want. The song is awesome and a CD Single definitely worth purchasing!

**久保田利伸 (Toshinobu Kubota) - LA・LA・LA LOVE SONG**


1. LA・LA・LA LOVE SONG (feat. Naomi Campbell) 2. What’s the Wonder? 3. LA・LA・LA LOVE SONG (オリジナル・カラオケ)

With the very popular Japanese drama series “Long Vacation” starring Takuya Kimura and Tomoko Yamaguchi generating high ratings, its theme song "LA・LA・LA LOVE SONG" by Toshinobu Kubota and fashion model Naomi Campbell has been tearing up the music charts. "LA・LA・LA LOVE SONG" is the latest single from Kubota, known for popularizing soul R&B in Japan but with this single, it's a pop tune that has been catching the attention of people not just in Japan but also in the US as the drama has been airing in various metropolitan areas (via their International channel) and according to sales clerks at various Kinokuniya stores across the U.S., the singles keep selling out. Needless to say, the songs have been a boon to Japanese music shows as well, it's common to watch many stars singing this song on "Yoromo Hit Parade" and hearing the clips on Music Station and Hey! Hey! Hey! Music Champ. "LA・LA・LA LOVE SONG" is a catchy, addictive pop tune showcasing Toshi Kubota's cool and smooth rhythmic style and throw in Naomi Campbell singing "Want to make love, Want to make a love song" definitely makes the song quite appealing and I wouldn't be surprised if this song also ranks high on the karaoke charts as it makes a great karaoke release as well (the song has been popular at our karaoke parties). The coupling track "What’s the Wonder?" is Kubota R&B fare with the funky music, funky bass, deep beats and scratch samples. But overall, a cool coupling track. Overall, I wouldn't be surprised if you owned this single by now, it's an addictive single and a wonderful theme song for one of the coolest Japanese dramas ever! And if you are just curious and love the song, definitely pick this single up! Definitely worth owning!
My Little Lover - Hello, Again ～昔からある場所～ (Hello, Again ～Mukashi Kara Aru Basho)
Toy's Factory / TFDC-28037 / DURATION: 17 minutes / RELEASE DATE: August 21, 1995

My Little Lover is back with a new single and words can’t express how much I love this single! The third single “Hello, Again ～Mukashi Kara Aru Basho” is a single that is wonderfully produced by Takeshi Kobayashi (producer of Mr. Children and The Southern All Stars) and a song that showcases Akko’s vocals and Kenji Fujji’s guitars but the songwriting showcases hope and pain and just an emotional song that you can hear from Akko’s vocals. The single debuted at #1 on the Oricon Charts and was #1 for two weeks straight. The coupling song “Delicacy” has the style of music that I love from My Little Lover with the live band that they have been working with to create a live house, breezy and addictive sound. In fact, if you visit the My Little Lover website, there are videos on Akko and Kenji behind the scenes of the making of their album “Evergreen” and sample of the musicians working on “Delicacy”. But this is my favorite song for 1995. I know it’s only summer and the year is not even over, but this single is simply a must buy!

福山雅治 (Masaharu Fukuyama) - HELLO
BMG Victor / BVCR-8803 / DURATION: 26 Minutes / RELEASE DATE: February 6, 1995
1. Hello  2. そのままで...  3. Pa Pa Pa  4. Hello (Original Karaoke)  5. そのままで... (Original Karaoke)

Masaharu Fukuyama has returned with his most popular single yet! “Hello” marks the 10th single anniversary (the words featured on the obi) of the popular singer and also a song that is used on the drama “Saiko no Kataomoi” which I have been hooked on as of late. The single debuted #1 on the Oricon Music Charts and sold over a million copies, receiving a gold certification from the Recording Industry Association of Japan. The single is catchy, upbeat and addictive, but there is also another track on the single that is just as enjoyable and that is the coupling track “Sono made...”. The single also marks the special friendship and collaboration with Fukuyama and one of Japan’s renown photographers, Shoji Ueda who shot the photos for “Hello”. Overall, a fantastic single from Masaharu Fukuyama!

スチャダラパー (Scha Dara Parr) - 今夜はブギー・バック (Konya wa Boogie Back)
Ki/oon Sony Records / KSD2-1061 / DURATION: 16:40 / March 9, 1994
1. 今夜はブギー・バック (smooth rap)  2. 今夜はブギー・バック (Live At BIG Egg)  3. 今夜はブギー・バック (ラップ用カラオケ)

Scha Dara Parr is back with their sixth single “Konya wa Boogie Back” and a collaboration with up and coming Toshiba-EMI artist Kenji Ozawa. The song is so popular that I’ve seen the two perform together and the audience singing in unison. Needless to say, the single has been a big commercial hit for the hip hop group which consist of MC’s Ani and Bose and DJ Shinco. The single begins with “Konya wa Boogie Back” (smooth rap). Some people may have seen the performance on television and the difference is that Scha Dara Parr uses a more synth musical arrangement. But I admit that my preference is the beat-driven version we have seen them perform on Japanese television, where the guys are more live, more raw and where you can hear the audience be moved by that energy. And fortunately, that live bass-beat version of the song is included as the second track as the group is performing Live at BIG Egg. This is the Scha Dara Parr that I’m used to hearing and it’s a track that I enjoy much more than the smooth rap version. The single ends with the karaoke version of “Konya wa Boogie Back” (Smooth Rap). The CD Single comes with an insert with the lyrics and production credits. Overall, “Konya wa Boogie Back” is an awesome single and if you enjoyed listening to these guys perform this track on various music shows, then you’ll be happy to know that they did include a live version of the song on this single. Definitely recommended!
Possibly the biggest commercial hip hop group in Japan since Scha Dara Parr, hip hop group EAST END teams up with Tokyo Performance Dolls idol YURI to form EAST END x YURI and have dominated the charts with their song "DA.YO.NE." A song that has had many copycat versions but reflecting the slang of their city’s version of "oh really?" But the significance of this song in Japan is the merging of a Japanese underground hip hop with J-Pop. And with many Japanese hip hop artists right now still known via the underground scene, it was quite interesting to see so much attention put on this group because of the merging and eventually, getting the name of a Japanese hip hop group out there and hopefully giving exposure to Japan’s hip hop scene. Also, the song was the first non-English hip hop track to reach a million in sales and getting the group's name on the Guinness Book of World Records and also became the first hip hop group to appear on the popular Japanese New Year’s Eve Show – "Kouhaku Uta Gassen". The first track "DA.YO.NE." is a fun and enjoyable hip hop track which kicks off with Yuri known for singing bursting out rhymes, followed up by MC Gaku as the two trade off with their communicative rhymes and beats supplied by DJ YOGGI. But the surprise was the coupling track “Sunao ni” featuring a smooth hip hop ballad by both Yuri and MC Gaku. The ballad is just well done and for the most part, has surpassed my love for “DA.YO.NE” in being my favorite track of the single. Great rhythm and flow by GAKU but Yuri adds sexiness to the track. The third track is a version for the boys of “Sunao ni” which is the same song without MC Gaku but only Yuri’s segment. For those who want to bust out their rhymes for the song. This CD single comes in the horizontal packaging with lyrics and production credits. Overall, I’ve become quite an addict to the music of EAST END x YURI and "DA.YO.NE." is just a great CD single and also great to see some form of Japanese hip hop getting noticed in Japan. Granted, some may see East End possibly selling out by teaming up with a Japanese music idol but I don’t think so. I think it's all about opportunity and getting out into the mainstream and now the group can reap its benefits while giving some props to other Japanese hip hop artists out there.

With the success of Puffy's debut CD single “Asian no Junshin” earlier in the year (May 1996), many awaited the second single from the female duo who is produced by Tamio Okuda (of UNICORN fame). Featuring a new CD single with artwork by Rodney A. Greenblat, “Kore ga Watashi no Ikiru Michi” was an instant hit when it was released and earned the duo their first #1 single. The song had a hint of Beatles and a late 50’s to early 60’s rock sound and had a catchy melody plus a lively music video featuring the duo in Japan and the United States filmed for their first video “Run! Puffy! Run!”. The coupling track “Yuki Ga Furu Machi” is a cover of the UNICORN hit but at a slower pace and features a synth/experimental background with the electronic drumbeats. The final remaining tracks are the karaoke instrumentals with the “Kore ga Watashi no Ikiru Michi” receiving a stereo version of the music. As for inside the CD insert, all that is included are the lyrics and production credits and the CD singles are the Japanese mini-CD singles. Overall, the CD single is quite solid and easily one of my favorite tracks to listen to on my CD player at the moment. Definitely worth purchasing!

Hikaru “Hikki” Utada is currently dominating the charts in Japan and throughout Asia. Her music is enjoyed not only by people in Asia but by fans all over the world. Hikaru was born in New York in 1983. She was exposed to music at an early age. Her mother, singer Keiko Fujii is known for her popular songs in the 70’s. Hikaru released an album at the age of 12 with her parents known as U3. At the age of 15, she released an all English album under the name Cubic U which was praised by singer Lenny Kravitz. At the age of 16, she exploded into the music scene with the song “Automatic” and the c/w song “Time Will Tell” which will likely win the #1 song of the year in Japan. Both tracks are addictive but “Automatic” is unlike anything that is out in Japan right now. Listen to a lot of the top female solo artists and nothing comes close to “Automatic” and some would call it a more western pop style, but people are loving it, I’m loving it. When I was in Japan and purchased this single weeks after its release, I watched the morning shows in Japan go crazy over the teenager. Was it because she was the daughter of Keiko Fujii or was it because Japan found a new pop star that resonated strongly for them? Someone who is releasing awesome music? I usually don’t like to say “keep your eyes on this singer” after a first single but I feel that Hikaru Utada is special, I look forward to her second single!
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For the president and owner of the Ani-Jam anime convention in Fresno, CA., Antonio Airoso had previously traveled to Japan in 2012 with a tour group. Determined to see more of the otaku attractions in 2013, Antonio debated if going to Japan and traveling by himself would be a good idea, considering he had no understanding of the Japanese language. With a bit of anxiety and not sure how his trip would be in Japan, Antonio decided that he would forego to the travel group and go by himself. How will Antonio fare in Japan?
I arrived at the Sakura Hotel in Ikebukuro from Narita Airport at 11:00 p.m. It’s one of the most economical places for foreigners to stay in Japan. The rates are even better if you are staying longer than a week. The hotel has Internet and they do speak English. I was able to navigate thanks to a GPS that I brought along. But for my second day in Japan, I had to get ready for the first day of the Tokyo International Anime Fair at Tokyo Big Site in Odaiba, Japan. As an owner of the anime convention, Ani-Jam, I was invited to this event and I’m looking forward to this industry day and seeing what anime is being currently being promoted in Japan.
Antonio's Otaku Adventure!
When I arrived during an industry day for Tokyo International Anime Fair, it was nice to be able to see the booths before they open to the public. Aside from the foreigners who were there, many promoting their own anime convention, I wish I could speak and understand Japanese in order to communicate with the industry. For industry day, it wasn’t too crowded and you get to see various booths promoting the latest anime, card games and also a few arcade games. With 80% of the anime industry in Tokyo, the fair invites animation-related companies from Japan and all over the world to help revitalize its commerce and raising awareness that Tokyo is a major producer of animation. At this 2013 event, there were booths from over 120 companies from both Japan and overseas. The fair is organized by the Tokyo International Anime Fair Executive Committee (www.taf.metro.tokyo.jp). The first two days are dedicated to industry/businesses and the final two days are open to the general public.
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure!
Antonio's Otaku Adventure!
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure!
For day 3, I headed to the Tokyo International Anime Fair to see how crowded it would be for a public event. The big cosplay that day was “Tiger & Bunny”. Afterward, I visited other attractions in Odaiba such as Sega Joypolis, Sega’s indoor amusement park. I then visited Fuji TV, where many popular series are made and they take you through a tour of the various sets inside the building. On the day I went on the Fuji TV tour, there were promotions for the “Dragon Ball Z” movie. I also went to check out Nyan Da Cafe, one of the popular cat cafe’s in Tokyo.
On days 4-5, I spent time at Akihabara, Shibuya and Shinjuku. On day 6, I visited Tokyo Sky Tree. There are three ways to purchase tickets to Tokyo Sky Tree, via web, via the group reservation center and through a travel agency. Hearing how long the lines are for Tokyo Sky Tree, I went early and purchased a day ticket at the Tokyo Skytree 4th floor ticket counter. The first floor is where the Skytree Shop and group ticket counter are located. The fourth floor is the ticket counter and information center. The fifth floor features more Skytree shops and the next are two levels you can purchase: Tokyo Skytree Tembo Deck (Floor 350) which costs Y2,000 which includes the cafe, more shops and the Sky Restaurant and the Tokyo Skytree Tembo Galleria (floor 445) which costs an additional Y1,000. For more information on Tokyo Sky Tree, please visit: http://www.tokyoskytree.jp/en/reservation/
On day 7, I spent time in the flashy part of Tokyo, Ginza. On day 8, I headed to Harajuku toward Takeshita Street to find the Evangelion Store. I wish I could have taken more pictures but there were signs for no photos allowed. I managed to get a few but the store is definitely great for Neon Genesis Evangelion fans. Afterward, I headed out to a mall area and inside there was a Dragon Ball Z exhibit to promote the film. You could see concept art for the film and many DBZ toys.
Antonio's Otaku Adventure!

/// TRAVEL

A J!-ENT SPECIAL FEATURE
On day 9, I headed south to Yokohama, unfortunately I wasn’t feeling that well, so I only stayed a short time in Yokohama visiting the Queen’s Mall and Landmark area before heading back to Tokyo. But I was able to visit the Jump Shop, the Pokemon Center and the Moe Garden which specializes in Studio Ghibli toys.
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure!
A week after Tokyo International Anime Fair is the big anime convention in Chiba, Anime Contents Expo (ACE) and has become one of the largest anime trade fairs in the world. The first event was held in 2012 and the venue, Makuhari Messe (the same location where the annual Tokyo Game Show, Tokyo Auto Salon and Jump Festa are held), is absolutely packed on both days. It was way too packed for me but I stayed for a few hours before returning back to Tokyo and rest for the remainder of the day.
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure!
Antonio's Otaku Adventure!

[Images of various anime conventions and cosplay events]
Since I was staying at the Sakura Hotel in Ikebukuro, I figured that on day 11, it was time to finally check out Otome Road and the stores in the area.
A location I have been wanting to see is the Fuji-Q Highland Amusement Park where the Gundam and Evangelion attraction is located. From Ikebukuro to Otsuki the limited express shinkansen was Y1470 and then you take the limited express JR to Fuji-Q for an additional Y800. But you can take a direct ticket for Y2500. The shinkansen was marked with what train it was and matched the ticket. As with normal trains, it would announce the next stop in Japanese and English. So, expect to pay nearly $25 to go there and another $25 to return back to Tokyo.
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure!
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure!

DAY 13 - AKIHABARA (GOOD SMILE CAFE)

My final sight-seeing day in Japan before I leave to Narita Airport. Today it’s raining in Akihabara but I’m going to try and visit a few more stores (unfortunately, many stores don’t allow cameras inside) and visit a few more restaurants. Because the portions are quite small, I ended up eating at Good Smile Cafe and the Gundam Cafe.
Antonio's Otaku Adventure!
Antonio’s Otaku Adventure!

DAY 13 - AKIHABARA (GUNDAM CAFE)
I believe that anyone can go to Japan and travel to their favorite anime/manga destinations without Japanese knowledge and even purchase items without knowing Japanese. Having conversations, is another thing. As for getting to one place from another, the GPS I used was google maps. I had rented a mobile hot spot to get my tablet to work as a GPS. The mobile hotspot was an unlimited data 3G hotspot. It was very helpful to look things up while I was traveling. As for if I would ever do it again? Even not knowing how to speak Japanese, there are many things I was able to do. Most electronic terminals are translated and I can order with images from menus at restaurants. With GPS navigations the streets in Japan, I was able to find the places I wanted to go. Visiting Japan is now something I plan to do every year. And I will be back in Japan in March 2014. If you have any suggestions of cool locations to cover in Tokyo or elsewhere in Japan, feel free to let me know at: https://www.facebook.com/Boss.Man.559
J!-ENT ON LOCATION @ SAKURA CON 2013:
Media Q&A with “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)” voice actress, Ayumi Fujimura

By Dennis A. Amith and Michelle Tymon

PHOTO /// PROVIDED BY SAKURA CON
@ SAKURA CON 2013 AT THE WASHINGTON STATE CONVENTION CENTER
Ayuomi Fujimura has become one of the premiere voice acting stars in Japan. Best known for her voice as Audrey Burne/Mineva Lao Zabi in the popular hit animated series “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)”, Ayumi has done voices for a variety of characters for Japanese animated series such as Chiharu Harukaze of “Hayate Combat Butler”, Kimiko Nakamura of “Shugakun no Shana”, Karada Ikowaka of “Living for the Day After Tomorrow”, Aiko Iwake of “Bakuman” and Haruka Uehara and Ayane Iwa of “Lagrange – The Flower of Rin-ne”, just to name a few.

Ayuomi has also done voices for video games such as Saka in “Luminous Arc 2: Will”, Frederick in “Suikoden IV”, Mylene Wilder in “Tales of Symphonia”, Ibuki in “Super Street Fighter IV” and also for the live action film “Harrie Potter and the Half-Blood Prince” as Kate Bell.

On April 1st, Ayumi Fujimura attended her first anime convention in the U.S. in Seattle as a Guest of Honor for Sakura-Con 2013 to promote her voice work for Bandai Visual’s “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)” and took part in a media press conference.

The following is a transcript of the press conference which Ji-ENT took part in.

**Ji-ENT:** Is this your first time as a guest at an anime convention? And now that you’re in America, is there a certain food you want to try or any shops you want to go to in Seattle?

**AYUMI:** It is. We already had some free time to roam around, so I already bought some gifts. The seafood here is rather delicious. I got to enjoy some salmon and some scallops so I wanted to enjoy some more seafood. And as for gifts, I bought some nice smelling lotion. I had a lot of fun.

This being your first experience at a western anime convention, do you think American anime fans are very similar or very different to Japanese fans?

**AYUMI:** I think there are some similarities and some differences. I think their passion and love for the shows are the same in either country. I think they have a shyness about them, but are still able to express how they feel about the shows in their own way. I think I might feel that is a bit stronger here than in Japan. Also, I’ve noticed that everyone is able to communicate with each other easily and in that aspect, I think the Japanese fans may be a bit shyer. But here, I felt as everyone was trying to enjoy this convention together and it was very free and liberating.

**Ji-ENT:** What was your first ever role? Describe what it was like to go into the booth for the first time.

**AYUMI FUJIMURA:** It was an anime called “Nishi no Yoki Majo”, and I played a maid who was a good friend of the main character, that was my first role. It was my first role and I was brand new, so I was very nervous when I was standing in front of the mic. The director would coach me a lot with my acting and I think that experience helped me with who I am now.

**Ji-ENT:** What was your favorite manga and anime growing up?

**AYUMI FUJIMURA:** It was “Sailor Moon.” As for the manga, I really liked the manga magazine, “Nakayoshi,” which “Sailor Moon” was serialized in, and read it all the time.

The project you’re here to promote is “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)”. Could you describe the steps you took to prepare to play the role of Mineva Lao Zabi? What was your mindset and what did you want to convey?

**AYUMI FUJIMURA:** Well first… Oh, well, this character was in the first Gundam series as a baby and so she has been living through the history of the Gundam series from the first series. This was for the 30th anniversary, so I went back and watched the original Gundam so I could study the role and the series and get an understanding of her before getting into the role. The other thing I was very careful about, she’s usually… how do I put it, she’s usually very serious, so it was hard to sometimes match her seriousness with my own feelings, but I make sure I keep that in mind every time.

With “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)” and your role as Audrey, did you have to audition for that role against other actresses or were you approached by the production? And to expand on that, do you find yourself auditioning for a lot of roles or are you at a point in your career that you are offered roles more frequently?

**AYUMI FUJIMURA:** The role of Mineva was an audition, and where I’m at in my career, I am grateful that I am offered roles as well, but overall I still audition. Also, I believe that no matter how much of a veteran a seiyuu might be, they don’t come to a point where they don’t audition at all. I do believe that it depends on the project, though.

**Ji-ENT:** When you were younger, what anime characters’ voices did you like trying to mimic?

**AYUMI FUJIMURA:** I did! I would mimic “Crayon Shin-chan” and Doraemon… and let’s see, what else… I think I did quite a few others as well when I was a child because I really liked anime.

So you mentioned before that you actually went back and watched some of the older series, for your role of Audrey. When you looked at part of Audrey’s history, what part of her past or present do you find most interesting? I’m not sure if you watched “Gundam ZZ” for her childhood, where she was actually a pawn in a larger game, and now she’s growing out of being a pawn. How do you feel about that transition and what do you think her maturity level would be at this point, now that she’s taking on the role that she was born to have and may be reluctant to accept?

**AYUMI FUJIMURA:** Well, I think she’s matured quite a bit. I think her meeting Banagher may have brought that on. Her feelings of wanting to stop the war are rather strong, but… how do I say this, she had grown up being treated like a princess by the ones around her. So as for what she wants to do, I think Banagher was the one to show her that. And because of that, I think she’s able to say what she really thinks. Because she met Banagher, we get to see the Mineva is a girl before she is a princess. I’m not sure if her feelings will go as far as romantic feelings, but we do get to see this side of her now and so I think she’s now rather human.

Do you often find yourself being cast as characters that are similar to you? And if so, do you enjoy that? Or do you find yourself seeking out roles that are a little bit different from how you are in real life for the challenge?

**AYUMI FUJIMURA:** I do feel like I get a lot of roles that seem rather similar to me. Well I say that they’re similar… but there are aspects that are completely different. But I’m rather… hardheaded at times and don’t like to give up or lose and can be rather confident, so I think I get cast as strong, energetic girls quite a bit. But I will say that it’s easier to do roles that are similar to myself, because I can imagine what I’d do in certain situations and acting out those roles, I don’t have to hold back. I can have fun with them without being tied down and all kinds of emotions seem to come forth naturally.

**Ji-ENT:** We talked about your heroic character roles, but have you ever played a villain character before?

**AYUMI:** When I get asked what kinds of roles I’d like to play next, I usually say that I’d like to play a villain. I don’t think I can say I’ve never played that kind of a role… But yes, I’d like to play a role that’d be a
completely hopeless villain, with a personality that is completely wretched.

Previously done voice acting for male characters as well, like in "Natsume Yujin-cho" you played young Natsume and in Aquarian EVO you played MIX who later gender swapped as MIXY. What is your approach to playing male characters, the younger male characters, instead of your usual heroine characters?

AYUMI: I think the most important thing is the feeling, the emotions. But in the end if it comes down to the voice, if I concentrate too much on the emotions, the voice starts to sound more girlish. So I do my best to try to sound like a boy and as for their personalities, it completely varies on the character, and their tone changes as well. Just because they're a boy, I don't think I have a set way of acting them out, I do believe I change it every time.

From your perspective as a performer, does the profile or the budget of a project affect how it's dubbed? Like for example, "Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)" is high budget and high profile. How is it different dubbing that and then say something like Maid-sama, so like a TV series role?

AYUMI: There isn't much of a difference when I'm in the recording studio, and I don't think there's much of that which affects us, the actors, and it's more on behind the scenes on the staff side and there's more that they can do if they have the money or not. Events cost money as well, so it's a popular project, I'm sure they can do a lot more. Not just events, but I think in general we're able to do things like we want to if the money is available. In the end, the actors aren't really involved in that part of the project and know very little about it, so it doesn't really affect our acting.

In your extensive career, which character would you say that you identify with most? Which is your favorite role, male or female?

AYUMI: Let's see... When I played the role of Eiko in the show, "Squid Girl," in my mind, she feels as though Squid Girl is her little sister. I have a little sister as well, so I was able to relate and act out the role with that in mind and it gave me a very warm, pleasant feeling. All of the other roles I've done, I love as well, but when I was playing Eiko, I felt that there were many things that were in sync with myself. The feelings she had toward Squid Girl came out rather naturally, so much so that it actually surprised myself. So I hope that could be felt onscreen as well.

J!-ENT: If you are allowed to discuss it, can you tell us what current anime series you are working on that your fans in America can look forward to?

AYUMI: Well, there’s “Suisei no Gargantia”(Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet) where I play Striker, also “Rinne no Lagrange”(Lagrange: The Flower of Rin-ne) where I play an operator named Haruka. And then there's of course “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)” which is why I was called to this convention, and there is still the final episode left, so I hope everyone looks forward to that.

Do you have any special moments that you want to share with your fans?

AYUMI: Yesterday, I had the opportunity to have dinner with the fans. That was my first time having dinner with the fans, so I think that was definitely a memorable experience. I couldn't speak to them directly in English, so I'm a little worried if they actually enjoyed it or not, but I had a lot of fun.

J!-ENT: In 2006, your first major role was playing Karada Iokawa in the anime series “Asatte no Houkou”. This anime did come out in the US but I was wondering how was the experience as a voice actress of playing a major role?

AYUMI: The role of Iokawa Karada was my first major role, and it might be a little embarrassing to see it now because it was still when I was very new. But because I played the role at that time, I think that is what made the role what it is, and I think that's what's interesting about being an actor. Of course there is good and bad, but there are things that can only be brought up at that time, so if I were to play the role of Iokawa Karada right now, I don't think I'd be able to bring out the same charm I was able to bring out at that time. So I believe that it was a very important experience. I believe that was the first time I was truly able to delve into a role, and the first time I was able to go face to face with a role.

Outside of anime, you’ve had some roles outside of anime, like in “Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword.” Could you describe to me some of the differences that you felt playing a character that's a little more terse than what you would normally do as a main character?

AYUMI: Instead of speaking actual words, they were more like sounds, so it was a very interesting experience. So since there wasn't actual dialogue, I can't actually rely on expressing any meaning or feeling through dialogue. But I still have to convey feeling, so it was a hard role to play, but I felt it was very worthwhile.

You mentioned before that you grew up watching “Sailor Moon.” Who was your favorite sailor scout and why?

AYUMI: When I was younger, I liked the main character, Usagi-chan. Usagi-chan was a very cute, charming, and very likeable girl, but when I was younger, I liked main characters in general. No matter what the series was, I always seemed to pick the main character as my favorite. I think now Rei-chan might be my favorite. When I was younger, I really didn't like Rei-chan because she was always mean to Usagi-chan. But now, I think when she was being mean to Usagi-chan, it was out of love and that they did have a strong friendship. In reality, she was a very nice person, but she had a hard time expressing that, I guess now it'd be referred to as “tsundere” and is rather cute and I can understand that now as an adult. Also, her red costume is really cute and she's the only one wearing high heels, at least I think she was... But I think she looks really cool wearing high heels with no stockings.

J!-ENT: Earlier, you talked about going back and watching the original Gundam to understand Mineva Lao Zabi a little better. Did you watch any Gundam growing up, or was it something you discovered as an adult?

AYUMI: The first time I had seen any Gundam series was when I had learned that I would be playing Mineva. Up until then, I had thought that it was an anime that boys watched, so I didn't have much interest in it, to be honest. But it is a series filled with history so I thought I should study it and when I actually watched it. It was very interesting. I was blown away and thought that I should have probably watched it earlier. It was also great research in the terms of acting. It's a pretty old series, so the art isn't as nice as it might be now, and the lip syncing isn't completely accurate all the time, but the human drama was very well performed and the expressions were very detailed. The dialogue was filled with emotions as well. If I had seen it as a child, and I rewatched it as an adult, I believe that my opinion would have been quite different. It's a very in-depth show.

J!-ENT: Outside of voice acting, what other hobbies do you enjoy?

AYUMI: Do you know what Nico Nico Douga is? I love watching Nico Nico Douga and love to listen to Vocaloids on Nico Nico Douga. I have a cat, so I like to play with my cat as well.

For more information on “Mobile Suit Gundam UC (Unicorn)”, please click here.

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J!-ENT ON LOCATION @ SAKURA CON 2013:
Media Q&A with “PSYCHO-PASS” Executive Director Katsuyuki Motohiro, Director Naoyoshi Shiotani and Producer Joji Wada.

By Dennis A. Amith and Michelle Tymon

PHOTOGRAPHY /// MICHELLE TYMON
@ SAKURA CON 2013 AT THE WASHINGTON STATE CONVENTION CENTER
In Japan, Katsuyuki Motohiro is a respected director. From directing the popular "Odoru Daisousassen" drama and film series (known as "Bayside Shakedown" in Asia and the U.S.), "Udon", "Shaolin Girl" and "Space Travelers", Katsuyuki Motohiro was given a chance to work on an anime series. And in this case, become the executive producer for Production I.G's anime series. And in this case, become Motohiro was given a chance to work on Motohiro's series "PSYCHO-PASS".

Working with director Naoyoshi Shiotani ("Blood-C", "Tokyo Marble Chocolate") and producer Joji Wada ("Guilty Crown", "Kimi ni Todoke", "Robotics;Notes", "Sengoku Basara: Samurai Kings"), the three were invited as guests at Sakura Con 2013 to promote "PSYCHO-PASS".

The series which aired on Fuji TV's Noitamina from October 2012 through March 2013 is gearing for a second season as revealed by Production I.G President Mitsuhisa Ishikawa at Anime Expo 2013. "PSYCHO-PASS" is set in the future where an individual's mental state, personality and the probability of committing a crime can be measured via a "cymatic scan" of the brain, a technique known as Psycho-Pass.

If the individual's Psycho-Pass is deemed high as determined by the "Crime Coefficient" index, the individual will be pursued and apprehended by inspectors of the Public Safety Bureau's Criminal Investigation Division.

The series focuses on a young inspector named Akane Tsunemori, a new police officer who hunts criminals with a special team known as the Enforcers.

Utilizing their "Dominators", a special weapon designed to fire at criminals with an excessively high Crime Coefficient, the series focuses on Akane and the Enforcers going after the mastermind behind multiple crimes happening in the city.

The following Q&A transcript is from the PSYCHO-PASS press conference with Executive Director Katsuyuki Motohiro, Director Naoyoshi Shiotani and Producer Joji Wada.

Please note that because this is a transcript, the pacing of the questions from media are not consistent.

Since you started working in anime, how have you evolved and what would you say is your greatest lesson that you learned?

SHIOTANI: The first thing I thought about was how I could make that piece different from everything else. For example, while talking to the executive director Motohiro-san yesterday, instead of what would be popular, we like to make something we enjoy. That would be the priority. For example, using a very unique design, since the story takes place in the near future. And as for romantic situations, we didn't put a spotlight on that too much and let the audience think about that on their own. We wanted to make it a piece concentrating on strong male bonds/friendships and I think that the audience enjoyed that very much.

MOTOHIRO: My job for this project as the executive director, was to stand in between the director and the producer, so I left most of the creative side of the work to them. I also protected the director from the producer, to protect their creativity and to protect the script. I think this is what the position of executive director has evolved to.

SHIOTANI: He really did protect me quite a bit in all sorts of situations. For example, it's required in TV animation to play an ending song but in "PSYCHO-PASS", we used arrangements that fit with the story. For example, there were times where we had cut out parts of the song. Of course, the producers of the song would be concerned about this, because of one of the sponsors is Sony and it's sung by an artist from there. So there were many times that I would be called down to talk to the producer and I would ask Motohiro-san if he'd like to come along and he'd stand in between us.

MOTOHIRO: That was very specific.

(WADA: Maybe a little too specific, and they won't understand. (laughs))

This is primarily for Motohiro-san. You are known for your live action work, like "Bayside Shakedown", but how did that experience play into animation and what were some hurdles you faced transitioning to animation?

MOTOHIRO: When I'm directing live-action, there are many references and homages to animation and this is ended up helping create popular live action series. As a way of giving direction, I would have the actors act things out like they were in an anime from the past. So this time around, I was able to actually able to see the world of anime, since I don't really know much about it personally. So I was able to go in and work with everyone and get to know more about things I thought were rather mysterious to me. And as for my involvement working with people on the ground level, such as the animators, and the script writers, my primary job was to be their support.

I know that "Odoru Daisousassen" (Bayside Shakedown) ended with the final movie in 2012. But what are the chances of a spin-off series with the characters of Shunsaku Aoshima, Shiji Muroi, or Sumire Onda?

MOTOHIRO: Sadly, there are no plans for any spin-offs. The movie that was released last year was indeed the final of the whole series.

Akane’s appearance evolves from a sweet and innocent girl to almost haunted in the final episode without any physical change. Was it difficult to plan this into the character?

SHIOTANI: This definitely wasn’t decided as we were going along. From the beginning, one of the aspects of the story was how the heroine, Akane, would evolve and grow. She as the heroine comes in between the main character, Kouga Shinya, and his main rival, and enemy, Makishima Shogo. And up until that point where she goes in between them, they’re both veteran detectives, so to have her grow and mature enough that she could actually stand in between them was a big part of the story. That was intended from the start.

SHIOTANI: And another thing was Akane exists to be the audience's perspective into this show. So when Akane questions certain things or wonders about certain things, she is doing so from the audience’s point of view and the more the audience understands, the more Akane grew herself and eventually works herself...
into the standpoint of one of the main characters herself.

For students pursuing to become future directors, I’d like to ask Motohiro-san to give us a message.

MOTOHIRO: The reason I decided to become a director, simply put, is because I love doing it. So to do something that I love as a profession, there are many misfortunes, but as long as I keep it as my hobby, I can think about it happily. But as soon as I make it into a job, I have to consider the fact that many people are going to be viewing my work so I have to make it something that many people can view and laugh and cry when they see it. So for students, and this is how I pursued it myself, but I think of it as pursuing your dreams, I think will make you happier in the end. I have no regrets and I think I’d be content with dying at anytime.

Episode 16 was the true highlight of the series, but then in episode 17 and 18, there were animation issues. How do you feel about the transition between those episodes.

SHIOTANI: You have stumbled upon something that is rather hard to talk about. This is a bit difficult. The reason that episode 16 was such a success...

WADA: This really is sort of hard to talk about...

SHIOTANI: You must have watched very closely to point out that very sort of thing. I do agree that episode 16 was the best episode in the series and an episode that I am very proud of. But one thing that you should be aware of is that everyone involved in “PSYCHO-PASS”, was really pushing things to the very limit. And this is something we did at the limit of our abilities. Right before I started working on “PSYCHO-PASS”, I was working on the movie “Blood-C: The Last Dark”, literally right up to the point where I started working on “PSYCHO-PASS”. So just three months before starting on “PSYCHO-PASS”, I had been working on a the film, so I had to just jump right into the new series that was in full on production and there was not enough ramp up time there. So from there, I kept concentrating on how to make this series that would run for six months a great series. However, there was just one moment where I had run out of stamina, which was during episode 17 and 18. And a bunch of people ran out of stamina after pushing for episode 16. And I knew that might become apparent, so we had clear plans to work extra hard to make things great again from episode 19. However in the end, episode 17 and 18, we ended up having to leave much of it to luck and had to ask everyone to just do whatever they could.

WADA: Episode 17 and 18 is what is great about making a TV series.

MOTOHIRO: Are they going to get that?

SHIOTANI: It’s the “loose” part of the series.

WADA: Yes, the “loose” part.

SHIOTANI: If we want to go into some details, episode 17 and 18 were made outside of our team, and we had asked another company to help us out with those two episodes. There was probably the aspect of us not being able to support them very well. They might not have been able to use the same techniques we were using or may not have been able to express the near future world of “PSYCHO-PASS” very well since we were lacking in schedule time as well as being able to communicate things. So we were able to pick things back up from episode 19. Shiotani: But as for the retail product, we are completely remaking episode
17 and 18, so they’ll be completely different.

What do you like to do on your off time?
MOTOHIRO: I love to watch movies.
SHIOTANI: If I consider the time working on “PSYCHO-PASS”, I’d have to say that I didn’t really have any free time. So I would sleep for a little bit, wake up, and then continue working on “PSYCHO-PASS”… that’s how I spent a whole year. The one thing that I think slightly comforted me while working on “PSYCHO-PASS”, was to listen to the songs of the most popular idols in Japan right now and I would even go see them live even though it meant I would lose some sleep.
WADA: I think you can mention their name.
SHIOTANI: Momoiro Clover Z, who is popular among our workplace staff. And right at the time where I felt that I couldn’t go on anymore, Motohiro-san took me to meet Momoiro Clover Z.
MOTOHIRO: I had gotten platinum tickets.
WADA: Indeed, he is the executive director.
SHIOTANI: Thank you very much for that.

J!-ENT: Do you feel that “PSYCHO-PASS” is an anime series that can receive a live-action film or drama series adaptation?
MOTOHIRO: Of course!

SHIOTANI: He told me from the beginning: Please don’t make anything that we can’t make into live-action.
MOTOHIRO: Now that we have 22 episodes of the animation complete, and now that it’s being distributed in the US as well as the series being novelized, but I believe this is all material for my live films. (The three are laughing hard)

What actors would you consider for the live-action?
MOTOHIRO: There’s already quite a bit of buzz on the Internet on who should play who.
SHIOTANI: Do you look at all of that?
MOTOHIRO: Yes, I do. But right now, with the Japanese economy, I don’t think a live-action would be possible at this moment, unless Hollywood wanted to step in.

J!-ENT: Now that you’re here in America, are there any foods that you have wanted to try or any shops that you have been wanting to visit in Seattle?
MOTOHIRO: Right now, I feel… like I’d like to have some more seafood. Especially the crab where you have to actually smash it with a hammer. It was really good!
WADA: There is something the three of us are currently regretting. When we got the clam chowder, we all ordered a cup, but we should have gotten the bowl! (All three are laughing)

Is there any American media that influenced your work?
MOTOHIRO: One of my favorite directors is George Roy Hill, who directed such movies like “The World According to Garp” and “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.”
SHIOTANI: I have many, many influences, but for “PSYCHO-PASS”, one of the biggest influences was “Seven”. I like David Fincher a lot, so in the opening, there is some influence from “Fight Club” and “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”.

If you received more funding to produce more episodes of “PSYCHO-PASS”, would you create more episodes of “PSYCHO-PASS” and include a fan service episode, for example when they all go to the beach? Also, I heard that you wanted to lose “moe” so you purposely made the world of “PSYCHO-PASS” a rather dark world with very little cuteness.
SHIOTANI: In Japan, we call that the “Onsen Episode”. It pretty much happens because things get hard on production, so if we put in an episode where they go to the onsen, it’ll get high ratings and it’ll be easy to work on.
MOTOHIRO: Would we do it if we had money?
SHIOTANI: Those episodes are made because of the lack of funds.
MOTOHIRO: In a similar case for TV dramas, we take all of the cast and staff to an onsen and we wrap up all the shooting in one day. Since the actors take off their clothes, the ratings go up and the staff gets really excited as well because they get a short vacation. However, this was the first time I heard that it was done in anime as well.

MOTOHIRO: We did want to lose the moe and focus on a show where the guys could be passionate about something. But because the guys were so passionate and on fire, in turn, the female audience totally got into the show.

This is a question for Motohiro-san, but what is your next goal as a direc-
Where did your limits come from in limiting the violence in the show? Were they clearly defined going into production and how did that affect your execution of the series.

SHIOTANI: The story itself is quite violent and involves a lot of body horror, for example, like a person’s legs and arms being attached oppositely and a head being within a head, or there being a face on a stomach. So as to how to deal with that in the TV series, Gen Urobochi-san just let us deal with it. The reason any of that is in the series is not because we wanted to make a violent series, but we wanted to make an artistic series that just happened to have some violence included in it, and we wanted people to view it like they were looking at some piece of art. There were parts that were done off camera and if it needed to be seen, it was seen as well. And when it involves the main characters, we wanted to do it very beautifully and dramatically and make it very memorable. However there were two instances we were told by the TV station that we had gone overboard and so we had to fix those instances so they could be aired.

If you three had the chance to collaborate again in the future, would you like to and what genres and projects would you like to explore?

MOTOHIRO: Well right now, if we were going to do something again, “PSYCHO-PASS” is doing rather well and gaining quite a bit of popularity, so I would like to work on a continuation of the series.

SHIOTANI: I feel the same. That was the short answer. (laughs) The series is an original and it finally felt like what we had all worked very hard on had just taken shape and we had created something very big. And the way the story was written, it feels like we had only covered just a part of a story that has much more episodes that have yet to come to light. So it’d be great if we could pick up the series from any of those other episodes.

What type of personality does it take to do the jobs that you all do?

MOTOHIRO: As a director, I need to make sure that things aren’t too concentrated but not too loose, either. There are aspects that I personally concentrate on, but I know there are parts I can leave up to the rest of the staff and I think that is very important.

SHIOTANI: There are many different kinds of people so it’s hard to say, but I think having a very distinct on and off switch is very important. I think people who can become idiots are great. I think it’s best when people are super serious when they’re working, but when they’re not, they can totally turn that switch off and dumb themselves down, otherwise you sort of lose your mind. I think your body holds up better when you can separate the two, working seriously and having fun, and can think about it positively. If you become an idiot, those around you will do the same, and it’s easy to get along and then you can see what they are like on the inside and it’s something that can be applied to my work. So in the end, it’s actually a very serious approach.

WADA: The most important thing about being a producer, is to not give up. I had heard that many people wanted to create an anime with Motohiro-san and he has had a lot of offers, but I think we’re all here now because I was the only one who didn’t give up.

What sort of process do you go through to achieve the results that you want on a project?

WADA: The most important process or procedure is in the beginning, all of us: Motohiro-san, Shiotani-san, Uro-buchi-san, and Amano-san all decide on what exactly we want to work on together and to not forget that up until the very end.

SHIOTANI: I usually make sure I say, “Yes, I can.” to whenever I’m asked if I can do something, but then I go and panic about it when I’m by myself. I make sure to try not to decline anything. Accept everything… and then worry about the details later. (laughs) I think there are a lot of people who say they can’t do something because they’ve never done it before, but I think it’s more fun to do things that you’ve never done before. It’ll be super hard, and you might be killed, but it’s super fun to do.

MOTOHIRO: In Japan, there’s a saying, “Accept those who come to you, and do not chase pursue those who leave you”, so I accept all of those who come to me, and make sure I just say goodbye to those who leave me and see them off. I think this is important in many aspects. This means that many people with a lot of talent come to me, including Shiotani. And there are also a lot of people that things don’t work out with and they end up leaving. This way, I end up making great things with other people that can see eye-to-eye with me and I think this process has been very successful so far. I always make sure I have a beacon or antenna up, looking at and studying various things, I think that’s important as well. That would be my process.

What’s your criminal coefficient?

WADA: Yesterday, a fan of PSYCHO-PASS calculated this for me, and I was told it was 300. Apparently, there is an app. out that can calculate this.

SHIOTANI: While I was making “PSYCHO-PASS”, I would have to say it was too big to measure, judging what those said about me and how I looked making it. But right now, I’ve calmed down… but my dream is to be so calm that it can’t be measured, like Makishima. That is my goal. I want to become just a brain. (laughs)

MOTOHIRO: I’ve reached the enlightenment level. Once you reach the enlightenment level, your criminal coefficient becomes unreadable. So no matter when I’m measured, it will be low. I am always calm and never get angry… I make sure that they can never find out the coefficient.
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J!-ENT ON LOCATION @ SAKURA CON 2013:
Media Q&A with Toshihiro Kawamoto
(Co-Founder of anime studio BONES)

By Dennis A. Amith and Michelle Tymon

PHOTO /// PROVIDED BY SAKURA CON
PHOTOGRAPHY FROM Q&A /// MICHELLE TYMON
© SAKURA CON 2013 AT THE WASHINGTON STATE CONVENTION CENTER
Toshihiro Kawamoto is one of the anime legends that fans are always excited to see at an anime convention.

While in high school and after graduating, Kawamoto became interested in becoming an animator thanks to the “Macross” and “Mobile Suit Gundam” series. Inspired by Yoshikazu Yasuhiko’s character designs, after graduating at Tokyo Designer Gakuen College, he was offered a job to work on the 1986 animated film “Arion” supervised by Yoshinobu Inano and mentored by lead character designer Sachiko Kamimura.

During his earlier years, Kawamoto worked on some of the highly regarded classic titles such as “Mobile Suit Gundam ZZ”, “Metal Armor Dragoon”, “Mobile Suit Gundam: Char’s Counterattack” and “Venus Wars”.

Three years later, in 1989, Kawamoto was the animation director for “Mobile Suit Gundam 0080: War in the Pocket”, “Mobile Suit Gundam 0083: Stardust Memory”, “Mobile Suit Gundam F91”, “Mobile Suit Gundam 0083: Last blitz of Zeon” and “Super Dimension Century Orguss 02”.

While Kawamoto has a long list of anime that he has worked on in his oeuvre, for American fans, he is best known for his work on “Cowboy Bebop” as a character designer and animation director, “Wolf’s Rain”, “Golden Boy” and “Kurau: Phantom Memory” as an animation director.

Toshihiro Kawamoto is also known for his work with the animation studio, Studio BONES, that he co-founded with Sunrise staff members Masahiko Minami and Hiroshi Osaka in 1998.

And in the last five years, Studio BONES have worked on anime series such as “Darker than Black”, “Skull Man”, “Soul Eater”, “Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood”, “Tokyo Magnitude 8.0”, “Star Driver: Kagayaki no Takueto”, “Un-Go”, “Eureka Seven: Astral Ocean” and many more.

On April 6th, Toshihiro Kawamoto took part in a media Q&A at Sakura-Con 2013 in Seattle. The following is a transcript of the press conference with Toshihiro Kawamoto which J!-ENT took part in.

**TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO:** I can’t announce the two titles right now but there are two anime series being created by BONES. So, I really wanted to announce these two upcoming titles, but we have to put off the announcement for a little while, so I am unable to answer any questions about these two titles right now. But if you like to ask me questions about my experience as an animator or about BONES, I’ll be more than happy to talk about that. Thank you very much.

With your contribution to the Gundam universe and seeing the transition of the character designs, for example, “Mobile Suit Gundam” originally to “Mobile Suit G Gundam”, what are your thoughts about the transition of the character designs? Is there anything you want to add or improve on?

**TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO:** So, I worked on “Cowboy Bebop” in 1998, and after that, the producer at Sunrise, Masahiko Minami, who was the producer, decided he wanted to go independent and so he invited me along and that was the trigger for the creation of BONES. I think that Minami-san wanted to work on creating something new rather than previously existing work, so that’s why he left Sunrise and left to go independent.

**When you established BONES 12-years ago, were you confident in starting it up the animation studio?**

**TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO:** So, I joined BONES and joined my friend Minami-san and because I had the same thoughts as Minami-san, as far as what I wanted to create and becoming an independent animator, I wasn’t really thinking if it would be successful or not. I was just thinking about what I wanted to create and the things that I wanted to make. And I was very happy that many of the people that worked on “Cowboy Bebop” that were freelance animators, were able to move and join BONES as well. I was really happy about that! And so we were able to create “RahXephon” and the actual feeling of where we were working, didn’t really change that much from “Cowboy Bebop” because we had the same staff working on it.

My question is the reception of “Cowboy Bebop” in the West. And by many Western anime fans, “Cowboy Bebop” is one of the most well-regard anime. Were you surprised by the Western reception to “Cowboy Bebop” was?

**TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO:** When we made “Cowboy Bebop”, it was hard to get broadcast slots, so we didn’t know if it would become a hit or not. So faced with all these difficulties, we shortened it from a 26-episode series to a 13-episode series. But now, even ten years later, even outside of Japan, it’s almost a strange and surreal feeling. With regards to a sequel, you saw the last scene, so there are no plans at this time. I’m not part of the staff, but I heard there still may be a possibility of a live-action version. So, we may see a Hollywood version of “Cowboy Bebop” in the future.
Can you please elaborate more on the difficulty of the broadcast slots?

TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: When we were trying to find broadcast slots in Japan, we were facing challenges of some of the violence such as the “Bloody Eye” episode which had a lot of drug references and also the violence made it hard. Also at the same time, there was a real-life incident known as the Pokemon shock when a youth was wielding a knife, so we had to remove a knife digitally from a particular scene because of the social impact at that time. So, the bloody eye episode was episode #1, so we had to start broadcast episode #2 because of those kind of issues. But the episodes #1 and #5 were released in their original format, so I was glad to be able to take care of those.

Who were your inspirations as a child in becoming an animator?

TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: There are many! There are not so many people but their creations and the anime I was watching in high school that inspired me. So, for example the Gundam designs from Yasuhiro Yoshikazu and from Yoshiyuki Tomino, as well as from Hayao Miyazaki’s films. And Shoji Kawamori of “Macross” fame and “Urusei Yatsura’s” Mamoru Oshii. It was their work and watching their creations that I decided to join this industry.

Speaking of “Gundam”, for “Gundam 0083: Stardust Memory”, featured many different characters of different ethnicity, how important was that for you in being a director?

TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: “Stardust Memory” has a Hollywood movie feel to it, there was a request from the developer to include people of many different races. I think we became more aware of that over time, “0083” was made in the similar style of the first Gundam. I’m sorry, I’m not to familiar with the recent Gundam, so I don’t know what direction they are taking. But my memory of “Gundam 0083” is that we thought about the different characters that the actors were representing, and we based the character design on that. And “Cowboy Bebop” was like that as well, we thought about the characters first as well.

Studio BONES has done a lot of really awesome animations and there have been some that were original creations from BONES. How does BONES approach pre-existing titles vs. anime series that you created yourself?

TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: For projects such as “Fullmetal Alchemist”, it was a creator at BONES named Yoshiyuki Ito who thought it would be great to make an anime series, so he talked to the producer at BONES and then we talked to Square Enix who owns the
IP. And that’s how we created the anime for “Fullmetal Alchemist”. And that’s how it was decided that Yoshiyuki Ito would become the character designer and main animator for “Fullmetal Alchemist”. And of course, there are times when sponsors or the original creator of the work will sponsor the creation of an anime. So, a recent work that I worked on was “Towa no Quon” was also based on an original work by a creator who created that work.

How do they choose whether or not the next project is pre-existing work or original?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: It’s all up to the President. Whatever he says goes. However, we all do have input in the direction the company is going. So, we have the feeling that we do want to create our own works, and so that is a possibility. Although it can be difficult to do that some times. But I think there are possibility for original work from BONES.

Given that you worked with prolific titles such as “Gundam”, “City Hunter” and “Venus Wars”, was there any fears of you working on established series?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: No particular concerns. But there is a strong way of thought in the industry in terms of a business standpoint, it’s easier to be successful with known properties. So, there is a tendency to prefer sequels over original works if they are already known.

Given that, are there any series that you haven’t worked on yet that you wanted to work on?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: No particular concerns. But there is a strong way of thought in the industry in terms of a business standpoint, it’s easier to be successful with known properties. So, there is a tendency to prefer sequels over original works if they are already known. Sequels...hmm...that really is a difficult question. I think from a sales or business success standpoint, it would make sense to do a sequel for “Cowboy Bebop”. But that would violate the director policy to create that, so that would be a bit difficult. And instead of existing work, creating something new or original work that would have some long term popularity and become a long term series would be great for our company. So, there was a tendency in the past to create a series with 26-episodes, which we call two packs. The tendency now is for 13-episodes or one pack series. So, there is a difficult situation of creating a 13-episode series and make a decision of whether to create an additional 13-episodes, so it’s becoming more difficult.

You have been part of the growing industry of constant changing styles as each new generation of anime emerges. What do you think of animations and character designs today, compare to those from your beginnings, particularly against popular series such as “Madoka Magica”, “Sword Art Online” and “Guilty Crown”? TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: I think those series that you mentioned reflect to popular face styles and character design, so I think...
that face balance kind of reflects the current state of the industry. There will be a tendency where there will be a hit of a particular series with a particular art style and when that’s popular, a lot of similar series will be influenced by that art style and that style will be used and will spread. But even within those trends, there are an increasing number of original creations and new directions. So, I really think it’s up to our choice to choose the designs that we like and up to the fans as well to choose the designs they like. Our job is to create designs that are requested of us by the producers and directors.

How does all that change from older series such as the original “Gundam” and “Cowboy Bebop”?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: It’s hard to be specific, if you look at them side-by-side but you can tell. The biggest would be the change from creating individual cells to the digital creating process. One of the effects of digitization, previously when people were doing hand-drawn animation in cells, the width of the lines can vary. But now with digital, all the lines have to be the same width. There is sort of a trend to that, but that is one thing that has had an effect. So, while the screen is clearer, you can get a very clear image. You lose a little bit in terms of what the creator’s hand drawn works with the new digital process. The appeal of the hand drawn aspect has been lost to some extent.

Do you prefer the old style as opposed to more mainstream current works?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: Of course, I’m from the cell era. I think it’s something we need to
challenge and how we can take that same feeling that we created from cells and convey it to fans using the digital process. Other companies are working on this issue and I think there are various technologies that they are experimenting with. So, they can reproduce this original feeling of the original cells, but it takes extra effort to bring back what was originally there. I think another big change is that now it’s possible for individual animators to perform their own animation check digitally, so now a single animator can put something together and check how it flows very easily.

How much difference from your other works was it when you were working on “Golden Boy”?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: So, Tatsuya Egawa was the original creator and Hiroyuki Kitakubo was the director and so meeting their vision was something that I would strive to work hard in “Golden Boy”.

Do you have a favorite series that you worked on?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: I get that question a lot and it’s hard to say and choose what is #1. Of course, “Cowboy Bebop”. And I think “The Cockpit” that I did with Hiroyuki Kitakubo was an important because it led to “Ghost in the Shell” and “Cowboy Bebop”.

I know that Ed from “Cowboy Bebop” is one of the most interesting characters of that anime era and that you based your design on Yoko Kanno. Why her? And what sort of challenges did you face in matching her to the character personality of the story?
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: I’ll talk about how the character of Ed was created. So, the original plan in additional to the characters of Spike, Jet and Fay, there would be a little boy who was a hacker and a girl that would be laying around sleeping. So, there were five characters. As planning progressed, it was decided to combine the hacker boy character with the girl who was always sleeping on the sofa to a single character and that became Ed. And the idea was that the character would be like a cat lounging around all the time, but then the director said, “Like Yoko Kanno?”. I haven’t met her at the time, so I would have to imagine in my mind but I was told that she was the kind of person who would sleep in a meeting and a very honest and natural person. So, although I haven’t met her, I would imagine her character. I remember the amazing work that she did in “Escaflowne” and “Macross Plus” and it was really hard for me to fill in that gap between those amazing works and this character that I was being described. So, why did that become Ed? It’s very interesting. And then after the design was done, then I actually met Yoko Kanno. Visually, she was a regular, cute and attractive girl. But when I actually saw her fall asleep on the sofa, I thought “oh yeah, that was her”.

Final words from Kawamoto
TOSHIHIRO KAWAMOTO: Thank you all for coming today, I really appreciate it. Thank you for your interest and support in the anime industry and I look forward to your interest in our future works.

For more information on Studio BONES, please visit their official website.
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J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH & MICHELLE TYMON INTERVIEWS AKI TSUNAKI

J!-ENT: What was your favorite anime and manga growing up?
AKI: As a child, I liked “Kyojin no Hoshi” and “Ashita no Joe”. These are two titles that were very important to me to get into this industry.

J!-ENT: Was it your dream and passion to work in the anime industry or did you have another career in mind?
AKI: When I was in high school, I started thinking about wanting to get into this industry. One of the main reasons for that was because of my father. He had many interests such as sports like swimming and fishing and he also liked cameras and photography, especially 8mm cameras. At the time, 8mm cameras were pretty new, so my father would go buy the camera and take footage of their families. It was pretty unusual to get to see yourself moving on a screen at the time, so watching that was a lot of fun. I liked to play with my father’s camera and I thought it'd actually be fun to create my own films and so I filmed my own family using my own scripts and costumes. Then I would gather the children in the neighborhood and show them my films. What I liked to watch was their responses and just to see them react and enjoy it. That was really special to me and it was just playing around but I did spend all night working on the films just so I could show it to them the next day. All the troubles and all the editing I had to do was worth it just because of the audience’s reaction and that made me want to create something.

J!-ENT: A lot of anime fans are familiar with anime that you have been involved with such as “Eat-Man 98”, “Pokemon 2000-The Movie” and “Yu-Gi-Oh!”, of all the past anime series that you have worked on, would there have been a certain series that you have a special fondness for and would love to direct today?
SASAKI: Well, starting with something like “Initial D”, there are series that have an original story and I would like to work on something like that and I would like to work on things that have a lot of movement like sports anime. And if possible, if I could put together the presentation and everything, I would like to work on my own original story, something that I created. I think that would be an ultimate dream.

J!-ENT: “HARUKA: Beyond the Stream of Time” was released in the US and in Japan, you have worked on the film, a special and OAV episode of “Harukanaru Toki no Naka de”. What types of challenges did you have when adapting the storyline from what was once a manga series to a television series?
SASAKI: I really wanted to make it something that respected the original story so I wanted to make sure that we took special care in creating the setting for the series and that it didn’t destroy the flow of the original story as well as the art style. Aside from the story, the beauty and sensibility of the characters are really important to the fans of the series.

J!-ENT: “HARUKA”, there were a total of 26 episodes, did you feel that you would of liked the storyline to go much longer and there was a lot of underlying storylines that you wanted to feature?
SASAKI: I definitely felt that 26 episodes weren’t enough. The manga is still continuing for “HARUKA” and the ending hasn’t been drawn yet, but we had a deal for the anime series to be finished in 26 episodes. So, the first half of the series is based off the story from the manga but the rest of the story was based off of Akram being the main character and then the relationship of Akane and Akram to the very end and connecting those stories. But if I kept it at that, it would be a very dark and unhappy story, so we wanted to make a comical type story if time had allowed.
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: MICHELLE TYMON INTERVIEWS RYO HORIKAWA

J!-ENT: How did you get into voice acting?
RYO: Well, I started acting as a child. I got into voice acting with the anime, “Yume Senshi Wingman” and before I knew it, many years have passed with me doing this business. Overall, I think that when you’re playing a role, be it voice acting or playing someone on stage, I believe it’s the same thing. You’re breathing life into that role, be it through pictures or in person, or standing in front of a microphone or standing on stage.

J!-ENT: Are there any times in auditions that you went in for a certain role and instead got asked to play a different role?
RYO: Sometimes I get approached with roles that are very different from myself and I try to stay very open to that and lose any likes or dislikes I may initially feel and instead purely concentrate on what the character would feel or do. For example, if I was that character, what would I do in this situation or what would I feel in that situation, how would I move, etc. I try to take my first honest thoughts from the heart, so as a result I don’t really think about this role would be a bit hard for me or this role would be easy for me.

J!-ENT: Could you tell me how you got your debut role as Kenta Hirono in “Yume Senshi Wingman”? Were you offered the role or did you go audition? With the roles that followed your debut, did you get those mostly due to auditions or were you offered the roles?
RYO: That was genuinely and simply due to an audition. Of course there were many people there auditioning for the role so I didn’t think at all that I would get the role. But as an actor, I’ve done work on stage and TV so I thought I’d give this audition a shot as well. As I said, I didn’t think at all that I would even get the role, so I did the role naturally without too much thought. Before I knew it, I was in the final auditions and I was told “you’re the one” and I was like, “Really?” That was the start of my voice acting career. Towards the beginning, because I wasn’t that well known yet most of my roles were due to auditions. Once my career advanced more, I was offered some roles as well.

J!-ENT: Do you have any secret talents?
RYO: (Laughing) It’s not exactly hidden but I guess we can make it a secret. It may not be a talent but one of my favorite things to do is wine tasting. It’s not just drinking wine, but the communication that takes place with say friends or a girlfriend... family, etc. I enjoy being able to enjoy communication with another. So I go by myself, I go with friends... and also I do like to drink. When everyone around me is happy and having a good time while eating and drinking, I feel happy as well. That is also the energy I try to bring to work as well, when everyone around me is having a good time, I’m having a good time. Outside of work, I also enjoy jogging and walking. I like to walk around and of course it’s good for your health. I do quite a bit of walking every day.
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH INTERVIEWS JOHN SIRABELLA, SOFTWARE SCULPTORS

J!-ENT: How and why did you create Software Sculptors?
JOHN: Software Sculptors was originally a group of computer consultants. In 1992, Software Sculptors was formed and consisted of Henry Lai, Sam Leibowitz and myself.

J!-ENT: How did you get interested in Japanese animation?
JOHN: One day we were at a Star Trek convention and I saw something that caught my eye. It was called “Outlanders” and I fell in love with anime then.

J!-ENT: Do you think it would be a big risk of starting a company based on anime? Do you think that animation will hit a major drought in sales and popularity similar to what happened in the 1980’s?
JOHN: No, it has a good shot going mainstream. It is getting more popular. More anime dedicated stores are popping up. Even in my area (New York). Also, with Sailor Moon coming out on Fox, I get a feeling that anime will continue to be popular.

J!-ENT: Where do you get your information on anime and in pursuing the licenses?
JOHN: From “Animerica”, “Protoculture Addicts”, “Anime U.K.” and also the Japanese animation magazines such as “Newtype” and a few others. We look in the magazines and look at what is popular in Japan.

J!-ENT: What is the most difficult part for Software Sculptors?
JOHN: Getting the licensing is very difficult.

J!-ENT: What is the average budget of producing an anime screensaver and how long, if I may ask?
JOHN: No problem. It costs around $60,000. It takes around 6 months to a year to make a screensaver. That is including getting the licenses and everything involved.

J!-ENT: We received questions from our BBS visitors of why the sound for the screensavers is in mono and not in stereo?
JOHN: The reason why they are in mono is that some were made in mono. Also, to let those who don’t know this, the music taken from a movie or an OAV must be licensed and if it was taken from television there is no license. So, when you get a license to a certain anime, you get the license for the animation and the music. Licensing is trick and it is a slow process but you learn to be patient.

J!-ENT: What is in store for the otaku’s in the future from Software Sculptors?
JOHN: We are looking into doing anime video games on the PC.

J!-ENT: Like Megatech?
JOHN: Yes and better. Also, we plan to get the licenses of certain anime.

(Note: Four years after this interview, John Sirabella and Sam Leibowitz went on to create the company, Media Blasters)
J!-ENT: Let’s talk about your film “Stranger~Mukoh Hadan” (Sword of the Stranger). In Japan, you have worked on a good number of films and television. What types of challenges did you encounter in the making of this animated film?

MASAHIRO: This was my first time as director in general so directing this movie, “Stranger”, was a very big challenge, and trying to figure out how to extract the jidaigeki (note: jidaigeki means “period piece”) style successfully to an animated film. Also pretty much everything involved with constructing this film: the directing style, the animation, the backgrounds, etc. was difficult.

J!-ENT: Was there an underlying theme or message that you wanted to convey to the viewers of “Sword of the Stranger”?

MASAHIRO: Within the genre of “jidaigeki”, the life and death of people is the core of the story. Greed is some thing that doesn’t ever change in any age. I wanted to write a story dealing with people who are driven by their greed to fight and the emptiness they feel. And in the center of that, I wanted to write about a man who was only able to establish his existence by fighting and his redemption and the rebirth of his soul.

J!-ENT: What was your favorite anime and manga growing up?

MASAHIRO: When I was a child, I really liked the sci-fi manga called “Babel Nisei” (Babel the 2nd) by Yokoyama Mitsuteru. The theme in the manga, the loneliness of one with telekinetic powers was written in a way that kids could understand. As for anime, I liked the pro-wrestling manga called “Tiger Mask”. In the story, Tiger Mask wants to save the orphanage that he grew up in so he uses the prize money he wins for that purpose and becomes a traitor who has to fight assassin wrestlers. Now that I think about it, there is a similarity in the relationship between Nanashi and Kotaro and the relationship between Tiger Mask (who starts out as a villain wrestler) and the boy from the orphanage.

J!-ENT: A lot of anime fans are familiar with anime that you have been involved with such as “Cowboy Bebop: The Movie”, “Fullmetal Alchemist”, “Ghost and the Shell” and “RahXephon”. Of all the past anime series that you have worked on, is there a certain series that you have a special fondness for and would love to direct today?

MASAHIRO: I don’t think I’ve thought that about any existing series but I really liked how “Fullmetal Alchemist” balances out the heavy story with the light characters, and in my mind it is a very ideal film as a TV anime.

J!-ENT: I read somewhere that you began key animation work at the age of 18. That is amazing! When you were younger, what kind of hobbies did you have or what kind of work did you do to get prepared in a career in the anime industry?

MASAHIRO: I had no intention of going to professional school, so I studied basic sketching a bit on my own. Because I was going into work in animation, I tried to absorb as much as I could outside of that genre.
J!-ENT ON LOCATION @ SAKURA CON 2013:
Media Q&A with Reki Kawahara (Creator of “Sword Art Online” and “Accel World”)

By Dennis A. Amith and Michelle Tymon

PHOTO PROVIDED BY SAKURA-CON
eki Kawahara has quickly became one of the most popular figures in the anime industry thanks to his light novel and manga work for the hit series “Accel World” and “Sword Art Online”. With both titles receiving anime adaptations, both series have quickly become a big hit in the United States, especially “Sword Art Online” (SAO) because of its MMORPG storyline.

Reki’s light novels are so popular that accumulative sales for his books have exceeded one million copies worldwide.

Reki attended his first anime convention in North America at Sakura-con in Seattle.

The following is a transcript of the press conference with Reki Kawahara which J!-ENT took part in.

Sakura-Con will be your first convention appearance in America. Is there some type of American food you always wanted to try or something you have wanted to experience but haven’t had a chance to?

REKI: This morning at breakfast at the hotel, I had a real oatmeal for the first time and it was delicious. I would like to try a real American-size T-Bone steak.

If “Sword Art Online” was to be turned into a real MMO, would you play it?

REKI: As long as I don’t die when my HP becomes zero, then yes.

In a recent interview, you said that having characters stuck in a MMORPG was the easy part, but finding the mechanism was the difficult part and you admitted that the Nerve Gear system had its faults, thus creating plot holes. So, my question if you had time to go back and add or fix the little things that had faults what would you do with anything or would you create an additional version that had additional sections?

REKI: One of the things I heard was wouldn’t it be possible to instantaneously destroy the Nerve Gear that the players are using to make it inactive in time before it would kill the player. And so, to solve that problem, one of the ideas was to have Kayaba announce should anybody attempt this or succeed, another player will randomly pay for that action.

Asuna’s sort of a tricky character: she starts off as an incredibly strong fighter, important to the political system of SAO, but in the Alfheim arc, she’s assaulted and replaced with women half of her ability in depth. What would you say to the critics who find her role problematic, especially given often misogynistic climate of anime and gaming?

REKI: When I created Asuna, she was a little too perfect and when she was together with Kirito, there really wasn’t anything they couldn’t solve together. She became a little too powerful, so in the next arc, I needed to put her in a position where she was unable to help Kirito and because of that, I do have some regrets about putting her in that situation in order to build up the sense danger in Kirito’s adventure in the second story arc. Because of that regret, I wrote an arc called “Mother’s Rosario”… and if there was to be more of the anime made, I would like that arc to be animated.

How much of Kirito’s character and personality is based off of your own personality or characters you have played in other MMO’s?

REKI: I don’t really ever project myself into my characters, but as for a similarity between Kirito and I, we are both terrible at creating parties and prefer playing solo.

There is evidence that shows some kind of connection the “Accel World” light novels and “Sword Art Online”. Were these similarities intentional?

REKI: Well first, I’ll explain the picture in episode 22. The person who drew that illustration was the person who did the mechanic designs in “Accel World”, Yousuke Kabashima. And because he drew it, he decided to be a little playful, and that’s why Kirito and Leafa’s swords looked similar to those in Accel World. And the connection between the two stories, the two stories are separate, despite their being some similarities. I haven’t officially said that the two stories were on the same world, just at different times, but if I can figure out some of the problems, I may be able to write a new series officially linking the two.

Between 2002 when you submitted your submission for Dengeki Game Shosetsu Taishou, and between your actual publication in 2008, what were you doing?

REKI: I continued publishing SAO on my homepage during that time and eventually that was picked up for publication, after being re-edited and reworked and was eventually released in 2008. And in the novel series, I still have a lot I have to cover from what I originally wrote.

Explain to me the process of how your work got turned into multi-platform media property – the series, manga. How did it all start?
REKI: If I had originally intended my work to be made into anime versions, I probably would have made the main character from “Accel World”, Haruyuki, a lot cooler looking. At first I really was just concentrating on becoming an author, so I hadn’t even considered my work being turned into various multimedia versions. So when my editor told me that there was going to be an anime version, I was extremely surprised and very happy.

The “Sword Art Online” is not available in English, how does Reki feels about people translating his light novels and publishing his work online? REKI: I am very happy to hear that fans overseas are that eager to read my novels, to the point that translations are made. When I asked my editor if there were plans on an English version of my work that was going to be released, and I was told that as soon as we could get an offer from a publisher, it could happen at any time.

Yesterday you touched upon the fact that there really wasn’t that much cut out from the anime compared to the light novels, but there were a few things like the Underworld arc (and a few other examples mentioned). Do you feel if there was anything missed? REKI: Well that came about because it wasn’t originally included on the series on my webpage, but I put it in the novelization because I didn’t have enough material. So if it were to be in the anime version, it would feel rather tacked on, so it was decided to be taken out.

So obviously “Sword Art Online” delves heavily into MMO’s, so what’s your experience with MMO’s and which one is your favorite game in general? REKI: The one I have played the most is “World of Warcraft” and more recently, I started playing “Diablo 3.” I really love Blizzard games, but lately, there haven’t been Japanese versions of their games, so I’m very saddened by this.

We heard that you felt very fortunate meeting with your editor, Miki Kazuma-san, is there anything you couldn’t agree on at certain times? REKI: Miki-san never gets angry with the writer, but if we disagree on something, he never backs down either. So whenever we don’t agree on something, our discussions tend to get very long.

You left Kayaba out of the “Gun Gale Online” arc, but if you were to redo the arc, would you have given him more importance? REKI: If Kayaba kept ending up as the mastermind in each arc, a pattern would form and it would become redundant.

How are you able to craft such a believable virtual game in your stories? In many other shows, such efforts are more unrealistic. REKI: I was able to make the virtual world of “Sword Art Online” watching and reading various American movies and books that deal with virtual worlds and incorporating factors from that into my own work. One of the titles I really enjoyed was “Realtime Interrupt” by James P. Hogan, and I got a lot of ideas from there.

In “Accel World”, Black Lotus’s name is never revealed. Was there a reason why it was never revealed and are there plans in the future to reveal that? REKI: When I originally wrote “Accel World”, there was no plans on writing a continuation. So when volume two came out, I felt like I lost the opportune moment to reveal her name. I do have plans to reveal her name in the very last volume.

You are currently very busy with two very successful titles, “Accel World” and “Sword Art Online”, but what do you like to do when you’re not busy working? REKI: Other than online games, I love riding bicycles and recently bought a Trek road bike. And recently, I was very saddened by the fact that Lance Armstrong was revoked of all of his records.

In an interview, you stated that you tend to use strategy guides for RPGs. If you were to create one for “Sword Art Online”, what would you include and what kind of advice would you give other than to not die? REKI: Other than “don’t die”, I’d have to say don’t leave the city.

What influenced the difference of the main characters of “Accel World” and “Sword Art Online”? REKI: I actually thought up Kirito first, who’s a character who’s very close to being perfect, and then thought up Haruyuki later. Kirito may seem perfect, but on the inside, he can be rather weak at times. Haruyuki may look a little flawed on the outside, but is extremely strong on the inside. So I had never really thought about which one may be more superior overall.

When was it that you decided to become a novelist and that
REKI: Even from childhood, I had always wanted a job where I could create stories. Originally, I wanted to be a game scenario writer, but I was unable to attain that dream. So because of that, before I knew it, I had wanted to become a novelist. I didn’t know how to become a game scenario writer. When I was a student, I found out that to become a game scenario writer, I’d have to get a job at a gaming company and that was a pretty high hurdle that I couldn’t get over, so I changed my goal when I was in my twenties.

What were difficult story arcs you had to write for "Accel World" and "Sword Art Online"?

REKI: In "Accel World", the setting was time would be a thousand times faster in the virtual world in comparison to the real world. So as I was writing that, if ten hours had passed in the game world, I’d have to figure out exactly how much time had passed in the real world, and that became rather difficult. It was then that I wondered why there are sixty seconds in a minute rather than a hundred.

Looking at the sales figures for various media for the two titles, “Accel World” and “Sword Art Online”, there is a distinct difference in which “Sword Art Online” is selling much better than “Accel World”. Why do you think there’s such a discrepancy between the two titles when it comes to sales numbers? A theory is that “Sword Art Online” is more girl friendly because they like Kirito.

REKI: It’s true that in the terms of fanbase, “Sword Art Online” has a lot more female fans as well as younger fans, so I believe that the difference in numbers is coming from that. But personally, I had always written “Accel World” with a younger audience in mind, so in a way, I do find the difference in numbers a little unfortunate. But the job of worrying about numbers really falls on the editors and anime companies like Aniplex, so I try not to think about the numbers too much.

What did you expect coming into Sakura-Con, and now that you’re here, what do you think? What are some of the good things and some of the bad things?

REKI: I was able to meet many more Kirito’s than I had ever imagined, so I was very happy. And the venue itself is a lot bigger than I had imagined and the anime fans seem to be having so much fun and I think that’s great. In Japan, if they had such an event like this in the middle of the city, I highly doubt that many fans would show up.

When you were creating the Alicization Arc and lengthening the foundations like time is set up by thousand and will power was the key to everything, was that foundation carried over from “Accel World” used in “Sword Art Online”? You said there was no directed connection to “Accel World” and “SAO” but the technology used in the “Alicization Arc”, was that used as a foundation?

REKI: It’s true that the technology used in the Alicization Arc could be or is the foundation of the technology being used in “Accel World”, there are some similarities but nothing has been made clear that they are indeed the same world. If I were to say for sure that the two worlds were the same, the list of things I have to resolve would be multiplied quite a bit and I don’t think I’d be able to resolve everything successfully. Recently, there was a movie released called “The Avengers”, and I highly respect the staff behind that movie because they were able to successfully take so many different properties and combine them into one movie.

The changes in the Alicization Arc where it focuses on will power than skill, was that to bring Kirito to a more manageable level?

REKI: That may have been the original intention, but after this arc, it puts Kirito at an even more godlike state.

In Alicization Turning, Kayaba has been personified as a NPC/AI, from an all powerful program to a program that is unable to undo its usual function, what was your intention?

REKI: In the original “Sword Art Online” story arc, the story was about Kirito vs. Kayaba. But at the same time, it was a battle against the system itself. So in order for Kirito to combat the system, it became necessary in the Alicization story arc when he was going up against the system and having it being all powerful without a personality, became rather difficult. So in order to create the story battling the system, it became necessary for me to give it a personality and make it something that Kirito can face.

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For more information on Reki Kawahara, please visit his official website:

http://wordgear.x0.com/
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The Otaku Generation club began in 1993 when Robert Henderson and Ben Folk noticed a guy named Francis Fung showing anime at conventions. They approached him and asked him if he wanted to start a club in the Fresno area. They knew that Francis has a long LD collection. So, in 1993 the Otaku Generation was formed. Then a staff was enlisted which was Sam Clegg, Keith Kissel and Thomas Pearson. The club was founded with an idea to be democratic, provocative and no dictatorship. Their staff meetings are basically “What should we show?” and the staff agrees or disagrees. The club started out very small but eventually grew with each meeting and anime screening.

J!-Ent: what is your first anime you watched, favorite anime, manga and character designer?

Francis Fung: “Akira” at the San Diego Comic Con in 1989 was my first anime. It was outstanding. My favorite anime is “Wings of Honnemaise“. My favorite character designer is Mikimoto, Yuki Nobuteru and Kenichi Sonoda.

Keith Kissel: My first anime that I watched was “Jungle Emperor-Kimba the White Lion” and my favorite manga is “Ghost in the Shell”. My favorite anime is “Bubblegum Crisis” and my favorite character designer is Kenichi Sonoda and Yoshitako Amano.

Sam Clegg: My first anime that I watched was “Marine Boy”. My favorite anime and manga is “Nausicaa” and my favorite character designer is Yoshitako Amano.

How do describe your anime staff meetings?

Francis: Loose. No agenda, just talk. We have suggestions on what to show and we vote on it. That’s basically it. No politics in this club.

What changes do you see in anime in the future? Do you think people will lose interest in anime like it did in the early 1980’s?

Francis: Anime will be going through computer animation and anime will probably lose interest due to over saturation. and that when that happen...their will be underground anime clubs.

What advice do you give to those who want to start an anime club?

Francis: Start talking to fans. Know what they would like to see. Have something to show people with. Before we had this projector, we used a 19 inch television, VCR and boom box. Then, is the location. You have to find a room that is affordable. Then to make sure that your club is NON-PROFIT and the last and also very important is to prevent any one individual to have to much power. All staff members must have a chemistry with each other. No ego’s!!

Give us the top 5 anime that otaku’s should watch (in no particular order).

1. Angel’s Egg”  2. Touch!  3. Mobile Suit Gundam (Keith: This anime deserves to be exposed in the U.S.)
4. Omohide no Poro (Only Yesterday)  5. Night on Galactic Railroad
Revisiting the

J!-ENT ARCHIVES

A Glimpse From Our Past J!-Ent Anime-Related Interviews

1995

J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH INTERVIEWS
CENTRAL ANIME KANSAS

The following interview was done with Todd Perkins, a co-founder/fan subtitler and Hiroaki Fukuda, translator for the Central Anime club based in Wichita, Kansas. The club was formed back in 1993 by Chris Howard in Topeka. When Chris began posting fliers in Wichita, Todd Perkins joined him and Central Anime was formed.

How did you become an anime fan?
TODD: Well, the first anime I saw was “Star Blazers” when I was eleven years old. Then I didn’t see anime for seven or so years. In Alaska, you don’t get the mainstream stuff. I went to college and saw “Star Blazers” again and another four year dry spell took place. The Air Force took me to California where I met another officer in my line of work and he introduced me to “MEGAZONE 23,” “MACROSS: LOVE, DO YOU REMEMBER?” in English and “CRYING FREEMAN”. After that I started looking aggressively for anime. Then I met George Greene in Merced (Founder of Club Anime in Merced) and started to go to San Francisco to Laser Perceptions and any convention that was held. I started using my plastic and bought my first series which was “Kimagure Orange Road”.

HIROAKI: Truthfully, I didn’t watch much anime in Japan until I came here. Now I love it.

In your opinion, will anime hit another dry spell like in the early eighties?
TODD: Not a dry spell, a spell of too many people with too many opinions. I like anime because it doesn’t treat you like an idiot like Carl Macek, the anime anti-christ does.

HIROAKI: No. In Japan, there is so much anime coming out and it is very popular. Here in the United States...I think it will become popular with may companies starting and good anime coming out here.

What anime do you recommend anime fans to watch (in no particular order)?

Hiroaki, is translating anime from Japanese to English difficult for you?
HIROAKI: It’s not hard but time consuming. Also, we try to get things perfect but you have people who are never satisfied with translations. I try my best. For instance, “Patlabor Movie 2”, that took a long time. That has plenty of dialogue. For a 30-minute episode, it usually takes me 4 hours to translate because you have to make sure their are no mistakes.

What advice do you give to beginners who want to start an anime club?
TODD: Do it for fun. If you don’t enjoy putting many hours and seeing the same show 20 or more times, then go for it. If you can stand it, go out and stay away from the fan politics and the pirates.

Hiroaki, what anime are you translating right now?
HIROAKI: An anime called “Graduation”.

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On October 11, 1997, The Asunaro Club had it’s “Fall Minna Atsumare Party” at J!-ENT HQ. For those wondering if the name of club was inspired by the Japanese drama “Asunaro Hakusho”, the answer is “yes”. The goal was to do something different from the standard anime club but to be more social and bring together those who are interested in Japanese culture.

So, at Asunaro Club meetings, we tend to show a mix of programming from Japanese dramas (often English subtitled for viewers who don't understand Japanese), Japanese music and variety shows which are typically easy to follow and if anyone had questions, a lot of Japanese students attend our parties, to explain to people what the show is about.

But we had a lot of fun and the party took a while to plan. With Chef Mahito and others preparing meals, it was an okonomiyaki, takoyaki and yakisoba food party with a lot of snacks and nearly exhausted the food. It was a little expensive but the nice thing is everyone helped chip in about $5 to cover expenses. But it was great to see everyone and for the most part, everyone have a lot of fun!

After a long night, we ended the party watching the CLAMP movie “X” and singing karaoke. We all had a fun time!
**J!-ENT EXCERPTS: MICHELLE TYMON & IAN FERGUSON INTERVIEWS KAPPEI YAMAGUCHI**

**J!-ENT: Is this your first time to Seattle and if so, is there anything specifically that you’d like to do or anything that interests you about Seattle?**

**KAPPEI: I’m definitely going to talk now. (Laughing) This is my first time in Seattle and it has always been a city I wanted to visit. Because of Ichiro, Seattle has become quite famous and is getting a lot of attention in Japan. But for me, of course I like Ichiro as well, but for me there is something else that I was more excited about coming to Seattle. I really love Jimi Hendrix and I always wanted to come to Seattle at least once in my life. It’s also a very beautiful city, the environment is great and it’s right by the water so I would love to live here, actually. Earlier today, I was able to go to Jimi Hendrix’s grave and I got to go to the museum so I had a lot of fun. It was a very exciting event for me. Also apparently tonight they are taking me to the oyster bar so I’m excited about that too because the food here is so great.**

**J!-ENT: Out of your extensive list of roles, if you could pick three of your all-time favorite roles, which would they be?**

**KAPPEI: Let’s see... it’s hard to pick only three. I really have a love for all of the characters I have played. So speaking more in the term of this is the role that I started my career as a voice actor, and the reason I’m here today, I’d have to say my debut role as Saotome Ranma from “Ranma ½”. Also currently the role I am working hard on and putting my heart into is Usopp from “One Piece”. I believe that this role is very important as well. And lastly, right now I am personally very interested in the education of young children so I want to do something for them. So I have been working on a Japanese show called “Okaasan to Issho” (With Mother). The character I voice on that show is very dear to me and is something I consider as my life’s work.**

**J!-ENT: You’ve done many shows with Hidaka Noriko, who’s also a very famous seiyuu and I was wondering if you two were good friends outside of work and also if there were any other seiyuu you were friends with.**

**KAPPEI: We are indeed very close. Actually, she’s been taking care of me ever since I’ve debuted so she’s like a mentor to me. She also knows a lot of the initial mistakes I made when I first debuted as well as a lot of embarrassing things that happened to me, so in a way I’m always a little weak in front of her. She’s very much like an older sister to me. I have a lot of other seiyuu that I’m close to. If I was to list them, there are so many that there wouldn’t be an end. However all of us are so busy all the time so we don’t really get to hang out and that makes me a little sad. But out of those people, two of my closest friends are Seki Tomokazu and Takagi Wataru, who I have formed a stage troupe with. We are able to talk about anything and they are very close to me.**

**J!-ENT: You’ve done a lot of characters but have you ever heard the American dub of your character and if so, how did you feel hearing and seeing them?**

**KAPPEI: Yes, I have. I’ve seen the American versions, the Italian versions, and various other versions of various roles and it’s a very strange feeling. But I think in each different version, they capture special characteristics and when I think about how people in those countries are enjoying those creations, it makes me happy. So in the opposite scenario where I am playing Bugs Bunny from “Looney Tunes” and Kyle from “South Park”, if the creators of those characters heard my versions of those characters I feel that they would feel the same way.**
Kotono Mitsuishi is a name known by most anime fans and at this year's Sakura-Con, attendees had the chance to meet the anime icon. A talented voice actress with a very wide range, a few of her notable roles include Usagi Tsukino/Sailor Moon from “Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon”, Misato Katsuragi from “Neon Genesis Evangelion”, and Excel from “Excel Saga”.

Kotono Mitsuishi was born in Tokyo in 1967. After she graduated high school, she entered the Katsuta Voice Actor’s Academy. In 1988, she debuted as a seiyuu as Tomoyo in “Ace wo Nerae! 2”. A few year later, her popularity will skyrocket because of a certain role in a show about super hero sailor scouts. Mitsuishi-san’s most famous role would probably have to be Usagi Tsukino/Sailor Moon from the “Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon” series. That role propelled her into stardom. The role of Usagi/Sailor Moon called for her to be silly as well as serious (mostly silly). Usagi was usually very ditzy, happy and silly which would also carry over when she turned into Sailor Moon, however there are some very serious and dark moments in where Sailor Moon would show her serious side and Mitsuishi-san pulled this off flawlessly.

The next notable role she played was Misato Katsuragi from “Neon Genesis Evangelion”. Though Misato does have a silly side to her, it was very much a contrast from Usagi’s character. With this role, Mitsuishi-san was able to show off her range even more since this character was much older, and there was many more serious scenes in this series than in “Sailor Moon”.

Since then, she has an impressive resume of roles including Mink from “Dragon Half”, Kagura Sohma from “Fruits Basket”, Murrue Ramias from “Gundam SEED/Gundam SEED Destiny”, Mireille Bouquet from “Noir”, Ebichu from “Oruchuban Ebichu” and most recently Boa Hancock from “One Piece”. Another role that stands out when you hear Mitsuishi-san’s name is the role of Excel from “Excel Saga”. Playing that role, Mitsuishi-san would have ridiculously long lines that she would have to say really fast and at the end of every episode for the preview of the next episode, she would have to speak even faster as if she was saying a tongue twister. The role is so hard that the first American voice actress to voice Excel had to step down because of the strain it put on her voice. With such a range of characters from super cute to serious, it’s not wonder that she has so many fans all over the world.

At this year’s Sakura-Con, her schedule of events included two Q&A sessions, two autograph signings, a live performance with Team Dreamcatchers, and an appearance at the Charity Auction. Fans lined up to go to each of her events and were eager at the chance of meeting her. At both of her autograph signings, the lines were very long but she stayed and signed everyone’s items were signed even though it meant she had to stay a little after the allotted time.

At her Q&A sessions, she answered various questions from fans and at the end of the sessions, she held an anime quiz and gave prizes to the winners. All of the prizes were items she personally brought from Japan. At her autograph signings, she was very kind to every fan in line both times and thanked everyone individually. At the second signing, despite going over the allotted time, she stayed until everyone got their autograph. Also at her signings, she had a container out to collect donations to help with relief efforts for those affected by the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. At her Q&As she answered various questions that people had about her roles and even acted out Boa Hancock’s voice live. At the Team Dreamcatchers’ performance, she performed the song “Moonlight Densetsu” with Team Dreamcatchers and did some live voice acting to show how voice acting is done in Japan.

With such talent and kindness, fans were definitely very grateful that Mitsuishi-san came to the convention and we’re all looking forward to her future endeavors.
**ANIME: TOP 10 BEST SELLING DVD’S IN JAPAN**

Source: ORICON ANIME DVD RANKINGS (OCTOBER 7, 2013)

1. うたの☆プリンスさまっ♪ マジLOVE2000% 4 (Uta no☆Prince sama MajiLOVE 2000% v4)
2. 怪盗グルーの月泥棒 (12. 04)  (Kaitou Guru no tsuki dorououbou)
3. 君のいる町① (Kim no Iru Machi Vol. 1)
4. トムとジェリー とどーっと32話  てんこもりパック Vol. 1 (Tom and Jerry Dodon to 32 Tenkomori Pack)
5. 進撃の巨人3 (Shingeki no Kyojin Vol. 3)
6. ジョジョの奇妙な冒険 V ol. 9  DVD＜初回生産限定版＞ (JoJo no Kimyou na Bouken Vol. 9)
7. とある科学の超電磁砲S 第3巻 ＜初回生産限定版＞  (Toaru kagaku no Rail Gun S Vol. 3)
8. マギ 10 (完全生産限定版) (Magi vol. 10)
10. ドラゴンボールZ 神と神 (Dragon Ball Z Kami to Kami)

**MANGA: TOP 10 BEST SELLERS IN THE U.S.A.**

Source: THE NEW YORK TIMES: OCTOBER 6, 2013

1. Sailor Moon Short Stories, Vol. 1 (Naoko Takeuchi, Kodansha Comics)
2. Attack on Titan, Vol. 1 (Hajime Isayama, Kodansha Comics)
3. Attack on Titan, Vol. 6 (Hajime Isayama, Kodansha Comics)
5. ONE PIECE, Vol. 68 (Eiichiro Oda, Viz Media)
7. Attack on Titan, Vol. 2 (Hajime Isayama, Kodansha Comics)
8. Naruto Vol. 62 (Masashi Kishimoto, Viz Media)
9. Attack on Titan Vol. 3 (Hajime Isayama, Kodansha Comics)
10. Naruto Vol. 61 (Masashi Kishimoto, Viz Media)

**MANGA: TOP 10 BEST SELLERS IN JAPAN**

Source: ORICON MANGA RANKINGS (OCTOBER 7, 2013)

1. 三月のライオン 9 / 羽海野チカ (Sangetsu no Lion Vol. 9, Chica Umino)
2. マギ 18 / 大高忍 (Magi Vol. 18, Shinobu Ohtaka)
3. スキップ・ビート！ 33 / 仲村佳樹 (Skip Beat! Vol. 33, Yoshiki Nakamura)
4. オオカミ少女と黒王子 7 / 八田鮎子 (Ookami shoujo to Kuro Ouji vol. 7, Ayuko Hatta)
5. ぱらかもん 8 / ヨシノサツキ (Barakamon Vol. 8, Satsuki Yoshino)
6. 私がモテないのはどう考えてもお前らが悪い！ 5 / 谷川ニコ (Watashi ga Motenai no wa Dou Kangaete Omaera mo ga Warui! Vol. 5, Nico Tanegawa)
7. 三月のライオン 9 おでかけニャーしょうぎ付限定版 (Sangetsu no Lion Vol. 9 Shogi)
8. プリンシパル 7 / いくえみ綾 (Principal Vol. 7, Ryo Ikuemi)
9. 日々蝶々 5 / 森下SUU (Hibi Choujo Vol. 6, SUU Morita)
10. 魔法少女リリカルなのはV i V i d 10 / (原作) 都築真紀/ (画) 藤真拓哉 (Mahou Shojoi Ririka Nanoha Vol. 10 / Masaki Tsuzuki and Takuya Fujima)
MANGA UNIVERSITY presents...

How to Draw MANGA CHARACTERS!

mangauniversity.com

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HAKUBA NO ŌJISAMA TO SIMULCAST ON CRUNCHYROLL THIS FALL

Crunchyroll, Inc., adds on its first live-action Japanese drama this season with the inclusion of HAKUBA NO ŌJISAMA to its simulcast lineup. HAKUBA NO ŌJISAMA will broadcast every Friday starting on October 4 at 11:00 pm Pacific Time for its premium members. Free users will be able to view this series one (1) week after initial broadcast on Crunchyroll. More information can be found on www.crunchyroll.com/hakuba.

The intricate web of relations in HAKUBA NO ŌJISAMA will ensnare and entangle protagonist Takahiro Miura, Hirofumi Arai (Yamato Mizoguchi in the live action Space Brothers), and Shunsuke Nakamura (Zettai Kareshi), along with an unannounced actress who will portray Hara Takako, our primary female protagonist.

“‘I’m alone because nobody chose me.’

Hara Takako, age 32, works as a teacher at an all-girls’ school. Having been burned by love, she is on the verge of being torn apart by loneliness and anxiety when she meets the new teacher, Kotaro, seven years her junior. It’s the first stirring of love she has felt in a long time... but Kotaro has a fiancée! Her former fling, Kurosawa, also comes into the picture, complicating her love story further...”

HAKUBA NO ŌJISAMA will be available to users in the following territories: United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and South America.
VIZ MEDIA ANNOUNCES THE RETURN OF THE CLASSIC SERIES “RANMA 1/2” TO NORTH AMERICA

Legendary Martial Arts-Action-Adventure-Comedy Manga Created By Rumiko Takahashi Debuts In 2-in-1 Editions Spring 2014; Anime Launches Today On VIZAnime.com; Neon Alley, Blu-ray And DVD Debuts Coming Soon

VIZ Media, LLC (VIZ Media), the largest distributor and licensor of manga and anime in North America, has announced the return of one of the genre’s most celebrated manga and anime properties – RANMA ½.

RANMA ½ is a renowned martial arts action-adventure manga (graphic novel) series created by Rumiko Takahashi. The manga series was a staple of the VIZ Media catalog for over 14 years and remains one of the company’s longest-running titles and one of the longest-running manga series in North America. VIZ Media plans to begin publishing the RANMA ½ manga series (rated ‘T+’ for Older Teens) in new 2-in-1 omnibus editions featuring the original right-to-left reading format for the first time ever in early 2014.

VIZ Media today also launches the smash-hit RANMA ½ (subtitled, rated TV-14) anime series on its VIZAnime.com streaming service as well as on Hulu. The series will debut on its Neon Alley anime channel this fall (dubbed), and will be available on DVD and, for the first time ever, Blu-ray box set editions next year.

Ranma Saotome never thought a martial arts training mission to China would turn out like this! Due to an unfortunate accident at the cursed Chinese training ground Jusenkyo, when Ranma and his father get splashed with cold water, papa turns into a giant panda and male Ranma becomes a buxom young woman! Hot water reverses the effect, but only until the next time! Constantly chased by battle-happy martial artists and lovesick suitors of both sexes, what’s a half-boy, half-girl martial artist to do?

“A groundbreaking story with eccentric characters, martial arts mayhem, and quirky romantic subplots, RANMA ½ is a zany adventure that has thrilled generations of fans with its colorful mix of action, romance and screwball comedy,” says Leyla Aker, Vice President, Publishing. “We’re delighted to deliver this classic manga series to a new legion of North American fans this spring in 2-in-1 editions presented in right-to-left format for the first time.”

Rumiko Takahashi is one of Japan’s most prolific and respected manga artists and one of the creator of several long running series including MAISON IKKOKU, RANMA 1/2, and INUYASHA – all published in North America by VIZ Media. The spotlight on her prolific career began in 1978 when she won an honorable mention in Shogakukan’s annual New Comic Artist Contest for Those Selfish Aliens. Later that same year, her boy-meets-alien comedy series, Urusei Yatsura, was serialized in Weekly Shonen Sunday. This phenomenally successful manga series was adapted into anime format and also spawned a TV series and half a dozen theatrical-release movies, all incredibly popular. Takahashi followed up the success of her debut series with one blockbuster hit after another— MAISON IKKOKU ran from 1980 to 1987, RANMA ½ from 1987 to 1996, and INUYASHA from 1996 to 2008. Other notable works include MERMAID SAGA, RUMIC THEATER, ONE-POUND GOSPEL, and RIN-NE (all also published in North America by VIZ Media).

For more information on Rumiko Takahashi titles by VIZ Media, please visit www.VIZ.com.

SWITCHBLADE PICTURES PUTS THE PEDAL TO THE METAL WITH “BIG BAD MAMA-SAN – DEKOTORA 1”

Switchblade Pictures will release Big Bad Mama-San – Dekotora 1 on bilingual DVD December 10, 2013 in conjunction with home video distributor Section23 Films (Clannad, High School of the Dead, Appleseed).
VIZ Media, LLC (VIZ Media), the largest publisher, distributor and licensor of manga and anime in North America, has announced the availability of its entire digital manga (graphic novel) catalog for Amazon Kindle devices, including Kindle Fire tablets and the new Kindle Paperwhite, beginning today. Users of the world’s best-selling e-reader now have instant access via the Kindle Store to an extensive digital library featuring over 1,500 manga volumes constituting more than 160 different series.

Volumes are available for purchase and immediate download in the U.S. and Canada from the Kindle Store for generally $6.99 (U.S. / CAN) each. New series as well as updates to numerous ongoing titles will be added each week. VIZ Media has also synchronized its digital publishing schedule so that future Kindle Store manga titles will have near-simultaneous domestic digital release that coincides with their print counterparts.

The launch list features the latest digital releases of ongoing fan favorites such NARUTO (rated ‘T’ for Teens), BLEACH (rated ‘T’ for Teens), BAKUMAN (rated ‘T’ for Teens), and ONE PIECE (rated ‘T’ for Teens) as well as recent bestsellers such as DEMON LOVE SPELL (rated ‘T+’ for Older Teens), MAGI: THE Labyrinth OF MAGIC (rated ‘T’ for Teens) and many, many more. Kindle users may check out free previews for every series available.

“We are strong advocates for the continued growth of digital manga content, and are very pleased to partner with Amazon to bring the world’s best titles to millions of avid readers and fans in North America,” says Gagan Singh, EVP and CTO, VIZ Media. “We invite Amazon Kindle users to explore VIZ Media’s extensive offerings, one of the most current, diverse, and also historically deep manga catalogs available anywhere.”

For more information on VIZ Media digital manga titles on the Amazon Kindle, please click here.

For more information on VIZ Media manga titles, please visit www.VIZ.com.
CRUNCHYROLL TO SIMULCAST OUTBREAK COMPANY ANIME SERIES FOR FALL 2013

Crunchyroll, Inc., has acquired the anime series Outbreak Company as part of its fall simulcasts, and is set to broadcast every Saturday starting on October 5, 2013 at 10:00pm Pacific Time for its premium members, with free members able to watch one week later. More information can be found on www.crunchyroll.com/outbreak.

Outbreak Company will be available to Crunchyroll's members in the following territories: North America.

Based off of a light novel series of the same name and written by Ichiro Sakaki, with illustrations by Yugen, Outbreak Company stars Shinichi Kanou, an otaku with an impeccable knowledge of all things “moe”. One day, he finds himself transported to a fantasy world and is given a quest to enhance cultural exchange as a “moe missionary”!

Natsuki Hanae, also in this season's Nagi no Asukara as Hikari Sakishima, stars as the main character Shinichi, with Suzuko Mimori, Himiko from BTOOOM!, cast as Myuseru Foaran, Maaya Uchida, Rikka Takanashi from Love, Chunibyo and Other Delusions!, is Minori Koganoama, Mai Fuchigami, also known for her role as Miho Nishizumi from GIRLS und PANZER, voices Petoraru Anne Endanto III, and Sumire Uesaka, also known as Iori from Mushibugyo, is Elbia Hanaiman.

Episodes can be accessed from Crunchyroll.com, the free iPhone and iPad application, the Android application, Windows Phone, PS3™, Xbox LIVE®, Apple TV®, Panasonic TVs with Viera Connect, Roku, Boxee, Google TV, Samsung TV, Vizio VIA, WD TV Live, additional set-top channels, and affiliate partners.

SWITCHBLADE PICTURES STEELS UP WITH “IRON GIRL”

As superhero films based on American comics sweep over the world, Switchblade Pictures returns the favor with Japan's typically unique perspective on the concept: IRON GIRL! Based on the longstanding Japanese science fiction and anime philosophy that a few extra artificial enhancements can only make a super heroine even more attractive, IRON GIRL launches AV model, actress and ultimate hardbody Kiara Asuka (ULTRAMAN GINGA) into Power Ranger style combat against hordes of ruthless bandits terrorizing a mysterious post-apocalyptic world. Adding extra feminine firepower to the mix is KAMEN RIDER franchise star (and METAL GEAR SOLID 3 poster girl) Rina Akiyama, who joins in the girls gone wild in the wastelands action, while complimentary eye candy for the ladies is provided by Yasuhsu Furuhara (PIRATE SQUADRON GOKAIGER, ENGINE SQUADRON GO-ONGER.) Featuring fight choreography provided by stunt world legend Takanori Shibahara (DYNAMAN, the SPACE SHAR-1FF series, JUSPION, FLOWER & SNAKE,) the 92 minute film was directed by Masatoshi Yagamine from a screenplay by Yagamine and Yoshiyuki Ishizuka.

In a distant land and an unknown time, a small village is under siege, terrorized by the brutal reign of the bandits known as the Crazy Dogs. However, the legends of the village speak of an Iron Clad Savior, one who shall come to the aid of the people and liberate them from the forces of evil and oppression. So when brave young Anne is miraculously rescued from a vicious bandit attack by a superhumanly strong heroine in shining armor, she becomes convinced that this mysterious fighter must be the figure from the prophecy. However, the woman known only as Iron Girl has been cursed with amnesia, and not even she knows whether she can actually defeat the Crazy Dogs. Not that the Dogs are about to let any potential threat to their power stay alive. Prepare for a battle royale as a full frontal assault of female fury tears into the dogs of war in IRON GIRL!

IRON GIRL will be released on DVD in Japanese with English subtitles beginning in January 2014.

SENTAI FILMWORKS LICENSES “INFINITE STRATOS 2”

The high-flying fan favorite is back in Sentai Filmworks' newest acquisition: Infinite Stratos 2. This 12 episode follow up to the hugely successful series is directed by Yasuhito Kikuchi and features character designs by Kumi Horii (Student Council's Discretion) with sound direction by Toshihiko Nakajima (Infinite Stratos, Devil May Cry) and music by Hikaru Nanase (Infinite Stratos, Canaan).

There are probably worse things that could have happened to Ichika Orimura besides being the first male on the planet capable of operating an Infinite Stratos powered exoskeleton. Then again, being the only guy in an academy filled with highly competitive, boy-crazed teenage girls equipped with giant robots and excessive amounts of combat training definitely qualifies as hazardous duty! It was bad enough becoming the focus of a rivalry between his childhood friends Lingyin and Houki, but when British and German pilots Cecillia and Laura joined in the melee he barely escaped with his dignity intact. And when the new French "dude," Charles, turned out to be a Charlotte, Ichika's hands were filled with a roommate whose disguise slipped off at the least convenient times. But surely, by now, Ichika's finally put all his girl troubles behind him, right? Oh don't be ridiculous. None of the femme fatales in his life have canceled their conquest scenarios; there's double trouble arriving in the form of the Sarashiki sisters; and the rest of the school is still waiting in line to take their shot as the mecha maiden mayhem continues in INFINITE STRATOS 2!

Infinite Stratos 2 will be available soon through select digital outlets with a home video release to follow in 2014.
To fight a hidden enemy requires an invisible army in Sentai Filmworks’ newest acquisition: GATCHAMAN CROWDS! This 12 episode series derived from the classic GATCHAMAN TV series originally produced by Tatsunoko Production is directed by Kenji Nakamura (tsuritama), features character designs by Kinako, G-Suit designs by Kenji Andou and Koji Nakakita, who also does mechanical designs, and series composition by Toshiya Ono.

For most of the residents of Tachikawa city, life seems to be perfectly normal. That’s how it seems, but the truth, known only by a tiny select handful, is that this is a city at war. Every day, as the citizens go about their business, they are under attack by alien criminals and mysterious monsters seeking to conquer, enslave and destroy. But to combat these threats, a covert council has secretly selected certain individuals to serve as protectors. Wearing special suits that amplify latent powers hitherto unsuspected, they blend into the crowds and shadows, waiting until the call is given to fight again. They could be anyone: your neighbor; your best friend’s mom; even high school students like Sugane Tachibana and recent college grad Joe Hibiki. And needless to say, schoolgirl artist Hajime Ichinose is probably the last person anyone would ever suspect of being a soldier entrusted with defending mankind. But she is, even if as the latest recruit she still has an awful lot of learning to do. Hiding like ninjas, powered by super-science, they are humanity’s first and greatest line of defense. They are the GATCHAMAN!

GATCHAMAN CROWDS will be available soon through select digital outlets with a home video release to follow in 2014.

CRUNCHYROLL TO SIMULCAST “GALILEI DONNA” ANIME SERIES FOR FALL 2013

Crunchyroll, Inc., has acquired the anime series Galilei Donna as part of its fall simulcasts, and is set to broadcast every Thursday starting on October 10, at 11:00a.m. Pacific Time for its premium members, with free members able to watch one week later. More information can be found on www.crunchyroll.com/galileidonna.

Galilei Donna will be available to Crunchyroll’s audience in the following territories: U.S.A, Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Central and South America including Caribbean, Europe (including Scandinavia and French-speaking and German-speaking territories).

An original production from A-1 pictures and airing on the coveted noitaminA block in Japan, Galilei Donna follows the three Ferrari sisters who are descendents of the astronomer, Galileo Galilei. The year is 2061 and the world is in the grips of another ice age. With a mysterious organization hunting them down and searching for the “Galilei Donna”, the three sisters must work together to fight against the organization and discover their true destinies.

Hozuki Ferrari is the youngest sister at 13, with Rina Hidaka, who also voiced Nana Ichikawa from Love Lab, cast in the role. The middle sister is 16-year old Kazuki Ferrari, played by Rumi Okubo, who also voiced Toko Ichimiya from Servant x Service. The oldest of the sisters is Hazuki Ferrari, age 20, voiced by Kei Shindo, also known as Mito Aizawa in The Knight in the Area.

Episodes can be accessed from Crunchyroll.com, the free iPhone and iPad application, the Android application, Windows Phone, PS3™, Xbox LIVE®, Apple TV®, Panasonic TVs with Viera Connect, Roku, Boxee, Google TV, Samsung TV, Vizio VIA, WD TV Live, additional set-top channels, and affiliate partners.

Follow the red string of fate, if you dare, to Sentai Filmworks’ newest acquisition: Diabolik Lovers. This sexy and provocative 12 episode series about the fate of a young woman in the hands of a brood of vampires is directed by Shinobu Tagashira and features character designs by Yuuko Yahiro and music by Yuuki Hayashi.

Yui Komori used to see dead people. But as troubling as past glimpses of spirits, poltergeists and psychic phenomena may have been, they pale into insignificance compared to what she’s about to discover once she’s forced to transfer to a new school. Because it turns out that her own history is very different from what she thought it was, and she has a very different kind of family waiting for her. Now she’ll be sharing her living space with six very attractive young men, though not a single one is human. And while her new dorm mates may be brothers, and their attraction to her involves her bloodline, “brotherly” is the last word to describe their intentions. In moving from her father’s church to becoming the object of six blood lusting young vampires’ affections, Yui will undergo the most shocking, soul ripping and draining experience any teenage girl could imagine in her wildest fantasies… or most salacious nightmares. From walking to school with the dead, to becoming the Sakimaki brothers’ preferred dinner companion, she is about to learn what it is to become one of the DIABOLIK LOVERS!

Diabolik Lovers will be available soon through select digital outlets with a home video release to follow in 2014.
Aniplex to host Sword Art Online “Watch and Win” Contest on Toonami™

This month, Sword Art Online fans will be treated to something special. Aniplex of America has just announced they will be hosting a special Sword Art Online “Watch and Win” contest on Adult Swim’s Toonami™. Viewers will have the opportunity to win a wide variety of prizes including Sword Art Online Blu-ray sets and DVDs. Other prizes include Sword Art Online Weib Schwarz trial decks from Bushiroad. Three special grand prize winners will receive a brand new 3D Personal Viewer courtesy of Sony Electronics. The New Sony 3D Personal Viewers will let fans submerge themselves into the world of Sword Art Online as if they were Kirito and Asuna. With the Sony 3D Personal Viewers fans can experience entertainment in a brand new way. This is a special opportunity to win some great prizes while watching Sword Art Online.

To enter, viewers would need to tune in and watch Sword Art Online on Toonami™ Saturday Nights at 2:00am EST/PST on October 20th and 27th and look for the keyword shown immediately after the show. Viewers will then enter the keyword on the entry form on the Sword Art Online Contest Page (www.aniplexusa.com/contest). Be sure to watch Sword Art Online on Toonami™ and don’t miss your chance to watch and win from Aniplex of America!

Adult Swim’s Toonami™ is not sponsoring this contest. For complete details about the Sword Art Online Watch and Win Contest, please go to AniplexUSA.com/contest
CRUNCHYROLL TO SIMULCAST HAJIME NO IPPO: THE FIGHTING! -RISING- ANIME SERIES FOR FALL 2013

Crunchyroll, Inc., has acquired the anime series Hajime No Ippo: The Fighting! –Rising– as part of its fall simulcasts, and is set to broadcast every Saturday starting on October 5, 2013 at 11:00am Pacific Time for its premium members, with free members able to watch one week later. More information can be found on www.crunchyroll.com/hajime.

Hajime No Ippo: The Fighting! –Rising– will be available to Crunchyroll’s Premium members in the following territories: U.S.A, Canada, UK, Ireland, Iceland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

Hajime No Ippo is a Japanese boxing manga written and illustrated by George Morikawa and has appeared in Weekly Shonen Magazine since 1989. After being frequently bullied as a child, Ippo’s encounter with the sport of boxing inspired him to think about what true strength really is. Ippo has endured the kind, yet rigorous, instruction of Coach Kamogawa and defeated one powerful opponent after another. He mastered his signature punch, the Dempsey roll, and even became the champion of all Japan. But even as champion, he still hasn’t found the meaning of “true strength”...

Episodes can be accessed from Crunchyroll.com, the free iPhone and iPad application, the Android application, Windows Phone, PS3™, Xbox LIVE®, Apple TV®, Panasonic TVs with Viera Connect, Roku, Boxee, Google TV, Samsung TV, Vizio VIA, WD TV Live, additional set-top channels, and affiliate partners.

CRUNCHYROLL TO SIMULCAST KUROKO’S BASKETBALL 2 ANIME FOR FALL 2013

Crunchyroll, Inc., has acquired the anime series Kuroko’s Basketball 2 as part of its fall simulcasts, and is set to broadcast every Saturday starting on October 5, at 11:30a.m. Pacific Time for premium members, and free members able to watch one week later. More information can be found on www.crunchyroll.com/kuroko.

Kuroko’s Basketball will be available to Crunchyroll’s audience in the following territories: North America, South America, United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden.

The long-awaited second season of the basketball anime returns this fall with Kuroko’s Basketball 2! Based on the ongoing manga by Tadatoshi Fujimaki, Kuroko’s Basketball 2 focuses on the basketball team from Seirin High as they compete and fight their way to the top at the national tournament.

The entire voice cast from the previous season returns to reprise their roles, with Kensho Ono as Tetsuya Kuroko and Yuuki Ono voicing Taiga Kagami. The rest of the cast is star-studded with veterans and fan favorites including Daisuke Ono, Hiroshi Kamiya, Jun Fukuyama, Junichi Suwabe, and Shinichiro Miki.

Episodes can be accessed from Crunchyroll.com, the free iPhone and iPad application, the Android application, Windows Phone, PS3™, Xbox LIVE®, Apple TV®, Panasonic TVs with Viera Connect, Roku, Boxee, Google TV, Samsung TV, Vizio VIA, WD TV Live, additional set-top channels, and affiliate partners.
EXCITING PLANS FOR YEAR TWO!

Neon Alley has provided English dubbed anime to NeonAlley.com subscribers through their service on the PlayStation 3 (via PSN), XBOX 360 (via XBOX Live) and on their website, but now they intend to turn things up a notch with new services that were recently implemented and new plans for 2014. J!-ENT interviews Neon Alley Program Director, Kevin Kleinrock to discuss what their plans are for their second year.

By Dennis A. Amith

It’s the one year anniversary for Neon Alley. Happy first anniversary to you and the staff! With a wonderful first year for Neon Alley, what can viewers expect to see in 2014?

KEVIN: Thank you! We are really excited to have reached our one year anniversary and want to thank all of our members and fans for being part of this first amazing year – especially those members who have been with us since day one. And, there are quite a few of them. Now it’s time to deliver a killer 2nd year of the service.

As we head into 2014, we’re tremendously excited about the launch of our Catch Up service across all of our platforms. While I love and personally prefer to watch the live stream, because with it you are getting an immersive experience, really an entire anime lifestyle network, I am glad that we can now bring our members a way to watch our latest episodes and movies on their own schedule.

But in terms of what our members can expect to see – more great series, more great movies – including the controversial “BERSERK THE GOLDEN AGE ARC III”, and more great lifestyle interstitials and programming including expanded convention coverage and weekly news from around the industry. But the shows are paramount and we will continue to work hard to bring the absolute best in uncut, uncensored, English dubbed anime.

When Neon Alley first began, it was primarily through the Sony PS3 via PSN and XBOX 360 via XBOX Live and now users have web accessibility through the official website (www.neonalley.com). What are the chances of seeing an iOS or Android app for Neon Alley?

KEVIN: Bringing Neon Alley to the web was a great way to...
expand our footprint beyond the gaming consoles. Now anyone with a Mac or PC and an internet connection can enjoy the service. As we continue to grow we are considering where the service will head next. Nothing has been decided yet, but we'll continue to expand where we see the largest potential audiences.

One of the things that many viewers wanted was a way to watch episodes they missed and Neon Alley introduced the “Catch Up” VOD feature that allows them to watch a couple of week’s episodes at any time. Currently it’s for both the web and the PS3 versions of the platform. Will Xbox Live users have that ability any time soon?

KEVIN: It’s actually live on the XBOX 360 app now too. Both the XBOX 360 and PS3 updates launched this past Tuesday, October 1st. And, we’ve received some great feedback about the XBOX version including the Kinect interactivity with the app.

Neon Alley is a linear channel such as a traditional broadcast channel and even similar to programming schedules to Japan’s Sky Perfect TV satellite channel. But with previous anime streaming companies out there and newer ones available. With some providing newer programming that is coming out of Japan and others providing old school anime programming, where does Neon Alley look towards programming.

KEVIN: Neon Alley is dedicated to bring the best English dubbed content across the genre. For us that means selecting shows we would want to watch ourselves, “all killer and no filler,” as I like to call it. And to that end, it means a mix of both new and old. Of course our Neon Alley exclusive world premieres like “NARUTO SHIPPUDEN” and starting on October 18th “MAGI: THE LABYRINTH OF MAGIC”, are a key to our programming. In the past we have had the world premieres of “BLUE EXORCIST”, “TIGER & BUNNY”, “ZETMAN”, “ACCEL WORLD”, “K” and “FATE/ ZERO”. And, with every season Neon Alley will continue to bring brand new fresh and in-demand world premieres. But we also love bringing fan favorites like “BLEACH”, classic “NARUTO”, “ONE PIECE”, “DEATH NOTE” and “INU YASHA” among the series. And, we are extremely excited to be bringing RANMA ½ to the network not only dubbed but in HD for the very first time!

Another great part of our programming is that Neon Alley is studio agnostic. Current anime series and movies on the network come from VIZ, Aniplex, FUNimation, Sentai and Nozomi. And Neon Alley is the ONLY place to see English dubbed series from all of these studios in one place.

I’m curious, among the viewers of Neon Alley, do you get more request from viewers wanting to see the anime in its original Japanese presentation with English subtitles or programming with English dubs?
“Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic” is among the anime series to be shown on Neon Alley in Fall 2013. Image courtesy of Neon Alley.

We literally log everything. Every tweet, every Facebook post, every email to our customer service department, everything gets logged so we have our finger on the pulse of what our viewers and fans want. Plus, our team here at Neon Alley is definitely on the pulse of the anime industry both in terms of the newest and latest shows from Japan and the most popular and best shows in general. So, every season will always provide a great programming mix. I think it’s safe to say anything is a possibility for Neon Alley.

What are chances of original programming? For example, there are other satellite networks that have an annual special covering E3 (the video games trade show) but what are the chances of Neon Alley doing a special from a major anime event or even J-Pop Summit Festival?

KEVIN: We definitely like bringing our viewers all kinds of interstitials and coverage from around the anime universe. Just this year alone we've seen coverage on the network from Anime Expo in Los Angeles, San Diego Comic Con, Fanime in San Jose and the Japan Expo in Santa Clara. And, next week, we head to New York Comic Con. We headed out to the J-Pop Summit as well where we interviewed Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. Members can definitely expect to see coverage of this type continue and expand in the year to come. That’s why even with our Catch Up service now available, I think we’re going to find that the live stream continues to remain popular because it really is an anime experience like no other and is truly an anime lifestyle channel.

Old school anime fans will definitely be excited to see Rumiko Takahashi’s “Ranma 1/2” to be airing on Neon Alley. What are the chances of seeing other Rumiko Takahashi’s classics such as “Urusei Yatsura” or “Maison Ikkoku” being released on Neon Alley?

KEVIN: The great part about the network is that literally nothing is off limits. And, we pay very close attention to what our members and fans want to see. We have been testing different types of series to see how they resonate with our audience. We have “NANA” and “VAMPIRE KNIGHT” which have their romantic elements. We ran the

For Neon Alley, there has been a lot of focus on the “Naruto Shippuden”, “One Piece” and “Bleach” anime series and with programming, the majority of the series featured are action-driven. What are the chances of seeing anime programming that deals with romantic comedies or horror?

KEVIN: We have been testing different types of series to see how they resonate with our audience. We have “NANA” and “VAMPIRE KNIGHT” which have their romantic elements. We ran the
entire season of “HIGH SCHOOL OF THE DEAD”. And, we will continue to mix it up and deliver what the audience proves to want. We’re always looking at things fans want and fit in with the current lineup. We want to focus on great content and a true anime lifestyle experience. It doesn’t matter the genre—we want to bring quality shows regardless of genre.

What is the biggest learning experience for you in terms of programming for Neon Alley and what is the most challenging and rewarding aspects of the job?

KEVIN: I think the biggest learning experience for me has been just what it takes daily to build and maintain a 24/7 network. I mean we literally built this channel from scratch over the past couple years and there has been a lot to learn. When it comes to programming the channel, it’s been about trying to deliver the right mix of shows with the right mix of interstitials and anime or entertainment centric commercials, and creating this all encompassing anime lifestyle channel. The most challenging aspect of the job has been trying to make sure our members had ample opportunity to catch the newest episodes, but now that our Catch Up service exists, that challenge has been minimized.

I think the most rewarding aspect of the job has been blazing this new trail for the entire anime community. Fifty-three weeks ago, there was no service for fans of English dubbed anime to subscribe to for hundreds and hundreds of hours of content a month—and quality content at that! And, not only have we created and delivered that service, but we have done so in a way that is beyond traditional on-demand programming. We have truly created a network that is an anime experience like no other and is entertainment for the anime lifestyle. And having so many amazing members come to and enjoy this service which we have built has been extremely rewarding.

What can people expect from Neon Alley’s Fall Programming for 2013?

KEVIN: What we have on tap for Fall 2013 is not only members’ chances to experience the dozens of shows we have premiered over the past year in a whole new way using our Catch Up service, but 6 great new series as well.

Friday, October 18th we debut our new season with 2 episodes of “RANMA ½ “, the world premiere of “MAGI: THE LABYRINTH OF MAGIC”, and the network premieres of “PUELA MAGI MADOKA MAGICA” and “REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTE-NA”. Saturday, October 19th, we debut our Fall Shonen block with 2 episodes of “BLEACH”, a world premiere episode of “NARUTO SHIPPUD-EN”, and 2 episodes of “ONE PIECE”.

Sunday, October 20th, we add a new series to live-action programming with “CHIKARA”, a really fun comic book and sci-fi influenced pro wrestling show. And, on Thursday, October 24th, we have our network premiere of “GUR-REN LAGAAN”. And that’s just some of what we are delivering our viewers this season! For a complete look at our schedule and lineup, I encourage everyone to check out NeonAlley.com. That’s also where you can get a one week free trial of the service.

For more information on “Neon Alley”, please click on the following link below:

NeonAlley.com
The Neon Alley Fall Season commences on Friday, October 18th and includes the highly anticipated high definition return of RANMA ½ to North America along with the exclusive dub premiere of MAGI: THE Labyrinth of Magic. Additional premieres this season include GURREN LAGAAN, PUELLA MAGI MADOKA MAGICA, and REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA. The latest episodes of ongoing favorites BLEACH, NARUTO SHIPPUDEN and ONE PIECE are also scheduled and Neon Alley members are invited to check out CHIKARA, a brand new live-action American Luchador-style wrestling series.

Neon Alley Fall Season Premiere Week Programming:

Friday, October 18th:
- RANMA ½ - 2 Episodes
- MAGI: THE Labyrinth OF MAGIC – 1 Episode
- PUELLA MAGI MADOKA MAGICA – 1 Episode
- REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA – 1 Episode

Saturday, October 19th
- BLEACH – 2 Episodes
- NARUTO SHIPPUDEN – 1 Episode
- ONE PIECE – 2 Episodes

Sunday, October 20th
- CHIKARA – 1 Episode

Thursday, October 24th
- GURREN LAGAAN – 1 Episode

“"The Fall 2013 schedule for Neon Alley is filled with a host of brand new shows and audiences won't want to miss all of the exciting action we have planned," says Brian Ige, VIZ Media Vice President, Animation. "From the martial arts zaniness of RANMA ½ to the sci-fi-inspired drama of GURREN LAGAAN, magical adventures of MAGI and PUELLA MAGI MADOKA MAGICA, and the gorgeous animation of REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA, Neon Alley will be the place to go for the hottest uncut anime content this Fall. Wrestling fans can also catch the high-flying Lucha Libre action of CHIKARA. And with the new video-on-demand 'Catch Up' feature for PS3, Xbox and the Web, members now have even more flexibility to watch recent episodes of their favorite series whenever they want!”

GURREN LAGAAN (Aniplex)
In a bleak future where humanity is forced to live underground, a fourteen year-old boy named Simon is assigned the task of digging tunnels to expand his village. But Simon stumbles across a fantastic device, and with the help of many other friends, they use the robots’ power to fight against their oppressors and take back the surface of their planet.

MAGI: THE Labyrinth OF MAGIC (Aniplex)
A young boy, Aladin, travels a mysterious continent that is home to a mysterious ruin known as the “Dungeon,” in which great treasure is said to lay hidden. During his travels, the young boy meets Alibaba, and together they attempt to clear the “Dungeon” in order to claim the treasures within. As their quest brings about new encounters and farewells, Aladin will come to learn of his true destiny.

RANMA ½ (VIZ Media)
Ranma Saotome never thought a martial arts training mission to China would turn out like this! An accidental dunk in a cursed spring changes boy Ranma into a young girl, every time he is splashed with cold water. Hot water reverses the effect - but only until next time!

PUELLA MAGI MADOKA MAGICA (Aniplex)
She has a loving family and best friends and laughs and cries from time to time. Madoka Kaname, an eighth grader of Mitakihara middle school, is one of those girls who lives such a life. One day, she has a very magical encounter. She doesn’t know if it happened by chance or by fate. This is a fateful encounter that can change her destiny and the beginning of a new story of magical witch girls.

REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA (Nozomi)
“Never lose that strength or nobility, even when you grow up.” When Utena was just a child in the depths of sorrow, she found salvation in those words. They were the words of a prince, who wrapped her in his rose-scented embrace and bestowed upon her both a ring and the promise that it would lead her to him again. Utena never forgot the encounter. In fact, she was so impressed that she aspired to be like the prince and also help those in need. Now a spirited teenager, Utena attends the prestigious Ohtori Academy. However, her strong sense of chivalry soon places her at odds with the school's student council and thrusts her into a series of mysterious and dangerous duels against its members. REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA has been called one of the Top 5 “Best Anime of all Time” (Anime Insider) and also inspired an animated film, manga, and stage play adaptations.

CHIKARA
CHIKARA is a fresh, colorful take on Mexican lucha libre that plays like a comic book come to life. One of the most popular independent wrestling promotions in the world, with a rabid internet following, CHIKARA brings a unique sense of theatricality to the ring wars as evidenced by the bizarre cast of wrestlers that inhabit their little corner of the universe. The action is breathtaking, the characters are mind-blowing, and the experience is one of a kind. Additional information is available at: www.chikarapro.com.
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DICE Throws Down an Intercontinental Challenge: Who Takes Top Billing in Battlefield 4 — USA or Europe?

The Winner Will Be Decided at the “Battlefield 4: Showdown Live Europe vs USA” Event

Xbox Live’s Major Nelson and AceyBongos Command 32-person Squads in a Head-to-Head Battle of Battlefield 4 Second Assault — Its Worldwide Debut on Xbox One

Enter the Xbox Battlefield 4 “Play and Win” Sweepstakes This Weekend for the Chance to Compete

Electronic Arts Inc. (NASDAQ: EA) announced Battlefield 4™: Showdown Live Europe vs. USA, where two teams of 32-players will compete in an event in London, UK. The event will be live streamed on Xbox Live online entertainment network from Microsoft on November 1 at 10:00AM PDT.

The Showdown will mark the debut of Battlefield 4 Second Assault, an expansion pack available at launch first on Xbox One, the all-in-one games and entertainment system from Microsoft. Battlefield 4 Second Assault includes four fan-favorite Battlefield 3™ maps re-imagined with the power of Frostbite™ 3. Top-tier Battlefield players will be hand selected to represent their country as they battle it out on Xbox One.

Xbox Live’s Major Nelson and AceyBongos will command their respective squads to lead their teams to victory. Starting today and ending on Sunday, October 6, Xbox is offering one lucky gamer in the USA the chance to be on Major Nelson’s side by entering the Battlefield 4 “Play and Win” sweepstakes*. Players can download the Battlefield 4 Gamer Pic and play the Battlefield 4 beta** on Xbox Live this weekend for a chance to win a trip for two to London, two passes to the event, a seat on the USA team and a $500 gift card.

Battlefield 4 will be available October 29 for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 console and PC. Battlefield 4 will be in stores November 19 on Xbox One (November 22 in Europe) and November 12 on PlayStation®4 (November 29 in Europe).

Battlefield 4 Second Assault is one of five expansion packs included in Battlefield 4 Premium, an exclusive membership for fans that provides a wealth of new content to keep the action going all year long for only $50. Battlefield 4 Second Assault will be available first on Xbox One.

To join the conversation on Battlefield 4, please visit http://www.facebook.com/battlefield, follow us on Twitter® at www.twitter.com/battlefield and #BF4, or sign up for the official Battlefield newsletter at www.battlefield.com.

* NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Eligibility restrictions apply. See www.xbox.com/bf4pw for Official Rules.

** Xbox Live gold membership required.
It was recently announced that Mewtwo can achieve Mega Evolution, an extremely powerful form that only certain Pokémon can access during battles in Pokémon X and Pokémon Y. It is now known that Mewtwo can Mega Evolve into either Mega Mewtwo X or Mega Mewtwo Y, depending on which Mega Stone Mewtwo holds—Mewtwonite X or Mewtwonite Y. The previously announced Mega Mewtwo is in fact Mega Mewtwo Y; Mega Mewtwo X is being introduced for the first time today. Players can obtain Mewtwonite X in Pokémon X and Mega Evolve Mewtwo into Mega Mewtwo X, which gains the Fighting type to go along with its Psychic type. Players can Mega Evolve Mewtwo into Mega Mewtwo Y, whose Special Attack is greatly boosted, by obtaining Mewtwonite Y in Pokémon Y. Both titles launch worldwide on October 12, 2013, for the Nintendo 3DS family of systems.

An already powerful Dragon- and Ground-type Pokémon, Garchomp, can Mega Evolve into Mega Garchomp in Pokémon X and Pokémon Y. The increased energy released by its Mega Evolution turns Mega Garchomp’s arms into huge blades that send out a furious attack. Mega Garchomp’s Attack and Special Attack are greatly increased after it Mega Evolves, so its Dragon-type move Dragon Claw becomes extra ferocious.
Evolved Forms of Chespin, Fennekin, and Froakie Are Revealed!

Since the reveal earlier this year, Pokémon fans have debated which first partner Pokémon—Chespin, Fennekin, or Froakie—they are going to choose in Pokémon X and Pokémon Y. Players are now getting a first look at their evolved forms, featured in a new gameplay trailer released today on Pokemon.com/XY.

• When Chespin evolves into Quilladin, the hard spikes on its body grow even sturdier, and it’s able to withstand the impact of even something the size of a tractor-trailer truck without flinching. Its solid shell repels attacks while it strikes back with its pointed spines. The gentle Spiny Armor Pokémon never seeks out battles on its own, but when an opposing Pokémon strikes, it fights back! It can learn the Ground-type move Mud Shot, which does damage to opponents and lowers their Speed. This move is super effective against Fire-type Pokémon, which are usually tough opponents for Grass types like Quilladin.

• Braixen is the evolved form of the Fire-type Fox Pokémon Fennekin. Players will notice that Braixen keeps a small twig tucked into its tail. Fennekin often snacks on a twig, but Braixen uses it in another way—the twig calms its mind and is also sometimes used in battle after being set aflame with a little friction. Braixen can learn the Psychic-type move Psyshock, a special move that deals damage based on the opponent’s Defense, as if it were a physical move. Players will want to use Psyshock on opponents that have high Special Defense.
• Froakie has awesome jumping skills that are greatly improved when it evolves into Frogadier. This Bubble Frog Pokémon can reach to the top of a 2,000-foot tower with ease and eludes its opponents by leaping around ceilings or into trees. Frogadier can learn the Flying-type move Bounce, which sends the user into the air on its first turn so it can attack on the second. Bounce is super effective against Grass-type Pokémon, which often pose a challenge for Water types like Frogadier.

Trainers Can Show Their Style!

In Pokémon X and Pokémon Y, players can visit boutiques and a salon to change their Trainers’ outfits and hairstyles. You can change your clothes, hat, shoes, and accessories to show off your individual style and put together different looks. There are boutiques in many of the cities throughout the Kalos region, each with its own unique style. Adding to this customized feature, when players change their outfits and hairstyles, their icons on the Player Search System (PSS) update too!

Never-Before-Seen Pokémon That Possess Different Forms!

Some Pokémon in Pokémon X and Pokémon Y possess a number of different forms, some of which are being revealed for the very first time.

• The stylish Poodle Pokémon, Furfrou, can be groomed into a number of different appearances. The more it is groomed, the more styles may become available, some of which are being shown for the first time today. Players will be alerted to Furfrou’s grooming schedule, and if it’s left untended, its fur will grow long and shaggy, returning to Furfrou’s original look. This Pokémon is very intelligent and loyal to its Trainer, and it’s said that in ancient times Furfrou guarded the king of the Kalos region. Furfrou can learn Baby-Doll Eyes, a new Fairy-type move debuting in Pokémon X and Pokémon Y that allows its user to go first regardless of Speed and can lower the opponent’s Attack stat.

• Meowstic is a never-before-seen Psychic-type Pokémon that has different forms depending on its gender. This expressionless Constraint Pokémon does not show emotion to others, but it seems that some Trainers love the unsociable front it puts on. Unlike other Pokémon that have different forms based on gender, the moves Meowstic can learn will differ based on whether it’s male or female. Male Meowstic can learn the Psychic-type move Miracle Eye, a move that allows future moves to hit regardless of the opponent’s evasion, making it a powerful support in battle. Female Meowstic are better at outright attacks and can learn the Psychic-type move Extrasensory, which not only does damage but can also cause the target to flinch so it can’t use moves on that turn.

Introducing More People You’ll Meet!

More is known about Team Flare. Five Scientists are believed to be the driving force behind this mysterious group, each one identified by a different hairstyle and unique outfit. The purple-haired woman is Celosia, the orange-haired woman is Aliana, the green-haired woman is Bryony, and the blue-haired woman is Mable. There is one man among the Scientists, Xerosic, who is easily identifiable by his red goggles and fire-red hair. Their focus is world-changing, and they have a clear goal in mind, but what is it?

Everyone in the Kalos region loves Diantha, a famous movie star Trainers will meet during their journey. In addition to her acting career, Diantha is a Pokémon Trainer, though she seems to show more interest in other Trainers who have real potential.

For more information about Pokémon X and Pokémon Y for the Nintendo 3DS family of systems, including new images and gameplay video featuring information announced today, please visit Pokemon.com/XY.

Be sure to check out Pokemon.com, Like the official Pokémon Facebook page at Facebook.com/Pokemon, and follow Pokémon on Twitter @Pokemon to ensure you’re receiving the latest Pokémon X and Pokémon Y news!
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Dual Destinies to Be Released Digitally for the Nintendo 3DS

Capcom, a leading worldwide developer and publisher of video games, will be releasing “Phoenix Wright™: Ace Attorney™ - Dual Destinies” digitally on Nintendo 3DS™ across Europe and North America on October 24th price at $29.99 / €24.99.

“Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Dual Destinies”, previously announced for the West as “Ace Attorney™ 5”, sees the return of courtroom hero Phoenix Wright. Set eight years since his last appearance in the courts, the first case in “Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Dual Destinies” sees the action start in a destroyed court room. It’s down to Phoenix Wright and his team at the Wright Anything Agency to discover the cause of the destruction. Players will have to battle it out in court against Gaspen Payne, the younger brother of Winston Payne from previous Ace Attorney™ titles, as they defend the accused.

The much loved gameplay and features from previous titles in the Ace Attorney series return but for the first time with stunning 3D graphics, bringing the courtroom and characters to life and putting players directly in the heart of the action. Players will need to investigate each crime scene with dynamic 3D visuals, making it possible to change views and zoom-in on areas to uncover any hidden evidence or clues. The drama continues in the court room as players present their evidence, challenge witnesses and begin to unravel the truth behind each of the cases in “Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Dual Destinies”.

Joining Phoenix is the young Attorney Apollo Justice and new Associate Attorney Athena Cykes. Athena’s unique ability to psychoanalyse witnesses introduces a brand new element to proceedings. Using Athena’s ‘Mood Matrix’ players can detect the emotional state of a witness and tell whether they’re surprised, angry, happy or sad. Players can compare these feelings with the statement given by the witness, point out any contradictions between the two and challenge the witness testimony.
TECMO KOEI AMERICA ANNOUNCES STEAM RELEASE FOR YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z

TECMO KOEI America announced today that YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z will see a release on Steam® (PC). Launching day and date in North America alongside the PlayStation®3 computer entertainment system and Xbox 360® video game and entertainment system from Microsoft versions, the Steam® release will be available via digital download in early 2014.

“YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z is an impressive project led by the expertise of Team NINJA’s Yosuke Hayashi and comcept’s Keiji Inafune, with the goal of creating a thrilling new experience for fans,” said Amos Ip, SVP and General Manager of TECMO KOEI America. “We are extremely pleased to offer YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z on PC through Steam, giving us the ability to reach as many gamers as possible with their action-packed creation.”

In YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z, players battle fierce zombies as YAIBA, a cyborg ninja who will do anything to get revenge and stay alive. Cleaved in two, he is brought back to life with cyber-technology. Brandishing his ninja sword and the mecha weapons in his cyborg arm, he slaughters zombies with brutal, over-the-top abandon.

Step into a stylized living comic book where stunning graphics depict a world gone mad. Hordes of undead can only be stopped by YAIBA’s willingness to use any means necessary to get the job done. Will he kill by turning his cyborg arm into a razor chainsaw for slicing up undead—or just rip off an opponent’s arms to use as zombie nunchucks? Both possibilities fill YAIBA’s heart with twisted laughter—and the desire to kill more and more zombies!

YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z comes from the two teams behind the most famous ninja and zombie videogame creations as Team NINJA and legendary producer Keiji Inafune team up to create a new experience. The world of the ninja meets undead warriors, cybernetic weapons, comic books, in an entirely new IP that draws from the NINJA GAIDEN franchise with a host of bold, new features including an original storyline and style of gameplay.

Always intense, never boring, YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z is violent, creative, and daringly different. Sharpen your sword, fire up your cyborg arm, and prepare to GET SOME!

YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z will be available for the PlayStation®3 computer entertainment system, Xbox 360® video game and entertainment system from Microsoft and Steam® (PC) in early 2014. This title has not yet been rated by the ESRB.

More information about YAIBA: NINJA GAIDEN Z can be found at www.YaibaNGZ.com, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/YaibaNinjaGaidenZ and Twitter https://twitter.com/YaibaNGZ
Sweden-based Coffee Stain Studios, creators of the first hybrid of tower-defense and first person shooter genres - Sanctum and Sanctum 2 - have updated their highly addictive and quirky traditional tower-defense game based in the Sanctum universe, Super Sanctum TD. Now also available for Mac, the 2.0 update features a completely revamped perk system, new enemy types, new skills, and new user interface that brings a refreshing look to the entertaining strategy action.

Super Sanctum TD is a retro-styled, tower-defense game that focuses on strategy, customization and replayability. Build advanced mazes and construct powerful towers to prevent alien hordes from reaching the Core. When the aliens swarm your maze and everything seems lost, use active abilities like Air Strike and Freeze to tilt the battlefield to your advantage!

Super Sanctum TD is now available for $3.99 on PC and Mac via Steam. Sanctum 2 is available for $14.99 on PC, PlayStation®Network, and the Xbox LIVE® Arcade for the Xbox 360® video game and entertainment system from Microsoft.
Beamdog, Atari, and Overhaul Games announce pre-purchasing for Baldur’s Gate II: Enhanced Edition on Mac and PC has begun, in preparation for release on November 15th, 2013.

The original Baldur’s Gate II: Shadows of Amn, launched in September 2000, and became the most celebrated Dungeons & Dragons fantasy roleplaying video game of its time. On November 15th, gamers new and old can experience the epic continuation and conclusion of the Bhaalspawn Saga with full HD resolution support and area art remastered from the original renders.

Set in the iconic Dungeons & Dragons Forgotten Realms universe from Wizards of the Coast, Baldur’s Gate II: Enhanced Edition includes the adventures Shadows of Amn and Throne of Bhaal. In addition to the improved graphics and gameplay, the Enhanced Edition bundles four new allies for your party, each with their own unique quests. Also bundled in the Enhanced Edition is The Black Pits 2: Gladiators of Thay, an arena challenge that puts players’ tactical skills to the ultimate test.

“We are thrilled that our partners at Beamdog have confirmed a date for the rerelease of what many people consider one of the greatest RPGs ever on PC, (Baldur’s Gate II),” said Nathan Stewart, Brand Director for D&D at Wizards of the Coast. “As we continue to expand our world-class storytelling on digital platforms, it is great to bring this classic to new devices and share the rich fantasy of D&D with new fans.”

Baldur’s Gate II: Enhanced Edition for PC and Mac can be pre-loaded through either the Beamdog client or an upcoming stand-alone installer. Pre-loading the game allows players to access Baldur’s Gate II: Enhanced Edition immediately after its release on November 15th, 2013.

Click here to go to www.BaldursGateII.com for more information.
ICEBERG INTERACTIVE GETS GORY IN SPACE WITH DARK MATTER, COMING SOON TO STEAM

Developer InterWave Studios Delivers Hard-Hitting 2.5D Survival Platformer mid-October 2013

Veteran video game publisher Iceberg Interactive revealed today that its love affair with all things off-planet continues apace with the action-packed 2.5D survival platformer Dark Matter, coming to PC, OS X and Linux on Steam and in Western European retail mid-October.

Developed by InterWave Studios, Dark Matter is set in a derelict spaceship inundated by a sinister alien presence and infested with deadly parasites. As the Ensign, players must explore the adrift spaceship Endeavour through echoing, fetid hallways and facilities, scavenging for parts and blueprints, while expanding their arsenal and customizing their combat style against the intelligent and reactive enemies.

“After Nuclear Dawn, we dedicated ourselves to a more personal project, a revival of the Metroidvania canon, but with an InterWave twist,” said Michiel Beenen, CEO at InterWave Studios. “Dark Matter is a fantastic convergence of passion and technology, a dark world to explore, a great new story to discover. We are excited to bring it to a worldwide audience thanks to Iceberg’s great work.”

Dark Matter takes a unique spin on the survival horror genre, set in deep space, with a heavy emphasis on hard-hitting tactical combat and exploration in a beautiful 2D/3D setting. This unique side-scrolling action/survival horror game presents players with heavy tension, as they must decide whether to use environmental resources to prevent an unknown alien presence from ravaging them to pieces, or skillfully wield upgradable weapons one bullet at a time to stay alive.

Dark Matter is rated PEGI 12 and is expected to release mid-October on Steam. For more on Dark Matter, please click here to go to darkmatterthegame.com or see it on Steam.
Paradox Interactive, a publisher of games and minion of all-powerful wizards, announced the upcoming release of Warlock 2: The Exiled from Ino-Co Plus, the sequel to turn-based strategy fantasy game Warlock: Master of the Arcane. Coming to PC in Spring 2014, Warlock 2 will challenge strategic sorcerers and megalomaniacal mages to conquer Ardania in an all-out war of cunning, combat, diplomacy, and excessively enormous fireballs. Single-player and multi-player gameplay will each challenge would-be warlocks to manage an entire realm full of deadly beasts, promising to make Warlock 2: The Exiled an exercise in constant war mongering and turn-based tragedy.

Journey back to the realm of Ardania, the land that cannot go an entire week without being conquered, and conquer it once again! Exiled to a shard from a shattered world, players of Warlock 2: The Exiled must contend with fellow exiled mages and a host of terrifying creatures. Wield ancient magic, summon even more terrifying creatures, wage constant war where every decision is crucial (warlocks don’t do auto-resolving battles), and discover just who possesses the greatest balls of fire in a turn-based strategy game that offers no surrender or retreat.

Warlock 2: The Exiled features:

The Never-ending Gory – The battle for Ardania is constant, merciless, and challenging: your claim to the land will be tested with battles across the world map where each fight is worthy of your personal attention; you’re not called a WAR-lock for nothing

Spelling Counts – Over 150 spells to add to your tome, allowing command over powerful enchantments, nasty hexes, and elemental forces

A Crass Menagerie – Hundreds of different mythical and magical beasts to deploy on the battlefield with distinct tactical uses, from giant rats and dwarven prospectors to werewolves with hats on them

Friendship is Magic – A multi-player experience as robust as the single-player experience, including PvP, Co-op PvE, and every combination in between

Warlock 2: The Playstyles – Fight your way through the shards to reclaim Ardania in new ‘Exile’ mode, or relive the classic gameplay of ‘Master of the Arcane’ mode with new features from the sequel

For more information about Warlock 2: The Exiled, visit www.warlock2.com.

Star Wars Pinball: Balance of the Force Releasing Week of October 14

Star Wars™ Pinball: Balance of the Force will be available for download on digital platforms starting October 15th.

October 15 - PlayStation Network in North America
October 16 - Xbox LIVE Arcade, Steam, Windows 8, iOS, Google Play, Kindle, PlayStation Network in EuropeWii U and Mac App Store have been delayed, we will confirm release dates at a later time

The biggest Star Wars space battles come to life on the Star Wars™: Starfighter Assault pinball table, releasing in two weeks for the new Star Wars™ Pinball: Balance of the Force pack. Players must choose to support the Rebel Alliance’s Fleet or the Galactic Empire’s Armada as they complete missions while dodging turret fire and destructible ramps!

As missions are completed, players will earn Fleet Upgrades that can be spent to upgrade the fleet, fighters and turrets. In addition, players will be able to advance the rank of their pilot as they progress through the table!

The table includes legendary Starfighters like the X-wing and TIE fighter, along with iconic vessels like the Millennium Falcon and the Death Star II.
2013 IndieCade Award Winners Revealed

Blendo Games’ Quadrilateral Cowboy Takes Home Grand Jury Award

The 2013 IndieCade named this year’s award winners, including the Grand Jury Award going to Quadrilateral Cowboy, created by Blendo Games. IndieCade recognizes superior examples of story development, visual, technological, audio and all-around independent game titles as well as creators who have greatly contributed to the independent gaming field.

Ten of the winners, including the Grand Jury Award, were announced at the Red Carpet awards show on Thursday, Oct. 3. The Grand Jury Award allows IndieCade’s Distinguished Award Jurors to select a game that they feel deserves a special citation for overall excellence. This could be a game that couldn’t fit into any other category, but the jury each year determines the criteria for assignment of this award. Past recipients could have included Gravitation (2008), Moon Stories (2009), Groping in the Dark (2010), Fez (2011) and Unmanned (2012). This year the jury chose from more than 850 games from six different continents. On Sunday, Oct. 5 the Game Changer, Audience, Developer and Media Choice Awards were announced at the closing party.

This year’s IndieCade included the debut of two new awards: The Media Choice award, given to the game the most media members selected as their favorite, as well as The Trailblazer Award, given to a relative newcomer who has shaken things up and used games in original as well as innovative ways.

“Every year IndieCade’s awards recognize a diverse array of titles and some of the brightest developers in indie gaming, increasing awareness for this exceptional craft,” said Stephanie Barish, CEO, IndieCade. “It is an honor to identify these amazing projects and we are proud to provide a platform which helps distinguish these games and their creators.”

The game and developer winners this year are:

- Grand Jury Award: Quadrilateral Cowboy – Blendo Games
- Visuals: Kentucky Route Zero – Cardboard Computer
- Audio: Gone Home – The Fullbright Company
- Impact: Dog Eat Dog – Liwanag Press
- Interaction: Spaceteam – Henry Smith
- Game Design: NIDHOGG – MESSHOF
- Technology: Spin the Bottle: Bumpie’s Party – KnapNok Games & Redgrim
- Story/World Design: Kentucky Route Zero – Cardboard Computer
- Special Recognition: Porpentine’s Twine Compilation – Porpentine
- The Trailblazers Award: Tracy Fullerton
- Game Changer Award: Anna Anthropy
- Developers Choice Award: Killer Queen Arcade – Joshua DeBonis & Nikita Mikros
- Audience Choice Award: Slash Dash – Nevernaut
- Media Choice Award: TowerFall – Matt Makes Games

For more information, visit http://www.indiecade.com/
1. Grand Theft Auto V (Take Two Interactive, XBOX 360)
2. Grand Theft Auto V (Take Two Interactive, PS3)
3. FIFA Soccer 14 (Electronic Arts, XBOX 360)
4. FIFA Soccer 14 (Electronic Arts, XBOX 360)
5. Madden NFL 25 (Electronic Arts, PS3)
6. Minecraft (Microsoft Game Studios, XBOX 360)
7. Madden NFL 25 (Electronic Arts, XB360)
8. Nintendo Land (Nintendo, WiiU)
9. Saints Row IV (Deep Silver, XBOX 360)
10. Kinect Adventures! (Microsoft Game Studios, XBOX 360)

Source: vgchartz.com

1. Angry Birds Star Wars II
2. Minecraft - Pocket Edition
3. Pixel Gun 3D - Block World Pocket Survival Shooter with Skins Maker
4. Scribblenauts Remix
5. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Rooftop Run
6. SurvivalCraft
7. NBA2K14
8. Lego Batman: DC Superheroes
9. War of Cubes - Online Multi-player Block Building Sandbox
10. Black Ops: MC Mini FPS Game

Source: iTunes

As well as being produced by the creators of the original, “Amnesia: The Dark Descent” Frictional Games, The Chinese Room takes a different approach in ‘Machine for Pigs’ with the same Amnesia feel, but streamlined mechanics such as no inventory, sanity meter, and less interaction with objects in game, bringing more of the focus on the story, adventure and overall experience.

In the same spirit of the first, you play Mandus who has been out for three months and now has amnesia after contracting a terrible illness. Much of the story there after is on delving into the depths to uncover what dark secrets lie beneath and how these dark secrets came to fruition being led by visions, voice boxes with a familiar voice, and journal pages scattered among the different levels.

With much of the mechanics from Dark Descent left out in Machine for Pigs the emphasis on story and experience is apparent when playing. Instead of managing inventory or adding more oil to your lantern the focus is shifted towards progressing in the story line and immersion. While those who favored Dark Descent’s mechanics may feel as if they received the short end of the stick, I felt that the story and immersion focus paid off overall.

While I was still spooked by Dark Descent’s immersion, “Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs” seemed to leave more of an impact with much of the game streamlined in comparison to the first. The creak of floorboards or phantom copies of kids darting past areas in the game left me panicked and cautious to what may lie across the long stretch of hallway.

As a result of the streamlined mechanics, much of the puzzles held much less depth than the first. This gave much of the puzzles a ‘put square block into square hole’ feel and much of the confusion was short lived. Since much of the games items and objects are nailed down and can not be interacted with this left the one item needed to continue stick out like a sore thumb in most cases.

Regardless of focus, “Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs” still has monsters about just as in the first that spells certain death if you find yourself cornered with one. While in “Dark Descent”, much of your time is spent finding hiding spots or planning ways of escape from monsters.

In “Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs” however most monsters are duped by running away since the most hiding spots you have are limited to hiding under tables or pipes. I find myself more in favor of the original way of dealing with monsters, but the slight difference doesn’t seem like a ‘make or break it’ in this regard.

Levels in the game are more dynamic than the first, from a mansion, to an industrial nightmare, to the calming yet unsettling streets of London. The changes to environment was nice part of “Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs” because it was enjoyable to have a change of scenery every once and a while in game and appealing to the eyes.

Story is of medium difficulty to follow, much of the story is grasped through the journal pages and putting two and three or four together is needed to grasp the entire picture. Much of the back story is also covered in the journal pages and explain the how and why of all that is happening. Voice boxes help to lead the character through the story and give direction to each objective.

Controls are mostly pointing, clicking and dragging to interact with everything in the game.

Graphics for “Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs” were better and smooth looking and were aesthetically pleasing. Items and environment were clear cut with no apparent eyesore graphical errors. At the start of the game you have a prompt to set brightness to a level to be able to see all within the game. Details on pipes, gauges, and various metalwork was done well with rivets and stats done in detail. Horror elements such as blood and bodies are clear in their distinction and add to the ‘scarness’ of the game. Cut scenes did not appear to be much different from the actual game and just made you lose control of your character during the various sequences.

Sound is also done well no discrepancies and I recommend using headphones for an immersion focused experience. Musical scores are also done incredibly well with appropriate lyrics and genre used. The most interesting of the scores plays to the tune “God Save the Queen” backwards and provides a haunting feeling as the main lyric sung is “Kyrie Eleison” or “Lord have Mercy”. Ambient sounds were done well in immersing the player in the game whether it is the whistle of steam through pipes, creaks of the floorboard, or cries of monsters from below.

I feel that “Machine for Pigs” did Amnesia justice with immersion and story focus. Game play is definitely not for anyone such as kids to play due to some visually graphic horror parts of the game and the depressing and very dark parts of the story.

While much of the mechanics and intricacies that some may favor are left out, I was still satisfied overall with the game.

As a final judgment call, I’d say if you are a fan of the “Amnesia” games to give the game a try, much of the feeling from carried over and left it to be an enjoyable horror experience. “Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs” is a game with great immersion, dark overtones and compelling story warrants a four out of five stars. ****
DEAD OR ALIVE 5: ULTIMATE

TYPE OF GAME: Fighting Game
PLATFORM: PS3/XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: Tecmo Koei Games
RATED: M for Mature
REVIEWED BY: KNDY

In 2012, the release of "Dead or Alive 5" was highly anticipated as it had been 15 years since the release of "Dead or Alive" to be followed by "Dead or Alive 5+" for the PlayStation Vita. But a year later after the release of the first game, "Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate" for the PS3 and Xbox 360 has now arrived and not only is it a much better game than the original, it features five additional characters plus enhanced tag team mode and more!

"Dead or Alive 5" was the first DOA game to be released via multi-platform since the second game back in 1999. Developed by Team Ninja minus "Dead or Alive" creator Tomanobu Itagaki, the new game will be directed by Yohei Shimbori.

The fighting game would feature 25 characters. 18 characters from the "Dead or Alive" universe and would introduce new characters Rig and Mila but also characters from the "Dead or Alive" universe and would be directed by Yohei Shimbori.

The story of "Dead or Alive 5" takes place two years since the last "Dead or Alive 4" tournament. Despite the destruction of the DOATEC TriTower HQ, despite the dissolution of the DOATEC Biotechnology Division and the Projects Alpha, Epsilon and Omega that Dr. Victor Donovan had control of and most importantly despite Helena now being the chairperson of DOATEC, it appears that someone is still working on those projects. Who are these individuals?

Meanwhile, Helena plans to hold the fifth Dead or Alive tournament, hosted by Zack, in honor of the projects. Who are these individuals? Playing immediately, a ranked match, lobby match and entering video game series, Akira Yuki, Sarah Bryant and Pai Chan.

For "Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate", the game now adds five more characters which include "Virtuous Fighter" character Jacky, "Ninja Gaiden" characters Momoji and Rachel and "Dead or Alive 4" characters Leon and Ein.

The story remains the same as "Dead or Alive 5" which is one major storyline and you can't choose which character to play but you get to experience all fighters.

But that is where arcade mode comes in and one can play solo or play Tag Team. While there is no upgrading from "Dead or Alive 5" to "Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate", the game does reuse your save, so you don't have to play story mode or try to unlock every clothing item again. In fact, the last game offered 114 costumes which you can choose who you want to fight. With a friend via solo or tag, up to four people can play.

TIME ATTACK MODE: How many characters can you beat in the shortest amount of time.
SURVIVAL MODE: Fight as many characters per stage (10 characters per stage). If you lose, game over.
TRAILING MODE: With a lot of moves, you can utilize the training mode to not only learn moves but open achievements. Ultimate now includes free training, command training, tutorial and combo challenge.
ONLINE MODE: You can fight against anyone around the world via a simple match which you can start fighting immediately, a ranked match, lobby match and enables spectator mode to chat with other players.

Online training mode now offers 2 vs 2 tag mode. Players can also battle in ranked tag matches in order to become #1 in the world rankings. Separate from solo matches, in tag matches Grade Points (GP) are earned for both team members with each win counting as two toward unlockable costumes.

DOA players can now attain the new "Prize Fighter" ranking. Four different ranks can be earned by winning consecutive ranked matches: Bronze Fighter, Silver Fighter, Gold Fighter and Platinum Fighter. Prize Fighters can earn extra Grade Points with wins and those who defeat another Prize Fighter receive a GP bonus. Grade Points have been updated to now allow for players to earn up to Grade U from S+. Bonus GPs are rewarded when fighters move to the next grade level.

Also added to online competition is "Character Points" (CP) which displays a player's skill level with each character. With the inclusion of CP, players can check if they are using their best character and see where they place in the world ranking.

Tecmo also made improvements to online mode enhancing gameplay and provides a smoother experience regardless of a player's network connection and also cutting search times to find opponents ranked matches and unranked throw downs.
an area and how detail many stages look, I was very impressed! As for audio, “Dead or Alive 5” sounds great! Audio is crystal clear and you can easily change the audio to Japanese or English. Dialogue is easily understandable and while I am used to the Japanese voicework, which is awesome! The English dub is very good. So, fore those wondering if Tecmo provides both vocal soundtracks, they do!

As for sound effects and ambiance, some states are more immersive than others. Especially one stage that involves tanks and artillery being shot out.

Having had a chance to play both “Dead or Alive 5” and “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate”, the latest game in the series is much better than its predecessor. But not a whole lot?

The additional characters, stages and songs are a major plus and they have beefed up the training mode considerably and you get the Power Launcher move in which people can do more juggling combo attacks. But “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate” also introduces players who just want to test the game thanks to its free Core Fighters release on PSN.

With that being said, as a new game and not a game that could have been updated via DLC, previous “Dead or Alive 5” players have to purchase “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate” and can’t just pay to download the additional characters. “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate” is a more enjoyable game with better fight mechanics over “Dead or Alive 5” but previous owners will have to repurchase the game.

With the incorporation of “Virtus Fighter” characters, one would hope Tecmo Koei will someday add accessory or clothing customization. While it’s great to have these unlockable costumes and some that need to be purchased online (which are mostly bikinis and Christmas outfits), people are going to want to see more if they are going to have to repurchase the game for another $39.99. Other upgraded versions of other games did not cost as much and with the fighting game genre so competitive, you really need to stand out. And I believe clothing and accessory customization and more than five characters would be a welcomed by fans.

As a long time fan of the series, one who has put a ton of hours into this series since the game has first came out, “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate” is the best DOA game made so far!

From the look of the characters, how smooth they play and the learning curve to learn other critical moves is impressive! Even online mode is an improvement and enjoyable to play!

But the big question now is if this game is worth purchasing? The answer is “Yes!”. And the good news is that if you want to try the game, you can download “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate: Core Fighters” on PSN for free and start playing immediately. You won’t have Story Mode but you will be able to utilize four characters and see if the game is worth your time.

But what if you owned “Dead or Alive 5”? The answer is also “yes” but also depending on how important the new stages and five extra characters are for you. There is also more added to training mode, new animations, new music and other changes included to online gaming mode.

Unfortunately, there is no DLC to upgrade your game or purchase the additional five characters or modes, you simply have to buy a new game and I know this may be disheartening for some, but it’s where a lot of companies are going with their fighting games, albeit it would have been much better if “Ultimate” was offered for a much cheaper price but that is subjective.

Overall, “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate” is the best “Dead or Alive” fighting game made so far! But is “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate” a major step up from “Dead or Alive 5”? Just slightly. It’s still an enjoyable fighting game but is definitely in need for newer game enhancements, more new characters than the five included. More customizable options for clothing and accessories would be great!

Still, I love playing this game and if you are a fan, I recommend “Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate”! ****
The futuristic racing game "AiRace" is back in its third sequel "AiRace Speed" (from independent development studio QubicGames) for the Nintendo 3DS via Nintendo eShop.

Fast and furious, try to use your futuristic jet as you navigate through environments packed with obstacles, tunnels, shortcuts and more.

Try to beat your own personal time or against fellow competitors around the world via online leaderboards and unlock special achievements.

Have you ever watched the movie "Star Wars: Episode IV" and remember the scene where Luke Skywalker and the rebels had to navigate and fly through the Death Star's small areas and openings as quickly as possible to destroy it?

Well, that's what you can expect from AiRace SPEED. An adrenaline pumping, speed race as you try to accomplish the best time by going through tunnels, obstacles with only enough space for your aircraft at different angles.

You get a good sense of the feeling of speed by playing this game and while I'm sure there are people who can probably use the 3DS controls and memorize certain patterns, I did have a more difficult time of using full-on speed and completing certain courses in a short amount of time. In fact, braking became my biggest ally in the game but definitely made my times slightly higher than I would have liked.

The game sports up to 18 tracks and up to five vehicles and to move on to other levels, you will need to beat the previous level to move on.

The earlier levels are much more forgiving. Certain spacecraft have a health meter and if you hit walls, the health meter goes down but slow down and brake and the meter goes back up.

But by the sixth level, the track doesn't allow for brakes but then you will need to utilize your skill, get past that and you make it through a new level featuring different aircraft, environments and challenges.

As for the game, some levels will let you restart as many times as you want. After crashing, restart takes place where you passed a glowing blue marker, so you don't have to replay the course after a crash which is good. But I noticed on the sixth course, three crashes and the game went back to the menu.

Crashing does dock you several seconds on your time, so if you are playing for the best speed, you want to avoid any hitting of walls or get into any accidents. But it's difficult to avoid the walls, so I felt I was playing not much for speed records but opening up new courses and aircraft.

But for the most part, I found myself memorizing certain obstacles through a lot of trial and mishaps and certain courses that I thought would be impossible, became very possible as I put many more hours into the game.

The main controls is using the stick or the directional buttons to steer, shoulder buttons to roll left or right, and A for nitro and B for brake. In the options menu, you are able to use button mode or stylus mode, flight assist and change invert up/down and also change miles to km if needed.

Graphics for "AiRace Speed" is good on the 3DS. Each panel is well detailed, shaded, some with very good reflections and there are more than a number of obstacles during the game. But because the amount of speed that you are going, it's one of the few games where you don't get to admire the graphics so much because you're racing through them quite quickly.

Audio features synth-based music and the main audio you will hear is if you speed up, slow down, crash or when you receive a warning alert, but the majority of audio is through the music playing during the game. And the effects do sound good via 3DS speaker but moreso with headphones.

I have to say that this is one of the most challenging futuristic race games I have played. It's an addictive game for those who love futuristic racing game like "F-Zero" and "Wipeout" with the exception that you are not racing against other vehicles and most of the time, it's about you trying to beat your own personal time or other times while going through courses with just a small amount of openings or just simply challenging yourself to beat each course in order to open another and open up other aircraft.

"AiRace Speed" featured well-designed exteriors with plenty of detail, the feeling of speed is also well-done and what I loved about the game is the feeling that courses that seemed impossible at first, become very possible and you start to realize that the more you play, the more trial and error through crashing, you eventually start to memorize those obstacles and find a way to get through them.

It's a great feeling of accomplishment as I was able to advance through the courses and just became immersed by the game and its various challenges.

AiRace" has been an exciting race game for years on the Nintendo DS and it's latest sequel is even better for the Nintendo 3DS. Great challenging and addictive gameplay, "AiRace Speed" is a game that I recommend! ****
Larian Studios comes through with their latest “Divinity” video game. Finessly blending combination of strategy and RPG elements with a sprinkle of real time strategy gameplay, “Divinity: Dragon Commander” is the name and dragon commanding is the game from outsmarting other nations by cards or clever unit placement to commanding armies on the battle field first hand to making hard decisions in the political arena. With a world torn by treachery and heavy war machinery only the Dragon prince can hope to have the final say.

Overall gameplay focuses on role-playing as the dragon prince turn “Dragon Commander” utilizing strategy, RTS, and role playing all in one package. As the last loyal of kin it turns to you to reclaim the kingdom from your treacherous brothers through strategy and a large commanding force.

Though you do not stand alone as many who join you along the way offer advantages such as upgrades and the ability to turn the tides with enhanced speed in battle or sleight of hand on the world map.

Strategy when commanding units and the like on the world map is simple enough with actions such as moving units, building units, and making various types of buildings. On this map you also have cards available to buff your own economy or attack another nations economy. Each turn taken gives gold used for units and research points used to upgrade either your dragon form or to buy and upgrade various units.

With each turn your opponents also move, upgrade units, and use cars against you. While simplistic in comparison to pure strategy games that have more depth such as assassination and counsel management, it is only one part of the three part package.

“Dragon Commander” utilizes RTS gameplay to decide battles when you choose to take the battlefield yourself. Each unit has advantages and disadvantages with some having abilities to turn the tides quickly in your favor. Building in the game is straightforward purchasing buildings using recruits and gold to build more units to siege your opponent.

Aside from the air and land units, sea units are helpful to assassinate an enemy building or provide much needed support near the shores. With all this said there still remains the one unit you can employ at the cost of recruits: the Dragon. Each time you summon your hero unit you have abilities to buff and debuff units, fire-power, and a jet pack to zoom across the field to key points. All this allows for an enjoyable alternative the usual strategy game combat.

Although like it’s strategy counterpart, it lacks in comparison to the purebred RTS games which either point may turn away those looking for the whole experience when it comes to specific genres. I find it lacking due to the structured RTS gameplay where you can’t choose where to build buildings and at times end up mobbing for the win rather than a clutch maneuver. Difficulty increase could circumvent these cheese tactics, but still remains to be seen whether or not it would make difference.

Even though the game can feel like Jack of All Trades and master of neither, the story and role playing involved picks up the slack. You as the dragon prince have multitudes of choices and can shape the future kingdom how you see fit.

In the political arena, you allow or disallow touchy subjects such as drug usage, same-sex marriage, and wages for those you have dominion over. Relationships with your wife and your generals are also greatly influenced by some of your political decisions as well as dialogue choices with them which could end with any one of them not enjoying your company. For those who enjoy going down an evil path, are also properly satisfied as there are options to deal in dark magics to give you an edge at a cost.

Those who enjoy the good path can skip the dark magics and make whatever choices add to the overall betterment of the kingdom. In the instance you are unsure of how someone will react to your choices each turn, you can save before then to ensure that it won’t be permanent damage to your save meant for doing only good, evil, or neutral. With so many choices, compelling role playing, and influential actions makes the RPG aspect of “Dragon Commander” stand out above all else.

Controls are straightforward such as clicking and scrolling to select units and keyboard bindings to use abilities and issue commands.

Graphics are outstanding with the amount of detail of the various characters met and the landscape of every battlefield you fight on. With noticeable subtleties such as trees crashing down as your machinery crosses over them or facial expressions and hair movement.

Surround sound audio seems to be a great asset when battling it out on the field as everything seems to explode immersing you more into the game. Audio is clear cut with no noticeable discrepancies allowing for an enjoyable audio experience.

“Dragon Commander” has some a bit more replay value than most story games out there as different paths are available as you decide how to rule your kingdom. There is also a multiplayer battle system where you can duke it out against other dragon princes and co-op campaign for those who prefer playing with friends as they conquer each nation.

All wrapped up in one package “Dragon Commander” is a worthwhile game. While it may not appeal to those hardcore to the various genres mixed together, it still allows plenty of fun by appealing to a multitude of different players.

I recommend “Divinity: Dragon Commander” to those who enjoy story and a mash up keystone genres to command and conquer as a dragon, a dragon with a jet pack no less.
In July 2013, Zen Studios unveiled their latest video game on Steam, “CastleStorm”.

A mashup of 2D physics destruction mashed with a tower defense brawler, according to Zen Studios, the game was inspired of a childhood memory of building and destroying LEGO castles.

As the first game focused on the character Sir Gareth, the game focused on Knights vs. Vikings and featured a story-driven solo campaign, a customizable castle editor, online multiplayer and co-op modes.

Weeks later, Zen Studios released their first DLC titled “From Outcast to Savior” which featured a new 20 battle campaign, new hero, Royal Guard-class troops, new weapons and achievements along with new environments. And the war against the Vikings continued as the goal was to capture the power-hungry Viking king, chief Ramhorn.

And here we are with the second DLC from Zen Studios titled “CastleStorm: The Warrior Queen”. And this time around, Sir Gareth may have met his unfortunate demise, but he intends to continue and do good by helping a new class of Viking elite warrior, the Warrior Queen. And the war against the Vikings continued as the goal was to capture the power-hungry Viking king, chief Ramhorn. And here we are with the second DLC from Zen Studios titled “CastleStorm: The Warrior Queen”. And this time around, Sir Gareth may have met his unfortunate demise, but he intends to continue and do good by helping a new class of Viking elite warrior, the Warrior Queen.

“CastleStorm: The Warrior Queen” has four gameplay modes: Campaign, Skirmish, Survival and Hero Survival.

Campaign: This is the main story mode of the game which allows you to play as Freia the Viking in a 2D fight mode and the other as you must send your troops to battle to steal your opponent's flag or destroying their castle.

The storyline is that Sir Gareth is now a ghost after trying to save Freia. He tries to help the Viking Freia escape from prison by having a cake delivered to her with an axe inside. Now, Freia must free her comrades and lead her troops to battle against Chief Ramhorn and his knights.

The game is rather short and can be beaten possibly in five hours or less.

During the Campaign Mode, similar to the previous “CastleStorm” games, you control Freia (and other fellow Viking friends) as you try to fight the enemy Vikings with your axe. You can clobber them or you can throw axes afar. But it’s not that easy as the enemy has shields, some are weak and can be beaten easily, while others are in armor or you have giant beats going after you which can literally pummel the life out of you with two hits. So, you need to stand on a distance and throw your axe while preparing for attacks on both sides and preparing to use your shield to defend yourself and attack.

But most of the fun is the physics destruction games in which you can earn enough gold to upgrade your projectiles such as barbed harpoons, spear guns, flaming explosive barrels, golem hostages, stormbringers, beat makers, frozen swordfish, arctic snowballs and meteor showers.

During battle (destruction games), you can use spells that sends Freia or Captain Thorvard to fight briefly or send rock showers, lightning bolts, ghost armies, blizzard or protective shields.

You can upgrade your troops such as Berserker Elites, Pack Leaders (Wolves), Bombardiers, Shamans, Motivational Chiefs, Hammer Chiefs, Valkyries, Warrior Trolls and Flying Dragons.

Your weapons don't run out but their is a refill gauge which takes its time to fill up before you can use the weapon again. Thus the importance of upgrading your weapons, for faster response times, stronger weapons, etc.

Skirmish Mode: This mode allows you to play the destruction mode or play a side that must defend its flag from a hoard of knights trying to steal it.

Survival and Hero Survival Mode: Survival and Hero Survival is a last man standing with Hero Survival allowing one to play an unlocked character right at the start as you try to survive each wave and prevent an enemy from stealing your flag or killing you. The more you advance with each wave, the more stronger your opponent is.

I enjoyed the gameplay especially the games that required one to steal the other opponent's flag or destroy their castle. The weapons were pretty far out, such as the use of throwing fishes at your opponent to throwing exploding barrels or golem hostages at your opponents castle. But the fun of unleashing a ghost army on many of your opponents during battle.

The game was a lot of fun and some levels were quite challenging. And I felt that I was having random clicking fatigue via mouse until I switched to an XBOX 360 controller and the game became much easier to defeat an enemy during Freia's fight games, while the keyboard and mouse was easy for the destruction games, but you can use the XBOX 360 controller but it takes a little getting used to at first.

But the “CastleStorm: The Warrior Queen” DLC was better than I expected and for those who have played and enjoyed “CastleStorm” and “From Outcast to Savior”, will surely want to play this DLC game. A lot of humor, plenty of action and enjoyable gameplay. I don't think there is any game where you can impale an enemy with a frozen swordfish! That's how crazy and fun this game really is!

“CastleStorm: The Warrior Queen” is a game that I can't find any faults other than I wish the game was longer. “The Warrior Queen” was a lot of fun, in fact, I had so much fun playing it that I was bummed out that Campaign mode was a bit on the short side because I enjoyed the game so much! Yet, it's a DLC and an awesome one at that!

“CastleStorm: The Warrior Queen” is recommended! ****
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DORASU to release “SLOTTER MANIA V: HIGH SCHOOL OF THE DEAD”

On October 10th, Dorasu will be releasing its latest game in the “Slotter Mania” series, “SLOTTER MANIA V: HIGH SCHOOL OF THE DEAD” for PS Vita. The game will feature the original Japanese voice talent.

Ark System Works to release “BlazBlue: Chrono Phantasma” for the PS3

The popular arcade game “BlazBlue: Chrono Phantasma” will be released in Japan on October 24th. Featuring all characters from the arcade plus a few new characters for the PS3 edition.

The game will feature the original voice actors, story mode, tutorial mode but also online gameplay plus challenge and training modes.
KONAMI TO RELEASE “JIKKYOU PAWAFURU PUROYAKYU 2013”

Konami will be releasing its latest “Jikkyou Pawafuru Puroyakyu 2013” for the Sony PS3, Vita and PSP on October 24th. This year, new game features will include updates of player data, enhancements to high school mode and event deck system, salary negotiations in “My Life” mode and those who purchase the game through Amazon Japan can get access to a limited version with a rare character plus Power Getter Ticket with DLC.

“SAINT SEIYA: BRAVE SOLDIERS” TO BE RELEASED IN JAPAN ON OCTOBER 17TH

Bandai Namco Games will release their latest “Saint Seiya” fighting game titled “Saint Seiya: Brave Soldiers” for the PlayStation 3 in Japan on October 17th. Featuring the most characters in a “Saint Seiya” fighting game (over 50 characters), the game will feature a story mode with dialogue and a major improvement in the animation of the game. Also, “Saint Seiya: Brave Soldiers” will feature an online battle mode where people can take on other fighters around the world.

DAIGASSO BAND BROTHERS P TO BE RELEASED ON THE 3DS IN JAPAN ON 11/14

The popular Japanese Nintendo rhythm game series “Daigasso Band Brothers” will receive the Nintendo 3DS treatment as the game “Daigasso Band Brothers P” (“P” for Professional and Pro Producers”) will be released in Japan on November 4th. The new game known for its plethora of J-Pop tracks will feature a Vocaloid Engine and will utilize music from the iVocaloid library. The game will allow you to take photos of yourself using your 3DS and add your face to the character. While it’s not known if the game will be primarily Vocaloid tracks or contain a large amount of J-Pop tracks like the original Nintendo DS games remain to be seen. But what is known is that the game will feature TK (Tetsuya Komuro), Golden Bomber, Hyadain and more!
JAPANESE VIDEO GAME SALES CHARTS • SEPTEMBER 23 - SEPTEMBER 29, 2012
Source: m-create.com

1. Monster Hunter 4 (Capcom, 3DS)  | モンスターハンター4
2. Sen no Kiseki (The Legend of Heroes) (Falcom, PS Vita)  | 英雄伝説 閃の軌跡
3. Muso Orochi 2 Ultimate (Koei Tecmo Games, PS3)  | 無双OROCHI 2 Ultimate
4. Sen no Kiseki (The Legend of Heroes) (Falcom, PS3)  | 英雄伝説 閃の軌跡
5. Armored Core Verdict Day (FROM SOFTWARE, PS3)  | アーマード・コア ヴァーディクトデイ
6. Ore no Imouto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai Happy End HD BOX (Bandai Namco Games, PS3)  | 俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない。ハッピーエンド
7. Zelda no Densetsu: Kaze no Takuto HD (Nintendo, Wii U)  | ゼルダの伝説 風のタクト HD
8. Muso Orochi 2 Ultimate (Koei Tecmo Games, Vita)  | 無双OROCHI 2 Ultimate
9. Tomodachi Collection: Shin Seikatsu (Nintendo, 3DS)  | トモダチコレクション 新生活
   たちからにげきれ！
10. Arcadias no Ikusahime (Nihon Software, PS3)  | アルカディアスの戦姫

iTUNES JAPAN iPAD GAMES APP CHARTS • OCTOBER 8, 2013
Source: iTunes Japan

1. Plague Inc.
2. Where’s Wally® in Hollywood
3. 釣りRPG ドラゴンフィッシャーズ
4. ONE PIECE RUNNING Chopper
5. Asphalt 8: Airborne
6. Mincraft - Pocket Edition
7. Cytus
8. Where’s My Perry?
9. Infinity Blade III
10. ぱちスロAKB48アプリ
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Cosplay Interview: Shae_

As J!-ENT continues our global spotlight for cosplayers around the world, our attention goes to France where we interview a creative and driven cosplayer named Shae_. J!-ENT recently interviewed Shae_ regarding her passion for cosplay and also learn more about her creative side.

By Ken Eric Chen

When did you start cosplaying?
Shae_: The first time I heard of cosplay it was in 2006 or 2007, via some “Final Fantasy” blogs. I found that very nice but didn’t see myself making cosplay! It’s only in 2009, when I left my parent’s home and moved to a bigger city (I’m from a very little city, and my parents are far from being geeks) that I made my first cosplay. During high school I was in a boarding school and we shared a lot of books and manga, plus I had some friends there who were already cosplayers, I also became a very good friend with one of the FF blogger who was also a cosplayer! Few months after I moved, there was a convention and they asked me if I wanted to come and make a little cosplay… I accepted! I was very curious to see it!

How many does each costume take to complete? How many have you completed?
Shae_: I’ve already made almost 40 costumes now! As for the hours spent on them, it depends on the costume. Some were made in few hours only, and some asked me more than 150 hours like Rydia or June May. Yes, I stop counting after 150!

What was the most challenging aspect of cosplaying?
Shae_: Not getting mad at the drama! (Laughing) More seriously, my personal challenge is to bring character to life and make my cosplay look as realistic as possible. For example, if I cosplay as a fighter, I’ll try my best to have a costume that resist to fighting moves, and if I cosplay as a princess, I’ll try to be as graceful as possible.
How have your abilities improved throughout the years?

**Shae:** They improved a lot! I’m a very curious person who loves trying nice things, that’s a reason why I love cosplay so much, I always have to find crazy solutions to craft things! Also, make up. I wasn’t into make up at all before starting cosplay, and even if my mother’s a beautician who gave me great tips, I learned a lot by myself and I’m very happy of it!

When you create a costume, what is more important: accuracy or adding your personal touches?

**Shae:** I love to add personal touches. I try to make an accurate costume as much as possible but I’ll add a little something to make it more personal. Mostly on cosplays that I really love and wear several times like Rydia or my new Jaina costume that I’ll finish soon. It’s only little details that most of people won’t notice like little jewels, embroideries or accessories but it makes me like my costumes even better.

What do you do with your costumes, wigs, and props after you are done with them?

**Shae:** I moved a lot in the last few years and my flat was very humid, so sadly many of my costumes died. Some of my old costumes are in boxes, in my workshop, I don’t want to throw them away because when I see them, along with my new costumes I realize how much I improved in a few years. Also, yeah, I have a workshop now, so I can stock everything without problem. I also sell wigs I don’t use anymore sometimes.

What is the most satisfying aspect of cosplaying?

**Shae:** As for me there are few. First, the satisfaction when I complete a costume, or a prop and realize I learned things from that. Then the social part and most of all the smile of people when they meet me in convention or sometimes on photoshoots. I really like speaking with people, explaining what’s cosplay, taking photos and interacting with other cosplayers or people to create little scenes. I’m also very happy cosplay gave me nice opportunities, like being invited at Tales of the Lane, a League of Legends tournament, participating in some fan films and other great things like that!

Is your family and friends supportive towards your hobby?

**Shae:** Most of my friends are roleplayers, gamers, artists... Let’s say geeks in general, so I don’t have any problem with them and the fact that I’m a cosplayer! As for my family that’s another thing. Many of them just don’t know about that because we don’t see each other very often, few like my grandma appreciate the fact that I craft pretty dresses sometimes, but the most interesting must be my mother. When I started cosplay, she hated manga, fantasy, videos games and stuff. As I lived by my own it wasn’t really a problem, I’ve been patient and explained her everything, how I craft my costumes, the people I meet in convention, the message I receive, the photos I pose for. It took a lot of time but now she can’t wait to attend her first convention and would be happy to wear a costume!

What is your favorite cosplay you have done? Which one had the most positive reaction?

**Shae:** It may change soon but my very favorites are Rydia from “Final Fantasy IV” and Jaina from “Warcraft”. As for positive reaction, I don’t really know... I know many people like Rydia and Jaina, my Elyon cos-
“I love creating things and with cosplay you have so many things to do with so many various techniques, it’s like the perfect hobby for me.” – Shae
How hard do you try to stay in character?

**Shae:** I really do my best on stage and on photoshoots to find beautiful place that’ll match the character’s universe and spend time to learn my character’s poses and facial expressions by practicing in front of a mirror. At a convention, it’s a bit different, in general I just pose for photos and try to walk like my character would do. But in general, the simple fact that you don’t have the same shoes as usual changes the way you walk!

Also, when I meet another cosplayer and know that they appreciate this kind of roleplay interactions, we sometimes do little scenes just for fun. I really support this idea of improvised scenes and happenings in convention, it’s so much fun for everyone!

What would you like to improve on? (either your sewing skills, prop making, etc)

**Shae:** Everything! I love learning things and I’m a perfectionist who’s never satisfied with her results.

What are your hobbies outside of cosplaying and do they contribute to your cosplaying ideas?

**Shae:** I love drawing, painting, I took eight years of dance lessons (Classic, Modern Jazz and Baroque) and three years of theater when I was younger. Also, some movie making, photography and write a little when I have time. I just can’t stop creating stuff and cosplay is just a part of this creativity madness, I think! I also love cooking and video games!

How many conventions do you attend? How far do you usually travel?

**Shae:** I go to many Parisian events! I’d like to travel more but I miss time and money for that. Next year, I’d love to attend a convention in Belgium and Switzerland, also to the Gamescom in Germany!

What is your motivation to continue? Recognition, pure passion, or becoming pro?

**Shae:** Passion mostly. As I said before, I love creating things and with cosplay you have so many things to do with so many various techniques, it’s like the perfect hobby for me. And as for recognition, well, I don’t want to be a famous person, like I don’t care about the number of followers I have on social media, but the fact that people appreciate my cosplays and the tips I give really motivate me to continue and do my best! I wouldn’t stop without that, it’s just that I’m happy to share this passion with people.

Which character do you want to cosplay as the most?

**Shae:** I’m working on new costumes for Jaina, Rydia and June May, I can’t wait to finish and wear them! I also have few projects that I am working on that I can’t wait to reveal, but I prefer to keep them secret until I’m satisfied with the costumes! I’ll post work in progress pictures of my next cosplay very soon, as well as more photos and info. on my Facebook page:

https://www.facebook.com/Shae.Underscore

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play from “W.I.T.C.H”, Ahri Dynasty from “League of Legends” and June May from “Cloth Road” seems to be pretty popular too!
“I love to add personal touches. I try to make an accurate costume as much as possible but I’ll add a little something to make it more personal.” – Shae
COSPLAY INTERVIEW: SHAE_
Revisiting the J!-ENT ARCHIVES
J!-ENT Cosplay Underground Photos by Nergene Arquelada

2009
Revisiting the J!-ENT ARCHIVES
J!-ENT Cosplay Underground Photos by Nergene Arquelada
2009
Revisiting the J!-ENT ARCHIVES

J!-ENT Cosplay Underground Photos by Nergene Arquelada

2009
VIDEO PARTY SCHEDULE

7:00 SAINT SEIYA
mythology, the Saint Fighters Pegus; Dragon, face the Gold Zodiac Saints of Aries!!

7:30 CITY HUNTER
Ryo Saeba, handgun expert and would-be "The Enforcer" in the humor-adventure

8:00 ZILLION
Japan's answer to "Photon", the three sharp "White Nuts" team and their mysterious "2:500"

8:30 URUSEI YATSURA
Those Darn Aliens are back again. Ataru, Lum, whole gang - join the fun and watch out for soon to be a VIZ Eclipse Comic!!

9:00 MEGAZONE 23 PART
Biker Punks led by Johnny Winters are Mankind against fascist police and version of this was used by Robotech film.

9:30 THE GUYS
Kei and Yuri of the WWWA are and monsters, as they face PCs, aliens, not to mention the more

10:00 ANIME Perfect Memory
A mysterious teenager.
Remembering USA Musume

All over the world, cosplay dance competitions have grown in popularity, especially idol based cover dance competitions in Asia. While the idea has not taken off in the American convention scene, back in the early 2000's, USA Musume was among the first in the U.S. to compete as a cosplay dance group based on Morning Musume and Hello! Project groups. I revisit USA Musume with an interview with Kimi Pasamonte about her thoughts on the cosplay dance scene and her memories of being a member of USA Musume.

By Dennis A. Amith

It has been over a decade since USA Musume was formed. At the time, there were hardly any one doing J-Pop or idol-inspired cosplay let alone cover dances but in Asia, it has quickly become popular and competitive. Do you think something like this can ever be possible in the US?

KIMI: I think it can be possible. The K-Pop scene right now is really hot and known for it’s choreographed videos and performances. At the US convention, KCon (devoted to Korean pop), they feature all-day-dance and invited choreographers to teach the dance routines to fans. At concerts, they have pre-concert dance events to win prizes such as hand-shakes or hi-touch.

Currently at Anime-related conventions, they have and had events such as Ballroom Dance, Learn to Tango/Waltz and Para Para panels. Popular idol groups such as AKB48, Morning Musume and Momoiro Clover Z, have choreographed dances that are fun and interesting to learn/do/watch, but there hasn’t been a panel/event that focuses only on dance covers. The most popular covers now are Idolm@ster and Vocaloid. I think it can happen, but it would have to start out really specific such as a one-hour “learn Idolmaster dances” or a dance cover contest.
Looking back at USA Musume, what were your biggest memory of being part of USA Musume and were you all able to take it as far as you wanted at the time?

KIMI: My best memories are my friends! I am still friends with all the girls in our group and keep in contact with them. The best times we had as a group weren't when we performed on stage, but all of the pre-post rehearsal eating! Having a performance was a great reason to have to get together. With technology now, I have so many things I would add or improve. We had so many routines we learned and performed, I wish we could re-do them and have them recorded in HD, so I could put them on YouTube!

What is your biggest memory of USA Musume?

KIMI: My biggest memory is a toss-up between two events. The first being when Ami and I went to Japan and represented USA Musume at two Morning Musume fan-events. We wore our Salt 5 outfits and danced with the 200 Hello! Project fans all night! Everyone was so friendly and really happy we loved Morning Musume. We performed on stage with other fans and had the best time.

The most exciting was meeting Morning Musume at Anime Expo in 2009! Kixies and I attended all their events that weekend including the breakfast! They are even more perfect in person! We brought presents to the first handshake event to our favorite members... and I thought it was nerdy to give a picture of our group, but I regretted it after! I hope my card and gift conveyed just how much Morning Musume has affected my life! Cheesy, but I might not have the amazing friends I have now if we didn't start a dance cover group!

Any upcoming projects that you and the other members are working on?

KIMI: Although USA Musume hasn't performed as a group in a while, a few of us have still been active in projects. Karrie and Kixies were part of Bandai's K-on! promotion live group and Karrie, Kixies, and I formed a sub-group called “Triple K” for Fanimecon's Stage Zero. We still enjoy anime, cosplay and J-pop and it's the perfect blend of all three. Our setlist was No3b's (No Sleeves) "Answer", Perfume's "Laser Beam", Buono's "Rottara Rottara!" and "1/3 Junjou na Kanjou". I hope we can perform together again in the future!
Cosplay Interview: Katnip

As J!-ENT has interviewed many cosplayers, one country that we have not done a cosplay interview was in the Philippines. One of the cosplayers we have discovered is Katnip Rodriguez. We learn about Katnip’s cosplay but also about cosplaying in the Philippines and more!

By Dennis A. Amith

So, tell me how you got involved with cosplaying? And why do you cosplay?

KATNIP: To start, I love anime and that is the main reason why I’m into cosplaying. Being able to portray the characters I love makes me happy and relieves my stress.

In the U.S., many people cosplayers such as Alodia and Myrtle have given exposure to cosplay in the Philippines. But for those who are not familiar with anime events in the Philippines, what are the primary conventions that many cosplayers attend?

KATNIP: The biggest conventions to attend here in the Philippines would be Cosplay Mania, Best of Anime, Ozine Fest. Those are the events I usually attend.

Is cosplay quite competitive in the Philippines?

KATNIP: Filipino cosplayers aren’t very well known yet but we’re getting there. Filipino cosplayers are very competitive some already won at international events. As for the prizes, we usually get cash prizes and some anime goodies.

Are you a solo cosplayer or part of a group?

KATNIP: Originally, I was a solo cosplayer but until I joined the AKB0048 group, Sugar48. I would consider myself being both a group and a solo cosplayer.

You have done quite a number of cosplay but for 2013. What outfits have you created so far?

KATNIP: I don’t really create my outfits but I do make the details of every costume I have and I also make the accessories.
These are the following costumes I have for 2013: Asuna Yuuki (“Sword Art Online”), Neko (“Project K”), Takahashi Minami the 5th (“AKB0048”). I still have cosplays for this year but haven’t started with the costumes yet.

**How far in advance do you have your costumes planned out?**

**KATNIP:** Usually about a month or two before a certain event.

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**How does your family feel about you cosplaying?**

**KATNIP:** They don’t fully approve of my hobby. They say I spend more on my costumes while I can spend my money into something more useful.

**Do your co-workers, classmates or non-cosplaying friends know about your hobby? Are they supportive?**

**KATNIP:** Yes they do. And they support me all the way!

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**When you create a costume, do you try to make it look as authentic as possible? Or do you add your own personal creativity to it?**

**KATNIP:** Yes, as much as possible. I do add my own personal touches to it sometimes.

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**When you are done cosplaying, what do you do with your costumes? Do you continue to wear them or are they retired and packed away in your closet?**

**KATNIP:** When there is a costume or wig that I won’t use anymore I tend to sell them. But some costumes that are memorable to me I keep.

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**What is the most satisfying and most frustrating aspect of being a cosplayer?**

**KATNIP:** Most satisfying would be when I can portray the character accurately, give full justice to the character and the costume. And the most frustrating would be the opposite.

---

**Do you cosplay for fun, the cosplay recognition or the competition/challenge of creating a great costume?**

**KATNIP:** All of the above! I love cosplaying because it’s my stress reliever. Even if I’m dead tired, when I cosplay everything becomes okay. The feeling is very surreal when I cosplay.
Is there anything that you would like to improve on yourself having to do with cosplay (skills, attitude, habits, etc.)?
If so, what would that be?
KATNIP: Skills—need to learn how to sew more, attitude—with regards to portraying a character. I’m having a hard time doing Yandere characters but Tsunderes I love! Habits—that would be rushing costumes and not making it accurately.

When you cosplay as a character, do you try to stay in character?
KATNIP: Yes, but when I cosplay tsundere character I don’t, only when taking pictures and acting on stage. I’m scared people will get mad at me. (Laughing)

Do you feel stressed out when a con nears, that you have to finish a costume or a numerous amount of costumes quickly?
KATNIP: Yes! Very very stressed! Stress to the highest level!

How many costumes do you own or have been created for you?
KATNIP: I own 10 costumes since I started cosplaying but most of them I sold already. Only a few are left.

If you had all the time and money to make a costume, what would be your dream costume?
KATNIP: That would be all version of Asuka Langley Sohryu costumes and AKB48 costumes!

Have you ever worn your costume to an area (non-Anime con or event) that freaked people out? How was that experience?
KATNIP: Yes! They stared at me like I was an alien or something, some asks for pictures.

You have done anime-related cosplay. Do you watch a lot of anime or play video games and if so, what are your favorites?
KATNIP: Yes I do. I love playing “Kingdom Hearts”, “Final Fantasy”, “Pokemon”, MMORPG. I’m addicted to these kind of games. As for anime, I watch anything under the sun, so long as I find it interesting.

What cosplay ideas do you have floating in your head right now of possible costumes for the near future?
KATNIP: I have these following cosplays lined up for the end of the year and next year: Asuka Langley – version 3.0 plugsuit, Asuka Langley – Shunya Yamashita version, Hoshimiya Ichigo – Aikatsu!, Takahashi Minami the 5th – Heavy Rotation and Beginner.

For more information on Katnip’s cosplay, visit her website at:
https://www.facebook.com/neko.katmae
J!-ENT EXCERPTS: DENNIS A. AMITH INTERVIEWS TIFFANY MARIE-AUSTIN

J!-ENT: How did you get involved in cosplay?

TIFFANY: I actually really like this story! I feel like I’ve told it a million times already, but I think it’s a pretty good one. The first time I ever cosplayed I actually had no idea that I was cosplaying, or that such a thing as cosplay even existed! It all began on a long eight-hour car ride home from Disneyland. My two very close friends and I were speculating on what costumes we wanted to wear for Halloween. Anime was still fairly new to us at this point, and we had just recently fallen in love with the series “Magic Knights Rayearth”. One of my friends expressed how she really wanted to be Fuu for Halloween, and so we all each decided to be our favorite characters from the series. Thus we made our costumes and we were the three Magical Knights for Halloween 1996. It wasn’t till almost a year later that we attended our first convention, Anime Expo (AX) 1997, and realized that people dressed up in costume at the convention! I was totally surprised about this but immediately became very excited! I wished that we had known so that we could have worn our own costumes as well. The next convention we went to, Fanime 1998, we made sure to wear our Rayearth costumes from Halloween! We had a blast wearing our costumes around the con, and from that moment on I think we were hooked, though we hadn’t even realized it yet! We planned to make new costumes for AX 98, and the rest is history.

Although, I love dressing up in costume and it is one of my favorite parts of cosplaying, the real reason why I began cosplaying and have continued to do so for so long is because of my two very close friends, whom I share the cosplay group “Ah! My Cosplay” with. We started out making the costumes together, and the process of brainstorming costume ideas, making the costumes, and wearing them has been something that we always did together, as a team. Cosplay was our time to bond and spend time together, so for me, cosplay has always been about our friendship and represents the great friendship we have! Since I began cosplaying, I have been lucky enough to make many more wonderful friends and I feel like things have expanded from being only about the friendship within my trio to being about the great friendships I have with many other people as well.

J!-ENT: When you create a costume, do you try to make it look as authentic as possible? Do you add your own creativity to it?

TIFFANY: Authentic all the way for me! It is very important to me that I make the costume as accurate as possible. There have been occasions where I’ll change things just a little bit, but that’s very rare. I’ll usually decide beforehand whether I want to go for complete and total accuracy or if I’ll allow for some minor changes. Usually the only things that I’ll do to alter a costume is to make it less revealing or to make something look better that is just plain ugly or unflattering! Accuracy and authenticity are more my cup of tea though, because I believe there to be a much greater challenge in it.

J!-ENT: Are you a perfectionist when it comes to making your costumes?

TIFFANY: (Laughing) This one should be pretty obvious! Did you guess perfectionist? You guessed right! I am a crazy perfectionist, I drive myself insane to perfect things that other people will never in a million years notice. As far as research goes, if I have the time, I’ll do as much as I can. Sometimes there just isn’t the time though. It really depends on the costume too.
How did the both of you come up with the name “Neko Twins”?  
KIE: Actually, we didn’t. Full credit goes to a Japanese cosplayer, Renka Izumi. At first we were known by our website name, “Double Cosplay Attack!!”, which was supposed to sound like some crazy sentai-style special technique. Later some of our friends started calling us the “Kitty Twins” because we love cats, and our online personas are both catgirls. We were also jokingly referred to as the “Northern California Leave It to the Twins”, after the Japanese cosplay twins Luke and Michiru. Renka Izumi, who, coincidentally, is Luke and Michiru’s cousin, was the first to call us the “Baby Neko Twins”, in reference to my nickname, “Baby Snow Leopard”. Our friends caught on and after that it just stuck.  
LILY: I think the name fits us well because we really like cats and we prefer doing cute cosplays as opposed to popular, sexy, or gothic cosplay. Hence the “baby” in our name, because we all know kittens are cuter than cats. Some of our cosplay friends started using Baby Neko Twins to refer to us as a group, and after that the name just stuck. I guess some people now say Neko Twins because it’s shorter, but we’re still officially Baby Neko Twins.

When you create a costume, do you try to make it look as authentic as possible? Do you add your own creativity to it?  
LILY: Interpreting a character design and constructing the costume as you see it require many elements of creativity in themselves. I try to make my costumes accurate and authentic. If I had wanted a costume that expressed my own character designing creativity, I would have created my own original character rather than adding on to another person’s designs. Sometimes character designs are unclear or inconsistent. In such cases I do take creative liberty in coming up with a costume design, but I like to try to keep the costume design in the same style as the character design so that the costume will seem accurate and authentic even if it is not. However, if I am somewhat impartial to the character whose costume I am working on I may not care so much whether my costume is completely accurate. This may happen when I decided to do a simple costume to join a friend’s group.  
KIE: Sometimes trying to make something look authentic takes creativity in itself. I cosplay characters because I love them, and want to look just like them, so I try to stick as close as possible to the drawings. Sometimes it’s hard to translate pictures into real life, but that is part of the fun. It’s great to see a costume that really captures the essence of the character, down to the last detail.
Revisiting the J!-ENT ARCHIVES
J!-ENT Cosplay Underground Photos by Dennis A. Amith - Anime America

1994
Revisiting the
J!-ENT ARCHIVES
J!-ENT Cosplay Underground Photos by Dennis A. Amith - Anime America

1995
Revisiting the J!-ENT ARCHIVES
J!-ENT Cosplay Underground Photos by Peter Pastor - Japan Town Anime Faire 2003
Revisiting the
J!-ENT ARCHIVES
J!-ENT Cosplay Underground Photos by Gilbert “Realm” Aquino - Pacific Media Expo
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WHAT I SAW @ ANIME EXPO 2013

Having covered anime conventions since 1995, Anime Expo is one of the few events where every few years I do attend, the growth of the convention continues to amaze me. I had to see for myself of how Anime Expo would be in 2013.

Article & Photography By Gilbert “Realm” Aquino

Anime Expo made its way to Los Angeles once again and having covered anime conventions for J!-ENT since 1995, I always look forward in seeing how Anime Expo has evolved and what the convention has to offer.

The convention has grown tremendously since I first attended. With over 65,000 attendees, the convention has always been a major destination for cosplayers all around the world but the level of growth that I have witnessed this year, it was one of the most crowded Anime Expo events I have ever attended.

Guests of Honor at this year’s event include Mari Okada, Kazuhiko Inoue, Alodia Gosiengfiao, Johnny Yong Bosch & his band Eyeshine, Porno Graffitti and Ram Rider, to name a few.

The usual cosplays were seen throughout the event. Spider-Man, Power Rangers, Batman, Street Fighter, Metal Gear Solid, and characters I’ve never seen before, were out and about. Some of my favorites were this impressive “Raiden” from “Metal Gear Solid” and the various “Power Rangers” from different seasons.

The Aksys Games booth had beta versions of the upcoming “Blaze Blue Chronophantasma” game for testing, even though the game console version isn’t even out in Japan just yet!

Lab Zero Games had the “Skull Girls” game on deck, with the new character, Squigly, is playable.

Namco Bandai had demos of “Pirate Warriors 2”, where many attendees made their way to test the game.

Bluefin/Tamashii had many upcoming prototypes of statues and S.H. Figuarts on display. Among them were the upcoming Figuarts of the “Mighty Morphin Power Rangers”, with the red and green ranger starting off as the first two releases. Some amazing “MegaMan” Figuarts and the always impressive “Gundam” model kits and figures.

Legendary Bandai toy designer, Tsuyoshi Nonaka, was at the event, doing commission sketches, which are always amazing. He
also had his custom “Pyramidas” action figure on display, which was from “Power Rangers Zeo” to fans in the US (Ohranger in Japan). Nonaka designed and built this amazing piece, which is not for sale. And as a fan, it’s always great to see Nonaka in the U.S.

Around the exhibit hall, there were quite a number of featured many in-booth meet and greets. Among them, singer Aye Ikeda, the cosplay women from “LT3” that included Vampy and Jessica Nigri, all did various appearances throughout the weekend, of which caused many long lines within the aisles of their booths.

Cosplay queen, Alodia Gosiengfiao wore her very own costume that she herself designed to her press Q&A panel.

Featured recently on the cover of “FHM” Philippines magazine, Alodia spoke about her experiences throughout various trade shows such as the San Diego Comic-Con, shows overseas and how she became involved in the cosplay industry.

When asked about how she felt being on the cover of “FHM” magazine, she replied by stating it was a surprise and very respectful of the editors to run everything by Alodia and her family as far as what content to publish.

At the Eyeshine panel, lead by Johnny Yong Bosch, he was asked if the vibe was different when playing between an anime crowd at a trade show versus a club event for an actual concert.

Johnny stated that there is a difference, where the anime crowd tends to be more supportive, due to the case of his days as a Power Ranger and currently a voice actor in the animation/video game industry.

But Johnny and the band do enjoy attending various trade shows, where they can share their talent of music. Eyeshine did a 30-minute Q&A set, where they would be asked questions and would reply with an answer by signing and playing it to the audience, which I found was very hilarious, due to the off-the-wall responses that was given.

According to Twitter and various reports, some celebrities also made their way to Anime Expo. Former “Heroes” star, Masi Oka, posted photos of the event as he made his way through the main exhibit hall. Stuntman and martial arts expert, Ernie Reyes Jr., had a camera crew with him, filming content for his new show as he walked the halls of Anime Expo.

Food trucks were in full force again this year, on site and across the street. I made my way to the infamous “White Rabbit” truck, where I got my fix of their delicious “Adobo” burrito! If you haven’t had one, I highly recommend ordering it!

But my three days at Anime Expo, I have seen how this anime convention has grown. Even compared to their last events in the past three years, there is no doubt that AX has now brought in the cosplay crowd who tend to cosplay at non-anime events such as San Diego Comic Con, Wonder Con and others.

The convention center is still large enough to handle the capacity of the increase of attendance. But in the end, I had a lot of fun covering Anime Expo. J!-ENT has continued to cover this event since 1993 and it continues to be one of the must-visit events for anime and cosplay fans around the world. I personally look forward to seeing what AX has planned for their upcoming 25th anniversary in a few years from now. But for any anime fan, especially cosplayer, this is an event you must experience at least once in your lifetime.

For more information on Anime Expo, please visit their website at: http://www.anime-expo.org/
SPECIAL FEATURE: ANIME EXPO 2013

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SPECIAL FEATURE: ANIME EXPO 2013

J!-ENT 2013 ANNUAL
There is no spokesperson with a catchy phrase to remind the driver to slow down, stop eating, quit messing with the radio or pay attention to the road. There’s Only You. Speak Up.
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: June 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT BOTCON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: June 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT BOTCON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT SAN DIEGO COMIC CON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT SAN DIEGO COMIC CON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT SAN DIEGO COMIC CON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT SAN DIEGO COMIC CON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT SAN DIEGO COMIC CON 2013 IN SAN DIEGO, CA - PHOTOS BY REALM AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CA) BY ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CA) BY ANGELO DELOS REYES

OCTOBER 2013
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CA) BY ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CA) BY ANGELO DELOS REYES

[Image of a woman singing into a microphone]
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013
J!-ENT COVERAGE AT J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CA) BY ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: July 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT J-POP SUMMIT FESTIVAL 2013 (SAN FRANCISCO, CA) BY ANGELO DELOS REYES
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: August 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT ANI-JAM 2013 (FRESNO, CA) BY DENNIS A. AMITH
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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: August 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT ANI-JAM 2013 (FRESNO, CA) BY DENNIS A. AMITH
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: August 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT D23 EXPO (ANAHEIM, CA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: August 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT D23 EXPO (ANAHEIM, CA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: August 2013

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A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: August 2013

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT D23 EXPO (ANAHEIM, CA) BY GILBERT “REALM” AQUINO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: September 2003

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT RAMEN YOKOCHO FEST (TORRANCE, CALIFORNIA) BY ANTONIO AIROSO
A Look Back at our J!-ENT Event Coverage: September 2003

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT RAMEN YOKOCHO FEST (TORRANCE, CALIFORNIA) BY ANTONIO AIROSO
5-Year Rewind: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2008

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT SAKURA CON BY MICHELLE TYMON & JAMES FERGUSON
5-Year Rewind: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2008

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT TOKYO NIGHT 2008 BY NERGENE ARQUELADA
10-Year Rewind: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2003

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT ANIME EXPO 2003 BY EDWIN MACARAEG, PETER PASTOR, RANDY HARADA AND MELVIN MACARAEG
10-Year Rewind: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2003

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT ANIME EXPO 2003 BY EDWIN MACARAEG, PETER PASTOR, RANDY HARADA AND MELVIN MACARAEG
10-Year Rewind: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2003

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT FANIME 2003 BY DENNIS A. AMITH & PETER PASTOR
10-Year Rewind: A Look Back at our J!-ENT Coverage: 2003

J!-ENT COVERAGE AT FANIME 2003 BY DENNIS A. AMITH & PETER PASTOR
Spotlight on Anime America ‘94
by Dennis A. Amith, featured on the Neo-Tokyo 2099 BBS


The long travel to San Jose wasn’t too bad. The first thing we noticed were the cool badges that pre-paid attendees received which had faces of popular anime characters like Akane, Belldandy, Nabiki and more. While the badges were cool, when it came to registration, many people in line noticed the first problem... A few of the registration staff of Anime America 1994 were very rude!

I know...putting on a convention is stressful but damn! People traveled many miles to get to this event, wait an hour more in line and then you get a smart ass answer by some staff member wearing her Spock ears (or was it...Lodoss). Aside from seeing attendees encounter with rude staff, the first thing we heard from people is people saying “How unorganized!”. Aside from that, we ventured into the dealer’s rooms to spend some money!!

They had a lot of cool stuff there!! From Kimono My House’s anime merchandise, even more cheaper merchandise from the Binbo Club, also industry booths from Studio Proteus and the Viz booth. We spent a lot of money on a lot of anime music CDs to magazines and wallscrolls. I do wish I purchased the “Ranma 1/2:Neighborhood Combat” game for $30. Oh well!

The next thing we did was stay in line for the autograph session with Go Nagai. This was pretty awesome but we had a bit of a scare. There were four people in line before our turn. But then we got word that Nagai was about to stop. Man, I felt that I have been in line for 2 hours now and I felt bummed out. But then Go Nagai decided that he would continue for a little longer. We got a picture of Go Nagai and an illustration of “Cutey Honey”. I saw Trish Ledoux walking around and took a photo with her and then I saw a parody of “Dirty Pair” and “Iczer-C-Ko”. But we headed out for a quick bite before joining our friends with the Otaku Generation anime club of Fresno and the Cartoon-Fantasy Organization of Los Angeles who were throwing a party for Go Nagai and Akemi Takada. I am supplying beverages, but I hope it’s enough. The following day, we heard that it was one of the biggest anime parties thrown at a con. Which was cool. Also, got an autograph from Stephen Tsai who wrote the dojinshi “Kimagure Orange College” and that was our first day at Anime America 1994.

Day 2 and I was getting badgered by the people of FOX who were shooting a news story at the con. I couldn’t do an interview with them as I had to get to the Akemi Takada panel. One thing I was dissapointed was there were a lot of people at the panel but it was shameful that not too many people wanted to ask questions (Akemi came so far for this con, at least come up with a question). Despite having an interview with Akemi earlier, I figured I could ask more questions to add to the interview and if no one was going to ask questions, fine...I’ll do it! And the questions were pretty good ones that required her to think a lot. Akemi’s panel ended with her giving out free stuff that people could win but it was time for “Janken” or “Rock-Paper-Scissors”, a game that I have had no success with as a child and once again had no success with it as an adult...on to the Dealer’s Room. Now, it was time for the Anime Game Show by AnimEigo and Chris Swett. At least I did much better with this game as I made it to the final 6 people out of 50 or more people. It was taking to long to find the 3 final winners, so, the crowd asked the judges to end it with a “Janken” matchup. Great.... not another Janken game. I knew from that point that I was going to loseand in the end , I was #5. In a way I was glad I didn't win, because the finals had to answer questions on “Madox”, "Moldiver" or "Genesis Survivor Gaiaarth". And now it was off to the Cosplay Masquerade.

For the final day at Anime America, it was time to go back home but it was one last time of shopping at the Dealer’s Hall but overall, Skuld and I had a great time at Anime America 1994. Aside from seeing the rudeness at registration, I also have to credit the staff, especially one at security who went all over to find my lost camera. She looked everywhere and found it. Now, that’s service! But overall, I enjoyed Anime America 1994 and I’ll be back again next year!
STEPHANIE YANEZ

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ROBOT CHICKEN: SEASON 6

What happens when G.I. Joe is sent to join with a modern military to fight with the Taliban? What happens when the Thundercats go into heat? What happens when the Great Zordon brings in their new Power Rangers, the Teletubbies? What is the real truth about Pac-Man? What happens when Wilson of “Cast Away” makes it back to the United States? And what happens when Alvin & the Chipmunks spend time alone with their female fans (human)?

If you are familiar with Seth Green and the writing crew of “Robot Chicken”, you know that you are going to get crazy, naughty adult humor in this latest release.

For those not familiar with “Robot Chicken”, episodes feature toys in stop-motion or claymation and parodying the shows that they came from. Featuring 20-episodes (each episode is around 11 minutes long), each with audio commentary and a lot of special features jam-packed into this release.

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: IT’S A SPONGEBOB CHRISTMAS!

Everyone in Bikini Bottom is excited for Christmas and Santa to come and visit the area. But Plankton who has been receiving nothing but coal, comes up with a plan to taint fruit cake with jerktonium and making everyone bad so their Christmas is ruined.

But when Plankton tries the tainted fruit cake on SpongeBob, it doesn’t work. So, Plankton figures his invention is not working and thus gives the Jerktonium maker to SpongeBob, who decides to give everyone in Bikini Bottom some of Plankton’s delicious fruit cake. Is Christmas ruined?

The special is the same as what was aired on Nickelodeon and released on DVD in 2012, but the primary difference aside from the Blu-ray having better video and audio quality is that Nickelodeon has added ten bonus “SpongeBob SquarePants” episodes to the 2013 Blu-ray edition plus more bonus features.

Overall, a safe purchase for parents and a cool Christmas release for “SpongeBob SquarePants” fans!

THE LITTLE MERMAID: DIAMOND EDITION

Watching “The Little Mermaid” again in 2013, on Blu-ray and 3D Blu-ray, and comapring it to the old VHS and prior DVD release, I can easil say that the film looks absolutely magnificent, clean and vibrant on Blu-ray.

If anything, what people are going to get with “The Little Mermaid: Diamond Edition” is the most beautiful and current definitive version of this film on video. The water is blue and vibrant, not murky or gray. Colors are vibrant and look sharper, cleaner and so much better than I have ever seen it.

And Disney also gives the DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 treatment to the film, dialogue and lossless audio is crystal clear.

As for the 3D, first and foremost, it’s a 25-year-old animated film and one should not expect glorious 3D with “The Little Mermaid”. But with the technology, Disney is able to give us 3D in terms of depth. It’s not ground-breaking, but it gives you a new way to look at the movie.

Disney also has packed this release with many special features, including the original DVD special features and also you get a code to download the free musical soundtrack of “The Little Mermaid Favorites”. If you are a big fan of this Disney animated classic, this Blu-ray release is highly recommended!

GRAVITY FALLS: SIX STRANGE TALES

The Disney Channel animated series “Gravity Falls” will be coming out on DVD!

For 12-year-old twins, Dipper and Mabel Pines, the two have been sent by their parents to get some fresh air by going to Gravity Falls, Oregon for the summer and stay with their Great Uncle (Grunkle) Stan.

But as soon as the twins arrive, they learn that all is not right in the town of Gravity Falls.

As Dipper is aware of the strange occurrences in the area, his sister Mabel is more interested in meeting up with guys, eating candy, knitting sweaters with rainbows and making a wax statue (which for some mysterious reason, has lost its head).

And Disney also gives the DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 treatment to the film, dialogue and lossless audio is crystal clear.
**THE NEIGHBORS: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON**

**AVAILABLE:** Now | **MEDIA:** DVD | **COMPANY:** ABC Studios | **DURATION:** 22 Episodes (506 Minutes)

From Dan Fogelman, the writer of Disney films such as “Tangled”, “Bolt”, “Cars” and “Cars 2” has created an ABC television series “The Neighbors”. The comedy revolves around the Weaver family who has moved into a safe and normal community. So, they thought. The Weavers discover that the community are not human but are all aliens, who happen to be named after pro athletes.

As the Weaver’s get to know their alien neighbors and teach them human customs, will they be accepted into the community?

I don’t know how many times I have laughed while watching this high-concept show. It’s an odd television series which has now become one of my favorite television series.

I love the crazy concept, I love the characters and I absolutely enjoy this show! A series that makes you laugh and is quite delightful, “The Neighbors: Complete First Season” is highly recommended! ****

**ADVENTURE TIME: JAKE THE DAD**

**AVAILABLE:** Now | **MEDIA:** DVD | **COMPANY:** Cartoon Network | **DURATION:** 176 MIN. | **RATING:** PG

Jake and Lady Rainicorn are expecting pups, but that means that Jake can’t spend much time with Finn anymore. How will fatherhood affect their friendship?

While the DVD is named “Jake the Dad”, there are two episodes that actually deal with Jake as a father to his pups. The remaining 14 episodes are random episodes from season 4-5 and pretty much deals with a variety of characters such as Finn and his relationship with Flame Princess, Marceline and her connection to the Ice King, BMO surviving a kidnapping and hanging out with a big pink baby and a talking bubble and more!

While I know some fans rather wait until the Blu-ray or DVD releases of season four and five are out, that’s still a few years away as season one and two was released this past summer.

So, “Adventure Time: Jake the Dad” is worth purchasing if you want to watch the episodes now and also to get the cool Jake hat which comes with the DVD! ****

**THIS IS THE END**

**AVAILABLE:** NOW | **MEDIA:** Blu-ray & DVD | **COMPANY:** Sony Pictures Home Entertainment | **DURATION:** 100 Minutes | **RATING:** PG-13

“After Earth” takes place in the future after an environmental cataclysm caused by human kind forced humanity to leave the Earth and settle in a new world known as Nova Prime.

A thousand years after humans settled in Nova Prime, an alien race known as S’Krell have decided to conquer the planet by unleashing their Ursa, blind predatory creatures that attack by sensing one’s pheromones set off by fear. One man who has conquered the fear (known as “Ghosting” to fight the Ursa is General Cypher Raige (portrayed by Will Smith) Kitai Raige (portrayed by Jaden Smith) is a teenager who had failed Ranger training because of his fear and recklessness.

As father and son go out on a trip, their transport ship is hit by an asteroid and crash lands on future Earth. But with only a few days of survival and his father badly injured, Kitai must find a beacon to summon a rescue party.

Directed by M. Night Shyamalan, the film may not be for everyone, but it’s far from being a terrible film. Worth giving a try if you are a sci-fi fan. ***

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TIGER & BUNNY THE MOVIE: THE BEGINNING


For those who enjoyed the “Tiger & Bunny” animated series, will no doubt enjoy the film release “Tiger & Bunny The Movie: The Beginning”.

Set not long after episode 2 in the animated series, the film features a new antagonist but focuses on the new partnership between veteran super hero Wild Tiger (Kotetsu) and the popular Barnaby Brooks Jr.

The film shows much more about why Kotetsu is driven to be a hero, how he changed his costume and lost his original corporate sponsorship. But also featuring the team dynamics between Kotetsu and Barnaby.

But where this release delivers is the addition of the 2.5 hour World Premiere Event in Japan, the half hour Ustream special and also the live screening that was done in San Francisco and more.

For fans of “Tiger & Bunny”, this Blu-ray release not only looks spectacular but with its 5.1 lossless soundtrack (on both Japanese and English), is immersive in HD!

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AKB0048: SEASON ONE - COMPLETE COLLECTION

AVAILABLE: Now | MEDIA: Blu-ray and DVD | COMPANY: Sentai Filmworks | 325 Minutes | RATING: TV14V

A series about a time when entertainment in the world has been banned. But a rogue idol group known as AKB0048 fights against the anti-entertainment establishment and are recruiting new girls to be the next generation of idol singers.

“AKB0048” features stunning visual backgrounds, beautiful character designs especially the close-up of the eyes, the use of CG in combination with the artwork… for a TV series, you can tell that this was a higher budget anime TV series as their is detail galore in “AKB0048” and it looks stunning on Blu-ray.

As for audio, if there was one small thing that I wished, it would be the fact that I would have loved to have heard a more immersive 5.1 lossless soundtrack than 2.0, considering the action and the music featured in the series. And as far as special features go, there is only the Japanese promos and clean opening and ending animation.

Overall, I absolutely love “AKB0048” but I know that idol-based anime series is not for everyone. From the old school “Hummingsbird” OVA’s to the “Idolm@ster” video games, I enjoy idol music-based anime series and as for “AKB0048”, I personally think it’s the best idol-based anime series that I have ever seen and the fact that Shoji Kawamori is tied to the series and brought his attention to quality and mecha makes “AKB0048” even more special. I look forward to the second season!

BLEACH DVD SET EIGHTEEN - ORIGINAL & UNCUT


The filler Zanpakuto arc is now coming to an end. But as the Soul Reapers have made peace with their Zanpakuto, others are not sure if they want to go back to becoming zanpakuto or they prefer their freedom.

Meanwhile, sword fiends are attacking humans and also causing trouble in the Rukon district. Will the Zanpakuto of the Soul Reapers return back to their original sword form?

As this DVD completes the Zanpakuto Arc (Season 13 in Japan), the final two episodes finally returns to the Arrancar storyline (Season 14 in Japan) as the battle between Ichigo Kurosaki and Ulquiorra begins.

Meanwhile, Chad and Renji takes on a huge Hollow in Las Noches.

As Ichigo fights Ulquiorra, Loly and Menoly approach Orihime, but will they try to kill her?

Overall, I’m glad the filler season of the Zanpakuto Arc has come to an end. And with this volume, fans get the conclusion of the Arc and the return to the Arrancar Arc, which many have been waiting patiently for.

DVD features the omake, production art and clean ending. It’s important to note that the episodes are now contained on two DVD’s instead of three.

LAST EXILE - FAM, THE SILVER WING - PART 1

AVAILABLE: Now | MEDIA: Blu-ray & DVD Combo | COMPANY: FUNimation | DURATION: 300 Minutes | RATING: TV 14V

After the events from the original “Last Exile” anime series, “Last Exile: Fam, The Silver Wing” now focuses on Fam Fan Fan and Giselle Collette, the pilots of a Vespa Vanahip who love racing but end up becoming Sky Pirates who capture and sell battleships.

With the help of their older sister, Millia Il Velch Cutretta Turan, Princess of the Turan Kingdom, from the Ades Federation, the two along with the Sky Pirates try to protect the two from being killed by the Federation, who has declared war against nations that are allowing immigrants to return back to Earth, people who abandoned Earth when it was in chaos.

A complex and deep storyline, Part 1 features episodes 1-11 (plus episode 9.5). The series looks wonderful on Blu-ray and features audio commentaries, anime CM series plus part 1 of the promotion at Anime Expo 2011. Looking for an anime series with a deep storyline?

“Last Exile - Fam, The Silver Wing” is recommended!
**NARUTO SHIPPUDEN ORIGINAL & UNCUT VOL. 16**

AVAILABLE: Now | MEDIA: DVD | COMPANY: Viz Media | 300 Minutes | TV 14

While the last DVD volume featured a return to the filler episodes of “Naruto Shippuden” after Naruto's epic battle against Pain, the episodes focused on the past adventures of Team 7 featuring Kakashi, Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura.

With vol. 16, we get the last remaining Team 7 episodes for the season and a return to the post-Pain storyline (that was featured in the manga) as Danzo has been selected as the new Hokage, as Lady Tsunade is recuperating from her severe injuries.

But with Danzo's first order of authorizing the elimination of Sasuke by branding him a rogue ninja, it doesn't sit well with the other young leaf ninja who knew Sasuke.

With various Ninja Clans heading to a summit in the Land of the Iron, Naruto tries to do all he can to stop the order and convince someone to listen to him but will his plea be good enough?

Featuring episodes 193-205, “Naruto Shippuden” no doubt is becoming more exciting with the Danzo storyline, but also to see what happens when the true antagonist reveals himself. **3.5 STARS**

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**SWORD ART ONLINE: LIMITED EDITION BLU-RAY BOX SET II**


It has been two years since Kirito and Asuna have been trapped in the life-or-death “Sword Art Online” game.

As Kirito and Asuna’s relationship grows closer, the more she wants to leave the Kings of the Blood Death Guild. But leaving the Guild is not going to be easy, as Kirito must faceoff against Heathcliff in order to gain Asuna’s freedom.

Meanwhile, the Assault Team takes on the 75th level boss, the Skull Reaper!

Once again, Aniplex Inc. delivers with this Limited Edition Blu-ray Box Set. Featuring audio commentary by both English and Japanese cast, “Sword Art Offline” special animations, a DVD with staff interviews, 16-page Deluxe Edition Booklet, a set of Pin-Up Illustration Postcards, an exclusive Bushiroad Weib Schwarz Collectible Card #2 and Rigid Box illustrated by abec (the original character designer).

An excellent anime series and a fantastic Blu-ray set from Aniplex. Like the last set, this second set is easily deserving of five stars. Highly recommended! **5 STARS**

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**PATLABOR THE MOBILE POLICE: THE TELEVISION SERIES COLLECTION 2**

AVAILABLE: Now | MEDIA: Blu-ray | COMPANY: Maiden Japan | 300 Minutes | RATED: TV 14V

For any old school anime fan who grew up watching the 1988-1989 anime series, “Mobile Suit Patlabor”, the fact that Maiden Japan has released the OVA’s and the first 12 episodes on Blu-ray is awesome!

And now the second volume on Blu-ray has been released, featuring episodes 13-24 (there are 47 episodes total).

“Patlabor: The Mobile Police” takes place in the future in which mechanical robots known as “labors” are used for construction work.

Unfortunately, there are those using labors for criminal activity and so the Tokyo Metropolitan Police have created a patrol labor unit (Patlabor) as part of their Special Vehicle Command

Episodes include the SV2 taking part in a Police Judo Tournament, Division 2 working at the Sapporo Snow Festival in Hokkaido, the group helping an idol singer named Kana Matsumoto pilot an Ingram during her one-week training at SV2 and a Phantom Labor creating havoc!

The picture quality of the anime series is looks amazing on Blu-ray and is presented as 1080p High Definition (1:33:1) and also a lossless DTS-HD Master Audio 2.0 soundtrack.

If you are a Patlabor or mecha fan, “Patlabor the Mobile Police: The Television Series” Collection 2 is highly recommended! **4 STARS**

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**SAKURA WARS: THE MOVIE**


In 2001, “Sakura Wars: The Movie” was released in theaters. While the original DVD was released back in 2003, the film will be re-released in the U.S. in Oct. 2013 via Blu-ray+DVD combo courtesy of FUNimation.

The film features Lachette Altair arriving to the area from New York City and assigned to the Imperial Assault Force Flower Division.

With the events set after “Sakura Wars 3”, Douglas-Stewart President Brent Furlong and his subordinate Patrick Hamilton have summoned a Kouma to destroy the city. Meanwhile, as the Flower Division is severely banged up, Patrick along with another subordinate sends the army to take command of the Great Imperial Theater. And now the Flower Division must do what they can to take back their theater and defeat the Kouma.

“Sakura Wars: The Movie” is an upscaled anime on Blu-ray that looks much better in terms of color and sharpness. The film definitely holds up 12-years-later but for an old school anime film, this is probably the best this film will ever look for now.

The lossless Japanese and English DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack features very good dynamic range and good use of surrounds during the action sequences. The Blu-ray comes with an October 2012 interview with Sakura Wars creator Oji Hiroi, Director Mitsuru Hongo, mecha designer Atsushi Takeuchi and Mitsuissa Ishikawa, President of Production I.G. plus original trailer and Japanese commercials.

Old school anime fans or fans of the “Sakura Wars” series, this Blu-ray release is for you! **3.5 STARS**
**LAST EXILE - FAM, THE SILVER WING - PART 2**

AVAILABLE: Now | MEDIA: Blu-ray & DVD Combo | COMPANY: FUNimation | DURATION: 300 Minutes | RATING: TV 14V

After finding out that the Ades military is about to attack Iglasia, the capital of Turan, Fam, Giselle and Millia try to hurry and warn Dian. Meanwhile, Ades Federation Premier Luscinia Hafez who has kidnapped Liliana, has her summon an Exile to destroy Iglasia. As Luscinia continues to conquer lands, will the Allied Forces be strong enough to stop him?

A complex and deep storyline, the sequel to “Last Exile” features episodes 12-21. As the series had its lighthearted moments for the first half, the series becomes quite grim showing one man’s drive to obliter-rate nations for a twisted belief.

The voice acting for both soundtracks are well done and the animation from GONZO is detailed, mecha designs are fantastic and the Blu-ray features great detail for a TV series. Special features include audio commentary for two episodes, spinoff anime CM series “Friday Night” and part 2 of “Last Exile - Fam, The Silver Wing” promotions at Anime Expo 2011.

A smart, complex and entertaining anime series. Recommended! 4 STARS

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**BLUE EXORCIST: LIMITED EDITION BLU-RAY BOX SET II**


Once again, Aniplex, Inc. hits another grand slam with the release of “Blue Exorcist: Limited Edition Blu-ray Box Set II”!

The series introduced us to Rin Okumura and his younger bother Yukio. Both are the sons of Satan and a human mother. But because they were raised by their now-deceased guardian, Father Fujimoto at Cross Academy Town’s Southern Cross Boys Monastery, both were raised with love and compassion.

But as Satan has tried to get his son back, so he can use him as a vessel, Father Fujimoto sacrificed his life to save Rin. Now Rin wants to avenge Father Fujimoto by becoming a Knight of the true Cross and learn how to exorcise demons despite being a demon himself.

Rin learns he has power like his father but must try to control it or else he will lose his human self. Meanwhile, his brother Yukio appears to be exhibiting demon traits.

This set features episodes 13-25 of the series and features the original soundtrack CD 2, a bonus DVD with English Voice Cast Interviews Part 2, a 36-page illustration booklet, rigid box illustrated by Kazue Kato and more.

“Blue Exorcist” has a good balance of humor, action and an interesting concept in balance with awesome animation and beautiful backgrounds. While the action may be a bit too visual for younger anime viewers (as this is suggested for 13 and up), for fans of action-based anime or manga series such as “Naruto” and “Bleach” will find “Blue Exorcist” to their liking.

Overall, “Blue Exorcist” turned out to be a wonderful, action-packed series that I highly recommend! 5 STARS

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**PHI-BRAIN: PUZZLE OF GOD - THE ORPHEUS ORDER SEASON TWO, COLLECTION 1**

AVAILABLE: Now | MEDIA: Blu-ray | COMPANY: Sentai Filmworks | DURATION: 325 Minutes | RATING: TV 14VL

For Kaito Daimon, he has been searching for childhood friend Rook Banjou Crossfield, a friend that grew up under the tutelage of the man who taught Kaito how to be the ultimate puzzle master.

For so long, Kaito has dared the mysterious organization known as P.O.G. by solving and beating all of their puzzles, but as each puzzle becomes riskier and start to include his friends, it has now become personal.

And as he finally meets with Rook, he discovers that there are people who are higher than P.O.G. that are pulling the strings on the deadly challenges that Kaito has faced. Those who are responsible are the Orpheus Order and immediately, to kick off season 2, a member of the mysterious organization warns Kaito that Kaito will be betrayed by his comrades.

And somehow and somehow, the Orpheus Order has managed to find ways of controlling Kaito’s friends.

Who is the Orpheus Order and why are they so interested in Kaito?

The second season ups the ante of the stakes that Kaito must face with each puzzle-themed challenge. The NHK educational anime series is presented in 1080p High Definition and in English/Japanese DTS-HD Master Audio 2.0.

If you love puzzles and anime, you’ll enjoy “PHI-BRAIN: PUZZLE OF GOD - THE ORPHEUS ORDER”! 4 STARS

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**NURA: RISE OF THE YOKAI CLAN VOL. 2**

AVAILABLE: Now | MEDIA: Blu-ray | COMPANY: Viz Media | DURATION: 305 Minutes | RATING: TV14

“Yokai” which means ghost/demon spirits from Japanese folklore, plays a big part in the anime series, as it is said that a head of the Nura Clan would lead the Yokai (who typically see humans as their enemies).

But fast forward to modern times in which the elder Nurarihyon, the Supreme Commander of the Nura Clan has decided that with his grandson Rikuo Nura (who inherited a 1/4 of his grandfather’s blood) now turning 13-years-old, he wants him to succeed him as the leader of the Yokai. Rikuo may look nerdy and weak on the outside, but inside him is great power.

But with Rikuo being raised to live a human life and doing good deeds, unlike previous masters of the yokai, Nura cares about the humans, and not so much of yokai’s evil nature and wants to establish peace, by doing good deeds. And that includes turning into the Third Head, in which his Yokai blood activates and awakens his yokai form when there is impending danger, and turns him to this white hair, brave and powerful individual.

But he knows his role in the family and that he would be the third head of the Nura clan but he intends to live a normal life.

In the second half of the series, the enemy, Hagoromo Gitsune is trying to revive Nue, while Rikuo is going through training.

Will Rikuo be ready to fight when the time comes?

Featuring episodes 14-26, this is the conclusion to “Nura: Rise of the Yokai Clan”. A fun and exciting Shonen Jump anime series, featuring plenty of characters, action and humor. Recommended! 4 STARS
Back in 2004, the anime adaptation of “Elfen Lied” was released on DVD in 2005. Based on Lynn Okamoto’s manga series that was serialized in Weekly Young Jump from 2002-2005.

Now “Elfen Lied” is being re-released but this time on Blu-ray and as a complete collection with all 13 episodes plus the OVA.

When I first reviewed “Elfen Lied” back in 2005, I wrote: “I have never recalled watching an anime that made me almost sick to my stomach and yet, love it at the same time.”

At the time, I had never seen an anime that utilizes the cuteness of a character yet throw in a really violent and bloody twist that makes this anime quite freaky yet unique!

The series revolves around a bio-engineered girl named Lucy who is a diclonius, a mutated human with the power of the vectors (invisible, deadly arms).

While the series is an upscale, since it is an older anime, colors are vibrant than the older DVD. Audio is now presented in English and Japanese DTS-HD MA 5.1 and sounds great!

If you can stomach anime with a lot of violence, “Elfen Lied” is for you!

4 STARS

“Blood-C” is recommended.

The second animated film improves on the first and needless to say, the power of the vectors (invisble, deadly arms).

Utilizing great use of CG and wonderful animation, what I felt was problematic with the series, is much more interesting in the film version which answers a lot of questions in regards to the relation of Furukimono and humanity.

I was actually surprised by how much better the film was, storyline-wise, especially in tying up loose ends but also a featuring an ending that I was not expecting, but found it to be quite fitting for this series.

The Blu-ray release features the U.S. actor and staff commentary, NoNeNoNe Theater (six parts), promotional videos original teaser and trailers.

A darker, more violent and tragic tale, “Blood-C” is recommended.

4 STARS

“We Without Wings” is for you!

Overall, “We Without Wings: Season One” is an adult comedy anime series that is sexually charged with crazy with a lot of awkward moments. If you are into fan service-driven anime, then “We Without Wings” is for you!

3 STARS

Guts has stuck with the group for three years in his own personal mission to pursue Griffith’s dream together with him and so he can be his equal. As Guts has shown how awesome of a fighter he is on the battlefield, with the promotion of Griffith to king, Guts has shown how awesome of a fighter he is on the battlefield, with the promotion of Griffith to king.

The dialogue and music is crisp and clear and while most surround usage is during the action sequence, the film utilizes a wonderful score from the legendary anime composer Shiro Sagisu. The voice acting is well-done on both Japanese and English soundtracks but it’s important for people to know that the voice acting does not utilize the same voice talent from the video games.

Overall, “Berserk: The Golden Age Arc 2 – The Battle for Doldrey” is an entertaining yet violent action animated film based on the manga series. The second animated film improves on the first and needless to say, the story gets better and better!
**TIGER & BUNNY THE MOVIE - THE BEGINNING SIDE A/SIDE B**

BY Tsutomu Oono | AVAILABLE: NOW | COMPANY: VIZ MEDIA | RATING: T for older Teen

"Tiger & Bunny the Movie - The Beginning" will be released on Blu-ray and DVD but also in manga format. Unlike the manga for the TV series, for the movie, Tsutomu Oono is the artist. The manga release is pretty much capturing what one saw in the movie, but featuring Oono’s artwork.

Set not long after episode 2 in the animated series, the film featured a new antagonist but focuses on the new partnership between veteran super hero Wild Tiger (Kotetsu) and the popular Barnaby Brooks Jr. The film and its manga adaptation, shows much more about why Kotetsu is driven to be a hero, how he changed his costume and lost his original corporate sponsorship. But also featuring the team dynamics between Kotetsu and Barnaby.

In Side A, this is the first half of the film, as Kotetsu reminiscences how he became a hero as a child thanks to Mr. Legend and what happens when the two confront a child with Next Powers. Side B features the group pursuing a thief who stole the “Hero’s Statue”. Problem is that the villain can switch places with anyone he looks at. Overall, the manga is great if you are a fan or if you have no time or access to the movie. Tsutomu Oono showcases his artwork for the manga series but it’s pretty much the same story of the film but in manga format.

**BLEACH VOL. 58**

BY Tite Kubo | AVAILABLE: Now | COMPANY: VIZ MEDIA | RATING: T for Older Teen

For many volumes, we have seen how powerful Division 1 Captain Yamamoto is, but now he has confronted his most powerful adversary yet... Yhwach, leader of the Vandenreich.

Unleashing his bankai that is a powerful weapon that would take out his own arm, Yamamoto uses it on Yhwach, to find out it was a shapeshifter and now... the great leader of the Soul Society may be in deep trouble. Will Ichigo Kurosaki be able to reach him in time and protect the Soul Reapers and what happens when Yhwach unveils something to Ichigo about his mother? Meanwhile, a secret kept within the Soul Society is the mysterious Squad Zero and now they make themselves known in order to help Ichigo. But what is Squad Zero and also, how will Captain Yamamoto fare in his battle with Yhwach? It is important to note that with the release of volume 58 of "Bleach", the USA releases are now two volumes behind Japan (volume 60 was released in August 2013 in Japan).

An exciting action-packed volume from Tite Kubo, “Bleach” vol. 58 features the conclusion to the awesome battle between Captain Yamamoto and Yhwach! But also what happens when Ichigo tries to confront Yhwach?

For longtime “Bleach” fans, "Bleach" Vol. 58 is highly recommended!

**IKIGAMI: THE ULTIMATE LIMIT VOL. 9**

By Motoro Mase | AVAILABLE: Now | COMPANY: Viz Media | RATING: M for Mature

You’re a young person who has found love, a person who has a brilliant and promising career, a person who lives a life full of pain, a person who has goals and dreams. A regular person living in Japan that receives an ikigami notice from the government’s National Welfare policy that in service of your country, you will be dying in the next 24 hours. As the government would say... for the greater good to maintain peace. Motoro Mase’s ‘IKIGAMI – THE ULTIMATE LIMIT’ is a manga series which gives readers a unique perspective on an alternate Japan where the government instills fear of death as a means to obtain a peaceful society. The manga series focuses on the character of Fujimoto who works for the government and his job is to notify people with an “Ikigami” notice that they will die within 24 hours.

In vol. 9 of “IKIGAMI: THE ULTIMATE LIMIT”, we start to see Fujimoto begin to crack under the pressure of delivering the death notices and others becoming more vigilant against it.

One more volume is left and I look forward in seeing how Motoro Mase completes this manga series!

**ONE PIECE VOL. 68**

By Eiichiro Oda | AVAILABLE: Now | COMPANY: Viz Media | Rating: T for Older Teen

With the Straw Hat Pirates divided, Sanji and Nami (who have switched bodies thanks to Trafalgar’s powers) along with Zoro, Usopp and Brook try to help the samurai known as Foxfire Kin’emon retrieve his torso and put him back together.

Meanwhile, Luffy, Nico Robin, Trafalgar Law and Smoker and Tashigi (who have switched bodies thanks to Trafalgar) see Caesar Clown decimating the marines and the pirates and now they must take on the crazed scientist. But will they be able to?

All hell breaks loose in Punk Hazard, while big black monstrous blobs start showing up throughout the island and the sea. What is Caesar Clown up to?

An action-packed volume that features intense battles but probably one of the most elaborate and chaotic scenes I have seen in the pages of “One Piece”. I’m quite pleased that we are now getting into a more deeper, darker and action-packed storyline with this Punk Hazard arc. Not only do you have the Straw Hat Pirates but you have the Marines, Trafalgar Law, Caesar Clown and others that have yet to make a presence. I could tell already that this arc is going to be exciting and full of action and I can’t wait for the next volume!
“Tiger & Bunny” takes place in NC1978 in the city of Sternbild City. 45 years prior, humans with supernatural abilities known as “NEXT” began appearing in the planet. And now, these people with special abilities and are superheroes sponsored by major corporations such as Pepsi, Softbank, Calbee, etc. and are featured on the popular reality TV show titled “Hero TV”.

Each season, these heroes try to achieve points by capturing/deleting criminals and the best ranked super-hero will be crowned as “King of Heroes”. While each are competing with each other, often they work as a super-hero team.

Meanwhile, Barnaby’s investigation on who killed his parents has led him to a name...Ouroboros. And whenever Barnaby tries to investigate Ouroborous, the people he tries to get in contact with are killed. And standing in his way is a mysterious anti-hero known as Lunatic.

The illustrations by Mizuki Sakakibara are good and the artwork manages to capture the action quite nicely. A Barnaby-driven volume but an entertaining volume worth reading!

We have read the adventures of Clare and Raki, working together to stop Yoma. But things have changed and for seven years, Clare has been looking for Raki until she was absorbed into a Abyssal One.

But now her fellow Claymore warriors are determined in rescuing her, while the organization has revived three former warriors to take on the Claymores who have risen up in revolt.

Will the warriors along with Raki find Clare?
I’ve been captivated by Norihiro Yagi’s character designs. From the eyes to the hair, especially how his shading patterns are, much different from other series as they are literally cross hatching and line art and a style that is very much unique and a style, quite personally his own.

So far, “Claymore” has been a complex but yet entertaining series. It goes beyond the anime series and for those wanting a storyline that is deep and entertaining will find Norihiro Yagi’s “Claymore” to be a manga series worth reading!

Shinji is devastated that his friends, Rei and Asuka have been severely injured and are incapacitated.

He has been wondering what has this fighting been all for?
Is it to please his father? Why does he fight when those close to him die or get badly injured?

In the fourth volume of “Neon Genesis Evangelion”, SEELE has had enough of NERV’s Gendo Ikari and feel that in order to fix the world and humanity by destroying it, they must destroy NERV.

But what they don’t know is that Gendo is not exactly trying to fix the world and humanity by destroying it, they must destroy humanity either.

The revelation of what the second impact and what the An-gels are is revealed in the latest 3-in-1 omnibus (featuring volumes 10-12) of Yoshiyuki Sadamoto’s “Neon Genesis Evangelion”!

“Neon Genesis Evangelion 3-in-1 Edition, Volume 4 was another excellent omnibus in the series with a heavy hitting, complex but entertaining storyline. Illustration and storyline is fantastic and even if you watched the anime series or even the animated films, you may find something new in the manga. But there is no doubt that Sadamoto’s manga series is exciting, action-packed, emotional and extremely entertaining! For the price, these Evangelion omnibus are simply worth owning!

From award winning mangaka, Takehiko Inoue (“Slam Dunk”, “Vagabond”, “Buzzer Beater”), “Real” is a story of three individuals who become paralyzed or lost a leg and are now in a wheelchair.

But are now brought together with others to learn how to play wheelchair basketball and compete.

The manga shows the characters having to deal with their inferiority and the psychological challenges they face, because they are in a wheelchair. But by volume 12, Kiyoharu Togawa, a former track athlete who had dedicated his life to becoming the fastest sprinter in Japan, but lost his right leg after being diagnosed with osteosarcoma, has become isolate.

Now putting his drive to become the best in wheelchair basketball, the problem is that he has become a solo player in a team sport. Will Kiyo learn that basketball is about being part of a team?

For those who enjoyed Takehiko Inoue’s “Slam Dunk”, “Real” is a lot different as it doesn’t focus on humor or romance but the struggles that people who are disabled face. The psychological barriers and trying to have meaning in their life despite being physically disabled.

Known for its realism, if you have been following the series, “Real” Vol. 12 is recommended!
OTAKU SPACES

By Patrick W. Galbraith, Photographs by Androniki Christodoulou | AVAILABLE: Now | COMPANY: Chin Music Press

When it comes to books on Japanese pop culture, Patrick W. Galbraith is one of the few writers who specializes in the field.

The author of “The Otaku Encyclopedia” now dwells into those who consider themselves otaku or those who consider themselves collectors.

In “Otaku Spaces”, Galbraith interviews individuals who collect different things.

For 24-year-old Harada Mariru, the race queen of 2006, the model is also an otaku. Owing 13,000 manga, over a thousand limited edition anime DVD’s and seven thousand video games, does she consider herself an otaku?

What about K-1 athlete Nagashima “Jienotsu” Yuichiro, who uses his money to fund his otaku lifestyle?

Or cosplayer and model Inui Yoko, a member of the cross dressing idol group Fudanjuku, who collects cosplay outfits and has hundreds of them?

Galbraith also visits and writes about various otaku locations throughout Japan.

While the book does not solely focus on anime or manga otaku, it’s still an entertaining book worth reading!

FRESH OFF THE BOAT: A MEMOIR

By Eddie Huang | AVAILABLE: Now | COMPANY: Spiegel & Grau

Before Eddie Huang became opened the East Village Shop Baohaus and before he was seen on television, the controversial star didn’t have an easy life.

Growing up Taiwanese and he and his brothers being one of the few Asians in school, he had to endure racism, having to deal with culture struggles but his outlet of frustration would be taking it out on the basketball court or listening to hip hop music but one day, he wasn’t going to take it anymore and fought back.

Often getting into a lot of trouble as a teenager, all Eddie wanted to do was fit in.

In his book “Fresh off the Boat: A Memoir”, Eddie Huang talks about his life and troubles in his own style (expect a lot of profanity) and wit (Eddie is one hell of a sh*t talker).

A raw and fascinating book about how Eddie’s life of troubles and how his passion for food would eventually bring him to success.

60 YEARS OF JAPANESE TV: THE COUCH POTATO’S GUIDE TO JAPAN

By Wm. Penn | AVAILABLE: Now | COMPANY: Forest River Press

When it came to Japanese television, there was one person who’s articles would captivate me every week in the Daily Yomiuri, and that was Wm. Penn’s “Televiews”.

As a fan of Japanese television, it was always interesting to get Wm. Penn’s take on a show, may it be critical or humorous and to see how others would respond to her articles via online forums.

Wm. Penn’s is a true professional when it comes to Japanese television shows, especially when it comes Japanese dramas and variety shows.

She has seen the trends and wrote about them in her column and that knowledge was collected and featured in her 2003 book, “The Couch Potato’s Guide to Japan”.


An insightful, fun and fascinating book that I recommend for any fan of Japanese entertainment.

MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO: THE NOVEL

Original Story and Art by Hayao Miyazaki, Novel by Tsugiko Kubo, Translated by Jim Hubert | COMPANY: VIZ Media

As a fan of Hayao Miyazaki films, “My Neighbor Totoro” was an animated film that is among one of the Studio Ghibli classics.

But as a parent, what better way to showcase the classic film to your child, who is trying to advance in their reading than by introducing them to a book version of “My Neighbor Totoro”.

Written by veteran children’s author Tsugiko Kubo and translated by Jim Hubbert, “My Neighbor Totoro: The Novel” is a 254-page hard cover book that doesn’t stray from the animated film at all.

The actions of the children are described, as with the weather and environments. And the novel is just as magical and delightful to read.

Original illustrations by Miyazaki are featured as well.

For those who love “My Neighbor Totoro” or if you are a parent who has an older child that loves reading, “My Neighbor Totoro: The Novel” is recommended!
HKT48
Melon Juice (Type-A)
Universal Sigma
UMCK-5444
DURATION: 23:48
RELEASE DATE: September 4, 2013

01. メロンジュース
02. そこで何を考えるか?
03. 希望の海流
04. メロンジュース (Instrumental)
05. そこで何を考えるか? (Instrumental)
06. 希望の海流 (Instrumental)

In 2008, AKB48 producer Yasushi Akimoto announced that he had plans to create other 48 groups, one that would be HKT48 based in Hakata-ku, Fukuoka. In 2011, HKT48 was revealed and unlike AKB48, SKE48 and NMB48 groups, HKT48 would feature many young teenagers ranging from 11 to 17-year-olds.

The group would gain recognition thanks to the MC expertise of AKB48 member Rino Sashihara who transferred to the group in June 2012 and also added AKB48 member Aika Ota to help bring a veteran AKB48 element to the group.

With several television shows and members who have risen in popularity among fans, HKT48 has generated a lot of buzz and earlier in March 2013, the group released their first CD single “Suki! Suki! Skip!” (“Love! Love! Skip!”) under the Universal Sigma label which sold over 250,000 copies in its first week of release.

And here we are with a second single from the group titled “Melon Juice”, which continued the success of the group by selling over 268,000 copies during its first week. There are a total of four versions of this single (three CD+DVD’s and one theater version which is CD only).

The version I am reviewing is “Melon Juice (Type-A)”.

The CD insert is a tri-fold and features on the cover: Meru Tashima sitting and Haruka Kodama on the left, Rino Sashihara sitting on a desk, while Mio Tomonaga is jumping in the air. Inside are the lyrics and production credits.

The first track on the single is “Melon Juice” and while the arrangement is more rock-based with its guitar riffs, it still contains the synth pop arrangement and the cuteness that HKT48 is known for.

A catchy track that is about a girl who wants to give the person she likes some melon juice. And like melon juice, the person is trying to squeeze out her feelings for the person she is in love with.

The second track is titled “Soko de Nani wo Kangaeru Ka?” (which translates to “So, what do you think?”) under the Universal Sigma label which is about a person who wanted to be in the lead in a race and thought they were good at marathons, the person didn’t come in first place. And now, her junior has surpassed her and all she can do is try to work harder.

While the song is about a race, it can also be equated to the competition within HKT48.

For example, member Sakura Miyawaki voiced her frustration on her Google+ page about not being selected the center for this single but is determined to work harder in hopes that one day she will be an ace in HKT48.

The third track is titled “Kibou no Kairyuu” (which translates to “Currents of Hope”) and performed by Amakuchi Hime (similar to what AKB48 and SKE48 does with their Shirogumi/Akagumi units).

The song is an inspirational pop track about a person who put a letter in a glass bottle and let it float on the current of hope, hoping to not give up and that their dreams will come true.

The remaining three tracks are the instrumental versions of the three vocal songs.

Type-A also comes with a region 2 DVD (Duration: 1:03:25) with the music videos for “Melon Juice”, “Kibou no Kairyuu” and 53 minutes of personal videos of HKT48 members showing their talents or doing something crazy during their summer holiday.

Overall, “Melon Juice (Type-A)” is a wonderful single release. The songs are upbeat and the DVD content will entertain HKT48 fans. Recommended!
AKB48
Koi Suru Fortune Cookie
(Type-B)
King Records
KIZM-90229/30
DURATION: 29 Minutes
RELEASE DATE: August 21, 2013

With the senbatsu senkyou ending with Rino Sashihara being declared the ace center for 2013’s 32nd single “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie”, suffice to say, the song has caught the attention of many people from all over the world are dancing along to AKB48’s latest hit song! And with the 32nd single “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” (which translates to “Love Fortune Cookie”), AKB48 has managed to reach #1 with this single and it becoming the 14th #1 million selling single for AKB48 but also their 12th consecutive single at #1.

The version I will be reviewing is the limited edition version of Type-B which features a blue cover with Rino Sashihara as center. Unlike other AKB48 CD+DVD releases, the insert cover is actually a poster. The poster features the cover of the single on one side, while the other side of the poster features each 16 senbatsu members with their individual photo. The lyrics to the songs are included on the inside back cover.

The single begins with addictive disco pop song “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” (Type-B) CD+DVD single! And it’s my favorite of the three types, primarily because this contains AKB48 music videos ever made! Of the different KFC releases, Type-B contains Tomomi Itano and Mariko Shinoda. While all three “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” types are wonderful, if you are a non-region DVD player) but can be played on a MAC or PC using free video playing software such as VLC or Daum PotPlayer.

Overall, I really enjoyed the “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” (Type-B) CD+DVD single! And it’s my favorite of the three types, primarily because this contains the graduation songs and music videos for Tomomi Itano and Mariko Shinoda. While all three “Koi Suru Fortune Cookie” types are wonderful, if you are a non-region DVD player) but can be played on a MAC or PC using free video playing software such as VLC or Daum PotPlayer.

< ARE YOU READY TO DO THE KFC DANCE?

CD:
1. 恋するフォーチュンクッキー
2. 最後のドア
3. 涙のせいじゃない
4. 恋するフォーチュンクッキー off vocal ver.
5. 最後のドア off vocal ver.
6. 涙のせいじゃない off vocal ver.

DVD: (DURATION: 43:18)
1. 恋するフォーチュンクッキー Music Video
2. 恋するフォーチュンクッキー (振り付け映像 Type B)
3. 最後のドア Music Video
4. 涙のせいじゃない Music Video
5. SF少女ドラマシリーズ 「ADS77」:第三幕 降霊

< ARE YOU READY TO DO THE KFC DANCE?

Of the different KFC releases, Type-B contains Tomomi Itano and Mariko Shinoda’s graduation songs and music videos.
Back in 2009, R&B artist Jasmine was once called “the next Hikaru Utada”.

Having had success with her debut single “Sad to Say” (which was certified platinum for “full-length cellphone downloads” and repeated similar success with her second single “No More”, Jasmine has released her tenth single titled “Hero”.

The single sports Jasmine on the cover with blue lipstick, long fingernails and sporting a “HERO” hat and the bi-fold insert features the lyrics and production credits for the single.

The first track “HERO” features a collaboration with Taku Takahashi of m-flo, who produced the single and features music by Taku and Minami of CREAM.

The inspirational track is about looking at one as a hero, believing in them and not losing hope in them.

The single is well-performed, upbeat and musically well-arranged.

The coupling track is “Missing”, a modern cover of Toshinobu Kubota’s popular 1986 hit single.

While I forever will be biased towards Toshi Kubota’s original song, JASMINE does a great job with the vocals. MANABOON does a good job serving up a modern R&B track.

The song is about loving someone deeply and wanting to hold that person, may it be under the starry night or during the day, you want that person to know that your missing them and that you love them.

The third track is “Why” (T.O.M. Remix for JAS VEGAS). The song is a cool remix done by Tomokazu T.O.M. Matsuzawa of JASMINE’s “Why” which was featured on her debut album “Gold” and is a song written by JASMINE but also featuring music that she and Red-T worked on. T.O.M’s remix is upbeat and catchy remix.

Overall, JASMINE’s tenth single is another solid single from the artist. The collaboration with Taku is quite positive for her musical career and hopefully new collaborations will inject more excitement and lead to more interest in her music!

In May 2013, R&B artist JASMINE released her ninth single titled “High Flying” which she wrote and also composed the music (with KO-KI) and features a collaboration with UTA of TinyVoice Production.

An upbeat, catchy, addictive tracks with the slamming percussion and synth beats. Featuring solid vocals and arrangement, a solid single!

The coupling track features a cover of DOUBLE’s hit ‘90s song “BED”. And what I am most proud of is that MANABOON pays tribute by keeping the smooth R&B style of the original track and also a song in which JASMINE can show off her sultry vocals.

The third track is the instrumental for “High Flying”.

Bi-fold insert features lyrics, production credits and a message from JASMINE. Included insert promotes JASMINE’s live performances at JAS VEGAS and info. on her fanclub site, JASMINE WORLD.

Overall, a solid single from JASMINE and one that pays tribute to DOUBLE! Recommended!
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<td>January 10-12, 2014</td>
<td>Los Angeles Airport Marriott</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
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<td>Akumakon</td>
<td>January 17-19, 2014</td>
<td>National University of Ireland</td>
<td>Galway, Ireland</td>
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<td>Arisia</td>
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For the AKB48 Fandom Worldwide articles, there are times when nicknames are used during our interviews such as "Sayane" instead of Sayaka Yamamoto, "Tomochin" instead of Tomomi Itano, "TakaMina" instead of Minami Takahashi, "Acchan" instead of Atsuko Maeda.

While we used it for our questions, if those being interviewed used the Japanese name order convention, we did not alter it.

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