

A J!-ENT SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE AND INTERVIEW

MONORAL



INTERVIEW BY WYNNE IP
IMAGES COURTESY OF VAMPROSE

Born in London to a Japanese father and a Moroccan mother, MONORAL's vocalist Anis Shimada grew up listening to '80s rock music, and building his musical background by performing in clubs when he lived in Paris.

Half way around the globe, bassist Ali Morizumi, who was born to an American father and a Japanese mother, grew up in a musically inclined family and started out in a band during the days when he studied at an international school.

Anis and Ali met at MTV Japan working as VJs, and having found out that they shared similar interest in music, the duo started MONORAL in 1999.

With their multi-cultural background, MONORAL released their first mini album "in stereo" in 2001, containing five tracks and providing a unique sound and composition that was hard to find in Japan.

With their fluently natural English lyrics and their progressive sound, MONORAL performed at the nation's top rock'n'roll festival "Fuji Rock '01" two days after their debut mini album, and received high remarks.

In 2004, MONORAL released their second mini album "ammonite", which once again contained five songs, reaching the number three position in Tower Record's indie chart, and remaining in it for the next seven months.

MONORAL released their first full-length album "Petrol" in 2005, and performed again at "Fuji Rock" the same year.

Their debut single was released in the same year known as "VISIONS IN MY HEAD", which was used as the theme song in the commercial for the Canon IXY Digital; the increased exposure allowed their first headliner live in Ebisu Liquid Room to sell out in just ten minutes.

In 2006, MONORAL performed at the Japanese rock festival "SUMMER SONIC '06", and released the single "kiri", which was the opening theme of the anime series Ergo Proxy (ending theme by Radiohead), gaining further international praise and fame.



MONORAL (from L-R): Ali Morizumi and Anis Shimada. Images courtesy of VAMPROSE.

A second album "Turbulence" was released in 2007 alongside their first nationwide tour in Japan and performances at "Fuji Rock '07" and "Rising Sun '07".

MONORAL's latest album "Via", which consists of eleven diverse tracks of all-English lyrics, as in all their previous releases, was released on October 29, 2008 worldwide, including the 2008 singles "Casbah" and "Safira", which were dubbed "Arabian metal" style.

Recently, J!-ENT was given an opportunity to interview the rock duo, who had just completed a few gigs this fall and are preparing for a Latin-American tour starting in late November in four different countries.

J!-ENT: To give an idea to the readers who may not be familiar with MONORAL, how would you describe your own music?

ANIS: Rock, pop, hard pop, Arabian metal, Arabian groove, progressive rock with a cherry on top!

ALI: Moody, Rock, Fragile.

J!-ENT: On your MySpace page, it says "if Radiohead, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, and Portishead all got drunk, had crazy sex and spawned 2 offspring, they might sound something like MONORAL." Please explain.

ANIS: I think whoever wrote that is a genius! It is pretty much something like that I guess...

ALI: I've been trying to figure this one out myself. The situation is too male dominant for my taste.

J!-ENT: We've heard that the two of you met as VJs on MTV Japan, so first of all, how did you guys start out being VJs, and do you remember what the first impression of each other was?

ANIS: I went to an audition for MTV and



MONORAL (from L-R): Ali Morizumi and Anis Shimada. Images courtesy of VAMPROSE.

somehow I got the job. Both Ali and I were in a different band at that time and we were doing VJs as part time jobs... just kidding of course. We met great people and musicians, and it got us together, so I'm really thankful!

ALI: I was trying to negotiate with MTV to play my bands music video. There was a mix up, and I ended up as a VJ! My first impression of Anis was "she kind of looks like a guy".

J!-ENT: Typically when we think of a band, it's more than two people. So, how come MONORAL was formed with only the two of you? Did you have trouble finding more members to join the group, or did you think two people was just right for the type of music you want to make?

ANIS: We wanted to find a drummer and guitarist to join the band, but as we

started making songs together we kind of focused more on the writing of the music. I think we are great making music together! And we have gorgeous support members, so it feels like being in a band whenever we tour. We have great chemistry going on!

ALI: We're both a big fans of Wham! And Savage garden. I just don't understand why George Michael stopped wearing shorts!?

J!-ENT: If you have not met and therefore MONORAL was never formed, what do you think you would be doing career-wise at this point?

ANIS: Definitely a band! But I'd surely be missing Ali... somehow...

ALI: Astronaut.

J!-ENT: Let's talk about your new album, "Via". Who came up with this title?

ALI: Friend and part of Monoral family... cause we couldn't come up with one...

ANIS: Our staff. I think due to the fact that Via means road in Latin, and "by way of" in general, it pretty much describes our situation and feelings. We want to challenge the world, we want to step forward to make a new road for us and see what happens. We are full of expectations.

J!-ENT: To me, MONORAL's work usually seems to incorporate the atmosphere of lots of different culture in it, and it is not the typical J-Rock music that you hear from pop bands, visual-kei bands, or metal bands. It is all of the above and very diverse. Is this what we could expect from "Via"?

ANIS: We have always been diverse if you use that word, and we can't be anything else. That's MONORAL and I



MONORAL live in concert. Image courtesy of VAMPROSE.

hope you like it!

ALI: Most definitely.

J!-ENT: I heard that it took a long time to create this album. Why is that?

ANIS: Actually it was the fastest album we made. But it took us a long time to decide which songs we would record... we had over 25 ideas for the album, tiny song parts that we made over the years. And we are very bad with fast decisions, so we ended up being behind schedule. But we made wise choices, I hope!

ALI: The recording itself was actually fairly quick.

J!-ENT: I'm sure your fans enjoyed the songs you've chosen to record. So, do you have any stories during the recording that you can share with us?

ANIS: We were pretty busy recording and touring Japan, so I don't remember anything at all! I hope that Ali does... But the rainy season this year was really heavy. One night the river that flows next to our studio nearly drowned us all!

ALI: To be honest, I don't really remember the recording either. The thing I

remember are bunch of insanely long meetings. I think the recording itself wasn't as intense as the other Albums. We had a tight schedule to meet and both of us were on hands and knees to meet the deadline. Nevertheless, it was pretty smooth recording.

J!-ENT: By the way, congratulations on the simultaneous international release of "Via". We know that you have been releasing songs on iTunes outside of Japan. Why did you decide to release your new album overseas on the same date as the domestic release of "Via" on iTunes and on CD-Baby.com?

ALI: Thanks! We've always wanted to release our album simultaneously. This was possible thanks to CDBaby.

ANIS: Thanks to the internet, we receive a lot of real time reactions from overseas. Since it is possible to release it simultaneously, we wanted everybody out there to be able to listen to it and share our excitement at the same time!

J!-ENT: Speaking of overseas, you have recently announced a Latin

American tour in Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. So how did you decide to tour those specific countries as part of your first international tour?

ANIS: We did have chances to go on international Tours but somehow they always didn't work out... But this time, thanks to the hard work of the production companies in Latin America, we were able to realize this. And I'm so excited to actually meet the people who know MONORAL, a band from Japan... like from the other side of the globe! It seems so crazy!

ALI: We've always wanted to tour outside of Japan and have been looking for opportunities. We chose Latin America because it's the farthest from Japan, and we have a feeling the fans there are going to be amazing!

J!-ENT: I'm sure your fans there will be very excited. Will you be trying to speak some Spanish and Portuguese?

ANIS: Ali is fluent with Spanish and Portuguese! Look forward to him doing the MC-ing!

ALI: Anis is in charge of Portuguese and I'll have a swing at Spanish.

J!-ENT: Can we expect more overseas tours such as North America and Europe in the future?

ALI: If we make it through our Latin America tour intact, I'm sure more will follow.

ANIS: I hope! I grew up in Europe, I would really love to perform in front of my friends and ex-girlfriends! North America would be tough because I don't have any relatives there to send threat mail to... "Come to our shows!", but I really want to play there, too!

J!-ENT: Speaking of touring and concerts, every year MONORAL would take part in a number of Halloween live concert, and this year was no exception. How many Halloween shows did you do this year, and can you describe your costumes to those of us who couldn't be at the shows?

ANIS: We had one individual Halloween concert and two events. For the individual one, our theme was a Circus. So our image was a bit like Cirque du Soleil, if you know them. We all dressed up in weird, fantastic costumes. So it's hard to tell what we were exactly. I was a unicorn-like man.

And for the event, all the members could choose what they wanted to be, so we had a werewolf, a heavy-metal band guy, a Sheik, Ali was dressed up as Amy Winehouse, and I was a samurai.

ALI: Yeah, I dressed as Pierrot (from Cirque du Soleil) and Amy Winehouse. We all basically dress up as whatever the hell we want to. We have the best team of Halloween artists that makes our fantasies come true.

J!-ENT: So who do you think had the best costume this year?

ANIS: Ali was hot. He loves being dressed like a girl!

ALI: Probably Daigo, our drummer, dressed as an oil tycoon. He looked very rich!

J!-ENT: If we were to look into your CD or MP3 player right now, whose songs can we find in there?

ANIS: a-ha! They are still great!

ALI: Kings of Leon is in my CD player beside me.

J!-ENT: Let's say, hypothetically, I run into you at a bar and I want to buy you a drink, what would I end up buying you?

MONORAL



MONORAL (from L-R): Ali Morizumi and Anis Shimada. Images courtesy of VAMPROSE.

ANIS: Wow! Never happened to me... Malibu pine may be? (Malibu Rum and Pineapple Juice)

ALI: Chocolate milkshake with rum.

J!-ENT: Anis, how long have you had long hair, and why did you decide to cut it off? Do you miss it?

ANIS: I don't really miss it. And I don't know why I cut it either. Maybe I was drunk.

J!-ENT: We were never told the result of the poll on MySpace regarding Ali's favorite "comfort food", so what was it? (The choices were pizza, ramen, nankotsu, lasagna & tacos, ham & cheese sandwich, and French fries.)

ALI: Lasagna and Tacos with French Fries!

ANIS: I think that is everything he can eat! Other than that he is very difficult concerning food.

J!-ENT: What can we expect from MONORAL in 2009?

ANIS: We'd love to tour around! And make good music!

ALI: It's too far out into the future that I can't even imagine. My concentration is

on the 2008 tour.

J!-ENT: Any message for your international fans who might be reading this interview?

ALI: Hope you dig our new album Via. We'll be doing our best to tour outside of Japan so if we visit your country, be sure to check us out live. We are really grateful for your support! It means a lot to us.

ANIS: I hope we didn't bore you with our answers and thank you for reading them! ■

For more information on MONORAL, please visit:

Official website:

<http://www.monoral.com/>

Official Myspace:

<http://www.myspace.com/monoralofficial>

VAMPROSE official website:

<http://www.vamprose.com/>

MONORAL

Via

VAMPROSE

RELEASE DATE: October 29, 2008

Format: Album (CD)

Catalog No.: XQCR-1008

Retail Price: JPY 2,961 (incl. tax)

01. Everybody's way
02. You
03. Costa Rica
04. Safira
05. Via
06. Guards Of Mice
07. Everest
08. Sun Shadow
09. Casbah
10. I don't mind
11. Sometimes

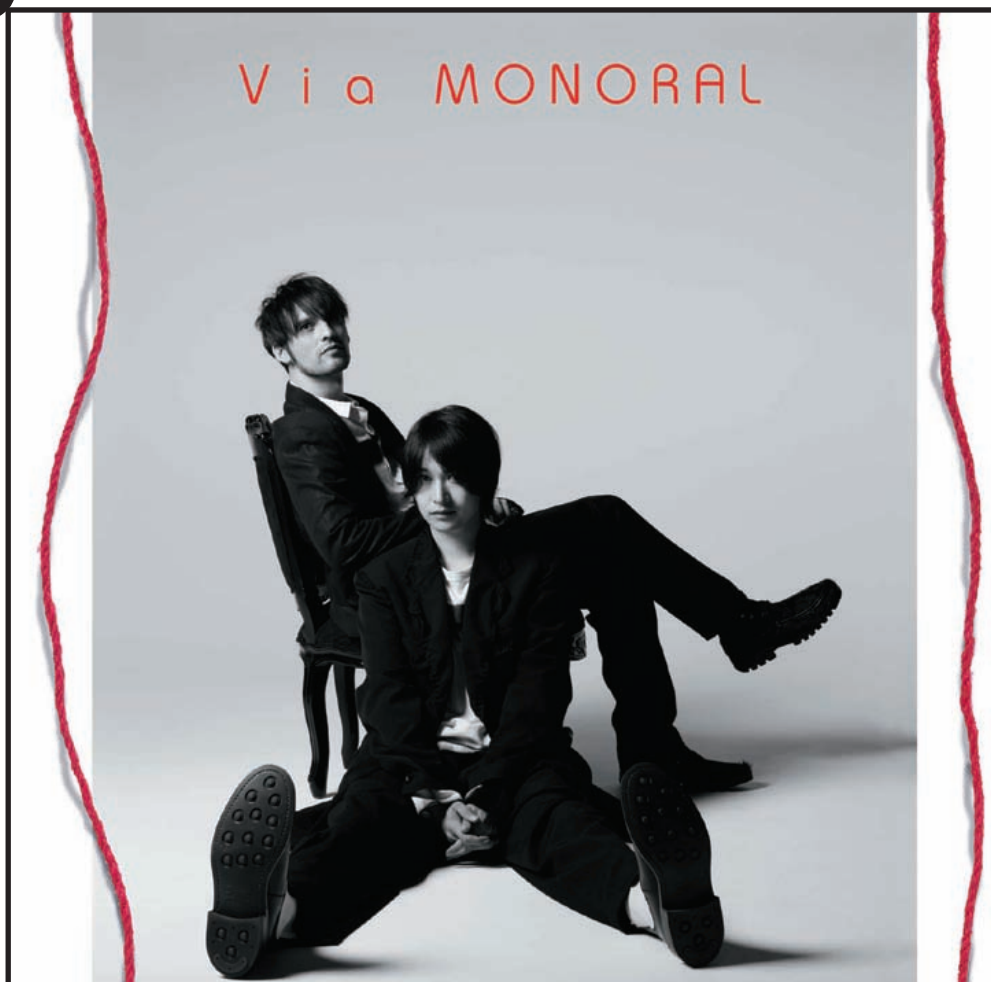
VAMPROSE artist MONORAL's latest album "Via" is the progressive rock duo's third full-length album. As was in previous releases, MONORAL continued to incorporate the sound from the east and west, and made it their own.

Vocalist Anis was born to Japanese and Moroccan parents but grew up in Europe, and he was able to speak fluent Arabic, English, French, and Japanese. Bassist Ali was born to Japanese and American parents, and went to international schools in Japan. Their exposure to different cultures allowed them to combine all their backgrounds into this unique blend of sound that we now know as MONORAL.

MONORAL's diversity in music clearly reflected in "Via". For example, their heaviest metal rock in the album could be heard in "You" and "Casbah", with the latter dearly dubbed "Arabian metal rock" because of Anis' leading vocals at the start of the song and Ali's distinct bass intro before the song dived into the heavy parts the rest of the way. In "You", the part I enjoyed most was actually the transitional melody, where Anis' vocal and Ali's bass had a lighter duet before the end of the song.

Slightly less head-banging but still fist-pumping are tracks such as the album's title song "Via", "Guards Of Mice", and my favorite song of the album, "Safira", which has a mysterious touch towards the beginning of the so-called "A-melody" because of the harmonies in the vocal.

On the other hand, MONORAL delivered the softer side in this album through "Everybody's way", "Costa



< AMAZING & DIVERSE!!!

MONORAL returns with a third album showcasing the music of the progressive rock duo!

Rica", "I don't mind", and "Sometimes", with the addition of the acoustic guitars in these tracks provided calmness and serenity to them. The heavier slow-rock numbers on the album are "Everest" and "Sun Shadow", which really demonstrated Anis' vocal abilities.

Even though MONORAL only has two members, the sound of the album is full, and as I read the notes of each song in the CD booklet, I was simply amazed that sometimes there were four or five layers of guitars being mixed into the songs.

Speaking of the CD booklet, the cover features Anis and Ali sitting down, and as I opened the booklet and pulled it out into one long rectangular sheet, one side had various pictures of the members, and the other side contained all the lyrics and credits.

I really liked the red string that was

printed on both side of the booklet through the pages. It was also printed on the bottom cover where the CD tray was, providing a visual, continuous theme throughout.

All on all, "Via" is a very enjoyable album, and as someone outside of Japan listening to a rock band based in Japan, their natural, comprehensible English lyrics, which often lack in Japanese songs, definitely helped.

MONORAL's popularity is certainly increasing overseas and their music can be purchased internationally at retailers such as amazon.co.jp, iTunes, and CDBaby.com. With their Latin-American tour coming up in late 2008, let's look forward to more of MONORAL's international exposure in the years to come.

— WYNNE IP

J!-ENT

Written by the staff of J!-ENT, an entertainment and pop culture website celebrating its 15th Year Anniversary in 2008.
www.j-entonline.com



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.

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MONORAL Latin America TOUR 2008

**2008/11/30 Mexico City, Mexico
at Expo Reforma**

**2008/12/06 Fortaleza, Brazil
at Anime Master**

**2008/12/10 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
at Teatro Odisseia**

**2008/12/12 Porto Alegre, Brazil
at Manara Bar**

**2008/12/13 Sao Paulo, Brazil
at Inferno Club**

**2008/12/14 Sao Paulo, Brazil
at Inferno Club**

**2008/12/16 Santiago, Chile
at Centro Cultural MORI**

**2008/12/17 Valparaiso, Chile
at El Huevo**

**2008/12/19 Concepcion, Chile
at Sala Dos**

**2008/12/20 Santiago, Chile
at Super J Live**

**2008/12/21 Buenos Aires, Argentina
at Cultural Konex**

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A SPECIAL J!-ENT CONCERT PHOTO FEATURE FROM PERFORMANCES IN SF, LA & NYC



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