A J!-ENT SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE & INTERVIEW

STEREOPONY
ステレオポニー

BY DENNIS A. AMITH
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SONY MUSIC JAPAN
STEREOPONY has definitely caught a lot of attention worldwide through their debut CD single “Hitohira no Hanabira”. The teenage female rock trio from Okinawa consists of Aimi (Lead vocalist and lead guitarist), Nohana (bass) and Shiho (Drums) gained recognition from performing on the Japanese rock radio program “School of Lock!”.

Not long after, the group were signed on Sony Music Records Inc. sub-label gr8! Records. The CD single would receive an anime tie-in as the main track “Hitohira no Hanabira” was used as ending theme for the popular anime series “BLEACH”.

The band has also had other hit singles such as “Namida no Mukou” (used as the second opening theme for “Mobile Suit Gundam 00”) and “Tsukiakari no Michishirube” (opening theme for the second season of the anime series “Darker than Black”).

The band has developed a growing fanbase outside of Japan and the band performed at SXSW in Texas in 2009 and in June 2010, the band performed in New Jersey at AnimeNEXT.

After their performance in New Jersey, J!-ENT had the opportunity to interview the band.

J!-ENT: Before we get into questions about your music, let’s first learn about the group. How did you guys come up with the name Stereopony?
STEREOPONY: It’s a coined word. We wanted to combine the word “Stereo” which for us had a cool/three-dimensional image, and “Pony” which has a cute image.

J!-ENT: How did the three of you meet and go on to create a band?
STEREOPONY: There is a music studio in Okinawa where all the music lovers hang out, and Aimi and Nohana met here in the studio. Then Aimi asked Shiho to play the drums where the two were classmates in high school.

J!-ENT: When you were younger and still in school, what career did each of you imagine yourself working in?
AIMI: I thought I’d be a hairdresser
NOHANA: I always wanted to play music.
SHIHO: I wanted to be a nursery
J!-ENT: What was the moment in your life where you decided and you knew you would be pursuing music as a career?

AIMI: I used to go and see many indie bands when I was in middle school and I started to feel like I wanted to start my own band in high school. Then we started to write our own music and after winning the music contest in Okinawa, we started to aim for a major debut. I remember talking about our career at our school bench in 2007.

J!-ENT: What kind of students were you three in high school. The athlete? The troublemaker? The bookworm? The prankster? Normal student?

AIMI: All I remember from high school is about our band.

SHIHO: Yes, we were always playing music, so we didn’t have that much time hanging out with friends... We were playing for school festivals and stuff too.

J!-ENT: Which artists or bands did you listen to a lot while growing up? And was there any artist that inspired you?

AIMI: When I was very little, I remember listening to Judy and Mary’s “Sobakasu” over and over because it was the theme song for anime series “Rurouni Kenshin”. My parents like Judy and Mary too and they’re still one of my favorite groups. I very much admire Yuki.

SHIHO: I grew up listening to classical music and I used to play the piano. I never listened to bands until I was asked to join the band from Aimi in high school.

NOHANA: I really like Amuro Namie since I was very little.

J!-ENT: 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?

NOHANA: Stereopony (laughs). I was also listening to Bob Marley while on the plane.

SHIHO: Ayaka Hirahara

J!-ENT: You have a strong music following outside of Japan and you have many fans in other countries. What is your reaction when you see people all over the world who love your music?

STEREOPONY: It’s unbelievable and we feel very fortunate. As a musician, it’s amazing that there are people that know us even outside of our home country, and to be able to even perform in a different country.

J!-ENT: Your first single “Hitorihana no Hanabira” was used for “BLEACH” and your second single “Namida no Muko” was used for “Mobile Suit Gundam 00”. That’s a pretty big promotion for a band or artist to have their song on an anime or drama series. How was that experience for you to hear your song in an anime series? And do you watch anime or read manga?

AIMI: I really enjoy reading manga, so I was very happy to see our music being featured in such anime series like “Bleach”, “Gundam” and “Darker than Black”. As for my favorite, I like Sailor Moon.

SHIHO: Dragon Ball

NOHANA: I like everything from Shojo to Shonen manga.

J!-ENT: In 2009, your album “A Hydrangea Blooms” was released. And I can tell you that I have listened to this album many times. How was the experience of working on this album? And how long was the process of writing the songs, composing and recording?

AIMI: Some of these songs are from before our debut, so it was a long way making this album. Everything was new for us at the time, so the whole recording process took a long time, but we weren’t able to finish the 2nd album if it wasn’t for this 1st album.

J!-ENT: In June 2010, your second album “Over the Border” was released. Was there anything different than you wanted to accomplish compared to the work you did on “A Hydrangea Blooms”?

SHIHO: Compared to our first album, I think we were able to express our music even more, as we were more used to the whole recording/production process this time.

J!-ENT: Which song on your album “Over the Border” was most memorable for you and why? And what song was the most challenging/difficult to create?

AIMI: The memory I have from the 1st album recording was that it was hard work, but we were able to relax and enjoy more on the 2nd album.
If one were to make a quick list of the world’s favorite composers, despite his relatively recent vintage, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky would be on it. After all, he did compose Swan Lake, which is perhaps the most famous ballet of all time. And there can’t be more than just a handful of ballet companies that don’t perform The Nutcracker every Christmas.

Indeed, this great Romantic composer should be so immortalized. As a young man, he pursued a career in music at enormous personal risk and against his own father’s advice. His mild temperament combined with his tendency to work too hard left him with insomnia, debilitating headaches and hallucinations. On top of that, Tchaikovsky’s composition teacher never liked his work, even after he became world-famous. Setbacks like these could have finished a lesser man. Instead, they informed his work, which remains some of the best loved in history. Yet some kids will still confuse Tchaikovsky with a nasal spasm.

Why? Because the arts are slowly but surely being eliminated from today’s schools, even though a majority of the parents believe music and drama and dance and art make their children better students and better people.

To help reverse this disturbing trend, or for more information about all the many benefits of arts education, visit us at AmericansForTheArts.org. Or else Tchaikovsky could seem like just another casualty of allergy season.

**ART. ASK FOR MORE.**

For more information about the importance of arts education, contact www.AmericansForTheArts.org.
"Over the Border" because of all the experience from the previous album.

J!-ENT: When it comes to songwriting and musical arrangement, are you perfectionists when it comes to creating your music or are you pretty quick when it comes to creating music?
AIMI: It usually takes a lot of time for me when I feel like ‘I should write’ music. It’s much faster if I get certain inspirations and write.
SHIHO: As for the lyrics, I take notes or record on my cell phone whenever I get inspiration.

J!-ENT: Let’s talk about your music videos. You have awesome music videos! Curious, for each of you, which music video was your favorite to work on and why?
AIMI: “Tsukiakari no Michishirube”. We were able to convey our music through this video. We got soaking wet, plus there were grass and sand going into my mouth (laughs), but it made all the effort worthwhile.
SHIHO: We had extras for “Smilife” and “Hanbunko” which was very fun during the video shoot.
NOHANA: “Overdrive”. We had some scenes where we weren’t playing, and that was new for us.

J!-ENT: You performed at the SXSW (South by Southwest) music festival in 2009, how was that experience for you?
STEREOPONY: We were very nervous as that was our first time performing outside of Japan, but it was so much fun! That experience meant so much for Stereopony.

J!-ENT: Before a performance, do any of you have a special routine or something that you like to do hours before you hit the stage?
STEREOPONY: It’s called “Enjin” in Japanese. (Note: When everyone gathers in a circle and puts their hand on top of the other.)

J!-ENT: Is there a big difference in performing in front of a Japanese audience versus an American audience and how different are they?
STEREOPONY: Yes, very much.
AIMI: I wish we could play in America every time! (laughs)
SHIHO: American people are very direct, and that makes a positive impact for Stereopony.

J!-ENT: Before a performance, are there any cities
interview available now on

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alan
or countries that you both have dreamed of performing at and also visiting?

AIMI: London
SHIHO: There are too many places!
NOHANA: Space (laughs)

J!-ENT: Outside of music, what other hobbies do you enjoy doing?

SHIHO: Yoga
NOHANA: Nail art
AIMI: I just love eating (smiles)

J!-ENT: If we had the chance to hang out with STEREOPONY for a day, which city in Japan and what area would you like to take us to and why?

STEREOPONY: We would take you to our home Okinawa, and hang out just like the locals would do. Going for a drive, aquarium, beach parties, etc.

J!-ENT: If there is one word to describe yourself, what word would that be and why?

SHIHO: Negative
NOHANA: Positive
AIMI: Stubborn

J!-ENT: For every interview, we have a section called word play which I give you five words and you give me your definition for those words:

a. Love
AIMI: People
NOHANA: Chocolate sundae
SHIHO: Music

b. Success
AIMI: Live Performance
NOHANA: Live Performance
SHIHO: Live Performance

c. PAIN
AIMI: I trip over a lot! (laughs)
NOHANA: My Teeth! I just got braces.

SHIHO: My Lower Back

d. A Hydrangea Blooms
AIMI: Okinawa
NOHANA: The studio in Okinawa
SHIHO: Suffer

d. Over the Border
AIMI: America
NOHANA: World
SHIHO: Feeling of stepping across the line

J!-ENT: What final words do you have for your fans worldwide?

STEREOPONY: We’ll be playing worldwide someday! Thank you very much for all your support.

For more information on STEREOPONY, please visit:

http://www.stereopony.com/
COMING IN AUGUST 2010
BY DENNIS A. AMITH
CONCERT PHOTOGRAPHY BY NERGENE ARQUELADA
On November 22nd, celebrities and rock stars came together in support of LAYN ROCKS, an event hosted by actor/comedian George Lopez and a concert made possible by musician SLASH and his friends for the Los Angeles Youth Network.

BY DENNIS A. AMITH
PHOTOS BY NERGENE ARQUELADA

In Los Angeles, actor/comedian George Lopez hosted an event known as LAYN ROCKS, an event benefitting the Los Angeles Youth Network (LAYN) and a concert made possibly by rock musician SLASH and his friends.

The concert was presented on Nov. 22nd at Avalon Hollywood and included Ozzy Osbourne, Perry Farrell, Tom Morello, Billy Idol, Chester Bennington of Linkin Park, Travis Barker, Andrew Stockdale of Wolfmother and Dave Navarro.

World renowned musician SLASH is known for his involvement with helping the homeless. His wife Perla is a board member of LAYN and both are supporters of the non-profit organization.

As for the one night rock event, according to SLASH, getting friends involved with the event was simple and just required a phone call. And one of the more exciting parts of having LAYN ROCKS is that everything is thrown all together and with this type of event, things are spontaneous and you never know what’s going to happen.

But the event is all for a good cause and that is to help keep the doors open for the Los Angeles Youth Network.

In Los Angeles, more than 10,000 youth sleep on the streets and are sleeping in abandoned buildings under freeways and living without food, water and the basic medical service.

Many of the youth are either thrown out or abandoned on the street and among the 12-17 year old runaways that LAYN has seen, most of their parents never report them missing.

LAYN was founded in 1984 and is a non-profit agency with a mission to help end the homelessness one kid at a time by providing shelter, food and counseling for the abuse, neglected and abandoned.

Their mission is to also help homeless adolescents become self-sufficient by providing street outreach, food, emergency shelter and transitional living programs with a professional caring staff in a nurturing and safe environment.

The goals for each child is to successfully complete the permanent transition away from street life to a safe and secure living environment, so they can participate in society.

If you want to donate or be involved with the Los Angeles Youth Network, please click on the following link below:

http://www.layn.org