

* JETAA EXCLUSIVE! *
ROCK TALK WITH

Puffy AmiYumi



by Justin Tedaldi

Since exploding on the J-Pop scene in 1996, Puffy AmiYumi (or Puffy to their fans at home) has proved that girls can not only rock, but they can have their rock star lifestyle minted into a hit TV show. Debuting last November, *Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi Show* can be seen Fridays at 7:30 p.m. on Cartoon Network. Its anything-goes style and colorful computer animation is a worthy companion to Puffy's own eclectic personality. Drawing from the Beatles as a musical touchstone, Puffy's tunes are a power pop kaleidoscope with the amps cranked full blast. Now, guitars firmly in hand, Puffy are set for an East Coast tour following a pair of stadium gigs at SummerSonic in Japan. The first stop for this five-city engagement? New York's own Irving Plaza on Thursday, August 18th, followed by Philadelphia, Washington, Boston, and Chicago. We caught up with Ami and Yumi recently to ask them about the tour and their newfound fame in the states.

Q. *How does it feel to be the most popular J-pop group in America?*

A. Whenever we do interviews, we are asked that but we're not. The fact that we live in Japan also takes us away from the reality of what's going on in the states.

Q. *Did you ever think you would be this successful here when you played your first concert in Texas five years ago?*

A. We were offered to perform in the states and thought it would be fun. We weren't really thinking of trying to be big or what would happen from there. At that time we were just enjoying the chance to perform.



Q. *What do you like the most about touring the U.S.?*

A. We love to tour no matter where it is. It's great to be able to perform in front of people and have fun. But it is definitely exciting to see that we have fans that support us in the states also.

Q. *Are you practicing any special phrases in English for your American fans at the show? All of us on JET had to give speeches in Japanese at one point or another and we know how tough it can be!*

A. We should be practicing but we're not. But of course at our performances we try to MC in English so we can communicate with our audience.

Q. *Are there any American cities or places you would like to see in the future?*

A. Can't think of any in particular but it would be great to be able to go to states we haven't been to yet.



Q. *Any differences between your concerts in Japan and the ones in America (crowd, song selection, etc.)?*

A. Japan or the United States, we approach everything in the same way; we don't change our style or methods. Nothing is different, as long as we feel comfortable with what we are doing and as long as we're having fun.

Q. *You've been together for nearly a decade and know each other really well. What is one word you would use to describe one another?*

A. Partner.

Q. *Andy Sturmer of '90s band Jellyfish has co-written many songs with you and does the music for Hi Hi. How did you originally collaborate with him, and are there any other non-Japanese artists that you would love to write with?*

A. Our producer Tamio Okuda was working with Andy and we were introduced. From there we started working together. He was actually the one that gave us our name "PUFFY." We would definitely like to keep working with Andy and...we'll think of someone by the next interview (laughs).



Q. *If Puffy could play the Tokyo Dome with any band, past or present, who would it be?*

A. Tokyo Dome is way too huge so we prefer to watch other performances there. We'd love to see the Red Hot Chili Peppers at the Tokyo Dome...of course front row!!

Q. *If Puffy could choose any cover song in English for your next album, what would it be?*

A. A song to cover...? Can't think of one right now. We're actually in the midst of making our next original album right now so we're very excited for it to come out. Hope you all like it!



Q. There's a strong visual element in Puffy's look both on- and off-stage. Were you influenced by the same kinds of artists?

A. We're not really influenced by anyone; we just wear what we feel like wearing and make our own style.

Q. Puffy's sound is famous for covering so many kinds of musical styles. Who were your biggest influences and do you have any band or CD recommendations for American fans that are just discovering you?

A. Tamio Okuda and Andy Sturmer are definitely our biggest influences and we're lucky to be able to work with them. If we were to recommend a Japanese band, we'd say NEW ROTOKA.

Q. Have ever you met Sean Combs, a.k.a. The Artist Formerly Known as Puff Daddy, a.k.a. "Puffy"?

A. No.



Q. Let's talk about the show. One thing I love about it is that Ami and Yumi can literally do anything and go anywhere their adventures take them. The jokes and references to the music biz and being a rock star are also fun, so the show is very original and can appeal to anyone who watches it. When you were first approached with the show, was it already in "the spirit of Puffy" or did you give the creators some guidelines on how to create your animated world?

A. The offer for the *Hi Hi* cartoon came from the producer of the show who said he really liked our music and our style so we think it was in "the Spirit of Puffy" from the very start. But in the beginning we were involved and were shown the different animated Amis and Yumis and gave our suggestions and story ideas.

Q. *JETs can also enjoy the smattering of Japanese that is used in each episode. The show doesn't try to Americanize your characters, but the audience can totally relate to your situations and enjoy it, just like a great piece of music. Is there anything you hope to teach your American fans about Japanese language or culture in the show?*

A. Of course it would be great if people became more familiar with some words but like you said the Japanese touch is in the cartoon because we are Japanese.



Q. *Do you have any favorite episodes of Hi Hi?*

A. "Collect All 5"; it'd be cute if the collectables were real, but we haven't seen the recent ones because it's in English. We'll be able to watch all of it once they are on air in Japanese.

Q. *Where did "sutetto" and "bye bye boo" come from? These have sort of become the unofficial catch phrases of the show!*

A. We wanted to introduce the show by saying "start" and at the end say "bye." When we were asked to make these words PUFFY-like, we came up with these words.

Q. *The show launches in Japan later this year. Will you use your own voices for that one?*

A. We did the voiceover of the first seven-minute story, where cartoon Ami and Yumi go to the west and perform (the very first episode). But we leave it up to the cartoon voice professionals to do our voices.



Q. *All the characters in the show have charm and a strong sense of humor, your manager Kaz in particular with his cost-cutting and moneymaking schemes. Is he based on someone you know?*

A. He is our real-life manager! If you come to our concerts you will definitely see him.

Q. *Do you have any final messages for JETs here and the ones in Japan reading this?*

A. There is kanji, hiragana, and there are different meanings and ways to use the different characters so it's a tough language, but then again it's a beautiful language at the same time. It's great that you are all learning Japanese. GANBATTE-NE!!

Thanks to Archie Meguro and Fumika Fujibuchi at Sony Music for all photos and translations. For ticket information, visit <http://www.ticketmaster.com>, and check out www.puffyamiyumi.com for band info and all East Coast tour dates.