

JETAA.NY

Newsletter for The
Japan Exchange
and Teaching Program
Alumni Association,
New York Chapter

Vol. 15, Issue 2

SPRING 2006

THE "RELIGION" ISSUE

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HOLY JET PROGRAM!

*Stories of Religion from Our
Days as JETs*

When I was in Osaka in the mid-1980s while a student at Kansai Gaidai, I was living with a Japanese family. It was spring and Passover season arrived. My parents sent over a Passover Survival Kit, complete with *matzah*. The father of this family had nominally converted to Christianity while a young man and had a Japanese-English Bible in the house. Using the Bible as a guide and my then-rudimentary Japanese, I held a makeshift seder one night in our home. We then went to bed and I awoke the next morning to find that Takashi, the father, had eaten the entire remaining box of *matzah*. I wrote a letter to my parents recounting this story and my father passed it on to the makers of Manischewitz saying they should consider marketing *matzah* in Japan. Some weeks went by and my father got a letter in return. "Dear Mr. Feiler, Thank you very much for your son's letter. But please leave the marketing to us!"

Bruce Feiler

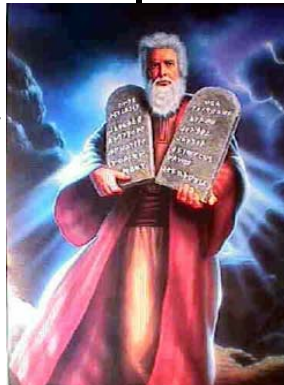
When I was on JET I dated another JET who was going through his own soul searching (for lack of a better word) and we spent a lot of time discussing religion and its meaning. I think he felt even more compelled to do so because to him Japan and the Japanese appeared to have no religion (generally speaking). I wanted him to see that it wasn't

FINDING GOD IN JAPAN

**How One JET Unexpectedly
Found Himself**

by Brian Hersey

On my first day as an ALT, as my supervisor showed me from the principal's office to my new desk, he suddenly turned to me and asked, "Are you a Christian?"



I hesitated, wondering where this was going. "Yes," I said uncomfortably. His eyes lit up. Takao-sensei had spent a year in an Arkansas home-stay with a Christian family. "Good." He replied, "I like Christians, although I can't believe myself since I was not raised that way." Phew!

My view, I thought, to myself, was a bit more ambivalent. I had been raised "that way" and attended church (Baptist then Presbyterian) weekly from the time I can remember. Some of my earliest memories are of my parents holding me in the pew to stop me from running down the aisle to "give my life to Jesus" as I had the week before. Although devout, my parents were never pious or legalistic. They had always encouraged me to ask questions, confident that their faith could withstand scrutiny and that God would answer questions raised.

When I entered the JET Program in 1994, however, my faith seemed barely relevant to everyday life. Oh, I knew the theology, God reaches out to mankind in the person of Jesus ("Christianity" continued on page 7)



**SEE JAPAN
vs. CROATIA
Details on p. 15**

("Religion" continued on page 10)

The "RELIGION" Issue

WARNING!

Religion is a darn sensitive issue to get into, but hey, let's give it a shot. As a notable JET likes to point out, we're often told not to discuss religion in public, and yet it's such a significant part of our society, our politics and our lives (even for atheists), how can we not discuss it?

Japan is often viewed as a non-religious country, but, as you'll see in this issue, we had plenty of religious experiences. Some people go over to Japan to bring their religion to others. Some go in search of Eastern religiousness. And others find their sense of religion challenged and changed by their experience in Japan.

In this issue you'll read some deep and moving experiences, and you'll also read about the lighter side of religion and Japan. We're hoping that whatever you read, it's a religious experience for you.

Steven Horowitz

Newsletter Editor

P.S. Did you hear the one about the minister, the rabbi and the Shinto priest?

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**JETAANY
New York**

EDITOR

Steven Horowitz
newsletter@jetaany.org

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Justin Tedaldi

PRESIDENT

Jennifer Olayon
president@jetaany.org

VICE PRESIDENT

Katrina Barnas
vicepres@jetaany.org

SECRETARY

Carey Lynn Asselstine
secretary@jetaany.org

TREASURER

Tony McCormac
treasurer@jetaany.org

SOCIAL COORDINATOR

Anyone?
social@jetaany.org

PHILADELPHIA REPRESENTATIVE

Therese Stephen
phillyrep@jetaany.org

WEBMASTER

Scott Norman
webmaster@jetaany.org

DATABASE COORDINATOR

Shannan Spisak
database@jetaany.org

Please check out e-mail from our Secretary and the web site

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COMINGS & GOINGS



SAYONARA HIDA-SAN & SAKAEDA-SAN!



This month we say goodbye to **Naofumi Hida**, the Director of the **Japan Local Government Center** who returns to Tokyo after 5 years in NY. Hida-san has been extremely supportive of JETAA NY for the past five years, and we will miss his caring spirit, his knowledge and his friendly nature. JETAA NY would not be where it is today without his efforts and encouragement.



We are also sad to say goodbye to **Lisa Sakaeda**, JET Program Coordinator for the Consulate General of Japan in New York. Lisa has been instrumental in the coordination of JET recruitment, interviews, and pre-departure orientation over the last three years. Shes staying in New York, so we welcome her to transition into a taiseitsu FOJ, friend of JET!

O-SEWA NI NARIMASHITA!!!

YOKOSO ONO-SAN & AHAREN-SAN



Meanwhile, we warmly welcome **Hirotaka Ono** of the **Consulate General of Japan** to New York. Ono-san replaces **Noriko Iida**, who returned to Tokyo last month, as the Consulate's liaison with JETAA NY. We look forward to working with Ono-san and to benefitting from his guidance.



Additionally, JETAA is fortunate to have **Takao Aharen** (an experienced New York veteran) as its new liaison with the **Japan Local Government Center**. Aharen-san replaces **Masahiro Nagumo** as Assistant Director responsible for JETAA NY activities, and we are extremely appreciative of his efforts to date and to come.

YOROSHIKU ONEGAI SHIMASU!!!



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**JETAA NEW YORK
SOCIETY PAGE**
by Yoku Shitteiru

First off, Yoku Shitteiru wants to say a big *yokoso* to all the new JETs, aka Future JETAA NY Members. Have a great time over there and, would it hurt to write us every now and then? When you're back in NYC you can join in on great events like March's **Young Professionals Meishi Exchange** at **Coco Sushi**, featuring work by JET alum artists **Yasmine Awais** and **Manya Tessler** and JET alum playwright **Randall David Cook** sharing a video clip of *Sake With the Haiku Geisha*, his hit off-broadway play inspired by his experience on the JET Program. Did I mention a special cameo sighting of former JETAA Treasurer **Jo Sonido** who then promptly jetted back to **Australia**? The fun continued April 30 at the **JETAA Sakura Matsuri** at the **Brooklyn Botanical Gardens**. **Vice-Prez Kat Barnas** not only pulled together an excellent picnic crew — including **Earth Bennett**, **John Hyon**, **Cindy "Mc" Hoffman**, **Stacy Smith** (well, she would've been there if her phone battery hadn't died), our fearless **Prez Jennifer Olayon**, her *suteki boifurendo* **Tristan**, our super rockstar new **Secretary Carey Lynn** (who was on time even though she went to sleep at 6am!) and our new friend **Doug**, as well as Friends of JET (FOJs) **Ayano**, **Sakura**, **Takuya (Murakami)**, and JETAA's favorite FOJ couple, **Keiko** and **Keiichi Suzuki** — Kat also supplied the Poland Spring "water." There was plenty of *natsukashii hanami* tradition including *koto*, *taiko* and *shamisen* music and Japanese cultural demonstrations, but the group was really more interested in absorbing the good weather and beautiful ambiance of the cherry esplanade..... On May 2, an invite-only crowd of JET alum glitteratti, government dignitaries and media gathered at **Ambassador Motoatsu Sakurai's** residence on the Upper East Side as "Mr." **President Jenn**



Olayon accepted a special plaque from the Japan National Tourist Organization, which has named the JETAA NY chapter as a "**Special Representative for Visit Japan Campaign**." The JNTO has set a goal of attracting 10 million foreign tourists to Japan by 2010. There are about 1,000 New York JET alums, so that means if we divide up the work, each of us is only responsible for **100,000 tourists each**. *Sore de*, stop reading and get cracking! Ganbarou! Meanwhile, one notable JET alum attendee was Brooklyn native and Inuyama City Councilman **Anthony Bianchi** who happened to be in town with an entourage of artisans from his region on a cultural exchange. Anthony had also taken in the previous week's *sakura matsuri* as Brooklyn Borough President **Marty Markowitz's** guest. And for those curious as to the main issues in Inuyama City government, according to Anthony they are transparency in government budgeting and city *gomi* disposal. (Probably a little too far for Staten Island to help out on the second one.) On the same night JETAA NY received the Plaque, **Karen Sumberg** and **Justin Tedaldi** were manning the JET Program booth at **The International Center's** annual **Exploration Abroads Fair** for the benefit of its volunteers. Special thanks to Karen and Justin for picking up the slack left by an editor who will remain nameless While not everyone was able to go to the ambassador's residence, May 12 afforded all JET alums to "**Meet the Plaque**" with the return of **Happy Hour**, this time at the **Black Sheep Pub** on 5th Ave. in Brooklyn. Featuring the annual surprise re-appearance of **John Sandoval** (who has located the one sushi joint in Puerto Rico and befriended the owner), others including **Monica**, **Nick**, **Kat**, **Cindy**, **Wynne**, **Chris** and **Joe** kicked it Brooklyn-style. Rumor (and photographic evidence) has it that **Nandita** even felt



moved to kiss the Plaque Less than 24 hours later, **Nick**, **Cindy** and **Kat** were still going strong in **Kita-Brooklyn** (aka **Williamsburg**) where **Gaijin-a-Go-Go** (which played the *sakura matsuri* the week before) was the main attraction for **Japan-ophelia** night. But the real crowd-pleaser of the evening turned out to be superfungroovy Okinawa-style band **Happy-funsmile**, which had everyone dancing and hoping to catch the eye of

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(“JETAA Society” continued on page 8)

Paul Golin is associate executive director of the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI.org), a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a more inclusive Jewish community for intermarried families. He hasn't done the JET program yet, but hopes to one day.

"There's a jewel that I think is—ugh, I'm going to sound like such a JAP.... And by JAP, I mean Japanese."

-- Sarah Silverman, Jewish-American Comedian

Aside from sharing a disparaging epithet, there are a number of other interesting commonalities between Jews and Japanese. As a Jewish-American man married to a Japanese woman, I'm in a good position to catalog them. Of course, you can't categorize an entire people or peoples without making some generalizations, and when you generalize a racial or ethnic group, that's called stereotyping. Having acknowledged it as such...let the stereotyping begin!

All Japanese love *onsen*. And while many people around the world visit hot springs, the Japanese have raised bathing to a ritual. And therein laid my first hint of a connection. Before my first *onsen* experience, my wife (then girlfriend) explained in detail exactly how I was to wash myself and in what order, before entering the painfully scalding waters. Combined with the removing of shoes before entering homes and the lack of both garbage and garbage pails on the streets of Tokyo, I soon came to regard the Japanese as the most obsessively-compulsively clean people in the world. And here I'd thought the Jews invented both cleanliness *and* Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder!

Ritual cleanliness has been an important part of the Jewish religion for thousands of years. Today, observant Jewish women still visit the *mikvah* (ritual bath) a week after menstruating to "purify" themselves enough to resume sexual relations with their husbands. The ritual washing of hands takes place when waking up, before eating, after eating, and after "evacuating," all based on the requisite page-after-page of Talmudic commentary by the ancient Rabbis. Nowadays, washing your hands before eating and after pooping is something we all do regularly (I sincerely hope) but for most of history—and even in parts of the word today—it was a radical notion.

Jewish tradition suggests its adherents say at least 100 blessings a day, not just while ritually washing but also while doing all kinds of activities. The idea is that by bringing God into even the most mundane requirements of daily living, we make those otherwise-routine activities holy. Likewise, Japanese have raised certainly daily rituals to an art form. Sure, everyone in Asia drinks tea (it seems), but the Japanese have ritualized the tea ceremony into an almost religious ceremony. A more daily example of this ritualization is in the "proper" way to pour beer, with two hands on the bottle while your guest receives it holding the glass with both hands. Why bother? Because it turns the routine into something special, makes us more "in the moment."

Living in the moment is important to Jews, because most believe this moment is all we've got. The notion of an afterlife is a hazy one, even for many religious Jews. There is no one clear description of Heaven or Hell, just varying interpretations of vague Torah text. And in practice, the overwhelming majority of Jews are secular in outlook. While most Japanese generally believe in reincarnation, few would describe themselves as "religious." The notion of punishment and reward in the hereafter is simply not a motivating factor for the behavior of either Jew or Japanese. Instead, it's peer pressure.

Societal pressure in Japan is well documented. Within the U.S. Jewish

JAPANESE & JEWS

Oy vey! Ehh to ne... How similar are they?

by Paul Golin



Graphic by P. Golin

community it has waned greatly over the past several decades as Jews "Became White Folks" (as the title of a recent book suggests), spreading out from the traditional Jewish neighborhoods and assimilating fully into the larger society. Nevertheless, anyone who knows my mom will assure you it still exists. Here's an analogy you won't see on the SATs:

Guilt : Jews :: Shame : Japanese

Whether by guilt or shame, Jews and Japanese both feel bad leaving food on their plate.

Many of the similarities between Jews and Japanese are of course shared by lots of people: emphasis on family, education, and professional achievement. What defines Jews and Japanese is the almost obsessive-compulsive nature in which these goals are pursued by nearly the entire group. There's an old joke that asks: When does Jewish law consider the fetus as becoming a human being? Answer: When it has a graduate degree.

Jews might bristle when someone asserts that they "control the media," but most take pride in the notion that "Jews Invented Hollywood" (from the title of another book). Similarly, Japanese anime has taken over the world, Harajuku style is closely watched (for better or worse), and the gaming industry along with other entertainment innovations continue to emanate from Japan. While *manga* is a growing global phenomenon, the greatest American comic books had Jewish creators, including Batman (by Bob Kane, nee Kahn), Superman (by Siegel and Shuster), and Spiderman (by Stan Lee, nee Lieber).

Again, this is not to diminish the contributions of others, but to point out the similarities in experiences of two relatively small peoples. And for both, engagement with the wider world has been a challenge. For many centuries, both Jews and Japanese were "a people that shall dwell alone."

The Japanese call non-Japanese *gaijin*; the Jews use a similar-sounding word for non-Jews, "goyim." Both words are allegedly neutral in tone, but both can be used derisively. Today, the isolation is gone but the challenge in relating to "the other" remains. This challenge becomes more relevant when coupled with another shared challenge: both Japan and the American Jewish community have a declining population, thanks primarily to low birthrates.

Of course, there are also tremendous differences between Jews and Japanese. For example, Japanese are masters at non-verbal communication. When I watch Japanese TV with my wife, I'm amazed at how long they can go without a single line of dialog; volumes are said just through close-ups of the actors' eyes. For Jews, "non-verbal communication" means speaking in a normal tone rather than the usual shouting over one another at the dinner table.

Considering there are more Jews marrying Japanese than at any time in history, I imagine my hobby of looking for intersections between the two might catch on. Soon I hope to create a website at Jewpanese.com as a kind of repository for this silliness, and I invite all those who might be interested to join me.

Intelligent JET Design



On December 21, 2005, in the midst of the national debate on evolution and intelligent design, JET Alum **Bruce Feiler's** Op-Ed ran in the *New York Times*. In addition to writing the original JET book **Learning to Bow**, Bruce has become one of the leading American writers on religion with his best-selling books **Abraham**, **Walking the Bible**, and most recently **Where God Was Born: A Journey by Land to the Roots of Religion**. To learn more about him, visit his website at www.brucefeiler.com.

Teach, Don't Preach, the Bible

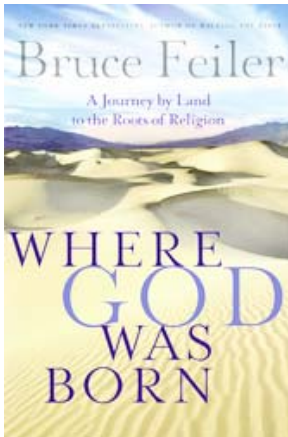
by BRUCE FEILER

Originally published: December 21, 2005.

Yesterday's ruling by a federal judge that "intelligent design" cannot be taught in biology classes in a Pennsylvania public school district has the potential to put the teaching of the Bible back where it belongs in our schools: not in the science laboratory, but in its proper historical and literary context. An elective, nonsectarian high school Bible class would allow students to explore one of the most influential books of all time and would do so in a manner that clearly falls within Supreme Court rulings.

In the landmark 1963 Abington case (which also involved Pennsylvania public schools), the Supreme Court outlawed reading the Bible as part of morning prayers but left the door open for studying the Bible. Writing for the 8-1 majority, Justice Thomas Clark stated that the Bible is "worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities," and added, "Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment."

Though the far right may complain that this academic approach to teaching the Bible locks God out of the classroom, and the far left may complain that it sneaks God in, the vast majority of Americans would embrace it. But the devil, as some might say, is in the details. School board officials in Odessa, Tex., for example, have been embroiled in a running controversy over their choice of a curriculum for an elective high school Bible class. While the board's choice is now between two competing curriculums, pressure from civil liberties groups has prompted changes in even the more conservative alternative.



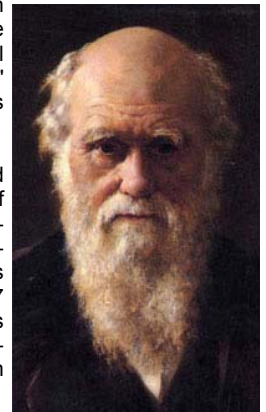
By helping to design an academic course in the Bible, moderates can show that the Bible is not composed entirely of talking points for the religious right. In fact, on a wide range of topics, including respecting the value of other faiths, shielding religion from politics, serving the poor and protecting the environment, the Bible offers powerful arguments in support of moderate and liberal causes.

In the story of David, the ruthless Israelite king who unites the tribes of Israel around 1000 B.C.E. but is rebuked by God when he wants to build a temple, the Bible makes a stirring argument in favor of separating religion and politics, or church and state to use contemporary terms.

In the Book of Isaiah, God embraces the Persian king Cyrus and his respect for different religions, even though Cyrus does not know God's name and does not practice Judaism. By calling Cyrus "the anointed one," or messiah, God signals his tolerance for people who share his moral vision, no matter their nationality or faith.

In the Book of Jonah, God offers a message of forgiveness and tolerance when he denounces his own prophet and spares his former enemies, the Ninevites, when they repent and turn toward him.

In recent decades, the debate over religion has been characterized as a struggle between two groups that Noah Feldman calls "values evangelicals," like Roy Moore, who placed the Ten Commandments in the Alabama Supreme Court, and "legal secularists," like Michael Newdow, who attacked the use of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. This debate does not represent reality.



The Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, completed in 2004 by the University of Akron, shows that only 12.6 percent of Americans consider themselves "traditionalist evangelical Protestants," which the survey equates with the term "religious right." A mere 10.7 percent of Americans define themselves as "secular" or "atheist, agnostic." The vast majority of Americans are what survey-takers term centrist or modernist in their religious views.

These mainstream believers represent to their religiously liberal and conservative neighbors what independents do to Republicans and Democrats in the political arena. They are the under-discussed "swing voters" in the values debate who, the survey shows, are slightly pro-choice, believe in the death penalty, support stem-cell research and favor gay rights but oppose gay marriage.

Above all, they welcome religion in public life but are turned off by efforts to claim exclusive access to God.

At a time when religion dominates the headlines — from Iraq to terrorism to stem cells — finding a way to educate young people about faith should become a national imperative. Achieving this goal in a legal, nonsectarian manner requires Americans to get over the kitchen-table bromide, "Don't talk about politics and religion in public."

The extremists talk about religion — and spew messages of hate. Religious moderates must denounce this bigotry and reclaim Scripture as the shared document of all. When flamethrowers hold up Scripture and say, "It says this," moderates must hold up the same text say, "Yes, but it also says this." The Bible is simply too important to the history of Western civilization — and too vital to its future — to be ceded to one side in the debate over values.

(“Christianity” continued from page 1)

Christ to restore our intended relationship with him. Yet my faith was passive, a backup source of comfort but little more. Moreover, it didn't really make as much sense to me as I pretended in church. I had some questions that had not

The sparse Christian community in Japan forced us to band together based purely on our shared faith and exposed me to a wider variety of Christians and worship styles than I would ever encounter in the States.

answered in two decades of weekly sermons, Sunday school classes, summer camps, youth group or Bible studies. “Isn't it all kind of silly?” I wondered vaguely. Yet the lingering unease with all this “God stuff” lacked urgency. My questions were set aside unanswered. The noisy din of study, work, romance, friends and day-to-day life drowned them out. I just wasn't that interested. Someday I would tackle this, when I had more time.

Then, I flew off to Japan and suddenly, I had LOTS of time. The remote, declining, former coal-mining town in Fukuoka prefecture where I was stationed offered few distractions, especially for an ALT who spoke no Japanese. The other JET in town, while gracious, had a local girlfriend who kept him occupied. Long periods of relative solitude bracketed the memorable events of my first year. One can only exercise, read novels, practice cooking, and study Japanese so much. TV was in Japanese, no VCR and the Internet was unavailable. The solitude was quite a shock for an extrovert accustomed to constant activity.

So, as much to pass the time as anything, I decided to “focus on my relationship with God.” I began to read the Bible and pray more often. Rather than feeling closer, however, God seemed more distant than ever. The doubts I had ignored grew, looming in the back of my awareness, springing up unexpectedly and refusing to be silenced.

Almost against my will, I began to deconstruct Christian claims about God, humanity, the meaning of life, and the authority of the Bible, until one day on the local train, I reached a question that I could only answer in the affirmative: wasn't it much more probable that some creative power beyond my limited comprehension was behind “life, the universe and everything,” and less likely that it had all just happened by random chance? This realization that a creative power - a god - probably existed was the first step (and only the first step) in the transformation of my faith from something I was taught to something I personally accepted, believed and understood. The process took numerous steps, many of which occurred post JET (i.e. beyond the scope of this article), and I do not want to give the impression that the journey of faith is purely intellectual. Faith has a more mysterious side.

Meanwhile, the scarcity of Christians in Japan exposed me to the diversity and strength of Christian community. There was little “choice.” The very low number of Christians in Japan forced us to reach across denominational and ethnic lines that are not as readily crossed in the U.S. and this was an extraordinary opportunity to experience new worship styles and to interact with Christians I might not have met as easily in the U.S.



As a JET, I attended church services partly out of a sense of duty, partly to avoid causing parental concern, and partly because I did not have much else to do. A small Anglican congregation in Kokura was the only church within two hours of me that held English services. Father David, a Californian, was very “high church” even for an Anglican. He chanted rather than spoke mass and loved the ceremonies and the rituals. For me, raised in less formal churches, the rituals and set prayers were fresh and meaningful. After JET, when I moved to Fukuoka City to study Japanese, a bilingual Vineyard congregation exposed me to another extreme, a more free-wheeling, contemporary worship-style where attendees chimed in regularly to share their thoughts. For the first time in my experience, a two-hour service seemed comfortable and short.

In addition to church, the Christian JETs in Fukuoka managed to gather once or twice a month to talk about being Christians in Japan, to study the Bible, pray together and to generally talk about our lives. Everyone brought the same faith, but unique perspectives, traditions and experiences. Dan spoke Japanese fluently and attended a Pentecostal house church. Nathaniel, an aspiring opera singer, had been rejected by his family for his homosexuality. Matt, our charismatic AJET representative and a devout Catholic, had lived for a year under a vow of poverty before coming to Japan. Jeff was prone to bitter, witty tirades about Japan, and struggled to strike a balance between maintaining his faith and rejecting the fundamentalist excesses of his upbringing. An African-American woman (whose name slips my mind) was vigilant about any hint of the racism that tends to flourish in the expatriate culture (“Japanese people are...”), Sam, an ethnically Japanese Hawaiian, joined us my second year.

Nathaniel, an aspiring opera singer, had been rejected by his family for his homosexuality. Matt, our charismatic AJET representative and a devout Catholic, had lived for a year under a vow of poverty before coming to Japan.

This diversity gave the studies and the conversations a richness that challenged me and forced me to re-think issues. This experience foreshadowed my post-JET years in Fukuoka and Tokyo, where diversity in the English or bilingual churches expanded to include people from Thailand, Korea, the Philippines, Laos, Myanmar, Poland, Australia, England and China, among many others. The sparse Christian community in Japan forced us to band together based purely on our shared faith and exposed me to a wider variety of Christians and worship styles than I would ever encounter in the States. It presented more challenges (do we pray out loud all at once? one at a time? in tongues? silently? or following prescribed prayers?), and as a result, I think I learned more in those times than I have ever been able to get out of the more homogeneous fellowship.

Japan, a nation with one of the smallest Christian populations (1-3% depending on who you ask) proved a fertile path on my Christian journey. My JET years unexpectedly became a crucial turning point in my spiritual life. The relative solitude of rural JET life gave me a chance to really consider my faith, explore my doubts, and ultimately make it my own. At the same time, I believe God taught me of the value of the diversity of the Christian community. Looking back, I feel profoundly blessed by my time in the JET Program.

("JETAA Society" continued from page 4)

HFS's *happa* lead singer Meanwhile, on May 8 **Jenn Olayon** was once again representing JETAA NY on the New York scene, this time rubbing shoulders with **Mayor Michael Bloomberg** at **Gracie Mansion** at an event in honor of **Asian Heritage Month**. Also on the scene were **NYdeVolunteer President Noriko Hino** as well as Ambassador Sakurai, all enjoying the sushi provided by **Genji Sushi Express** (of which JET alum **Michael Wirin** happens to be the Sales and New Business Development Manager)..... **Japanese Hot Spots in NYC**: Two unique establishments recently noticed by **Yoku Shitteiru**: (1) **Cha An Tea House** (www.cha-an.com) on 9th St. between 2nd & 3rd Aves. Go upstairs and not only do they have great classic Japanese teahouse style, part of the space is an actual *tatami* tea house that you can enter. They even do tea ceremonies on Fridays between 12 p.m. & 5 p.m. and Sundays between 5 p.m. & 8 p.m. (2) **Tebaya** — a tiny Japanese fast food joint in Chelsea on 19th St between 7th & 8th aves. The owner, Hoi, is a Nagoya native and offers Japanese chicken wings, tonkatsu, chicken katsu, fried vegetables on a stick. It's Japanese fast food but American style (i.e., it fills you up and makes you feel like you should probably go exercise.) Not a light meal That's all for the spring! Make sure to get up early on June 18 to *oen suru* for Nippon in the **World Cup** at **Mr. Dennehy's Bar**, and then go have some *natsu tanoshimi*. *Jaa ne*, see you in September!



A little "water" always makes *hanami* more fun!

"THE PLAQUE"



1. JETAA NY President **Jenn Olayon** accepts the Plaque from the Japan National Tourist Organization designating JETAA NY as *Special Representative for Visit Japan Campaign*.....



2. **Scott and Monica** welcome the Plaque.....



3. **Cindy, Wynne and Steven** warmly embrace the Plaque.....



4. and **Nandita** gets in a little *ichya-ichya* with the Plaque.

Exhibit Review

MUSEUM OF SEX:

Peeping, Probing and Porn: Four Centuries of Graphic Sex in Japan

by Alexei Esikoff

Overcrowded Tokyo, teeming with people living atop one another, made for a dream weekend getaway from my mountainous *inaka* town. As with all escapes, however, there was a downside. When wedged onto the subway next to a salaryman openly reading a rape comic, I felt a bit queasy and wrong. The graphic nature of the *manga* was the first problem: even if I couldn't read the *kanji*, there was no mistaking the images of a schoolgirl overpowered by people or creatures with exaggerated sexual organs. Two, it would often be the most innocuous-looking person reading it, and my interest in him made *me* a voyeur. A nagging thought in the back of my head repeated itself: There's nothing wrong in reading a pornographic cartoon, right? If he doesn't mind reading it in public, why should I?



licking it with tiny tongues.

Interestingly, anal sex between a man and boy is also present. There were no social qualms against homosexuality in the Yoshiwara. The exhibit theorized that this was linked to Kabuki, and the new laws that only men could participate.

In the 1800s, rape pictures became common. To coincide with Commodore Perry opening Japan, the rapists are hairy, fat, and Western. However, in an unexpected twist, one of the most reproduced of these *shunga* depict an octopus performing cunnilingus on a lucky lady. Men were more frequently drawn in Western clothing (women remained in kimono) until 1872, when brothels were made illegal altogether.

I felt the same unease walking into the **Museum of Sex** (5th Ave. & 27th St. in Manhattan). I was there to review their exhibit *Peeping, Probing and Porn: Four Centuries of Graphic Sex in Japan*, and I was taking it very seriously. Poised with a little notebook and pen, I took notes diligently. This was my mistake. Halfway through, I read back what I had written and it was almost silly: "Two women play with black dildo," or "French-kissing and fingering." Enough, I thought. Time to toss off my Western shackles and enjoy.

The exhibit skips in time to the 1930s and the beginning of *manga*. Osamu Tezuka, known for his saucer-eyed *kawaii* characters, is often considered the founder. He changed the "gaze" of pornography—instead of voyeurism, his drawings invite participation. It makes a difference when looking at his cartoon of a woman masturbating (which, incidentally, was known as "laughing"); the viewer is *with* the woman. Even with the earliest *manga*, the bubbly Japanese drawing we know today is evident. Unlike the pictures of the Edo period, women wear modern clothing, have eyebrows, simple hairstyles, and mouths wide enough to take in the (still-exaggerated) penises.



Walking into the exhibit, the mood is immediate. Twangy, old-fashioned music is softly playing. The walls are black, the lights red. Cut into the wall are three postcard-size slots; peering in, I see a samurai and a kimono-clad lady doing it doggy-style. Ahead is a large cloth screen of another man being serviced by two prostitutes.

As visitors to Japan know, vaginas were censored or fuzzed out until only very recently. Even contemporary examples of vaginas prove they are not the most important parts of the body. More prized are gargantuan breasts. The unearthly sizes of penises and breasts are the main theme highlighted by the exhibit. Also recurring are unfaithful wives (punish them!), resistant girls (you know they really want it!), and horny aliens (for the more creative fantasizer). All of these are given example in *Peeping, Probing and Porn*.

The first part of the exhibit concentrates on the Edo period (1603-1867). Tokyo, then Edo, was known as the "City of Bachelors." The Yoshiwara area, a licensed brothel quarter, kept men satisfied. Everyone entered the "floating world" through the Great Gate, pictures depict even randy monks sneaking in for a fix.

A fun side category is *shonen-ai*, or Boy's Love. Created by and for women, these comics exclusively feature men kissing, holding hands, and having dramatic relationships. The exhibit stresses that this genre is very successful. In comparison to the other porn, it seems to be a reaction: perhaps women are threatened by what the mainstream offers.

Oirans were the most wanted women, prostitutes with the power to reject customers. *Yujo*, or playgirls, filled in the gaps. Vendors sold graphic drawings to help people get in the mood (or to pleasure themselves); the dirtiest of those were called *shunga*, or spring pictures.

A wall of four monitors, each showing different *anime* movie, lead to the exit. Taken together, it was a barrage of shrieky, unwatchable pornography. Whereas I grew more comfortable midway through the exhibit and started to see some of it as artful, this was not. A barrage of porn merely reminds you that it's time to move on to something more important.



"Cherry-viewing" was a euphemism for visiting the brothels (make what you will of that). Many of the *shunga* depict such visits. Generally, the pictures have a man on top, with a woman (or women) serving. His penis features a throbbing neon blue vein and is out-of-proportionally large compared to the rest of his body. Idealized women had buds for mouths, far too small to handle the member. To compromise, in some of the *shunga* they are shown

("Religion" continued from page 1)

necessarily that there is no religion, but that there is a lack of tradition of organized religion the way it is in other places. I still think that there is faith and a belief in God in Japan. It just manifests itself differently and from a Christian perspective, in a "pagan" way. In any case, this topic about looking into your faith and at these issues brought back the memories and debates that we had in Japan.

Anonymous

I was teaching an English class for City Hall employees, and when they learned

I was Jewish, they wanted to understand the difference between Christianity and Judaism. I thought about it for a moment and started to explain that, well, Christians believe Jesus was the son of God and Jews don't. But that seemed kind of like it wasn't going to really do the trick. Then I thought of saying that Jews like cornbeef on rye with mustard and Christians like turkey on white bread with mayonnaise, but I knew that wouldn't make much sense either. I somehow stumbled through an explanation, but it subsequently dawned on me that Christians and Jews are pretty similar when viewed from a Japanese perspective, and many the distinctions that always seemed religious to me are more often cultural and contextual.

Steven Horowitz

I worked at a kindergarten once a week and we had the daughter of former Mormon missionaries attending the kindergarten. Although they didn't really have much of a concept of religions such as Mormonism, the staff at the kindergarten really tried hard to be accommodating. The kids would typically drink *o-cha* with their lunches, but the little girl's mother let them know that she was not allowed to have anything containing caffeine for religious reasons. A few of the staff were surprised, but the head of the kindergarten grabbed a kettle, put a blue ribbon on it, and used this kettle for water for the little girl and anyone else who wanted it. This may not seem so unusual to us, but in Japan, where conformity is stressed and children are not encouraged to be different and stand out from the others, I was very impressed with the respect my colleagues had for religious beliefs different from their own.

Ilonka Oszvald

In Beppu or Oita-City I saw one of the saddest things. A temple had a bunch of statues of *mizugo*, or water children. *Mizugo* means unborn baby and the statues memorialize children who never make it out of the womb, whether because of miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, or who die very young. It is often the Japanese version of abortion counseling. People had left toys for the children to play with in the next world, and notebooks where women had written letters to them. One asked, "Do you play with other children?" and "*O-kaachama*" ("Mommy") was a signature I saw. I was in tears. A woman came by with a son about three years old and talked with the priest. She told me her

son was ill. Obviously not the flu or mumps.

Mike Harper, CIR, Kagoshima-Ken, 1990-93

The closest I ever came to a Japanese religious experience was probably having *hanami* under the *sakura*! Seriously. Because the Japanese people know every meaning that the *sakura* have, appreciate their beauty more than I ever knew how to appreciate any tree, and create family and friendship traditions beneath the trees every year. If they had to miss having *hanami* one year, it may be just as bad as missing Christmas dinner or a Passover *seder* with your family.

Michelle Andrews



My mom, who had recently converted to Orthodox Judaism, came to visit me in Japan during Chanukah while I was a third-year JET. We went to Kyoto together for sightseeing and she forgot her *chanukiah*, so we had to make do with putting some candles in a peanut butter sandwich. I'm sure *halacha* would frown on that but it made our holidays bright and cheerful. :-)

Rosie DeFremery

Part of my job as a CIR was to introduce American culture to Japanese students, and one year an elementary school that I had visited in the past asked me to organize a Halloween event for the third graders. With happy memories of Halloweens past I gladly accepted, and decided to hold a festival like we had had every year at my own elementary school. All the grades would gather in the auditorium and some parents would show up as well. The festival usually took place on Halloween itself and involved trick-or-treating, as well as students coming into school wearing their costumes and then taking the stage in turn to show them off to everyone. Certain prizes were awarded for a handful of kids in each grade for categories such as scariest, funniest, and most creative costumes.

Figuring that such a simple cultural concept would be easy for the Japanese students to relate to, I shared my idea with the third grade teachers and they loved it. I made a pre-Halloween visit to tell the kids about the history of the holiday and how it was celebrated in the States. I encouraged them to be as creative as possible, for the fun of Halloween was not in how much money you spent or how pretty you looked, but in escaping your own identity to become whoever or whatever you wanted and making your costume believable.

I eagerly awaited the arrival of the day and made requests for specific Halloween candy to the folks back home in order to make the trick-or-treating portion somewhat close to the real thing. Finally, October 31 rolled around, and as the students crossed the stage clad in their various costumes, I couldn't help but be impressed by the efforts exerted by their *okaasans*. There were a handful of predictable costumes like Morning Musume and Pikachu, but others were truly unique and had clearly taken time to make. Just when I was about to give myself a big pat on the back

("Religion" continued on page 11)

(“Religion” continued from page 10)

for creating such a successful event, a boy crossed the stage in a costume that caused me to do a double take. This couldn't be what I think it is...

But it was. This 8-year old had chosen to be Jesus Christ, not him as a carpenter or delivering the loaves and fishes, but on his deathbed! Yes, his Halloween costume depicted the crucifixion, down to the real-looking blood dripping from where his hands were bound by fake nails to the cardboard cross! What was there to say, other than to declare him the hands-down winner for creativity? Clearly, certain traditions, even seemingly innocent ones involving candy and costumes, don't translate as smoothly as one might think!
Stacy Smith

My grandfather passed away during my first year on JET and I found it a very lonely experience not being able to be with my family or find a comfortable religious setting in which I could sort through my feelings. Grandpa was a great lover of nature and we joked that the Sierra Club was actually the religion he and my grandmother followed, so on the day I found out that we lost him, I walked up to my favorite tiny hilltop shrine overlooking the ocean. No one ever went there and it was like my own personal spiritual refuge, so I spent some time there alone staring out to sea and remembering what he meant to me.

Rosie DeFremery

I went to Japan with an avid interest in Buddhism mostly gleaned from Kerouac and other Beat writers. I visited two temples for the purpose of prayer — one Zen recommended by a friend and then the local temple that was located just near my home. At the Zen temple, once we were all situated in a quiet room below the main area of the temple and the time came to meditate with the group of about 20 people I was thinking to myself that I could get used to this kind of religious practice. Quiet, individual, exploratory, and no book to memorize. I didn't know when the time to start would happen and so I wasn't sure what to do other than wait painfully in *zazen*. All of the sudden the bell rang! I was startled to say the least. I know I also made a loud gasping sound as if my heart stopped because others spoke to me afterwards and they continued to say how “surprised” I was. I am sure those old pros found it quite amusing. I went back only once since that temple wasn't so convenient and instead I started going to the temple near my home where on most occasions I was the only person there. I was invited inside for dinner afterwards and then I found out that I played basketball with the temple master's son. He and I became better friends from then and I continued to visit the temple from time to time and was always asked to stay for dinner afterwards. I went to my basketball friend's wedding also when he married one of the girls in our basketball club. They wanted to see Shaq and Kobe play in L.A. for their honeymoon and they did it. I was raised without going to church and I don't think I would ever want to go to church, but I will go to a temple from time to time because I always feel a little more at ease inside. Not sure why, but so it goes, and it suits me fine.

Scott Hiniker, Nagasaki '96-'98

During my stint in Japan, I had the pleasure of attending a wide variety of English and not-so-English Catholic masses. My first one was oddly enough in good old Choshi, my JET hometown. I was pretty amazed (and pleased) to discover shortly after I arrived that not only did Choshi have a church, but a bilingual one at that! The mass was done in both Japanese and English for the benefit of the Filipino community (I think). It was a strange experience (but great for my Japanese) to have things said in both languages right after each other, but it did add to the length of the service.

Kat Barnas

In my second year in Fukuoka, a friend of mine from church was diagnosed with cancer. We all expected her to recover, but she passed away suddenly. Her family had a Buddhist funeral ceremony with an open casket. As the ceremony closed, everyone picked flowers from the arrangements that lined the walls and laid them in her casket as they filed past. During her illness she had refused all visitors because she did not want anyone to see her while she was ill. The last time I saw Akiko she looked angelic, her face radiant in a sea of flowers.

Brian Hersey

I had a Jehovah's Witness church in my town, which kind of surprised me, and the school in that neighborhood had a fair number of students who were Jehovah's Witnesses (or *yehoba* as I think they're called in Japanese). As a result, every time the school played the national anthem, those students would remain seated. So much for the

stereotype of uniformity and non-religiousness in Japan. One day two Jehovah's Witnesses came to my door — a middle aged woman and a very young woman. They showed me a book, opened to a page with a colorful picture of the Garden of Eden hosting what appeared to be the most colorful and multi-racial picnic ever. I invoked the “*nihongo ga wakarimasen*” defense, prompting the middle aged woman to give up. But the young woman was beaming at me and exclaimed, “Steven sensei!” My eyes suddenly widened, I recovered and went through an awkward greeting and then we said goodbye. The epilogue is that that evening a Japanese friend was taking me to his home for dinner with his family, and as I related the story of the visit from my Jehovah's Witness student, I added, “They're kind of strange, huh?” To which he nodded politely, paused a moment and then said, “My wife is a *yehoba*.” I never figured out if he was offended or if he agreed with me and wasn't so thrilled that his wife was a *yehoba*.

Steven Horowitz

When I was a student in Kobe, I lived with a temporary host family for

(“Religion” continued on page 12)



(*"Religion"* continued from page 11)

two weeks. The family had two obsessions: baseball and Buddhism. As rabid Hanshin Tigers fans, not a day went by that there wasn't a game on TV. And not a night went by that *okaasan* and her daughter didn't light some incense and lead her daughter in a chant before the family altar.

Although I was supposed to be on vacation, I was also dragged to the other two sons' little league games (twice daily) to sit in the bleachers with all the fanatic mothers in the cold March air. Then later in the month I was asked to attend a "special ceremony" with *okaasan* and her daughter. Naturally, I was expecting a simple temple service. What I got was a crash course introduction to a cult.

Somewhere in Osaka, we drove up to a complex where visitors were allowed in only by magnetic swipe card. I was signed in as a guest, and escorted to a room with the family where a dozen of us (mostly women) sat in the excruciating *seiza* position for nearly an hour while watching a videotaped monk's chanting. The room was solemn and I'm sure I would have been more caught up in the spirit of things had my legs not felt like they were on fire. While everyone else was reflecting on the Now, I was lost in thought wondering how many more recruits Buddhism would stand to gain through the introduction of chairs.

After that we were shuttled off to a massive hall that resembled the inside of those churches (studios?) seen on Sunday morning TV, except that there were flowers everywhere, and another huge monitor beaming images of monks walking in slow motion dropping flower petals followed by people crying. Everyone had their heads bowed and eyes closed—everyone except me, since I needed to focus on something in the room to get my mind off the shooting pain my legs were still in.

After the video ran its course, *okaasan* escorted us back to the entrance where she made a donation and swiped her card again, telling me something about "points" she was accumulating. She then introduced me to one staff member and while I couldn't make out everything she was saying, he suddenly became very animated and handed me something that looked like an application form. It asked for my name, phone number and address in the U.S.

There was no way I was going to fill that thing out (I would rather have joined Morning Musume's fan club), but they both had a look in their eyes that suggested I wasn't going anywhere until I complied. So in the sloppiest handwriting I could swing, I gave them an address they'd never be able to track me down at.

As we turned to go (*okaasan* said something about a "new soul" being born), I was stopped abruptly by the staff member. "Excuse me, but where is this 'Springfield' I see here?", he said. "I was told that you're from New York." Uh-oh. "It's a suburb," I asked, one foot already out the door. "Ah, I see. Thank you very much." Fortunately, I never

heard from the cult again, although I did sit *seiza* again the following year at a wedding during JET. And my legs are still smarting.

Justin Tedaldi

For Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur I went to a synagogue in Kobe, the only one in Japan outside of Tokyo. It was a bit awkward and difficult explaining to my supervisor the reason I needed to take off twice from work in a short period ("How often do Jews have to take off from work?") And it felt very paradoxical to me that I was traveling several hours to go to a religious service that I always dreaded and tried to avoid back home. But the real problem was that on Yom Kippur there was nowhere to go to just take a break and chill for a while until I went back for the evening service before breaking the fast. My friend and I wandered around downtown Kobe a bit but quickly grew tired, and the only decent solution seemed to be to go

to a movie theatre where we could just sit and relax for a few hours. *Jurassic Park* was showing, and so that's what I'll always associate with Yom Kippur in Japan.

Steven Horowitz

While I was in Japan last fall for my first visit back since JET I paid a visit to Kiyomizudera in Kyoto to pick up an *omamori* for my mother, who had loved that temple and felt a spiritual connection with it. I also got a little purple one reading "*Katsu*" ("Win / "Be Victorious") to help me with my next major goals in life (pulling off some tough projects at work, passing the JLPT exam, etc.), and with some divine support I succeeded in all of those goals just a few months later. Thank you *k a m i - s a m a !*

Rosie DeFremery

The first interesting religious thing I saw was a small

Catholic church in my town of Yaku-Cho in Kagoshima Prefecture. An Italian priest who had come to Japan in the early 1950s was living there and researching the life of a Father Giovanni Battista Siddotti, an Italian who landed there around 1709 in the Tokugawa Era. He was eventually taken to Kyoto and executed. One source says he was the last missionary to enter Japan before the country was closed off to foreigners. Every so often I would go out to visit the priest to say hello. For Christmas 1992 I attended his service and a Japanese man who was a Christian brought about eight or 10 Filipina hostesses living on the island to the service as well. The priest told me he did very few marriages but sometimes performed them for the people from that *shuuraku* (neighborhood).

One of the town officials, a section chief in the *yaku-ba*, was a Pentecostal Christian. He actually spoke in tongues for me and said I was welcome anytime I wanted to come to his church. He and his wife ran the neighborhood kindergarten. He ran the tax section. I wonder if he ever thought about "rendering unto Caesar." I heard that in the the 1950s an American missionary friend of his had brought an oven to the island for baking bread. Apparently before that the people had primarily eaten rice.

Mike Harper, CIR, Kagoshima-Ken, 1990-93



"IF YOU KNEW SUSHI LIKE WE KNOW SUSHI" event at Asia Society

by Stacy Smith

On April 25, many of the major players of New York's Japanese restaurant scene, along with an international cameo, gathered at Asia Society to discuss a topic close to all of their hearts: sushi. This all-star cast consisted of **Masaharu Morimoto**, one of the **Iron Chefs** and proprietor of **Morimoto**; **Tadashi Ono**, Executive Chef and co-owner of **Mat-suri**; **Keita Sato**, President of **Hatsuhana of U.S.A., Inc.**; **Marcus Samuelsson**, Chef and

Proprietor of **Riingo**; **Josh DeChellis**, Chef and Partner of **Sumile**; food critic **Mimi Sheraton** and, all the way from Tokyo, food journalist **Elizabeth Andoh**. Ms. Sheraton moderated the discussion among these diverse group members, which offered insight into the symbolic food of Japanese cuisine.

Surprisingly, most of the restaurants cited their percentage of Japanese clientele as only somewhere between 10-20%. This led to the question of where Japanese customers go and the theory that there exist hole-in-the-wall places that might not be so friendly to gaijin. This kind of establishment was not represented on the panel so it is hard to know whether this is actually true or not, but the numbers would seem to point to the fact that most Japanese are not going to large-scale fusion places but to more intimate, at-home locations for their native cuisine.

Another issue raised by Ms. Sheraton was the state of fusion cooking itself. She posed the question to the panelists of whether they thought the new was going to kill the old and did they care? Mr. DeChellis emphasized that authentic must co-exist with fusion, and added that they must show mutual respect for each other. This sentiment was pretty much echoed by the other members as well, with the general feeling that the world is getting smaller so fusion is inevitable. Ms. Andoh introduced an interesting aspect of the Tokyo fusion scene, that of rolls being billed as "NY-style sushi." Not only will you find California rolls (known as "American sushi"!) in certain restaurants, but they can also be found in *conbini bentos* and supermarkets. This reverse fusion was a phenomenon unfamiliar to many in the audience.

An urban myth that was dispelled during the event was the idea that females do not qualify as sushi chefs due to their slightly higher body temperatures than males. Mr. Morimoto eagerly contested this by asking Ms. Sheraton to feel his hands, which she confirmed were indeed warmer than her own. However, evidently some traditional places still do not allow

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MUSIC REVIEW

THEY ARE THE HEROES TONIGHT: LOUDNESS RETURNS TO NYC

by Justin Tedaldi

The early '80s were a heady time for heavy metal. Acts like Judas Priest, Ozzy Osbourne and Motörhead birthed a string of classic albums, and newer groups like Iron Maiden, Metallica and Slayer were poised to lead the next generation of headbangers through their innovations in thrash metal.

But a Japanese band overlooked by most rock history buffs also cut its teeth during this fertile time. That band was **Loudness**, Japan's premier trailblazers of metal, which released its debut album in 1981. For a few years in the '80s, they were best-known Japanese act in the world, with an international record deal (beginning with 1985's *Thunder in the East* album) and opening gigs for AC/DC and Mötley Crüe (where they also became the first Japanese band to play Madison Square Garden). As the '80s drew to a close, so did the maiden lineup of Loudness, with singer Minoru Niihara the first to depart, with guitar maestro Akira Takasaki the only original member left by the end of the century.

Fortunately for fans of metal and Japanese music everywhere, the reunited lineup of Loudness rocked B.B. King Blues Club and Grill on March 26, with a crowd of hundreds gathered in honor of its 25th anniversary and the first NYC invasion of the group in nearly 20 years.

Niihara welcomed the crowd with all the flamboyance of a carnival barker (sample patter: "Loudness has returned, New York City, to rock you, you know!"). His entertaining intros in English were something any JET keynote speaker could take notes from. Kicking off with newer songs "Exultation" and "Lunatic", the band then ripped into its back-in-the-day MTV hit "Crazy Night" and chased it with "Crazy Doctor", much to the pleasure of a crowd that was all too happy to sink back into nostalgia.

After that, it was mostly material from the Niihara-less era like "S.D.I." and "The Battleship Musashi", the sound of which owed more to bands like Pantera and Black Label Society than Van Halen. Takasaki was nothing less than a monster on the axe, taking many of his solos right over the audience's heads, so close up that the sweat from his shaved head and flying fingers showered a lucky few.

Drummer Munetaka Higuchi and bassist Masayoshi Yamashita were equally busy, with Higuchi even chain-smoking his way through a couple tunes. Living up to their moniker, the band was loud to the point of distortion, and their closer "Like Hell" brought down the house.

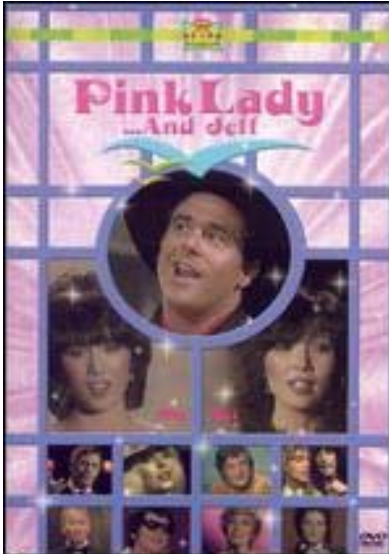
As an added bonus for their fans, the entire show was captured on video for a future DVD release. Hopefully, Loudness will not wait another 20 years to bring us their unique version of metal.



DVD REVIEW

Before there was Puffy AmiYumi, there was...
PINK LADY..... AND JEFF

by Lyle Sylvander



Few Japanese pop groups have matched the success of the pop duo **Pink Lady**. In 1976, Mitsuyo Nemoto and Keiko Masuda performed on the TV show *Star Tanjo* and won the chance to become professional stars. They were renamed Mie and Kei and collectively rechristened Pink Lady. A string of hits followed: "Pepper Keibu", "Blame it on the Bubbles", "Surf Riding Pirates" and "Pink Typhoon" (a cover of the *Village People's* "In the Navy" - "Pink-A-La-Dy") all filled the Japanese airwaves for two years. When "Kiss in the Dark" reached #37 on the Billboard charts in 1979, it seemed that they were ready to become a crossover success

appeals to the *schadenfreude* in all of us: in the entertainment world, the prospect of watching people fail in front of millions is, to be honest, fun. Plus *Pink Lady* is bad in a unique way. There's a specific stylistic badness that can only be called *Pink Lady...And Jeff*-ism. While sitting through the DVD, the question perpetually popping into one's head is "What were they thinking?"

Pink Lady...And Jeff may have the distinction of being the only American variety show hosted by non-English speakers. Mie and Kie phonetically read their lines from cue cards, devoid of much emotion. The spectacularly untalented Jeff Altman (his most impressive credit was guest host of *Solid Gold*) bombs with every one of his jokes. ("I use a stage name. Someone in show biz already had the name I was born with: Sex Pistols!") Interspersed throughout the show are comic routines, musical numbers featuring Mie and Kie and interviews with such disparate guests as Hugh Hefner, Jerry Lewis and Alice Cooper. The opening ten minutes of the first episode, featuring Mie and Kie singing "Boogie Wonderland" with a chorus of dancers dressed in peacock feathers really sets the low standard. Along the way, we are treated to Altman's bad impersonations of Jimmy Carter, Richard Nixon and Johnny Carson, Florence Henderson ("Mrs. Brady") singing "My Old Kentucky Home" and Sid Caesar playing a samurai.

in the U.S. NBC programming executive Fred Silverman sought to anticipate their popularity by signing them to his network. Pink Lady had appeared in a number of televised concert specials and commercials in Japan and Silverman decided they were ready for a prime time variety show. Comedian Jeff Altman was hired as co-host and *Pink Lady... And Jeff* debuted on March 1, 1980.

Jeff Altman introduces each episode but doesn't reveal many interesting anecdotes. He acknowledges the show's badness and seems to shrug the whole thing off as a bad dream. The show's baffling concept made little sense to him or anyone else at the time. It may never be known why Fred Silverman thought an unknown stand-up comic and a Japanese pop duo would make a good prime time pair. The other problem is that, like the Spice Girls, Pink Lady was, from the beginning, a product created and marketed by the music industry. Their flashy routines and good looks were more style than substance and they did not have enough musical talent to sustain their success. Like all fads, they eventually faded from public view. In Japan, their real popularity only lasted from 1976-1980. They do, however, have a cult following, as evidenced by the presence of this site on the Web: www.pinkladyamerica.com

The result was a resounding disaster - the show went off the air after only six episodes and is now routinely considered by many to be among the worst shows in television history. Fred Silverman lost his job after the debacle and Pink Lady returned to Japan, where they never regained the popularity they once enjoyed. The series has been released by Rhino as a 3-DVD set and it appeared on the cable network Trio last summer. For those of you wondering why anyone would want to see *Pink Lady ... And Jeff*, the answer is simple: it's so bad, it's good. It

("Sushi" continued from page 13)

women to come behind the sushi bar for this alleged reason and fear of adverse effects on their creations.

The wisdom that this amusingly raucous group shared continued in the Asia Society's lovely reception area, where *sushi* and *sake* from some of the participating restaurants was featured. Floating among the participants were several former JETs currently involved in the Japanese restaurant industry, such as **Beau Bernstein**, Marketing & sales manager for Ito-en (which generously provided their delicious teas for sampling). This post-discussion event gave attendees the chance to mingle with the panelists and apply some of their newfound sushi knowledge right away.



THE "RELIGION" ISSUE TOP 12!

Religion and humor are a dangerous mix. Nonetheless, we at the Newsletter have decided to say a prayer and wonder about ...

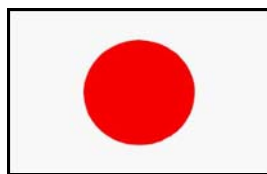
THE TOP 12 DIFFERENCES IF JETAA-NY WERE A RELIGION

12. Reverse culture shock treated through JETAA sponsored faith healing sessions
11. "And on the seventh day, God created the *izakaya*. And God saw that it was good."
10. All JET alums required to make pilgrimage to Tokyu Hands
9. Newsletter forms strategic partnership with The Gideons to access hotel distribution channel
8. Communion changed to *sake* and *o-senbei*
7. Holy Trinity? Godzilla, Pokemon and the Sailor Moon
6. Contentious split among membership over whether Ichiro or Nakata is the messiah.
5. "Are you familiar with JET? Why don't you take some of our literature, and let us know if you have any questions..."
4. JET alums worldwide riot for seven days after Newsletter publishes image of Yoku Shitteiru
3. Live fish sacrificed and eaten in front of membership
2. "Thou shalt not pronounce it *carry-okie!*"
1. Three words: Hello Kitty Bibles



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