

# JETaa NEWSLETTER



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

SPRING 2008

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### TALES FROM THE ENKAI



JET Alums Share Their Party Stories from Days of JET

No *enkai* was quite as exciting as my first, a festive post-Sports Day celebration that became synonymous with a total breakdown of conventional Japanese values.

Like most *enkais*, three of the male teachers were half-naked, making a human pyramid as we stood in a circle and chanted. As these inebriated acrobatics were unfolding, out of the corner of my eye I witnessed the gym teacher (a female) launch a full-on assault at the Japanese teacher (another female). There was the meeting of fist and face, the falling of one teacher and a swarm of others who swooped in and quickly escorted the victim out.

It all happened in the blink of an eye; the other teachers went on with their chanting and pyramids, leaving the poor foreigner wondering what the bloody hell had just happened. The chanting ends and the *kyoto-sensei* gives a closing speech with the gym teacher crying and howling like a dying whale, her face buried into our *kyoto-sensei's* back.

It took a solid day of poking and prodding to get my JTE to explain what happened the previous Friday. It turns out the two teachers had some disagreements about how children should be educated, and the feud spilled over into the *enkai*. We all went about our business working like all was sunny and gay. What happens at the *enkai* really does stay at the *enkai*.

Adam Lisbon, Kobe-shi 2004-07

\*\*\*\*\*

I remember my first *enkai* very well because I was sweating profusely. Couldn't stop, really – a combination of nervousness like never before and the Amazon-esque heat and humidity of Nagasaki in August. I learned the word *doki-doki* and *mushiatsui* and repeated it again and again trying to explain why it looked like I had just showered in between the appetizers and main course. But the beer tasted great and I was



hooked on *enkais* ever since, even when I no longer got the *gaijin* discount, and I never missed one in two years!

Scott Hiniker, Nagasaki-ken  
1996-98

\*\*\*\*\*

We had an elderly magician come and start doing really cheesy magic tricks. When he put on the flapper dress, high heels, fishnets and makeup, the magic suddenly became a whole lot more entertaining.

Another time four male teachers entered the room naked from the waist up and clad only in loincloths and sumo blankets fashioned from porno posters from the 1940s. They got on stage and, sumo style, shouted the achievements their homeroom classes had attained during the past semester.

Dawn Mostow, Gifu-ken 2003-06

\*\*\*\*\*

I once walked into the wrong *enkai* room at a huge *bon-nenkai* hotel. I wound up hanging out for about an hour, drinking their beer and singing karaoke, because I noticed that the girls were cuter at the "wrong" *enkai*. Nobody seemed to mind me, but apparently my school got worried that I was lost until a couple of teachers heard my trademark *enka* song coming from the other room.

Matt Jungblutt, Saitama-ken 1988-91

\*\*\*\*\*

At one *enkai* with people from the office the discussion of breast size came up and one of the women at the table, who was well-endowed, talked with no apparent embarrassment about which of

"*Enkai*" continued on page 8

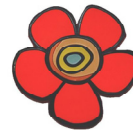


### NORIKO IIDA (1967-2008)

We are saddened to report to the JETAA New York community the passing of Noriko Iida, former Deputy Consul at the Consulate General of Japan's Information Center in New York, who recently died of breast cancer at age 41. Noriko was not only a tremendous asset to JETAA during her tenure in New York, but also a friend to many of us. We and others who knew her will miss her friendly smile and warm spirit. Below is an excerpt from the toast given in her honor at her farewell dinner before she left New York in 2006.

*We all have special memories with Iida-san. In 2006, some of the JETAA NY officers remember the first annual Japan-o-mania event in cooperation with the Big Brothers / Big Sisters of NY and NYdeVolunteer. Immediately, Iida-san lent her tireless energy and resources to make this event a big success. The fun-filled day introduced Japanese culture to American kids. That day, it was hard not to forget Iida-san truly enjoying herself at the games table and helping children improve their o-hashii techniques by catching items like marshmallows and beans. Every project we have collaborated on, she was an absolute professional, extremely supportive and reliable to the JETAA NY community. On a grander scale outside of the Program, she succeeded in strengthening Japanese-American cultural ties. It would be fair to say Iida-san was our bridge connecting Japan to the U.S. (adding a twist of French influence picked up from her assignment in Paris). JETAA NY appreciates Iida-san's committed dedication to the JET program and most of all, her friendship. We know she inspired those around her with the happiness, success, and good fortune she found in the Big Apple. We will treasure the happy memories she left behind.*

**Taihen o sewa ni narimashita.  
Watashi-tachi wa kokoro kara kansha shitte imasu.**



"Trust me, mate. Medieval Japanese literature is the next hot trend."

**THINK YOU'VE GOT SOME  
GOOD IDEAS?**

Contact us at [newsletter@jetaany.org](mailto:newsletter@jetaany.org) to join the Brainstorm Crew or share any ideas, comments or opinions.

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# COMINGS & GOINGS



*In April, the wonderful and talented JETAA USA Liaison Seiko Kubo returned to Japan. JETAA NY is grateful for all of the care, hard work and extra hours she put into her job on our behalf.*

After a two-year assignment in New York, I'm back in Japan working for the Kita-Kyushu City Government.

As I reflect on the past two years, I feel especially privileged to have met the members of JETAA NY. I also had the chance to work with many of you, which I enjoyed very much. I often felt as if I were everyone's big sister, which gave me great pleasure. I truly miss my dear brothers and sisters in New York City. I am so grateful for all the collaboration, friendship, and assistance you gave to me.

Thank you very much again, and I sincerely wish you every happiness and success.

All the best,

Seiko Kubo

## IRRASHAIMASSE!

With Kubo-san's departure, **Shinya Bando** moves to JETAA Coordinator and we welcome Japan Local Government Center newcomers **Taichi Hanzawa** and **Ryoko Kobayashi**, who will serve as liaisons to JETAA USA and Canada, respectively.

### Taichi Hanzawa Liaison for JETAA USA

**Furusato:** Sendai City, Miyagi

**Expertise:** Networks; JLGC Newsletter; PR Liaison

**Best thing about living in NY:** Watching football (Buffalo Bills) games and eating hot dogs.

**Goal for the Year:** I hope to improve my vocabulary in English. To accomplish this goal, I will do my best in my task and see many people in the U.S.

### Shinya Bando Coordinator for JETAA matters for U.S. and Canada

**Furusato:** Wakayama City, Wakayama

**Expertise:** Research Liaison; Waste Management

**Best thing about living in New York:** Eating bagels and going to museums.

**Goal for the Year:** I hope to make not only Japanese friends, but also American friends in NY and the U.S. To accomplish my goal, I will join JETAA NY activities as much as possible.



### Ryoko Kobayashi Liaison for JETAA Canada

**Furusato:** Kawasaki City, Kanagawa

**Expertise:** Budgeting; Library Management

**Best thing about living in NY:** Watching basketball games (favorite player: Jason Kidd)

**Goal for the Year:** Everything in the U.S. is new for me. I will try anything and go out anywhere!

O-TSUKARE SAMA DESHITA!

YOROSHIKU ONEGAISHIMASU!



**bremar**  
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# WHERE TO PARTY IN NEW YORK... JAPANESE STYLE!!!

The Japanese landscape in New York City is changing faster than t-shirt designs in Harajuku, so it's a bit of a moving target in terms of identifying the best places to party Japanese style. Nonetheless, we would be remiss if we didn't try to appease the tanukis. So here are some of the best places in NYC for you to retsu-party!

**Naniwa**

(46th St. between 5th and Madison)

Home of the JETAANY *shinnenkai*, their *tatami* rooms with sliding doors on the second floor bring you right back to your first *enkai* on JET.

**Brooklyn Botanic Gardens**

(Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn)

This is really only a once-a-year party locale, but it's the closest thing to recreating all the *hanami* fun you had in your local park in Japan. *Kotoshi* it's May 3 & 4, so don't miss it.

**Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden in Astoria**

(29th St and 31st St - which seems a bit paradoxical if you aren't familiar with Queens geography)

The huge outdoor garden, relaxed non-Manhattan vibe and kiel-basa on the grill make this a great place to party, period. It's also home of the biggest JET Alum Happy Hour every summer. And the thriving Japanese community in Astoria nicely compliments the Czech ambience.

**Knitting Factory....**

(74 Leonard St. in Tribeca)

...whenever they host Japanese band events. The **Japan Nite** tour came through

recently, featuring a lineup of hot Japanese bands (**Petty Booka**, **The Emeralds**, **ketchup mania**, **detroit7**, **The Beaches** and **Scandal**). The other tour to watch out for is **Japunks**, which recently featured a lineup of **The Ed Woods**, **The Spunks**, **The DuDoos**, **Peelander-Z** and **Bleach03**.



**Kenka**

(St Mark's Place between 2nd & 3rd Aves)

Is it the blaring old Japanese pop tunes? The classic pachinko machines on the wall? The *aspara*-bacon? The crowded tables with Japan-sized *izakaya* chairs? The ridiculously cheap *nama-biiru*? Or the bull penis special? Of course, it's the cheap *biiru*. It's not precisely like partying in Japan, but it's as close as you'll get while spending less than \$30.

**Wherever HappyFunSmile is playing. Usually Forbidden City**  
(Avenue A & 13th St)

The goofy, kitschy, bouncy, catchy and just plain *tanoshii chindon* band brings the party with them wherever they are, at *hanami matsuris*, the Columbia campus and especially at **Forbidden City**, a combination casual bar in the front and upscale Asian fusion restaurant in the back that becomes Japanese party central when HappyFunSmile is in the house. You can (and should) also catch them plaining at various festivals around the city.

**Z-Lounge**

(Formerly at 45th & 3rd Ave)

One of those places not listed in the guidebook, and at this point, perhaps more of a concept (kind of like the **Loch Ness Monster**). Z-Lounge apparently was a

*"Japanese Party" continued on page 20*



# JETAANY SOCIETY PAGE

By Yoku Shitteiru

Welcome to Spring my JETAANY friends, a time to reflect on parties past and parties to come! Shall we start with a haiku to get us in the mood?

*Enkais to the left  
Enkais to the right, sit down  
Stand up fight, fight, fight!*

That has indeed been the trend since mid-January, with our gregarious JETAANY Officer Corp organizing one event after another with hardly a moment to breathe and sip one's sake.

It really started back on January 26 with the *tabehodai/nomihodai Shinnenkai* at (where else?) Naniwa on E. 46th St. Approximately 45 JET alums crammed into the long *tatami* room whereupon the "cultural" requirement was met by an enlightening speech by **El Presidente and Japanese Medieval Literature PhD candidate Rob Tuck** on Japanese New Year traditions. Following the *kampai*, **Jenny Jung** shared how enjoyable it was to be a little less pregnant than when she attended last year's *shinnenkai*. **Shree** (then a civvie, now our es-



Happy JET alums at the *tabehodai, nomihodai Shinnenkai* at Naniwa on January 26.

teemed VP) shared the bizarre and complicated story of the time on JET when she accidentally agreed to clean sh\*\* cubes at the sanitation plant in her town. **Cindy Hoffman** attempted to explain the bizarre connection she and several other JET alums all share with **Seattle JET alum Kirsten Henning** and how it tied in with another friend named **Kiersten Jenning**. **Cindy** and **Stacy** (along with help from **Nandita**) then inadvertently carried on the time-honored tradition (detested by the Naniway staff) of knocking out the screen at the end of the room, leading to brief

confusion as to whether that was the secret passage-way to the *njikai*. Newly formed bonds were ripped asunder in the name of social mixing as all in attendance were requested to re-seat themselves according to the part of Japan in which they had lived. All left happy, however, with goodie bags from JET alum **Laura Epstein's Waltzing Matilda NYC** Australian-style bakery.... Postscript: Despite significant *sake* consumption, **Iron Woman Stacy Smith** still managed to rise and shine in time to run a half-marathon the next morning, about the same time as another alum (who shall remain anonymous) was arriving home after getting lost (though not robbed) on the subway ride home to **Brooklyn**. And that, my friends, is what makes it a *shinnenkai*.... Meanwhile, did you know that the **JETAA DC shinnenkai** involves bowling? *Kakkou ii deshou!*....

"JETAANY Society" continued on page 13



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# NEW OFFICERS IRRASHAIMASSE!!!

## PRESIDENT

**Megan Miller (Hyogo-ken, 2000-02)**

**What I Do All Day:** Underwriting at XL Insurance and Pursuing an MBA at NYU at night

**Hometown:** Philadelphia, PA

**Shyumi:** Running my small non-profit Charity Chic and watching *Lost* with my fiancée.

**Ideal Vacation:** One where I can forget about all the scurrying around I normally have to do, have no access to e-mail or phones, and receive plenty of pampering. This ideally would occur on a white sandy beach next to turquoise waters. An unlimited supply of money to spend on massages, pina colodas, and delicious food would top off this trip rather nicely!

**Jikou shoukai:** As your moto-VP and new Prez, I am honored to be serving another term on the JETAANY exec board and excited to take over the helm of this fantastic organization. After JET I moved to D.C. and then up here to NY. I have been involved to varying degrees with the JET alums in each of these cities, and I must confess that JETAANY has some of the best and most devoted members. You make this job fun and rewarding!



*Treasurer C.J. Hoppel, Secretary Meredith Wutz, President Megan Miller and Vice-Prez Shree Kurlekar*

## VICE-

## PRESIDENT

**Shree Kurlekar (Shiga-ken, 2005-07)**

**What I Do All Day:** I work at DDB Worldwide in their People Performance Group (a fancy word for HR).

**Hometown:** Houston, TX

**Shyumi:** Sports (watching, playing), movies, dancing.

**Earlier Life Ambition:** When I was five years old, my ambition in life was to be a mud wrestler.

**Jikou shoukai:** Thank you to everyone who voted. I'm very proud to be your new Vice-Prez. I arrived in New York in September and am lovin' it. I have two older brothers, one of whom lives on the upper east side, and on March 10th he and his wife made me an aunt for the first time!

## SECRETARY

**Meredith Wutz (Saitama-ken, 2000-02)**

**What I Do All Day:** Work at investment firm in midtown

**Hometown:** Williamsville, NY (suburb of Buffalo)

**Shyumi:** Snowboarding in the winter, softball in the spring and fall, travel, languages, diving whenever I have the money and/or chance, and marine life (especially manatees and sharks).

**Ideal Vacation:** I've always wanted to travel to southern Australia to go on a Rodney Fox white shark cage diving expedition, but I have yet to find someone willing to come along. So I'd settle for a nice, tropical island with some easy diving and the chance to see amazing coral and some nice and friendly reef sharks.

**Jikou shoukai:** Hi there! *Hajimemashite*. My name is Meredith and I am honored and excited to be the new JETAANY Secretary for 2008-09. I'm originally from Buffalo, but have been back and forth living in Japan since the age of 15. I recently moved to the borough of Queens from Japan in October of 2006 and am loving every bit of New York life. Of course, I sometimes miss my second homeland of Japan, so if you ever feel the urge to hit up an izakaya or karaoke box and are in need of some company give me a shout.

*Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!*

## TREASURER

**C.J. Hoppel (Nagasaki-ken, 2004-06)**

**What I Do All Day:** Second-year law student at NYU

**Hometown:** Detroit, MI

**Shyumi:** Climbing, cycling

**Ideal Vacation:** Cycling around the back roads of Japan or Iceland, camping and *onsen-ing*.

**Jikou shoukai:** My name's CJ Hoppel, I was the JETAANY Treasurer last year. I'm very excited to continue on in this position and work with an excellent group of people who I'm sure will continue to make JETAANY a great organization.



## OUTGOING OFFICERS O-TSUKARE SAMA DESHITA!

There's a moment at the end of season II of *The West Wing* where Martin Sheen's President Bartlett is persuaded to run for a second term by the ghost of his recently deceased secretary, on the grounds that he yet has work to do. Well, I'm not Martin Sheen, Carol, so far as I know, is still very much on this mortal coil, and I'm not running for a second term, so come to think of it, it's actually a fairly inept analogy, but more on that later.



ing people to flock to them.

*The West Wing* thing is a pretty lousy analogy, but it's true that there still is work to do. Those of you who've been involved in JETAANY for several years now will have noticed a lot of exciting things happening with the organisation right now. I've been lucky enough to be President just as JETAANY has really begun to show its potential, and I'm delighted that we have someone as capable as Megan to carry on

the development. Having worked with her for the last year, she's shown herself to be creative, energetic and highly organised. I have no doubt that JETAANY is in good hands.

So sayonara, for the moment, at least; I'm off to Japan in September to do field work in Tokyo as part of my dissertation research. It's been a blast -- thanks to everyone who's helped to make it so enjoyable. And remember -- it's JET-ar-knee. Rhymes with "Armani."

*Rob Tuck*

Thing is, though, just as in the world of politics, one's success or failure as a President is very much down to the staff one has, and I've been lucky enough to have some of the best in the business. Thanks are due to all of the Exec, to Steven, for his magnificent work with the Newsletter, to Lee-Sean, for his technical wizardry, and to Monica, for her uncanny knack of finding good places to drink and persuad-

I'm glad that I took the opportunity to serve a year as a member of the executive committee. I've learned so much about how the organization is run and what it means to the people who are members.



I encourage everybody to continue to contribute your ideas to the new execs! It helped us so much to have feedback from the members on the things they liked or felt could be done better. See you all at the next happy hour, and the one after that, and the one after that...

*Carol Elk*

**TIME FOR A HAIKU BREAK!**  
Brought to you by  
the JETAA NY Meishi Exchange

Hashi in my hand  
Crossing o'er Queensboro Bridge  
Let's St. Marks shi-you!

-Anna Barbaus (Nara-ken, 2006-07)

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“Enkai” continued from page 1

the women in the office had the biggest breasts. I don't know if it was just Japanese being relaxed or of not making waves and disturbing the wa even in the face of sexual harrasment. The women in question all looked good, apart from their breast size.

After the bonnenkai, a few of us went to a local cabaret with karaoke and hostesses. I think the women from our section came along,

At my first enkai there was a karaoke machine, and I had yet to learn of the shamelessness with which the Japanese publicly indulge in this national pas-time. I soon found myself on stage singing along with a co-worker to a Carpenters song (another weird object of obsession in Japan). I know this may be hard to believe, but before I got to Japan I had never heard of the Carpenters. So needless to say I didn't actually know the words to the song and ended up mumbling and humming along senselessly to the music. The teachers were



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though what they made of it I don't know. The videos for the karaoke were soft-core pornographic (showing just one actress, no one else).

I took a bunch of pictures at the nijikai (I was known as the "cameraman" by the locals because I took my camera everywhere). When I got the pictures from that night developed, I gave one to a co-worker that showed him dancing with the hostess. He was smiling, and the way she was dancing, any guy would have smiled. He put the picture in his coat pocket but neglected to remove it. His wife found it when doing laundry. Let's just say it would have been better for him if I had left my camera home that night.

fairly aghast that I didn't know, love, and memorize every lyric written by this oh-so-popular American band. I felt like a hen na gaijin that day indeed!

Megan Miller, Hyogo-ken 2000-02

\*\*\*\*\*

The most insane enkai blowout I remember during my JET years was one of those classic overnight hotel stays. We all checked into a hotel maybe half an hour away from our school and went downstairs for a lovely dinner including -- and followed by -- lots and lots of drinking. I ended up at the end of a long table next to a crush surrounded by tokkuri (sake flasks) that had been turned on their side to show that they were empty.

Mike Harper, CIR, Kagoshima-ken 1990-93

\*\*\*\*\*

“Enkai” continued on page 10

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By Stacy Smith  
(Kumamoto-ken 2000-03)

## CAN YOU USE CHOPSTICKS?

### An Interview with Chopsticks NY Editor Noriko Komura

Perhaps you've seen copies of Chopsticks New York stacked at a Japanese bookstore or restaurant. Maybe you were curious, drawn in by the fascinating, intricate and colorful cover art. Whatever your impression, this magazine has made its presence known in NYC and quickly grabbed the helm as the English language resource for all things related to Japanese food, culture and entertainment in the city. Where did this fountain of useful information, seemingly custom-made for the NY area JET alum, come from? And who is making it tick behind the scenes? To answer these questions, the JETAA NY Newsletter spoke with Ms. Noriko Komura, Editor-in-Chief of Chopsticks NY.

#### JETAANY: What is the idea behind *Chopsticks*? How did it come about?

**Noriko Komura:** The main purpose of our magazine is to have our readers know more about Japan, and there are many kinds of information about Japan that can be provided. If you live in the NYC area, you have plenty of chances to come into contact with things that are Japanese, whether they are food, pop culture or art. However, we seek to provide insight into the current state of Japan, as well as traditional aspects of the country including things that are still a part of daily life over there. Thirdly, we hope to shed light on the Japan world that is in NYC that might not necessarily have been discovered by readers. As a free paper, we have a very wide range in terms of who we are trying to target. We know that our audience is comprised of several groups: those who know a lot about Japan and may have even lived there, those who are anywhere from casually to deeply interested in Japan through food, pop culture, etc. and those who have limited knowledge about Japan but are likely to be interested in learning more, and we seek to satisfy all of these categories.

#### JETAANY: I have heard that you share a publisher with the Japanese free paper *Japion*.

**NK:** We share the same publisher, **Trend Pot**, and this company also produced the predecessor to *Chopsticks*, which was called *Asian Food and Lifestyle*. It was a bimonthly free publication that was distributed for two years, starting in 2004. The problem with this effort was that in attempting to cover all things Asian, it spread itself too wide. Additionally, something we discovered with this magazine was that people had more interest in Japan beyond just the typical arenas of food, anime and J-pop than we thought, so we sought to create a publication that would answer these needs. Therefore, when we began *Chopsticks* in May of 2007, we not only had experience from publishing *Japion* but from the previous magazine as well, and I think that this works to our advantage.

At *Chopsticks* we are a small staff of five, so we share office space with *Japion* although we are two separate entities. Besides my editing duties, I also supervise the editorial team of NY *Japion*, but everyone else is clearly on one staff or the other. In order to handle all the stories we cover, we employ several freelance writers. We would like to have more permanent staff in the future, but our profits need to reach a certain level to be able to do that. I think of our business model like a staircase, and in approaching our one-year anniversary we are in a good place but would like to go up to the next step. Once we reach that point, we can make changes such as increasing staff and adding more articles to *Chopsticks*.

**Q: How do story ideas come about? Do you follow trends both here and at home?**

**NK:** I have been in the States 13 years, so keeping up with current trends in Japan requires a lot of research. We watch these as closely as we watch trends in NYC. For example, our March issue features ramen and this was in response to the recent emergence of ramen restaurants here in the city. We saw Momofuku and many places like that have great success, which is great, but at the same time we also wanted readers to know about real ramen. For the Japanese it is like our national food, and it can be said to be deeper than sushi as well as cheaper! We wanted to break the association that Japan = sushi and broaden the frame of reference Americans have in regard to Japan. So I would say that presenting the "real Japan" is a motivating force behind the articles selected for the magazine.

Sometimes ideas for columns accidentally come about. In our February issue we had an extra page so we decided to devote it to explaining the Japanese holiday of *Setsubun* which is largely unknown in the States. However, the response to this addition was overwhelmingly positive! This surprised us and led us to think about putting similar content in future issues. For example, in May we are planning to profile Children's Day.

#### Q: What is your favorite thing about editing *Chopsticks*?

**NK:** I'd have to say it's the chance to learn about many different things and what's going on back home. If you live in Japan, you probably just go about your daily life without paying special attention to things, but from my position now I have to be much more observant. Things I wouldn't realize by living in Japan I see now because I have to be aware of them, and this is more interesting. To give you an example, when I was in Japan I had little interest in anime but now I'm hooked on the *Gundam SEED* series! Ironically, if I was living in Japan I don't think I'd have been exposed to it at all. This is a job that allows me to make these kinds of discoveries, so I'm grateful for that.

Through *Chopsticks*, I feel like I can easily experience aspects of Japan that would be less accessible back home. They might be available, but you wouldn't necessarily go out of your way to do them. I can compare it to a department store, where all the best of the best has been picked and by just going through you can sample everything. In the same way, the Japanese world in NYC offers a taste of different aspects of Japanese culture and you can experience them in a very compact way that would not be possible in Japan itself. For example, going to see Noh at Japan Society is easier than going to see this kind of performance at home.

#### Q: What lies ahead for *Chopsticks*? Are there any plans for expansion?

**NK:** *Chopsticks NY* has been successful, so we are thinking of expanding into other U.S. cities in the future. Of course, it would have to be places with high Japan awareness like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, etc. In addition, we would like to put more strength into our online version ([www.chopsticksnyc.com](http://www.chopsticksnyc.com)), which at the moment only reflects the magazine's content. Going forward, we would like to possibly create original website content. This also ties into another idea of more reader involvement. We would like to increase our contact with our audience via events and special projects. One way we are implementing this is with the current cover artist contest. We want to make *Chopsticks* a more interactive media in the future!

Can't find a copy of *Chopsticks New York*?  
Read it online at [www.chopsticksnyc.com](http://www.chopsticksnyc.com).  
Or check the list of distribution locations on their website.



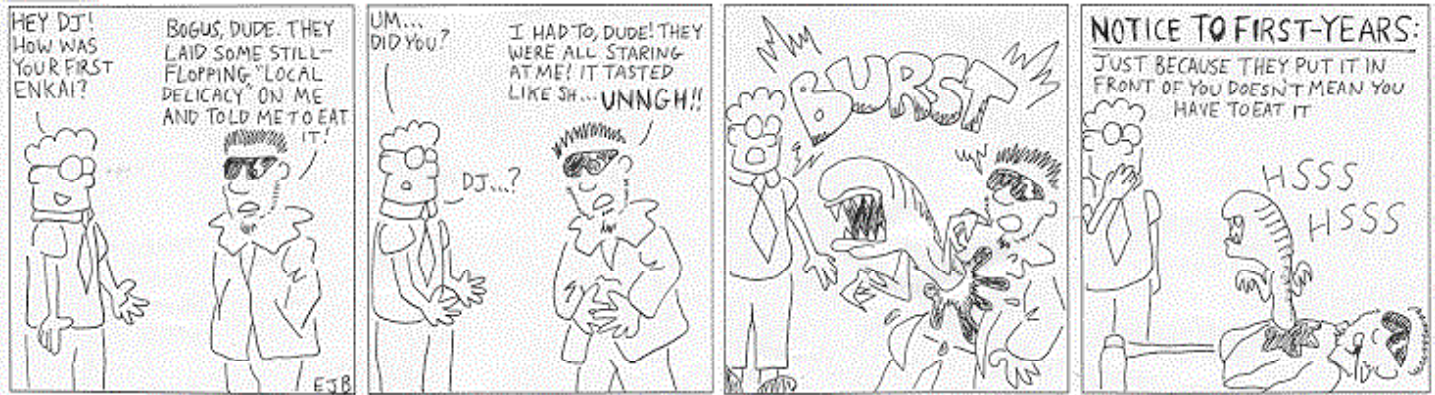
#### DID YOU KNOW?

JET Alums Stacy Smith and Kia Cheleen (Aichi-ken, 1996-99) have both been writing freelance articles for *Chopsticks New York* since 2007 and are both freelance writers, copy editors, translators and interpreters?

"Enkai" continued from page 8

From there we jumped in a cab to karaoke. He was already in the cab when I got in and he put his arm around me. I was totally loaded by that point, and so when he said, "You turn me on," my brilliant response was to say, "Me too!"

We arrived at the karaoke place, sang some songs and drank some whiskey, got even more lit. We all took cabs back to the hotel and I ended up ralphing in a wastebasket because I had overdone it. I think earlier in the evening I'd even seen our gym teacher peeing on a bed in the designated mah-jong room. Don't know what that was all about.



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Anyhow, needless to say the next morning I was wrecked and cursing the fact of my ever having been born. I went down to breakfast and looked askance at the fish and *nattou* in front of me, wondering how on earth I was going to get any of that into my mouth without hurling. The sight of the raw egg didn't help either. The crush came wandering in with a bright smile and said, "You look terrible!" "I feel like death," I replied. He laughed and sat down with me. I absently played with my food but could not have a real breakfast.

So what did we do for our next activity? Bowling! That's right kids, bowling with a hangover. My head was exploding, but I went (no choice because I didn't have independent transportation home) and, miraculously, I beat everyone. Don't know how that happened. I still have the score sheet printout somewhere.

Anyway, after that was over we all did return home and I was deposited in my *apato* to recover. That took about a day of lying in bed asking, "Why God, why?" and swearing not to ever let it get off the rails like that again. The next week my crush asked me if I remembered anything that had happened and when I confirmed that I had, he went ahead and asked me out. Who knew a drunken, slightly illogical confession could lead to a beautiful relationship?

Anonymous, Dokodemo-ken

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One time my coworkers proclaimed me drunk and unfit to drive after having one sip of a drink to taste it (literally, one sip, not a shot, not even a tablespoon -- probably about a teaspoon worth, really... I knew I would have to drive later on that night), after having finished my meal, after having stopped at another ramen shop on the way back to school since the teachers decided there wasn't enough food at the *enkai*, and then after having finally made it back to the school where my car was.

Now, Japan has a zero tolerance policy, but here I was after having approximately a teaspoon worth of a drink with an alcohol content on par with beer, two meals and three and a half hours later, and they told me I was unfit to drive as I had been "drinking." While I would never endorse driving under any influence of alcohol, the process of our bodies metabolizing alcohol was apparently a great mystery to these teachers.

As a result of my sip, I was dropped off at home and left to walk to school to pick up my car the next day that it wasn't raining (it's about a four-mile walk which I did indeed make the next day that it wasn't raining, three days later).

In contrast to my experience, the popular conversation of the *enkai* that night had been how many times over the years the vice principal drove home

drunk. Me being demonized for a sip, two meals and over three hours later, and his being deified for his drunk driving shenanigans over the years left me with a bitter taste in my mouth, and it wasn't from any sort of alcohol.

Curtis Edlin, Hyogo-ken 2007-Present

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Believe it or not, my CIR *enkais* were pretty dull (except for the times my *bucho* would get rip-roaring drunk and hypothesized at length about

my future wedded to a cute Japanese girl). I guess it was nice having a co-worker live vicariously through me, if only for that evening.

Justin Tedaldi, Kobe-shi 2001-02

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My Board of Education-sanctioned farewell party was held at a hostess bar. I am not a man. Why my BOE thought it was appropriate to have a party honoring a twenty-three-year-old female at a hostess bar—and have the gall to tell her it was expected that she offer to pay for half of it—is something that still baffles me.

I'm not being entirely fair. Before the hostess bar, I had a very nice banquet dinner with the entire BOE, in which I was presented with a beautiful navy *yukata* with a strawberry print. All the other women left soon after that. I was asked by my English-speaking supervisor if I wanted to continue the party. Well, yeah, of course I did.

So the hostess bar. It took me a few minutes to realize what it was. I had read about them, had my male JET friends describe the male-only *enkais* that occurred in them, but had never visited one myself. It didn't look any different from the snack bars, so it wasn't until I realized that the women who worked there weren't Japanese that I figured it out.

There were four women. They were dressed in more revealing clothes than most *mama-sans*, but weren't overly sexual. Two of the women were Filipino, and as such spoke better English than most of my JTEs. One of them took a liking to me, probably because I wasn't about to fondle her, and sat next to me to chat. I decided to stay, at least for a little while. It was like a sociological experiment.

The male BOE members got very drunk very quickly, and the other hostesses bustled around bringing constant fresh supplies of food and drinks, along with the karaoke mike. "Hello Ms. Alexei!" said one BOE member repeatedly, his tie around his head like Rambo. He wanted my attention to be on the English song he was singing, but I was asking my Filipino friend about her family back home. "Hello! Ms. Alexei! Ms. Alexei!"

A serving of kimchee appeared next to me, and my friend began to feed me. "No, that's okay—"

"Ms. Alexei! English song!"

My friend then took a napkin and wiped my mouth. I looked around, and saw at least two of the BOE members had ladies in their laps petting their heads. The

"Enkai" continued on page 14



# YUKI'S RIDE HOME

An Interview with Children's Book Author & Illustrator Manya Tessler (Wakayama-ken, 1998-2000) by Tamaris Rivera

*It's a late night in Astoria, and Manya, her husband Roumen and I chill in Manya's living room, alternately chasing her rabbit, Dessy, and her cat, Petunia, for mandatory adoration. On a normal night, we'd flop out on the couch to watch reruns of Columbo. Tonight, however, I set the recorder on the table, because we're here to talk about Manya's first book, the Japan-inspired children's book, *Yuki's Ride Home*.*

## What made you want to write this book, and how did your JET experience influence it?

While living in Wakayama, Japan for the JET Program, I loved to bike down to the beach. I'd find a nice secluded place by the water, pull out my sketchbook, and just write and sketch for hours. I filled over a dozen sketchbooks during the two years that I was in Japan, basically talking to myself and taking note of what I observed, both externally and internally. Some days, I read and worked on exercises from the Artist's Way [Note: *The Artist's Way is a 12-week creative self-discovery program by Julia Cameron*]; it really helped me realize that I wanted to write and illustrate children's books.

My first six months in Japan were stressful for me, because I couldn't understand much of what was going on around me. Being away from the comfortable and familiar, in a place where I was basically illiterate gave me the opportunity to explore not only on a new external level but helped me focus internally as well.

However, early on I developed a friendship with an artist named Tamaki-sensei and his wife, Fumi-san, a master dollmaker. Tamaki-sensei was a *sumi-e* artist, and my *sumi-e* teacher. [Note: *Sumi-e is an art form that strives to distill the essence of an object or scene in the fewest possible strokes.*]

After school, I would either bike around Wakayama, or bike to Tamaki-sensei's home for *sumi-e* lessons. Most of the time he, his wife (an amazing dollmaker), and I would chat and eat sweets. Until I learned enough Japanese to hold real conversations with him (which took a good year), he and I communicated largely with our sketchbooks and dictionaries. One night I showed Tamaki-sensei a drawing from my sketchbook, and from then on, he encouraged me to paint scenes from my imagination as well as the still lifes we had focused on in our lessons. He gave me this sketchbook that unfolds like a screen, and in two months it was completely filled up with images of people and animals and my everyday life in Japan.

A lot of my time spent there, including the bike ride to and from their house, inspired a lot of the book.

## How did you get to this point in your career?

I studied printmaking at Wesleyan [Note: *Where Manya and I met in a physics class and suffered together*], and my thesis advisor told me that my final project looked more like illustration than art. He meant it as a harsh critique, but it made me think that maybe I could really do illustration. It was actually a blessing in disguise. While I was in Japan, I took an online writing class through the Learning Center – and as the class went on, more and more people dropped out until there were only four of us left. We started a critique group that lasted for years, and now everyone who was in that group is published. It was really helpful to have that group to get feedback on and support with my work. During my second year on the JET Program I applied to (and was thrilled to be accepted to) the School of Visual Arts in New York.



## Any advice for anyone trying to break into this field?

One good place to start is the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators ([www.scbwi.org](http://www.scbwi.org)). They offer workshops, lectures and conferences to members, who can also join online critique groups. I think annual membership costs around \$60. It's helpful to go to conferences, because most publishers won't take unsolicited manuscripts. But if you talk to or attend a lecture by, someone from the publishing house, they often allow you to submit to them.

I'd also recommend the Children's Book Illustrators Group ([www.cbgi-nyc.com](http://www.cbgi-nyc.com)), since I'm a co-president of it. It's an amazing group, composed of people who really care about each other and the art of children's books.

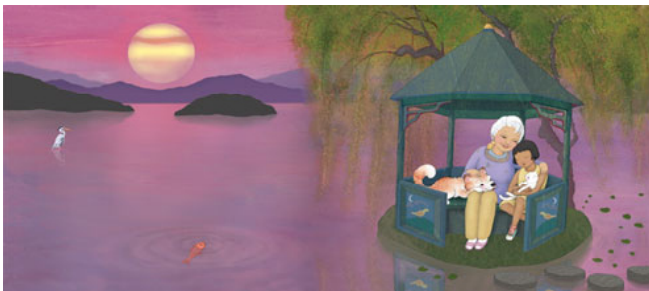
Advice, criticism and support from my critique group have also helped me enormously.

Taking classes has also helped me. I took a children's book writing class online many years ago (while I was working in Japan on the JET Program), which is how I met members of my first critique group. Monica Wellington teaches a wonderful continuing education class at SVA.

*After an hour of storytelling, reminiscing, and show and tell (including sketches from the folded sketchbook), Petunia, tired of adoration, has wedged herself under the TV, Dessy is happily munching something in the kitchen, and there's just one last question to be asked.*



Tamaki-sensei



## Why should people buy this book?

Oh, God. (She starts laughing. Note: *Self-promotion isn't Manya's strong point, and her husband Roumen asks for the recorder.*)  
**Roumen:** I can say why. First of all, the illustrations are gorgeous. Dreamy, the colors are out of this world. Then, I think it's a nice feminist story, about a girl... (Manya and I start laughing.)

**Manya:** It's a feminist story because there are no men in it! The only man is the dog.

**Me:** Ladies and gentlemen – a new definition of feminism.

**Roumen (once he stops laughing):** And the other nice thing, I think it's a book that can help the communication between a grandmother and a granddaughter, and kind of how to spend a good nice time together enjoying each other's company and learning together.  
**Me:** There we go – the official statement of why to buy this book.

More information on Manya's current – and future – projects can be found at her gorgeously illustrated website: [www.manyatessler.com](http://www.manyatessler.com).

Tamaris Rivera is a writer and crafter, also living in Astoria, and working at Columbia Business School's Center on Japanese Economy and Business alongside the JET alumni who convinced her to conduct this interview. (Thanks, Jenn!) Information on her projects can be found at her craft blog: [novenastar.livejournal.com](http://novenastar.livejournal.com).







Secret passageway to the nijikai!



"Nijikai ni irrashaimasse!"



Nicole and Chaz check out Adam's portfolio



Seth, Stacy and Jamie engaged in a 3-way meishi exchange at Kanvas



Carol, Patrick, Rob, Sarah, Steve and Nancy tabehodai-ing



"Saisho ha gu, jan-ken--"  
"Ehhhhhh? Nani sore?"



Freya, her husband Kazu and not her husband Anna at the Meishi Exchange



It's White Day at Latitudes, but where are the chocolates?



Kat, Ryan, Clara, Monica, Megan, Machiko and Masahiko at the Meishi Exchange

Joe, Patrick, Scott, Zack, Monica and Keiko smile, blissfully unaware that their photo would appear in the Newsletter.



Stacy, Carolyn and four tasty mojitos at the Meishi Exchange



More chocolate, please!



Sake tasting at Satsuko's. (OK, so there was some beer drinking as well.)



"Banzaiiii!"



“JETAANY Society” continued from page 5

With just enough time to recover from any lingering effects, the **Quarterly Development** continued the party on January 29 at the **Cha-An Teahouse** on 9th Street in the East Village. Mind you, this alcohol-free event was the first-ever Quarterly Meeting to offer attendees a choice of “salmon or tofu appetizer AND chicken teriyaki, OR seared tuna, OR codfish entree.” It’s fair to say in hindsight that this high-class affair met the culinary expectations it created, ending with a rich and tasty *mochi* with chocolate ganache. The only unanswered question, expressed by some male attendees: Would it be too much to have a **Toto Washlet** in the men’s restroom as well?..... But how irrelevant. This is not, as you know, the toilet issue. It’s also not the college basketball issue, but the party continued on February 8 when fans of meaningless Ivy League basketball games everywhere celebrated as **KJ Matsui**, the first ever native Japanese player to play Division 1 college basketball, hit six 3-pointers to lead **Columbia** to a rousing victory over visiting **Penn.**..... The good vibes from Matsui’s performance carried the JET alum community up to a **HappyFunSmile** JET alum happy hour at **Aruba** (Park Ave & 40th St) on February 19. Unfortunately, Aruba tried to charge a \$13 drink minimum on top of a \$10 cover charge to see HFS, so the JET alum crowd made their own beautiful music at **Bogart’s** before moving over to **Galway Hooker**..... **SPLISH SPLASH JETS WERE TAKING A BATH:** On March 2, it was time to move the party to **InSpa World** (or as Monica called it, **Naked World**), a Korean bath center in **College Point, NY** (near **Flushing**). Over 50 JET alums and FOJs showed up to disrobe and roam around the outdoor (mixed sex) and indoor (separate sex) facilities. And not only does InSpa World offer a \$10 buffet, but they also sell **steamed buns** for \$2. (Of course, you get those anyway just by sitting in the bath for about 20 minutes.)..... Meanwhile, did you realize that we are about to celebrate the **20th anniversary of JETAA**? That means that at last we can collectively drink legally next year when we celebrate our 21st Anniversary..... On March 13, **Nancy Ikehara** led a small crew to another **HappyFunSmile** show, this one at their home court -- **Forbidden City** on 13th & Ave. A..... And on March 14 it was finally time to find that special lady who makes

your heart go *doki-doki* and give her some chocolate, or cookies or **Pocky**, or whatever you’re supposed to give them on.... **WHITE DAY**. Social Chair **Monica Yuki** organized the **White Day Happy Hour** at **Latitudes** (8th Ave & 47th St.), which brought out a large crowd including **El ex-Presidente y La ex-Secretaria** along with **Nandita, Chaz, Mary Ann** from Saga-ken, **Wynne the Wu and Steven Too, Cindy, Nancy & David** (including David’s entourage), **Erin** (T-minus 2 months to wedding day and counting), **Carolyn O., Sarah** and her FOJ **Jennifer, Earth** (the JET alum, not the planet) and **Zi** among others. The scene was loud and crowd(ed), but fortunately Monica had reserved a private space upstairs. Well, private except for that other group that was a bit miffed that they had to share the space and manifested no apparent familiarity with White Day. They fought back, however, by bringing in a **belly dancer** who went on to perform an amazing routine involving fire. (You think Yoku Shitteiru is making this up, but Yoku Shitteiru is not.)..... Moving on to everyone’s favorite Japanese holiday (**St. Patty’s Day**), JLGC JETAA Liason **Seiko Kubo** was seen off (*sans* belly dancer) at a farewell party at **Patsy’s Pizzeria** on 23rd St. But not before an invite-only stop at the trendy new *ramen-ya* **Ippudo** on 4th Ave just off of St. Mark’s Place.... And just when you thought the **Quarterly Development Meeting** couldn’t get any sweeter, the ante was upped on March 19 as over 30 JET alums gathered at chocolate restaurant **Max Brenner’s** (Broadway & 13th St.) to hear the JETAANY officers attempt to *yellunicate* (yell + communicate) over the crowd noise about JETAANY’s accomplishments and plans before indulging in **chocolate-peanut butter pizzas** and **Italian hot chocolates**. (Rumor has it even the bathroom soap dispensers spewed chocolate.) With such tasty goodness, who cares if the customized paper place mats provided by the restaurant incorrectly read “**JEPAAANY**” (apparently, the Japan Exchange *Peaching* Alumni Association comprised of folks in a parallel universe who previously helped Japanese people learn to commune with fruit)..... *Honto ni, enkai shi-sugiru!* Time for a culture break..... That’s why on March 26, **Brooklyn Museum** employee and JET alum **Emily Golan** led over 20 JET alums and FOJs on a special after-hours tour of the



Megan, Lien, Shree and Emily smile (because they’ve just eaten chocolate)

“JETAANY Society” continued on page 16



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"Enkai" continued from page 10

men were watching me get fed and cleaned like a toddler. I wasn't nearly drunk enough to make this palatable. I think I lasted at my hostess-bar party for an hour.

Alexei Esikoff, Fukushima-ken 2001-02

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In general, my schools' enkais pretty much just involved teachers getting plastered and then drunk driving home to their families.

Earth Bennett, Aomori-ken 2000-02

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You know those scenes in the movies where a big cake is wheeled into the room and out pops a scantily clad lady shouting "surprise!?" Well, at one memora-

into things) to give our friends from the culture center a "special delivery." At which point, I popped out of the cooler yelling "Happy New Year" (in English, of course) and carrying two bottles of local sake. The whole room burst into cheers. I felt like a rock star (until the next morning, when I felt like an idiot).

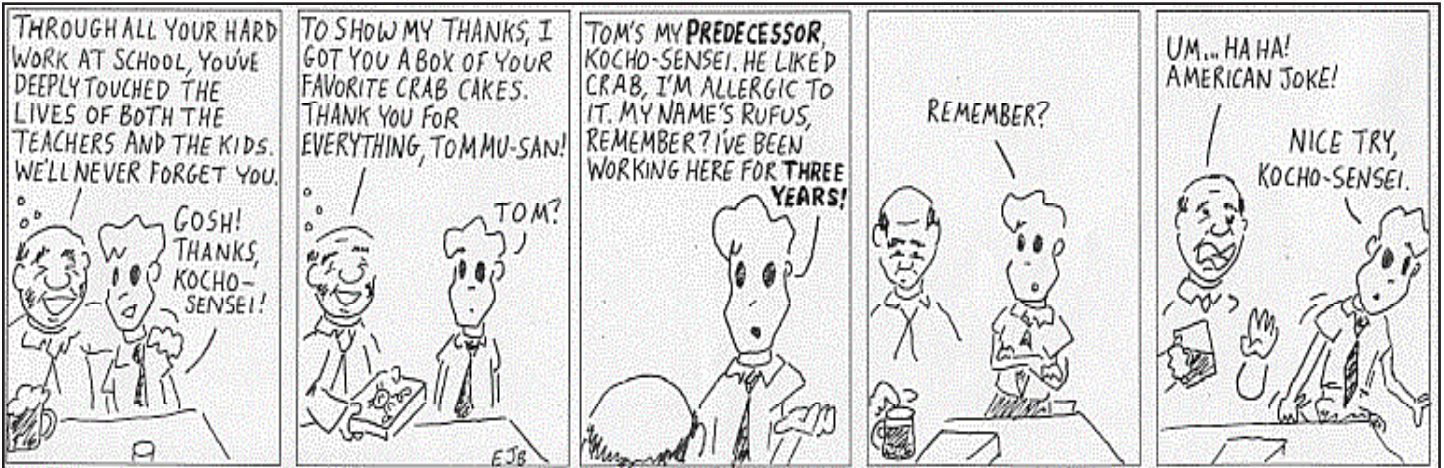
And that's how I ended up pretending to be a woman in a bikini jumping out of a cake.

Clara Solomon, Tottori-ken 1999-2001

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Somehow, my teachers were convinced that their black ALT must be some pro athlete; too many bad American '80s movies, perhaps. It never failed. At every enkai, every male teacher would line up, smallest to tallest for: "Marc-sensei vs. [fill in this week's school] chugakko suuupaaaaa arm wrestling challenge!!!!!"

Discovering beer to be a clearly inferior choice for fuel, I met bicep fail-



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ble enkai in rural Tottori-ken, that lady was me. Only with more clothes. And less frosting. And I didn't yell "surprise!" You see, out where I lived, we had limited forms of entertainment, and the standard enkai fare of drinking a lot and playing sekuhara with the secretaries got old pretty quickly (especially when the guys went out to drink almost every night of the week). So, for the BIG parties (I'm talking Bonenkai Big here) we would make the trek into the nearest city 45 minutes away, rent hotel rooms, and make a weekend of it.

Well, this one bonenkai was well under way in the party room at an onsen hotel when my co-workers discovered that the raucous party going on in the room next door was none other than our own town culture center (I worked for Town Hall). The guys in my party wanted to join our two parties together. But, just going next door with an open bottle of Kirin Ichiban didn't seem like a big enough splash. This was, after all, the Bonenkai. So, they formed a drunken huddle to figure out the best way to party with the culture center.

Let me interject here briefly on the male-female breakdown of my office. This party was attended by about 25 employees of the Planning and PR Division of Nichinan Town Hall, 4 of whom were women, including me. The other three ladies were older, and only attended these parties out of obligation. As soon as the nabe was packed away and the men turned to shochu and whiskey, the ladies went upstairs to bed. Sensible women, really. I'm not sure why, but I always stayed at the party, even after the other office ladies had left. So this leaves me with a room full of bored, drunk, Japanese men, one of whom just had a "great idea" for bringing our party next door.

See, we had this huge cooler that we had brought to the hotel with our own beef for shabu shabu (farmers bring their own food). Now that the cooler was empty, it seemed perfectly reasonable to put someone in it and "deliver" it to the party next door for their own shabu shabu. Well, who better to stuff into a cooler and present to your colleagues, than your 22-year-old blonde gaijin? Clearly I had consumed my own fair share of Kirin at this point, because this seemed like a logical plan to me. So, I stuffed myself into the cooler, someone squeezed the top on, and four hefty guys picked me up and stumbled next door (note to self: never be carried around by drunk men who are prone to bang

ure by the time I faced the kendo coach. Yes, the one whose arms you'd mistaken for two smuggled ni-nensei. I actually bested him ONCE, and my reward? Face off with the ONE healthy kyoto-sensei. You know, the marathon runner who'd be up for a "light" 20K run back home AFTER the enkai.

Surprisingly, not even flashbacks of Stallone's masterful Over the Top performance could pump me up for the feat. No love lost, though. The next day, we'd all just laugh and make pancakes. Fun the first time, but two years was just pure abuse.

Cultural ambassador? Cocky pop. Cultural ass whippin'.

Marc Carroll, Gifu-ken 2001-03

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Shortly after I became a CIR at Kumamoto City Hall's International Exchange section, they had a kangeikai to celebrate my arrival. Though most of my co-workers were friendly right from the start, there were a few (especially men) who seemed to be taking a while to warm up to me. I chalked it up to cultural differences and figured that time would do the trick.

Knowing that alcohol was rumored to have a way of speeding the process along, I was looking forward to the enkai that night. Sure enough, once the beer and shochu started flowing, in their drunken hazes my once reticent colleagues began telling me stories about their lives, asking me about mine and even putting their arms around my shoulders in companionship, some even attempting this in English!

Great, I thought, I've finally broken the unspoken barrier that has existed between us. I looked forward to a bright new office where I could be myself and not feel like I was treading on people's toes.

I headed to work the next day in a good mood, ready for my new workplace. However, when I got there I was in for a huge shock. The co-work-

"Enkai" continued on page 15



*"Enkai" continued from page 14*

ers I thought I had bonded with so much the night before barely even looked up when I came in. I felt like we were back to square one even though according to my perception, the night's festivities had brought us closer.

I guess what they say about what happens at *enkais* stays at *enkais* is actually true! Down the road, I came to develop positive relationships with each of my colleagues, but it was a process that took a couple of *enkais* to accomplish.

**Stacy Smith, Kumamoto-ken 2000-03**



At my first *enkai* here, my vice principal got drunk, or at least pretended to get drunk -- he'd only had the equivalent of about two glasses or one large bottle of beer by that point (though he would continue to consume more). Once thoroughly "drunk" (in Japan it seems to me that many people associate holding a beer bottle with being drunk even if the cap is still on, and they often seem to regard being "drunk" as being a legitimate excuse for just about anything -- including things which would otherwise be considered sexual harassment) the vice principal decides to spend the rest of the night asking me about, well... my... physiology down there.

The remaining hour of the *enkai* was pretty much him hounding me with the same question over and over: "Is your..." [makes strange masturbatory gesture] "...all right?" "Is your..." [repeats strange masturbatory gesture] "...okay?"

Honestly, I have no idea how to respond to that. Besides being shocked at the question, I had to think to myself, "Define 'all right' ... 'all right' in what way?" And, then, for whatever reason unbeknownst to me, everybody else at the *enkai* thinks his questions are THE CUTEST THING EVER. So, unfortunately, this kind of drunken debauchery led me to try to avoid *enkais* any way I could.

**Curtis Edlin, Hyogo-ken 2007-Present**



My welcome *enkai* at Nishi-chu was the night before my first day teaching at the school. The welcome party was pretty good, although I had learned

that the principal was considered a very serious and highly respected man, the message in short was that I should be on my best behavior around him.

Later on in the evening, I realized that I had left my keys at the first of the three drinking establishments to which I had been taken, and after another teacher drove me by there we realized it was closed and locked. How the heck was I going to get into my apartment? Another teacher called his house and told his mom to set out an extra futon, we're gonna have a foreigner at breakfast.

We drank at his house until at least 2:00 a.m. I woke up the next day feeling horrible, wearing the same clothes from the night before, and I had to go to a new school. Everybody would quickly realize that I was wearing the same clothes and hadn't shaved. My "host" teacher told me we had to go to the principal's office to explain that I would need to go get my keys sometime during the day. "Great," I'm thinking. "The one guy I'd actually most like to avoid is the guy I've got to go and see, to tell him my that my irresponsibility was about to screw up his schedule because I would be out of the building for an hour or so to get my keys and get cleaned up."



I waited outside his office while the teacher explained to him what happened, until finally I was summoned in. The principal had a very serious look on his face, and then it lightened. He smiled and proceeded to tell me this incredibly long story about his first *enkai* and how the next day he wound up at school the next morning with "tatami-face" after sleeping on the floor of a colleague's home. I was golden -- the toughest principal in the town had given me the okay because I apparently duplicated a mistake that he had made when he was as new to the work world as I was.

**Matt Jungblutt, Saitama-ken 1988-91**



I have to admit to being incredibly jealous of my fellow ALTs when I lived in Japan. While my JTEs were unbelievably sweet and generous in buying me presents, taking me to dinner, etc., they never once had an *enkai* at either one of my schools! What were the odds? I had my friends relive the madness at theirs for me but, let's face it, unless MY *kocho-sensei*'s eight beers deep and happily singing Avril Lavigne's "Complicated" at the top of his voice, it's just not the same.



**Nandita Ray, Saitama-ken 2004-05**

**TIME FOR ANOTHER HAIKU BREAK!**

Brought to you by  
the JETAA NY Meishi Exchange

To Paradise lost  
No money to stay in school  
dumb, you left Japan

-Seth Dorman (Akita-ken, 2004-07)

I slurp my ramen  
From Nakatsu to New York  
Soaks up the shochu

-Lee-Sean Huang (Oita-ken, 2003-06)

From N-train rumble  
Through English cacophony  
"Hai, moshi-moshi?"

-Anna Barbaus (Nara-ken, 2006-07)

Learning not to bow:  
MetroCard Vending Machine  
Does not have manners

-Dawn Mostow (Gifu-ken, 2003-06)

Warm udon ordered  
In perfect Japanese but  
Waiter speaks Chinese

-Steven Horowitz (Aichi-ken, 1992-94)

"JETAANY Society" continued from page 13

**Utagawa Exhibit** at the Museum. In addition to having the benefit of Emily's knowledge and perspectives (*What the prints have in common with baseball cards? Why the kabuki actors are depicted cross-eyed? When the color blue came to Japan? And who exactly this Utagawa feller was?*), those who came also got a preview of the **Murakami** exhibit in the form of a giant, trippy sculpture in the Museum foyer. In a post-tour effort to re-create some of the Utagawa images, Emily subsequently led a sub-group tour to **Soda Bar** (Vanderbilt Ave in **Prospect Heights**) for a *nijikai*..... So far, many of the events listed may seem large (30 people, 40 people, even 50 people), but not until the **Meishi Exchange** at **Kanvas** (23rd St & 9th Ave) on March 27 had JETAANY brought out **90 people** to an event that was not the **Welcome Back Reception** or **Free Back Massage Night** (Note: *not a real event, but it should be*). **Adam Lisbon** shared his design portfolio while NJ-based JET alum **Joshua Bernstein** shared his perspectives on good ways for Adam to sell his design services. **Secretary-elect Meredith Wutz** shared her networking knowledge by recommending the **French martinis** (which were fabulous), and **QUICK, Amnet** and **Actus** all had representatives circulating and getting friendly with the JET alum community. **Anna Barbaus, Scott Hiniker** and **Freya** all brought their spouses (**Sorin, Keiko** and **Kazu**, respectively), resulting in a complicated **Saitama-Queens** social triangle. Approximately 15 haikus lined the walls, commenting on post-JET life, and those in attendance had the opportunity to vote on the best one.... which turned out to be:

*Learning not to bow:  
MetroCard Vending Machine  
Does not have manners  
by Dawn Mostow (Gifu-ken 2003-06)*

For that lovely poem, Dawn won a year's membership at **Japan Society**. (*Sugoi, deshoul!*) After the party the *haiku* were left on the wall by JETAANY organizers as a commentary on the impermanence of existence (right, Monica?)..... Meanwhile, **Peter "Zippers" O'Keefe, Francis Lee, Scott Hiniker** and **Josh Bernstein** all won two tickets each to the *sake* tasting event at **Japan Society**, and **Earth Bennett, Clara Solomon, Daniel Hirsch, Katherine Lyons, Carolyn Okabe, Neel Ray** and **Chihiro Saka** all won two tickets each for the **Murakami** exhibit at the **Brooklyn Museum**. (If none of those people offered to share a ticket with you, then you need to work on you *goman suri*)..... Of course, you could've gone to the **Brooklyn Museum** for free on April 5 for **First Saturday Japanimation Night**, featuring various free films along with Japanese bands and a DJ. If you had, you might have run into **Stacy** and **Sachi, Lyle** and his entourage, **Jill & Kyle, Seth** and **Steven**, or, if you were lucky, **Dawn** in her super white space costume. (No word yet on whether she won the costume contest).... Or you could have jumped on the bus and headed down to D.C. for a little early *hanami*, a la **Cindy** and **Carolyn**..... On April 17, the JLGC's **Hanzawa-san** and **Kobayashi-san** had their first opportunity to party American style since arriving in NY as JETAANY hosted a *sake* tasting event at **Satsuko's** Japanese bar on Eldridge St just below Houston. Approximately 20 JET alums and FOJs had the pleasure of sampling six different kinds of *sake* while nibbling on the delicious (but scarce) *gyoza* and other little bites. **Connecticut-ken** residents **Matt Haine** and **Mark Brophy** made the trek, as did the hardworking **Chau Lam**, who had to commute back to the **Garden State** afterwards. Bellies were subsequently filled with spatzel and schnitzel and tasty German beer as some hungry folks made their way to **Lelise** for a *nijikai*..... Things moved back uptown on April 18 as **Columbia** hosted its own **Japan Day Festival** featuring performances by a number of groups including **HappyFunSmile**, who quickly had everyone doing *bon odori* circles, while foam-suit sumo matches continued nearby until the festival's end..... This quarter's party circuit finally came to a close at **Japas 38** on April 24, notable as the only party that involved karaoke this quarter. Thanks to **Sara A.**, it was also the only happy hour to which anyone brought *matzah*. And thanks to **Cindy**, it was the only one to which someone brought their father. Karaoke Grammys went to Lee-Sean for "Purple Rain" and to **Hanzawa-san** for "Ban-zai!" ..... **JET ALUMS ON THE SCENE**..... Want to support a JET alum while eating delicious homestyle Asian cuisine and sampling



Jamie belts out another enka at Japas 38

a splendid *sake* assortment? Just visit **Bao 111** (on Avenue C) or **Bao Noodles** (2nd Ave & 23rd St), part owned by JET alum and *sake* sommelier **Chris Johnson**..... International translator of mystery **Stacy Smith** was seen in Tokyo in February working on two interesting translation projects. Oh, and she also managed to run the **Tokyo Marathon** while in town..... and **Rosie DeFremery** was sighted in **New Orleans** in March attending an IT conference for not-for-profits..... At the **Pioneer Theatre** (3rd St. & Ave. A) February 21 showing of the documentary **Passing Poston** about the Arizona-based internment camp for Japanese-Americans, **Monica Yuki** stayed after to talk to the director. It turns out Monica's parents and other relatives were sent to that internment camp. And contrary to what you might expect, she reports that they actually had a positive experience. Her family, she notes, was fortunate to have friends who made sure they got all of their property back, though the documentary opened her eyes to other sides as well.....

Been a while since you hosted a *tatami* timeshare? Keep your eyes out for New England JET alum **B.J. Hill** (Fukushima-ken 2002-04). On March 1 he started walking from **San Francisco** across the country to collect messages from various Americans that he intends to take to the new president (who, it is safe to say, will not be named **Bush**). Estimated arrival date in NYC is the end of October, so plenty of time to tidy up, buy a new futon or even find a new apartment. You can track his experience at [www.walkamerica2008.blogspot.com](http://www.walkamerica2008.blogspot.com)..... On March 18, **Super Teacher Cindy Hoffman's** school not only hosted a special screening of **Wings of Defeat**, the recently released documentary about survivor *kamikaze* pilots, but Cindy's class also hosted a visit from the men who are the subjects of the film. A very unique and moving experience indeed..... **OTAKU-RIFFIC: Roland Kelts** (Osaka-fu 1998-99), author of **Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.**, appeared at the **Cafe Zaiya** in the new **Kinokuniya** across from **Bryant Park** for the release party of his new book and to sit on a panel with several popular *manga* authors. Amidst the dozens of goth maids and Naruto-clad attendees were JET alums **Lee-Sean Huang, Jenn Olayon, Justin Tedaldi** and **Vlad Baranenko**. (Subsequent photographs have refuted earlier claims that they were similarly dressed in *cosplay* outfits.)..... *Omedetou gozaimasu* to former Consulate JET Coordinator **Miho Walsh**, who not only got married at the beginning of February, but did so in three different cities (**Tokyo, Bangkok** and **New York**) between January 29 and February 8, a unique wedding that merited a feature story in the **New York Times** on February 24..... *Omedetou* to **Matt Jungblutt** (Saitama, 1988-91) on his December marriage in New York. Matt was recently seen DJing at the **Ding Dong Lounge** (106th St & Columbus Ave) on March 8 but is keeping his day job teaching at a school in **Clinton Hill, Brooklyn**..... Also *omedetou* to our **Secretary Meredith Wutz** who became *konyaku'd* on **Valentine's Day** when the captain of the **Cuban National Karate Team** proposed to her and she said "Hai!".... And a final *omedetou* to **Aichi-ken, Kariya-shi kanji** legend and frequent Newsletter contributor **Scott Alprin** who, as of his May 2 wedding, will make *bentos itsumademo* for his new bride **Ani Clump**..... *O-tsukare sama deshita* to former Secretary **Clara Solomon**, who was named Director of Career Services for **NYU Law School**..... and to **Brian Hersey** for his promotion to Vice President at **Mizuho**..... *Ganbatte* to **Lee-Sean Huang** for his acceptance into the **NYU Interactive Telecommunications Program**, which helps reinforce the shift in the JETAANY governance epicenter from **Columbia** to **NYU**..... And *ganbatte* to **Adam Lisbon** who has re-located to **Oakland** to teach English and serve as the Newsletter's West Coast Correspondent..... According to sources, **Drew Barnes** was in town for three weeks in February and was last seen in the vicinity of the **DD Lounge** at 4:30 on a Saturday morning..... JET alum, **Brooklyn** native and **Inuyama City Councilman Anthony Bianchi** was in town for a week in April leading a delegation from Inuyama around the city and kicking off a **Japan Day Festival** at **Xaverian High** in **Bay Ridge, Brooklyn**. JET alums **Adren Hart, Ed Davis** and **Meredith Wutz** were on hand to help with the cultural exchanges..... And *itteki-masu* to **John Marshall** who is evacuating **Jersey City** and heading to **Singapore** for an 18-month assignment..... **DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS: JETAANY Region 9 (Texas and Oklahoma)** experienced its own internationalization recently, finding its website had been hacked from somewhere outside of the U.S..... Lastly, just in case you want to throw these numbers around at your next cocktail party, there were **3,951 applications** to the JET Programme this year, which led to **2,248 interviews**



Neel, Nick, Megan and Zi show some JETAANY spirit at Japas 38

"JETAANY Society" continued on page 17



## Journey to Japan: Master Visual Storyteller Dawn Mostow

Review by Elizabeth Meggs



Dawn Mostow (*Gifu-ken 2003-06*) is currently a master's student at the Pratt Institute, where she focuses on costuming while pursuing a teaching certificate and translating on the side for **Anime Insider Magazine**. On March 24-25, JET alums and members of the Japan Local Government Center made their way to Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, to feast their eyes on Mostow's unique exhibit. Pratt student Elizabeth Meggs offers the following review.

A fantasy of Japan was brought to life by artist Dawn Mostow in her exhibit *Densetsu: Legends of Japan* at **Pratt Institute's Steuben Gallery** from March 24-30.

Not only did the exhibit include digital chromogenic prints (c-prints) that were carefully crafted pastiches of image sources, but it also presented the kimono and props used to create those images. The four prints were based on Jap-



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and **1,110 applicants accepted**. That's a little north of 25% and is consistent with the past several years. Of those accepted, 120 are from the New York area, with 117 ALTs and 3 CIRs. (Now that these numbers have been bequeathed to you, Yoku Shitteiru only asks that you make sure to use them for good and not for evil.)

*Yatto*, you've finished reading this column and you may commence partying activities once again, beginning with **Hanami Matsuri** in the **Brooklyn Botanic Gardens** on Saturday, May 3 and Sunday, May 4. But lest you deign to sleep late and saunter into the Gardens at mid-day, I leave you with a *haiku* of warning:



anese legends about the four seasons: *Summer: The Kappa*; *Autumn: The Fox Wedding*; *Winter: Amaterasu Omikami*; and *Spring: Red Devil and Blue Devil*.

Mostow photographed herself in costume posing as all of the characters in the four legends, then digitally altered and collaged these photos with a range of images, from a scanned handkerchief to a photo of cherry blossoms found on the Internet. A brief written description of each legend, presented with Mostow's digital illustrations, provided ample fodder for a fantastic suspension of disbelief and a mental journey to an enchanting and ancient mythical Japan.

Mostow's craft on every level should be lauded, from her costume-making and styling, her photographs, her performances as the model for a huge variety of characters, her seamless digital manipulation, and her gallery presentation. The work possesses the sleek refinement of high fashion imagery along with the humor, playfulness and drama that recall the historical precedent of fantasy illustration from the past, from Pieter Brueghel and Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake and Albrecht Durer, to Arthur Rackham and Maurice Sendak, as well as a huge precedent in Japanese art itself. The digital and photographic mediums also nod toward cinematic and video game references, as well as the performative self-portraiture work of artist Cindy Sherman.

In the gallery, the kimonos stood and hung with stunning tangible presence, as if the characters wearing them had just slipped away for a moment. Mostow's images show a deep empathy for the characters of the legends, with expressions and stances perfected for each story.

Surely Mostow's experience living in Japan for three years and fluency in the Japanese language brought a level of authenticity and understanding to her research and work for this exhibit. Mostow has mastered the art of visual storytelling in this recent work.

To learn more about Dawn's work, go to  
[www.dawnmostow.com](http://www.dawnmostow.com).

*Cherry blossoms bloom  
In Brooklyn Garden as you  
Stand in line outside*

That's all for this edition. See you in the summer when cherry blossoms have made way for the **Bohemian Beer Garden** and **softball tournament**.

Got some news bits for Yoku Shitteiru that you think should be included in the next column? Send an e-mail to [yokushitteiru@jetaany.org](mailto:yokushitteiru@jetaany.org).



# Donald Keene, John Nathan Share Stories at Japan Society

Reviewed by Justin Tedaldi  
(Kobe-shi 2001-02)

They've collaborated with world-famous authors, won distinguished awards in their respective fields, and have enough personal knowledge of Japan that today's students of the language and culture are intimately familiar with their work. But surprisingly, it took both **Donald Keene** and **John Nathan** until the spring of 2008 to publish their memoirs. Both men recently took some time out for lectures at **Japan Society** to reflect on life in, and inspired by, Japan.



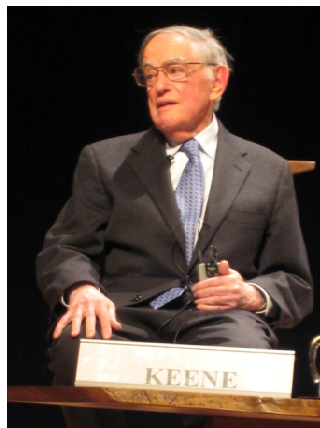
Possibly the biggest American name to anyone who's ever taken a Japanese literature course, Donald Keene is University Professor Emeritus and Shincho Professor Emeritus at Columbia University (where he has taught for over 50 years) as well as president of the Donald Keene Foundation for Japanese Culture. He's published 25 books in English, nearly 30 in Japanese (written directly in the language), and is best known for his translations of **Chikamatsu**, **Basho**, **Kawabata Yasunori**, the Noh plays of **Yukio Mishima**, and **Abe Kobo**, whom Keene knew personally. He also has written extensively on the history of Japanese literature, for which he received a Yomiuri Literature Prize in 1985, becoming the first non-Japanese to receive such an honor.

With the spring release of his new book *Chronicles of My Life: An American in the Heart of Japan*, Keene returned to Japan Society on January 30 to discuss a life engaged with Japanese culture. Introduced as a *kyogen* actor (reflecting Keene's current interest in the traditional theatrical art) by **Thomas Hare**, Princeton University's Professor of Comparative Literature, the distinguished guest immediately took the audience back in time to his first-ever encounter with a Japanese person: at a junior high school while growing up in New York City.

"From the moment I saw her, I knew my destiny would forever be attached to Japan," Keene said in a detectable New York accent. It was also through this girl that Keene first learned the custom of Asian names read in reverse order: "The principal did this at graduation to give the girl's parents pleasure."

Moving on through his junior high school days (when anti-Japanese sentiment began to grip the nation) up to his days as a sophomore at Columbia University in 1940 ("It was the worst year of my life"), Keene described the joy he got from discovering both volumes of the **Arthur Waley**-translated edition of *The Tale of Genji*, which had the dual purpose of bringing him closer to the Japan he was seeking as well as taking him away from the misery engulfing the rest of the world. "It became my greatest comfort that year not interrupted by constant hatred," he recalled.

The following year, Keene took a bold, if reluctant, step by formally deciding to study the Japanese language. "I thought it would be an act of treachery against my Chinese friends," he said, "but it was an act of treachery I never regretted," scoring huge laughs from the sold-out crowd. Enrolling in a class entitled "Readings in Japanese Thought," Keene quickly discovered that he was the only student in the class, to which his sensei said: "One is enough." On December 8, 1941, while Keene was immersing himself in the works of Chikamatsu, Saikaku and Basho, his teacher was interred, but he never forgot the man, reflecting that "In some way, everything I've ever done was an outgrowth of what I did with him."



Keene then told some stories of teaching the Japanese language along with his first experiences in the country, where he began publishing in Japanese. Reflecting on his reputation as the oldest representative in the field of Japanese literature, Keene said without missing a beat, "It's funny, because I think of myself as eternally youthful! It was also an accident that I appeared before you, and I am very happy to do so." Even at age 85, Keene was sprightly and in good humor. When asked about the wide variety of topics his published works have covered as opposed to concentrating in a single field, Keene said matter-of-factly: "My temperament is to go from flower to flower. This leads me to some charges of superficiality, but this has been so much fun."

In 1963, two years after first arriving in Japan in his early 20s, John Nathan became the first American to be admitted as a regular student to the University of Tokyo. His motorcycle-riding antics and impressive Japanese (a teacher claimed that he was better than legendary ambassador **Edwin O. Reischauer**, who taught Nathan as an undergrad at Harvard) caught the attention of Yukio Mishima, who entrusted the young student with the task of translating his novel *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*. What followed were translations of three novels by **Kenzaburo Oe**, a Mishima biography, and a stint as an Emmy-award winning documentary film director. Nathan currently serves as Takashima Professor of Japanese Cultural Studies at UC Santa Barbara.

His new memoir, *Living Carelessly in Tokyo and Elsewhere*, was the subject of a lecture at Japan Society on March 31. "I have to talk about myself, which I am loathe to do," he began, but the reading he prepared from the first chapter had the audience in stitches: his introduction to a Japanese-style squat toilet, and how he managed to tear the support bracket out of the wall—all during a year-end party. "I prayed for transport back to my home in Tucson or, if that was unreasonable, to be flushed down the toilet," he said.

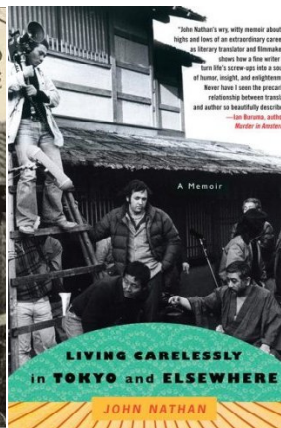
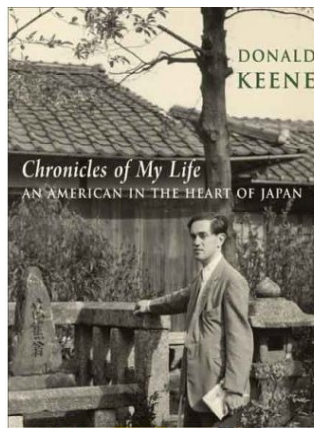
Next, Nathan went on a literary tangent, rhetorically asking how one can "problematize," while referencing **Bernard Malamud's** theory of invention in a persona. Nathan spent a lot of time discussing what he left out of the book on the advice of his editor, whom he thanked for many insights on the proper way to sum up how his experiences in Japan and its people shaped who he is today.

He returned to a motif several times in his talk, where years ago a Japanese student he met in the Harvard dining hall showed him a particularly intricate *kanji* compound. Nathan said that although he could remember the discussion exactly, he still had to question whether it actually happened, since it seemed at the time to be such a random thing. "Persona and endings have to collide," he explained, saying that invented or real, he was glad about it, as it contributed to the development of his own character.

Many of the questions for Nathan were asked by literary types wanting to know more about his relationship with Mishima. What was he really like?

"When he died, everyone said, 'I knew him so well,'" Nathan recalled. "But they only knew what he wanted to them to know," implying that the author crafted a carefully controlled image of himself. He recounted a story about how the author once showed him a pair of Levi's, eagerly telling him

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## Cornelius Brings His Sensuous Synchronized Show to NYC

Reviewed by Justin Tedaldi  
(Kobe-shi 2001-02)

He's been called Japan's answer to **Beck**, but with lyrics like "Tabacco huff puff/ Smoke fluffy fluff" and "The amount of crumbs of the GUM'S chewed/ The umbrella's shadow and God's wind," **Cornelius** is perhaps even more unconventional. On January 26, New Yorkers had the chance to experience **The Cornelius Group's Sensuous Synchronized Show** at Webster Hall.

Born **Keigo Oyamada** in 1969, Cornelius first received attention as a member of the pop duo **Flipper's Guitar**, a leading light of the nascent *Shibuya-kei* scene. Named after Tokyo's Shibuya district, this style of music has been described as a blend of jazz, pop and electropop, a style also associated with the band **Pizzicato Five**. After Flipper's Guitar fizzled out in the early '90s, Oyamada launched a successful solo career as "Cornelius" (from *Planet of the Apes*) with the release his 1997 debut album *Fantasma*. The follow-up, *Point*, appeared in 2001.

Since that time, Cornelius has continued to explore a galaxy of samples and sounds. A multi-instrumentalist, he is also known for incorporating non-musical objects into his sonic landscapes, creating a harmonic dissonance that's less about dancing and more about close listening, echoing **Kraftwerk** or Japan's own **Yellow Magic Orchestra**. In fact, Oyamada has collaborated with YMO's Academy Award-winning founding member **Ryuichi Sakamoto**, most notably on songs like "I Hate Hate."

Originally released in Japan in 2006, the album *Sensuous* received a stateside release by Everloving Records the following year. A 14-city Japanese tour was also imported to the U.S. in early 2008, with stops in L.A., San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, D.C. and New York.

Clad in black bowler hats and gray shirts and ties against a mammoth screen, the quartet of musicians quickly earned the standing room only crowd's attention with their syncopated rhythms and chant-like lyrics, sung by Oyamada, who also plucked guitar.

The main difference between Cornelius in the studio and Cornelius live is that the group recreates the records with their instruments, opening up the sound, while also moving into something completely different. This keeps the musicians from becoming too plugged into technology, and allows more freedom and band improvisation on stage.

The visuals were a mixed bag, having neither the thematic narrative of **Pink Floyd** nor a freak-out sensibility like the **Chemical Brothers**. Scenes like rapidly flashing Japanese characters, floating bubbles, and a jump cut pastiche of different mouths and household objects either reflected the dis-

*"Japan Society" continued from page 18*

that he was sandpapering them in an attempt to mimic **Marlon Brando** in *The Wild One*. Nathan's response? "Mishima-sensei, you are the spitting image of Marlon Brando." Nathan confessed that Mishima was a hard man to know.

The same might be said for John Nathan. True to his opening words, he had much more to say about other people than himself. When asked who in Japan he would most like to have a conversation with, Nathan was quick to shoot the question down with an "I can't answer that." Later, when asked about his favorite day in Japan, Nathan shot back, "Are you a wise guy? I've pre-



cord in the music or meant something else entirely.

More inspired were the attempts to involve members of the audience. At one point Oyama grabbed a young man in the front to join on percussion, and it was hard to tell who was more excited by the spontaneous gesture.

The second half of the show was a live airing of the *Sensuous* album. Beginning with the title track, the crowd was treated to the old school mysticism of wind chimes, followed by loping guitar figures.

"Fit Song" was next, a composition of staccato notes with stop-start lyrics and percussion. A strobe light pulsed on stage in time with the music, a theme that continued through "Toner," which began with the hum of a copy machine followed by electric keyboard and then piano, weaving back and forth through the rhythm.

"Beep It," which came later, sounded like an early 1980s synth deconstruction of **Michael Jackson's** "Beat It" with an occasional splash of funk bass. The song that followed, "Like a Rolling Stone," was an instrumental that seemingly owed nothing to **Bob Dylan**.

If anything, what it really sounded like was a bell telephone approaching a time warp.



Towards the end of the show, a racing rainbow-colored Mode 7 effect engulfed the background while Oyamada ran frantically from one end of the stage to the other holding out a push button-activated sample machine that blasted out, among other things, **Joey Ramone's** "Hey, ho, let's go!" from the **Ramones'** 1976 signature tune, "Blitzkrieg Bop." For a studio rat, Oyamada knows how to work a New York crowd.

Things wound down with a grand musical curvball: "Sleep Warm," a Dean Martin-associated ballad all the way from 1958. A flute solo now subbed for the sleepy synthesizers on the record, and Oyamada's vocals took on a more ethereal effect as he crooned alone onstage.

As the music faded and the chimes from the start of *Sensuous* washed over the delighted crowd, the screen flashed a special thank you message to all who attended. The musicians took a final bow, capping a show that combined old and new for something more than the average non-sensuous synchronized show.

For more information on Cornelius's latest works, visit [www.cornelius-sound.com](http://www.cornelius-sound.com).

pared myself not to be taken seriously by you." However, he generously folded, saying that meeting Kenzaburo Oe was one of the highlights of his life.

Asked about his future plans, Nathan revealed that he's mulling his first novel instead of film projects. "We need a story about Japanese life for outsiders, and at this point I want to be an introvert and write," he said.

For upcoming lectures at Japan Society, visit [www.japansociety.org/lectures](http://www.japansociety.org/lectures).

# PIRATES OF THE DOTOMBORI

JET Alums Help Improv Comedy Invasion of Osaka

By Adam H. Lisbon (Kobe-shi 2004-07)

In a country where rules and order reign supreme and the greatest fear is making a mistake in front of others, the last thing you'd expect to see are the random and unpredictable antics of improv comedy.

And yet Japan has now been boarded by the **Pirates of the Dotombori**, a multi-lingual, multi-national, just about multi-everything group of comedians who are showing the Japanese how no rules can be the most fun.

Founded by **Mike Staffa** in December 2005, the Pirates have been entertaining in Osaka for two and a half years, luring Japanese comedy fans into a whole new world of humor. Staffa came to Japan intent on doing improv. "I had done improv in Australia and the USA but wanted to try improv in Asia," said Staffa. "I figured Japan was the easiest place to start (it is very westernized), and I chose Osaka because it is famous for being the center of comedy in Japan."

In the Osaka scene, the Pirates have performed at expat-favored venues like the **Balabushka** in **Ame-Mura** and **Tin's Hall** in **Tennoji**. And the crowd of hooting foreigners includes many Japanese fans of improv. The art form isn't nearly as well known in Japan as in the West and, other than by a few small groups in Tokyo, is rarely performed.

According to Staffa, "Most Japanese people are completely surprised that we perform with no script. Some struggle to get involved with the show. As the audience, we need them to give suggestions for each scene. So we have had to educate the audience about our style so that they can participate effectively to create an enjoyable show for the audience."

I saw my first Pirates show in 2007. I remember the format being similar to what you might see on an episode of *Whose Line is it Anyway?* But the audience couldn't be a more unique bunch. Many audience members are gaijin who have made the rounds in the English teaching circuit, and as a result a Pirates show can sometimes feel like one big in-joke. In fact, most of the members are current English teachers, or have taught at some point, including JET alum **Sally Thelen** (Toyama-ken 1998-99). As a result, skits frequently work their way to the daily frustrations of living in Japan, with such popular themes as the *kancho* and casual bike theft.

Interestingly, the Pirates do not shy away from doing skits in Japanese. The

*"Japanese Party" continued from page 4*

Japanese bar on the third floor of a walk-up that only Japanese people knew about, where all the patrons except for one or two *pera-pera gaijin*. It allegedly closed down at some point but may have re-opened somewhere. If you know where it is now, good for you. If you don't, well then now you have a *mokuteki* for the summer.

## Riki

(E. 45th between Lexington & 3rd Ave)

Very popular nihon-rashii izakaya for Japanese kaishya-in to go for nomikais. (Recommended by many JET alums and Japanese expats.)

## Je Nomi (i.e., Japanese House Drinking Party)

As far as we can determine, the NYC epicenter of Japanese-style *ie nomi* appears to be within the Astoria-Woodside-Sunnyside locus (sometimes referred to as the DeFremery-Hineker-Hoffman Triangle). Less expensive rent, more spacious apartments and an expanding population of both Big Apple *Nissei* and JET alums in Queens-ku helps account for this phenomenon.

## Wherever Yaz is playing in the subway

(Grand Central, Penn Station or Times Square subway station)

If you've ever seen a Japanese guy wailing on the sax with a Japanese backup band



group even includes a Japanese member with a likely increase in *nihonjin* members to come. And the Japanese audience members clearly appreciate it. "It provides a comfort level to hear your native language and an educational challenge to hear a foreign language," says Staffa. "And that goes for both Japanese and foreigners."

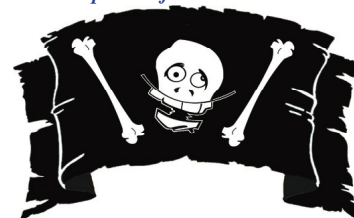
Thelen, who works as a professor at Konan University teaching academic English, explains that students are always surprised to learn about her after hours comedy exploits. "When I moved back to Japan, I assumed I would give up improv for a while, but then I stumbled across the Pirates website one day," says Thelen. "I went to one of their shows, really not sure what to expect, and was surprised at how professional the group was and how well the show went over with the crowd. Since joining the group last summer, I've been performing with them about once a month and going to practices every week."

The Pirates are gaining momentum. They have appeared on several Japanese tv channels, including NHK, Kansai TV and ABC. The group is even in the midst of filming their own pilot TV show that they will pitch to some of the Japanese networks.

The Pirates are a spectacularly funny crew. No doubt during the years on JET, humor was one way we all coped with inept coworkers, bizarre school schedules, and just missing last trains.

So, next time you are in Japan and in need of a laugh, check *Kansai Time Out* to see if you can catch one of their shows.

For more information on the Pirates of Dotombori, go to [www.piratesofthedotombori.com](http://www.piratesofthedotombori.com)



and a crowd to rival any of those generic breakdance groups, that's **Yasuyuki Takagi** (aka Yaz). Sticking with the crowd pleasers in his subway performances (Stevie Wonder; Earth, Wind & Fire; Marvin Gaye), he exudes a passion that's contagious enough to make people stop, watch and miss their trains. His website [www.yaz-band.com](http://www.yaz-band.com) even lists what subway stops he'll be playing at and when. Downsides: Alcohol policy is strictly BYOB in a brown paper bag.

## Hiro Ballroom at the Maritime Hotel

(363 West 16th St)

JET alums may raise a skeptical eyebrow at the inclusion of this one, but as long as ironic kitsch is still in fashion, this is worth a mention. The **Hiro Ballroom** is a Japanese-themed nightclub/event space with (snicker) incorrect *kanji* written by *gaijin* on the walls. Think of the **Benhiana** concept extended to the club scene and adapted for a **Chelsea** sensibility.

## Karaoke Duet

(53 West 35th between 5th & 6th Aves; 304 E. 48th St

between 1st & 2nd Aves)

They have karaoke marathons for one price on the weekend, and if you're sneaky you can do BYOB with soft drink containers. (Well, as long as they don't read this article.) Also, unlike Korean *noreban* **Bar Toto** on 32nd St. (which, don't get us wrong,

*"Japanese Party" continued on page 21*



## FILM CORNER

Isao Takahata's **GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES**

Reviewed by Lyle Sylvander

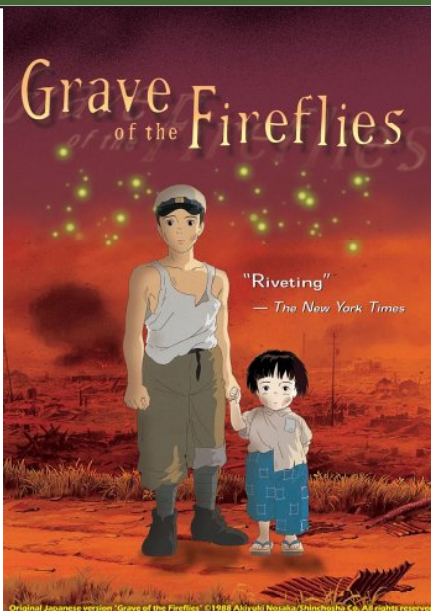
Perhaps more than any other country, Japan has elevated the art of animation from the confines of children's entertainment.

However, nothing in the anime universe quite compares with **Isao Takahata's** *Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaru no Haka*) in terms of emotional effect and power. Adapted from the novel by **Nosaka Akiyuki**, the film is not only one of the best animated features ever produced but also one of the greatest anti-war films as well.

Famous exports like *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* combine science fiction and action film contrivances into violent and often apocalyptic visions of the future. At the other end of the spectrum, **Hiyao Miyazaki's** fantastical and mature narratives (*Spirited Away*, *Princess Mononoke*) have won over critics and audiences throughout the world.

The film takes place during the waning days of World War II, when American planes dropped bombs on Japan. The story, relatively simple in turns of plot details but complex in emotional development, relates the survival tactics of the teenage Seita and his younger sister Setsuko. As food and water are scarce, the Japanese populace has turned competitive amongst themselves even between friends and relatives. After his mother dies in a bombing, Seita realizes that he and Setsuko must survive on their own, with him as his sister's protector and provider. Since the film opens with Setsuko's death and is told in flashback by the boy's spirit, there is no suspense as to the children's fate. Rather, the film emphasizes the slow and painful fight for survival among the nation's civilian populace during wartime.

Takahata eschews melodrama in favor of a direct approach, allowing the story to develop without extraneous emotion or superfluous detail. The animated landscape resembles the traditional Japanese woodblock prints where detail is often balanced by empty space and simplicity. As a result, the viewer contemplates the painful world inhabited by the protagonists as they fight for survival. Paradoxically, the choice of animation simplifies the visual language and brings the emotional core of the story



front and center – if the film were shot in live-action, it would have been harder for the director to control the visual environment and prevent the emotions from shifting to the periphery. Takahata's artistic rendering of Setsuko emphasizes her innocence and contrasts sharply with the harsh reality of her situation. In one especially moving sequence, Setsuko buries dead fireflies as she imagines her mother was buried. It is one of the most heart wrenching scenes in film history – the loss of childhood innocence has rarely been portrayed so powerfully.

Unfortunately, *Grave of the Fireflies* flopped at the box office in 1988 and did not receive distribution outside of Japan. The film's production company, **Studio Ghibli**, released it concurrently with **Hiyao Miyazaki's** enormously popular *My Neighbor Totoro*. The latter film's family appeal overshadowed the seriousness of *Fireflies* and pushed it out of the limelight. Since being rediscovered at the **Chicago International Film Festival** in 1994, *Fireflies* has garnered an iconic reputation among anime aficionados. The film has also been championed by the popular movie critic **Roger Ebert**, who lists it in his book *The Great Movies (Volume Two)*.

Central Park Media has provided a fine DVD release for the film in the United States and includes a bonus disc featuring an interview with Ebert, a documentary on the restoration of the film, an interview with Isao Takahata, a collection of animation cells and storyboards, a comparison of the film's animated locations with contemporary photos of the actual locations (all in the Kansai region), and an interview with **Theodore and Haruko Taya Cook**, authors of *Japan at War* and *Emperor's War, People's War*, concerning the historical context of the story. Overall, this is a must-see film for anyone with an interest in Japanese history and culture. In our age of visual over-stimulation, *Grave of the Fireflies'* minimalist aesthetic is a testament to the old adage that "less is more".

It should serve as an abject lesson for our contemporary animation studios that cartoons are not solely for children. If done properly, they can move an adult audience to tears.

"Japanese Party" continued from page 20

is a great place), Duet has all the Japanese songs you may (or may not) want to sing.

#### Japas - any of them (27, 38, 55)

(3rd Ave between 26th & 27th Sts; 38th St between 5th & Madison; 55th St between Broadway & 8th Ave)

Like Karaoke Duet, they have the bar where you can sing with the masses, or you can get your own party room. Always a good time. Good for JETAANY Development Meetings and happy hours too.

#### Sakagura

(43rd St. between 3rd & 2nd Aves)

You would barely know it's there unless you knew to look. A small, square Japanese sign is lit up at about knee level in front of an innocuous office building. You walk in past the guard, then u-turn down some stairs into the basement as if you're about to go fix the boiler. But a small Japanese wooden door hints at something more promising. And when you enter for the first time, you feel like you've stumbled on one of those secret places. In reality, it's not so secret anymore. But that doesn't change the fact that they have great decor and atmosphere, a terrific *sake* selection along with helpful *sake* sommeliers, and they have some of the best and most creative drinking food ever. Well, at least that's potentially within your price range for the foreseeable future.



#### Sake Bar Decibel

(E. 9th St between 3rd & 2nd Aves)

The same underground laid-back atmosphere and good drinks they've been serving for several years now.

#### Village Yokocho

(On the Japanese corner by 9th St & 3rd Ave, 2nd floor)

Not as cheap as Kenka, but not as expensive as midtown either. And enough space to have a decent *nomikai* and almost feel like you're back in Japan.

#### Hagi

(47th St just east of Broadway, downstairs)

A great homestyle *izakaya* with uniquely authentic dishes. If you can ever get a table.

This list, of course, is far from exhaustive. Perhaps because the Japanese party scene, like the people, shows us its *tatemae* but still retains its *honne*. According to one Japanese expat who provided several recommendations for this article, "There is also my most favorite *nomiya*, but of course it will be my secret sanctuary. Sorry!"

For each of us, every enkai was a potentially a whole new adventure -- in fun, cultural understanding or perhaps even boredom. But the one enkai sentiment we all shared at one point or another was, of course, discomfort. And so we present you with the....

## TOP 13 THINGS YOU'D RATHER NOT HEAR AT AN ENKAI

13. "Inoue-san will give you a ride home. He's had 6 beers, but only 4 *shochus*."
12. "Welcome to our school! And now a *kampai* in honor of the [insert predecessor's name] Community Center!"
11. "Ah, but it is unlucky to eat it after it has stopped moving."
10. "You are sexy like Catherine Zeta-Jones. Our *kocho-sensei* loves Catherine Zeta-Jones."
9. "But first, a speech by Tsumaranai-sensei."
8. "And then I said to that last English teacher, 'Keep complaining and I'll take off another finger.'"
7. "*Banzai Bush Daitoryou!!!*"
6. "We will go to karaoke now. You can sing MC Hammer, yes?"
5. "No, we don't know what kind of food this is, either."
4. "But your predecessor always wore the race queen costume at our *enkais*."
3. "And now, to determine whether the *gaijin* pays for all of us, *saishou ha gu, jan-ken...*"
2. "*Inna-san-may! Ig-pay atin-ray e-day anashimashou-hay!*"
1. "Joey-sensei, do you like gladiator movies?"





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