



**THE
UTADA
ISSUE**

JQ

**JETaa NY QUARTERLY
MAGAZINE**
jetaany.org/magazine

**HIKKI COMES
BACK TO US
FOR AN
EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW**

**JETAA
AUTHOR
SHOWCASE**

**JAPAN SOCIETY'S
NEW PRESIDENT**

**OSCAR WINNER
DEPARTURES**

**NY-TOKYO PUTS
ON A SHOW**

**ROLAND KELTS
SPEAKS OTAKU**

**STAR OF STOMP
YAKO MIYAMOTO**

**JET ALUM JAZZES
UP NEW YORK**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

**SAKURA MATSURI,
OUR PHOTO CONTEST
WINNERS, YOUR NEW
OFFICERS, AND MORE**

**BRINGING JAPAN A
LITTLE CLOSER TO YOU**

Spring 2009 Vol. 18 Issue No. 2



Table of Contents

- 3 Letter From the Editor / Letter From the Country Rep
4 Nippon News Blotter / JQ National Photo Contest Winners
5 Comings & Goings - New Officers and JLGC Changes
6 JETAANY Author Showcase / TAIKOPROJECT in Philly
By Gina Anderson and Justin Tedaldi / By Renay Loper
7 Japan Society's New President Motoatsu Sakurai
By Justin Tedaldi
8 JETlog
Featuring Ed Thompson (Chiba-shi CIR, 1994-97)
9 STOMP New York's Yako Miyamoto
By Liz Wanic
10 Running the Tokyo Marathon
By Stacy Smith
11 Nihonjin in NY - Featuring Noriko Furuhashi of the CGJ
By Rick Ambrosio
11 Sakura Matsuri at Brooklyn Botanic Garden
13 Hikaru Utada: The JQ Interview
By Justin Tedaldi
14 Adren Hart's ConnectForce Productions Jazzes Up NY
By Matt Matysik
15 JETAActivities Photos
16 An Animated Talk with *Japanamerica* Author Roland Kelts
By Larry Heiman
17 Destination Nippon: JNTO and Kintetsu International
By Sylvia Pertzborn
18 New York-Tokyo Founder Taeko Baba
By Marea Pariser
19 Film Review: *Departures*
By Lyle Sylvander
19 Book Corner: *Shutting Out the Sun*
By David Kowalsky
20 *Shutting Out the Sun* Author Michael Zielenziger Q&A
By Kelly Nixon
21 Awaji Puppet Theater at Japan Society
By Beata Wilk
23 Top 14 List / Life After the B.O.E. / Let's Make Chirashi!

JETAANY

JQ Quarterly Magazine

Editor

Justin Tedaldi
magazine@jetaany.org

President

Megan Miller
president@jetaany.org

Vice President

Monica Yuki
vicepres@jetaany.org

Secretary

Amber Liang
secretary@jetaany.org

Treasurer

Kelly Nixon
treasurer@jetaany.org

Professional Outreach & Development

Steven Horowitz
professional@jetaany.org

Community Relations

Chau Lam
community@jetaany.org

New Jersey Representative

Jenny Jung
njrep@jetaany.org
www.jetaany.org/nj

Philadelphia Representatives

Renay Loper, Natasha Robinson
phillyrep@jetaany.org
www.jetaany.org/philly

Pittsburgh Representative

Patrick Tracy
pittsburghrep@jetaany.org
www.jetaany.org/pitt

Webmaster

Lee-Sean Huang
webmaster@jetaany.org

Database Coordinator

Shannan Spisak
database@jetaany.org

For more information, subscribe to the weekly e-mail by contacting our secretary or visit jetaany.org for new announcements.

For back issues, visit jetaany.org/magazine/archive.

All material contained in this magazine is the sole property of JETAANY New York, Inc. with the exception of graphics as noted and may not be copied without permission.

In Memoriam

Sergeant Daniel Sakai
(Iwate-ken, 1997-1998)
Oakland Police Department





Letter From the Editor

I enjoy spring almost as much as summer, and I learned to love it even more after surviving my first winter in Japan. While the Japanese still have some catching up to do make the cold season a skosh more manageable (was the first thing you saw upon waking up almost every morning your own icy breath?), they sure know how to celebrate when the cherry blossoms bud. We've followed suit with our spring edition of *JQ*, which features plenty of seasonal content including Sakura Matsuri at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, a recap of JETAANY's first-ever Author Showcase, a chat with Japan Society's new president Motoatsu Sakurai, an early review of the Academy Award-winning film *Departures*, alumni profiles galore, and a recurring theme running through many of these stories: New York is a melting pot. (Couldn't agree more.)

And oh yeah—an interview with somebody named Hikaru Utada. Keep an eye on this one; I think she's going to be huge.

Editorially yours,

Justin Tedaldi
Editor
Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02



Letter From the Country Representative

Dear Members,

The clocks have been moved forward and spring is here...in name, if not in actual temperature. The sakura have bloomed and we start another year of JETAANY. My last year as vice president of this active chapter has been wonderful. I have enjoyed serving New York and am proud to be one of the three new country representatives for JETAA USA.



As vice president of JETAANY I loved being part of the executive board and helping to plan events that make all of us feel more connected to each other and Japan. Beginning with the onsen trip to Spa World as well as the wonderful quarterly meetings at Cha-An, Max Brenner and the new JLGC office, JETAANY members mixed and mingled. The first annual Author Showcase, which you will read more about in this issue, brought a whole new crop of JETAANY members out of the woodwork. The event was spectacularly executed by Steven Horowitz, Chau Lam and Amber Liang and I look forward to the next series. There are many more events that made this past year fulfilling and many more people that made them possible. In fact, it was being a part of the leadership for such an amazing chapter that fostered my want to bring our best practices to the network at large as country representative.

I first became interested in the country representative position during our chapter executive meetings when Shannan Spisak (CR 2006-08) would update us on the national initiatives. After attending the JETAA National Conference last August and hearing the path that Shannon Quinn and Ryan Hart would like us to embark on, I realized that I wanted to take a larger role in making this happen.

As country rep I am hoping to strengthen clear lines of communications between the local chapters by checking in with local chapters on a regular basis and making sure everyone is always moving forward. I am also hoping to help strengthen our subchapters, especially in mid-sized cities that could eventually become independent chapters.

I am proud of the work that JETAANY has done over the past year and look forward to all the events and activities to come.

Thank you,

Shree Kurlekar
Country Representative (2009)
Shiga-ken, 2005-07



Contribute to *JQ* and be happy!! Send your ideas to magazine@jetaany.org.



It's never too early to be added to our mailing list. Contact database@jetaany.org for a hard copy.

Nippon News Blotter

A Quarterly Roundup of Japan's Top Stories

2/17/09: Japan's finance minister, Shoichi Nakagawa, resigned amid growing criticism of his apparently alcohol-fuelled antics in front of the TV cameras at the G7 summit in Rome. (*The Guardian*)

2/23/09: The film *Okuribito* (Departures) won the Oscar for best foreign-language picture, while *Tsumiki no Ie*, also from Japan, was chosen as best animated short film at the 81st annual Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles. (*The Japan Times*)

2/27/09: Sony Corp. Chief Executive Officer Howard Stringer ousted Ryoji Chubachi as president, taking control of the main electronics business. (*Bloomberg*)

3/13/09: Japan threatened to shoot down a satellite that North Korea plans to launch early next month if it shows any signs of striking its territory, despite North Korean warnings that it would consider such a move an act of war. (*The Guardian*)

3/18/09: The U.S. Embassy in Japan urged Americans to avoid going to bars in Tokyo's raucous nightlife district of Roppongi due to a surge in reports of drink-spiking incidents resulting in robberies there. (*Japan Today*)

3/24/09: Japan clinched its second straight World Baseball Classic title after a 5-3 win over South Korea in 10 innings, as Ichiro Suzuki lined a two-out, two-strike single to center field off Chang Yong Lim to drive in two runs and ignite a celebration from Dodger Stadium to Tokyo. (*The New York Times*)

4/22/09: Japanese-Brazilian workers in Japan who lost their manufacturing jobs in the recession were offered government money to return to their home countries, with the government offering Latin American workers \$3,000 toward air fare, and \$2,000 for each dependent, to go home and promise not to return. (*The New York Times*)

4/23/09: Tsuyoshi Kusanagi of J-pop band SMAP was arrested on suspicion of public indecency after police officers found him yelling incoherently while naked on the grass near the Roppongi entertainment district at 3:00 a.m. after a night of drinking. (*The Guardian*)

5/4/09: Japan took top prizes with Brazil and Croatia in the Red Bull Paper Wings World Finals, an annual international aeronautics competition held in Austria, with the winners among 253 competitors from 83 countries. (*Fox News*)



5/5/09: A government report released a day ahead of the Children's Day national holiday shows there were an estimated 17.14 million children under the age of 15 in Japan as of April 1, marking a record low for the 28th straight year. (*Kyodo News*)

5/13/09: Internet search engine Google said it would reshoot all Japanese pictures for its online photo map service, Street View, using lower camera angles after complaints about invasion of privacy. (*Reuters*)

5/18/09: Japan's confirmed swine flu cases ballooned to more than 100 over the weekend, prompting schools to shut and companies to ask workers who show symptoms of the illness to stay at home. Japan has so far confirmed 125 cases of swine flu. (*Bloomberg*)



A special thanks to everyone who participated in the
2009 JQ NATIONAL PHOTO CONTEST
 Our "Lost in Translation Moments" finalists are here!



Photo Crystal Winner: 7th Inning Stretch



Having grown up in the U.S. and having attended baseball games as a child, I thought I knew what to expect during the 7th inning stretch. Not so; I was caught completely unawares by the phallic balloons released all over Koshien Stadium during this Hanshin Tigers game!

Rob Werner
 (Shimane-ken, 2003-06)
 New York, NY

1st Runner Up Tofu Truck's Lovin' It



I like this picture for its irony. I had a good laugh as I watched the tofu truck pull up to the McDonald's drive-thru window!

Stacy Smith
 (Kumamoto-ken CIR, 2000-03)
 New York, NY

2nd Runner Up Mario God Salute



Only in Japan: a festival float of a giant Mario saluting.

Peter Weber
 (Saitama-ken, 2004-07)
 San Francisco, CA

Sponsored by Indelible Creation Enterprise, crystallizing your moments in time.

www.indeliblecreation.com / www.crystallizedintime.com

Comings & Goings



From l., outgoing treasurer CJ Hoppel and secretary Meredith Wutz with Megan and Shree in 2008. *Otsukaresama!*



The 2009 lineup taking us into the next decade: Amber Liang, Monica Yuki, Megan Miller, Shree Kurlekar (elected the new country rep), and Kelly Nixon.

In the past, the Japanese new year was associated with the start of spring to represent new beginnings, and JETAANY has kept that tradition alive. May we present your new JETAANY officers!

Megan Miller

*Hyogo-ken ALT, 2000-02
JETAANY VP, 2007-08;
President, 2008-present*

Originally from Philadelphia, Megan participated in the JET Programme as an ALT for two years in the suburbs of Kobe. During that time, she created the Volunteer Special Interest Group (VSIG) for AJET and also served in various roles for the Hyogo AJET group. After returning to the U.S., Megan took an engineering position at a property insurance company in Washington, D.C. From there, she has continued in the commercial insurance industry, moving from engineering to construction underwriting and from D.C. to New York City.

Megan is currently employed at Swiss Re, a global reinsurance company, and is also pursuing her MBA at NYU. She lives with her

fiancé, Il Sun Yoo, in Long Island City.

Monica Yuki

*Saitama-ken ALT, 2002-04
Social Chair, 2006-09;
VP, 2009-*

Originally from Malibu, California, Monica served as a high school ALT in Iruma-shi, developing a greater appreciation for Japanese culture and her family heritage. During her time in Japan, Monica performed in several traditional Japanese dance performances, joined the Ikebana club and coached her high school's girls' softball team.

Today, Monica works for *USA Weekend* magazine as a research analyst. When not researching the hottest trends in consumer purchasing habits, Monica keeps herself busy playing softball, volleyball and training for her next NYC Marathon. She is currently the vice president of the Alpha Chi Omega alumni chapter in NYC and is involved in many NY Cares philanthropic activities. Monica has been an active member of JETAANY for the past three years, most recently in the role of social chair.

Amber Liang

*Kochi-ken ALT, 2006-08
Secretary, 2009-*

Amber Liang (aka Yan Xiang Liang) was born in the *inaka* of Yangjiang, China and immigrated to New York at the ripe old age of six. Having been enamored by Japan on a previous visit, Amber eagerly accepted a position on the JET Programme to teach at Kochi Nishi Senior High School.

While on JET, Amber planned cultural and social events as social chair, served as, among other things, creative manager for Kochi's annual fundraising play, ran Casa de Amber (JET hostel), and initiated a peer mentorship program, which she hopes to introduce to the JETAANY community. Upon returning to New York, Amber proactively involved herself in JETAANY, helping to plan the Author Showcase and other events. Amber is extremely honored and excited to be serving as JETAANY's secretary.

Kelly Nixon

*Iwate-ken ALT, 2003-06
Treasurer, 2009-*

Born and raised in North Carolina, Kelly's first adventures on foreign soil began via nine life-changing months in Nagoya as an undergrad, after which she decided to try the JET Programme. In 2002, she graduated magna cum laude with a B.S. in international business and set off for the *inaka* of northern Japan soon after.

As the resident ALT at a high school in Iwate, she also served as area coordinator for AJET and lectured extensively to new ALTs on topics such as personal finance and budget traveling. On the side, she volunteered with the local international center to create an intensive English preparatory program for young children going abroad and dabbled in market consulting for a local cosmetics business.

Shortly after moving to New York in 2007, Kelly began her current position as executive assistant with Japan Airlines. Whenever possible, she attempts to maximize the travel benefits she receives through work. Around town, she is in frequent pursuit of the best possible bowl of ramen, shows and happy hours as her budget allows.



Hanzawa-san (L.) and Kobayashi-san (R.) say their bye-byes to Bando-san.



Mukaikubo-san catches up with JETAANY President Emeritus Jennifer Olayon.

JLGC News: In March, Shinya Bando and Toru Mukaikubo returned to Japan, with JETAA ally supreme Taichi Hanzawa taking over Bando-san's job, which includes budgeting, as well as Ryoko Kobayashi's job of JETAA Canada liaison. Chizuko Kawamura from Hiroshima City (right box) will take over Hanzawa-san's job of JETAA USA liaison. Kobayashi-san will be the backup liaison for JETAA North America.

From Bando-san: "I spent two years with JETAANY members, who made my New York life wonderful. I really enjoyed working with you. Thank you JETAANY. I hope to see you again in Japan or Wakayama. SAYONARA!"



Meet JETAA's New NY Liaison!

Ms. Chizuko Kawamura
Liaison for JETAA USA
From Hiroshima City
Hobby/Interest: Traveling

I am from Hiroshima City. I worked at Hiroshima City University as an administrative officer for 10 years by the end of March 2009, where I was in charge of international affairs of the university, including their student exchange program.

I stayed in Manhattan from 1995 to '96 to work as an assistant for a Japanese director of the UN Regional Disarmament Center. Before that, I was in charge of the JET Programme (CIR) for two years at the International Affairs Office of the Hiroshima City Government.

I would like to make the most of my second stay in New York, enjoying opera, musical, museums, as well as visiting other U.S. cities.

Dozo yoroshiku onegaishimasu!

JETAANY Hosts Its First Author Showcase

By Gina Anderson (Nara-ken, 2003-05)
and Justin Tedaldi (Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02)

Article courtesy of *JetWit.com*
and *CGJ's Japan Info newsletter*

New York City's Holiday Inn hosted a summit for published JETs as JETAANY held its debut JET Alumni Author Showcase on March 22. The panelists included pro writers Roland Kelts (Osaka-shi, 1998-99), Robert Weston (Nara-ken, 2002-04) and James Kennedy (Nara-ken, 2004-06).

Drawing over 60 JET alums, friends and family, the event kicked off with some words from Akira Sugiyama, director of the Japan Information Center of the Consulate General of Japan in New York. Moderator and playwright Randall David Cook (Fukui-ken, 1991-93), creator of the critically acclaimed Off Broadway plays *Saké with the Haiku Geisha* and *Fate's Imagination*, asked each author to share a favorite selection of their works with the crowd.

A professor at three different universities including Tokyo University, a writer and editor for two magazines and a columnist for the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Kelts spoke about *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.*, his nonfiction book about the eponymous subject. He began by pointing out that *Japanamerica* is in part a reference to his own mixed Japanese and American backgrounds, explaining that he spent a year in Osaka on the JET Programme in part to have "a real Japanese experience" despite growing up with a Japanese mother and a lifelong exposure to Japanese pop culture.

His then read an excerpt from the introduction of his book, in which he recalled visiting friends in Los Angeles whose four-year-old daughter was captivated by *My Neighbor Totoro*, the classic anime film from Academy Award-winning director Hayao Miyazaki. Kelts cited the story as a metaphor for what Harvard professor Joseph Nye coined "soft power," or Japan's increased influence over a new generation of the West through pop culture and media. What followed was an enlightening discussion that touched on *otaku* (obsessive fan) behavior along with the unique changes *Japanamerica* faced on its way to publication in Japan.

Armed with their flair for perform-



From left: JET alum authors Randall David Cook, Robert Weston, Roland Kelts and James Kennedy talk shop at the Author Showcase in Midtown. (Noriko Furuhashi)

ing, authors Weston and Kennedy immersed the crowd in their readings, elevating the act of reciting fiction to total showmanship.

"This is a book that many people said couldn't be done, or more likely, shouldn't be done," Weston said, introducing his rhyming children's novel *Zorgamazoo*, which has won several awards since its publication last year.

His impassioned reading featured a multitude of character voices (inspired by Monty Python and character actor Peter Lorre) that kept the audience entranced. The author, who traveled from Toronto to participate in the event, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to gain exposure in the U.S.

Kennedy's background in physics, philosophy and computer programming seem at odds with his creative side, but that didn't stop the young author from finishing his first book and inking a deal with publishing giant Random House. Aimed at young adults, *The Order of Odd-Fish* was one of the Smithsonian's Notable Books for Children in 2008.

A musician and improv comic based in Chicago, Kennedy acted out a scene from his novel between two characters arguing over the lethality of his invented "apology gun," which he explained could be adjusted from sincere to sarcastic. The crowd erupted in laughter as he breathlessly fired off lines like "I choke your esophagus with the foodstuffs of destruction!" while bounding back and forth across the stage.

Following the readings, Cook asked the authors questions about their past experiences as JETs,

their present as authors, and future plans. The authors are all planning new books, and each tackled Q&As from the audience to discuss today's publishing world and how technology is, for better or for worse, changing the way books are marketed and distributed.

After the panel wrapped, the participants enjoyed refreshments and bought books provided by New York's Kinokuniya Bookstore. Afterwards, the authors signed their works and connected with old friends. Interestingly, a number of those friends turned out to be Nara JETs who made the trip to New York to support their fellow Kinki alums.

Visit www.jetaany.org/authors for photos and video of the event.

For more information about the authors, each with their respective blogs, visit www.japanamerica.blogspot.com, www.zorgamazoo.com and www.jameskennedy.com.



Natasha Robinson (JET), Courtney "Loud Sneezing Sound" Deguchi (TAIKOPROJECT), Therese Stephen (JET & Kyo Daiko) and JETAANY Philly honcho Renay Loper.

TAIKOPROJECT Gives Philly a Beat

By Renay Loper
(Iwate-ken, 2006-07)

On March 6, a few Philly JET Alumni and a Friend of JET attended a local performance by the world-renowned TAIKOPROJECT.

The group has performed all over the world, was featured at the 2009 Academy Awards, and has appeared with Justin Timberlake on his MTV show *The Phone*.

Held at Philly's Annenberg Center, the show was co-sponsored by the Asian Arts Initiative and Kyo Daiko, of which Philly JET alum Therese Stephens is a member.

In his first taiko experience, Devon Johnson (FOJ) said of the TAIKOPROJECT performance, "If taiko is to Japanese culture what R&B is to urban culture, I'm interested to see the new innovations and ideas brought to the forefront in the future!"

Not knowing what to expect, Johnson's favorite part was the choreography and storytelling aspect: "I appreciate the fact that the group was able to have fun with it," he said, "but still paid homage to their roots and the origin of the instrument and art."

JET alum Natasha Robinson was nearly brought to tears during the performance. "It really brings back memories of my days in Japan," she said. Needless to say, this heart pounding, high-energy performance exceeded all expectations, and definitely is not "your mama's taiko!"

For videos and upcoming shows, visit www.taikoproject.com.

Springtime for Sakurai Japan Society's New President

By Justin Tedaldi
(Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02)

Even century-old organizations can find new ways to change. In April, New York's Consul General of Japan Motoatsu Sakurai became the first Japanese president of the city's esteemed Japan Society. JQ talked with President Sakurai (who has graciously hosted JET gatherings at his home numerous times over the years) shortly after his inauguration to ask about his new plans and ideas for the future.

How did you become the new president of Japan Society? Did you campaign, or were you appointed directly by their board?

I have long been an admirer of Japan Society, its mission and its programs. In fact, I served as a member of Japan Society's board of directors from 2003 until my appointment as Ambassador and Consul General of Japan in New York, after which I became an honorary director. Towards the end of my term as ambassador, when former president Richard J. Wood was looking to retire, the Society's board approached me to see if I had an interest in the position. As my first venture into the nonprofit sector, leading this venerable 102-year old organization seemed like—and now is—an exciting new challenge.

You previously served as Consul General of Japan in New York, and president of both Mitsubishi International Corporation USA and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in New York. What kinds of skills developed from those positions do you think will be key as you begin your tenure at Japan Society?

In both the public and private sectors, you need to pay attention to the people you are serving. That is most important, I think. At Japan Society we have to be mindful of the bottom line, resourceful, and constantly building a better product. Everything one does in good business. At the same time, there is a diplomatic core to what we do in terms of building relationships, whether they're funders and partners who support our wide range of programs, or world leaders who participate in our endeavor.

Regarding your platform, what things will you do for Japan Society, and where do you see it in five years?

I did not come to Japan Society with any fixed ideas. I have made a point to meet with all staff to learn about the Society, and to listen to our stakeholders, including board members. I would like to continue the great work Japan Society has accomplished for over 100 years. To foster a constructive, resonant and dynamic relationship between the people of the U.S. and Japan remains our goal. Looking ahead, we need to better engage an international audience through new technologies as well as maximize our physical space.

More broadly speaking, we have entered a new era of U.S.-Japan relations. The bilateral relationship has grown very complex in the global

sphere—one could even say it is now multilateral. Therefore, the work of Japan Society has become increasingly multifaceted.

What are some of your favorite events that you've attended at Japan Society in the past?

I have attended so many outstanding events in recent years, it is very hard to select just a few (also, I should mention, Japan Society presents over 100 events every year). I enjoy the performances we present—from the traditional noh theater we had outdoors to cutting-edge contemporary dance that defies description. We mount three exhibitions every year that are extraordinarily beautiful, varied and unlike anything you will see at the major museums in the New York, from 12th century Zen figure paintings to incredible modern bamboo sculptures.



President Motoatsu Sakurai. (Ken Levinson)

Currently, KRAZY!, an exhibition of manga, anime and video games—art forms having a huge influence on American youth culture—has drawn record crowds to our gallery. I enjoy attending our family programs where children of all ages and nationalities learn about Japanese customs. Our corporate programming is exceptionally appealing to business leaders and policy makers. We were honored recently to welcome the Bank of Japan Governor Masaaki Shirakawa. If you were there, you would have seen me in the first row taking notes. I believe it is never too late to learn something new!

Because this is for the JETAANY magazine, I should mention our Toyota Language Center. We offer 12 levels of Japanese language instruction, teacher training, and shodo calligraphy classes. Who knows, perhaps you will find me there brushing up my skills, so to speak.

In this recession, budgets are facing a tough time, especially the arts. How will this affect Japan Society?

During my first weeks at Japan Society, I was pleasantly surprised to find the organization in strong standing. We had just completed an incredibly visible centennial celebration. Programming remained robust, and staff was as diligent and deeply engaged as ever. Like every organization today, though, Japan Society is facing unprecedented challenges with resources and development. We have had to make hard decisions and cuts. By addressing the issues

early, we have prepared for the difficult months ahead that will surely continue into 2010. I feel we are in a good position to maintain strong and steady programming, which has been our priority through the crisis, but the struggle is a constant right now.

The interesting thing is that while fundraising has become increasingly challenging, audiences have been growing, whether for our exhibitions as mentioned, our family events, or for our recent Tora-san film series (which your generous writers praised a few months back). Our Web site traffic has even grown significantly in the past six months. I think this has as much to do with our commitment to programming as it does with people's interest in Japan and their desire for education and entertainment in these difficult times. We are pleased we can continue to fill these needs.

What kinds of events or changes would you personally like to bring to Japan Society?

Since 1907, Japan Society has been a place of friendship, sharing and understanding. I don't want to change that. My job is to support our accomplished staff—highly engaged individuals who have steadily evolved Japan Society into a hub of dynamic and diverse thoughts and encounters.

There are things we can do to amplify this. We are currently looking for innovative ways to minimize cost and maximize our revenue and outreach. Are we being energy efficient? Are administrative expenses as low as they can be? Are our technologies up-to-date? Is our programming reaching and engaging the broadest audience? Have we identified new areas of exchange? Are we connecting to everyone in America who has an interest in Japan? What can Japan learn from the American perspective? These are questions we continuously pose as we address what Japan Society does.

Name some of your highlights as ambassador and Consul General of Japan in New York, and what you liked best about the job.

There were many challenges to the job—dealing with bureaucracy being a surprisingly tough one—but there were many more rewards that came from serving the people. I was honored to bring business leaders from Japan to meet U.S. officials, including Governor Jon Corzine of New Jersey, Governor Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, and Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania.

During my term as Consul General, I also helped create Japan Day @ Central Park, an annual outdoor cultural festival hosted by the Japanese community in New York. The event drew some 35,000 people in 2008, involving everyone from major corporations and nonprofit organizations to individual supporters. It was humbling to be among so many Japanese, American and international friends, and to give something back to New Yorkers for their hospitably and enthusiasm.

What's the overall impression you have of the JET Programme after meeting and working with so many JET alums?

I commented while ambassador that the JET Programme is one of the top programs organized by the Japanese government. The mission to promote grassroots international exchange between Japan and other nations is invaluable. The program engages thousands of people in many countries and creates an effective network for Americans interested in Japan and for Japanese living in the States. I commend the community engagement and overall training excellence the program engenders. It is no coincidence that there are four JET Programme alumni on staff at Japan Society.

Besides New York, where are some of your other favorite places in America, and why?

I lived and worked for 14 years in Washington, D.C. I raised my daughters there. It is an exceptionally international and wonderful town. The difference between it and New York is that in D.C., internationals function as foreigners. As a person from Japan you are Japanese there. In New York, everyone functions as a New Yorker. I am a New Yorker in New York. It is truly a melting pot.

Japan Society seeks to bring more Japanese arts and culture to Americans. How can we continue to promote those things to Americans who might be unfamiliar with Japanese culture?

That is a very good question. I will take it further: how do we let people know that some things they take for granted are Japanese? Sushi, manga and saké have all become common. People may forget the rich cultural legacy that brought them to the table. This is one of the reasons Japan Society is so vital. Our programming and projects are not only great introductions to Japanese culture—sometimes even for native Japanese people—but they are invaluable means to deepen appreciation and understanding of what is uniquely Japanese.

This is a very different time from when Japan Society was founded over 100 years ago. We live in a global culture and sometimes take for granted the cultural importance of what is around us. America as we know it is just 250 years old. It moves very fast and changes quickly. Japan's culture dates back thousands of years. It can be more reflective and reluctant to change. Between the two cultures there is still so much to discover and share. Japan Society brings this forward, focuses it and expands the process for everyone's benefit—in the U.S., Japan and the world.

Who in your opinion are the most influential Japanese people to have a positive impact on America?

I think Japan itself has had the most impact. Everywhere you look now, you see its presence: in food, fashion, film, art, music and architecture. Some of our top baseball players are Japanese. Educators everywhere are using *kamishibai* and manga as teaching tools. The list goes on. People are surrounded by Japan's influence and they are not aware of it. I want to make sure they are.

For more on President Sakurai, visit www.japansociety.org/content.cfm/bios#MotoatsuSakurai.

JETlog

This issue features Dallas native and Tokyo transplant Ed Thompson (Chiba-shi CIR, 1994-97). The following interview was originally published on the CIR homepage (www.cirhomepage.org).



What lasting impressions do you have of your time on JET?

The strongest impression I have of JET are from the people I interacted with in Chiba City, outside the office. There were many ordinary people who were extremely helpful to me in becoming acquainted with interesting aspects of life in the city and nuances of both professional and everyday culture in Japan. That included organizations like the Chiba branch of the Junior Chamber of Commerce (a global organization commonly referred to as the JCs) and private cultural organizations like the Izumi Club. Being invited to participate in those organizations was a very useful preview to understanding the social interaction of younger and older Japanese business people.

How has your time as a CIR influenced your future career? Similarly, what was the most valuable experience as a CIR for your current career?

In a nutshell, I work now as a communications specialist and business strategist, which has me managing projects for a wide range of organizations, from small domestic companies to larger multinational corporations and government institutions.

My experience as a CIR assisted me in becoming both bilingual and achieving a bicultural outlook, which is really necessary to become a truly competent business professional in Japan. There are still many niche professions where a person can advance while not knowing much of the language, lacking a truly immersive experience.

So, I think the cultural understanding is the most valuable exposure that CIRs can take away and combine with their existing or future professional skills. That ability has proven to be the edge for me in keeping client accounts in a constantly changing competitive environment, and winning business opportunities that otherwise would have been impossible to gain.

How did you find your current job?

I created it, in a recession no less! Another professional route that doesn't seem obvious to many people is that they can start their own businesses. This is what many translators (and freelancers) have done, but most do not really see it that way.

There are numerous opportunities that exist where a person, even if not pursuing it full-time, can start as an initial step. That ranges from import/export of products, professional services (such as translation), craft making or even the performing arts. The most important thing here is passion—you really need to love whatever it is you do—and the drive to weather the highs and lows that you will inevitably encounter along the way.

What are the details of your work?

I am co-founder and director of Genshoku Design & Marketing Consultants, which is a network of creative professionals experienced in traditional and interactive media, design, marketing and event production. While our main base is in Tokyo, we are building a global presence with my hometown of Dallas as another target location.

I have always had an interest in art and graphic design and was lucky enough to find an opportunity to work in the advertising industry here in Japan. After several years with a production company (where there were already several CIR alumni) creating overseas promotional material for Japanese multinationals, I became a manager at a digital marketing communications company during Japan's Internet boom. That became the springboard for my current business.

As a related part of promoting professional opportunities, I organize Advertising and Creative Arts Tokyo (ACA), which is an open forum for account managers, planners, public relations specialists, creative directors, market researchers, designers, commercial artists and copywriters. This also includes anyone interested in communications, marketing and other creative roles at corporations and other organizations. We also hold monthly networking events in Tokyo that are a great way to meet a diverse range of international and Japanese professionals in a casual setting.

We will also be creating an accompanying Web site covering advertising, marketing and cultural trends in Japan. We are looking for writers and photographers to contribute articles, so interested parties can get in touch through the link to Xing below!

What advice can you offer to ALTs and CIRs heading out into the real world?

A few things that immediately come to mind are making sure to utilize educational and professional resources available through the Internet. Universities and organizations in Japan offer seminars, and gaining a professional certificate or completing a distance learning degree while working as a ALT/CIR can be a substantial advantage when pursuing future opportunities.

In addition, it is a Web 2.0 world where it is possible to promote a solid image of yourself through a profile or a blog linked to your professional interests. Those activities can become additional components to leverage in your career, whether you are remaining in Japan or returning to your home country.

For more on Genshoku, Temple University's program, ACA events or to create a professional profile, visit www.genshoku.com.



Dance Dance Evolution: Q&A with *STOMP*'s Yako Miyamoto

By Liz Wanic (Kagoshima-ken, 2003-06)

STOMP in the East Village has something else that sets it apart from its other sister productions around the world: for the past seven years it has featured Yako Miyamoto, its first Japanese female member. JQ spoke with Yako to learn more about what it's like to be an international ambassador of rhythmic dance.

At age 10 you were an international Goodwill Ambassador between Japan and New Zealand. What was that like, and what duties did you have?

I was an international Goodwill Ambassador with the goal of getting people from New Zealand interested in Japan through *wadaiko*, a traditional instrument, and getting to know each other, deepening understanding between New Zealand and Japan.

I performed at some places in New Zealand and I experienced some of the culture, lifestyle and nature while I was an ambassador. Even though I was an elementary school student and couldn't speak English at all, I had a great time experiencing many things while staying with a host family to learn about the way they live.

Why did you decide not to finish your degree in chemistry? And why chemistry to begin with?

I happened to learn about the funk tap style of dance when I was a university student. I wanted to learn hands-on, so I took a one-year break from university in Japan 10 years ago and came to America. At that time, New York was the only place I could learn that kind of tap dance. During that time, I took an audition and happened to pass it. I thought about going back to school, but not wanting to have any regrets, postponed studying. I want to try to be the best performer I can while I'm young.

The reason I studied chemistry at university was that I've always been interested in math and biology, and wanted to know the true nature of things, like "what is the air, what is the water, what are we made of?" I studied it thinking I could create something that would benefit people and the world. After I retire from being a performer, I'd like to continue my studies.

What's it like being the only Japanese cast member of *STOMP* here?

When I passed my audition I wasn't even conscious of my being Japanese, but after I got offers from various Japanese TV and newspapers to do interviews, I received many e-mails from Japan and Japanese people who came to see the show. They said they were proud of me, and told me their dreams, saying my work cheered them up a lot. I was surprised, and I realized that they're proud of me



From left: Yako Miyamoto performing with the cast of *STOMP*. (Steve McNicholas)

because I'm Japanese. That made me realize I am a Japanese, and I started being proud of my nationality.

What is the best part of working with the cast?

Improving with each other—which I didn't get to do much in Japan—and the rhythm that comes from the other dancers' backgrounds, which I never experienced before in Japan. Through the tension of live performance, I've felt their talents and found myself having the best moments with new surprises and fulfilling excitement.

When you're really missing Japanese food, where do you go to eat?

The East Village! Around *STOMP*'s theater, there are many Japanese restaurants. For young people, there are good places such as *iza-kaya* that are cheap and fun.

How has living in New York affected your dance?

In Japan, I was good at American-style hip-hop. Since living in New York, many things have happened to me that made me feel more Japanese, and I've started showing more of my own "color" since I'm the only Japanese in the show. People now say they feel a Zen style from my dance.

What are the three most annoying questions that people

have asked you about being Japanese or about Japan?

I've been asked many strange questions. Some people conceive a prejudice and some minor misunderstandings against the Japanese based on anime. I myself used to have a lot of misunderstandings about America, so I've never gotten upset, even though I've been asked some strange questions. However, I remember these strange ques-

tions: "Japanese don't like Chinese and Koreans, do they?" (By the way, I've heard that some Japanese have asked Americans if they don't like the British, so maybe it's even?), "Japanese girls always say 'yes,' don't they?," and "all Japanese must play video games."

Do you find that being a woman has helped or hindered your career in any way?

In the last seven years I've been with *STOMP*, some cast members have had children. While the men can keep working the same as before, the women had to take leave without any guaranteed childcare and they were ultimately replaced. I was struck by the potential negatives that go with being pregnant and giving birth as a woman in this type of work.

What was your reason for founding rhythm performing arts group COBU?

I founded COBU to put the feelings of my world into shape. I'm hoping to express my "beat of this moment" through the fusion rhythm of both *wadaiko* and funk tap. I fully enjoy being with *STOMP*, and I provide a place of enjoyment through performing to the members of COBU, so I'm grateful that I can enjoy both of them.

I noticed that there are only female members of COBU. Is this by design? What is your

reasoning for that?

There used to be some male members, but the more auditions we held, the more the female performers showed their growth, so the current members are all female. There are many male students, but I haven't seen any male performers whose passion matched the current female performers' yet.

What was the hardest thing to adjust to after you moved to New York?

The hardest thing is English. The second hardest thing is visa status.

What do you miss the most about Japan?

I miss my Japanese friends and Japanese food that I'm used to eating. Also, hot springs.

What do you like and dislike the most about living in New York?

I like the excitement. New York is a melting pot, so it's not without culture shocks. New York makes me realize that I am Japanese, and I'm faced with new things every day. But, if you have ability, people accept you and life here improves. What I don't like about living in New York is that people are not punctual. They don't keep their appointed time like with phones, power and construction even though such appointed times are always followed in Japan, so that was quite a culture shock for me.

Did you know English before you moved here? Was it hard adjusting to a new language?

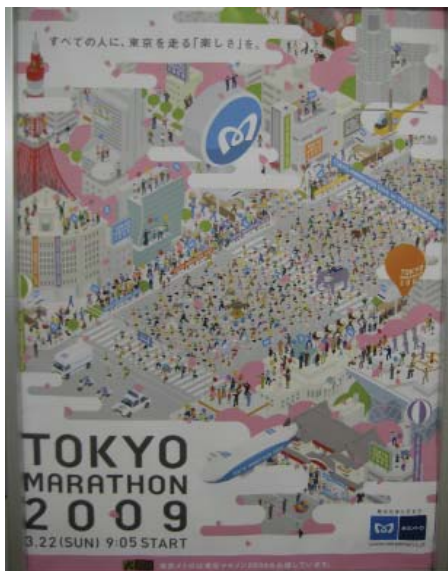
Before I moved here, I only knew three things: "yes," "no," and "thank you." It took a lot of time and effort until I could properly listen to and understand English. It's really difficult to understand a different language. I wasn't good at languages as a student even though I was good with numbers, so I still have a hard time.

What do you see for yourself in the future?

I want to live with my honest feelings from moment to moment. Even if you don't gain honor or a lot of money, you are happy if you live by being honest to yourself. I want to be a person who sincerely and fully achieves my goal at the time I want it.

*Special thanks to Jackie Green for media assistance. For more on *STOMP*, visit stomponline.com. For upcoming COBU appearances, visit www.cobu.us.*

Interview translated by Ayako Shimizu and Justin Tedaldi.



It's not yet up there with New York, Boston, Berlin, Chicago and London, but the relatively new Tokyo Marathon is coming into its own. In March, I participated in this race for the third time, having run every year since its debut in 2007. As a major marathoner and someone who is always looking for an excuse to go back to Japan, for me this event kills two birds with one stone.

Similar to New York, qualification for the Tokyo Marathon is decided by a lottery system. Whereas here if you are part of the Road Runners group and run nine races within the calendar year you can gain automatic entry to the following year's marathon, in Tokyo it is left purely to chance. That being said, although officially there is no such mechanism in place, it is highly likely that those applying from abroad will have no problem getting in (as evidenced by my three-year streak). Many of my Japanese friends, however, have repeatedly applied without much success. It is said that the rate of acceptance for domestic applicants is one out of every 7.5 people, and that the odds are getting tougher every year due to a running boom throughout the country. This leads some Japanese runners to resort to devious tactics such as applying with overseas addresses to ensure their entries!

This year, 35,000 participants lined up in front of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building to begin the race. The pre-marathon mood is a universal one, with people making last-minute bathroom stops, stretching and getting in their last bites or sips. When the wheelchair athletes took off, the crowd cheered on these initial challengers. As the starting time of 9:10 a.m. approached, the nervousness and excitement in the air was palpable. I was staring down at my shoes and noticed the women next to me had on the same ones. I looked over at her and smiled, and we began chatting. It turned out she was from Kumamoto, where I had spent my three years on JET! We started reminiscing about local races like the Ichigo Half Marathon that I used to run every year.

Fast Feet on the Streets Keeping Pace at the Tokyo Marathon

By Stacy Smith (Kumamoto-ken CIR, 2000-03)

After several short speeches and a rousing rendition of "Kimi ga Yo" with the sound of the starting gun we were off! It was slow-moving at the start, but we were rained down upon by a shower of pink paper confetti hearts, a *kawaii* touch appropriate for a Japanese marathon. The course takes runners through Shinjuku and Yotsuya to the Imperial Palace and nearby Hibiya Park, where the 10K portion of the race ends. From there the marathoners head toward Shinagawa, where the 15K mark is the first turnaround point. One of the cool things about the course is the two stretches where, because of a turnaround, you run along those on the opposite side (the other is Ginza). This means that mere mortals like me can watch the godlike pros as they tear up the course, and that you can wave to your slower/faster friends as they pass if you can find them!

Approaching Shinagawa, I was happy to catch sight of the Tokyo Tower in all its glory. Along



Hashire! Stacy enjoys a runner's high at the Tokyo Marathon.

the way, bands, taiko groups and other types of entertainment kept us going. Refreshment stations provided water and Amino Vital, Japan's version of Gatorade. My pace was steady thanks to the mostly downhill beginning, and I tried to soak up all the calls of "Ganbatte!" from the crowd. As I looked in front of me, I saw a familiar red jersey marked with Chinese characters and the words "Powered by Dim Sum." This is the name of my running group here in New York, and sure enough it was my friend from home! The chances of finding him out of all those people were slight, but somehow we ended up snapping pictures together on the course. I was happy to see the 20K mark coming up and waved goodbye as I headed into Ginza.

The course's most awe-inspiring moment is when you approach the Kaminarimon (Thunder Gate) in Asakusa at around 28K. It looms before you in its largeness and always gives me a necessary boost. At this area, it's rumored that they give out anko-filled *ningyoyaki* for a limited period, but I must have missed it, although I was fortified by *anpan* at a later rest stop. After this it's back into Ginza, and I was strongly moti-

vated by the fact that I would soon see my friend and her family who had come out to cheer me on at the 35K point. We had coordinated this spot, and things worked smoothly as we briefly chatted and they handed me a banana before I was on my way.

The course is said to be conducive to record-breaking as it is largely flat and doesn't get tough until the very end. At about the 37K mark, the Tsukuda Bridge in Tsukiji really tests runners' mettle. This is the first in a series of bridges whose ups and downs are anathema to everyone's tired legs. I plugged along thinking that what was left was not even a 10K, though knowing that these last couple of K would be the worst of the day. The end is not super-scenic, so it is at this point that the cheers of the crowd are more important than ever. With 13,000 volunteers and almost two million spectators coming out that day, we had plenty of support. I could see Big Sight where the finish line is located, and reassured myself that in just a couple more steps I would be at the 42.195K point.

According to my watch I crossed the finish line at about 3'50", thereby completing my 10th marathon! I was greeted with a chorus of *otsukaresama deshitas* and struggled to walk straight as one volunteer placed a medal around my neck, another gave me a goodie bag, and another wanted to shake my hand. For the past two years female finishers received a rose, which was a nice gesture but ultimately a bit wasteful as you end up throwing it away.

This year, all finishers instead received an awesome commemorative bath towel decorated with sakura petals and the Tokyo Marathon slogan of "Tokyo ga Hitotsu ni Naru Hi" (The Day Tokyo Becomes One). This was special because in previous years the marathon had been in February and next year it's supposedly being moved back to this month as well, so 2009 might be the only sakura-themed Tokyo Marathon.

Thanks to a chip you attach to your sneaker that records your splits every 5K, runners can go to the Tokyo Marathon Web site post-race and analyze their results (fans can also register a certain runner's number and receive updates every 5K, allowing them to figure out the timing of how to strategically move from place to place to cheer their runner on). Another really neat feature of the site that I have not seen elsewhere is the video version of your finish. By putting in runners' numbers or estimated times, you can replay footage of them crossing the finish line. I have to admit I checked out mine more than once, as like the ethereal sakura the miracle that is the marathon is all too short.

For complete results of this year's Tokyo Marathon, visit www.tokyo42195.org/2009/index_en.html.

Nihonjin in New York: Noriko Furuhashi

By Rick Ambrosio (Ibaraki-ken, 2006-08)

Noriko Furuhashi is the program coordinator of the Japan Information Center for the Consulate General of Japan in New York. Long title, right? If you've been to a JETAANY meeting, then chances are you've had the pleasure of meeting Noriko. **JQ** had a chance to catch up with one of our favorite JET friends to find out more about her life here in New York.

Tell us about yourself.

I was born and raised in Sagami-hara-shi and Kawasaki-shi in Kanagawa-ken. I came to the U.S. to study at university. I have been living in New York for more than 15 years. My husband is American (from Long Island). We have two daughters: one is Emi Marie (four years old), and the other one is Saya Abigail (who is one). Though I do not have much free time these days since I had kids, I enjoy practicing karate and going to museums. I have been working for the consulate since 2003, and became the educational program coordinator three years ago.

What does the program coordinator do for the consulate?

I have three main categories that I am responsible for coordinating. The biggest one that takes up most of my time is, of course, the JET Programme. The other two are the MEXT (Monbukagakusho) scholarship programs and an education program called Teachers' Workshop.

For the JET Programme, I'm responsible for recruiting, interviewing and sending off the new JET participants from New York to Japan. Also, I truly enjoy working with JETAANY for many of the events throughout the year. I especially appreciate the overwhelming support that I continuously receive from the JETAANY community for important events like school visits, interviews, pre-departure seminars and career forums. Meeting with JET alumni is definitely one of the most fun parts of my job. I have

met many interesting JET alumni in the past. Every person is different and has notable character, but one thing I found the same for all JET alums is that everyone is very intelligent. Interacting with them always motivates me to work hard and do my best. Also, it makes me very happy to know that everybody loves Japan!

How do you like living here?

I love it very much—otherwise, I would have left by now! I enjoy living in a multicultural environment, and I'd like my girls to grow up embracing different ideas and different views of the world.

Have you noticed a difference in the city since we entered the recession?

Yes, many of the people I know have been laid off. Very depressing... On a brighter note, I think because of the recession we saw a big increase of JET applications this year. This means that it is much more competitive this year, and you have to be really good to make it in.

What do you feel is the biggest difference between New York and, say, Tokyo or Osaka?

The biggest difference is the people. Big cities like Tokyo and Osaka have more foreigners than the rural areas, but still, I think no other cities in the world are like New York. In New York, anybody can become a New Yorker once you live here. But in Japan, if you are not Japanese, you are and always will be a foreigner no matter how many years you live there.

If there was one thing you could bring from Japan to New York City, what would it be?

Definitely an onsen!

Domo, Noriko-san! For more on the CGJ and to subscribe to their Japan Info e-newsletter, visit www.ny.us.emb-japan.gov.jp/en/c/index.html.



Noriko Furuhashi, John Fuller (Kinokuniya), Toru Mukaikubo (JLGC), Hirotaka Ono (CGJ), Tony McCormac (JET), Steven Horowitz (JET), Amber Liang (JET), Roland Kelts (JET), Akira Sugiyama (CGJ), and Ryoko Kobayashi (JLGC) at a JET/Kinokuniya event.

Banzai Brooklyn!

JETAANY Takes Sakura Matsuri at BBG

On the weekend of May 2, JETAANY dusted off its trusty banner and headed to Brooklyn Botanic Garden to attend the 28th annual Sakura Matsuri (Cherry Blossom Festival), which as usual was packed with admirers of both nature and things Japanese. Especially thrilling was the new ambassador and Consul General of Japan in New York Shinichi Nishimiya stopping by to give members a big Brooklyn "how ya doin'?" Visit www.bbg.org for more pics.



Yuko Suzuki (Japan Information Center), Akira Sugiyama (Japan Information Center), Shogun Adren Hart (JET), Madame Yukiko Nishimiya, Ambassador Shinichi Nishimiya, Jon Beck (JET), Monica Yuki (JET) and Justin Tedaldi (sans cello) enjoy some sakura.



Soh Daiko kicked off the performances.



Say cheese! Or *kawaii!*, it works here, too.



J-pop star Ai Kawashima also dropped by.



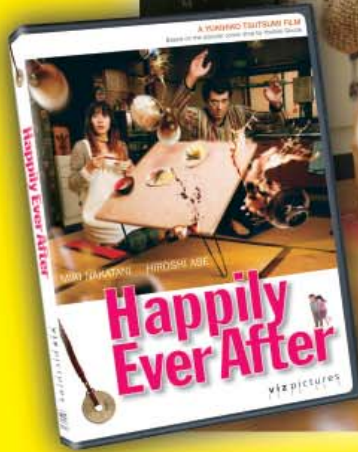
100 yen if you can name everybody here.

<http://jetaany.org/shop>



I'm poor & miserable... but it's OK, as long as you're here.

in stores
MAY 12th



J-CULTURE Q&A INSIDE!
Q: WHAT'S 'GO-EN'?
Q: MISSING A PINKY!!
Q: WHAT'S 'PACHINKO'?...AND MORE!

Happily Ever After

A Yukihiro Tsutsumi Film

based on the smash hit comic strip by Yoshiie Gouda



viz pictures
www.viz-pictures.com

DVD
COMING
SOON!



NOW
IN STORES!



L

change the World

www.DeathNoteFilms.com



© 2006 'DEATH NOTE' FILM PARTNERS. © 2003 Tsugumi Ohba TAKESHI Obata © 2008 "L" FILM PARTNERS. © 2008 "L" PLOT PRODUCE. © 2007 'Happily Ever After' Film Partners. © Yoshiie Gouda / Tezuka Productions, Ltd. All rights reserved.



Hikaru Utada: The *JQ* Interview

By Justin Tedaldi (Kobe-shi, 2001-02)

It was perfect timing. Back in January, Hikaru Utada, the New York-born recording phenomenon who notched three of Japan's top ten best-selling albums (including number one) before she was out of her teens, was back in town working on a new album for the U.S., and JQ spent a full hour with Hikaru to talk of many things, including her new disc This is the One, which hit stores in May.

Why have you chosen now to come back to do another English-language album?

Probably because I had a contract left. [laughs] I was contracted to do one more, and the record company, Island Def Jam, would say, “when, when?” and I would do two Japanese albums and they would [say] “when are you doing an American one?” and I was like, “Uh, I’ll get on it soon,” and I then I finally began working on it about a year ago, and it’s about almost done.

You recently had a birthday. Did you do anything special?

Actually, the past couple of months have been a peak of busyness in terms of getting this American album done, and the video and all this...and I was working editing—I’m the chief editor for my Japanese official book as an artist in Japan—and editing that, and there was all this stuff that just got together and I was...quite caught up with everything that I don’t really care how I spend my birthday. I’m usually working every year on my birthday, anyway. But this year for the first time, I ended up spending it on the plane. I was flying from New York to Tokyo, and when I get on a plane I just pass out for 10 hours. So most of my birthday I was sleeping on a plane, and once I got home I just had dinner and just went to sleep. [laughs]

You have to save the celebrations for after the album comes out.

[Laughs] Doesn’t really matter when you do it, as long as you celebrate your birthday.

For the new English album, comparing it with *Exodus* almost five years ago, what would you have done differently in hindsight with that album compared to the way you’re going to promote and market the new one?

Well, it’s not really a matter of me, it’s the promotional staff, like the record company and what kind of PR we get...actually, there’s a lot to learn from that. I mean, Island Def Jam [back then] was really...it on the edge of change and

chaos. Nobody knew what they were doing and nobody really knew what was going on and I was just like, “what the hell is this? No support, come on, man, what’s happening here?”

I read a quote from you earlier where it said that for *Exodus* you were “trying too hard.” Can you explain what you mean by that?

Yeah, it was sort of like a...very experimental kind of thing, I guess. Trying too hard, I mean. Because when you’re experimental, and...my attitude towards it was like, “Everyone else is in a mess, I’m just going to go ahead and do something weird, you know what I mean? [laughs] I’m just going to go ahead and make something real weird and intense but interesting. I think the music is very very neat, but it’s going to



Above and cover photo: Yasunari Kikuma

be weird, but...I’m not gonna care. And that’s why...in a sense I was trying hard, to show, to make interesting music. And I was doing all the arranging, and so they were saying technical things I have to really worry about in the music-making, and I was all over the place, really. But I’m just—I was so happy and proud of myself for having done that, that one album. And when I heard Elton John in an interview saying, “There’s a girl called Utada, a Japanese girl who makes interesting pop music, blah, blah, blah,” I thought, wow, that makes everything worth it, man, thank you. [laughs] But it was that kind of album where you have to be really into music or...it’s not easy to appreciate if you have no...if you have a certain, depending on your musical background or how deep into music you are. It’s wasn’t the kind of thing where you can listen to the radio and say, “that’s great!” and sing along to it, you know? And...I think I was trying to be more mature than I really was, I mean, what was I, like, nineteen or 20, and some of the stuff I was trying to be an adult, I was trying to say, I can do this. I’m grown-up, but I was a kid, kind

of. And then, this time I feel like I’ve matured more, I’m more of a woman. If I sing something sexy, it’s more natural, it’s not forced, nothing feels strained, and everything seems to feel right. Like, it doesn’t make the listener feel any strain, either. I just feel really comfortable making it and promoting the album, too.

Does the new album have more of an R&B style, or have you changed certain things that people will hear on the other new tracks?

Well, there’s a lot of variety in the album, and the thing you can say for the entire album that the songs have variety musically, and the common theme is, I guess my lyrics, they can be very funny at times or they can be very bookish at times, very poetic or very blunt at times, but...they’re that...the main theme, the ongoing theme throughout the album. And the reason there’s a bit of that R&B feeling back in my music for this new album is not because I thought, R&B, yes, let’s go that way, but, since I wanted to make something mainstream, at this point in American music, mainstream is just R&B.

It’s not a bad time to be with Def Jam, either.

Right. Well, the thing is, I’m only with Island, and it’s really funny, like...Island and Def Jam have come together to be IDJ—Island Def Jam, right? But since the impact of the word Def Jam is so strong, most people, I think, especially in Japan, think I’m with Def Jam, so they think it’s a hip-hop label, an R&B label, but...I’m with Island, which is U2, Bon Jovi, Sum 41...so that’s a funny misconception that I find myself fixing quite often. Because sometimes [journalists]...to make it short they just say “Def Jam,” but I’m like, no, no, no, no, that would actually be wrong. [laughs]

We’ll put that in bold type.

[Leans into the recorder] She’s with Island! [laughs]

I read this quote yesterday on RollingStone.com, and it was of a fan who posted something, and it was in response to a piece that RollingStone.com put up, talking about a song you did for [the video game] Kingdom Hearts II.

Oh!
And he was basically praising it, but the comment I read underneath it was great, and this is a direct quote. It said, “Utada is very talented. The fact that only nerds like me and you have seen her might be the saddest thing in this modern world, non-politically speaking.”
 [Laughs] That’s very well put!

How are you going to get yourself out there more this time? I hear that you’re thinking of going on some more mainstream talk shows like Conan O’Brien...

Umm, I think the promotion...the intent of the promotional plan so far is to keep it flexible and keep the music driven. And I think [Cont. on 17]

**All of Me: ConnectForce
Productions Founder
Adren Hart
By Matt Matysik
(Yamanashi-ken, 2006-07)**

Walk down Second Avenue in the East Village on Sunday evening and you'll see classic New York City iconography: yellow cabs cruising the windswept streets, newspapers drifting like tumbleweeds, and subway steam rising from sidewalk grates. Stop—listen. That's jazz you're hearing, another staple feature of NYC. Follow your ears and walk down the steps into the blue and purple neon light of the Blue Owl Cocktail Room.

JET Alum Adren Hart (Nagano-ken, 1998-2000) greets you at the door, dressed sharply in a tan suit, sporting a fedora. It's a hip, modern look, but it's also timeless, harkening back to an older generation of cool. It gels nicely with the music, our national treasure, and an art form as American as apple pie: jazz. But wait—the singer is Japanese? Many in the audience are, too; it's no secret that Japanese, like Europeans, have had a love affair with jazz for at least half a century. And this music, a true artistic symbol of the ideals of American democracy, has welcomed all musicians from all nationalities, giving each musician a shared forum for expression—at its best, jazz is a swinging, grooving melting pot!

As the founder of ConnectForce Productions, Adren has been working for over a year to create a space in New York City's jazz scene for Japanese artists. In addition to the bimonthly gigs at the Blue Owl, ConnectForce Productions is involved with music and video production, individual artist promotion, packaging, recording, and media content management. His enthusiasm is infectious. Likening himself to a baby bird, stumbling as it flaps its wings during its first awkward flight attempt, Adren is finally getting comfortable with his increased responsibilities and is truly excited about his work. "I really feel like I have wings now," Adren says, "like I'm starting to fly."

What is the story of ConnectForce Productions? How did you decide to start this organization?

As the name suggests, ConnectForce is about bringing things together. In our case, the goal is to bring people together using culture and the arts. Growing up in New York and later Miami, two international and very culturally diverse cities, played a huge role in my desire to interact with people from all over the world. To a large extent, JET was the culmination of those experiences.

After JET, I returned to New York and made friends in the Japanese community. Many of them were musicians who, because of my job at Sony BMG, would come to me for advice or help with whatever they were working on. Over the years, I discovered that there were a lot more people out there with similar needs. Ultimately, I decided to make a professional transition and take a chance combining two of my favor-



JET alum Adren Hart at the Blue Owl, East Village.

ite things: music and being the bridge between cultures.

What makes the artists on ConnectForce Productions special?

One of my pet projects is Nippon Jazz NYC. It's an event I produce featuring emerging Japanese jazz artists. I decided to produce the show because there are so many talented, young (mid-20s to early 30s) Japanese artists in the city. Personally, I find such interest in jazz from a large group of young people from outside of the U.S. to be a very interesting cultural phenomenon, because Americans within the same age group seem to have very little interest in jazz at all.

The lack of interest stems, I believe, from the idea that jazz is overly intellectual old music, played by old people in dingy, old clubs. So, it's not enough to just have young people playing the music; they have to play something new and exciting in order to get the attention of a younger audience. This is why I encourage the artists I work with to include some sort of Japanese "flavor" in their music. It can be something as simple as singing a standard in Japanese or playing a Japanese instrument. Or, it can be as complicated as creating an arrangement which incorporates traditional Japanese harmony, melody or rhythm.

The idea of adding Japanese musical elements to jazz itself is not original. Artists like Hiroshima and Yutaka Yokokura have been doing it since the '80s. But, there seems to be so few others that an event like Nippon Jazz NYC could encourage more of it with a younger generation.

Do you think people in New York have misconceptions about Japan and jazz? If so, what are they, and how do you counteract them?

As I mentioned earlier, I believe young Ameri-

cans think of jazz as outdated. However, we are living in time when Japan is HOT. As [JET alum] Roland Kelts indicates in his book *Japanamerica*, there is an incredible demand in America for "things Japanese," and I believe this fact coupled with the great talent of our artists is what attracts our audience.

In terms of misconceptions about Japan, I'm sure there are some, but I have no idea what they are. Whatever they may be, they're not relevant. People come to our shows because they're interested in the artists, the music and Japanese culture. And those are the people we want in attendance.

How does your experience on JET inform what you do today?

I would have to say that the experience of living in Japan and working with Japanese people on a daily basis has allowed me to build a relationship with artists a lot faster than someone who does not have that experience. Also, there have been some fellow alumni who have been very supportive of our efforts with everything from contacts to general information about what's happening in the community.

What do you want the JET alumni New York audience to know about your work?

I think that it's important to emphasize that we are a production company. We offer a suite of services which include events and public performance, music and video production, content licensing, and creative services, like CD/DVD packaging. Nippon Jazz NYC is just one example of the type of production we are involved in. We also promote a core roster of music acts which include Erika Matsuo. You may not know her name, but JETs who were abroad in early 2007 probably recognize her voice. She sang the Sokenbi-cha jingle early that year. Look for her debut CD release *Obsession* this June.

What are some highlights from your shows? Are there any memorable interactions with artists or any events that come to mind?

I would definitely say that having a full house on the night of the Super Bowl with no TV in sight was a milestone for the Nippon Jazz NYC event. Another unforgettable moment is the night Nabuko Kiryu, a buxom, husky-voiced singer from Tokyo sang her "Ingen Mame Blues" and had everyone in the joint (including the bartender) clapping their hands and doing the call and response thing. It was an infectious performance. But the most memorable interaction with an artist would have to have been the night we organized an EPK-DVD release party for Chiemi Nakai. After we let everyone watch the video and said a few words, she began to cry. She was overwhelmed not only by how well the piece came together, but also by the support she received from everyone in attendance. At that point, everything about my work in the music industry that left me jaded disappeared and I saw that what we were doing had the potential to impact dreams.

For more of Adren's upcoming concerts and projects, visit www.connectforceproductions.com and www.meetup.com/Nippon-Jazz-NYC-Meetup-Group.

JETAActivities Photos



Carolyn, Lisa, Noriko K., Dan, Antoinette, Ian, Olivia, Ronald, Cindy and Monica on the Killington ski trip.



Pooja Dadhanind and Amber help Noriko at Columbia Matsuri.



Tomo, Carleen, John, Dennis, Ambassador Nishimiya and his wife, Tommy, Renay & CR rep Chau Lam.



JETAANY Webmaster Lee-Sean Huang chills with Shree.



Jamie, Akemi, Larry, Steven and Marea at The Snug.



Joe Maruchek, Adren Hart and Justin blitzed on **JQ!**



Happy hour for Tommy, Chau and Nicole Bongiorno.



Nicole, Keiko M. & Tommy enjoying a Meishi Exchange.



Ashley Nease, Anton and Erin Gill Park say *cheezu*.



Steven's JetWit T-shirt has a genki effect on the ladies.



JET alum and *Japanamerica* author Roland Kelts in Tokyo. (Matthias Ley)

After introducing his book *Japanamerica* and sharing his thoughts and experiences as an author during the JET Alumni Author Showcase, Roland Kelts (Osaka-shi, 1998-99) found time after a busy book autographing session to sit down with JQ and discuss a variety of issues, from his personal views on otaku, advice to aspiring writers, and his future aspirations.

How did the JET experience impact your writing of *Japanamerica*?

The JET Programme was a great way to go and be a part of Japanese culture. For me, it was a great entry point into the broader culture, and it was absolutely instrumental [in eventually writing the book], since I was not just sitting on the fringe, but working directly with Japanese colleagues and kids, spending time after work in many *izakaya* discussing Japanese life and culture. Most young Japanese had no idea that there are people in the U.S. who are crazy about anime and manga. There is a passion for Japanese design and art and culture outside of Japan that relatively few Japanese, even today, are that keenly aware of. That gap was extraordinary to me. It was something I wanted to write about both as a fiction writer and



as a nonfiction writer.

You have said that you are not an *otaku* about anime and manga. How do you personally feel about this culture?

What I meant by that was the term *otaku* specifically refers to fans of Japanese popular culture paraphernalia, such as figurines, anime and manga. I am not a super fan of that stuff.

I came at the story as a writer, but like anyone who is passionate or obsessive about certain things in his or her life, I understand it. For the book, I interviewed people with apartments filled with anime and figurines from floor to ceiling. I don't view these people as oddities; I get it. I get the idea of being so passionate about something that you view it as your *raison d'être*. I've certainly become more of a fan than I was before, but it is just not the object of my particular obsessions.

Was there a specific episode during your JET experience that you particularly remember as having left a lasting impression on you?

I was teaching at a high school in Osaka on the day of the tragic shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado [in 1999], and I remember it very, very well. It happened at roughly 2:00 a.m. Japan time when I got to my desk at 8 a.m. everyone had heard about it—not just the English teachers, but other teachers and students. It made me realize how America-focused Japan is. They were saying, “*America wa kowai yo ne.*” Students were sincerely asking me things like, “Does every American own a gun?” It was a very grim picture of America.

What advice do you have for current or former JETs who are thinking about delving into writing about Japan?

An Animated Talk with Japanamerica Author Roland Kelts

By Larry Heiman (Ibaraki-ken, 1997-99)

I think that somehow recording the experience that you have in Japan, whether it's a diary, a journal, or a blog, where you record the impressions of the trips, the places, the food, and other things, is a good idea. Let's face it, it's a privilege to be able to live and work and eat in a foreign country, and that offers an amazing opportunity.

I felt that it was sad that some other people did only what they had to do for their job and then just partied. Not that there is anything wrong with partying—Japan is a great place for that. But it seems to me that if you spend a whole year or three years doing that without recording something, it would be kind of sad to leave Japan and go home, get a day job, and just have your JET experience reduced to a blip in your mind.

It must be sort of terrifying to become a writer—you're taking the risk of not having a fixed salary as well as all of the other uncertainties. Where did you get the courage to take such a risk?

To some degree you want to know that you really, really love writing. I think Hemingway said, “Most people want to have written books, but they don't want to write books.” meaning that people like the idea of having written a book but they don't want to go through the hang-ups, insecurities, and sheer grunt work of actually writing one. You should do what you love to do. But people don't need another book. The libraries are full of fantastic books that people don't have enough time to read. So, if you love to do it, that's the most important thing. Language is my favorite mode of expression, so I feel it's what I'm meant to do.

What environment do you like to write in? Do you work best at a certain time of day, or in a certain place?

With fiction writing I am a bit precious. I really like to work late at night. When everybody else is asleep, there is a feeling of subversiveness. There is the feeling that you are getting away with something. For me, the kind of fiction writing I want to read and write feels a little subversive. I think good writing has an edge to it, and so it is good to get yourself in that zone somehow. I like concentrat-

ing on finding something that is known deeply, but isn't visible on the surface. Haruki Murakami calls this dragging a truth into the light. With nonfiction, I feel I can write just about anywhere. The longer pieces require more time and reflection, of course, but I can pull out my notes and write in public places like airport lounges, and then go back later and refine it the editing process.

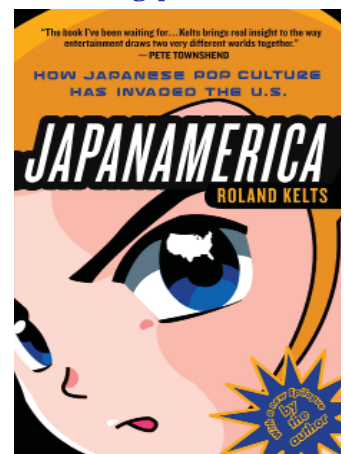
What are your main points of focus going forward?

My main goal right now is to get this novel *Access* out next year. It's something I've been carrying around for a while now. Like a lot of books, it just keeps evolving, and it's the main focus of my life right now. I still freelance a lot, and have been asked to do a follow-up to *Japanamerica*. I'm willing to if it's a different kind of book, one about the idea of Americans adopting elements of Asian culture in addition to pop culture.

It's one thing to get interested in anime and graphic novels, but it's quite another thing to go the next step and learn the language and adopt some of the sensibility and habits of the country—things like “think of others before you think of yourself,” as well as the sense of patience and responsibility in Japan and other Asian societies. What if some of those things become a part of Japanese culture that Americans want to adopt?

For more information on *Japanamerica*, visit www.japanamericabook.com.

For more updates, check out Roland's blog at www.japanamerica.blogspot.com.



[Cont. from 13] it's the music—from the beginning of making this album, I wanted to make something that will connect with a wider audience for this time, and for me to be saying, "hello! This is me, I'm introducing myself. Get to know me, listen to my music," that's the attitude, and I wanted to make something more mainstream, so...I think the music itself should do most of the job, basically."

Is it going to be tough to do extra promotion here, since you're probably also going to promote it in Japan? Because it comes out a couple of weeks earlier in Japan...

Ah, no, but...the priority is the U.S., honestly, because I made it for the U.S. And Japanese promotion, I—in Japan, see, I don't do much promotion for myself, anyway. I'm infamous for not doing promotion. I rarely do TV, I hardly do any magazines, I just do, like, one big interview and then I have a writer write, like 20 different articles for different magazines.... There isn't much for me to do in Japan, promotion-wise.

But of course back here in the U.S., it's kind of a different story.

I guess we're going for more of that mainstream promotion this time, and that's the priority.

Okay, so going back a little bit, the fact that *Exodus* was released in English also in Japan, was that a conscious decision? Was there ever any pressure either on your label over there, or from other people to say, "Well, if you do Japanese versions of these songs, they'll be so much more accessible, many more people will get to that?"

From the beginning, yeah...before doing that contract, I'd done a few songs where I had to translate, like for Kingdom Hearts, I had to make an English version of the song "Hikari," which became "Simple and Clean," and then also for Kingdom Hearts II, I had to make the Japanese version which was the song "Passion" and then the English version that was "Sanctuary," and that was so hard, it's just—it felt strained—and as a result, I'm happy that I worked hard to do those, because those English versions are really good and "Simple and Clean," I think, is a really good song, and people...most of the people that know me here, they know me for that, but it's not ideal for me as a writer, because I had to change the melodies for "Simple and Clean" and "Hikari," [Cont. on 22]

Destination Nippon JNTO and Kintetsu

By Sylvia Pertzborn
(Kyoto-fu, 1995-97)

Spring is finally here, and the cherry blossoms are slowly unfurling their delicate blooms, stirring up memories of my favorite time of year in Japan. Sakura reports, *hanami* parties and fabulous spring dishes excite my desire to visit again with the help of Japan National Tourism Organization and Kintetsu International.

Established in 1964 by the Japanese government to further international exchange through tourism, JNTO refocused its goals in 2003 when then-prime minister Junichiro Koizumi made tourism an important part of his economic agenda. "Before Koizumi, our budget for overseas promotion was small, but after 2003 we had a significant increase," said Akihiro Obata, marketing director for JNTO's New York office. From this, the global Yokoso! Japan Campaign, with its goal of bringing 10 million visitors to Japan by 2010 was conceived.

"In 2008, we had approximately 8.35 million visitors, which is 1.65 million away from our goal," Obata said. Although the first quarter of 2009 shows a decrease in visitors, JNTO's goal remains firm. "Many think it is impossible, but we will not give up," said Obata.

All JETs are encouraged to share their favorite anecdotes about Japan to help reach their goal of 10 million visitors, and stories will be featured on a blog currently under development. Who better to promote travel than the JET "Japan experts," according to Obata? When asked about his favorite Japan experience, the director, a fan of festivals, described the Kenka Matsuri (Fighting Festival) in his hometown of Himeji, where parade floats crash into each other. "Festivals are like a time machine where we get away from modern technology and experience ancient styles and customs," he said.

After you've planned everything you want to see and do using JNTO's homepage, you're ready to visit Kintetsu International to book your trip. You're probably familiar with the Kintetsu subway and rail lines, but did you know the company was founded in 1910 as the Osaka Electric Railroad? The company has since expanded



Director Akihiro Obata (far R.) and exec director Shuichi Kameyama (C.) with JNTO.

to include freight forwarding companies, department stores, restaurants, theaters, and hotel chains, becoming one of the largest travel companies on the planet with offices worldwide. KIE states on their Web site that they "are involved intimately in the way people move," which makes sense as they are one of the companies contracted to "move" 800 new JETs from across the U.S. to Japan this summer.

Although the Kintetsu International name is not as familiar here, "it was selected as one of the top 30 travel agencies in the U.S.," according to Bill Sarcona, assistant general manager of the New York office. KIE's goals in the U.S. market are to increase tourist traffic and generate a greater awareness of the company. Sarcona said he and his colleagues are "always looking for opportunities to expose more Americans to Kintetsu." Most recently, they held a cross-promotion with Sony Pictures to create a special *Memoirs of a Geisha* tour sponsored by Anime Selects on Comcast's video on demand broadcasts. And for all you classic manga fans, KIE has a new Yokai-Do Tour which includes an opportunity to visit the Mizuki Production studios and meet *GeGeGe no Kitaro* creator Shigeru Mizuki. Tour dates have yet to be confirmed, but Sarcona says an announcement is coming soon.

Kintetsu also prides itself on of-

fering clients a personal touch. "Online companies are okay for booking simple trips where little destination knowledge is necessary, but if you have no knowledge of how to travel throughout Japan, then KIE is a better choice," Sarcona said, noting KIE agents have plenty of "destination knowledge." If you're wondering if any of those agents are former JETs, Sarcona confirmed that in his 10 years with KIE, he has in fact worked with several JET alumni.

When asked for his personal suggestions for places to see in Japan, Sarcona recommended destinations "a bit off the beaten path" like Takayama, Himeji, and the islands of Kyushu, Shikoku or Hokkaido. "Because of the bullet trains and our affordable JR Pass, many popular destinations in Japan can be covered easily, quickly, and are relatively affordable," he said. When you purchase a roundtrip ticket to Japan, the deal is even sweeter with KIE's JET alumni 5% discount on the JR Pass.

So now that you know where to go to plan your trip and where to book it, *minna-san, ikimashou ka?*

For more information about JNTO, visit www.japantravelinfo.com. Send your Japan travel stories to them at info@jntonyc.org. Visit Kintetsu International's homepage at www.japanforyou.com.



From left: Bill Sarcona, Vanessa Connelly and Tad Fukunaga of Kintetsu.

'Anime Saved My Life': NY-Tokyo Founder Taeko Baba

By Marea Pariser (Kagoshima-ken, 2003-04)

If it's been packaged into mainstream Japanese pop culture—from J-pop to anime to films, video games, sports and robots—Tokyo native Taeko Baba has brought it to New York.

In 2001 Baba founded New York-Tokyo, a marketing and communications production company which she describes as “uniquely positioned to tap into the creative cultural vibe between New York and Tokyo.”

Since its inception, Baba has worked with some of the best music talent in Tokyo, including pop idols BoA, Pe'z and the Teriyaki Boys.

Desperate for exposure in the United States, Baba says, these A-list performers joined the New York-Tokyo music festivals in 2006 and 2007 without receiving any performance fee.

“Because normally, who is inviting the Japanese artists to the United States?” she asks rhetorically. “Only anime conventions. If they really want to make something happen in the United States, they have to invest money, [and] we give them the best venue and maximum exposure.”

The venue was Central Park and attendance was 7,000 people—much more than at festivals such as South by Southwest, Baba says.

It hasn't been an easy road for Baba, who met for an interview late on a Friday night, two days after a late-night event in Williamsburg that featured the artwork of Hirosher, who transformed aged skateboard decks into a helicopter sculpture.

She looks sleep deprived. Talking in quick sentences, she rushes on about her life and how she ended up as president of New York-Tokyo. Not the typical entrepreneur, with bleached blond hair in two perfect pigtails, she looks like the epitome of a Harajuku girl. It's not until we see the dark circles under her eyes that her age is revealed.

Arriving in the United States in the late 1990s, Baba came in search for an outlet after losing both her parents and at the same time breaking up with her longtime boyfriend.

“I couldn't do anything,” she recalls. “I was looking for what to do, and then I met anime. Anime saved my life. I didn't like it much in Japan because my family—my parents—were so strict about manga and that kind of thing,” she says.

It was when she was in the United States that she was properly introduced to anime, which helped get her through the tough times dealing with the loss of her parents. Perhaps what drew her to anime, she says, was the similarity she found of the characters to her own life.

“Every [character] has some problem about their childhood, like they lost their parents or something like that,” she says. “I didn't realize that all the manga and anime has the same story.... You know, they have some problem and they grew and then they try to fight for something.”

Baba said she became so inspired by anime that she contacted the University of Tokyo anime club and studied the culture until she was an expert on all things anime. Since she discovered anime in the U.S., she also studied the influence anime has on Americans.

In 2000, Japan Society held an anime symposium, inviting the top players in anime at the time. Executives for production houses from the U.S. and Japan came to watch and give presentations. Baba came as a presenter. Dressed head to toe in cosplay, she recalls giving an exciting presentation on the growth of anime in America.

Her presentation captured the attention of the



Asakusa Jinta perform at Japan Nite '09, presented by New York-Tokyo. (Adren Hart)

Sci Fi Channel, and she was hired to organize an anime film festival. From there, she created an online chat room, where anime fans in the America could communicate with anime directors.

It was there that she realized her potential, and the idea was born for what would become New York-Tokyo. With no business background, Baba claims she lost nearly her entire savings in the beginning: “I didn't know I had to get a sponsor to make an event. So I just did an event and many, many people came, but I lost about \$70,000.”

Shortly after 9/11 and finding herself wanting to cheer up New York, she organized an event that introduced robots from Japan, bringing in Sony iBot. In 2003 she received sponsorship from Fujisankei Communications International and worked with FCI up until 2008. After numerous music and film festivals, Baba said she's now ready to take a slight turn in her business, choosing to focus more on lifestyle rather than music.



In 2008 she took a break from “cool events” and focused on curating an event for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Last February, the Center held “JAPAN! Culture + Hyperculture,” which invited more than 450 artists to showcase the best in Japanese theater and dance, music, fashion, architecture, sculpture, poetry, literature, photography and film.

“That was a very good experience because I really want to be a curator,” Baba says.

New York-Tokyo also helped promote the South by Southwest Japan Nite 2009 tour, which hit New York on March 22. Showcasing eight bands emerging from Japan's rock scene, acts included Detroit7, a Tokyo-based trio led by female vocalist Tomomi Nabana; the “kings of Japanese punk” SA; the post-punk new wave-influenced indie rock outfit Sparta Locals; and Flip, an all-girl band from Okinawa and Omadaka, who embody a “seamless mixture of Japanese traditional-flavored folk songs and electronic music.”

New York-Tokyo also hosted a preview of the film *Departures* [see review on 19], which scooped up this year's Academy Award for best foreign language film. Not only was the film screened immediately after its premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival, but the star and director presented it and participated in a Q&A afterwards.

Beyond the events, Baba says the people she's met have made her company thrive. She said she doesn't hire Japanese staff to work with her because she wants to cater to the “cool” New Yorkers. In fact, Baba says some of her former interns went on to do the JET Programme. “It's a great program,” Baba says, and she hopes to work with more JET alumni in the future as New York-Tokyo grows.

For more on New York-Tokyo and to subscribe to their e-newsletter, visit www.newyork-tokyo.com/wp/.

View a photo gallery of Japan Nite 2009's New York gig by JET alum Adren Hart at www.flickr.com/photos/33296917@N07/sets/72157615718846891/.

Grateful Dead Win Oscar Departures Review

By Lyle Sylvander
(Yokohama-shi, 2001-02)

The Academy Award for best foreign language film is unlike the other Oscar categories in that Academy members must prove that they have seen all nominees before voting. Since subtitled films have a relatively small audience in the United States, the category is also largely free of the studio marketing and publicity blitz that accompanies the Hollywood awards season. As a result, the category has more credibility than many of the other categories and the winner usually wins on its aesthetic qualities rather than through industry lobbying.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that a relatively little-known Japanese film about the unlikely subject of *nokanshi* (professionals who cleanse and dress up bodies before burial) beat this year's favorite, France's *The Class* (winner of the Palm d'Or at Cannes), to receive the Oscar—the first Japanese film to do so since the category was established as a competitive one in 1957. Now that *Departures* (*Okuribito*) is being released to the general public, audiences can see for themselves how this “little film that could” won over the Academy voters.

The film follows the travails of

Daigo (played by pop idol-turned actor Masahiro Motoki), a professional cellist who finds himself unemployed when his Tokyo-based orchestra goes belly-up. With no immediate job prospects, he and his wife Mika (Ryoko Hirose) return to his abandoned childhood home in rural Yamagata. A printing error in the classified section of the local paper leads him to a local *nokanshi* business.

Thinking he has been hired to work at a travel agency (mistaking the word “departure” for its more mundane and earthly meaning), he expresses disgust when learning of the firm's true business but is persuaded to try the job out by the firm's president, Sasakisan (played by veteran Tsutomu Yamazaki of *Tampopo* fame). What follows is a story of both spiritual and emotional growth, as Daigo not only learns the fine art of his new job but comes to terms with his early abandonment by his father.

When Daigo's wife and friends learn of his new trade, they react with disgust and resentment. In Japan, it appears that the mechanics of death and the actual touching of dead bodies stigmatizes the occupation as “unclean” and fit



Departures star Masahiro Motoki and director Yojiro Takita at the NY screening.

only for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Director Yojiro Takita, however, films the *nokanshi* ceremony in such a delicately noble manner that it recalls the cinema of Yasujiro Ozu in its restrained artistry and elegance.

The ritual is not so much about methodically preparing the body for burial or cremation but rather preserving the living essence of the dearly departed. An accomplished *nokanshi* captures the person as he or she lived so that survivors can get one last look at the person they knew in life.

Daigo's journey from Tokyo to Yamagata has a preordained nature about it. By leaving his life as a professional musician for that of a *nokanshi*, he undergoes a spiritual journey into his past. As he refines his craft, under the tutelage of his surrogate father, Sasakisan, he discovers the truth of his biological

father and his newfound wisdom enables him to confront this truth with mature dignity. It would be unfair to give away the major plot points of the final reel, but screenwriter Kundo Koyama and director Takita successfully fuse Daigo's physical, spiritual and emotional journeys into one final destination point.

While Takita abandons his earlier restraint and gives in to melodrama at the end, he fortunately does not allow the film to drown in emotional excess. Apparently, it took twelve years for Motoki and Takita bring this film to fruition, and it would not have made it without their passion for the project, a passion which is clearly demonstrated on screen.

Departures opens in limited theatrical release on May 29. For complete listings, visit departures-themovie.com.

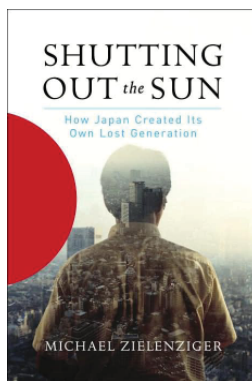
Book Corner Shutting Out the Sun By David Kowalsky (Hiroshima-ken ALT/CIR, 1991-93)

There hasn't been a lot of good news coming out of Japan in the last couple of months. Shoichi Nakagawa resigned as finance minister after a “drunken” display at the G7 meeting in Rome. Prime Minister Taro Aso's approval rating fell below 10 percent. Its economy, the world's second largest, recorded its third consecutive quarter of contraction—the worst decline in 35 years.

But while things are grim now, Japan's decline can be traced all the way back to 1989, the year its speculative “bubble economy” collapsed. What effect has so many years of financial troubles and slowing growth had on Japan's people? Michael Zielenziger addresses this question in his 2006

book *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation*. The overall aim of this ambitious book is, according to the author, to “unravel the social, cultural, and psychological constraints that have stifled the people of this proud, primordial nation and prevented change from bubbling up from within.”

Roughly half of the book is devoted to examining the disturbing plight of *hikikomori* (“joins together,” with the Japanese words *hiku*, or “pull,” with *komoru*, or “retire”), the name given to about one million adults. About 80 percent are male, who refuse to leave their bedrooms for months, or even years in extreme cases. The book title is the creative reference to these men literally shutting themselves away from the sun.



Zielenziger, who lived in Japan for seven years as the Tokyo bureau chief for Knight Ridder newspaper publishers, writes moving profiles of a half dozen *hikikomori*, their parents, and the people taking imaginative approaches to counsel them. As kids, extreme *ijime* (bullying) is common and *futoko* (school refusal)

is often the first stage. But perhaps most important is to understand why *hikikomori* choose to withdraw completely from a society they feel denies them any expression of self. The only “free space” they can control is their bedroom, a place to escape the constant judgment of others and the pressures of fitting in.

The second half of *Shutting Out the Sun* expands its scope to cover a wide range of topics about adults in their 20s through 40s: suicide,

alcoholism, women who avoid marriage and children, and the fetishizing of brand names. Also covered is a thorough explanation of what the “iron triangle”—corporations, politicians, and government bureaucrats—did to create Japan's economic mess in the first place.

Zielenziger insightfully shows parallels about Japan as a nation with the *hikikomori*, and speculates about Japan's future by saying one direction is to “undertake fundamental reforms and social adjustments to...integrate more effectively with the outside world.” The other direction? Act like a *hikikomori* who admits to having a problem, but doesn't get help. Japan can resist all but the most cosmetic responses to globalization. It won't be long before China replaces Japan first in regional and then global superiority, leaving Japan behind as a stable, second-rank power.

Read an exclusive interview with the author on page 20.

Talking with *Shutting Out the Sun* Author Michael Zielenziger By Kelly Nixon (Iwate-ken, 2003-06)

Have you ever known a Japanese person who always seemed to be wrapped up in their own world? This is a social phenomenon known as hikikomori, and in Japan it's on the rise, becoming the subject of books, films and numerous social studies that seem to indicate a crisis of sorts for an identity and status-conscious nation.

One such book is *Shutting Out the Sun*, Michael Zielenziger's study and commentary. The author took the time to answer some of JQ's pointed questions about the book and what he thinks about the future direction that Japan seems to be headed in.

Tell us what inspired you to undertake writing a book which attempts to shed light on the darker aspects of Japanese society.

After living for many years in Japan as a foreign correspondent, I felt it important to come to some understanding of why a country with such an inspired past was so clearly "losing its way" after the collapse of the economic bubble and could not emerge from its stagnation.

I did not originally seek to look at Japan's "dark side," but when I first learned of the million-plus talented and sensitive young Japanese who chose to stay hidden away at home, I felt this was an important metaphor, which could help unravel so much of the social and political deadlock I was witnessing.

Your book details the approach Japan took to its economic recession in the 1990s, which draws close comparison to the current global economic crisis. What is your personal view regarding America's decision last year to emulate Japan's recession exit strategy?

America's economic problems are not exactly the same as Japan's. One of the key differences is that the U.S. is a truly global economy, so that losses at U.S. banks are felt in Iceland, Germany, France, etc.

Most of Japan's debts when their banks came undone were held by other Japanese. This allowed Japan to take far more time to recognize and write off bad debts than the U.S. can be afforded. There is also far less collusion in U.S. financial institutions than in Japan's.

That being said, the decision by the U.S. Federal Reserve to boost government spending and lower interest rates quickly was very important. Japan waited quite a long time before acting with such decisiveness.

It was often said during the administration of prime minister Keizo Obuchi [1998-2000] that Japan's economic officials constantly offered solutions that were "too little, too late." The U.S. Fed is determined not to repeat that mistake, and Chairman Ben Bernanke intensively studied the Japanese banking meltdown.

In your opinion, is the Japanese government doing enough, or anything, about the "problems" forming within the country which may possibly lead to the entire nation insulating itself from globalization?

Not enough—Japan is quite schizophrenic on this topic. On the one hand, it would like to promote tourism and continue with important programs like JET to expose Japanese to foreigners and foreign influence.

On the other hand, it doesn't want to reform its immigration laws and when economic hard times come, it tries to entice Brazilian-Japanese who work in its factories to go back home.



Author Michael Zielenziger. (Paula Bronstein/Getty)

Japanese want tourists to visit, but wants to fingerprint them when they arrive. It wants to invest billions in overseas purchases, but makes it difficult for foreigners to invest in Japan. For many years, China actively courted—through tax breaks and the like—foreign investment in the Chinese economy. Japan tends to put up walls to block meaningful foreign investment.

Even though Japan is getting older and its population is falling, its leaders are most "afraid" of the outside world...and, I fear, would prefer to steer the country towards "splendid isolation."

I don't think a country can very easily "pick and choose" the nature of its exposure to globalization. Either it's relatively open, or it's pretty closed. I think Japan has demonstrated it would like to remain quite remarkably closed.

At the end of your book you write, "Naturally, all errors of insight, omission and

misunderstanding are mine alone to bear." What type of positive feedback and criticism did you receive immediately following the book's release? Has that feedback changed over the last few years?

I am sure some people in Japan were quite unhappy with my book, but actually virtually all the reviews the book has received were very positive, including ones in the Japanese press.

Once the book was published in Japanese, I was invited to give a keynote lecture at Kyoto University to discuss the interaction of the social issues I described including suicide, birth collapse and alcoholism...and contacts in various Japanese ministries told me they found the book refreshing, truthful and innovative.

In America, reviews in publications like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post* were very favorable. I guess it's sometimes frustrating to read pieces contributed by reviewers who never set foot in the country.

Since the book was published in 2006, has there been other news—in the headlines or otherwise—which fit into the same theme of *Shutting Out the Sun*? Are you planning to continue writing about this subject in a follow-up book?

I have seen numerous stories recently that demonstrate the issues I discussed in the book have not disappeared. The rise of young suicides coordinated on the Internet is one example. The disaffection with the education system is another. Certainly the birth rate in Japan has not adjusted favorably.

However, it is also fair to say that the rapid rise of Internet blogging as a means of communications by young people has altered the social dynamic in a positive way. New blog sites give young people more opportunity to interact with others and communicate with outsiders, which is very healthy.

I have also seen the issues my book attempts to tackle come up more frequently now in plays and movies. The film *Tokyo Sonata*, for instance, comes right out of the pages of *Shutting Out the Sun*. Last year, I gave a talk in Manhattan after the Off-Off-Broadway production of a play about *hikikomori* in Japan.

How many years had you lived in Japan before writing this book? Are you entertaining the thought of returning to Japan for any prolonged amount of time?

I lived for seven years in Japan as a foreign correspondent before writing the book and always welcome the chance to go back. Japan will always have an important place in my head and my heart...

That being said, there are few realistic opportunities for journalism at the moment in Japan, and the economic climate has not made it very attractive for new foreign equity players to set up shop there.

How can JETs benefit by reading *Shutting Out the Sun*? In your opinion, is this a book which should be read before travelling to Japan, or after spending some

time living in the country?

I think most foreigners find some behaviors about Japan absolutely baffling. They tend to ascribe this to a feeling that somehow Japanese are “weird.”

The point of my book is that most of these behaviors are not at all “weird,” but seem absolutely logical in the context of Japanese mores, social conventions and group dynamics. So I think the book would be a very important part of the “toolkit” for anyone planning to be in Japan for an extended period, or for someone who has already been there and keeps wondering...Why do the Japanese Act This Way?

I think JETs can be especially demonstrating to other Japanese that there are alternatives: other ways to think about the world and other ways to think about an individual's place within it.

What resources would you suggest to those who are interested in pursuing further research into the topics covered in *Shutting Out the Sun*?

Now that the government has acknowledged the problem of birth collapse and *hikikomori*, the Health and Welfare Ministry sometimes issues reports on these, and the Kokoro Institute at Kyoto University is also preparing to investigate some of these subjects. I think it is particularly important if foreign researchers would work together with Japanese counterparts to more carefully investigate some of the phenomena I describe in the book. I think a wealth of innovative Ph.D. dissertations could emerge from such collaborative work.

Young people in Japan are disaffected, underemployed and pessimistic about their future. Any efforts to work with these creative young adults to have recast Japanese society would be well worthwhile.

What are some of your current pursuits and interests?

I write a monthly column for the *Nikkei Shimbun's* English weekly; I also consult and do writing assignments for corporates and non-profits related to Asia. Because of the economic crisis in the U.S., I now do a significant amount of research and writing for the *AARP Bulletin* and for a new blog called *Trueslant*.

For more on the author and reviews of *Shutting Out the Sun*, visit www.shuttingoutthesun.com.

My Two Cents About a 500-Year-Old Tradition: Awaji Puppet Theater Returns to NY By Beata Wilk (Fukui-ken, 2004-08)

“*Ohisashiburi!*” rang throughout the hall as friends joined together, students met with teachers, and colleagues reunited at Japan Society from March 5 to 7 to see a rare and unique performance by the Awaji Puppet Theater company.

Representing a 500-year-history of bunraku (Japanese puppet theater), the company is so famed that Awaji has become synonymous with the art, and to ensure that everyone would understand the Japanese-language performance, a TV monitor was set up on the left side of the stage to provide an English translation and the right side of the stage was reserved for the chanter and the musician.

I took my seat and looked ahead to the stage. A brightly painted curtain stared back at me. I saw three images: a bright red bridge, which I assume is the Awaji Bridge of Hyogo-ken, a set of puppet heads, and a kimono-like dress painted on the curtain. The air of the auditorium was thick with anxiety as everyone eagerly waited for the performance to begin. The lights dimmed and the curtain was drawn, revealing a figure clad in black from head to toe, even his face masked by a black high-pointed hood. The show began.

The evening consisted of three acts with three separate stories. Similar to kabuki, the first act was a comedy, and the two acts that followed were dramas. Beginning with a comedy was a nice way to, for lack of better word, ease the audience into the world of bunraku. I also found that as the show went on I was no longer distracted by the three hooded figures behind each puppet, and my focus remained solely on the puppets themselves.

Act one was “Ebisu-Mai,” or the dance of the Japanese god of fishermen and fortune. The famed Ebisu visits an *ojis*an in Nishinomiya, a small fishing village. The old man welcomes Ebisu to his home and offers his guest some saké. The comedic scene continues as the happy god continues drinking. He drinks to the friendly townsmen, to the prosperity of the village, to the health of the audience, and on so forth.

The company cleverly incorporated some toasts tailored to New Yorkers: *kampai* “to world peace,”

“to more green cars in New York City” and “to the Yankees winning the World Series.” The happy god drinks until the saké is gone and then staggers around and dances, bringing prosperity to the village. Ebisu then leaves the townsman's home and heads out fishing on a boat. The scene ends with Ebisu catching a big red snapper, another symbol of prosperity.



Awaji's Ebisu-Mai puppet. (Tadashi Ogino)

In acts two and three, the technique was equally impressive that I found myself immersed in the emotionally charged stories. The performers, puppeteers, musicians and chanter united to execute a brilliant performance.

In act two we move away from comedy to “Ferry Crossing Scene,” a tale of heartache and jealousy from Hidakagawa Iriai Zakura. The legend is about Anchin and Kiyohime, the woman who becomes consumed by her love for him. Within the play, Prince Sakuragi is in danger when a feud breaks out over the emperor's successor. The prince disguises himself as a monk, Anchin, so that he can flee to Dojoji Temple with his love, Odamakihime. Kiyohime falls in love with the monk, unaware that he is actually the prince.

The ferry crossing scene picks up as Kiyohime is in pursuit of her Anchin, whom she saw fleeing with another woman, eventually consuming her with jealousy. The music builds, stronger now, as Kiyohime throws herself in the river and begins to swim towards the temple at the other side of the river. The maddening beats continue as she changes into a serpent. The

curtain closes as she reaches the other side of the river.

The last story is the “Mountain Scene” from “Tsubosaka Reigenki,” or “The Miracle at Tsubosaka Temple.” The one act play tells the story of a couple and a miracle that happens at Tsubosaka Temple, the sixth of the thirty-three pilgrimage temples dedicated to the Kannon Goddess in Shikoku. The scene begins after Sawaichi, a blind musician, has falsely accused his wife, Osato, of being unfaithful. Sawaichi then learns that his wife has been going to pray to the Kannon in hopes of her husband's sight being restored. Ashamed for suspecting his wife of being unfaithful, Sawaichi decides to take the pilgrimage up the mountain to Tsubosaka Temple.

After reaching the temple, Sawaichi asks his wife to return home. Now alone on the mountain, Sawaichi thinks of how good she has been to him and concludes that she deserves a happy life. He jumps off the cliff, leaving only his cane behind. Osato returns to find his cane, sees his body down in the valley below, following him to her death. The Kannon, Goddess of Mercy, is witness to this and is greatly moved by Osato's devotion to her husband, and their great sacrifice. She restores their lives and even Sawaichi's sight.

The curtain falls and I am once again pleasantly surprised at how realistic and “human” the movements of the puppets are. The chanting and music played a key role in driving the story and heightening emotions. The chanter, musicians and puppeteers must work harmoniously to create such a dynamic performance. These aspects are astounding and make it difficult to determine at any given moment what the proper focal point is.

It's no surprise why the Awaji tradition of puppetry has survived and remained popular for over 500 years, and I hope this Japanese cultural gem lasts at least another 500 years. Hopefully, the wait for an encore engagement in New York won't be as long!

Special thanks to Shannon Jowett at Japan Society for media assistance. For upcoming events, visit www.japansociety.org.



Hikki at Sephora Fifth Avenue with Z100 radio's Carolina in March. (Adren Hart)

[Cont. from 17] and when you change the language you're singing in, the same melodies don't work—and as a writer, it's just very frustrating to have, like—I wrote these melodies for Japanese words, and to have to write in English for that, it's just not right. And then for this contract with Island Def Jam, in the beginning I separated it to this English-language album, and I don't do Japanese translations. I just, my integrity as an artist just would not take that, could not take that.

Has anyone ever said to you, "First Love' would be a huge hit for Mariah Carey," or anyone who's popular right now. Have you ever had to turn down someone who said, "well, if you sang a duet with this person and it's one of your songs, that will increase your exposure?" or "if you maybe tailored a certain song for someone else, they could be really big?" We've seen lots of examples of that happen many times in pop history. Actually, I've just begun considering those options recently, because working with [producer] Stargate, they're like, "You're a really good songwriter...do you want to write for some other artists?" And now that we're really in touch and we know each other, we've actually spoken a bit about that and I've been thinking about, well, to have someone cover my old song, and maybe I can write the English words to it for an American artist, or change it a bit, I mean, that's...a very timely question, I've just been thinking about that.

I've been thinking about it for years, so I'm glad I came up with that one. Oh, okay! [laughs]

Who would you like to see, if you had a wish list of other artists, I guess an American or English-speaking artist, to cover your song or do a song that you wrote, are there any people in particular with whom you've always thought, it would be such an honor to

see that person perform?

[At this point, Hikki's father/producer/manager Teruzane Utada and mother Junko Utada enter the room and take seats on the other side of the table]

The thing is, the people—the artists that I really really admire, most of them tend to be writers themselves, like singers and songwriters, so it's hard for me to imagine any of them covering my songs—just like I don't cover people's songs.

Do you have any plans to tour here or do any additional live or concert appearances?

Yeah, actually there are some appearances that are not set yet [Hikki later did a three-city Sephora appearance tour in March], but we're thinking about—some are ongoing, underway. And a tour, we're not planning yet, but I do think I should. [laughs]

Let me know, we'll be there in the front row.

[Laughs] As long as there's a demand, yeah, I think we will.

What's your favorite ice cream flavor?

As I've grown, I've come to like, how do you say it in English? [to her father] "Choco minto." Mint chocolate has become my favorite.

About Kuma Chang, what's the fascination, and is there anything else that you always like to have with you all the time?

All I need is Kuma. It's funny, I guess...he and I would make a very good team of therapists. When I actually talk with him, and through this dialogue I often discover things about myself that I [have] tucked away in my subconscious, and I can become more honest about, and discover what I feel deep down—it comes out, by talking with this big teddy bear, that—I do his talking, too, but here's a funny therapeutic aspect to it.

What's your favorite thing about New York?

About New York? Oh, New York is

just New York. I love...I guess this is from when I was really small, we grew up in New York. I walked a lot, so the fact that you can just walk anywhere. It's a great city to walk in, like when I'm in L.A., I don't even have a driving license, I'm like, "bummer, I can't go anywhere without a car, I can't drive, what am I supposed to do?," but New York, of course you can cab it if it's a long-distance drive, but...I just love to walk forever and ever and ever, and they have a huge park right next to the biggest shopping areas, so it's a great mixture and you get the best of both worlds with city and the park, and just the fact that I can walk around everywhere and have a great time wherever I walk.

Are you going to be involved in the soundtrack for Kingdom Hearts III?

I don't think so, I don't know. Probably not.

Mr. Utada: We said no to Disney.

You turned down Disney?

Mr. Utada: Yeah. Because they don't pay.

My parents work for Disney World, so I'm sure they'd be in agreement with you on that.

They can have a drink over that. [all laugh]

What goals do you have in music, in life, anything else, in the future, and how do you want to be remembered?

Goals and...I really don't have goals, [laughs] I never have goals or plans for the future.

It's not a huge thing, basically, for this album to become the greatest thing that's ever happened to the U.S.?

Well, that would be great if it happened, but it's not something...I'll

do what I can on my part to try to make this happen for this project but...I think it's silly to plan ahead—if you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, then that might change everything, so what's the point of planning?

I just don't have any life planning in me, because everything happened so unexpectedly, and things never happen the way you expect them to, and to me it's better that way; I love that about life. But I do, eventually, want to take a long break and have kids and play with them for a while, that kind of thing, some time, but I don't have any specific idea of when or where I want to live, or career-wise, what I want to do in the future...I have no idea.

And being remembered, is it the same?

Remembered...I'd like being remembered more as an artist than a celebrity, and an intelligent artist with integrity. Honesty, an honest artist.

Any other messages for our readers and members of the JET Programme and JETAA New York?

Umm, New York is the best city after everything, isn't it? [all laugh] I guess I might bump into these people while walking around New York.

Or at the concert.

Yeah, or at a concert. [laughs]

Visit www.jetaany.org/magazine/utada for our complete interview with Hikki.

Special thanks to Caroline Bubnis at THE DOOR for photos and media assistance. For more on Utada and This is the One, visit her homepage at www.utada.com.



Over 1,000 fans lined up in the cold to see Hikki at Sephora. (Utada.com)

THE FUNNY PAGE

The surprise Oscar win of *Departures* earlier this year has revived interest in Japanese cinema, becoming a new source of national pride for its people. But what about some of the less worthy candidates snubbed at past ceremonies? *JQ* is proud to present the...

Top 14 Nihonteki Films Overlooked by the Academy

14. *Snow White and the Seven Samurai*

13. *The Rord of the Lings*

12. *Kung Fu Badtz-Maru*

11. *Raiders of the Lost Panties*

10. *Citizen Akane*

9. *Three Salarymen and a Little "My Way"*

8. *Hello, Kitty!*

7. *A Fish Called Honda*

6. *Love Hotel Story*

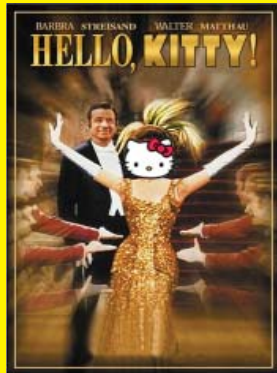
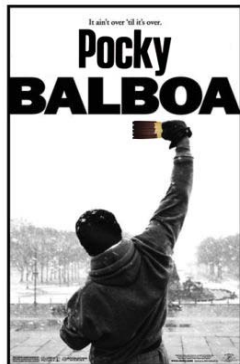
5. *Dragonball Evolution*

4. *Pocky Balboa*

3. *Sex, Lies, and Digital Pets*

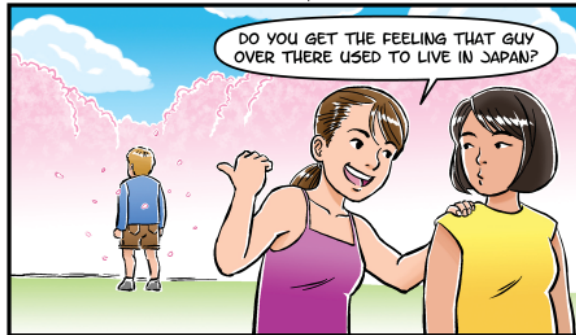
2. *Dude, Where's My Omiyage?*

1. *Gimme Shelter, Central Heating, a Flushable Toilet, and Neighbors Who Don't Have an Unhealthy Obsession with My Private Parts*



Life After the B.O.E.

by David Namisato, Aomori-ken CIR, 2002-04



We all came back with some degree of cherry blossom obsession, didn't we?

Courtesy of JETAA Toronto's newsletter. For more Life After the B.O.E., check out www.namisato.org.

Let's Make Chirashizushi!

By Sylvia Pertzborn (Kyoto-fu, 1995-97), recipe courtesy of Akemi Shinjo



Directions

- First, prepare the sushi rice.
- Rinse rice until water is clear. Drain water and let it soak for about 30 minutes before cooking.
- Mix vinegar, sugar and salt in a saucepan. Stir over low heat until sugar dissolves. Let mixture cool.
- Once the rice is done, spread it in a large bowl (non-metallic) or on a plate and sprinkle with sushi vinegar. Traditionally, wooden bowls (called *sushi-oke*) are used along with a *shamoji* (rice spatula) for quick mixing without smashing it.
- You can use a fan as you mix to cool and remove the moisture from the rice.

Chirashizushi is a bowl of sushi rice with other ingredients mixed in. It is commonly eaten in Japan because it is filling, fast and easy to make. Chirashizushi most often varies regionally because it is eaten annually as a part of the Doll Festival, celebrated only during March in Japan. Now you can enjoy this spring dish by following this easy-to-make recipe!

Now for the *chirashi* (scattered) part of the recipe. Here are some suggestions, but feel free to choose your favorite toppings:

Ingredients

- 2 cups rice
- 2 ¼ cups water
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 ½ tablespoons salt

- Eggs
- Raw tuna or salmon
- Shiitake
- Lotus root
- Cucumbers
- Boiled shrimp

KIE - The # 1 Experts To Japan!



Discounted Air Fare

We have the lowest rates to Japan and many other Asian destinations.



Hotel and Tours

KIE has specially negotiated hotel rates for many properties in Asia.



Japan Rail Passes

This is the most affordable and convenient way to travel throughout Japan.

Please contact us for more information about all our products and services.



www.japanforyou.com

Toll Free: **1-800-422-3481**

KINTETSU INTERNATIONAL

Hours: 9:00am - 5:30pm EST. (Mon. - Fri.)