

**THE
NEW
ISSUE**

JQ
JETaany **NY** **QUARTERLY
MAGAZINE**
jetaany.org/magazine

**JERO
EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW**

**CHIP KIDD
TALKS ABOUT
HIS NEW
BATMAN
BOOK**

INSIDE THE JLGC

**THE HISTORY OF
JAPAN AIRLINES**

**ALL ABOUT
JETWIT**

**CATCHING UP
WITH RANDALL
DAVID COOK**

**Q&A: SHOGUN
MACBETH**

**JOOST BRINGS
NTV HOME**

**WE TACKLE
SPEED DATING**

THE LATEST FEATURES

MUSIC, MOVIES, NEWS,
THEATRE, DINING,
BOOKS, CULTURE

BRINGING JAPAN A
LITTLE CLOSER TO YOU

Winter 2009 Vol. 18 Issue No. 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 Letter From the Editor / Letter From the President
 4 Nippon News Blotter
 5 JETAAnnouncements
 6 East Meets West
 7 Nihonjin in New York Featuring the JLGC
 By Junko Ishikawa
 8 JETlog
 Featuring Sean Sakamoto
 9 JetWit.com
 Q&A with Steven Horowitz
 9 Catching Up with Randall David Cook
 By Lyle Sylvander
 10 Youth for Understanding
 By Sylvia Pertzborn
 11 Theatre Review: *Shogun Macbeth* / John Briggs Q&A
 By Olivia Nilsson and Adren Hart
 12 Speekit LLC: Kevin Kajitani Interview
 By Junko Ishikawa
 13 Jero: The JQ Interview
 By Justin Tedaldi
 14 Joost!: Japanese TV on Your PC
 By Rick Ambrosio
 15 Film Review: *Sukiyaki Western Django*
 By Elizabeth Wanic
 16 An Inside Look at Japan Airlines
 By Kelly Nixon
 17 Japan Society's Best of Tora-san Series
 By Matt Matysik
 18 Chip Kidd Talks *Bat-Manga!*
 By Justin Tedaldi
 19 Book Corner: Natuso Kirino's *Real World*
 By David Kowalsky
 19 Restaurant Spotlight: Wajima
 By Allen Wan
 20 Adventures in SwirlySwirlDates
 By Rick Ambrosio and Nicole Bongiorno
 21 Yosakoi Dance Project
 By Kirsten Phillips
 22 The Tale of Eric and Ozawa
 By Rick Ambrosio
 23 Top 14 List / Next Issue / Sponsors Index



While it's not a new chibi-Escalade, we've awarded some pretty spiffy prizes to the winners of our "new" anecdote contest.

Therese Stephen (Iwate-ken, 1996-99)
 Dinner for two at Bao Noodles (www.baonoodles.com), owned by Chris Johnson (Oita-ken, 1992-95), 2nd Ave. between 22nd & 23rd Sts.

Rick Ambrosio (Ibaraki-ken, 2006-08)
 \$25 Gift Certificate at Kinokuniya Bookstore, 1071 Avenue of the Americas

Meredith Hodges-Boos (Ehime-ken, 2003-05)
 One item with free delivery at Waltzing Matilda's NYC (waltzingmatildasnyc.com), an Aussie-style bakery owned by Laura Epstein (Gunma-ken, 2001-02)

Andecdotes start on page 8.

JETAA NY

Quarterly Magazine

Editor

Justin Tedaldi
magazine@jetaany.org

President

Megan Miller
president@jetaany.org

Vice President

Shree Kurlekar
vicepres@jetaany.org

Secretary

Meredith Wutz
secretary@jetaany.org

Treasurer

C.J. Hoppel
treasuren@jetaany.org

Social Coordinator

Monica Yuki
social@jetaany.org

Philadelphia Representatives

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

Pittsburgh Representative

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

New Jersey Representative

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

Webmaster

Lee-Sean Huang
webmaster@jetaany.org

Database Coordinator

Shannan Spisak
database@jetaany.org

For more info, subscribe to the weekly e-mail by contacting our secretary or check out jetaany.org for updated announcements

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

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

Letter From the Editor

Hello there, ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to the new issue of *JETAA NY Quarterly* (or **JQ** for short), the magazine that brings Japan a little closer to you. This edition is all about New. New year, new U.S. president, a new editor (me), a new design, some new future Pulitzer Prize-winning writers, and, most importantly of all, new features.

It's not every day we get to profile superstars in our pages, but our new issue's got one: an exclusive interview with Pittsburgh-born enka phenom **Jero**. More than one-third of Japan's households tuned in on New Year's Eve to watch his "dream performance," and Jero tells us what he's currently up to, along with sharing some kind words about JET!

For more new stuff, check out our Nippon News Blotter, a handy update of recent top news stories from Japan. East Meets West poses a question our to readers from both sides of the pond to show just what a unique experience living abroad is. Nihonjin in New York focuses on Japanese companies and organizations here in the city, and JETlog is alums and current JET Programme participants on life in Japan today. Of course, we still have all the arts, culture, anecdotes, humor and world-at-large stuff you remember.

Feedback, story suggestions and ad inquiries (hint!) are absolutely encouraged, so drop me a line at the e-mail address down the page (the one above the bowls of rice). Finally, a huge triple encore dedication those who helped give this issue its signature look, voice and style, particularly Anson Mau and Aya Shimizu. The winds of change are blowing strong here at **JQ**, and I thank you for all your dedication and support as we "jet" into a new era together.

Dozo!

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



Letter From the President

Dear Members,

Lately, it seems that the only constant thing in our topsy-turvy world is change. And what better way to celebrate this tumultuousness in our lives than with an homage to all things New. Economic woes seem to have given way—at least temporarily—to an excited optimism as our country's new president takes office and offers hope for brighter days. It seems that everyone is eager to forget 2008 and the recent past, and in spite of the lingering predictions concerning further economic collapse, it is with a hopeful and resilient energy that we watch 2009 unfold.

In our own small way, JETAA NY is seizing the New and embracing change. Moving into our third year as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, we now have a seasoned board of directors and a growing executive committee. In keeping with best non-profit business practices, we are moving towards a new system for selecting our organization's leadership, whereby executive officers will be appointed by the board of directors (with input from our general membership) and board members will be elected by the membership via a quorum.

We are also constantly looking to reshape our organization to support our ever-evolving membership base. To that end, we conducted a membership survey in late 2008 to hear from the source how we can best support you. The results are being compiled and we will use this information to implement new strategies for reaching a broader, more diverse alumni network. Although the survey is now closed, we always encourage your involvement, ideas and feedback to president@jetaany.org.

And finally, as you have probably noticed, we have a fresh new approach to our chapter publication, now a quarterly *magazine*. Please help us spread some much-needed optimism and focus on the New in New York this New Year!

Yours anew,

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



Creative type? Send your ideas and comments to magazine@jetaany.org.

JETAA NY Quarterly. The greatest gift of all. Contact database@jetaany.org for a hard copy.



Nippon News Blotter

A Quarterly Roundup of Japan's Top Stories



11/05/08: Music producer **Tetsuya Komuro** and two others were arrested on suspicion of defrauding a company president of Ashiya, Hyogo prefecture, out of ¥500 million over the sale of copyrights to songs created by Komuro. (Xinhua)

11/07/08: Crimes committed by elderly people, particularly shoplifting and pickpocketing, are surging in rapidly aging Japan, with the number of senior offenders doubling in the past five years, according to a government report. (International Herald Tribune)

11/21/08: **Keidanren**, Japan's biggest business organization, is worried the nation's workers aren't having enough sex. The group urged its 1,632 member companies to start so-called family weeks that give employees more time for playing with the kids and having more children to reverse a declining birth rate. (Bloomberg)

12/12/08: **Toyota Motor** announced that it expected its first loss in 70 years in its core vehicle-making business. (International Herald Tribune)

1/06/09: Japan's leading organized crime expert said that the global financial crisis is now squeezing the economy so badly that it's hurting the **Yakuza**, or Japanese Mafia, hitting their real estate and finance holdings and forcing them to branch out into new fields like weddings and funerals. (ABC News AU)

1/29/09: Ginza's landmark **Kabuki-za** theater, which is to be dismantled and rebuilt due to its deteriorating state, will be reborn as a 150-meter-tall theater and office complex, expected to be completed by spring 2013. (Daily Yomiuri)

1/29/09: Tokyo's **Tsukiji**, dubbed "the fish market at the center of the world," is being forced to move in the year 2014 to a site laced with cancer-causing chemicals. (Bloomberg)

2/02/09: Sumo wrestler **Wakakirin**, 25, was busted for the possession of cannabis, the first Japanese-born athlete of his kind to be arrested on such a charge. (ABC News AU)

2/02/09: Japan's **Mount Asama** volcano erupted, spewing smoke almost two kilometers into the air and causing ash to drift over parts of Tokyo. There were no reports of injuries or damage. (BBC)

2/3/09: *Dragon Ball* creator **Akira Toriyama** illustrated J-pop singer **Ayumi Hamasaki** for the CD art of "Rule," her theme song for the upcoming live action film *Dragonball Evolution*, which will premiere in Japan on March 13. (J!-ENT)

2/4/09: A sewage treatment facility in Nagano prefecture has recorded a higher gold yield from sludge than can be found at some of the world's best mines. It expects to earn about ¥15 million from the ashes of the sludge. (Reuters)

2/6/09: Japanese police arrested the 75-year-old head of bedding company **L&G** and 21 others suspected of operating an alleged \$2.5-billion Ponzi scheme that sucked in tens of thousands of people, the nation's biggest fraud of its kind. (Financial Times)

2/12/09: Electronics giant **Pioneer Corp.** said it would cut 10,000 jobs worldwide and quit the television business as it braces for a record loss in the year to March. (AFP)

2/16/09: Arriving in Tokyo, **Hillary Rodham Clinton** became the first U.S. Secretary of State in nearly 50 years to begin tenure with a trip to Asia, lauding the U.S.-Japan partnership as "a cornerstone of our efforts around the world." (Washington Post)



DISCOVER JAPAN

With JALPAK, Japan is now within your reach!

- Air Tickets
 - JR Rail Passes
 - Special Tours
 - Hotels
 - Car Rentals
 - Flex Packages
- and more

JTB JTB Global Travel, Inc.

1212 Avenue of the Americas, 19th Fl, New York, NY 10036
 Toll Free: 1-888-352-5725
 Tel: 212.850.7474 • Fax: 212.850.7490
 URL: www.jalpak.com • E-mail: jpinyc@jtbgt.com



JETA Announcements



On Friday, January 23, nearly three dozen *paatii* animals gathered at traditional Japanese restaurant **Naniwa** (East 46th between Fifth & Madison) for the annual **JETAA NY Shinnenkai** to enjoy all-you-can-eat shabu-shabu and, more importantly, all-you-can-drink alcohol.

Adding to the nostalgia factor was tatami seating and paper sliding doors, kicking the new year off with fond memories of days in Japan gone but not forgotten. On the menu that evening was beef, seafood yosenabe, and did we mention the all-you-can-drink? A big *domo* to Social Coordinator **Monica Yuki** for organizing and all who attended. See you next decade!

Seated left to right: **C.J. Hoppel**, **Katrina Barnas**, **Carolyn Okabe**, **Nancy Ikehara**, **Alyssa Hannah**

While we're on the subject of new things, **JQ** has a new contributor for this issue. Originally from Denencho-fu, Tokyo, please welcome **Junko Ishikawa**!

Following a string of interpreting assignments in Kenya, Junko moved here in 2000 to attend the Music Composition and Media program at New School University and NYU, and is now a media researcher, social/cultural writer and English to Japanese translator for various organizations, as well as a Japanese instructor for Fortune 500 business professionals.



Hello, my name is **Kiyora Linda Torres**, baby of **Meredith Wutz**. Kiyora stands for "grace and beauty," which suits me perfectly! I was born on December 18th at a whopping seven pounds, 14 ounces.

My favorite pastimes are eating, sleeping, crying and watching Maury Povich with Mommy. I also enjoy long walks in the park—in a stroller, of course!

I'm happy to say that I'm a proud BOJ: Baby of JET. *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!!!*



Now's your chance to share with the world the moments that stir your memories.

Ever have a moment that literally doesn't make sense, but does in another language?

Did you take a picture? Make it last even longer.

Technical quality, clarity and composition are all important, but so too is a flair for the unexpected and the ability to capture the right moment. We are excited to see your personal creativity and unique artistic vision in order to crystallize your **Lost in Translation Moment**.



Enter **JQ's**

National Photo Contest Today!

For a chance to win one-of-a-kind Photo Crystal by ICE, valued at over \$100!

A "Lost in Translation Moment" is the theme for our first photo contest to commemorate JQ's relaunch as a magazine.



The ICE (Indelible Creations Enterprise) team is honored to present to the finalists of this photo contest with hand-selected Photo Crystals that best suit the winning photographs in order to crystallize your **Lost in Translation Moment**



The rules for the contest are as follows:

Please submit your best "Lost in Translation Moment" captured in a photo. **Do your best to make the judges see the connection.**

Registration is **FREE**.

You may submit as many photographs as you'd like, but only one of your photos will be selected. Three finalists will be selected. The entries of all three finalists will be published in our spring 2009 edition of **JQ** magazine.

The deadline for submissions is Friday, April 3, at 11:59 p.m. (Year of the Ox.)

Please enter your photos only as described above. Unfortunately, we can only accept digital files, not prints, CDs, etc.

We reserve the right to disqualify photos for any reason, including but not exclusive to, offensive materials of any sort, infringement on someone else's intellectual property or copyrights, etc.

A panel of judges will choose three finalists based on artistry and how well they show the meaning of the theme. Finalists will be contacted only with the e-mail address provided. Shipping addresses will be requested only for winning photos. U.S. delivery only.

Should you have any other questions, contact magazine@jetaany.org or jetaaphotocontest@indeliblecreation.com.

For more information on the sponsor of these Photo Crystal awards as well as JET special discounts, please see the ICE advertisement on **page 13**.

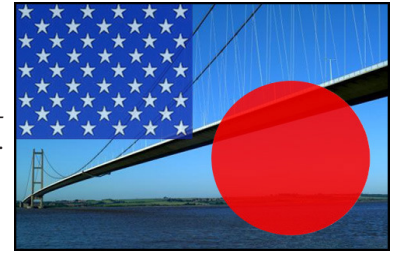
To enter:

- JET or JET AA members only
- All Photos must be submitted in JPG, BMP, GIF, PNG and TIF formats only and **please do NOT send files larger than 2mb**
- Only original photographs will be accepted (no composites or illustrations)
- Please e-mail a digital copy of your photograph to: magazine@jetaany.org and jetaaphotocontest@indeliblecreation.com
- Put "Photo Contest" in the subject line
- Put the following information in the body:
 - **First Name, Last Name, City, State, E-mail Address**
 - **Up to three sentences describing your photo** (not necessary, but recommended)

Enter Today!

East Meets West

Do Americans and Japanese really think differently about the same things? In this new feature, we pose a question to JET alums and Japanese who have all lived in New York to find out. This issue's two-part question is...



What was your biggest culture shock living in another country? How did you deal with it, and what kind of reverse culture shock did you experience after returning home?



Keiko Mitsunaga (Originally From Okayama-ken)
I have two: the first is the length of public bathroom doors! You can see people's legs and, oh, I was not comfortable with it. I had no choice but to get used to it.
The other is we see so many old and beaten-up cars on the highways...but I have learned to love old cars when I met my husband Scott [Hiniker, (Nagasaki-ken 1996-98)] and his Toyota van from '86!



Meredith Hodges-Boos (Ehime-ken, 2003-05)
My biggest cultural shock when I arrived in Japan was the quietness in the busses, trains and planes. At first it was almost eerie that no one spoke (other than the very old or the very young), and the rides passed by like dreams. When I returned to the States for Christmas my first year, I missed that hush. I found myself grumbling at the loud, boisterous people. All the noise, noise, noise, noise! It made me feel like the Grinch.



Kimiko Nakatake (Originally From Fukuoka-ken)
Culture shock: full frontal nudity in a prestigious Broadway production. (I was alone in center orchestra, first row surrounded by 90% gay couples.)



Steven Horowitz (Aichi-ken, 1992-94)
One of my greatest culture shocks going to Japan was realizing that formal meetings were more about just establishing an initial relationship, limiting my answers to less-substantive, easily-understood, bite-sized nuggets. Upon returning home, one of the big culture shocks for me were these two American culture shifts: 1) *Seinfeld*; and 2) the advent of coffee menus featuring cappuccinos, lattes and other words I'd never heard of.



Meg Kakuda (Originally From Yamanashi-ken)
The college students wore sunglasses in class and would say "yo" to the professor. (My college was full of young kids...!)



Stacy Smith (CIR Kumamoto-ken, 2000-03)
The patience of Japanese people astounds me, and that was my first taste of culture shock. I remember going to the post office early on in my time there, and being amazed at how quietly people waited despite long lines and slow service. Of course there is a similar situation at post offices here in the States, but people are a lot less quiet about it! I always want to mix the good qualities of both countries together, especially in customer relations!

Yokoso! JAPAN

Is JAPAN Your Favorite Country?

Promote Japan with us!

Yokoso! Japan Campaign's goal is to bring 10 million visitors to Japan by 2010.

Yokoso Japan needs more from JET AA in 2009!
Help us increase the number of travelers to Japan by:

- * Writing your experience in the JNTO' blog and E-newsletter to 40,000 subscribers
- * Visiting Japan again with your friends

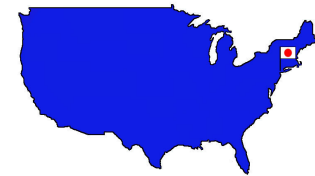
Contact us for your Japan experience to share with others, and for free travel brochures, maps, regional information and rental travel DVDs!

Japan National Tourist Organization
New York Office
www.japantravelinfo.com
info@jntonyc.org

Photo: Wakayama Prefecture

Nihonjin in New York

Behind the Scenes at the JLGC



By Junko Ishikawa
(Contributing Writer)

With the **Japan Local Government Center (CLAIR's New York branch)** kicking off the new year with a move to 3 Park Avenue, **JQ** spoke with assistant managers **Sho Nakazono** and **Fumitake (Fumi) Saijo**, who introduce Japanese culture and business to the U.S. through the promotion of Japanese municipality operations. Let's take a look at what they have to say about life in New York.

Tell us about your backgrounds.

Nakazono: I studied architecture in college. I joined Sakai city office as an architect after resigning my position at General Contractor. I came here because I applied for a position in New York at JLGC. My background living and studying here (in New York) from ages 12 to 15 might have helped me to pass the audition for this opportunity.

Saijo: After graduating college, I got a job in the educational committee at the Tsuyama town office in Miyagi Prefecture where I grew up. After Tsuyama town merged with eight other towns, I became an officer at the Tobei educational committee at Tobei city and worked there for two years. I'm not sure why I was selected for an opportunity in New York as I didn't take any tests. However, HR decided to send me, so I came here.

What are the main goals of the JLGC here? Are there other centers in the U.S. with a similar purpose?

Both: We are like a bridge between the Japanese municipality and various U.S. public organizations. Depending upon research requests from the Japanese municipality, we try to search for the most relevant U.S. public organizations and contact them on behalf of each Japanese municipality.

Our job is to acquire as much information as possible to enhance knowledge and understanding of U.S. organizations and culture among the municipality. In order to develop and maintain a good relationship with potential local partners, we try to attend many events and seminars. Also, our job is to introduce Japan and its culture to the U.S. In order to achieve this goal, we promote overseas exchange seminars and training in North America for Japanese college students.

Nakazono: **KLAFIR** [Korea Local Authorities Foundation for International Relations], **JETRO** and **JNTO** are our important partners and competitors here.

What kinds of things have you learned from JETs by being here in New York?

Nakazono: Throughout my communication with many Americans, I have realized that what Americans consider interesting or unique about Japan is quite different from that of the Japanese. I am always impressed by different viewpoints that I can observe between Americans and Japanese, even when we are looking at the same subjects.

Saijo: I met an instructor who is a JET alum at the kendo club. This

instructor really made me think that some JET alumni are very serious about learning Japanese culture and to continue teaching what he or she has learned from Japan to their own people here in New York. I was awakened by his seriousness in this respect. I believe that many JET members have high sophistication and the ability to appreciate, understand and absorb other cultures. They are true cosmopolitans.

What do you like most about living here? How about the least?

Nakazono: I like the friendliness and fun character of New Yorkers. Also, I love the dynamic architecture here. I'm not a big fan of the customer service, though.

Saijo: I like the diversity of streets, people and cultures. I don't like customer service, or the rough attitude in driving.



Saijo-san and Nakazono-san of the JLGC

Tell us a culture shock story about New York.

Nakazono: I would say...the size of everything. I think I would be shocked with the prices of many things upon returning to Japan, as everything is so cheap here in New York, and I've start getting used to it. Also, the size of a house or apartment impresses me. It is pretty spacious here.

Saijo: I am amazed by the size and quantity of food. Whatever I see is huge here! Also, I am touched by energy that New Yorkers carry. This New Year's Eve was amazing.

Tell us a surprising story about something you experienced here in New York.

Nakazono: Sometimes, the subway runs on an entirely wrong rail (like the R line trains running on the E line). This is unimaginable in Japan, and I noticed many tourists were stunned and entirely lost by facing this scene.

Saijo: I was quite surprised to see Japanese celebrities on the streets of Manhattan. They were eating lunch at the sidewalk restaurant. Also, I am a bit overwhelmed by New York's summers and winters.

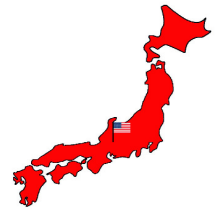
How can JETs contribute to and further assist the JLGC with its goals?

Our goal and hope is to create and develop a progressive relationship between the Japanese municipality and JET members. We would like to stimulate our municipal operations and cultures through generating a global partnership with various international organizations.

Thank you, Nakazono-san and Saijo-san! We hope the work you do at JLGC will bring future JET members the same exciting opportunities that we all went through, and help people appreciate the value of cultural exchange. Also, special thanks to their colleague Laura Smith for interview assistance.

Vist the JLGC's homepage at www.jlgc.org.

JETlog



Welcome to JETlog, a new feature where we hear from current on-the-job JETs and alums about life in Japan. Our first contributor is Sean Sakamoto (Gifu-ken, 2008-) who joined the program from New York. Dozo, Sean-san!

I had no idea that living next to a river is like natural air conditioning. I had no idea that a piece of bamboo with a few holes drilled in it can cost over 3,000 bucks. I had no idea that steak from Japan could be so good that it would make me want to run a victory lap every time I took a bite because I felt like I just won at life.

When I applied for JET, I had no idea about any of these things. I also had no idea what I was doing with my life. At 39 years old, with a wife, a kid, and a career in advertising in New York City, I felt something coming on that I'd feared since I first watched Woody Allen's characters—and then the director himself—go through: the dreaded midlife crisis. It's a cliché, but I've never met a cliché I didn't like.

And so I decided to start my life over. When I was fresh out of college, I fantasized about moving to Japan to teach English. I moved to New York instead. Now, thanks to the kind folks in the JET Programme, I got a do-over. It has been over six months since I landed in Gifu, and it has been everything that this cynical, tired and restless recently-ex-New Yorker has needed.

I am in Gifu in central Japan in a quaint historical castle town called **Gujo Hachiman**. My five-year-old son, Kazu, is enrolled in the local kindergarten and he's learning Japanese a lot faster than I am. My wife, Noriko, spent 20 years in the U.S. and is having all kinds of flashbacks from earlier days as she readjusts to life in the *tierra-de-la-madre*.

The best decision I made when I arrived was to say “yes” to whatever came along, and I'm glad I did. One of the teachers at my school is a master at the *shakuhachi*, a bamboo flute. He offered to teach me to play, and

I accepted his offer despite having no interest in the instrument.

Since then, I've graduated from not being able to produce any sound at all to making it sound like a dying cat. How my teacher can sit through a lesson without snatching the stick from my hand and beating me upside the head is a testament to his stoicism and patience. I wonder if he has any regrets. I sure don't. I have acquired a taste for the thing, and I practice every day.



The author at Gujo Hachiman Castle

I guess that's been the biggest lesson for me here. I've become a learner again. They say you have to be a good student to be a good teacher. Well, I was neither before I arrived. I've had to slow down, humble myself, and listen to people. My colleagues show me how to teach, strangers at the supermarket show me where to bag my food, and I even had to learn how to fire up my antique propane bathwater heater. Everything is new, and I had no idea how to go about life here.

I've had to learn how to learn. With each breath through that *shakuhachi*, with each mangled Japanese verb, and with each class full of students eager to learn (I have great kids), I've had to watch, listen and enjoy the process. That's

a mentality that runs counter to everything I did in New York for the past 18 years. I was the kind of person for whom learning was less a joyful discovery and more an endless parade of humiliations. In the time that the mountains around me that have turned from deep green to misty and snow-capped, my approach to learning has begun to change. It's been great. So far, this is the best midlife crisis I've ever had.

For more musings, visit Sean's blog at www.idratherbe.tv/injapan.



"New" Anecdotes!



Being a rural JET with a “long drop toilet” in my apartment, I made a point of sitting down with my supervisor soon after arrival to get his help in setting up my *kumitori* schedule.

This means having a guy come in his little green poop tank truck to vacuum out my pit toilet. I'd heard that the rule of thumb for rural Japanese is that one calls the *kumitori* guys when the pit “splashes back,” or about every three months.

Not wanting to get that close to my, er, toilet contents, I took my predecessor's advice and decided to set a frequent regular schedule for *kumitori*-ing. After much looking up of words in my Japanese-English dictionary, double checking my grammar books to ensure I was wording things right, and waiting until the lunch break when much of my board of ed colleagues had stepped out, I discreetly asked my supervisor for a word in private.

Having no conference room, “private” meant sitting in a little seating area in the middle of the office. I then started my rehearsed speech in a low undertone so just he and I could hear. The conversation went a bit like this...

Me (*hushed whisper*): Anouu...it's about my toilet, and the *kumitori* company, *desu ga*...

Supervisor (*in a voice loud enough to be heard at the ramen shop*



I don't know how deep it goes

down the street): YOUR TOILET? THE *KUMITORI* COMPANY?!

Me (*mortified whisper*): Anouu, yes, you see, I wonder if you could please help me set up an automatic cleaning schedule. Once every six weeks. And pay them by automatic bank transfer.

Supervisor (*even louder than before, just in case anyone in the building hadn't heard him the first time*): YOUR TOILET?! HAVE IT CLEANED OUT ONCE EVERY TWO MONTHS?! YOU NEED IT CLEANED OUT EVERY TWO MONTHS?!

Taking a quick embarrassed glance around the room to see if anyone was listening to this, I saw the top of a colleague's head peeking out above the newspaper he was pretending to read, his head and hands and newspaper shaking, face bright red, and if eyes can smile, then his eyes were outright pissing themselves laughing. In that moment I realized I'd have to give up any claim to pride, privacy and embarrassment while in Japan. People would know my business no matter how much I'd want

to keep things private, and they'd no doubt have many good laughs at my expense.

Therese Stephen (Iwate-ken, 1996-99)

"Anecdotes" continued on page 10

JetWit.com: Taking the JET Alumni Community to Another Level

After spending the last several years growing the JETAA NY Quarterly newsletter into a full-fledged alumni magazine, **Steven Horowitz** (Aichi-ken, 1992-94) began focusing his efforts on **JetWit.com** last fall. **JQ** caught up with Steven to learn more and see how he's doing.

Hey, what is a JetWit, anyway?

It's just "JET" plus the acronym for "Writers Interpreters and Translators." I started the WIT e-mail group last May to find more writers for the JET alum publications and also to help freelance translators find more work opportunities. I wanted to create a sort of public face for the WIT group to be able to do these things on a more consistent basis. I also wanted to create an online archive of newsletter articles that editors from other JETAA chapters could easily access and copy and paste for their own chapter newsletters.

Then why does JetWit look like an elephant?

[Laughs] I knew I wanted a Japanese-style mascot, so I went to graphic designer and Web developer **Zi Mei** (Saitama-ken, 2002-05) because I'd seen some of the excellent characters he created on his site (sugarcloud.com). I told him I wanted a cute animal, and he somehow he came back with an elephant that he named A.J., which I love anyway.

How's it going so far?

Pretty good. The site is getting between 50 and 200 hits per day right now. But more importantly, it's helped some JET alums find work, like **Julie Matsyk** (Yamanashi-ken, 2006-07), who had just moved to New York and was looking for work in publishing. I asked her to start writing about her job search process for the benefit of other alums. Within two posts, another JET alum at a publishing house saw her posts, got in touch and ended up offering her an internship. Meanwhile, **Jonathan Trace** (Fukuoka-ken, 2005-08) was also looking for work in publishing and had just started doing the **JETAA Chapter Beat** feature for JetWit when Julie told me



A.J., the JetWit mascot
Created by graphic designer/developer
Zi Mei (Saitama-ken, 2005-06)

to let Jonathan know that her company had another internship opening, which Jonathan subsequently got. This is the JET alum network at work and it makes me really happy.

So what's the plan going forward?

I'd love to get more JET alums writing about their expertise, like triple-threat interpreter/translator/writer **Stacy Smith** (Kumamoto-ken, 2000-03), who does the **WITLife** posts after watching Japanese news each day, which she does anyway to keep her interpreting skills sharp. I'd also love to keep pulling veteran JET alums out of the woodwork. Like authors **Roland Kelts** (Osaka-shi, 1998-99) (*Japanamerica*), **James Kennedy** (Nara-ken, 2004-06) (*The Order of Odd-Fish*) and **Rob Weston** (Nara-ken, 2002-04) (*Zorgamazoo*), who I never would have learned about if I hadn't started JetWit. I also wouldn't mind attracting some paying advertisers.

At the risk of offending, you're a bit of a veteran JET alum yourself. Any parting words of wisdom for the younger JET set?

So I'm at that age where I can start indiscriminately doling out gratuitous advice? OK, might as well get on my soapbox while the memory is still relatively sharp. I guess I'd say that the JET alumni community is a terrific resource, and it's still largely untapped in many ways. Given that the economy doesn't seem inclined to do anyone any favors these days—well, except for those of us who work in the bankruptcy field—now is a great time to take advantage of the JET Alumni Association and our network, including JetWit.com. You can meet a lot of people, but more significantly you can use the organization to create opportunities for yourself to get experience in whatever field you want.

Thanks, Steven. And good luck with everything. We'll keep an eye on JetWit.com in the meanwhile.

A JET Alum's Experience Makes its Way to the Stage: JQ Catches Up with Playwright Randall David Cook

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

Three years ago, the Gotham Stage Company produced the terrific play **Sake with the Haiku Geisha** by JET alum **Randall David Cook** (Fukui-ken, 1991-93). The entire evening consisted of five one-act vignettes, all involving cross-cultural conflict among expatriates in Japan. As I noted in my review for **JQ** at the time, what made the play so successful was its exploration of the psychological issues confronting the main characters.

At first glance, Randall David Cook does not fit the profile of the typical playwright. As a human resources specialist with an international MBA, he was working in a corporate capacity at *Newsweek* magazine when two random events set him on a playwrighting course.

"I was dissatisfied with most of the new plays I was seeing at the time," Cook says in his native South Carolina accent. "I kept insisting that I could do better, and one of my friends set me up on the challenge. At the same time, I was heartbroken over a relationship that had just ended and writing seemed like a good way for me to channel my emotions into a more productive pursuit."

The result was **Southern Discomfort**, which was performed at the acclaimed Ensemble Studio Theatre and other non-profits across the country. Despite its mixed reception, Cook was hooked on writing for the theatre.

"Soon after *Southern Discomfort* was produced, a JET friend from England contacted me about writing a play for the Dawlish Arts Festival in Southern England," he says. "I wrote a one-act called **Sushi and Scones**, which was about an English girl on the JET Programme and that eventually became the first act of *Sake with the Haiku Geisha*."



Randall David Cook

Besides winning acclaim at Dawlish, *Sushi and Scones* won Best Play at the Southeastern Playwrights Conference and was produced by BBC Radio and performed at the JETAA International Conference. This success prompted Cook to explore the experiences of other people he knew in Japan along with his own, and he soon wrote other one-act plays.

"The one problem I had was trying to figure it all out—how to make all these plays work together," he says. That's when I hit on the idea of the last act, where the child of Sumiko, the act's main character, and her Irish lover, grows up to be the geisha of the title, who connects all the vignettes together in one sitting. She is sort of an emcee who unites all of these plays together."

Through a professional theater contact, Cook was able to get his script into the hands of an off-Broadway producer and eventually found his way to the fledgling **Gotham Stage Company**, which presented the play as its premier production. Despite an unfamiliarity with Japan or Japanese culture, the producing team at Gotham was enthusiastic about the script, as was director Alex Lippard, who spent time at the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center studying Japanese noh theatre, which is integral to the play's structure.

"In writing the play, I wanted to capture the feeling of being so foreign in an otherwise homogenous society," Cook says. "Western twists on the many elements of noh—the dances, a changing primary character for each play, the constant Buddhist theme of the impermanence of life, the evocation of mood and emotions through recollections of the past—run throughout the play and mirror the cultural challenges faced by both sides as Eastern and Western cultures collide and clash."

"Cook" continued on page 12

Youth For Understanding: Connecting the World

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

"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page." like a Who's Who of Japanese corporations (Mitsui, Sony, etc.).

This quote, attributed to St. Augustine and written thousands of years ago, sums up my view on the value of international exchange opportunities. It is through my experiences traveling, studying and working overseas that I have learned a great deal not only about other cultures, but also about myself. When I was offered the chance to profile one of the world's oldest student exchange programs, **Youth for Understanding**, I couldn't resist!

Many of these companies offer scholarships to encourage high school-age children of U.S. employees as well as students from the community to study abroad and experience Japan. In fact, of the 61 scholarships offered through YFU USA, 25 focus on student exchanges in Japan. The scholarships provide full or partial funding for either a one-year or summer exchange, but Jacob stressed "that candidates are still required to make a minimum contribution in order to encourage ownership" of the program among students and parents.

First, a little bit of YFU history. In 1951, American minister John Eberly proposed to other church leaders that students be brought over from war-torn Germany to give them an opportunity to escape their environment. Students would be placed with families and sent to schools in the community. Organizers believed that exposure to U.S. culture and democracy would motivate these young people to go back and help rebuild their country based on their experiences.



Field Director Jacob Carter with Youth for Understanding volunteers

Jacob. Jesse is a mentor to a Japanese student currently living in Brooklyn.

The Japan connection is also noticeable among the volunteers that help make this organization successful. YFU USA relies on over 1,400 active volunteers to help run its programs. These volunteers do everything from interviewing candidates and host families to planning orientations for students or providing support to students, families and schools. Jacob has come across a few former JETs who volunteer in the Northeast region. As a matter of fact, it was through a Friend of JET, **Jesse Hollander**, that I was put in touch with

Seventy-five German students were selected to live with families in the Detroit area in the first year. In 1955, the first group of American students went to Europe to live with families during summer vacation. A few years later, YFU expanded its programs into Asia and Latin America. The first group of Asian students to arrive in the U.S. in 1958 came from Japan. Today, YFU has exchange programs in 60 countries and has exchanged over 225,000 students worldwide.

YFU continues to grow its programs, which now include community college and gap year programs offering young adults an opportunity to study English at local community colleges, study sustainable energy at a Danish university, or spend a year overseas before heading off to college. The core component of these programs remains the same: students are housed with families in order to experience the local lifestyle. Along with this growth of program offerings comes a need for ongoing volunteer support to keep things running seamlessly.

YFU has 44 offices overseas and four U.S. district offices. **Jacob Carter**, field director for NYC/NJ/Philadelphia in the northeast district office, provided insight into current YFU operations. According to Jacob, in 2007 YFU sent 530 U.S. students overseas and 2,050 international students were placed in U.S. homes. It also was interesting to learn that of those 530 students, 338 went to Japan and 187 Japanese came to the U.S. Why all the interest in going to Japan?

There are many ways you can help, including interviewing candidates, mentoring exchange students, or actually hosting a student in your home. Think back to all the people who helped you adjust to life in your new town in Japan. I know it wouldn't have been the same without the support I received from my colleagues and fellow JETs. Volunteering with YFU can be your opportunity to give back by making someone's transition to a new culture a smooth one.

Over the past quarter century, joint efforts between YFU Japan and YFU USA to enhance relations have translated into generous program and scholarship support. A review of YFU's 2007 annual report reads

To learn more about these fabulous volunteer opportunities, contact Jacob at jcarter@yfu.org. If you know of a student interested in studying overseas or simply want to learn more about YFU USA, visit www.yfu-usa.org for more details.

新 More "New" Anecdotes! 新

I remember my first "new" friend in Japan. I'd been living in my auto manufacturing town for about a week and was going stir crazy. It was pre-Internet and cell phones, and with virtually no Japanese ability and a paralyzing fear that anything I said or did would offend Japanese people (culled from reading various cultural guides), I didn't know what to do with myself. I couldn't watch any more Japanese TV in my matchbox-sized apartment, and I decided to just go for another walk around my town.

After about 15 minutes of aimless wandering, I suddenly spotted another *gaijin*. I practically attacked him as I went up and eagerly introduced myself. His name was Dave, he was British, had been living in the town teaching English with a private company for a few years, and had a Japanese wife. He told me about a bar nearby that was *gaijin*-friendly. I met him there that night along with a few other people, as we drank good beer from elaborate German steins that the Japanese bar owner had obtained. I had finally found some semblance of community and connection in my town.

Steven Horowitz (Aichi-ken, 1992-94)

We've been home almost four years now and I am still looking for cantaloupe flavored Fanta. This may sound odd, but while in Japan I developed a slightly masochistic dependency on the ever-changing, ever stranger "seasonal" Fanta flavors. Some JETs marked the transition from summer to fall or winter to spring the normal way by changing out their wardrobe or spying that first lovely cherry blossom. Not me, though; my means were a bit more humble. I was out looking at the fare in the vending machines.

Muscad, blueberry, aloe, watermelon, musk melon, and my favorite, cantaloupe, met me when the seasons changed. Every new flavor was to be savored for scant weeks at a time before they disappeared from the palate forever. And though there were greater reverse culture shocks when returning home, the only one that lingers is the aching thirst for those unusual flavors.

Meredith Hodges-Boos (Ehime-ken, 2003-05)

"Anecdotes" continued on page 16

'Shogun Macbeth' Gets Medieval on Japan

By Olivia Nilsson (Tokushima-ken, 2006-08) and Adren Hart (Nagano-ken, 1998-00)

"Is this a *shoto* which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?"

So quoth the samurai Macbeth as he plots against the sleeping shogun in this Japanese adaptation of Shakespeare's masterpiece. This is *Shogun Macbeth*, which finished its engagement earlier this December with the **Pan Asian Repertory Theatre**.

In his adaptation, creator **John R. Briggs** undertakes transposing this classic play from the Scottish highlands to the Japanese islands, leaving no katana unturned as he peppers the language of Elizabethan England with Japanese legends, phrases and songs. Directed here by **Ernest Abuba**, the play was given heightened authenticity by the talents of its costume designer, fight choreographer and Japanese movement coach.

The set was relatively unadorned: a large Buddha statue flanked by slanted torii in the background, a gnarled tree to the side. As the action shifted from battlefield to bedroom, the actors alone informed the audience of the new setting and situation. Their costumes, a mix of samurai armor, simple yukata and garish royal robes, were clear indicators of status and purpose.

But of course, it takes a lot more than hakama-clad actors and a smattering of spiritual references to make this play believable, and luckily the strong performances of the lead actors draw the viewer into the play's world, helping us to see Shakespeare from a different angle.

Pan-Asian Repertory regular **Rosanne Ma** gave an especially impressive performance as the doomed Fujin Macbeth, crafting that "fiend-like queen" into a samurai's wife walking the edge between menace and madness. The power she has over Macbeth (**Kaipo Schwab**), matched by her self-control, gives way as she falls to her restless conscience and tormented thoughts.

In *Shogun Macbeth*, writer-director John R. Briggs transposes Shakespeare's "Scottish play" to samurai-ruled Japan. It's an idea clearly inspired by **Akira Kurosawa's** *Throne of Blood*, a 1957 film based loosely on *Macbeth*, also set in medieval Japan. Briggs doesn't just copy Kurosawa. He goes several steps further, staying truer to his source material and upping the theatrical ante by infusing the Japanese theatrical traditions of *noh* and *kyogen*. After seeing the show, Adren and Olivia spoke with Mr. Briggs.

At the time you decided to redo the play, what made you choose feudal Japan as the backdrop? Were there any current or world events that influenced your decision or were there more personal reasons?

At the time I began work on the text, America was in love with all things Japanese. Both the novel and TV miniseries *Shogun* had been released to great acclaim, the Japanese economy was going great guns and they were investing in everything American. This definitely influenced my approach to *Macbeth*.

As someone who has lived in Japan and studied its culture, I was impressed by the inclusion of classical Japanese and the detail in which the tea ceremony was performed. What is your relationship to Japan and its culture?

I've never had the privilege of visiting Japan. My inclusion of many of the details came from my study of the country and its culture, especially its samurai culture.

What were some of the challenges you faced in rewriting the play?

I have done many adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and the thing I most

The Three Weird Sisters, here depicted as *yojos*, donned kabuki make-up and immense wigs to strut around the stage, in turns sinister and slapstick. They provided a nice continuity to the play, appearing later in the roles of murderers hired by Macbeth to assassinate his political enemies, and even as palace servants in the play's last scenes. As Macbeth descends further into madness and alienation, the *yojos'* roles expand accordingly. They seep into all aspects of his life and attend him on all sides, fitting parallels of the forces that lead to his destruction: greed, ambition and a lust for violence.

Schwab transitions well into the samurai role as he commands the stage, brandishing his katana at enemies both real and imagined. He also endeavors to show us the problems Macbeth cannot solve with a swing of his sword, the internal enemies he faces and the mental anguish he endures. The key driver of action here, in this adaptation as well as in the original, is that otherworldly prophecy, the potential that waits only in his mind, always just beyond his grasp as Shakespeare calls attention to his own axiom: "Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings."

In a production such as this, the setting, the language, the costumes and the manners of the characters do their best to reposition our understanding of the play. So it's reassuring to find highlighted, in the midst of this Japanese milieu, familiar Shakespearean themes still taking root. Ultimately, we put the setting aside, we disregard the costumes, and we are arrested by the characters, whose motivations, fears and goals are universally recognizable and perennially provocative.

Special thanks to Abby Felder at PanAsian Repertory for photos and media assistance. For upcoming performances, visit their homepage at www.panasianrep.org.



Kaipo Schwab and Rosanne Ma in a scene from *Shogun Macbeth*



Playwright John Briggs

am interested in is creating a world in which the audience has no comfort zone of preconditioned knowledge. Putting his plays in different costumes from a different time has never been very satisfying to me. In fact, I'd just as soon leave them in Elizabethan garb. If you change a cultural reference here or there, if you force the audience to listen because you introduce things they are unfamiliar with, are you really rewriting the play or simply giving it an opportunity to allow the overarching themes a new life? Too many people know the Shakespeare too well, all of it colored by whatever professor they had in college. I'm always wanting the audience to experience the play as a first-time encounter.

Has the play changed in any way over time? If so, how has it evolved?

It evolved between the time I first staged in at the Shakespeare Festival of Dallas and Pan Asian. Once it was published I left it alone. I'm sure Ernest's staging was different from mine and in that there is evolution.

Which Macbeth characters adapted most easily to the Japanese setting of your play, and which were hardest to transform?

The porter was most difficult, so I replaced him with the *kyogen*. The point of the scene, from a dramaturgical point of view, is to provide the audience some comic respite from what just transpired and what will come. The *kyogen* serves that purpose and because it is all in Japanese it pulls the audience deeper into the Japanese world before delving the deeper elements of the play.

"Briggs" continued on page 14

JET Alum Launches Online Study System

By Junko Ishikawa (Contributing Writer)

Kevin Kajitani (Hyogo-ken, 2006-07) is the president and co-founder of **Speakit LLC**, a Seattle-based online language learning and software development company. He also is a Pacific Northwest JET alum. Kevin's career as an entrepreneurial academician first started in Japan, when he worked as an ALT at Kawanishi Hokuryo High School in Hyogo prefecture. At school, he taught his students not only English but also topics related to international affairs, cultures and even global warming!

One of his company's new products, **Japanese Accelerator**, is a breakthrough language training system that allows people to simulate conversations taken from the real world. You can learn to speak Japanese by putting yourself inside real, everyday conversations. According to Kevin, Japanese Accelerator is a one-of-a-kind simulation tool researched by prominent linguistic experts and universities, proven to boost your speaking ability. **JQ** spoke to Kevin to find out where exactly his entrepreneurship began and how he came to launch Speakit.

What was the first impression when you first came to Kawanishi Hokuryo High?

Honestly, I didn't get any big culture shock. Given my background (my parents are both Japanese) and the fact that I previously taught English in Osaka, I had a pretty smooth transition when I arrived there, and I found the students were very nice.

Did your English teaching experience give you any specific inspiration to what you do currently?

Yes. I was actually surprised by the so-called "institutionalized learning" when I first observed my students learning a foreign language. Despite the fact that there are many different ways of learning English, there wasn't much diversity in methods for students to learn English in Japan. The testing system was also not profound enough to improve students' language skills. So, I thought that people can learn a foreign language better by utilizing more customized tools. That is around the time when I started thinking about developing new software to help people learn Japanese. I thought of customized tools such as a Skype class or e-learning. I believe that people generally learn things faster and more intuitively when learning materials or products are customized and fun for them to look at.

Tell me about the customization in your products.

Obviously, we customize our product (software) depending on the level of each student. Also, Japanese Accelerator presents various scenario-based video tutorials. In other words, people can learn Japanese based on a scene they're in, whether be it one of traveling, learning or working. We also use a three-step method: first, we present a video lecture by a professor, where people can learn basic Japanese expressions and words in a particular scene. Then, you see some situational video clips that actually put you in the scene, where you have to use those phrases you just learned from the lecture. Then, the final step will be to try it out with actual native Japanese speakers.

Me and my partner Aron realized the importance of authority and structure when learning a new language. With the collaboration of Professor Masashi

"Cook" continued from page 9

As for the future, Cook hopes that the play will be produced elsewhere around the country. "The reception has been uniformly positive, especially from people who have lived in Japan," he says. "For instance, one military wife recently read the play and told me how much it meant to her. Ideally, the play should be produced in theaters with 100-200 seats and with its international cast, it can be done anywhere with extensive JET alumni.

Kato, from the University of Washington's Department of Japanese, we worked hard on the research aspect and have developed a very specific learning tool. Japanese Accelerator is useful in many ways, especially if you are interested in distance learning or e-learning.

Any struggles or big challenges so far?

Well, this is a very common issue for anybody [laughs], but launching a newly developed product always costs money. This is especially hard under the current economic climate. Also, we do not rely on investors, since our business is entirely self-financed. Our fear was that outside investors would not be too concerned with the actual learning process or a quality lesson that people can get from our product, so we decided to finance this business by ourselves to pursue our goal to make a great and effective product.

Other than that, finding time has been always a struggle for both me and Aron, as we both work full-time as an engineer and consultant, respectively. We work 60-80 hours a week! Also, generating traffic to our Web site can be quite challenging. We try to be active participants by joining related networking events, online forums in language learning and business, and joining as many communities as possible.

What do you see yourself doing in the future? Any particular ambitions or dreams in terms of your business or product development?

Well, I certainly hope that our business will be successful and grow faster. We would love to add more languages in our service, like Korean, Chinese, etc. In terms of market growth, we are aiming at expanding our business to other Asian countries as well. Also, it will be great if we can work with travel agencies or homestay types of cultural exchange organizations. I hope to develop more products and pitch them to those new clients.

Finally, any feelings toward Japan? Did you miss Japan a lot after you came back?

Yes, very much. One thing I noticed upon my return from Japan was...how close and comfortable I became to Japan. I was also surprised to feel how comfortable I felt while I was in Japan. I felt very natural about Japan's group culture and I even had a reverse culture shock when I came back to the States. Since I was so accustomed to living in a group society for a while, coming back to individualistic society and readjusting myself to an entirely opposite value system was a bit of an awkward feeling. But at the same time, I feel like I have learned from Japan about working and living with various types of people. Because of Japan's implication-based communication, like saying or doing something without openly saying it and *wa* (harmony) culture, I think I became more a flexible individual to work with anybody.

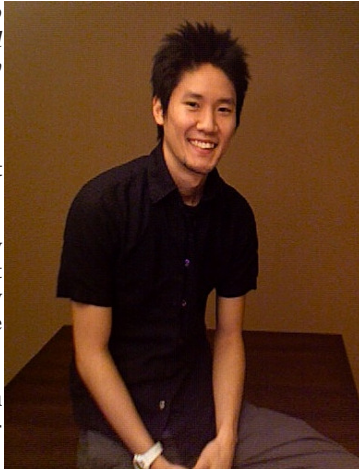
Thank you, Kevin! His thoughtful observations and insightful analysis on culture will keep surprising us, and surely he and Aron will continue to develop their innovative language learning software. We shouldn't miss what Speakit will bring to our lives in the years to come.

For more information, visit www.JapaneseAccelerator.com and www.speakit.com/blog.

It also provides a number of good roles for Asian actors—Angela Lin, who played the title geisha, went on to act in *Coram Boy* and *Top Girls* on Broadway. Nothing pleases me more than to see audience members enjoy seeing the play as much as I enjoyed writing it."

Read Lyle's original review of *Sake with the Haiku Geisha* from our winter 2006 issue at:

www.jetaany.org/newsletter_files/Winter%202006%20v4.pdf.



Speakit co-founder Kevin Kajitani

Jero: The JQ Interview

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

Enka, or Japanese blues, typically skews to older crowds in Japan. But for the past year, one American-born former information science student has made Japan pay attention again to songs about love and life lost.

His name is **Jero**, and his first single **"Umiyuki"** became Japan's highest-charting debut for an enka performer. This breakout success allowed the 27-year-old to achieve his lifelong dream of performing on **Kohaku Uta Gassen**, Japan's year-end "song battle," at which Jero paid tribute to his late Japanese grandmother and lifelong inspiration.

With his second single **"Eisa"** also riding high on the charts, Jero is now prepping his debut album **Yakusoku**, due February 25 in Japan. In this **JQ** exclusive interview conducted the week after his Kohaku performance, we talked with one of Japan's most recognizable foreign-born celebrities.

What are your thoughts now that you've performed on Kohaku Uta Gassen?

I am very happy that I was able to carry out my dream, and even more happy that my mother was there to share the experience with me.

Now that you've performed on it, what is your next career dream goal?

Quite frankly, to continue to perform on *Kohaku* every year, and get even more younger audiences listening to enka.

Which performers were you most excited to watch in person at the show?

All of the other enka artists, as well as J-pop artists I'm a fan of.

What do you know about the JET Programme, and do you have any impressions or stories about it?

I have met many former teachers of the JET Programme, and they have all enjoyed their time here in Japan. I was not a part of the JET Programme myself, but I have made some good friends who participated in the JET Programme.

What was your formal introduction to learning Japanese?

I have been listening to Japanese since I was a child, and started studying formally in high school.



Jerome Charles White, Jr. aka Jero, the new face of enka

Remembering kanji.

What do you think is the best way to proficiently learn another language?

Become immersed in the language as much as possible, daily if possible.

What are some of your favorite non-enka songs?

I listen to J-pop every once in a while, such as Ken Hirai and Noriyuki Makihara. My favorite R&B artist is Luther Vandross.

Have you ever been to New York? If so, what were your impressions? If not, what would you most like to do there?

I have been to New York several times. It was very much like Tokyo, very high-paced, and a lot of people. Lots of things to do and see.

Imagine you have a month of nothing but free time. How would you spend it?

I would spend half with my family and friends, the other half on vacation.

If you weren't a singer, what kind of job would you most likely have right now?

I would most likely be working in IT in Japan.

What's the most difficult thing about being a foreigner in the Japanese music business?

I don't think I've had any difficulties from being a foreigner in the Japanese music business. I think the music business in Japan in general is very high-paced and extremely busy. Much busier than the U.S. music industry, I would assume.

Do you plan to expand your career outside of Japan, or sing in English?

"Jero" continued on page 15

PHOTO CRYSTAL + CRYSTAL = PHOTO CRYSTAL

Crystallize Your Precious Moment In Time
www.crystallizedintime.com

Save an addition 10% on ALL CRYSTALS with this JETAANY exclusive code: **JQMagPhotoCrystal** by JCE

Joost!: All Your Japanese Television Wishes, Granted!



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

I was one of those kids growing up who was annoyed with America's airing of Japanese TV, especially anime. It was always censored, always cut, and always aired at around 2 a.m. To get anything worthwhile, I found myself scouring random Internet fansites, downloading questionably legal fansubs (Japanese anime and shows translated and subtitled by fans) for hours, wondering if the quality would even be watchable. Fast forward to today and I'm watching full-length uncensored episodes of *Naruto Shippuden* and other Japanese shows like it, anywhere, anytime, all on one site. But wait, I can also drop some Japanese variety shows in my queue if I want, or a music video, or movies, and...what time is it?

It's easy to lose track of time when you're playing around on **Joost**, the video portal now providing all this great Japanese content in partnership with Yoshimoto Kogyo, Dentsu and **NTV**. It's also deceptively smart. Joost isn't just another random video site; on the contrary, it aims to be a "truly global platform...with content from around the world," as **Akihiro Tsuchiya**, Joost's director of business development, explains. Joost already boasts 10 national channels and content from around the world. It's also the largest legal library of anime on the Internet due to its other partnerships with VIZ Media, FUNimation and Anime News Network.

It's not just anime, either. Joost's Japanese Humor "OWARAI" channel hosts a multitude of Japanese variety shows like *Nasubi*, *R-Mania*, *24-HourTag*, and many more. Tsuchiya admitted that it was his favorite channel. Now you can relive that confused first time you turned on your TV in Japan as a greenhorn JET and caught these kinds of shows during one of their wacky challenges.

I have to admit, the series "Daddy the Evil Ninja Foot Soldier" on the Owarai channel had me laughing all night. It follows the life of a lowly "extra" character in a reality where Masked Riders and Colonel Death exist. Watching him deal with his wife, new guys on the team and his interesting day job had me wondering if I was in the right field.

But how did the great idea of Japanese content on Joost get off the ground? "Having an interest in Japan, and for Japanese Animation content," Tsuchiya says. "We hired sales consultants in Tokyo who had initiated discussions with NTV early on. NTV themselves were also looking for legitimate partners outside Japan with whom they could work on content export ventures, so the timing worked out well for both sides."

Still, I would think that putting content on the Internet is something broadcasters would need a lot of convincing to do. The Internet, especially for TV media, can seem like an intimidating place. "I have been involved across the

board to help close the deal including a trip to their head office in Shiodome, Tokyo," Tsuchiya says, "but the [best] part was working with NTV to provide them with the necessary confidence on how to launch and operate their channels on the Joost platform, and generating creative ideas to promote both their content and their brand in the Internet space. For many broadcasters, the leap into the Internet space is often seen as challenging, and one of my roles was to ensure that this transition went smoothly."

The Web site itself works very similar to that of other video sites, such as YouTube. There are search features, content filters and channels at your disposal to find the content you want. Especially interesting is the queue system, which lets you look for your next video in a mini browser, click on the "+" button, and add it to your list of programs to watch, all while you're enjoying your current video.



Ultimate Survivor Kaiji, one of Joost's offerings with NTV

Having boatloads of anime and Japanese variety shows on tap is great for JET alums like myself, but what about Westerners who don't fully understand Japanese culture? Tsuchiya admits that the humor does not always translate perfectly to the Westerner viewer: "Not all the Japanese humor will work in the U.S. or the UK. The same can be said about U.S. comedy series not working well in Japan, in spite of localization edits such as subtitling or dubbing," he says.

"NTV and other Japanese content producers must be selective and marketing-smart about what they choose to service into foreign markets. Programs such as *Denpa Shonen* and *Gakitsuka* are straightforward and toy with the element of physical danger and challenges, which in many ways is a shared universal theme."

Marketing and careful planning is indeed an important part of making Joost a success, and it's been making some interesting moves. You can now integrate your Facebook account with Joost, and you can also download the Joost app from the Apple Store and watch videos on your iPhone or iPod Touch.

While Tsuchiya was mum on specific new titles, Joost plans to offer in the future, he hinted that a combination of high-end TV productions and niche content tend to work well on the Internet. If that means more fun stuff from Japan, then you can bet I'll be spending a lot more time on Joost having *natsukashii* memories of Japan.

For a listing of NTV programs on Joost, visit www.joost.com/search?type=c&q=NTV#.

"Briggs" continued from page 11

How would you compare production styles in Elizabethan theater to those of Japanese kabuki or noh? What are some of the ways you tried to combine these styles in your production?

Except that both theaters tend to be presentational, I'm not sure their styles are very similar. Kabuki and noh are highly stylized and use very intricate physical actions to communicate character and emotion to the audience.

What advice do you have for anyone interested in taking up a similar project?

Approach it as if Shakespeare were your best friend and collaborator. Accept nothing as sacred. Let him (through the text) be just as tough on you. Try to think from a modern structural point of view.

Is there anything that you would have done differently?

Not so much with *Shogun Macbeth*. With *Hamlet*, *Godfather of Brooklyn*,

yes, there are things I will do differently.

What playwrights or plays most inspire you?

I have directed several hundred professional productions and with few exceptions I am always in love with what I am working on. I tend to not like works that beat a drum for a particular cause unless it's done as satire. Too many playwrights and plays to mention.

What's your latest project?

I just mounted an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, à la 1958-63 *American Bandstand* (*Athenian Bandstand*). Oberon was Elvis, Titania the Olivia Newton-John character at the end of the movie *Grease*. The lovers straight out of *Happy Days*. The mechanicals were the TV crew. Puck a James Dean (*Rebel Without a Cause*). I added 12 songs from the era that moved the plot or expressed character sung to karaoke tracks. It had the audience dancing in the aisles—literally. A lot of fun.

For more on John R. Briggs and his latest plays, visit the Off Square Theatre Company's homepage at www.offsquare.org.

Sukiyaki Western Django

Over the Top with a Raw Egg on the Side

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

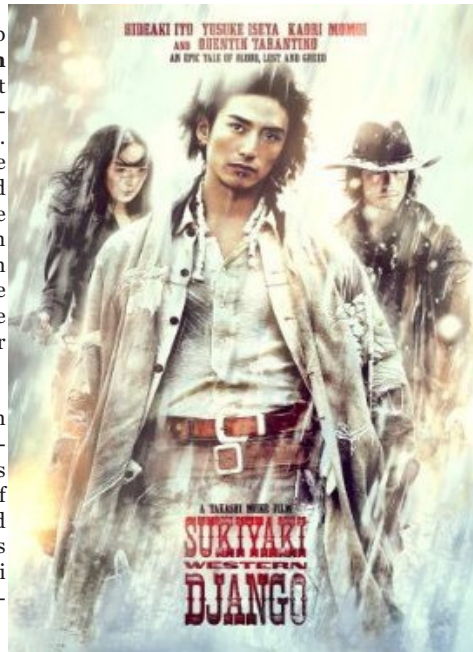


Sukiyaki Western Django is director **Takashi Miike**'s Japanese spin on the spaghetti western genre. If you didn't already know (and no, you're not the only one), *Django* is a 1966 spaghetti Western cult classic from Sergio Corbucci—not to be confused with *dango*, the delicious matsuri yatai treat. So, perhaps the title should be "*Sukiyaki*" Western: *Django* for clarity's sake.

This Far East meets Wild West cinematic mashup opens with a prelude in which Ringo (**Quentin Tarantino**) cuts a raw egg out of a snake's throat and, after besting his opponents in a gun fight, proceeds to consume it with a dish of...sukiyaki. (Spaghetti westerns got their name because the characters ate a lot of pasta, right?) Flash forward to a nameless Nevada town, where the red Heike tribe is at odds with the white Genji tribe, both sides supposedly searching for the town's hidden treasure. They actually appear to be waiting for the arrival of a solitary stranger (**Hideaki Ito**), whose services they compete for to enlist in exchange for part (or all?) of the gold.

For reasons unexplained, only two women exist in the town: Ruriko (**Kaori Momoi**) and her daughter, Shizuka (**Yoshino Kimura**). Ruriko offers assistance to the lone gunman and he finds himself intrigued by the plight of the widowed Shizuka and her mute son. Translation: the lone gunman stirs up trouble by trying to "get the girl" from the Genji clan, with whom she has been living since the murder of her husband.

Naturally, she's become a prostitute and can be found dancing (can we call it that?) and seductively yanking beads from her throat in the saloon. Violence, swordsmanship, secrets revealed and a Gatling gun pulled in a coffin (a nod to the film's namesake) all serve to carry the action to the final "explosive" showdown.



Unfortunately, what could have been a clever mixing of genres turns out to be overblown and incoherent. The characters' phonetic all-"English" dialogue makes for acutely affected acting, and Miike writes in far too many clichés to call it humorous. Parts of the film feel like they were composed by a twisted child playing cowboys in his basement.

After killing off one of his characters, he decides he still needs him, so he just brings him back to life. This strategy might work if you're the only one playing the game, but makes for a bit much to swallow when watching a film—especially when we're asked to believe it on more than one occasion. And I'm still not sure what to make of the internally conflicted/dual personality sheriff.

As any good mixer of mashups knows, the pieces have to fit together precisely, or instead of a patchwork quilt, you end up with a hobo's garments. *Katakana*-ized English, a few clever tricks and an adorable child don't mask the poor acting, undeveloped characters and piecemeal plot. Miike misses the mark: his "Western"-inspired sukiyaki is really just a plate of leftovers with a raw egg garnish.

Despite this critic's opinion, the film did win second place for "Best Asian Film" at the 2008 Fant-Asia Film Festival and first prize for Best Art Direction and Best Technical Award for Costume Design at the 2008 Mainichi Film Concours. It was also nominated (inexplicably) for the prestigious Golden Lion at the 2007 Venice Film Festival.

Sample at your own risk.

Sukiyaki Western Django is available on Blu-ray and DVD. If you'd like to get your hands on a copy or check out some of the other films distributed by First Look Studios, visit their site at www.firstlookstudios.com.

"Jero" continued from page 13

I do not plan to expand my career outside of Japan, and I unfortunately have no desire to sing in English.

How long do you plan to live in Japan for?

I do not plan to return the U.S.

Traditionally, enka is popular with an older crowd. What makes you so appealing to all ages?

I honestly have no idea. I think I may bring something new to enka, and allow the younger listeners a new way to listen to enka.

What is it about enka that moves you?

Everything about it, from the artists, music and lyrics. I always enjoyed listening to music with a very distinct meaning, melody and soul. Enka is a perfect example.

Where in Japan and the world would you most like to visit that you haven't been to yet?

I would like to climb Mount Fuji one day, and perhaps visit some South American countries.

Do you feel that there's more Japanese interest in your hometown of Pittsburgh now (for example, in sister cities Saitama and Omiya)?

Possibly. I know many Japanese have not heard of Pittsburgh before.

If you were to cover one song of your choice in English, what song would it be and why?

Anything by Luther Vandross. His music is the very best, in my opinion.

Are there any musical instruments you'd like to learn to play?

I played the snare drum from elementary school to high school, and played a bit of piano. I wish I would have stuck with the piano a little longer.

Besides enka, are there any other forms of Japanese art or culture that you similarly enjoy?

I enjoy trying different types of Japanese food.

Thanks for sharing your time with us. Do you have any final message for your JETAA NY fans?

Please continue to share your experiences with Japanese youngsters, and continue to be positive role models for them.

For a selection of Jero's TV appearances, visit www.veoh.com/search/videos/q/jero#, and check out his blog at www.blog.goo.ne.jp/jeroenka.

Special thanks to Takaaki Shiraiishi of Guan Bar! for photos and interview assistance.



NYC ↔ TYO: An Inside Look at Japan Airlines



By Kelly Nixon (Iwate-ken, 2003-06)

Japan Airlines, recognized as Asia's largest air carrier and employer of over 50,000 people worldwide, has been a part of Manhattan's international business scene almost as long as the company itself.

In 1953, the Japanese government enacted the "Japan Airlines Law" and took the private company under the protective wing of government control. Later that same year, JAL initiated its own global expansion by choosing Manhattan as the location for its first international sales office. JAL's first charter flight to New York was made to transport staff to the 1964 World's Fair, followed by the inauguration of service between Tokyo and New York in 1966.

Today, JAL operates two to three daily flights between New York and Tokyo and is a prime example of how Japanese corporate culture can flourish in a foreign market and unite Japanese and non-Japanese in lifetime employment.

Back during the golden age of air travel, JAL's U.S. headquarters occupied ten floors at 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue. Betty English, one of the 200 employees who began working at the new building when it opened in 1969, recalls the massive showcase window that surrounded the ground floor ticketing counter at the former building.

"It was like the ticketing counter was enclosed in a fish bowl where everyone could look in from the street. One year the window display was dressed with five-foot tall chrysanthemums and another year massive tanks of koi fish were installed," she says. "Of course, our biggest crowd draw was our annual origami tree."

JAL's famous 10-foot Christmas tree, on which every single ornament was folded by an expert origami master, was retired and dismantled into souvenir pieces over six years ago, but is still fondly remembered by staff and New Yorkers alike. As recently as last December, some visitors to New York made the pilgrimage to JAL's office with hopes of being able to see this once-impressive holiday display that rivaled the Rockefeller tree in popularity.

Even though JAL's New York presence has now been downgraded from headquarters to regional sales office and is currently consolidated into a single floor at a different building near Bryant Park, the office still boasts a handful of "old-timers" such as English, who have remained with the company for the better part of the last 30 years. Impressive still is that almost half of JAL's employees in New York have given the company more than 20 years of service, a feat that most employees attribute to the close-knit camaraderie of the office members throughout the years.

In true Japanese corporate fashion, the career history of many of the remaining employees at the New York office has been long and varied.

"Anecdotes" continued from page 10

I'll never forget my first run-in with the Otohime, or "sound princess." In 1995, the Otohime, an electronic device that reproduces the sound of a flushing toilet to help mask any unflattering noises, was installed in the ladies' restrooms of Yokohama's government offices.

At first I was confounded by the sensor-activated device, which also bore the cryptic label *sesezagi no nagare*, or "running brook." I'd assumed, wrongly, that they were put in place for our listening enjoyment, ha ha.



Director Takuji Kimura in JAL's JFK Airport office

Every employee began his or her career in one department and has since moved around considerably as the needs of the employee or the company has changed. This modification of the traditional *tenkin*, or office transfer, system allowed employees the autonomy to change positions and departments and "grow up with the company" while fostering a "sense of family among all of the JAL staff," according to Carol Anderson, current vice president of marketing.

Anderson was one of the lucky employees selected to participate in JAL's work exchange program in the early 1990s. "I was very fortunate that I had amazing colleagues and a nice balance between my JAL life as well as meeting a lot of people who were expats with other companies. It was a terrific experience that is both good for the Tokyo office and for the employee after they return home," she says.

Imagine the teacher's room or the board of education office most JETs remember from Japan multiplied at least 10 times over in terms of square footage and personnel and one can begin to visualize a typical office floor in JAL's Tokyo headquarters. With only 40 spacious and private employee cubicles, JAL's Manhattan sales office feels like a relaxed departure from the stark, open and crowded conditions that most JAL employees work their way up in, according to **Takuji Kimura**, JAL's latest home office transfer to New York.

Kimura was given approximately one month's notice to prepare for his transfer from passenger service manager at Kansai International Airport to director of administration in New York last spring. Although he did not have any input in this decision, he says that it was his dream to come to New York because he had experienced living in the UK and Europe but not the U.S.

Even though he's finding that New York is more difficult to live in than he had imagined, he says the biggest perk of his job now is walking down the streets of New York and seeing a cityscape with a vanishing point, churches, and other scenery which does not exist in Tokyo. On Sundays his favorite thing to do is go out for a walk with a coffee and a copy of the *New York Times*—which he doesn't read, but purchases in order to truly feel the New York experience.

Adjusting to a new country, a completely new job position, new colleagues and non-Japanese subordinates appears to be something that Kimura is taking in stride, displaying those key components of a successful international manager: flexibility and grace. Mr. Kimura notes that "in Japan there are more people around to delegate tasks to, but here I am often the only one who can take care of a task, so the long hours worked here are done out of necessity."

Luckily, Kimura says the stress doesn't get to him since "everyone in the office is so helpful." That is, after all, what the JAL family is for.

For more on the history of Japan Airlines, visit www.jal.com/en/history/openning.html.



Try finding one of these at Penn Station

After several visits to the washroom where I'd been greeted by a cacophony of artificial running water, I asked a female colleague to what purpose do those silly noise-making contraptions serve. Of course, I had a good laugh when I found out that the Otohime was part of a water conservation measure meant to prevent women from double-flushing. What stunned me most, however, was to discover how modest Japanese women could be. For until that day, I'd never given a second thought to the noises associated with tinkling. Nature's call was just that—a natural occurrence, not an embarrassing act that needed to be masked.

Nancy Ikehara (CIR Yokohama-shi, 1994-97)

"Anecdotes" continued on page 22

By Matt Matysik (Yamanashi-ken, 2006-07)

Who is **Tora-san**? I certainly didn't know, as I sat in the **Japan Society** theater, patiently waiting for the film to begin. As a JET alumnus, and someone with genuine interest in Japan, I consider myself reasonably knowledgeable when it comes to Japanese culture and film—Kurosawa, of course; Ozu, sure; Mizoguchi, yep—and yet somehow, Tora-san had escaped me.

As the film began, however, I became less concerned with my perceived inadequacies as a filmgoer and more captivated by the world being displayed; it was a Japan I myself had witnessed: moss-covered rocks, yammering cicadas, family dinners on tatami with beer, and at the center of it all, Tora-san.

Tora-san, an affable derelict traveling Japan with only his suitcase, is a somewhat unlikely hero. He drinks, he's raucous, he is generally uncouth; yet he's harmless at heart. More than harmless, he is mischievous, funny and ultimately helpful and unifying to his family, his friends and to Japanese and world audiences alike.

Known in Japan as **Otoko wa Tsurai Yo** (It's Tough Being a Man), the Tora-san films claim distinction as the world's longest-running film series, with 48 films dating from 1969 (another blow to my excuse of ignorance...). Director **Yoji Yamada** was intimately involved with each film, having written and directed all but two of the 48, some of which were shot and distributed within different seasons of the same year.

Each film has a similar simple tone, following an almost identical narrative structure: Tora-san wanders Japan, settles momentarily, meets and falls in love with a beautiful woman (or "Madonna," a folksy variation of the Bond Girls), creates a stir within his newfound community, and ultimately leaves town for a new adventure, his love perpetually unrequited. Yet rather than confining creativity and yielding a repetitive cycle of déjà vu, this episodic structure allowed actor **Kiyoshi Atsumi** and Yamada to create a nuanced depiction of Japanese society from the bottom up.

These films work on the audience's prior knowledge of these elements, applying this basic recognition to explore themes of tradition, social class, family, and, of course, nostalgia. Sitting down to watch a Tora-san film was a holiday homecoming—fitting considering that Tora-san himself frequently surprised his relatives with his unannounced visits. It was precisely this nostalgia that I felt upon watching my first Tora-san film. I missed Japan!

Thankfully, New York's Japan Society offers the next best thing: a monthly audience with Tora-san, among other items of Japanese cultural interest on a regular basis. The Japan Society's Monthly Classics film series, organized around a particular theme, genre, studio, director or actor, made its debut in 2007 with *No Borders, No Limits*, a series of screenings devoted to 1960s **Nikkatsu** action cinema. The Best of Tora-san films are the second installment of the Monthly Classics series. This year's series also represents a unique collaboration on the part of three players: Japan Society, **Shochiku** (the studio that produced the Tora-san films) and director Yamada.

"We discovered that Shochiku was running a big campaign in 2008 for the 40th anniversary of the first episode, the 80th anniversary of actor Atsumi's birth and also the 13th anniversary of Atsumi's death," explained Japan Society's film program officer **Ryo Nagasawa**. On behalf of Japan Society, Shochiku asked Yamada to select eight films for this series. Spanning twenty years, they offer English-speaking audiences the chance to enjoy one of Japan's most beloved national icons.

As an added bonus for those in attendance the night of the first screening,

Yamada corresponded with Japan Society's New York audience live from Japan by videoconference. He answered audience questions and discussed the origins of the Tora-san character and the historical relevance of the films to a tumultuous social and cultural time in Japan and the world at large.

These comments especially helped to explain the Best of Tora-san film series taking place this season. After all, the organizer of a monthly series bringing classic films to English-speaking audiences should ask and implicitly answer the most basic question: why? Why Tora-san now, in 2009, in New York?

It might help to ask the same question, positioned this time during the first years of the series: the late 1960s and early 1970s. A post-World War II Japan had recovered from devastation to achieve extraordinary levels of economic growth. Tora-san emerged, as Yamada described, amidst a burgeoning consumer culture of "Three Cs": cars, coolers (air conditioners) and color TVs. Of course, the possession-less Tora-san represents the very antithesis of consumer culture (if we ignore the yearly audience consumption of his films, of course). As Yamada revealed, "Tora-san is not interested in progress or development or innovation; he's really turned his back on these things—he's a very...old fashioned person."

This "old fashioned" person stood out starkly against his movie contemporaries: the slick Yakuza film stars of the 1970s and the stoic samurai warriors. In contrast, Tora-san inhabits a smaller world, where day-to-day human interactions make a real difference. For example, during **Tora-san Goes Religious?**, Tora-san, posing as a monk, helps facilitate the relationship between two young lovers by encouraging them to follow their dreams. Even though the young lovers are clearly in tension with the traditional order and the older generation, the film suggests that humans must ultimately make the life choices that are appropriate for them.

Let's return to that important question: why Tora-san now in New York? Enjoyable as these films are, they go beyond mere escapism. Make no mistake, these films are not the Busby Berkeley musicals of the 1930s, helping audiences forget their economic conditions if only for a few hours. The Tora-san series is about nostalgia, enjoyment and laughter, but also about living life to its fullest, seizing the moment, and strengthening the bonds between us.

In my view, we could always use a little self-improvement, self-examination and general healing, and the time has never been better. Speaking from experience as a former resident of Japan, I wasn't expecting to be transported back to a land that did and did not exist once upon a time—yet there I was, among friends and family, of sorts. The fact that a character like Tora-san, who enacts small changes on a local level, has had such a national, and now global, impact is a testament to his value today. Treat yourself in this new year: take advantage of the Tora-san screenings at Japan Society while the moment is right!

*The Best of Tora-san Monthly Classics series has three Tora-san films remaining. All screenings are at Japan Society, 333 East 47th Street between First and Second Avenues. The next film, **Tora-san's Dream Come True**, premieres Friday, March 13 at 7:30 p.m. For a complete schedule of events and ticket information, visit www.japansociety.org.*

For footage of the interview with director Yoji Yamada at Japan Society in October, visit journalist Christopher Bourne's film blog at www.chris-bourne.blogspot.com/2008/11/yoji-yamada-tora-san-our-lovable-tramp.html.

Special thanks to Shannon Jowett at Japan Society for media assistance.



The late Kiyoshi Atsumi (left), star of the celebrated Tora-san film series

BAT-FANS, MEET YOUR NEW MIYAGI: NEW YORKER CHIP KIDD TALKS ‘BAT-MANGA!’

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

What do the works of **Haruki Murakami**, **Cormac McCarthy**, **Bret Easton Ellis**, **John Updike**, **Michael Crichton**, **Charles Schulz** and **Elmore Leonard** have in common? They all share the same designer. **Chip Kidd** is known primarily for his book covers, but he occasionally writes tomes of his own.

His latest book, **Bat-Manga! The Secret History of Batman in Japan**, combines two of his greatest passions: **Batman** and its myriad collectibles. The book combines 1960s **Caped Crusader** manga (by the legendary **Jiro Kuwata**) with a vintage showcase of **Bat**-memorabilia released in Japan at the time (collected by **Chicagoan Saul Ferris** with photos by **Geoff Spear**).

You saw your first Batman comic at age three. When were you introduced to anime?

Technically, I was introduced to anime at the same time, in the late 60s: our local TV station in Philadelphia was showing all sorts of Japanese kids' programs—**Astro Boy**, **Ultraman**, **The Space Giants**, **Marine Boy**, **Speed Racer**, etc. In fact, they also showed **8-Man** cartoons, so I was a fan of **Jiro Kuwata's** work long before I ever knew who he was.

Growing up, what anime shows made an impression on you? How about traditional or commercial Japanese art?

I loved all of those shows [mentioned]. I couldn't have articulated it at the time, but their sleek modernist art direction very much inspired me. I never did seriously study "traditional" Japanese art and frankly have never had much interest in it. The commercial stuff has always been so much more interesting to me.

Is there anyone you'd most like to collaborate on a project with, Japanese or otherwise?

Well, yes, many people! But to limit it to Japanese, I would very much like to try and write a **Batman** story that **Kuwata-sensei** would draw. We have been communicating a little bit about doing that. We'll see. For what it's worth, I am also a tremendous admirer of [**Akira** author] **Katsuhiko Otomo's** work. He did a short **Batman** story once that is truly bizarre.

What Japanese works that you've been commissioned for rank among your favorites?

[**Osamu**] **Tezuka's** *Buddha* series, definitely. Everything by him that I've worked on is great, but those books are classics. I especially enjoy recommending them to my friends' children.

Did you study any Japanese artists in school?

I studied graphic designers and graphic design history, so the Japanese artists I learned about and admired were **Shigeo Fukuda**, **Ikko Tanaka**, and **Tadanori Yokoo**. I had the pleasure of meeting **Mr. Tanaka** in Tokyo, shortly before his death, at the opening of an exhibition of mine.

Regarding your first visit to Japan, what were your overall thoughts and impressions?

I have had the good fortune to visit three times, the first two in 2001. I was honored to present exhibitions of my work at the **Dai Nippon Printing** company's **DDD** gallery in **Osaka** and their **GGG** gallery in **Tokyo**. My total impression was that **Japan** quickly became one of my top five favorite

places on earth. Seriously. I would very much like to come back and visit.

Here in America, Batman stands for many things, like fear, retribution and deductive thinking. What do you personally think Batman meant to Japanese readers back in the 1960s?

The Japanese readers at the time were taking a cue from the 1966 **Batman** TV show, which was very lighthearted and fun. But I can only assume that **Batman** didn't really sustain any significant lasting popularity among Japanese kids, because the comics ran for only a year (ditto the show).

Is Kuwata-sensei's interpretation of the character somewhat faithful to that particular era of Batman, or do you think he represents something else entirely in manga form?

I would say that, amazingly, he achieves both of those things simultaneously. It is both true to 1966 **Batman**, but the sense of swift movement and urgent intensity of manga is there as well. I thoroughly love the combination.

What new things did you learn about Batman and his world while putting together this book?

The book itself is the answer to that, and many, many hardcore **Batman** fans that I know were totally surprised by it. This material is extremely obscure, even in **Japan**, because it was never collected or reprinted. So it really is a revelation to many people—it's like discovering an album by the **Beatles** that was written and recorded in **Japan**, and then put away on a shelf.

What kinds of trends have you observed in popular Japanese comics, and how are they similar or different from American forms?

With American comics, you would need to narrow the question down considerably in order to start to adequately answer it. Japanese comics cover such an enormous spectrum of genres, themes and visual styles that to try and generalize them doesn't do the form justice.

I would say one example of a wide disparity in a particular genre are the Japanese stories for teenage girls that feature boys/young men who are in love with other boys/young men [*yaoi* manga]. That is something that you never would have seen in American comics.

How did you end up becoming an art director at [NY publisher] Vertical? Did you have to modify your style when designing for a Japanese staff?

The founders of **Vertical** asked me at the start to be their art director, and I was thrilled that they did so. I only had to modify my way of visual thinking when I was designing covers that opened right to left, which was rare (but something I carried over into *Bat-Manga!*). I think in general the challenge was to try and make them visually appealing to an American audience without denying what they were—translations of Japanese novels and comics. The collection of **Batman** merchandise and ephemera photographed for the book is a real treasure trove.

What items in the book do you think are especially cool or notably different from American toys and games?

I love the tin toys, which by and large they did not make here in the States. They're so beautifully produced, and I love the fact that the boxes for them are rarer and often more sought after than the toys themselves.

"Bat-Manga!" continued on page 21



Chip Kidd (Photo: Charlie Kochman)



Natsuo Kirino's 'Real World'

By David Kowalsky (ALT/CIR Hiroshima-ken, 1991-93)



A member of JETAA's Seattle chapter, David served as a JET in a small town in Hiroshima prefecture for two years in the early nineties. After returning, he earned an MA in East Asian Studies from Washington University (St. Louis) and has been working for NEC Corporation of America in Bellevue/Redmond, Washington since 1997. He is currently a technical writer.

This past summer, while the reviews were pouring in for Haruki Murakami's latest book published in English, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, I was more excited about the publication of *Real World*, the latest work translated into English from Natsuo Kirino, the prolific Japanese novelist and short story writer who is still nowhere close to being in the same league for both name recognition and popularity as Murakami here in the States.

At under 250 pages, *Real World* is a shorter, less substantial work than Kirino's *Out* and *Grotesque*, but is another novel about a murder with women as the main characters. What makes each novel so fascinating is to get beyond the murder plot and view the underlying social commentary on contemporary Japan.

Out was a thriller about four female factory workers who band together when one kills her abusive husband. *Grotesque* covered the brutal killings of two female prostitutes while telling the story of the devalued role of women in Japan. And now there is *Real World*, an intimate look at the alienation and struggles of four high school teenagers.

The book's clever title is a theme to explain being hopelessly stuck in the never-so-easy time of adolescence versus living in the, well, real world. It may be easy to dismiss the teens in *Real World* as being overly self-absorbed in a book with a predictable plot. But this novel may also be not so far from the reality of Japan's real life "Lost Generation."

In his book *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation*, Michael Zielenziger wrote extensively about hikikomori, the phenomenon of individuals who refuse to leave their parents' house and isolate themselves from society in their homes for long periods of at least six months all the way up to decades in the rarest cases.

Real World begins with a matricide, which quickly turns to a killer-on-the-run story, told from the perspective of four high school girls, who take turns narrating from their own perspectives. Also taking two turns nar-

rating is Worm, a 17-year-old male high school student.

We first meet Toshi, arguably the most normal of the four women, who even says "I want to wear ordinary clothes and not stand out." Next is Yuzan, a closet lesbian with no energy to think about plans for college as she struggles with deceiving everyone or coming out, and living with the pain of the death of her mother. Then there is Kirarin, dealing with a breakup and running with two different cliques, but never feeling completely comfortable with either group. Finally, the last narrator is Terauchi, who has major abandonment issues because of her mother having an affair with a younger man.

Worm, the antihero of the book, does not at first consider the consequences of his actions. He's enjoying the girls being both sympathetic and attracted to the glamour of his murder. When he does realize the enormity of what he has done, he wants to carefully control his image. He goes as far as to order one of the other girls to ghostwrite the manifesto of his crime, which he wants to be better than Sakakibara's. This refers to Japan's disturbing 1997 case of the 14-year-old student known by the pseudonym Sakakibara Seito, who shocked the nation by beheading an 11-year-old retarded boy.

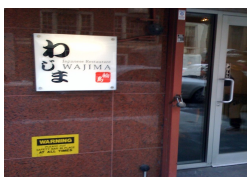
Another very timely real life reference Worm makes is to having twice read the novel *Battle Royale*, the controversial bestseller (and internationally-released film and sequel), which is not only known for being extremely violent, but also as a cautionary tale about the ultracompetitive Japanese school system.

Perhaps it is no surprise Worm would enjoy such a book, who is beyond frustrated with the expected path he is expected to take unquestioningly. He believes the only way out is to kill his mother. "As long as she's around I'll never be free. She'll decide which university I should go to, pick out who I should marry, and wind up bossing my kids around," he says.

Natsuo Kirino is a novelist to watch. With only four of her novels currently published in English, astute readers can look forward to more being translated and published here in the future.

There is also a chance that film adaptations of her novels might become a reality. In 2004, *Variety* announced that New Line Cinema had acquired *Out* for development into an Americanized thriller, but for whatever reason the project stalled, with the film's current status unknown.

For more on Natsuo Kirino, visit www.natsukirino.com.



Wajima: Tasty Bentos, But Bring Your Own Lacquerware

By Allen Wan (Ishikawa-ken, 1992-94)



Craving a little authentic Japanese for lunch and not willing to blow a week's salary for that indulgence, I luckily chanced into **Wajima** one day last summer and have been back over a dozen times since.

I was attracted by the name, as it reminded me of the fishing village along the Sea of Japan coast in Ishikawa-ken that was my home for two years when I was on JET. (Must be good fish, I mused.)

Besides a convenient Midtown location (two blocks north of Bloomingdale's), the three-year-old restaurant offers Zen-like ambience and several delicious bento lunches for less than \$10.



I recommend the *sanzemizu* (chirashi, shrimp tempura, cold soba, chawanmushi and miso soup) if you're hungry as I usually am. The tempura is crispy and the chawanmushi comes out steaming hot like an onsen.

The buckwheat soba is homemade and also offered as a meal in itself. Wajima has sushi and sashimi set lunches and specialties that can range up to \$50 for the kaiseki, which according to manager Masaya has been popular with its customers even during these lean economic times. That will have to wait until I get my bonus.

Wajima is at 134 East 61st Street at Lexington Avenue. For more information, visit www.wajima.com.

SwirlySwirlDates:

Two JETs' First-Time Adventures In Interracial Speed Dating

By Rick Ambrosio (Ibaraki-ken, 2006-08) and Nicole Bongiorno (Saga-ken, 1990-91)

On a cold night in January I arrived at Penn and shot out of the station quickly, hightailing it to Eighth Avenue. Before I walked in the door of the lounge I did a quick once-over. Breath? Check. Clothes? Check. Hair? Check.

I stepped in and before I could apologize for being late, the hosts (**Eddie Elle** and **Charmane Tsang**) handed me a piece of paper, quickly went through the rules and showed me to my seat. I was still practically out of breath when I introduced myself to the cute girl across from me.

I'm not exactly the nervous type, nor am I particularly shy, but it always seemed like a hassle to me walking up and having to start conversations with girls. I suppose that's just part of being a guy. A lot of the time someone isn't interested in talking with you, has a boyfriend, is waiting for friends, whatever. I sort of just wish I could line up the girls who wanted to talk and chat a bit. **SwirlySwirlDates** has done just that, but with a twist.

"Hi...I'm...Rick."

"Hi, I'm Jamie.*"

Just like that I was doing something I had never done before, and never really thought I'd do; I was speed dating. To add to it, I was interracial speed dating. Jamie, like all the other women there that evening, was Asian. She and I would talk for a frantic six minutes about each others' interests, jobs, and whatever else we could think of. After six minutes a small bell would ring, signaling the rotation to the next "date." Something started to happen that I didn't think would occur, either: I was having a great time.

You see, speed dating to me brought to mind desperate people with no time on their hands, looking for a husband or wife as soon as possible in a high-pressure atmosphere. The reality provided by SwirlySwirl was much different; everyone was very open-minded, provided interesting conversation, and was just having plain fun.

"The focus is really on fun," Eddie tells me. "I'd see lots of interracial dating on the streets...and we saw an opportunity to introduce more people to each other." Eddie and Charmane co-founded SwirlySwirl to create a fun environment for people to meet, date and form networks outside their race. They currently offer Asian, Caucasian, African American and Hispanic events on their Web site.

After the third "date" there was a 15-minute break, and Charmane suggested that maybe the boys should buy the ladies a drink at the bar. I realized in my rush here I never got myself one. As I approached the bar, my second and third "dates" Alysha* and Jane* approached me and we started talking. As it would turn out, they were both good friends from college and came to the SwirlySwirl event to relax and meet new people.

"We thought it would be fun, and it's exciting to mix it up with different people," Jane says.

Alysha also adds an interesting perspective to it: "Sometimes you see an Asian girl, and you wonder if she dates outside her race or not. You don't even know if you have a shot. Same thing with guys from other races. Here that whole pretense just drops; everyone is having fun."

My fourth date, Amanda*, was too cool to be true. Originally from L.A., she studied computer science in school (I did IT!), had worked in finance, and was now here in New York doing event planning. Her laugh was infectious and she had a killer smile. She politely joked that I talked more with

*Name has been changed

my hands than my mouth. Before I knew it, the little bell rang and an all-too-fast six minutes was up. After each rotation, you rate each date from one to five stars. If two people rate each other four or above, they are a "match" and are later notified online at the SwirlySwirl site, where they can message one another and exchange information. Amanda was certainly a five. Here I was hoping she thought I was at least a four.

When asked about the future of SwirlySwirl, Eddie and Charmane alluded to possible expansions into the Houston and California area, as well as expanded dating services such as pre-packaged SwirlySwirl dates for matches that would assure to be interesting and fun.

"We pride ourselves to be the first interracial speed dating company in New York," Charmane says. "We want to continue to have the reputation of being the most fun and enjoyable speed dating company available. Not only do we cater to different ethnicities, we also strive to be fun, different and interesting. Dating packages and professional/social networking parties are part of our future plans in 2009."

"We are anticipating a lot of fun in the future," Eddie said with a smile.

I woke up the next morning and found the e-mail I had been waiting for; my SwirlySwirl matches were in! I logged onto the site to see if anyone I ranked four stars or above felt the same about me [*drum roll*]...

The page loaded and I smiled as I found that Alysha, Jane, and yes, Amanda too, felt I was a match. It seems that I had a great night and met some new, fun people in the process.

SwirlySwirl did a great job providing a fun, no-pressure atmosphere to meet new people from different races. Now I had to think of something witty to write the girls. I then noticed I had unconsciously scrolled to the future events page. I may be doing some more "swirling" sooner than I thought.

Charmane and Eddie also explained to me that SwirlySwirl not only holds speed dating events, but also networking events for previous customers. You never know what kind of connection you're going to make meeting new people. It doesn't have to necessarily be dating, but could also just be friendship or a professional connection. It's all about socializing!

SwirlySwirl plans to have theme nights for speed dating where topics will be chosen from a bowl and the six-minute dates will center around asking and answering questions related to that topic. You can also purchase exclusive date packages on SwirlySwirl's Web site that include a menu designed for couples. So if you made that special connection at a speed dating event, you can then plan a special romantic date through SwirlySwirl as well.

It was my first time to try speed dating, and I didn't know what to expect. My only conception of what it would be like was what I had seen on TV or in the movies, but SwirlySwirl had a much more laid back vibe to it. It was nice being able to sit back and wait for your new "date" to make their way to you.

For female JET alums who have their heart set on meeting a Japanese or Japanese American man for a dating connection, SwirlySwirl may not be the thing for you as in the "Asian male" category Chinese-American guys seemed to be the majority. However, I made a special request to Charmane for a Japanese male night and she seemed receptive, so keep your fingers crossed. In the meantime, if you are looking for an efficient, fun and different way to meet people, it can't hurt to give SwirlySwirl a try!

Dare to swirl? Visit SwirlySwirl's homepage at www.swirlyswirl.com.

Stacy Smith (CIR Kumamoto-ken, 2000-03) contributed to this article.



A night out, SwirlySwirl-style



10tecmai Yosakoi Dance Project: How I Got My Funiki Back



By Kirsten Phillips (Niigata-ken, 2005-08)

Three people are on the stage. Buddha waits to the left, bongo drums at the ready. Poised beside him, a girl in floral sleeves takes an expectant stance. At stage right sits an enigmatic wooden box. Perched on top of said box is Hiro Kobayashi. Before anyone can wonder what the box has to say, Hiro shouts: "Here we go!"

The scene ignites with a burst of music. Wordless tribal chanting melds with the syncopated clickety-clack of the girl's feet, percussionist Toshi Minami (Buddha) dishes out heavy *sazon* on the bongos, and Hiro (founder/percussionist) lets skilled hands on the side of his box do the rest of his talking.

More dancers fly out of the woodwork, shouting enthusiastically. Disorganized merriment quickly gives way to three ballerinas who slink gracefully center stage. A lively jazz section takes over, which then segues into hip-hop. The rhythm (guided by Buddha and Hiro) is the thread connecting each distinct weave in the pattern. Colored lights catch the sound, amplifying the flurry of motion so thrillingly in the moment that anyone sitting down cannot help but fidget just a little.



The author and her yosakoi crew

That's before the sword fight. Fast-paced and highly expressive, the movements tell a story that is anyone's guess. For those acquainted with **yosakoi**, it is the familiar but not the expected. For those who are not, it is pure **10tecmai**.

What is 10tecmai? In one word, according to executive director **Tomas Trinidad**, 10tecmai is "Unity."

"The theme of 10tecmai is 'Goes beyond Words,'" Trinidad says. "Through the primal medium of dance, we strive to tell our messages and stories in a way that no doubt invokes different reactions from those who see us."

Just one of many talented acts featured in this year's Japan Arts Matsuri 2008 (JAM), the dual monikered 10tecmai has been putting on shows in the New York area since 2004. Originally made up of just four members, it has since expanded to 16. If anyone had told me last year that I'd be sharing a stage with them, I'd have stressed most emphatically that they probably had rabies.

No JET walks away from Japan empty-handed. Tea ceremony was never my scene. Kendo, no jive. Mecha, schmecka. If I was going to bring one thing back with me, it was going to be the giddy, fizzy excitement of flailing about with a set of wooden clappers and their best friend in the whole wide world—yosakoi.

Yosakoi is an energetic and eclectic dance widely performed at festivals or ceremonies in Japan. Before coming to Japan, I had never heard of it.

Watching my elementary school kids perform yosakoi one day made me envious enough to want to join them, so I signed up for the community dance group. That is how every Saturday morning you could find me cheerfully clacking and jumping around with my students. Not only did I dance with them, I danced with their parents and their teachers and other people I would never have met if not for those *naruko*. I owed them plenty of good times. After my return to New York, I unpacked countless well-wishes, 236 sets of *taraimawashi* hand towels, two wooden *naruko* and a desire to use them again, please.

I found 10tecmai to be as friendly as they were intense, supportive as they were dedicated and more fun than I'd had since leaving my beloved hamlet in Niigata. Some of us are students. Some of us are parents. One of us is an uncoordinated JET alum. We are not the same age or come from the same background, but we are together for one purpose—to share the yosakoi love with everybody else. From me, they asked only for commitment. For the joy of doing something I never thought I'd be able to do again? I gave them that, plus the aching ham-strings.

Along with recognized yosakoi dances, 10tecmai also creates original choreography, taking elements from a wide range of both traditional and modern dance styles to create a distinct energy and dynamic. So what's with the name?

Trinidad: "The characters, when loosely translated into their English counterparts, mean 'heaven – hands – traditional – dance'; I like to take it to mean that the source of our dance, while rooted in the traditional as well as gaining aspects of other cultures and dance techniques, ultimately comes from a higher power."

So what does 10tecmai reflect to audiences about Japan?

"The passions and strong ideals about the people of Japan as well as the dedication to achieve one's goals," Trinidad says.

I'd like more than anything to be able to clearly convey to others the answer to the question, "Why Japan?" I could go on forever, but instead I dance.

YOSAKOI DANCE PROJECT AUDITION!

Yosakoi Dance Project 10tecmai is seeking dancers (ages 18 and up) for an open audition in Midtown on Saturday, February 28 from 2:00-4:00 p.m. No previous dance training is necessary, and registration is free.

For more details and a performance clip, visit 10tecmai's homepage at www.10tecmai.com.

"Bat-Manga!" continued from page 18

What aspects of Batman's character feel "Japanese" to you, if any?

The gadgets, definitely. And Kuwata invented all sorts of variations of ray guns for him and Robin to use.

If you weren't an artist, what would be the next best job for you?

Exotic dancing.

What plans are on your plate for Batman's 70th anniversary this year?

I am working on a special, new Batman project that I can't talk about yet, but it probably won't be coming out until 2010 at the earliest.

Finally, any special message for JET alums and your fans in Japan?

I didn't realize I had fans in Japan! I urge you all to take up a collection to bring me over on a Japanese tour!

For updates and anonymous donations to the tour fund, visit www.chipkidd.com.

Special thanks to Vanessa Hope Schneider of Pantheon Books for photos and interview assistance.

The Tale of Eric and Ozawa

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

It was one of our last big nights in Tokyo. A well dressed crew hailing from Ibaraki descended on Roppongi for our last big hurrah. In a couple months we would all go back to our homes, be them England, Australia, America, etc. and this weekend was an all out affair. Expensive dinners, nice hotel, Jacuzzi Karaoke, Tokyo Bay cruise...it was one for the books.

Saturday night of this luxurious weekend found us at club **Alife**, rumored to be a hot spot for famous Japanese actresses and models. To be honest, I don't think I'd know them if I saw them, but it was still cool to be partying where they party, and with a ¥3,000 entrance fee, it had better be fun. There were about 15 of us in total running around, having drinks, dancing, enjoying ourselves. Little did we know it would end up being one of our most talked-about nights in JET.

Around 3:00 a.m., I ascended from the "techno" section of the club located in the basement and headed towards the lounge and bar area. I had just gotten the number of a very attractive young Russian dancer (a story for another article) and wanted to gloat to my friends. When I got there I found a large group of them huddled around one table. As I entered the circle, it appeared there was an argument going on.

"It's her, man!" exclaimed Navin.

"No way, what would she be doing here?" argued Dan.

"I don't know, but I'm sure girls like her have to go out somewhere," said Ty.

I asked to be briefed on the current situation. As it would turn out, about 30 feet from our "base" sitting in a VIP section was a woman named **Maria Ozawa**. For those who don't know about her, well, don't Google her while you're at work. Allow me to help you out, though: she is one of Japan's premiere AV idols; half-Japanese, half-Canadian and very easy on the eyes. Though I wasn't exactly familiar with her, she did look vaguely familiar.

The group battled back and forth. Dan and Max were skeptical. Ty and Navin were convinced. Bryan, who was known for not being able to hold his liquor well, was semi-conscious as his head laid down on the table. But in the end, who would be bold enough to find out?

"I'm going to do it," said Eric, rising up. Eric hailed from Canada, and with light eyes, a tall, muscular composure and vast Japanese ability, he was the greatest warrior from the Ibaraki tribe. "I can't just stand here and not hit on my favorite porn star. No matter what happens, it's worth it," he said. We all nodded in agreement. The trouble was that she was at a table with her friends, engrossed in conversation in the VIP section.

A plan was quickly formulated. If she got up, we did our best not to stare, and Eric would go in and do the best he could. A great plan, of course, but it was more like a stakeout; she didn't budge. After about 15 minutes the excitement had waned a bit, and some of the group, namely Bryan and Max, decided to be amused elsewhere.

Suddenly Maria stood up and left her seat. Like a pack of hyenas on the savanna, all our heads darted in the same direction at once. With a playful stride, Maria walked over to the bar and began ordering drinks. We all looked at Eric. He took a deep breath, smiled, and said, "Here goes nothing." As he walked away, you could feel the muffled excitement of our group. I wanted to cheer his name as he strode off into glorious battle. Heck, I wish I could have joined him, but alas, it was a solo mission, and I was relegated to watch from a slight distance.

I saw his entrance; he saddled up next to her and ordered some drinks. I could see them fine, but it was too noisy and they were too far away to hear the conversation. With a casual touch of her forearm, he leaned in and said something. We all held our breath. She laughed and teasingly slapped his shoulder. (To this day Eric has not shared with us whatever this magnificent opener was.) She turned toward him and they started talking. Just like that, our friend—our friend—was talking to The Maria Ozawa!

Their drinks were delivered but they lingered. Eric wore his confident smile and Maria seemed to really enjoy talking to him. It was perfect. I was already fast forward-ing what was to come in my head; Maria invites all of us to hang out at her mansion, Maria calls all her AV friends, we all party with hot AV girls until the sun comes up and goes down in the halls of JET legend!

I was still drinking on the sweet libation of this fantasy as it happened. From the corner of my eye, I saw Bryan fumbling drunkenly towards Eric and Maria. It was too late to stop him. I then watched Bryan stand between Eric and the mortal sex goddess. He mumbled something towards Eric. Eric's mouth stood agape, and no words came out. There was no talking between the three for a few seconds. Bryan seemed drunkenly confused and then headed off upstairs.

My attention darted back towards Eric. He smiled at Maria, they exchanged a few words, and then she headed back to her place behind the gates of the VIP lounge. Eric then began walking towards us with his head down. Before he was at the table, though, it bobbed back up with an amused smirk painted from ear to ear.

"Now that was too funny to be true," he said good-naturedly.

We all crowded around him then, like kids around a fire listening to a camp counselor telling a ghost story. (All we needed were s'mores.) Eric then regaled us with the story: "She was surprisingly sweet and down to earth," he said. "We made small talk. I pretended that I didn't know her, and asked for her name. 'Stephanie,' she replied. She said that she was from Canada. I asked her if she had a boyfriend. 'I wish,' she said, crestfallen. 'I don't know why I can't find one.'"

"We kept talking. Then I get a tap on the shoulder. Worst timing ever. It was Bryan, teetering in a drunken stupor. The three of us stood in tight, triangular formation; Maria and I leaning against the bar, Bryan directly behind us. The smut queen and I turned toward him. He spoke. 'Hey, did you talk to that porn star yet?'"

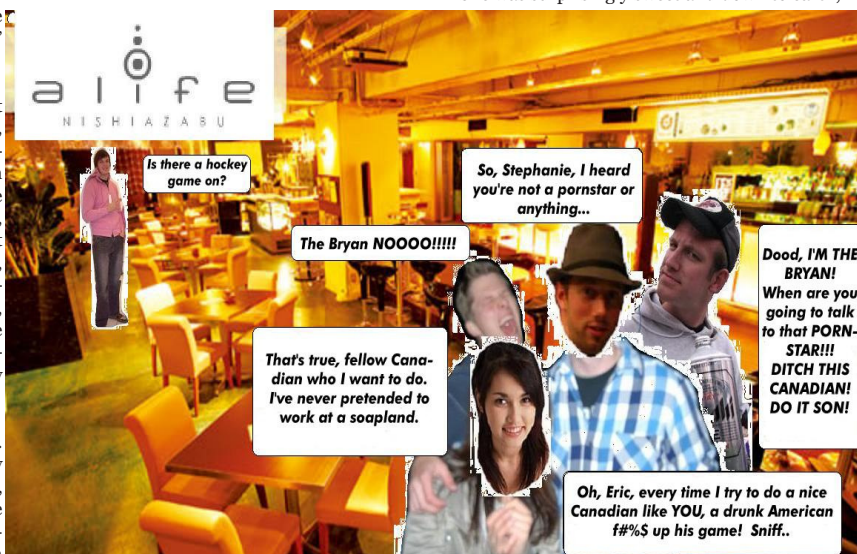
"I couldn't believe it. I didn't know how to react. I think I was in shock. So I just stared, blankly. After a few seconds Bryan, bless his soul, shrugged his shoulders, made a funny noise and carried on walking. I don't even think he realized that the girl I was talking to was the same one that I pointed out to him a few minutes earlier. It was a line right out of a movie."

"After he walked off, I kept talking to Maria as if nothing had happened. I didn't acknowledge Bryan's comment, and neither did she. But I think my game was ruined. She took hold of the drinks that she had bought for herself and her 'girlfriend,' said 'until next time,' and walked back to her table. I was happy enough; I got a chance to talk to Maria Ozawa, and Bryan made the story even better."

The first reaction of the group was to find Bryan and make him pay, but we figured he was too drunk to realize what he did and would therefore be too drunk to remember us beating him up. Eric could only smile, though; he had done what few men had the courage to do. The rest of the night was filled with more drinks and laughs, and we spilled out into the streets of Roppongi during the wee hours of the morning. Perhaps we were not victorious that night, but together with my fellow JET friends we touched on something more than victory; that night, we all became part of an epic tale.

It is said that in the deep cold winter nights of Ibaraki, JETs still huddle together under the kotatsu, feast on oden, and tell The Tale of Eric and Ozawa. Passed on from JET to JET, it is a story of pride and bravery that young, fledgling JETs aspire to and learn from. Some say that the story isn't true, that the girl was just a model, not the real Maria Ozawa. Some say Eric was never a real person, but a man made up out of myth and other JETs' exaggerated stories. But I was there, dear reader. I was there on the night a man became a legend, and the angel on the screen became real. I just hope that when the day comes, and Fate approaches you...my friend, like Eric, you buy her a drink, too.

Read Rick's "Tadaima!" column on *JetWit* at www.jetwit.com/wordpress/?s=tadaima%21.



Picture by Ty Martin

With the world's markets in freefall and unemployment skyrocketing, many are concerned about the future. But JET alums are more resilient than most. To show you're not alone out there, we at JQ proudly present the...

Top 14 Signs You're a JET Living in a Recession

14. You ruthlessly search eBay for bargains on a nice third-hand kotatsu
13. Tight budget means you can now only afford to buy songs and products from your favorite six members of Morning Musume
12. "Bank of America, feh! Congress really needs to bail out Sony and Toyota!"
11. Attending the next *Nihongo Dake* Dinner guarantees where next meal is coming from
10. "Good day! I'm with Public Television and we've, uh, started collecting door to door. If you own a TV..." *SLAM!*
9. Times Square just isn't the same since they took down the giant Cup Noodle
8. Citing a bad economy, you regretfully decide to break with years of tradition and back out of advertising for a leading Japan-related alumni magazine (wait a minute...)
7. You bring an empty rice bowl to the next *meishi* exchange
6. That image in the center is actually looking pretty damn good right now
5. You take your date to Nobu and are instantly dumped after a misguided attempt to recreate the iconic "Bella Notte" scene from *Lady and the Tramp*
4. Brutal job market forces you to teach impromptu English lessons outside of Kenka for some of that sweet, sweet cotton candy
3. The picture at the bottom of **page 3** has you very excited...but you can't tell if that's *koshihikari* or just California short grain
2. JQ's home office flooded with requests for next issue to be available in two-ply
1. For the first time in your life, you seriously wonder what Anpanman tastes like



Sponsors Index

Bao Noodles

Owner: **Chris Johnson** (Oita-ken, 1992-95)
391 2nd Avenue (between 22nd & 23d Street)
www.baonoodles.com
Gift Certificate for New Anecdotes

Indelible Creation Enterprise (P. 12)

Online Photo Crystal Shop
www.indeliblecreation.com
www.crystallizedintime.com
Sponsor for Photo Contest

Japan National Tourist Organization (P.6)

One Rockefeller Plaza, Suite 1250
(212) 757-5640

JTB Global Travel Inc. (P. 4)

1212 Avenue of the Americas, 19th F
New York, NY 10036
(212) 850-7474

JTB USA Inc. (Back Cover)

156 West 56th Street., 2F
(877) 798-9808

Kinokuniya Bookstore

1071 Avenue of the Americas (bet. 40th & 41st)
(212) 869-1700
Gift Certificate for New Anecdotes

Kintetsu International (Back Cover)

1325 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 2002
(212) 259-9600

Waltzing Matilda's NYC

Owner: **Laura Epstein** (Gunma-ken, 2001-02)
Online Aussie-style bakery
www.waltzingmatildasnyc.com
Gift Certificate for New Anecdotes

In Our Next Issue

Hikaru Utada has wrapped recording her first English album in five years, *This is the One*, and JQ has conducted a **live exclusive interview** with Hikki in advance of the album's March release.

Read all about it spring 2009!

If you'd like to pitch stories, ads or other contributions for the next issue, drop us a line at magazine@jetaany.org.



You've Read the Magazine. Now Buy the Merchandise.

<http://jetaany.org/shop>



Welcome to Japan's No.1 Travel Specialists, KIE!



Discount Air Fare



Hotel and Ryokan



Japan Rail Pass



www.japanforyou.com

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

KINTETSU INTERNATIONAL

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

THE JTB USA DIFFERENCE: SEE IT! BELIEVE IT! EXPERIENCE IT!

www.JTBUSA.com



Online Discount Flights

Japan Rail Pass

Package Tour

Japan Sunrise Tour
Asia JTB4ASIA.com



Toll Free **877-798-9808**

JTB USA Japan & Asia Discount Travel

365 days OPEN 9:00am-9:00pm (EST)

Online discount flight is available. Please visit our web site

Your Global Lifestyle Partner

