



MPAJ Seminar at Music Matters

The J-POP Phenomenon

Marty Friedman

May 24th 2012

The Ritz-Carlton

Singapore

Music Publishers Association of Japan

<http://www.mpaj.or.jp>

The J-POP Phenomenon



<Interviewer>

Ken Ohtake, President, Sony Music Publishing (Japan) Inc.
and Executive Director, MPAJ

<Speaker>

Marty Friedman, Guitarist & Producer



【Marty Friedman Profile】

7 time Grammy nominated Gold and Platinum recording artist with sales of over 12 million during his 10 years as lead guitarist of Megadeth. He left the band to pursue his solo career in Japan where he has performed on over 400 television shows, motion pictures and commercials and has also written two books on J-pop. He is preparing a world concert tour this year following his 11th solo album.

Ken (K): Ladies and Gentleman, good afternoon and thank you for coming to our panel, ‘The J-POP Phenomenon’ organized by MPA Japan. And first of all I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you and Jasper and Music Matters and especially the musicians and producers who were involved in Fix You, you just heard, the covered project for Japan disaster aid on Music Matters 2011. It really mattered a lot to us.



Despite all the problems we have on the growth of the digital businesses, Japan is the second largest music market still in the world and 18% of the music has been consumed in Japan in 2011. As a music publisher, I strongly believe that there will be more chance for the music writers around the world, especially from this territory to be successful in our marketing writing for the Japanese like singers and artistes. We should learn from our panel today not only the business aspect to be lucrative. But some creative tips for you to be more accepted in our market. At the same time I’m very happy to learn that increasing number of people in Asia, Europe and Americans are paying strong attention to J-Pop. J-Pop will be available in various occasions in your territory. Light performances, sounds for sync and covers and many of J-Pop writers have a strong desire to write for the singers in your territory.

You get useful information through the Website we support called Sync Music Japan as you see there, and we’ll keep you update, updated with the lots of information’s including coming shows and concerts, tours of the Japanese artistes in Singapore and another countries as well. Also through our panel today, you will learn the uniqueness of the J-Pop from the music creator’s point of view.

So let me introduce this speaker of this panel Mr. Marty Friedman you may also know him as an ex-guitar player from Megadeth. He is currently strong among the most recognized artists in the Japanese music scene, based in Tokyo for 8 years now and speaking fluent Japanese, he is a celebrity we see on TV every day. He has published two books about J-Pop. Last year he released a second J-Pop hits cover album called

MPAJ & SYNC MUSIC JAPAN
Provides J-Live Info!
WWW.SYNCMUSIC.JP/LIVE

SHOKO NAKAGAWA
ONE OK ROCK
CROSSFAITH
Kalafina
Berryz Koubou
PIKO
AYABIE
Gacharic Spin
May'n
Angelo
Church of Misery
L.M.C
FLOW
OZ
SCREW

AND MORE!

MPA JAPAN MUSIC PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION OF JAPAN www.mpaj.or.jp
SYNC MUSIC JAPAN www.syncmusic.jp

Tokyo Juke Box 2. He continues to spread Japanese music to the listeners around the globe, as a guitar player and also as a producer. Today Marty will talk to you about, what J-Pop is from the view of successful non-Japanese music creator and how you can break into the Japanese music market from his own experiences and also about possibility of placing Japanese music overseas. We hope you get some tips on how you can explore opportunities for your business with Japan from this panel. Everybody please welcome Mr. Marty Friedman.

Marty Friedman (M): Thank you very much. Today we are going to talk about J-Pop in so much depth that by the time you finish with this, you will fall in love with it, or you won't want to hear about it again.[Public laughs]. And it's the type of thing that if you are enthusiastic about it, you are just going to really get hooked on it. Why am I the one telling you about this, I mean I have to explain that to you as well? Why am I the one that is spreading this word about J-Pop, we don't have a whole lot of time but I'll make it short for you. I was a guitar player in Megadeth for ten years. It's probably where a lot of people know me from. But during that time I started listening almost exclusively to Japanese music and that made me think, this is the kind of music that I want to play, this is the kind of musical atmosphere that I want to be in. Japanese music was just so exciting and fresh to me whereas I thought that international heavy metal scene was cool but was very stagnant to me as a musician. And as an artist I thought I really just have to follow my whims as an artist to do what I really wanted to do. So I left Megadeth to specifically go to Japan and kind of infiltrate my way to the Japanese music scene which I eventually did and, don't get me wrong, I loved all of my time playing in Megadeth, but when I left and went to Japan and started working in this new musical world, it was the best thing that I have ever done in my life as far as my step up as an artist so to speak.

I am going to talk to you from the angle of, first of all I being a great big fan of the genre of music, but also as probably the only person that I can think of that has my unique angle of seeing J-Pop from not only the inside view but an insider who came from the other world to see what was really going on in there and actually work my way into that style of music. So it's almost like a spy's eye view of the whole thing and for whatever reason I'm the only one who can see it my way and hopefully by the end of today, you'll see the attraction to it, what's great about it, why it's going to be happening around the whole world it to some extent soon and anyway hopefully my enthusiasm may rub off on you guys a little bit. So I'll at least give you a little bit of information.

What is J-POP ?

So rather than talking about music let's play a couple video clips, a few songs from Japan that every single person in Japan knows and then I will speak a little bit about each song. Let's take the first song which is a group called AKB48.

[Music Clip: AKB48 'Heavy Rotation']

K: This was the top best selling Japanese song last year.

M: Yeah, best selling song of the year 2011 and it's probably in the charts still now. But this is the kind of thing, if you can't get excited about this, I mean you must be deaf. [Public laughs]. I mean I heard this song, and first of all forget about how cute these girls are. Let's forget about that, let's forget about how sexy they are, let's forget how colorful and exciting the video is. Just look at this song first of all. That kind of song is exactly what I



was missing in western rock and pop music. I mean when you describe the popular songs of western music, words like deep and moody and personal and powerful and things like those kind of words come up a lot. But what about exciting, fun and happy? I mean, I never think about a happy song coming from western pop music. I know I am generalizing in a big way but when I think of it I get really kind of depressed because the biggest hugest artists are fantastic and I really respect them and all that. But where is the fun? I mean there is nothing that is nearly as fun as that one song (Heavy Rotation) coming out of western music. I can guarantee it. Of course everybody has different definitions of fun and this is pretty much only my opinion. Everybody is completely free to have their own opinions. But from my own personal taste, this is the fun in music that I was missing from western music. So on top of that, then you have these 48 gorgeous girls and not only being gorgeous they have been culled from lots of audition processes they have sweet personalities and do fun stuff on TV and they're really hardest working kind of artists that are coming out of Japan right now. It's an unbelievable work load that they have. They do 12 hour autograph sessions regularly. But my point is, even if they weren't cute and even if the video wasn't the most colorful and fun thing you have ever seen, the song alone is enough to get me into it. And oppositely even though the images are huge and striking, a big, big part of their popularity, it's their constant quality of songs that continues at this high level that keeps them on

the top of the charts. It really doesn't matter how much personality you have, if you don't have good songs and good song writing that can reach the people listening to it, it really doesn't matter how keen you are. But AKB48 has it all and have continued to have it all for a long time and it's just an extremely impressive thing, which leads me to the next song. The next song is similar to AKB48 in the way that, it is a unit of very cute girls, but it also leads me to talk about my position, or more specifically one of my many positions in the music scene in Japan. In J-Pop it's not like American music where genres are separated so much. In America, you got R&B and Rap and Hip Hop and then you've got Rock and then Heavy Metal and they don't really cross that much. In Japan, the genre of J-Pop there are so many different sounds and different feelings within this overall genre that it truly is like anything goes and to me as a musician I love that kind of feeling. We can try anything. It can be really futuristic or it can be really old style or it can be anything and you don't have to worry about stepping outside any boundaries due to genre.

Momoiro Clover Z; '...my guitar can belong in there because there's a whole lot of willingness to experiment in the Japanese music scene which makes really fresh for creative musicians...'

M: So that leads me to the next song which is from group called Momoiro Clover Z. I play the guitars on this song and this is the type of guitar playing that you might hear me playing on one of my solo records or even in a Megadeth song or a full on metal type of situation. But like when you hear that previous song by AKB48 you wouldn't immediately think that's where Marty's guitar belongs. But no, my guitar can belong in there because there's a whole lot of willingness to experiment in the Japanese music scene which makes really fresh for creative musicians. So I'll play you a little clip from Momoiro Clover Z which is kind of like an option to AKB48 as far as like huge arena dome class idol girl groups. So this is a song called, well it's probably best that I don't say the names of the songs, you will forget that anyway. Anyway it's Momoiro Clover Z.

[Music Clip: Momoiro Clover Z 'Mōretsu Uchū Kōkyōkyoku, Dai Nana Gakushō "Mugen no Ai"]

M: Now to western ear that is the weirdest thing ever, isn't it? [Laughs]. I just loved that. I love the "holy crap, what is that?!" and that's the kind of thing that gets my juices going as a musician, as an artist, as a producer, as a player, as all those things. That type of thing is totally normal to me in Japan but if I had been approached to do something like that back when I lived in America, oh my, it would be too overwhelming to deal with but the world of J-Pop is really all about finding new things that are delicious and in my opinion that's just great because I love it. First of all as a guitar player I love pop music that allows you to have, really rad guitar playing for lack of better word. I mean, in American pop music, the guitar is almost not existent and if it is, it's

just very, “just kind of stick some guitars over there”. But for a long time in Japanese pop music with a long explanation that I won’t go into, guitar is really kind of a “fits anywhere goes anywhere” kind of instrument, kind of sound so it works in this kind of music and it’s just very exciting to play in that type of thing.

Visual-kei

M: So we are not just going to just sit at here and talk about these girl pop things all the time. We are going to talk about the wideness of J-Pop in Japanese music in general. The next thing I want to talk to you about, is a whole different style of a music called Visual-kei and this is probably a little bit easier to understand happening in other countries than Japan and being more accepted in other countries little by little, it already is, some groups like Dir En Grey and X Japan who are really big names in visual music are already doing excellent outside of Japan.

L’Arc-en-Ciel was here in Singapore so this is starting, this already been happening for a while but I believe it’s happening more and more. Let me show you a video, one of the biggest Visual-kei groups now in Japan and then let’s talk about that a little bit. This is the group called the GazettE.

[Music Clip: the GazettE ‘HYENA’]

M: Now let me tell you what I think is super interesting about this. From hearing that sound you would think that all of their fans are boys. Especially growing up in America if that band came to America, there would be probably be maybe two girls in the audience. It would be a big bunch of dudes the just rocking and head banging, it totally would be. But when I first came to Japan and I went to see some of the bands like this, it was 100% girls, there were no guys in the audience. 100% girls and not only that but the girls knew the songs inside and out and they were head banging to these odd time signatures and following all the riffs and singing all the songs and these girls know their heavy songs better than the American guys who know their heavy metal songs. These are cute little girls you know, it kinda blew me away. Then I joined a band like this and I played a tour of Japan playing this kind of stuff and much to my surprise everybody in the audience were girls. This is great as a player.[Laughs] This is why I started playing! Finally, finally after all these years! I am still playing this heavy music that I love, and suddenly it’s all girls! What happened?

K: That’s why you are in Japan for years!

M: That’s why I am in Japan, you got it! [Laughs and claps] And then, it was actually with the singer named KIRITO who was in a very famous band called PIERROT and now is in a group

called Angelo. Actually we toured all of Japan and I was talking to him about it. He is really kind of a legend in this visual world and I am like, “dude this is great, it’s all girls every night”. Then he said, “No, I wish there are more guys who came to show tonight. [Laughs] They are the ones who really pay attention to the music and the girls are just there just for the image”. [Laughs] And I could sort of kind of sympathize with them, but I was really like “big problem, man...”. [Laughs] I just thought that was a very interesting concept. But when Visual-kei music breaks out of Japan and goes to other countries. I think it’s going to be a little bit more balanced and guys will come out and really dig that. I think even now there is a lot of American stuff that is kind of similar to Visual-kei and if you look it, like My Chemical Romance and Black Veil Brides stuff like that, it’s like kind of similar. You know, I think a lot of the influences are similar. But it’s a genre of music that is a very cool part of Japanese culture and it’s something that I think has got a lot of potential outside of Japan.

Kana Nishino: ‘...this type of singing would never make past the audition of American Idol. and that’s what good about it...’

M: Ok, the next song is a whole different 360 now. Yeah this is like, might be a typical kind of, what you will call an idol pop princess. Maybe not an idol, would you say idol?

K: Cell phone idol.

M: Cell phone idol. Cell phone. Well that sort of, that’s a point that he should explain much better than I could. [Laughs]. But this is, when I see this is, I think this is the type of female singer that most girls in Japan can relate to. Typically, young girls who buy albums actually buy the music on their cell phones. This is a singer named Nishino Kana and the thing about her that typifies her Japanese style is the fact that she just sticks to the melody. There is not a whole lot of adlibbing, actually there is no adlibbing at all. She just sticks to the melody. There’s no vocal gymnastics. I mean this type of singing would never make past the audition of American Idol. [Laughs] and that’s what good about it. I mean, I don’t get it. Can somebody explain me, why do people have to scream at their top of their lungs? Why do you need this five octave range just to sing a simple love song. I mean it’s just not my taste. But apparently it’s in the taste of lot of people so it’s equally as valid. But the reason why I am so attracted to Japanese music is because if you are singing a delicate pop song or a delicate love song, you don’t have to scream like Aretha Franklin. I get the point.



[Laughs]. And it is very, very uncommon in Japan to sing any more adventurous or any more virtuosic -if that's a word- than what you are going to hear in this song from Nishino Kana. This is a huge hit song in Japan so check it out.

[Music Clip: Nishino Kana 'Tatoe Donnani']

M: So why is this kind of thing like super popular in Japan? From my many years in Japan I think the best explanation is that Karaoke is a big thing in Japan and people want something that can make them say, "I can almost sing as good as she can, I think I can sing that song." If you have some super impossible song with amazing vocal skills and stuff like that, nobody is going to want to even try it and embarrass themselves at Karaoke. But when you have a good song with a melody that's really easy to understand and a voice that's cute, and has its own style to it, the second you hear it, you know that it's her, and you don't have to be a great singer to try to at least have fun with it - that is a very big reason why this style of kind of "just sing the melody" style is so big in Japan and it also frees up song writers to write melodies that are gorgeous. It's also personal taste in my case because I noticed about the great singers of American pop music, they might sing a first verse and bridge and maybe the first chorus of the song sort of normal and then they just take off and start adlibbing until it's nowhere near the melody anymore and that's called melisma I think it's the term for it and it's just adlibbing, especially in the world of R&B. It's like you have to show how strong of a singer you are at all times and I just don't get it. Somebody could explain what is good about it to me and I will understand it, but for my taste I don't just necessarily need to be screamed at.

In these types of Japanese pop songs, the lyrics are not always very deep. You know, they are about very normal things that any girl of any age can relate to about relationships etc. It's not like about going to the clubs and partying down all the time. It's just about normal relationships with maybe your friend or your boyfriend or something like that. It's not too deep and the melodies are not very hard to understand. So, this simplicity coupled with the production and the magic of that person's voice with the person's song choice is what makes the stuff so incredibly good.

Mr. Children

M: Okay. Now the next song I am going to play for you is a song by group called Mr. Children and this is a good representation of the grand scale of what a huge band and a huge superstar kind of project sounds like in Japan. First all of all listen to the song by Mr. Children.

[Music Clip: Mr. Children 'Shirushi']

M: I love this kind of band and I think maybe it's because for my melodic taste in music, I like stuff that's really grand and exaggerating, romantic melodies. When I hear this type of thing it's a very traditional ballad but it's really done on a large scale. I mean you can hear this at a huge venue like the Tokyo Dome or something like that and that's the type of place Mr. Children would play. Structurally if you look at the song, it takes you from A to Z on a musical journey and I will explain this more later, how the chord changes lead to each other in a certain way that is very typical to Japanese music. I am going to get it to that in more technical detail later for you songwriters out there.

Japanese R&B, Hip Hop: ‘...what I realized about Rap music in Japan is that the lyrics are not gangster at all, not in the slightest, actually they are quite the opposite...’

M: Let's just go to another song, and this is kind of like the genre of music that I'm probably least qualified to talk about. But I can totally give you my perception of this genre of music. This is the Japanese R&B and Rap Hip Hop type of scene, which every country has their own kind of Hip Hop /rap scene. As an American when I go to France and I see people rapping in French, I just have to start laughing. It just sounds weird to me but of course to them it means something and so the same thing happens when I came to Japan. The difference is that I speak Japanese so I know what they are talking about and what I realized about Rap music in Japan is that the lyrics are not gangster at all, not in the slightest, actually they are quite the opposite. For the most part they are very positive and they are like the song I am going to play for you right now. The basic theme of the song is to never give up, keep trying and do your best in whatever it is. Whether it's graduating school or trying to be a grown up or whatever, and that's very common. Be thankful for the things you have, thankful for the people you have in your life and stuff like that. The people around you and positive images are very common in the rap music in Japan. So I thought that was very interesting first of all as being an American I'm used to hearing things that are really quite freighting in rap music, so coming to Japan and hearing really quite positive messages is very nice for me. This song that I am going to play for you now is from the great artist SEAMO. So check this out.

[Music Clip: SEAMO ‘Continue’]

M: Yeah, that's a really beautiful song, I wish I could play you the rest. They used that graduation theme and kind of use a sample of Pomp and Circumstance. It's really nice lyrics had a big effect on me. But another thing about R&B flavored music in Japan—it's got its own taste. I think one of the originators or one of the most well known names in R&B music in Japan is the singer, Kubota Toshinobu. His style if you hear it, in Japan you might think it's R&B but if you hear it in America it just sounds like someone singing with a slightly R&B flavor, nice

ballads and nice lively R&B flavored dance type of songs. The biggest difference for me in Japanese R&B is the fact that melody is still the main thing just like in any other sub –genre of J-Pop, the melody has really got to be solid and something that people can make out easily. So in his R&B songs the melody is always been something super catchy and maybe the phrasing is little bit R&B and maybe there is some kind of hip hop type beats in the background, but basically it's just kind of your basic melodic ballad type of feeling and that's what fits in to my personal taste. I am not the biggest R&B or soul fan of all the time although I definitely respect the genre. There are some great producers like Jeff Miyahara who spoke at this event last year who is extremely knowledgeable in the issue and the things that he produced are considered R&B and hip hop in the Japanese music scene. When I hear his work, I just hear really a nice melody with the slight taste of R&B and that taste mixed with the cutest Japanese singing and the lack of the screaming and adlib is just the perfect amount of R&B for the type of sound that I like. So it might totally turn off someone who loves real hardcore deep R&B stuff. But I think in Japanese music it is much more towards the pop side of music. So it fits in with my taste.

Perfume: ‘...one of most exciting odd time signatures that I never heard in dance music...’

The next song is, I guess you can fit it into the dance music category or the club music category, but when I heard this group Perfume, I thought was the most futuristic coolest thing I ever heard and I thought, “this is the new rock”. I saw them at *Budokan* and people were jamming to this group. Regular people in the audience, it sounded like club music, but people were not hip club people or anything like that. It was all regular people. Couples, older people, younger people and they were rocking out to it like it was an AC/DC concert. I am telling you. Rock is officially dead because this is it. But at the same time it is everything that rock is against. All the vocals are pre-recorded and auto-tuned. There are no guitars but it is so freaking cool and powerful and the song I am about to play you has one of most exciting odd time signatures that I never heard in dance music. You never really hear odd times signatures in dance music anyway right? This is like against the law or something. But as a musician I heard this kind of a dance song with the odd time signature and extremely climactic odd time section and I am like, “Holy crap, this the greatest thing I’ve ever heard”. So listen to the song, on my album, “Tokyo Jukebox”, I actually covered this song. Polyrythm by Perfume, check it out.

[Music Clip: Perfume ‘Polyrythm’]



M: I mean, man, if that's not exciting! I strongly suggest listening to anything by Perfume, their producer Mr. Nakata is a genius and pretty much revolutionized the sound of Japanese pop music and what's happened in the last four or five years at least so sonically and technically he's really got lot of great things on the ball. I covered that particular song because I just loved that odd time section, I just had to do it on guitar. I mean was just screaming for guitar so I just had to do it.

Ikimono-gakari; '...the purest form of J-Pop...'

And the last clip I am going to show you is by a group called Ikimono-gakari which is a wonderful representation of, "what's J-Pop? "This song is the purest form of J-Pop. So check it out.

[Music Clip: Ikimono-gakari 'Arigatou']

M: If you have to pick one melodic representation of J-Pop it would be this group and possibly this song and one thing to note about these guys is, they are the kind of act who's fans and the parents of the fans are in agreement on. This is strange in rock and even pop music because you are not supposed to like the same music as your parents. [Laughs] I mean this is just not right! But this group is right on the line where parents are happy with their kids listening to it. The kids are happy to share their musical taste with their parents. I just think that's the weirdest phenomena but it works with this band because it's kind of an ageless song. Melodically it's very easy to accept and the lyrics are about stuff that young kids can relate to as well as their parents. So what's wrong with that? But I think the arrangements in the song writing and performances are just so right on, so good in fact that I wanted to share that song with all of you people. So hopefully all of these 8 songs will give you a little idea of the wideness of Japanese pop music.

K: Great. Thanks for introducing Japanese music. So we will spend our remaining time giving musicians some tips about how you can create this music from your point of view, can you pick up your guitar?

Songwriting in Japanese Music Market

M: Yeah. I think rather than talking about a musical concept I think it is easier to play guitar and explain so you can hear I am talking about. A lot of people think that if you write a song it can be used anywhere in the world but the one thing that you all need to know, especially song writers interested in this whole thing, about music in the Japanese world of music, is that there is a kind of standard melodic chord progression type of sense. In Japanese music it's all common sense type of things, but in western music its things that we didn't grow up with, so what is normal to them is not normal to everybody else. So I wanted to just rewind that for you and show exactly what that is.

This song that I just played for you, is called Arigatou which means thank you. It's a very typical chord progression, a very typical Japanese melody. So this type of thing you have to understand inside and out, if you want to write songs for Japanese artists. Especially if you are a new song writer, you going to want to keep it sort of traditional, something that a Japanese ear can pick up on and understand right away. I can't stress hard enough that these types of chord progressions and these types of melodies find their way into most every style of Japanese music whether they be really heavy, heavy interpretations of Visual-kei music or Japanese heavy metal or pop or dance music. These chord progressions and these melodies are pretty much the foundation for all of that type of stuff. So anyway I will outline the chords of that last song and just see you can understand the very typical Japanese chord progression. I want you to know beforehand is a lot of western songs they base themselves on four chords or so. Usually these types of chords...



Photo by crowdedstudios.com

[Guitar Playing]

You all heard that chord progression a billion times and they still continue to go on. It's a short cycle of four chords. But in Japanese pop music and rock and like everything else I said before,

often times it's a very long journey from the beginning to the end. So this is a very typical chord progression to a Japanese song. This is the progression from the last song Arigatou,

[Guitar Playing]

K: That sounds very Japanese.

M: So I don't know what the musical differences in the cultures are but maybe the Japanese need more chords and longer melodies to be satisfied. Also when you have a long chord progression like that, there is a whole of less room to ad lib in and show of your vocal stuff because if you don't stick to that melody, you are going to run into some traffic accidents falling on those tricky chords. Actually there were a lot of songs in American pop music in the 70's that followed progressions like this. I would suggest finding the correlations between those two styles of music.

***KOTOKO:** ‘...one of the first songs that I wrote that actually had some chart activity in Japanese pop music...’*

Now I will play you one of my songs that was one of the first songs that I wrote that actually had some chart activity in Japanese pop music. This is for a singer called KOTOKO and when a lot of my previous fans heard this they actually could not believe that it was me who wrote this and when I heard it finally done when I worked on the song with the singer we finished the record, I couldn't believe that as American person I had actually written this song. But after doing this for a long time and being in Japan it is completely second nature to understand this. So this is a very Japanese sounding song that I wrote called the Kireina-senritsu.

[Music Clip: KOTOKO ‘Kireina-senritsu’]

You'd never think that I wrote that particular song. You would never think that. But it's important to know that this was the chorus of the song, it's a long chorus with a lot of ups and downs, waves and valleys and mountains and goes up and down through lot of different emotions. When it hits some of those minor chords, those minor six chords, it's basically a major progression but when you throw that minor six chord in the right place and you have a really nice vocal harmony over it, it just kind of gives you a nostalgic kind of sad feeling that comes out very often in Japanese music and when used properly it can really give you goose bumps, and that's a feeling that I love when I am listening to pop music. So that is something I went for

when I wrote pop songs. So that's an example of what you really have to understand as a foundation to song writing if you want to start to approach that music market.

K: Also does the chorus, also have to fit in either 15 seconds or 30 seconds?

M: This is a very good point. In Japan, like everywhere else in the world but probably more so in Japan, people will take the chorus of the song and buy it for their phones as their ring tones and that's a very huge market and a very huge avenue for artists.



Photo by crowdedstudios.com

So it's so important to have that chorus be the type of melody that you want to have on your phone in the first place and especially the beginning of the chorus has to be something like, oh "that" song. You know, so, you really have to be able to fit it into 15 seconds or 30 seconds.

Songs for Television Commercials

M: Not only for that but also more importantly than in other countries, Japan has television commercials that feature pop songs whereas most of the commercials released in America rarely have current hit songs. They might have like an old classic rock song or something, "Born to be Wild" for a beer commercial or something like that. But in Japan its the complete opposite. Often songs are becoming hits because of their TV commercial exposure. So you got to have a chorus of the song that hits you in the first 10 seconds, 15 seconds, "oh that song from the ice cream commercial " or something like that. I can't tell you enough of how important that chorus, the grandness of the chorus has to be. And if you notice, it is not the grandness of the vocal technique, it is not the superstar singer, it's the song itself. It doesn't really matter as much about the person who is singing it or what they are singing about, rather it is in the magic between that singer and that song and for my taste that's really, really good. So an important thing to know is that inside the chorus you've got to have like some kind of emotional ups and downs in there. Of

course in western music there are a lot of great emotions as well. But a lot of that has to do with the singer's technique and the singer's interpretation. For example in the case of Adele, I mean it's a wonderful song, but there are only four chords in it. What gives it the value is her great vocal interpretation and the matching between her vocals and those personal lyrics. In Japan that doesn't happen nearly as much as the magic between the vocalist's personality and the song and the memorableness of the chorus which usually happens at the beginning of the song. So hopefully that can explain a little bit about the foundation of song writing in Japan from my perspective, anyway.

K: Great. I think now we will have a question round now. Q & A. Any questions?

Q&A

Question1: Hi Marty, Steve McClure here. Those are really, really interesting presentations, I have learned a lot. I continue to learn a lot about Japanese pop music and I respect you for having studied it as you obviously have. One question I want to ask you though is you really emphasized the complexity of the J-Pop in terms of the chords structure, the melody and I mean, do you think that one reason why Japanese music hasn't succeeded in selling overseas as much as you might think music from the world second biggest music market should?



M: Very good question and I don't think that's the reason nearly as much as the language barrier. Especially, in the case of the America whereas I remember not even listening to something because the singer had an English accent speaking English and sadly America really has to understand every word and they really take those lyrics as the gospel for whatever reason. One thing I love about Japan is they will listen to music of other countries and not understand a word but they just love it, the way they feel when they hear

the music. It's probably similar in Singapore and all over Asia because there are so many different cultures co-existing. But I just remember in America when Scorpions came out. Scorpions are guys that sing with a German accent, and it took them forever to get popular. I think that an accent is cool in a song. But America is a big country and I think rather than the difficulty of the music, I think it's the language, but the "exception" is something is going to do like the Scorpions did. Fans are going to embrace that difference and this big, "that voice is so cute", "that is so interesting" will be the selling point. It's a new world now since when the Scorpions came out. I think it's a globalized world. People are going to eventually fall in love with song of a different language. It's not going to be like 20 big acts from Japan will suddenly invade America. But something- we are not sure what it's going to be- is going to be that Japanese symbol and that's going to be the first step or one of many steps to get over that language barrier.

K: Maybe Perfume?

M: Maybe, Perfume. I'll be happy to see it.

Question2: Well, PUFFY did it. When I was working in New York, PUFFY Ami Yumi made a big buzz for the youth market and they made a cartoon. But they definitely use their Japanese culture with toys and cartoons and *manga*. At a Thanksgiving parade on New York's Fifth Avenue, they were able to perform. I believe they starred at a Baltimore, *Otaku* convention center. I don't want even to say, because *Otaku* sounds like very making fun of the culture, but American culture which Singapore has too, a big influence from Japan Anime and anything *Kawaii*. I think Puffy AmiYumi represent a feeling towards *Kawaii* culture. But at the time there was no doubt, there was bunch of girls' bands was going out happening in United States. So they couldn't compete with what they have gone for. Sony Music Japan at a time was focusing a little bit on the young market. The safe music that their parents take those you know, their kids go see Puffy AmiYumi because it is such a *Kawaii* band, it's positive. You don't see any drunk people. It was an underage concert. So I think there is a potential for J-Pop, if they made it to United States market. But R&B and black and hip hop music was really hard. It's outside of Sony music but Hikaru Utada from Universal tried to break into the R&B market. But I think Universal did a wrong marketing move because you can't compete with Mariah Carey, you can't compete with Mary J Blige. And they made a music video to try to compete with that with sex appeal. That's not what Japanese R&B music is about. It's more about a girl in *Shibuya* riding a bicycle with a headphone. That's Japan you know. Completely different cultures, I think it's so important to be who you are, you can't fake it, don't try to fit in somebody you are not. You just have to be kind of who you are to be confident. Even though you don't speak English but there is way to break the market I think.

M: I completely agree and I think a lot of Japanese artists try to break into the American music scene and maybe that's the goal, I don't know, but every person has different goals. I mean, I am an American who loves being in the Japanese music scene so I am sure there are Japanese who want to be in the American scene and I think exactly like you say; it's going to be someone who's going to be just themselves. There is no predicting what it's going to be. I think it's going to be someone who is ultra Japanese like Nakagawa Shoko or Kyary Pamyu Pamyu or it's something like Perfume. You just never know.

K: Well thank you. I think the Japanese market was enough lucrative in a way. The Japanese artist with record company could be happy making money only in Japan. But I think Korean success encourages us to move a little forward and opens the door so please support our music and it's pretty much open to do anything here in this market.

Question3: I just have a question. The 8 songs that you actually played out to us, honestly I could only see two differences, actually only one which was the language. In terms of the arrangements, in terms of the field, it seemed much influenced by the western. The question here was, does Japanese have anything, any genre which is actually specific to, like in India for example what we call Folk music? The question was that all the examples of the J-Pop you gave, are actually only, you know, the Japanese language in a more westernized style. Do we have something like Folk in Japanese?



M: Folk music?

Q3: Yeah, which actually can fall under the J-Pop category?

M: Oh of course. Folk music I didn't even put it in this but there are artists like Kobukuro and Yuzu and stuff like that. Huge. And Enka traditional Japanese music, it's a completely different world that we can spend hours on that. And one thing I forgot to mention, that in Japan, 80% of the music that is listened to is domestic Japanese music. Only 20% of music that is bought in

Japan, is from the whole rest of world and I am talking about Cold Play, U2 and Celine Dion, Lady Gaga and all that stuff, that only makes up 20%.

Q3: Do you have a market for it? I don't want them to think that the only music in Japan sounds like western music.

K: We have both markets. 20% as international music, maybe 70% of music is kind of what you may feel is the western influenced music, and maybe 10% are local folk songs.

Question4: Hi, Let's say thanks for the presentation you gave today. It's so difficult to get insight like that. I really appreciate it. I write for Chinese singers and I quite enjoyed it but I also really love to write for Japanese artists as I grew up loving Japanese music. What would you suggest for any song writers if they want to enter the Japanese market as song writers? Where do we start?

M: As a Chinese song writer?

Q4: Yeah.

M: He wants to approach the Japanese songwriting market and maybe this is a good one for Ken to answer.

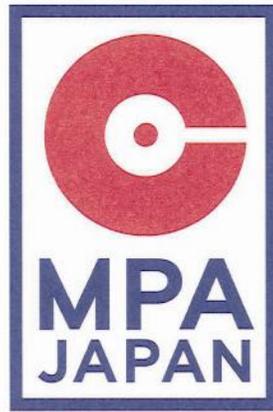
K: I think have a lot of opportunities because one of the reasons is that CD prices are pretty high still, so you can earn more money from writing for Japanese music. Anyway, there is a rule, there is little unique rule that we have in writing Japanese music commercially. So you should approach the publishers who are here. I see a lot of Japanese publishers here. So please reach out to them. Then I think they can answer you personally rather than me speaking up on behalf of Music Publishers Association. Okay?

Q4: Thank you.

K: Thank you and I have to wrap this panel. Thank you very much for listening and please a big round of applause to Mr. Marty Friedman.

[Applause]

END.



Music Publishers Association of Japan

www.mpaj.or.jp