

MPAJ presents Workshop at MIDEM

**What is J-POP?
~ Exposing the myth of
Japanese Music Phenomenon**

By Marty Friedman

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【Marty Friedman Profile】



Marty Friedman began his career as a Shrapnel solo recording artist and later joined forces with Jason Becker to form the unrivaled dual guitar unit, “Cacophony”. Amassing worldwide acclaim as a guitar superstar, he came to the attention of Megadeth. Racking up sales of over 10 million records with Megadeth, Friedman continued to record solo records, often embarking on adventurous musical forays far removed from his work with Megadeth.

In a bold move, he left the legendary Megadeth to pursue new musical goals and has succeeded tremendously. Friedman’s many accomplishments make him currently the only musician to be a fixture in the top class of the Japanese domestic as well as international music scene. Now residing in Tokyo, Friedman has become a television celebrity appearing as a regular on 5 major networks, he can be seen on mainstream hit TV programs almost every day in Japan.

MC: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming to the Japan Stand Workshop 'What is J-Pop - exposing the myth of Japanese music phenomenon'. The Japan Stand is run by both Music Publisher's Association of Japan (MPAJ) and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). This workshop is organized by MPAJ with the support from JETRO and other related party who is in the Japanese music industry to promote Japanese music globally. The speaker of this workshop is Mr. Marty Friedman. He's currently among the most recognized artists in the Japanese music scene. Based in Tokyo and speaking fluent Japanese, he's a celebrity we see on TV almost every day. Today Marty will talk to you about what 'J-pop' is, from the viewpoint of a debut or a successful foreign artist and how you can break into the Japanese music market from his own experiences and about the possibility of placing Japanese music overseas. We hope that you can get some tips on how you can explore your opportunity for your business with Japan from this workshop today. Everybody please welcome Mr. Marty Friedman.

Marty: Comment allez vous... No, I'm not going to do this in French... Today I'd like to talk about Japanese music, 'J-pop,' and what is really going on over in Japan. Because there is so little information that people have outside of Japan and it often gets lost in translation. I have a very odd perspective because I've been deeply inside the Japanese music scene for a long time but I've also been there as an international artist. So, I kind of have a viewpoint of almost like a spy that's found its way into the music scene and can understand it in a different and much deeper way than someone who's maybe just observing it. So today we are going to get into all kinds of details about 'J-pop, ' and you will definitely come away in learning something if you are at all interested. After I finish, we are going to have a Q&A session so if there are any questions which you have I'd be happy to answer anything that you would like to ask.

So, the first thing I'd like to do is introducing myself for those of you who might not know who I am.

I'm Marty Friedman, I'm a guitar player, everything else as well but mainly a guitar player. I was in Megadeth for 10 years and I left Megadeth. I quit the band because I was listening to 'J-pop' so often when I was coming to Japan, so much in fact that at one point I thought this is what I really need to be playing, this is what I need to be doing. When I was on tour with Megadeth in Japan doing promotion or doing live concerts or whatever, I heard the music around me and it was really exciting to me. Then when I would go back home to America, the popular music there was not the type of music that really appealed to me very much. You know rock was on the downslide and it was very much a rap-oriented musical culture back in America, which is fine, it was just not my taste. The rock that actually was popular in the US was rather negative and depressing but in Japan it was quite the opposite. Japanese pop and rock was still very aggressive and powerful, yet positive and uplifting. The complete opposite of current American rock! It's only my personal taste but I found

that as an artist you have to follow your own vision and do exactly what you want to do in music; or else there's really no point in doing anything at all.

So I took a personal risk and I quit this Gold and Platinum band, and started from zero in Japan. And it's the best thing I've ever done in my whole life. I mean, I'm totally happy and pleased with my history that I've had with Megadeth and all of my projects before Megadeth and all that stuff. But when I came to Japan I really found that now I'm doing something that only I can really do. That, as an artist, is a really satisfying thing. So that's a little bit about myself. When I came to Japan, I started kind of from zero because in Japan the people who listen to international music like Megadeth, Metallica, Celine Dion and U2, don't listen to the Japanese music very much. They listen to international music. But the people in Japan who listen to Japanese music and the local music don't listen to so much music from other countries so they didn't know who I was. So I was playing for Japanese music audiences and they were like who's this foreign guy? I've been playing huge places with Megadeth over there already for 10 years, but when I played in the same size or larger venues with Japanese artists, few people knew who the hell I was. So it was like really starting from zero when I first moved to Japan. So from that I started playing with more and more Japanese artists, slowly developing my name. I continued releasing my own solo records as well. Then I started doing television and I have done at least 400 or maybe 500 television programs since I've lived in Japan. From that came motion pictures, commercials, the whole thing. To sum it up I really have a deep, deep influence that comes from my experiences in Japan and hopefully I can relate some of that to all of you today.

And the main reason why I want to do this is because now is the time that Japan and its music scene is going to begin to be well-known outside of Japan. I think it's really beginning now and the people here at MIDEM are finding about this first and are going to have a very advantageous spot in the music business; because they are going to know things that will happen in the future, and I believe Japan's music is the future.

◆ What is J-POP?.....

Anyway let's talk about what 'J-pop' is and what makes it different from the music around the world. These are some of the reasons why I really got into the music, not only because it's so whacked and so freaking crazy but also so cool, so colorful and so happy.

I'm going to play you a couple of videos right now. The first one is a group called AKB48, and right now this is absolutely the biggest thing in Japan. When I say the biggest thing in Japan to give you a little outline of what they are doing, they had 5 million selling singles last year and they just sell tons and tons of stuff. And they have fans of all ages, all origins, all sexes and all everything. But you've got to watch this video clip from one of their songs and you can immediately see my attraction to Japanese music. This is a song called 'Heavy Rotation' from AKB48.

[♪ Music Video Playing 'Heavy Rotation' from AKB48]



Marty: Now this is freaking rad man, this is just like everything that the antithesis of negativity, I mean you cannot be unhappy and watch this video, I'm telling you. It's like pure sugar just going drilled into your teeth and if you can stand that it's the greatest thing. For me and my personal taste, when I see something like this, it's just deep on every single level. I mean there's absolutely nothing,

no part that I can say "well I don't like this about this I don't like that" about it. To me when I hear that, it reminds me of the Bay City Rollers, but with 48 of the cutest girls in the country singing it with a powerful 8 beat behind it. World-class production and it's just the ultimate. When I hear that song it makes me go crazy. And this is just one of their many hit singles. This is the type of thing that you can hear all around Japan anywhere you go in the department stores, the restaurants, the streets and stuff like that. This is not a brand new sound, this is very typical Japanese melodic sense and song construction, and we'll get into more of the technical stuff about that later, but first I want to introduce you to some more of the Japanese pop singers.

Another one is Ikimono-gakari, what really great about Ikimono-gakari is, it's a three-piece unit and its two guys and a girl, the singer is mainly the girl. The thing about their music that it's very positive and its very listenable by kids as well as their parents. I mean there's no age line in there, it's not rebellious at all. It's very easy to digest for older people as well as younger people. The lyrics are stuff that young kids can relate to but they are not the type of stuff that parents are against. It's a very interesting collaboration of music and the main thing that I want you to listen to about this that it is a very typical Japanese melodic structure. This song is called "Arigatou", a very simple song which means 'Thank You.' The structure is a very typical Japanese melody, so this is the type of thing that really sticks with me. This is s type of melody you can hear in so many different songs in Japan. This is a very big hit song.

[♪ Music Video Playing 'Arigatou' Ikimono-gakari,]

Marty: It's just a gorgeous melody and it's kind of sad in a different way than "sad" music is in Western music. When I think of sad music in Western music I would think of something like ADELE or something like that, really deeply sad. But this is kind of happy

and sad at the same time. It's a very unique emotion which for some reason it really fits into my own personal musical taste; but this is a very typical Japanese style of melody. And it's kind of based from music that comes from maybe 20-30-40 years ago called Kayoukyoku, which is traditional Japanese Pop melodies. And to get kind of technical it actually borrows a little bit from French music as well. I mean if there are any French people here, you might hear a melody like that and you may think it sounds like a Chanson type of melody. Because it's almost got a Latin and an Eastern European kind of chord change to it too. That's because it's based on mainly minor chords and it's not based on R&B in any sense of the word. That's another thing about Japanese pop music. There's almost no taste of R&B in it. Although sometimes I like R&B, one thing I like about Japanese music it doesn't have that R&B taste to it at all, so that's very exciting for me.

Let's go to another extremely huge phenomenal unit in Japan called Perfume. This is a three-piece female unit that is also a household name in Japan. The main thing about this unit is the producer is a genius. The producer, Nakata Yasutaka has basically created this sound for his artists, Perfume as well as several other artists, so he has an immediately identifiable sound as a producer. What I really like about this is that it's musically intense. It's kind of dance music but it has odd-time signatures in it. So for me as a progressive musician, usually when I hear odd-time signatures I think "this is boring jazz or boring progressive music". But when I hear it mixed in pop music so cleverly as in Perfume's case, it makes me go, 'oh my God this is so unique'. This is another thing about Japanese music is they can accept deep technical concepts within the context of ultra pop music. It's like candy pop music but the structure has got some deep technical elements in it. My American musician friends would go, 'oh my God, what did you just play for me and why is this number one in Japan?' If someone were to do odd-time signatures in a pop song in America, it would be in a cheap record bin over there somewhere, no one would ever want to listen to it. But in Japan they find clever ways of mixing progressive music with dance pop. So I would like you to listen to this one section of a song called Polyrhythm by Perfume.

[♪ Music Video Playing 'Polyrhythm' by Perfume.]

Marty: When I first heard this on the radio, I was like, 'you've totally got to be kidding'. So, I sent an MP3 of this song to all of my progressive guitar friends back in America, I would say 'Dude, I live in Japan, this is number one right now, check it out'. And people were just like, 'oh my God, what is going on over there in Japan this is just sick'. And I would go, 'this is rock in Japan'. I saw them at Budokan, and the audience were not like club people, these were like rock people. It's totally regular, you know, to have Joe six-pack type of people going to this concert and they are just rocking out to this kind of strange trendy music is very futuristic. When I saw the audience, it was like an AC/DC kind of crowd, but the music is just like the future. So when I listen to Perfume, I'm like this is the music of the future--at least in Japan, and I think that somehow it's going to slide its way outside of Japan.

Let me introduce a couple of more songs before we talk on a different subject just so that you get an idea. Mr. Children is a very famous band for many years. It's not going to sound like anything new, they've been around for at least 10-15 years. But every album is consistently a huge hit due to the quality of their song writing and performance. This is a song called Shirushi. When I hear that, I just think of something very grandiose. Maybe French people can relate to this because again I also hear a very French type of melody to it. This is also a very good example of a typical Japanese melody that would be a hit in Japan, Mr. Children.

[♪ Music Video Playing 'Shirushi' by Mr. Children.]

Marty: That's a song by Mr. Children. When you hear that it doesn't sound all that different from that Ikimono-gakari song that I played a little while ago, I mean the chord structures and the melody sense is very similar and very Japanese. This doesn't sound like music in China, it doesn't sound like music in Korea, it doesn't sound like music in England, this is a very Japanese song and it's a timeless sound.

I'll give you another example of a new artist that is just absolutely exploding in Japan with a similar sound. This is Nishino Kana and she is kind of a hero for girls in their teenage years. This as well is a very typical Japanese melody. Listen to this song called, Tatoo Donna ni.

[♪ Music Video Playing 'Tatoo Donani' by Nishino Kana.]



Marty: That is a huge song. You can kind of see the pattern in the ballads in Japan as they tend to resolve themselves towards the end, the melody will tend to resolve to the root of a major chord. It's like the song goes on a journey to all these different chords and when it ends up, it winds up in a very pleasant place. One thing that I really like to point out, particularly about her song and many female singers in Japan, is that they just sing the melody. There's no bullshit, there's no like ad-libbing, there's no gospel singing, there's no screaming. If a girl sings high, she's just singing high, she's just singing the melody. It's almost like playing the melody one note at a time, on a keyboard; which is unlike American pop singing. Especially the female ballads, the American girls have to constantly show all of

their vocal ad-libbing, how great they can riff and stuff like that. That's fine if that's your taste. For me it's not my taste at all. To me that's all American Idol stuff and American Idol, in my opinion, is everybody is just searching for the next Celine Dion and the next Mariah Carey, and it's all about the vocal skill and range. Whatever happened to just singing the melody? Whatever happened about having magic that's in your voice so you don't have to show all these vocal tricks to do? Now that's only my concept and I'm only one person, so my opinion is not any more valuable than anyone else's. But I'm just saying this is what stands out to me in Japan.

So there's very little of that kind of Mariah Carey ad-libbing scat singing or "melisma" as they call it. That's a very important thing to know about Japanese music, they stick to the melody. You don't need to be this great virtuoso singer, if you sing and you have your own tone to your voice, that may be just enough magic. That actually shows a vulnerability to your voice, as opposed to if you are only singing scales and singing adlibs and stuff all the time; where is the personal vulnerability, where is the personal magic to the voice? It's all technique, so that is a very important thing to know about Japanese music.

So I'd also like to talk about what are some of the common misconceptions about the music in Japan. As you just heard, this is very unique, don't you think? I mean a lot of people outside of Japan think music in Japan is a copy of American music or a copy of English music. I don't think anything will be further from the truth, I mean everything that I heard here, doesn't sound anything like you might hear on the radio ever in America. Maybe in the future you'll hear something like that but you could definitely not say that's it a copy of some other type of music. What I will say, is music maybe from 20-30 years ago in Japan was kind of like a weak copy of American music. Like in the 80s and early 90s if you listen to Japanese pop from that era, it's like everything sounded like Chicago or Billy Joel. I mean it was just like for some reason Japanese people were in love with Chicago and Billy Joel and I guess that they are fabulous musicians so I guess that's one reason why they liked it.

But if you listen to Japanese music from the 80s and early 90s, it wasn't nearly as developed as what I just played for you. This is pure Japanese, I mean it's very, very Japanese sounding music. It doesn't have too much of the influence of outside music as it did back in the 80s. And on a business point, take for example the first group that I played for you, AKB48. There's 48 girls in this unit and that gives fans a lot of different things to argue about, a lot of different things to like, talk to their friends about and trade cards with. It's almost like a baseball team, who's your favorite player, who's your favorite singer and who's your favorite dancer. And on a business level nothing could be more genius than the AKB48 business. For one thing, the fans of AKB48, not only AKB48 but similar groups, will buy more than one version of the same song. They will buy more than one disc of the same album, they will buy more than one of everything even if they have the same version, they will buy like two or three. First of all they will buy one copy just to save it, so it doesn't get beat up. Then they'll get one copy to listen to and then there will be another version with a different cover, that will be like one red cover and one blue cover. And they will buy that as well, even though what's inside the CD is exactly the same. They may have

a trading card that comes with the CD, and maybe one of those singers is in there. So if you keep buying CDs until you find that special trading card of your favorite singer you can buy 10-20 CDs before you have the CD that you want.

But these fans love to do it and it is not only because the girls are cute or because the marketing is good, it's because the product itself is really, really well done. I mean if you listen to the song, that song is extremely well done. And for people who are song writers out there, what you need to know about what goes into the songs of these idol singers is that they have huge competition between all the best song writers in Japan. I've done this myself. It's not easy, maybe 100 different song writers get asked to write for an artist like AKB48 and they will all submit demos. Maybe 100 demos and they keep getting reviewed by different members of the staff and reviewed and reviewed and reviewed and then it's down to 20. Then it's down to 10, and then it's down to three, three songs that make it to the record and then you get these down to three songs. They decide to make a demo of these three songs, and after the demo is done, two songs are gone. So it's a long process which involves the most famous song writers of Japan to get there. Even the biggest hit songwriters will get turned down because it is such a hard process to get a song that's that good.

Now when you hear songs like that AKB48 song, the first second you hear it you know it's a hit song. That's because it's gone through that process of so many different obstacles before it gets actually made. So many demos are made, so many different demo singers have sung it, so many different keys have been tried, so many different people have listened to the song and said well I like it or I don't like it. By the time it gets to be made into a record, everybody at the record company is convinced the song is going to be a hit. Now I'm not just talking about AKB48, I'm talking about all the similar bands, similar units like that like Arashi which is kind of a male version of that but with only 5 members in it. I guess the closest thing you could say on our western levels is Backstreet Boys or N'sync. It's that type of mentality except with the Backstreet Boys they have a lot of songs that are written by the same person and in AKB48 only the lyrics are written by the same person. He's actually like the person who masterminds the whole thing, an absolute genius. But the songs themselves, the arrangements and the musical content, they're just written by all different song writers of Japan. And I've contributed a lot of song-writing stuff that's made it to the demo process and stuff that's been recorded but like to get a song like that AKB48 song, it's a huge process. That's why the quality is good and that's why the fans wind up buying several copies of it. And of course on top of all that they do tons of television appearances, game shows, radio programs, magazines and every possible kind of media outlet that just feeds the whole thing. But at the base of it, and I always say this, is the music. Of course I love them because they are so cute but if their music wasn't any good it doesn't matter how cute they are, I wouldn't be buying it, I wouldn't be listening to it. When I first heard that song 'Heavy Rotation,' I thought, 'oh my God, this is the ultimate'. There are just one after the other songs like that in Japan. So that's why there's a lot of customer loyalty, there's a lot of the people who are fans of this type of band, and the people that are fans of bands like this will buy several copies of things, and that's why the

record sales for a unit like AKB48 are massive... well you'll also see the charts of it later. But if you look at how many units they've sold, they just blow away the regular artists and the regular singers. For example Mr. Children, they sell millions of copies but it's not the type of band like AKB48 where people buy 3-4 copies of the same single. So that reflects in the chart sales positions. It's an extremely interesting concept and being from a Heavy Metal background myself, it's not too distant from what I have done and what I still do now. Because a lot of Heavy Metal fans are like that, you know they have to have a bonus track; they have to have the French version or the Japanese version because the cover's different so I can totally relate to that.

Let's talk about a couple of other things.

Visual-kei is something that people in France are probably a little bit more aware of than kind of the straight up pop that I've talked to you about. I think we have the Gazette video ready to play; the Gazette is one of the biggest Visual-kei bands in Japan. People in France might know X-Japan, because X-Japan is successful here and they toured outside of Japan, just like Dir en Grey did. But in Japan X-Japan are the ancestors, they brought it to the mainstream first. There were a lot of Visual-kei bands before X-Japan, I'm talking about in the 80s and early 90s, but X-Japan was the first huge Visual band in Japan. They are the Godfathers. They started it, they set the pattern of it. And now its 2012 and finally its making its way out of Japan but even inside Japan it's kind of on a big boom itself right now. I'm going to show you a video from the Gazette which is a Tokyo Dome class Visual-kei band.

[♪ Music Video Playing : Gazette]



Marty: When I hear this, it just sounds like brutal metal to me, This just sounds like full on metal, but it's not even in the slightest in the metal genre in Japan. This is completely Visual-kei. If you look at the audience, its about 90% females. Go figure, females listening to this kind of music. When I first came to Japan I was a big fan of this groups called MUCC, MERRY and Dir En Grey. I just thought it was the heaviest stuff ever but when I went to the concert, it's all girls there. These songs are like tricky and technical and these girls are head banging in odd time signatures and I'm like, "what the hell planet am I on?!" It was so insane and I think it's because the girls really like to look at these bands, they are very beautiful, it's overall very visual that's why it's called Visual. However since the sound of it is quite manly, it's what boys listen to outside of Japan. I think these bands themselves really listen to

a lot of heavy music from outside of Japan.

But the melodic structure is very Japanese, the melodic structure is like what I said before, Kayoukyoku- traditional Japanese melodies, but these guys probably like Megadeth, Metallica and Marilyn Manson or something like that. They like heavy music but the type of music that they grew up with is very Japanese their interpretation is very heavy metal and hard rock but the content is very Japanese. So that makes the melodic part of it easy for Japanese to understand and listen to. But the audience it's mainly girls because they just love the overall look of it. But the reason I bring this point to all of you people here is that all the stuff I introduced to you from Japan is going to make it outside of Japan, and soon. I'm surprised it hasn't happened already. I'm talking this year, or next year something is going to explode because this stuff is too good.

Now I look at it as the antithesis of what is happening in America. When I look at American music to me it's very kind of dull, it's like subdued. It's kind of like girls with candles in their room and incense and pillows and it's not insane, I think the best thing to happen in American music is Lady Gaga, because it's exciting and its wild and its colorful, and that is very Japanese. But in Japan it's not unusual to be very outlandish and very extravagant like this and I think at some point in America and in Europe it will be this way as well to some extent. People are going to say, "I'm tired of this depressing music, I'm tired of this kind of dull, drab music" and for me personally, I'm speaking for Heavy Metal myself. I was playing Heavy Metal every single night and it's just like a bunch of guys beating the shit out of each other in the audience, and I'm like, this is not why I started music for. Then when I went to Japan and looked at these guys who are playing stuff with the same aggressive spirit that I love but it's not negative, depressing, "I'm going to kill myself, oh I hate my life, I hate everything" kind of stuff. I just couldn't stand the whole negativity of American Heavy Metal. I especially didn't like how it is with the female pop artists, in America, if someone's cute there's just so much bashing on them. I mean everybody hated on Britney Spears but she had number one songs one after the other because they are great songs and she did a great job singing them. I think she was a fantastic and still is fantastic artist and you don't have to be this great American Idol virtuoso to sing pop songs, it's absolutely absurd. I think it's more important to have something that people enjoy, doesn't have anything to do with talent; it has to do with magic. I think that's what's important in Japan. Of course talent and working hard is important. But there's something about magic, there's something about the right person getting the right song and the right group of people working on it. That's very Japanese style. In America it's like 'oh, she's got to have all this talent and do it all herself and she's got to write the songs, she's got to do this and that'. That's a bunch of crap. I think it's more important for all the people to join in and create something that's great rather than showcasing one super virtuoso. That is only my opinion but I think that this is what's great about Japanese music and what is going to be a relief to people outside of Japan who are sick of it. A while back in the 90s it was like alternative music where everything is dull and depressing and there was nothing exciting about it. In Japan it has to just be totally crazy, exciting or else no one will even notice it. So, it's the total extreme but I think America and

Europe is ready for a little bit more extreme music and extreme fun. I think why X-Japan and Dir En Grey and L'Arc-en-Ciel are kind of getting more popular outside of Japan and in France in particular. If you look at the Japanese music that are going to break out outside of Japan are like the Visual groups like the GazettE. The GazettE, and idol groups like AKB48, That idol sound, that very Japanese idol unit group, there's 5 girls or 10 girls or 20 girls, doing formations and playing this unique colorful music. I think either the idols or the visual groups are going to break it outside of Japan. Possibly due to the people here right now who are listening to this and then people in the music industry who are going to do some kind of collaboration with it.

I have done so many collaborations with this stuff myself. And I've done enough to know that there's something for people outside of Japan as well, it's not only for Japanese people. You know I'm enthusiastic about it but I'm sure there are people outside of Japan who will become similarly enthusiastic about this type of music once they get into it. That is going to happen sometime in the very near future. We can be a part of that if you choose to be. If you are interested in that type of thing there will be collaborations that all of us can be a part of in the future.

There's another group called Scandal, 4 girls who play rock music and they wear school uniforms. I think that's going to be a great thing in America because you never think of cute girls playing rock. You think of tough girls with tattoos and piercings and such, that image is not unusual. But it is very unusual to see very serious, good student kind of girls playing heavy rock. I think is just the type of thing that will wake a lot of Americans up. In the 90s, Shonen-Knife toured with Nirvana. Nirvana saw how cool they were because these were three tiny Japanese secretaries playing punk rock. If I just hear that description, I immediately want to go see them from the description alone. There's a lot of groups in Japan that could be doing stuff like that in the future and Scandal is one of them. So I always get behind them and talk about them outside of Japan.

◆ International Music in Japan.....

Now let's talk about international music in Japan and some of the myths and misconceptions of what international music people in Japan are listening to.

Okay, first of all, the main thing you need to know is that many people outside of Japan think everybody in Japan listens to American pop music and western music and that's all. You know Coca-Cola, Jeans and American pop music; but it's just not like that at all. As a matter of fact, 80% of the music that gets sold in Japan is domestic Japanese music, and the remaining 20% is international music from the whole rest of the world. I'm talking about the big artists like Lady Gaga, U2, Maroon 5 and Coldplay. All of them together still only makes up 20%.

Now I'm going to show you this is last year's record sales. Look at this chart here (Chart1), all the black ones are Japanese artists, the red ones are American artists and the blue ones are Korean artists and this is the amount of sales that happened in the year 2011.

This is what people need to know, in America, people think, 'oh in Japan they are just listening to American music like everybody else in the world'. It's just not the case and all this Japanese music I played for you before, it's very Japanese. It's not like American music with Japanese lyrics or American sounding music with Japanese

ORICON ALBUM TOP 20 (2011)

Rank	Album Title	Artist	Sales	Label
1	Beautiful World	Arashi	907,589	JST
2	Kokoni Itakoto	AKB 48	829,645	K
3	Negaino Tou	Exile	748,242	RZN
4	Born This Way	Lady Gaga	658,554	UM
5	Girls' Generation	Girls' Generation	642,054	UM
6	Checkmate!	Namie Amuro	484,336	AVT
7	Super Girl	Kara	450,595	UM
8	Musicman	Keisuke Kuwata	414,725	V
9	Smop Aid	SMAP	413,943	V
10	Ikimonobakari	Ikimonogakari	397,459	ES
11	C'mon	B'z	383,428	VMR
12	Matome I	Aiko	373,677	PC
13	Goodbye Lullaby	Avril Lavigne	368,483	SJI
14	Mind Travel	Superfly	346,598	WMJ
15	Thank You, Love	Kana Nishino	345,878	SER
16	Matome II	Aiko	341,830	PC
17	Cosmonaut	Bump Of Chicken	340,365	TF
18	You	JUJU	327,809	ASR
19	M Best	Miliyah Kato	304,723	SR
20	Tone	TVXQ	293,674	AVT

< Chart 1 >

Source: Original Confidence Jan.2012 vol.46

singers; it's very Japanese sounding, it's not any kind of knock off of American music. As you can see, Korean Music has a bigger presence in Japan than American music, including Lady Gaga. I think Lady Gaga isn't that far off from Japanese visual music in the first place. I think of Lady Gaga as someone who is very creative, very visual, very unique with amazing production values and amazing song qualities, and that reminds me of Perfume. Because it's very, it's very new, it's very visual and it's not a far leap to say that in Japan that it would be popular. When you take someone like ADELE who's a fabulous singer who I absolutely love, I find that a little bit harder for Japanese people to dive in to. Because no matter how beautiful her lyrics are what kind of great singer she is, there's



nothing for a Japanese person to latch on to that easily. They would have to really study the lyrics and have personal relationships that are similar to hers and that is hard because it's in a different culture. With cultures being different, lyrics really don't make much sense over in Japan even if you understand English. Because an ADELE fan in America's life is a different life than that type of 20-year old girl in Japan. Even if they sing about girl stuff, the

Japanese girl can't relate to it. But everybody can relate to like an exciting interesting visual like Lady Gaga. That's why you see the chart as it is. Avril Lavigne is also a quite popular American singer in Japan and because it's cool for girls to rock and to play guitar in Japan. So they look to Avril Lavigne as a role model because that's probably the best example of a rock chick in America. Avril Lavigne a rock girl singer and that's not very far off from what's happening in Japan. To me, when I see that, it's not very Western, it could be Japanese. And the Korean music is also extremely popular in Japan. But as you can see, Japan is an island on to itself when it comes to the music that they listen to, it's almost like they don't really need outside music there in Japan. I mean, if Lady Gaga didn't come out, I don't think there would be anyone on that chart from America. Basically Japan seems to be right now in a place where it doesn't need music from anywhere. It's all very self-contained and the numbers are absolutely huge, I mean people still buy CDs, not as much as they did before, but more than elsewhere alongside with downloads and ring tones and everything like that. There's a big hunger for music over there and the Japanese music is so developed right now that it is just selling at more at bigger lengths than it has before in a long time. The percentage is way higher for Japanese music sales compared to American.

◆ How can songwriters become successful in Japan?

Now let's talk about how songwriters become successful in Japan.

That's not exactly what I wanted to do when I came to Japan. But I've done absolutely everything since I've come to Japan, I've been asked to do so many things in Japan and write with so many artists and to collaborate with so many artists. I wrote a song for a singer named Kotoko and the song went Top 10 in Japan.

Let me play you a part of this song so you can get an idea of the song that I wrote. It's very un-American sounding, and very Japanese sounding but I'm as American as you can get. The reason I'm saying this is because if you want to be a songwriter in Japan, you have to understand some of the basic technical and musical aspects of writing songs in Japan. So I'm going to play you this one song that I wrote and then I'll explain it a little bit more technically with my guitar. This is a song called Kirei na Senritsu by Kotoko.

[♪ Music Video Playing Kirei na Senritsu by Kotoko]

Marty: Maybe you can see the similarity to some of the Japanese songs I played before. It's very non-R&B, there's no blues in there, there's no rapping. To me, it still sounds a little French to me, maybe I'm just kind of weird that way but I think some of the melodic structures are French but, it's a very typical Japanese style of melody. Let me explain with my guitar. In Japan a lot of songs, my song included, have a rather long chord progression that takes you through a lot of different emotions till it gets to the end result. Whereas often times in American music you'll have a four-chord progression that will repeat the chord

progression over and over again and then the singer will just kind of show his or her interpretation over that. But in Japan it's kind of a long journey of many chords from the beginning to the end.

[Guitar Playing]

Marty: For example, often when I hear music from America, especially the ballad type of songs, I hear a four-chord progression, and that kind of was based on 'Let it Be'. I hear it all the time.

[Guitar Playing]

Marty: I hear those four chords over and over again and a lot of songs are based on that. You can take the same four chords and put it in a different order and you hear that chord progression a lot of times too in Western music.

[Guitar Playing]

Marty: So that's a very common chord structure in Western music. But I'll play the chord progression from that song Arigatou by Ikimono-gakari. This is a very typical Japanese chord progression.

[Guitar Playing]

Marty: As you can see this is a long way to get from one end to the other. There are a lot of chords but all of them are very common connecting chords. But this is a major difference that you need to know. The basic foundation of a lot of pop songs, and when I play the Japanese song you might hear that, is that those types of songs are like a jazz format or something



like that. But even though these are very typical pop chords you may also find them in Heavy Rock and Heavy Metal. You'll have that same type of sense. So you need to understand the foundation of what chord goes to what chord, whereas in Western music it's kind of simpler in the way that the chords don't move around so much. It is a matter of taste, but I like the chords to go to a lot of different interesting places. And I like to be surprised

sometimes, when you hear a progression like that but just one chord in the middle of that might be unique and unusual. That's often enough to grab me into the song. That's what happens a lot of times in Japanese music, you will hear a very cliché chord progression like that but there'll be a little twist at the end, like one place will go minor when you didn't expect it, or one place will go augmented all of a sudden. It's all kind of based on this very Japanese chord style. So, you have to be careful when you put the melodies on top of that because chord changes are going by very fast almost like jazz. You have to have a really good solid melody, a really easy to understand melody that's not going to hurt any of those chords in there. Because you could fall on a dissident note anywhere and ruin the whole thing. Whereas when you are playing an American chord progression or a 'Let it Be' type of thing, if you just stay in a scale there are no wrong notes, it's so easy to ad lib over simple chord progressions like that. But it's like a little more dangerous with the Japanese thing because there are so many chords and you have to have a whole purpose to the whole melody, it has to bring you from Point A to Point B. For me, as a musician and an artist it's very appealing to me. So now I'm pretty much like all talked out with what I wanted to say, I'm more interested in what questions you guys might have because this is the kind of stuff the people are going to ask me when I go back to Japan, 'what did they want to know', 'what is everybody interested in'? Because for some reason Japanese people are very interested in what people from other countries think of Japan. Probably more than any place else in the world they are so interested in what foreigners think of the country. I see Japanese people laughing while I'm saying that... it's so true. In America I don't think anybody cares about any place else, this is a very general comment. What I learned from coming from Japan is that they really care about foreigners' opinions and it's very interesting to me as an American because I care about everywhere as well. I've been lucky enough to tour everywhere in the world and I want to learn about pop music from every culture. However in America that's not so common, like those in Japan who really wonder what the French think about us, what is going on, they are really concerned. So, this is the part that I've been looking for to doing so please feel free to ask questions and I'll try to answer them the best as I possibly can.

MC: Thank you Marty. So we'd like to move on to Q&A Session, does anyone have any questions for Marty?

Q&A.....

Q1: So yeah I totally hear what you say about the Japanese music that manage to manifest themselves there but I found also the Japanese have a certain level of enthusiasm that is rarely found in other cultures and I think that's one of the reasons why they will go through anything and they will make whatever they want and maybe took the 80s and the 90s to grasp certain pop concepts and then once they had their foundation they took off. And I've

played in Japan for the last 12 years. It's the only country I've toured in where people actually knew the lyrics to my chill-out tracks and would sing them along during chill-out parties and next to Fujiyama and places like that. I don't think we can, there is any other country that can match that. So my question is, if we were to somehow export the sound of Japan to the rest of the world and



avoiding falling in the traps of prejudice as it gets exported, would that be possible how do you see that happening? Or would that happen indirectly by Japanese producers going abroad, introduce Western artists to manifest the sound like that, which way would that work?

Marty: I had no idea I was going to get such good questions, this is the question that everybody is asking in Japan. I get this question all the time I've answered it in Japanese a 1000 times but never answered it in English, so this is my chance. This is a very important thing; I think a lot of it has to do with luck, a lot of it has to do with timing, the right person and the right song, I don't think it's something you can plan. I think a lot of Japanese artists have tried to do things abroad and spent all kinds of money and had all kinds of plans. You can't plan for something outside of your country because there's so many things that you don't know that will happen, unforeseen obstacles. So what I think is going to happen is the situation like Pink Martini. Pink Martini is a collaboration of all these different artists from around the world including a Japanese singer from the 60s and 70s named Yuki Saori. She is maybe my mother's age or a little bit younger than that and she's not like what you would see in the type of videos I showed you before. But everybody in Japan knows her because she was a very famous pop singer in the 70s and the 80s. She's got a very traditional, typical Japanese voice but the producer of Pink Martini heard this voice and heard the magic in that voice and put it in a context of a world-wide cultural musical group, and they sold out Royal Albert Hall in London. So this is the way these things happen. You know how he discovered her? He just randomly took her record out of a record rack in Japan and bought it, the single. That is how he heard her voice. This is a unique sound, when I hear it I'm like, yes she had a gorgeous voice and it's very typical Japanese, however many singers of that genre have a similar voice. So if he would have grabbed a different single it would have been a different singer who was playing at Royal Albert Hall. Now I hate to say this, I would never want to say that to her face, but I had to say it in Japanese many times. I think it's true and I think she might even agree there is a lot of luck involved. She is a very high quality talented singer. But it's not like she has an amazing range or

anything like that. She is just a great singer of that era and that magic resonated with the producer. So there's just got to be some kind of magical connection. Japanese music awareness is going to help the Visual-kei bands as well. The next obvious thing is that there is going to be a Visual-kei band with non-Japanese members. The closest thing that I think of is My Chemical Romance. If you look at their videos it looks like it's straight off a Visual-kei type of thing. I think there's a lot of bands being influenced by this and making it their own way which is kind of what I am doing with my own music, in a weird and perverted kind of way. It also could be a Japanese artist who is very Japanese and just represents Japan who makes it big outside Japan. So I think it's going to be one of those two ways.

Q2: Just in terms of what we call the aesthetics around a song from Japan, what do you think is, like what do you think makes a song Japanese? What are the aesthetics around the song?

Marty: Are you talking about the sonic elements of the song?

Q2: Yes.

Marty: Okay, good question, I think if you're talking about rock in particular, you're talking about musicians who didn't grow up with rock and blues. They didn't grow up like American guitarists. American guitarists might have grown up with Kiss or Zeppelin, AC/DC, Black Sabbath, Megadeth, or Metallica stuff with blues based, Heavy Metal based guitar riffs. In Japan, they might admire that stuff but they grew up with their parents music which is Enka and Kayoukyoku, Japanese traditional music, maybe stuff that Yuki Saori herself was singing and the stuff that is based on the chord progression that I played before. So those guitarists' fingers have a different touch. Their work is not based on adlib, and this is a very important point. Japanese rock musicians are not as much adlib type of players as people outside of Japan are. People outside of Japan, they tend to adlib more. Adlibbing is my thing, I mean my favorite thing to do is adlib. But in Japan it's all like 'let's decide the melody' and this is the way they play the melody or rehearse the melody or this is the way it goes. You might have someone who can play amazing things. But they don't adlib it, they rehearse it, so that makes their touch completely different from adlibbers. That makes it have an aesthetic sound, they were brought up with Japanese music, whereas in America we are brought up with Western rock music. So our rock roots are completely different. Hopefully that answered your question.

Q3: Hello Marty. I come from Italy, and from a strictly conservative Town Torino. I would like to know when you spoke about chord progressions. I would like you to elaborate more about the lyrics over chord progressions.

Marty: Lyrics.

Q3: Because I related to everything you said about the melodies, but what about the lyrics?

Marty: Well, obviously lyrics reflect the culture that you're in so that's another obstacle. That's why making it as outside of Japan with Japanese lyrics is tough because in America lyrics are very important. Even if the lyrics of Japanese music were translated, the culture is so different that few would understand anyway. So if something is going to break out outside of Japan it can't be on the strength of its lyrics because if you are not from Japan, Japanese it won't mean anything to you. It's just going to have a Japanese sound, it's going to have a Japanese sonic sound. So if that magic appeals to someone then they are going to enjoy that sound. But for the meaning of the lyrics, it's going to take a strange thing to make those meanings of lyrics translate to something outside of America but that also just might be the magic in it as well, who knows. What I was going to say about lyrics is that a lot of this stuff in Japanese, the lyrics match the image of what you see and you probably wondering what are they singing about that's so happy like that. It's normal, there is a big hit song right now that subject of the song is fake eyelashes. There would never be a song about fake eyelashes in America. But this is the biggest song in Japan right now. AKB48 have got songs about hair ties and it's very simple normal day-to-day type of stuff. When I listen to foreign music it's like everybody is trying to be the hottest girl in the club, picking up dudes and chicks and that's very normal. That's ok but sometimes, the real innocent stuff is even more sexual to me. I just get bored of all these single ladies do this and that. I think the simpler happier stuff appeals to me more that's why I am suited to the Japanese music. But I think there's probably a lot more people like me outside of Japan. There's a lot more interesting lyrics in Japan, there are a lot of very personal things. There is a lot of talking about graduation, as graduation is a big topic in Japan, so they talk about graduating school and going to miss their friends and have to be an adult now and stuff like that. It's very different from America. You know, people in America may think a graduation song would sound kind of cheesy but in Japan, graduation is a big topic, changing of seasons is also really big. Winter-related songs are very normal as well as other innocent types of things. Even in Japanese rap, there is a great song by Japanese rap singer SEAMO, the song is called "Continue". It's about people who are trying to complete graduate school and stuff like that. The message is that you can fail as many times as you want but as long as you don't give up you haven't lost and it's a very good message. When you hear rap music especially in America, I am kind of embarrassed because it's just stuff that you don't really want to say. It's not very elegant. Not that you have to be elegant all the time but the rap culture is not the culture I grew up in. I hear the rap lyrics in Japanese and I find that they very uplifting and positive. I'm definitely not putting down rap in America, it's just the lyrics is not something that I really understand or that I can get behind. I think lyrics are a little bit more innocent and naive in Japan compared to outside of Japan. Hopefully I answered your question.

Q4: Hi Marty, for me you really opened my eyes to specifically the level of sophistication of thought in music that's so well received in Japan. I think now since it appeals to me, it

would appeal to lot of producers in the UK or US who are looking for more of a challenge in writing music rather than sticking to the simple kind of commercial progressions and music their country demands. Do you think there is a lot of opportunity for foreign producers to get involved?

Marty: I think you have to have the desire to do something like that in the first place because it's quite an ordeal. As you heard from the music, it's a different world. It's like a different planet in my opinion. So this kind of thing resonates to you and you feel that you can add something to it then I think that's the key. You will find the way and I think Japan is very open to new and unique sounds and I think that's why Lady Gaga is so big over there. I think as a producer myself I like to add whatever it is that I have to something that is very traditional of Japan. If you plan to have a hit song in Japan in the domestic music scene you are going to have to somewhat understand the foundation of what I was talking about musically before or else no one would be able to musically grasp your song. It has to have somewhat of that melodic element in it or else it's too outside, it will be too left field for them, too crazy, maybe only some really adventurous people will get it. But I think if you're talking about major pop hit success, you are going to have to understand the basic musical foundation and as a producer add some modern new sounds to it. Now that's not terribly difficult to do. If you analyze some really big Japanese songs, you can see some patterns that repeat in there and you can see some things that make sense in Japanese music. Myself as a producer I love new sounds and I think that's about 'Perfume' in particular. The sound was new, the content was sort of new and I think Japan is, they have a big hunger for new sounds and new music but the content itself has got to be something they can relate to, something they have heard that before, but sonically is different, new and fresh. The content, it sounds like 'my old favorite song' but the interpretation is brand new. So I think producers with a unique sound will have a good chance to add that sound to something that's already there like a Japanese sounding song. I think all of a sudden, doing something totally new is going to be rough. Unless it's something outrageous but melodically simple like Lady Gaga it's going to be harder to find its way in there. I think Japanese musicians admire a lot of producers from outside of Japan. The ideal way to get started is to have your music heard by a well-known Japanese artist, and then have that person admire your music enough to have them want one of their songs to be produced by you. That's one way they do it and there is no better way to do that than go to Japan a couple of times and try to meet some people in the business and get your sound heard. If you have unique sound and are able to collaborate, it is best as Japan is a very collaborating country, a fact that I have learned so much while living there. I would have someone ask me to do something for a record, arrange a song, or play guitar, then I would do it 100% my way. Even then they will say, 'I am your biggest fan man, but actually I still kind of want you to do it this way,' as you have to also understand that there's got to be a little bit give and take no matter how famous you are or how developed your sound is. So if you can do that, if you are good with collaboration, that's a very important thing in Japan. Actually I love collaborating, even more than just working by myself, so that's why the Japanese system works well for me.

Q5: Hi Marty, I am going to ask you as a journalist. As I go back to Spain and I tell them this story of the change, I think they are going to find it unbelievable that a person who was rocking in Megadeth now is producing J Pop. Please be honest, is it that you like this music or do you make more money producing in Japan than rocking in Megadeth and 2nd question

Marty: Please

Q5: These people, these bands sing all in Japanese. Do you think that if they want to get they want to turn into global bands, will they have to sing in English?

Marty: Alright, let me get the first question first. Anybody who tries to do music for the money anywhere is like setting himself up for failure big



time, as it will never happen. You can never do music for money, never. There is no possible way because you will never be able to do it. I mean you will definitely not make it happen. I loved being in Megadeth, I just loved it. It was pretty much the ultimate, and I did it for 10 years. You know that was great. But like during those 10 years I found that I was listening to Japanese music so much more than what my contemporaries were doing at the time. I mean great stuff like Megadeth, Metallica and all those metal bands are great guys and it was great music. But I heard what was going on in Japan and it just seemed limitless, and there was so much cool stuff going on, so many opportunities to add new colors to music, that I felt like `this is what I have to do as an artist`, I had to go to Japan. It's risky like I said because in Japan, international music is only 20% of what's happening in Japan and I wanted to be in the 80% of the domestic part. Even though I had developed a large following in the international scene from my years in Megadeth and my solo work, that means very little in the massive domestic scene, so everybody saw me as this brand new foreign guitar player. It took me a while to get to where I am now, it took me a while before people like accepted me in the domestic music scene and it's a very, very hard task to do. After all that I love what I'm doing now. It's all good. I think now I have so much more musical potential than I did during Megadeth times by far, and so many more of my dreams have come true musically, since I have come to Japan. In Megadeth it was one big dream come true, and it was wonderful with great touring and big records. But In Japan, I mean every day I have awesome and unique musical challenges. For example just before this event in France, I filmed a great TV show for which I had to arrange this insane song and play it on TV with a bunch of A-list Japanese celebrities. I just arranged the thing the day

before I had to play it on the show, that was just before this trip and then the day after this trip when I get back to Japan I go on a even bigger TV show and play this other song, full on death metal song that I wrote, but I'll be playing with this boy band like the Backstreet Boys of Japan. Insane! Anyway, crazy musical stuff that really shapes you as a musician happens all the time there for me, and I love being challenged like that. If you play the same music everyday 250 times a year, I don't care how cool it is, you get sick of it, you just do. I just needed the stimulation and needed to be in a place where the music was like in the videos that I showed to you before. I can't imagine not living there. I just can't. So that's the reason for that. That being said I love everything that I have done in the past, no regrets, love it all. If it wasn't for Megadeth I would have never gone to Spain. So it's a great thing.

And the other question: Do you have to sing in English to make it outside of Japan. I don't think so. I think actually if the Japanese artist stays the way they are naturally and don't try to adapt, they might have a better chance. So many Japanese artists have tried to sing in English and I just don't see it happening, I don't see that being a plus so much and the reason why is because of a stereotype. In America anyway, and probably in every country, you look up to the artist. You want to be like them. Rap stars are cool, R&B singers are sexy. But in America the image of Japanese or Asian person is smart or brainy. They're doing the best in school and they have a very good image. But that's not the type of a hot R&B singer that one wants to look up to, most kids want to be Beyonce or they want to be Rihanna or something like that. They don't want to be like that ace student sitting next to me in school. It's a stereotype but it's just the way people think over there so I think that's a huge obstacle. Rather than going in that way, something that is totally Japanese like AKB48 is unapologetically Japanese so people may go, 'wow this is totally different'. Just the way it is. That's a little bit more unique because I can't see any Asian girl singer being like Beyonce or something like that, I just don't see it happening. I don't know anything I'm just one guy. It could happen tomorrow. I doubt it. My point is I don't think Japanese artists are going to need this sing in English.

Q6: I'm from the U.S. and one of the things that I've found pretty interesting that you are bringing up was the like the differences within the background of the music and how in Japan you're saying that they don't grow up on like the same American like on the roots music where it's like blues based and everything like that, what do you think should be done to have it so that Japanese music has a bigger hold in the US and its scene? When I hear it, it is very different and it's not based in like you know the 1-4-5 chord progression this is much more complex and its very different, it's intriguing but what do you think should be done to make it so that it is more sensible?

Marty: I don't think there is anything that you could do to the Japanese music that's going to make it more accessible. What's going to make it accessible is people who are already finding about Japanese music in America and Europe are kind of the outsiders, kind of the weird people like the same people who had found Nirvana when they first came out. Kind of guys like me who are not good in sports, didn't really care about school, weird people on the sidelines of life, you know what I mean? But there are a lot of those people out there in the world, who are sitting on the Internet finding this weird music from around the world. And this is like "my" music, nobody knows it yet, and that's what everybody thought about Nirvana who become the biggest band of all time because it's kind of the outsiders "get it" first, like the outsiders who are finding Visual-kei music right now. Everybody can go with the flow and listen to the latest hits that are already big. I remember when I was a kid finding stuff that other people didn't like was my whole purpose in life. If anybody liked it, I hated it immediately. I think there are a lot of people like that because everybody wants to have their own identity. So I think if you cannot find something in the USA scene, there are just so many riches within the Japanese music that you can get off on. And the word Otaku has already become part of the English language and a lot of these new Japanese music fans are Otaku. The Japanese Otaku, are the type of people who buy three of the same CD. These are the type of people who buy like every bit of merchandise that goes with the artist. And those people are in America as well so those are the people who are going to find it and they are going to find its place. I don't think it's going to be the hip thing. But there are enough un-hip people out there that can make it a huge thing.

Q 7: You played some sort of elongated chord progressions. Can you speak to the relationship between the Japanese language and the sort of longer phrasing and if there is a connection and how you think they kind of tie together?

Marty: Not necessarily the language but I can say that musically, almost all Japanese people, at one time or the other has played an instrument for a hobby or in school or they have at least touched an instrument before. When I grew up in America there were people who played music and people who had never even seen a guitar before. There was no in-between. But if you go to Japan, every taxi driver has either played a piano or organ or touched the guitar. Everybody knows a little bit about music. Everybody has done some kind of music course. I think the music education system in Japan is much more prioritized than possibly in America where it's out of lot of schools. Everybody can pretty much grasp musical concepts with a little bit more ease than in America, where you kind of have to spoon-feed American people music. I hate to sound down on America because I am not. I am proud to be an American. Don't get me wrong. But American people hear someone singing a high note and go oh my God this person's great, I have to go buy their record. I never thought that once in my life. That's the problem with American Idol, that's the whole problem in my opinion. I'm only one person but that's like the most popular show in the whole world so go figure. But like looking at someone singing and showing off high notes

and thinking that's what "good" is, bores the hell out of me. I think in Japan it's not so much the one person's ability to do some kind of crazy thing like sing an ultra high note, I think it's just music that they can respond to and I think they can relate to longer progressions because they have more actual hands on music experience, even if it's just a little bit at an amateur level. Just about everybody's been in an amateur band at some time or played violin or cello or something in their school. Everybody can relate to that progressive odd time signature in that dance music and nobody goes, 'oh my God I can't listen to it anymore'. Oppositely, that's the most exciting part of the song and that's what is brought out and exaggerated sometimes. I think that has to do with music education and another thing in Japan I find is that people who play music are regular people. Guys who already have girlfriends and are popular, and guys who are good at sports also play instruments and form bands. In America if you are a football player, there is no way that you are going to play music, no way you even want to play music. If you are good in school or if you are good in sports so if you have girlfriends and you're popular already, there is no way you are going to pick up a guitar, pick up drums and play. Playing music seriously, is usually for the outsiders. Regular people and popular people don't play instruments much. But in Japan, even popular people pick up a guitar and how learn a few chords or play piano, just about everybody has some experience. I still haven't understood that one even after living in Japan 8 years. I mean if I was on a football team and had girlfriends and stuff, the last thing I'd be doing is learning drums or something like that. But in Japan it seems like regular folks get into music and that's the difference. In America is like you have to really be musical, you have to love music you have to be really drawn to music to become a player I think.

Q 8: Hello Marty. I am from Israel. I'd like to ask you as a musician if you can talk a little bit about the way the Japanese culture changed you musically or developed you and if you can demonstrate it a little bit through the guitar to comparison to older things you did and the new things you did?

Marty: It wouldn't be so easy to understand on guitar how I've changed but I'll explain, I'll explain the main kind of changes. As a musician when you have experiences, those are what change you as a musician. Before I came to Japan I was touring and recording, touring and recording, that's it. As soon as I got to Japan all of a sudden I'm playing in a Japanese J-pop band with some famous singers I've to learn all these songs. So right there I'm absorbing all this stuff that was new to me but was very normal to Japanese people. Then I'm performing with a Japanese band that is quite different from an American band. All of a sudden, I started doing television, I was asked to do a TV show, and the show became really popular right away, and the show had me playing lots of guitar and doing adaptations of Japanese songs and it required tremendous arrangement abilities that I developed on the spot as, I haven't that much arrangement experience before that. So doing television and having to do a lot of new things on the spot like that with high pressure really added to my musical ability and my musical playing a lot. And then, I continued writing my own music

in Japan and releasing my own solo albums in Japan. For touring, all the musicians in my solo band are Japanese so we have a more Japanese way of doing things. The process is different and every different experience adds up to whatever my musical identity winds up being. I just get asked to do so many incredibly different things and I have to turn down most of them, but I do so many things that are so odd that's there is no way that it's not going to find its way into my music somehow. Because of that my musical sense is pretty whacked. I think that anybody who goes out of their own country and tries to do their craft there will learn things a little different way, and that is not just for guitar, not just for music. If you go out of your country and do something that you did before in your own country, and do it their way, it's going to touch you and its going to stick with your abilities somehow, even when you go back to your own country. That's a very important thing, and I have to say just from everyday experiences, the different kind of work that I do all the time whether it be my own solo music, or whether it be working with a Japanese artist, whether it be producing, playing, appearing on television or even in movies or commercials, its different from the way they do it back home, so that just kind of sticks with the way I play. I hope that answers your question, thank you very much.

Q9: Hi, thank you Marty. Just one question about piracy, music piracy, do you feel like the fan base is more respectful about this in Japan or do you feel there is a problem is the same in every single country?

Marty: I don't think I'm qualified to answer that actually. I think that the people that I came here with who are sponsoring this could answer it perfectly. But I can't really do that and mainly because I'm an artist and as an artist I already get everything. My mailbox is full of every CD that has ever come out and actually as a fan, and I'm just the luckiest person in the world, because I get things before they are released so I don't really have a viewpoint on it. I just don't think that the piracy is the be all end all of the music industry, I think it's all about being creative making more different ways to be able to make money to be able to continue to make music. I think the hunger for music will never ever change, just the way the record companies make their money will have to evolve. That will probably evolve over time and that you need somebody way smarter than I am to figure that out. I don't really know how they are going to do it but the artist makes the music and the business people figure out a way to deal with it. It's going to change but I can't really say much about the piracy, whether it's more in one country than in another. Hopefully that will not be an issue any more after a few years but it's a good question. And thank you all very, very much for coming I really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

MC: Thank you everybody and everybody please thank Marty for sharing such good information and thank you for joining us today.

[End]



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