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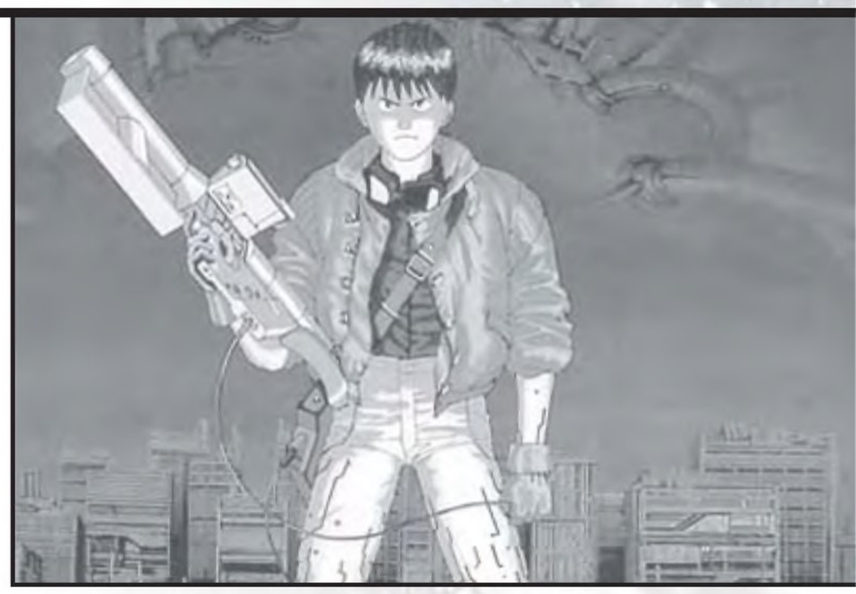
THE ANIME & MANGA MAGAZINE

Kieryn Breslow-Bardell (Order #53033488)

FANTASIA 2001: JAPANESE ANIMATION (Continued)

newly translated script, and then re-mixed with the original music and effects as a Dolby Digital AC3 Surround, THX-approved soundtrack. *Akira* should now be an entirely new experience!

However, my first reaction after the movie was "Where's the million?" It didn't feel much different than when I first saw it on a big screen in San Diego in August '89. The sound has now more punch and the dubbing is much better (although some voices, like the Colonel, sounded better in the old version). The changes are not as spectacular as it was hyped, but they are there and it makes a little difference. Anyway, *Akira* will always remain a classic that everyone must see. [CJP] ***Akira***, Japan, 1988, 124 min., Based on Katsuhiro Otomo's manga. Directed by Katsuhiro Otomo. Produced by Tokyo Movie Shinsha for Kodansha. Voice cast: Joshua Set (Tetsuo), Wendee Lee (Kei). ★★★★☆



BoogiePop Phantom

BoogiePop Phantom is a 12-episode animated TV series that played on TV Tokyo every wednesdays at 1:45 am during the first months of 2000. It is based on the popular and award-winning novel series by Kouhei Kadono, *Boogiepop wa Warawanai* (*The Boogiepop Never Laughs*) — which has also spawn a live-action theatrical feature. The TV series begins with the final scene of the novel's first chapter. One night, the school is hit by lightning and, ricocheting from the school, the light climbs toward space, causing all sorts of electrical problems in the city. A month later, strange things begin to happen… A suicidal girl is about to jump, a biker tempts his own death by driving at recklessly high speeds, etc. All appears to be possessed by an entity of some sort! Schoolgirls are whispering rumours about this enigmatic figure, Boogiepop, saying that it is the Death God who brings people to the next world before they become "too ugly" to live on Earth. Meet her one dark night and you are taken! No one knows for sure who Boogiepop is… People tell each other stories and laugh: no one believes that she exists in this day and age. Still, there are some strange things that appear to be going on….



This TV series is like an anthology of urban legends & mysteries, with each episode spotlighting a different character, but everything will eventually appears to be tied together. Bordering horror and psychological drama, it is one of those weird anime (in some aspects similar to *Serial Experiment Lain*) born from the fears of the new millenium and which reflects on the human condition. It is dark and weird, so if you liked *Lain* you'll like *BoogiePop*. However, the story unfold slowly and it takes more than three episodes (like it was shown at Fantasia) to really appreciate its complexity. [CJP] *BoogiePop Phantom*, TV Series, 25 min. each. Direction: Takashi Watanabe; Screenplay: Sadayuki Murai (*Perfect Blue*); Production: Studio Madhouse. ★★★

Laputa

This anime feature film, directed by Hayao Miyazaki, was first presented in Japan in 1986. Now, fifteen years later, this film was brought to the audiences of Fantasia 2001 as an anime classic (gee, time sure flies!), courtesy of Buena Vista Home Entertainment, with excellent voice actors (and they're stars from Hollywood!), such as Anna Paquin (*X-Men*) as Sheeta, James Van Der Beek as Pazu and none other than Mark Hamil (Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*) as the evil Muska! No one in the US thought Japanimation would become mainstream entertainment material in the 1980's, but now, even fifteen years since this anime was created, the film still shines like a jewel, with a fantastic (remixed) soundtrack by Jo Hisaishi! New anime fans surely enjoyed this big screen presentation and the beauty of the imaginary world of Laputa. It is more like a European children's' adventure story (it was inspired by Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's travel's*) than anything else. You'll fall in love with Dora, the old pirate lady, that's for sure! [MM] ★★★★☆



Neko-Jiru-So

This anime is the adaptation of the manga, which was published through Garo Magazine, directed by Tetsuo Sato. Totally surrealistic, therefore viewers must not watch this show hoping for it to have any common sense (because there is none!). The story is simple... It's the story of the affection of brother Nyata and sister Nyako (Nyata literally means "Miaow-Boy" and Nyako "Miaow-Girl") for each other. Nyako gets ill and the God of Death came to bring her to the next world. Nyata somehow managed to take back half of her soul, but now he has to find the other half if he wants to bring her back totally alive. So they go on a journey to find it. Cat lovers can enjoy this ultra surrealistic world of innocence and fraternal love and see this movie as if it was a dream. It might not appeal to all anime fans, but there is no dialogue so that it can be seen anywhere without any language barrier. Let's take a trip to look for an important thing in the metal flower garden! Innocent, but cynical at the same time!! [MM] ★★★☆



Kieryn Breslow-Bardell (Order #53033488)

CONVENTION REPORT: SAKURA CON

Dozens of costumers stood next to an odd-looking dome in Everett, Washington, shivering outside in the evening chill as they waited their turn to appear in the Sakura Con costume contest. Then it started to rain. Realizing that the participants in their largest event were going to get soaked, convention officials rushed the costumers around the dome and into a hall at the Holiday Inn where the convention was held. The costumers were herded down another hall before they were brought back to the dome so the program could start. And, in the best tradition of the theater, the show did go on, to a polite and entertained audience. The costumers' enthusiasm wasn't dampened by the rain, and when Sakura Con held their gripe session on the convention's final day, only one of the cosplayers returned to complain. That entire gripe session was cut short because of a lack of criticism.

Sakura Con, held April 27-29, 2001, joined the list of anime conventions that enjoyed major growth. In space and attendance, the event nearly doubled in size from one year to the next. Fewer than 900 had gone to Sakura Con in 2000, but more than 1,500 traveled to the Pacific Northwest in 2001 – so many that the convention had to turn fans away on their busiest day, Saturday. For the first time, Sakura Con had to deal with lines of fans waiting to get into their dealers' room.

Fans got to see a huge banner promoting the *Oni* title from Bungie Software and see demonstrations of Japanese games from Enix that had not been released in North America. They heard actor Pam Lauer talk about voicing the dub role of Kei in *Dirty Pair* and listened to Steve Bennett of Studio Ironcat describe how he won over a skeptical audience of parents in Iowa when he told them that anime told Christian stories, too.

And the convention was fortunate to ride the crest of popularity enjoyed by that season's hottest anime title, *The Big O*. Through the Cartoon Network's cablecast in the U.S. fans had been entranced by the story of android Dorothy Wainright, negotiator Roger Smith and his giant robot. And one of the people responsible for *Big O*'s popularity, scriptwriter and actor Lia Sargent, was on hand at Sakura Con. "It's cool. It has an edge to it," Sargent said about the show. She disagreed with the fan observations that *Big O* resembled *Batman*, saying she wrote the dialogue as if it was for a Sam Spade detective novel or a James Bond adventure.

After playing outgoing personalities such as Chun Li (Sargent's favorite "because she fights so well") and Milly Thompson, Sargent had to underplay the role of Wainright. "it was hard for me to play a monotone with all that humor. They said "That was so happy... don't play it so happy.""

"Out of a lot of the shows I've done, it was the least confusing. Some of the anime I've done, I have no idea what's going on," Sargent added, mentioning *Serial Experiments Lain* as the series that confounded her the most. Sargent was "dead" in most of *Lain*, playing the voice of the girl who kills herself in the first episode and haunts Lain for the rest of the series.

While Sargent was making her first anime convention appearance since Anime Expo in 1998, director Hiroki Hayashi was making what has turned out to be the latest in a series of annual appearances at North American events. Like Sargent, Hayashi traveled to Sakura Con on the heels of a major accomplishment, having finished a demo reel of the forthcoming *Magical Witchland* series for AIC. Hayashi had wanted to try a new project and new techniques, and he got his wish with *Witchland*, which promises to break new ground in the look of anime. While *Witchland* joins the anime series which are animated solely on computer systems and dispenses with ink and paint, it takes that technique one step further and gives the characters a three-dimensional look.

The audience enjoyed the demo reel – which took two years to develop. Hayashi and his computer graphics specialist, Mitsutaka Iguchi, found it was harder than they expected to create convincing characters and movement, but the demonstration showed that they've solved the problems.

Using computer graphics means that directors can create scenes that are more complex than cel-animated scenes, Hayashi emphasized. And that could lead to anime that is more animated. "Sometimes, dialogue is used to cover up for the lack of shots on the screen. I'd like to be able to make the film more fully animated," Hayashi said.

Those who like the elements of Japanese culture and fantasy in Hayashi's shows such as *Sol Bianca*, *Tenchi-Muyo* and *El-Hazard* might be surprised to know that the director enjoyed 1960's American TV shows: *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Star Trek*, *Lost in Space* and *Bewitched*. "At the time, Japan was still a growing media industry and Japan couldn't make the sort of entertainment that the U.S. was making for the world," he said.

Still, North American anime fans who may have never seen the series that Hayashi liked got some special enjoyment from a demonstration of Japanese culture at Sakura Con. Singer and dancer Mary Ohno, who runs a kabuki academy in the Seattle area, had convention fans singing along with her and shouting approval of her dances, once she told the fans that kabuki was as much a kind of dinner theater as a traditional art form.

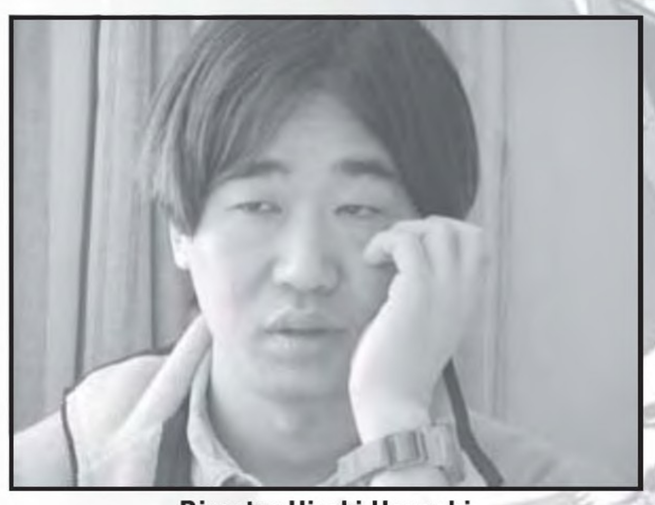
Sakura Con was so successful and few so much in 2001 that the convention organizers, the Asia Northwest Cultural Education Association, decided they needed more room – and fast. Before the 2001 convention was held, the association had signed a three-year contract to hold future Sakura Cons at the new Hilton hotel and convention center at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, beginning on April 26-28, 2002. Other Sakura Cons are scheduled for April 4-6, 2003 and April 23-25, 2004.



Actor Lia Sargent



Kabuki artist Mary Ohno



Director Hiroki Hayashi



Above: Computer artist Mitsutaka Iguchi
Below: Actor Pam Lauer



Pictures by Kevin Lillard. For more information: www.fansview.com and www.sakuracon.org

Kieryn Breslow-Bardell (Order #53033488)

CONVENTION REPORT: ANIME CENTRAL



Actor Yuko Kagata



Actor Wendee Lee



Artist Yoshitoshi Abe



Above: Artist Range Murata
Below: Artist & Mecha Designer Mika Akitaka



Fresh faces brightened the fourth Anime Central and took fans' minds off the indoor construction zone. For once, the highways around Arlington Heights, Illinois weren't desperately torn up on the weekend of the suburban Chicago convention. However, the Sheraton Arlington Park made up for that shortcoming by tearing up the hotel where the convention was held on May 11-13, 2001. Fans arrived to find the hotel's main entrance was closed and the lobby was chopped down to a fraction of its usual size.

But the convention was entertaining enough to outshine the dingy surroundings and overloaded elevators. While familiar personalities were part of the show – people like actors Amy Howard Wilson, Lisa Ortiz and Brett Weaver, publisher C.B. Cebulski, translator Neil Nadelman, producers Jeff Thompson and Shin Kurokawa, artists Bruce Lewis, Steve Bennett, J. Torres, Takeshi Miyazawa, and Robert DeJesus (who was married at the convention), and animator Scott Frazier (who performed the marriage), Anime Central featured people who were making their first convention appearances.

While many North American anime fans prefer the bright voices of Japanese actors, those actors have been the rarest of guests of honor at North American conventions. That may have been one of the reasons that the appearance of Yuko Kagata at Anime Central proved to be so popular, even though she had accumulated only a handful of roles by the time she traveled to Illinois (Haruna in *Corrector Yui* was her most prominent role). That voice had fans cheering when she did no more than greet the convention with a cheerful "Good Morning!" at the opening ceremonies. Fans were delighted by Kagata's cheerful, high-pitched voice and her tendency to wear costumes at convention events. And Kagata enjoyed those fans, saying that Japanese fans tend to be more shy and American fans are more open. "Japanese fans try to find out things about me and not talk about themselves," she said.

Kagata said that she's an anime fan who always wanted to be a voice actor. "If I'm surprised, I might come out with an anime character reaction. My friends often say that I act like I popped out from some anime." Acting might seem like fun from the outside, but she's found that it's hard work on the inside. Since Japanese animation is produced before the voices are recorded, Kagata has to adjust her performance based on the amount of time each character speaks on screen. "Each character has a set amount of lip-flap time. You can grasp if a character is a slow speaker or a fast speaker," said Kagata.

The convention also was visited by an actor who started with *Robotech* and never looked back. Wendee Lee, who began her anime dubbing career with Vanessa in *Robotech*, moved on to roles such as Faye Valentine in *Cowboy Bebop* and Kei in the latest dub of *Akira*. At one point, Lee was directing and acting in episodes of two anime series at the same time – *Outlaw Star* and *Digimon*. "*Outlaw Star*, that was a very tricky show," Lee said. "It was all done at night, and I was also directing *Digimon* during the day. We would get a little giddy at times. We would get a lot of crazy because it was at night – we'd say "I just hit the wall, it's time for tea.""

Lee sounded sad about the anime dub that got away, the English-language version of *Tonde Buurin*. She said that a North American company had purchased the rights to the show about a girl who turns into a pink crime-fighting pig, and all of the episodes had been dubbed – then the production company lost the rights. The *Tonde Buurin* episodes still sit on a shelf, ready to be released, she said. "It turned out incredibly adorable. It's a very sweet show and it would be perfect for young kids," said Lee.

Older kids love *Gundam Wing* and *Dragon Ball*, and fans got to enjoy two English-language actors from those series. Scott McNeil, the first-season Piccolo in *Dragon Ball Z* and Duo Maxwell in the *Gundam Wing* dub, came across as an intensely humorous person who was always "on." A comment from McNeil always seemed to include three jokes and six voices. "There's something defective in my brain. Doing what I do is something that keeps me out of a rubber room," McNeil joked. He observed that Maxwell is "...a little sarcastic and a little like me," and that "Piccolo's emotions come from a human place, he's not an alien even though he's green."

Morrow, Trowa Barton in *Gundam Wing* and Goku in *Dragon Ball Z*, said he turned Barton into a dark and brooding character as *Gundam Wing* progressed, while he screamed the Goku part all through *Dragon Ball*. One of Morrow's favorite anime dubbing roles was Van Fanel in *Vision of Escaflowne*, saying "...had that struggle in life and a love that he was interested in. Everyone has a person like that in their life."

The convention also saw a collection of first-class artists. Yoshitoshi Abe, designer of the characters in *Serial Experiments Lain*, continued to decline to explain the enigmatic series – but he said that *Lain* was so emotionally dark that the producers had to come up with the *NieA Under Seven* comedy so they could do something different. Despite Range Murata's beast designs being computerized for *Blue Submarine No. 6*, Murata said he still prefers to draw on paper. Mika Akitaka, who has designed mecha for three *Gundam* series, admitted that real Gundams aren't possible with today's metals because they would collapse under their own weight. And Kia Asamiya, creator of *Silent Moebius*, said he wouldn't want to live in *Moebius*' fictional world of supernatural monsters – but that world makes for great stories.

Anime Central won't have to worry about their future location; before the 2001 convention was held, the organizers had signed a contract to move the event to the Hyatt Regency O'Hare, nicknamed the "Hyatt *Macross*" for its flamboyant architecture, on April 19-21, 2002.

Pictures by Kevin Lillard. For more information: www.fansview.com and www.acen.org.

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