

re: music

Fans raise \$50,000 for Japanese band

Ian Martin
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

To most bands, it sounds like a dream come true: \$50,000 with no strings attached; the opportunity to record an album with one of the world's top engineers; and the freedom to make any kind of record you want, unhindered by interfering labels just waiting to drop you at the first sniff of commercial failure. Too good to be true?

Apparently not, if German/Dutch music Web site Sellaband has anything to say about it. Acting in part as a networking site that allows bands to build and connect with their fanbase, Sellaband takes it a step further by allowing fans, or "believers," as the Web site terms them, to show their devotion by investing in their favorite musicians, \$10 at a time. When pledges for a band reach the 5,000 mark, the musicians are given the money and go into a studio to make an album. Each believer gets a copy of the finished disc and also retains a stake in its sales.

It's not an entirely new idea, with the Internet having hosted similar schemes before. In 2001, British prog-rock band Marillion financed the album "Anoraknophobia" through preorders; Canadian publishing company Zeros 2 Heroes Media works on a similar principle, sourcing ideas from within an online social-networking environment; more recently, the Web-based venture company MyFootballClub bought the team Ebbsfleet United by taking donations from thousands of small investors throughout the world. The concept has even spawned its own neologism, "crowdsourcing."

Despite the cringe-inducing terminology, the Sellaband experience has been a positive one for many of the musicians using the site. Garage-metal band Electric Eel Shock recently became the first Japanese group to reach Sellaband's magic \$50,000, a figure they raised in just 54 days. Bassist Kazuto Maekawa points out, "The most obvious difference with (other social-networking sites) MySpace or Mixi is that you can invest in the band directly. It's obvious, but it's a massive difference; it means that Sellaband is a more active way of involving your fans—they're not only fans, they're part of the band."

For Maekawa, Sellaband is a natural development from Electric Eel Shock's own philosophy of fan involvement. From their wild live performances to their online interactions with fans, they have always believed in getting up close and personal. For a while now, the band have operated the Samurai Club, where

they have partly financed the recording of their previous albums (sometimes self-released, sometimes on traditional labels) by soliciting small donations from fans in return for lifetime guest passes for their live shows. They have even taken to describing Sellaband as "Samurai 2.0."

Electric Eel Shock spend a lot of their time on tour around the world, playing over 150 shows a year. As Maekawa says, "The Internet is borderless and Electric Eel Shock is a borderless band, so we need communication tools; that's why our motto is 'Sex, drugs and e-mail.'"

One of the first bands to successfully raise money through Sellaband was London-based trip-hop group Second Person, who in 2007 used the money to make "Elements," a concept album based on the five Chinese elements. Bass player Mark Maclaine believes that this kind of fan interaction represents an important step not just in the way bands

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interact with their fans but also in the way the whole music industry works.

"I think lots of people in the U.K. were getting disenchanting with the way they were getting pop music forced down their throats," he says. "And one facet of that is that people have stopped trusting the music industry."

Maekawa agrees with this sentiment, pointing out that one of Sellaband's strongest points is the way that it provides a level playing field for artists.

"There's no territory, no money power. There's just music there," he says. "You can compare the bands equally, whether they are independent or major, from anywhere in the world. Isn't that excellent?"

Maclaine believes that one of the biggest benefits the members of Second Person have gained from Sellaband was the ability to develop in a way that working through the industry as normal would never have allowed.



Metal money-makers: Electric Eel Shock (Kazuto Maekawa right), the first Japanese band to raise \$50,000 on Sellaband.com, clearly didn't spend the cash on a new wardrobe.

You say you want an evolution? So does the music biz

Adapting to the changes in the music industry has been a painful process for many, but big companies and small entrepreneurs are gradually coming to terms with the new order. Major record companies have been struggling to reconcile the Internet's inherent tendency toward democratization of information with their own instinct to protect and control their assets. In 2007 in Japan, Sony imprint Columbia set up **Oto Revo**, an online audition site where bands can post their own videos in the hope of qualifying for a recording deal. Whether this represents real engagement with Internet technology or simply an attempt to save money on A&R is a matter of debate.

The struggle record companies face in finding a way to turn file sharing into a revenue stream has been one of the more high-profile battles of the Internet era, with widely reported legal battles over services such as the prelegit Napster and a few cases of users being made an example of through aggressive prosecutions for music piracy. One method that might point to the future lies in the MSP (music service provider) set up in 2005 by U.K. music Web site **PlayLoudr**—basically an Internet service provider where part of the subscription fee goes to the record companies, in exchange for legal, unlimited downloading of that label's catalog. This kind of blanket license seems like a realistic option for record companies to pursue, and EMI's new chief of digital

operations, Douglas Merrill, has been making positive noises about such an approach.

The Web site **Sonicbids**, set up by well-connected entrepreneur Panos Panay in Boston, acts as an electronic middleman between event promoters and bands. Bands can upload an electronic press kit (EPK) to the site for a subscription fee of just under \$6 per month, and then submit it electronically to event promoters, usually paying an additional application fee. Event and festival promoters love Sonicbids because it makes their jobs so much easier, which has led to controversy as increasing numbers of them refuse to accept applications by any other means, making the subscription fee effectively a tax on access to most of the bigger events.

One side effect of the changing nature of the music industry is the increasing importance of touring to a band's revenue streams. The industry has been floundering around trying to find a way to deal with this situation for some time. As CD sales drop, ticket prices rise, and it was against this background that Madonna ditched Warner Music and signed an all-encompassing "360 Deal" in Oct. 2007 with event-promotion company **Live Nation**, combining albums, touring and other sources of revenue into a single deal worth a reported \$120 million. Live Nation went on to make similar staggeringly expensive deals with U2 and Jay-Z, then promptly fired the executive responsible. (Ian Martin)

"Nowadays, if a band's first album isn't a success, they get dropped, whereas in the past bands were allowed more time to develop," he says. "Working with Sellaband gave us that time, and the experience of working with one of the best engineers in the world, Tony Platt (producer of AC/DC's "Back in Black," who was introduced to Second Person by Sellaband), has also really helped us understand the studio."

According to Maclaine, Electric Eel Shock (of whom he himself is a fan) could have more tangible benefits to look forward to as well. "When we did the album 'Elements,' we also used some of the money to make videos for the tracks. One ended up as a YouTube featured video, and then MTV picked it up."

As a result, despite being an "album that no label would ever have allowed us to make," "Elements" proved to be an unexpected success for Second Person, with their music being used in an advert and receiving plenty of press.

The benefits are accruing for Electric Eel Shock before they even begin recording their new album, with a place on the bill at "Sellabration '08," a music festival featuring some of the most popular Sellaband artists, in Amsterdam this August. For now,

though, Maekawa is just grateful not to have to worry about money this time. He jokes that \$50,000 is "not enough to make a Radiohead album" but that it's importance to the band can't be understated.

"We were always struggling to make money for the recording each time, so we really appreciate all our believers," he says.

Whether or not sites such as Sellaband represent, as Maclaine puts it, "the evolution of the music industry," CD sales from major labels are continuing to drop, and the current status quo in the music business is looking increasingly shaky. What Sellaband probably does represent is an increasing dissolution of the boundaries between creators and consumers that has gone hand in hand with the development of the Internet as a tool for social interaction.

On the one hand, Sellaband is simply an alternative source of money than a record label. But then again, as Maekawa says, "The money contains the will of our believers, so I'm sure we can record a legendary album for them!"

www.sellaband.com;
www.electriceelshock.com;
www.secondperson.net

Next week

Japanese glam punks **Kegawa no Maries** grace **Simon Bartz's Fuzzy Logic** column

Listening post

LIVE



Uncut ALEX COLLADOS-NUNEZ

Recently selected as one of the best independent labels in North America by XLR8R Magazine, Canada's Paper Bag Records is responsible for exposing the world to underground rock faves Broken Social Scene, Stars and Tokyo Police Club. And Toronto's Uncut are the label's latest signee to attract international attention.

Formed in 2002 as a duo, Uncut released a pair of DJ-friendly club singles that merged techno and rock sounds before laptop-toting member Jake Fairley relocated to Berlin, leaving multi-instrumentalist Ian Worang to rebuild the group as a postpunk quartet. Their 2004 debut, "Those Who Were Hung Here," drew comparisons with Joy Division, netting oodles of positive press and an invitation from former Husker Du/Sugar frontman Bob Mould to open his 2006 North American tour.

Produced by drummer Jon Drew, their excellent sophomore effort, "Modern Currencies," complements moody, melodic structures with soaring, noisy guitar lines that bring to mind 1990s alt-rock stalwarts Dinosaur Jr. and Swervedriver (for whom Uncut opened during their Toronto reunion stop in June). Released by Paper Bag in late 2006 in Canada, Japan's Fifty One Records issued the album domestically (with two previously unreleased bonus tracks) this spring.

Uncut will perform three Japanese dates in support of the disc in July. Expect to hear a mix of old cuts and newly penned material played very, very loudly, with many selections morphing into wonderfully distorted walls of sound that will leave your ears ringing long after the shows end. (Shawn Despres)

Uncut play July 8, 8 p.m. at **Junkbox Mini, Niigata** (¥3,000, [02] 5229-1494); 9, 6:30 p.m. at **O-Nest, Tokyo** (¥3,400, [03] 3271-3185); 10, 6 p.m. at **Drunkard's Stadium, Chiba** (¥2,000, [04] 7199-2751). For full tour details, visit www.51records.com.

RECORDED

Flying Lotus "Los Angeles" (Beat Records/Warp)

There's been a good buzz around producer Flying Lotus recently—which makes it all the more unfortunate that his second album comes tagged as "wonky," a genre descriptor so ridiculous it makes the likes of "trip-hop," "nu folk" and "broken beat" sound positively inspired in comparison.

Get beyond that and there's actually plenty to enjoy about "Los Angeles," a record that marks its creator out as the pre-eminent explorer of the murky terrain between electronica and hip-hop.

Flying Lotus is frequently compared with Californian beat-maker Madlib and late Detroit producer J Dilla, and he shares their penchant for somnambulant grooves and rhythms that occasionally trip over their own feet. His points of reference, however, are a bit more recent: The nods to soul and spiritual jazz are complemented by gauzy 1980s synthesizers and hints of Miami Bass.

"Los Angeles" is a dense work that takes a few listens to unpack. Songs bleed into one another and come buried in layers of ambient effects, like the titular city seen through a veil of smog and heat haze. The effortlessly cool "Camel" and "Golden Diva" would be as comfortable soundtracking a pool party as a late-night smoking session, while even the more uptempo numbers shake as "GNG BNG" and "Parisian Goldfish" never quite shake off their narcotic fug. (James Hadfield)



Ry Cooder "I, Flathead" (Warner Music Japan)

The concept album is usually an accident waiting to happen, so Ry Cooder is pushing his luck making three in a row. "I, Flathead" is the concluding part of his "California Trilogy," following 2005's "Chavez Ravine" and last year's "My Name is Buddy," and it's a tribute to Cooder's talents that it's a match for either.

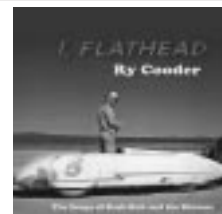
"I, Flathead" celebrates the underbelly of 1960s California, a world of home-built drag racers on the desert salt flats, of honky-tonk dance halls, trailer parks and fairground freak shows. There's even an accompanying 95-page novella to amplify the storyline.

Cooder's narrator is Kash Buk, a petrolhead who trades in his "flathead" dragster for life as a roadhouse country musician. The musical storyline is a breezy mixture of R&B, Tex-Mex and country. Its car songs allow Cooder to cut loose—the opening "Drive Like I Never Been Hurt" is all twang and mariachi horns, and "Ridin' With the Blues" recalls his early days riding guitar shotgun with the Stones.

Buk's career brings in country themes. "Johnny Cash" offers playful homage to the man in black, "Steel Guitar Heaven" and "Spayed Kooley" honor the lesser-sung heroes of "western swing," while the entire record is speckled with quotable quotes from pop history, from Motown, country, even Springsteen.

"Filipino Dance Hall Girl" is a south-of-the-border love song, reuniting Cooder with accordionist Flaco Jimenez, while Buk's hard-living life is poignantly summed up as "an old house trailer, two rusty Cadillacs and 5,000 country music songs."

There are a couple of awkward narrative moments but they're soon forgotten in a project that affirms Cooder's acute sense of place and musical history, and his fiery ambition to make "vernacular American music." (Neil Spencer, The Observer)



Well suited: Second Person (Mark Maclaine left) believe their success on Sellaband has opened doors for the band. ANNICK WOLFERS

Advance booking

KANTO

Pia..... Ticket Pia
classical music (0570)02-9990
other genres (0570)02-9999
CN..... CN Play Guide
classical music (03)5802-9990
other genres (03)5802-9999
Ka..... Kajimoto Ticket Center (03)3289-9999
La..... Lawson Ticket (03)3569-9900
E+..... E Plus (03)5749-9911
Su..... Suntry Hall (03)3584-9999
Ja..... Japan Arts (03)3499-9990
Ao..... Aoyama Ticket Agency (03)3401-9999
Ko..... Kyodo Tokyo (03)3498-9999

Classical & Traditional

Egberto Gismonti

• July 5
Guitar and piano; Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, 6 p.m.
¥6,800. Pia, E+, La; Arion Ticket Center (03) 5301-0950

Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra

• July 7, 8
Kenichiro Kobayashi (cond), Alina Pogostkina (vn); July 7, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, 7 p.m.; July 8, Sutory Hall, 7 p.m., Violin Concerto No. 4 in D major, K. 218 (Mozart); "Shéhérazade" op. 35 (Rimsky-Korsakov), etc.
¥2,000-8,000. Pia, E+; YNSO Ticket Center (03) 3562-1550

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Brass Quintet

• July 8
Feat. Frits Damrow (trp), Peter Masseurs (trp), Jasper de Waal (horn), Jürgen van Rijen (trb), Perry Hoogendijk (tuba); Hamariku Asahi Hall, 7 p.m., "The Golyardes Ground" (Forsyth), etc.
¥6,000. Pia, E+, CN, La; Asahi Hall Ticket Center (03) 3267-9990

Bachorchester des Gewantwahauses zu Leipzig

• July 9, 10
Christian Funke (cond, vn), July 9, Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, 2 p.m., Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F major BWV 1046 (J.S. Bach), etc.
July 10, with Kaori Muraji (guitar); Sutory Hall, 7 p.m., Cembalo

Concerto No. 2 in E major BWV 1053 (J.S. Bach), etc.
¥3,500-8,500. Pia, E+; Japan Arts Pia (03) 5237-7711

Jazz & Pop

Cyndi Lauper

• Sept. 24
Grammy Award-winning 1980s pop icon; Nippon Budokan, 7 p.m.
¥7,000-10,000. On sale July 5 at Pia, E+, CN, La; H.I.P. (03) 3475-9999

The Skatalites

• Sept. 28
Jamaican music; Shin-Kiba Studio Coast, 4 p.m.
¥6,000. On sale July 5 at Pia, E+, CN, La; Smash (03) 3444-6751

G. Love & Special Sauce

• Oct. 9
Alternative pop/rock; Shibuya-Ax, 7 p.m.
¥6,000. On sale July 5 at Pia, E+, La; Smash (03) 3444-6751

Billy Joel

• Nov. 18
American singer-songwriter; Tokyo Dome, 7 p.m.
¥9,450-10,500. On sale July 5 at Udo Ticket Center (0570) 09-3333

Performing Arts

July Grand Kabuki

• July 7-31
Kabuki-za, Part 1, 11:30 a.m., feat. "Yoshitsune Senbonzakura." Part 2, 5 p.m., feat. "Yashagaikae" and "Koya Hijiiri"

With Ichikawa Ebizo, Bando Tamasaburo and others
¥2,500-17,000. Ticket Phone Shochiku (03) 5565-6000

Opera National de Paris

• July 23, 26, 27, 29-31
Directed by Gerard Mortier; July 23, 26, "Ariane et Barbe-Bleue" (Dukas), feat. Willard White (bass) and others; July 27, 31, "Tristan und Isolde" (Wagner), feat. Clifton Forbes (ten) and Violeta Urmana (sop); July 29, 30, "Le Château de Barbe-Bleue" (Bartók) and "Journal d'un Disparu" (Janáček), feat. Michael König (ten) and others; Bunkamura Orchard Hall, start time varies.
¥20,000-58,000. Pia; Bunkamura Ticket Center (03) 3477-9999

KANSAI

Pia..... Ticket Pia (0570)02-9999/9966
La..... Lawson Ticket (0570)00-0905
CN..... CN Play Guide (06)6776-1199
Hk..... Hankyu Play Guide (06)6373-5446
Hs..... Hanshin Play Guide (06)6347-6510
E+..... E Plus (03)5749-9911

Classical & Traditional

Egberto Gismonti

• July 4
Guitar and piano; The Phoenix Hall, Osaka, 7 p.m.
¥5,000. Pia, La; The Phoenix Hall (06) 6363-7999

Trumpet Junction

• July 10
Peter Masseurs (trumpet), Japan Virtuoso Trumpeters; Kyoto Concert

Hall, 7 p.m., "Fanfare for St. Edmundsbury" (Britten), Concerto for trumpet (Arutimian), etc.
¥3,000. Pia; Kyoto Concert Hall (075) 711-3090

Chamber Music Evening

• July 10
Yasuko Shimada (p), Mayu Ishida (p) and others; Izumi Hall, Osaka, 6:45 p.m., Piano trio in G major, KV. 564 (Mozart), Radetzky March, op. 228 (Strauss), etc.
¥4,000. Izumi Hall (06) 6944-2828

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Brass Quintet

• July 12
Frits Damrow (trumpet) and others; Kyoto Concert Hall, 3 p.m., Sonata "Pathétique" (Beethoven), etc.
¥4,000, ¥3,000. Pia; Kyoto Onkyo (075) 211-0261

Jazz & Pop

Ninjaman

• Aug. 31
Jamaican dancehall DJ; Shinsai Club Quattro, 6 p.m.
¥6,500. On sale July 5 at Pia, La, E+; Shinsai Club Quattro (06) 6281-8181

Cindi Lauper

• Sept. 23
Grammy Award-winning 1980s pop icon; Grand Cube Osaka, 6 p.m.
¥7,000-10,000. On sale July 5 at Pia, La, CN, E+; H.I.P. Osaka (06) 6362-7301

Lenny Kravitz

• Sept. 24
Chart-friendly American rock; Kobe

World Kinen Hall, 7 p.m.
¥8,500-9,500. On sale June 28 at Pia, La; Kyodo Osaka Ticket Center (06) 7732-8888

Performing Arts

Gidayu

• July 5
Japanese dramatic recitation in puppet theater; Shunjuza, Kyoto, 2 p.m., "Horikawa Sarumawashi no Dan"
¥3,000. Pia; Shunjuza Ticket Center (075) 791-8240

"Shushu no Kutsu"

• July 6-8
Reading based on "Le Soulier de Satin" by Paul Claudel, directed and translated by Moriaki Watanabe, with special appearance by Mansaku Nomura on July 7 and 8; Kyoto Performing Arts Center, start time varies.
¥3,000. Pia; Kyoto Performing Arts Center (075) 791-8240

"Woman in Black"

• July 10-13
Based on "The Woman in Black" by Susan Hill, directed by Robin Herford, translated by Yoko Kawamoto, performed by Takaya Kamikawa, and others; Umeda Arts Theater, start time varies.
¥6,300-8,400. Pia, La, CN, E+; Kyodo Osaka Ticket Center (06) 7233-8888

Programs are subject to change without notice.