

影武者の KAGE MUSHA Pretty Guardian 美少女戦士セーラームーン SPECIAL

What you see here is an enhanced (and English) version of an article that appeared in the June/July issue of the German multimedia magazine „Multimania“. I decided to present you an enhanced version for two reasons: firstly the original article is rather short and with only two pictures, as it had to fit onto one page of the magazine, while in fact there's a lot more to report and many more pictures were taken (most of which are presented here).

INTERVIEW WITH KOMATSU AYAKA & KITAGAWA KEIKO

Secondly whilst the basic article was meant as a nice read for Joe Everybody (AKA „Karl Schmidt“ in Germany) who happens to read it in a magazine, I knew that I had to spice it up a little for people like you, who already know everything there is to know about Kei-chan and Komachu and who don't just want to read a couple of interview answers, but also want to know what it *felt* like to be in the same room with those stars. However, in case you *are* Joe Everybody and just want to read the English version of the article, you can do so by skipping the black text and *only read the blue text*. That's some great service, isn't it?

Well, after saying that we should have some privacy here, so let me assure you that you – the die hard PGSM fan – are the person that I did all this for. And it took quite some effort to get it done, with a huge amount of legwork and lots of good friend's help. All of it was done completely voluntarily and no money has exchanged hands in any direction (of course there where presents – you better don't dare to visit Japan without presents!).

Before I begin, I have to apologize for taking the right to meet those wonderful and beautiful girls on the sole basis of being the first person who had the idea to do it. Fact is, I *am* a writer and editor (and you *do* enjoy reading this article, don't you?). However, I am *not* a reporter and also *not* a professional photographer, and the result is a somewhat semi-professional article about two interviews that in many ways went quite chaotic – very much like a living proof of Murphy's first law, that everything that *can* go wrong *will* go wrong – but were

successful nonetheless and sprinkled with the fun of a lifetime. Let me put it this way: *I learned a lot* and most of all came to respect the people who are doing this kind of work for a living, because it's really not as easy as it looks.

For example, being a professional photographer means a lot more than just knowing your camera's technical details and how to use it (not that this wouldn't be difficult all by itself, mind you). It also means that you need the ability to spot a good background and perspective in an instant and – most importantly – get the person you are taking the picture of to do the pose that you want her to. Me, I didn't had my good friend and pro photographer with me, because he became sick and wasn't able to make the trip to Japan, so I had to do it myself. Being the great guy that he is, he lend me his high quality camera, which eventually helped a great deal in saving the day.

Try to imagine it: there you have this beautiful lady in front of your camera, a breathtaking view even without the fact that you deeply adore her as a fan for quite some time now, and she is sending the most brilliant smile your way, because it is part of her *job* to look good and smile like a goddess. And she is waiting for *you* to tell her what to do, like „lift your arm“, „sit like this“, „look into that

direction“. But of course you can't tell her *anything*, because you don't have the *slightest* idea about how to take a good picture, let alone the fact that your sparse knowledge of the Japanese language just went down the drain, together with the rest of your speaking ability, while you desperately try to keep your hands from shaking like crazy. „*Can you wllwlllnee ... onegai shimasu?*“

Of course I am overexagerating, but not much. Enough of the babbling, let's get this thing on the road ...



PRETTY GUARDIAN SAILOR MOON (PGSM in short) is a remake of the classic anime and manga series that hit Japanese television about two years ago. Set somewhere between the Mahojo Shoujo (like „Card Captor Sakura“) and Sentai (like „Power Rangers“) genre, the series quickly received a cult status, mostly because of its good story and the outstanding performance of its actors. In April I was able to do short interviews with two of the actresses, Ayaka Komatsu and Keiko Kitagawa, who are still friendly with each other.



There is of course a lot more to say about PGSM. First and foremost it has a very natural feel to it, despite being a Fantasy show with monsters and magical attacks, because it has a lot of the stuff called „Slice of Life“ in it, which is portrayed in a very believable way by the cast. The characters and the whole way they are represented are meant for the audience to feel with them in their daily adventures, not just the supernatural ones, but also and even more so the every-day ones. And this concept works very well, from the first to the last second, no matter the age or gender of the au-



Still, there is a chance of meeting the girls at DVD release events (if they work as idols, like Ayaka-chan and Miyu-chan) or movie premieres. Or you can ask a magazine to give you a good reference that allows you to get in contact with the star's promotion agencies. It's really a tripple-win-situation: You get to meet the

stars, the stars get their well-deserved publicity and the magazine gets the interview.

There are of course a couple of obstacles, and one of them is fate. Luckily fate can be overcome by karma. For example it means very good karma when on the same day that you send out the parcel with proofs of your previous works to Keiko's promotion agency you happen to buy a large pack of toilet paper and

carry it openly through the shopping mile of your hometown (it just happened incidentally, but from that moment on I *knew* this would work).

And all of a sudden it's the 4th of April, 4pm, and there I am, standing at the West Exit of JR Shibuya station. Here I will meet my good friend Ichigatsu (with-

out his help I wouldn't have made it this far) so we can go to the interview together. The interview is set for 5pm, so there's a lot of time, and I have a printed-out map about how to get to the location which is only about 5 minutes from the station. Everything is fine. But – first problem: Ichigatsu is nowhere to be found. Okay, no need to worry yet. I instruct my other travel companions to keep looking for him („He's about this high, black hair and looks Japanese.“), while I search for him at the other exits. Easier said than done – Shibuya station is *huge*, and it has about ten thousand exits, so when I return after circling the whole area, it's 4:20pm and Ichigatsu still not around, so I decide to call him from one of the phone booths – getting his answering machine. Oh well, can't be helped,

so I tell him in a crude mix of English and Japanese to meet me at the WEST exit. Okay, another circle tour around the train station, of course no luck in finding him, and I literally start to break a sweat (I haven't mentioned so far that it also was one of the hottest days of April, ne?). *Great, just great*, this is turning into a nightmare. But it's getting worse when I realize that after my last phone call I accidentally left my notebook in the phone booth. The one with the interview questions, Ichigatsu's contact phone number and the *map* and *address* of the *fxxxing* location!!! Without this notebook it didn't make a damn difference if I was standing here, about to meet Komatsu Ayaka, or hanging around somewhere in Antarctica.

dience. And the fact that they all sing their own character songs further enhances this experience (without making a big deal about their singing abilities) and makes it almost impossible to not start to deeply care for them.

And then, after only 49 Episodes (51 to be exact) the story is told and the show is over. Quite normal for a Japanese TV show but very unexpected for an audience that is used to TV shows going on forever and ever until really nobody cares about them anymore. Makes it hard to let go, but after the initial pain of separation has passed, one comes to acknowledge the wisdom of creating one short, fresh piece of art. PGSM is now a well-rounded masterpiece that you can take out of its shrine any time you want to adore it in its completeness.

For the real fan there are of course a couple of things left to achieve. You can start to learn the language to gain an even deeper understanding of the story and background. You can visit the country to get a firsthand experience of the people and the culture, including visiting the locations where some of the series' scenes were shot. And you can try to meet the stars, something that's very easy with long running series like Star Trek or Stargate, boasting half a dozen fan conventions each year, while the same cultural phenomenon seems to be almost unknown in Japan, despite the fact of its large Otaku movement.





Okay, how big are the chances of finding the right phone booth at the right place in Shibuya station and the notebook still lying there, after about a hundred other people have used that same phone booth in the meantime? Actually, the chances are not as small as you think. It was really still lying there, waiting for me, all I had to do was to open the booth's door without creating a turmoil with the woman who was using it at that time. It's 4:50pm, I am in a world of pain, Ichigatsu is nowhere to be seen, but I have my notebook back, so somehow fortune must be smiling down on me through all those thunderclouds.

I am telling this to you in this detail, because if you should try to do something similar, you *will* face a similar trial. At that moment, where everything that could have gone wrong had gone wrong, I gained second wind, and from then onward it all went perfectly. Using the map and address, I found the right building in an instant and was standing in the office of Ayaka's promotion agency at 5pm straight, where I met Jun Kinoshita, translator for Amuse Inc. and a very kind guy, who did me the favour of speaking onto Ichigatsu's answering machine once more in Japanese to tell him that he could meet us at the office, which he was able to do in time.

The good thing about running around Shibuya station is that you don't have time to get nervous, so I had the remaining 5 minutes to do that, before I finally met Ayaka Komatsu and Kumiko Kato, her manager. Such friendly people, it really was a warm, almost family-like atmosphere, and Jun did a splendid job by almost simultaneously translating all the questions and answers going back and forth, making it much easier for me than I had expected. Still I was adamant about reading the initial questions in Japanese, as Ayaka is one of the five persons who made me start learning the language in the first place. And so I began to ask her about PGSM.

Ayaka has a very positive recollection of that time. „*The role of Minako Aino was my first work as an actress. Before that I had worked two years as a model, and all of a sudden I was finding myself with this lively bunch of people of the same age. It was a very exciting time, and we had a lot of fun. Also the fame was a new experience for me, as the children on the streets began to recognize me as Sailor Venus. I am very happy that the series was received so well.*“

At the moment she can be seen in the live movie of the manga „*Boku wa Imouto ni Koi*“ that came to the cinemas in May. „*Apart from that I am pursuing my idol career and release many DVDs and photobooks. A lot of those shootings take place at exotic places, so I am getting around quite a lot. For the Sabra magazine (a famous Japanese lifestyle magazine) we went to Guam and did the shooting in the villa of the richest family there. Other shootings took me to Australia, Taiwan ...*“

How about Europe? „*I haven't been to Europe so far, but I would love to see those places one day.*“

For PGSM Komatsu recorded a couple of songs; is there a chance that we will hear new songs from her? „*Not very likely. I really like to sing and dance, but I am not very good at it. Doing it for the series was fun, but I probably won't do it on my own initiative.*“

Never ever? „*Well, if the opportunity arises, I will of course do it.*“

Apart from her work as an idol and model she is planning to pursue her acting career more actively. „*The series has awakened my interest for acting and also provided me with a an*



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amount of fame that brings me many acting offers. I am still standing at the very beginning of my career. For me PGSM was an important springboard and I am very grateful."

That's basically what the interview was about, mainly because I had only prepared 5 questions, as the interview was arranged for just 20 minutes, including photo shooting and autographs. Being polite as I am (some might call it stupid), I didn't even make plans for what to do to extend that time. Well ... lesson learned.

With still lots of time left and nobody really feeling like ending our very comfortable and relaxed meeting, I became the one being questioned. I will spare you the details, just let me assure you that after more or less proposing to Ayaka (for fun of course!) I did everything to let them know that there are quite a few PGSM and Ayaka fans outside of Japan; not more than a couple thousand, but with the added benefit that everyone of those would gladly take a bullet for her, which in my eyes is worth a lot more than a million so-called „fans“ who really don't care that much.

Okay, fast forward to the 7th of April and the Keiko interview. Set for 4pm, this time I meet up with Ichigatsu in the morning, so there was no way that anything could go wrong there this time. Instead, this time we failed to find the right building. But, you know what? – this time I *expected* it to happen, so I was very relaxed the whole time. At 4:15pm (and after one phone call telling Keiko's manager that we're already close to the location but cannot make it in time) we finally found what we thought was the

right building. Of course it wasn't. But even so we happened to find Chie Nakada there, Keiko's manager and a very kind and – dare I say it – beautiful person (no, I don't have a picture, and even if I had I wouldn't give it to you). And also perfectly fluent in English, so again I had nothing to worry about.

After leading us to the correct building, it was again time to get nervous. Honestly, I wasn't very nervous about Ayaka, because before meeting her I was under the impression that she is a very kind and shy girl. And I was right about it, apart from the fact that she wasn't too shy to openly talk about herself, which is a very good thing, and I love and respect her now even more than I did before.

Now, with Keiko I had built up an equally wrong picture in my mind. I knew that she's a handful and would eat me alive if I wouldn't be extra careful, so I scared myself half to death at the mere thought of meeting up with her. Well, again I was wrong. Sorry to confirm a prejudice here, but being Japanese she's first and foremost a very kind person. Of course, her whole body language was a lot different from Ayaka's, and she relied a lot less on her manager than Ayaka did, but still she is one of the nicest persons I ever met in my life.

Keiko too is very modest about her abilities. „I will try to answer all questions in English, even though I am not very good at it.“

Instead it turns out that she is mastering the language fluently and without the typical heavy Japanese accent. But that was not always so.

„When last October I went to America for two months to take part in the shooting of the Hollywood movie „The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift“, it was very difficult for me. I didn't know the language and had problems to read the script. Also I am working as an actress for only two years now and do not consider myself a fully trained actress yet. But Justin, my director, explained a lot to me about acting and English, and all the other actors were helping me all the time. Without their help I wouldn't have been able to do it.“



The question of whether or not she is comfortable with the result she answers hesitantly. „I did my best. I am playing Reiko, a young girl that repairs the racing cars that were wrecked by her friends. A very interesting role, and also a main character, but most of the time I am only visible in the background and don't have much text. “

What impressed her most was the professional yet friendly atmosphere at the set. „I felt like a nobody, when I came to Hollywood to take part in this huge movie project, yet everyone treated my like a pro and helped me where they could. It was a great experience. “

At the moment she is going to school and works for the Japanese fashion magazine „Seventeen“, while waiting for new acting offers. When I ask her about how she thinks about continuing her singing career (she's been the one who sang the „Sakura Fubuki“ song), she waves me aside with a smile. „I don't like to sing in front of an audience. I think I am too shy to do it. But if someone offers me a role where I also will have to sing, I would of course like to record a song for it. “

Well, and that was the other short interview, and again there was time left that I was unable to fill. And this time it was worse, because due to certain restrictions I wasn't able to make up any more questions from the top of my head. „What restrictions?“ I hear you ask. Well, let me put it this way: it's no coincidence that most of my questions for Ayaka were PGSM related, while most of Keiko's questions were non-PGSM related.

Still, this interview was one of the most impressive experiences of my life. I really didn't expect Keiko to speak English so well! It was absolutely mind-blowing. Of course she wasn't perfect, but what the hell, I am also not perfect, none of us non-native speakers will ever be. In fact I was so impressed, that my Japanese suffered from it, which is a shame, because she too belongs to the five people that made me start learning the language, but, hey, it wasn't about me anyway. I was just a representative of all you guys, who are reading this article, and I hope I was able to bring Keiko and Ayaka to you as lively as possible. It's the least I can do.

Also I did my best to make them aware of the fact that we are here and support them in any way possible. For example I told both of them that we would like to hear more songs from them, and I hope you all agree with me on this. If not, why the heck are you reading this article?!?

Thanks for the interviews and all the best in the future!

There's really no better way of ending this article, except maybe from saying: „See you again!“



海外のフタンの皆様へ
Dear my friends ♡



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