

taste of chaos 2008

AMERICA, ARE YOU READY??



LIVE REPORT FROM THE EAST COAST
INTERVIEW & EVENT REPORT FROM THE WEST COAST

MUCC D'ESPAIRS RAY

the UNDERNEATH

BY CHRISTINE S. FOR NIPPON PROJECT **FEATURE REPORT**



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Many Japanese artists attempt to join the American music market, so few make it while many fail. One of the few that has made an impact is rock band Dir en grey. Joining the Family Values Tour with KoЯn gained them massive popularity and has them touring solo here in the states. However, it seems that fellow bands MUCC, D'espairs Ray and the Underneath are paving their way into the lives of Americans (who may not be fans of Japanese rock). The bands were invited to play on one of America's most popular tours, Rockstar Taste of Chaos. Featuring mainly American rock bands such as Bullet for my Valentine, Atreyu and AVENGED SEVEN-FOLD; this year they featured Japanese rock bands. This could be an opening for more Japanese bands to invade the American rock music scene.

MUCC who has been to the U.S. several times in past (3 years ago to be exact), was formed in 1997. Their name originates from an old Japanese children's show, *Hirake! Ponkikki*, who had a character named "Mukku" (aka MUCC); the name is also known as 69 (aka sixnine; which can be pronounced "muku"). Their music started in a heavy direction, but over the years they've expanded their repertoire to include lighter and more experimental music. The band has a long history, is quite successful in Europe, and is now preparing to take some charge in the states.

D'espairs Ray, who made their American Debut in 2006 with their first showcase tour; later joined fellow Japanese bands on the JRock Revolution circuit soon after. With a hard, dark and gothic sound, they have made their way into the hearts of fans from Europe and America. This year they released their first U.S. release DVD, "*Spiral Staircase #15*" and album, "*Mirror*".

The Underneath, is a fairly new band (making their debut in L.A. of May 2007), but not so new to the scene. The used to be "Transtic Nerve" members have changed their looks, their sound and their name to something more befitting to them. They make their debut this year on the Rockstar Taste of Chaos tour with fellow veteran bands MUCC and D'espairs Ray and their first U.S. release album, "*MOON FLOWER*".

Each band has their history and has been in the same scene for over eight years, but this is the first time they've ever interacted and performed together. They were actually quite surprised at how well they get along.

While we were not able to get a one on one interview with the bands we were able to get an interview with two members from each band. A short simple interview consisted of us and another publication.

NP = Nippon Project
U = the Underneath
DR = D'espairs Ray
M = MUCC

NP: Can you tell us the #1 reason why you decided to participate in the Taste of Chaos Tour?

U: When we were still going under our old band name, we had the opportunity to do a show in LA and a lot of people who are involved with this tour were there. We were asked if we could

TAL and Ryo (the Underneath)





Kayru & Tsukasa (D'espairs Ray)

could play more J-rock music and that was when we decided to change our name. We decided to present more J-rock in our band and we got this chance.

DR: We're in the middle of recording our new album and we wanted to experience something that we've never had before. That's the main reason why we wanted to be on this tour.

M: Kevin Lyman attended the last show that we played in LA and we were asked by Kevin to join on Taste of Chaos. This is an event that we ourselves really like as well so we are very honored.

NP: This question is to the Underneath, can you tell us the story behind why you changed your name in more detail?

U: Well we really wanted to start off on a clean slate. Our former band was heavily geared towards America but we wanted to bring out more of the melodic J-rock elements...and so we decided, We should start from scratch and change our band name.

NP: This question is to MUCC, I see that you have played in America a few times already but how do you feel J-Rock is accepted here?

M: Well the first impression that I got was anime was really accepted here more than the music. But anime ended up being the reason why people started listening to our music or J-rock music, so I'm very happy about that.

NP: When you all first formed your bands, did you ever think that you'd end up performing overseas? Has it always been a dream, or did you not even consider it?

U: Well for us, we've always wanted to play in the United States ever since we started. We're very inspired by American rock music...It really is a dream come true for us that so many people are at the shows and it's unbelievable.

DR: We started out thinking that we want to first be famous in Japan. Around the time when we released our 2nd single though, we started thinking about expanding overseas...we also heard that there is a market for our music and that was when we first considered it.

M: We didn't consider it at all when we formed! Not at all. Well, later we had an opportunity to perform in Germany and we found out that you never know unless you try.

U: If you're a baseball player, it's always a dream to play in the MLB, if you're a soccer player, Germany's a country you'd want to go to... If you're a rock star, you definitely want play the field in America!

NP: Are there any bands on the Taste of Chaos tour that you're a fan of, or you've been influenced by?

U: Not really. We have CD's of some of the bands but we weren't really influenced by them... we have been around longer.

DR: I personally like Bullet for My Valentine. I've never heard of them before but they're live performance is just amazing... it's a landscape I've never seen before! I like their songs too.

M: I like Bullet for My Valentine as well. love them! They're all amazing bands... they all have something that we don't have. Atreyu's stage presence is something to watch... the entire stage is just so full of energy!

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EDITOR: RIN

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MAD PRAY
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NP: Yes, it's rare that the drummer can take the lead vocals.

M: It's something I should try. Yeah let's do it! (looks over at Tsukasa from D'spairsray)

DR: Yes. I like Bullet... and Atreyu as well... awesome stage presence.

U: Yes, I ended up liking all of the bands!

NP: I'm going to ask you something that has nothing to do with this but what do you guys do when you're not doing anything band related?

Karyu: Well recently, I've been into baths. Well I like to make my bath experience more erotic by putting special lighting in, adding a fountain in the tub and what not. (Everyone looks at him with a surprised look and laughs)

TAL: When we get a chunk of vacation, I like to go fishing or just go out on a drive. Other than that, I just stay at my house... playing online games.

Tsukasa: I like to draw and put my illustrations on our fan page. I'm also a huge fan of the "kiteretu daihyakka" manga, so I love watching that. I love the background illustrations in it, and I always dream about being able to jump into their world while I'm watchin. (laughs)

SATOchi: We play soccer! (points at yukke) He's the coach!

YUKKE: Yes I have a soccer team. We gathered all our band friends we know that play soccer and when we don't have anything to do, we'll be playing soccer all day.

NP: So did you both play soccer throughout middle school?

YUKKE: Nope, I played volleyball and he played basketball!

TAL: I have a baseball team myself! Some of the band members from Siam Shade are in it and I'm the coach!

NP: Are you fans of any of the professional teams in Japan?

TAL: Well we're from Kansai so we're *Hanshin Tiger* fans.

NP: It seems like you guys have been on tour for a long time but do you get homesick?

TAL: Hmm do we get homesick... It's more like we don't wanna go home! America's so much fun...everybody's cheerful, when we see each other, it's always "hey!" with a high five.

Karyu: We're pretty homesick. We'd like to go home once every 2 weeks! There's not a lot of Japanese food places and ramen places around here... There's a ramen place near my house that I always go to but if I don't go there once a week, my body starts shaking....

Tsukasa: I brought a batch of Miso soup with me. Whenever I'm eating miso soup, I always think about Japan... other than that, it's always high fives and partying!!

SATOchi: I wanna go home!! It got really bad about a month ago. I wanted to go home so bad I started flipping through my planner counting down the days... but now that those days have gone by, I'm gonna miss it. The tour's coming to an end!

YUKKE: Yeah, we gotta make the best of each day!

Lastly, can we get a message to your fans around the world?*

TAL: It's only been 3- 4months since we renamed ourselves, the Underneath, but we'll keep writing songs that you guys will want to listen to so please keep in touch with us!

SATOchi and YUKKE (MUCC)



Ryo: For this Taste of Chaos tour, we 3 bands were the fortunate enough to represent J-Rock but please know that there are other amazing bands in Japan, and keep listening to J-ROCK!

Karyu: I think J-rock's headed into a great direction. I'd love to travel the world.

Tsukasa: I truly believe that there are no borders for music; we can all be moved by music no matter what country we are from. We'd love to go to all different countries and for our fans to have fun at our shows.

SATOchi: Well we've traveled through Europe and now America...so now everyone, it's your turn to come to Japan! I'll show you around when you come visit. Leave it to me!

YUKKE: Don't let J-Rock be just another trend in music. We'd love to see it find a place in the world... we'll keep doing what we're doing to make that happen.

*This last question was asked by the other party involved in the interview, so I included it, because it is a question we planned on asking as well.

What we did find out from the band members though is that they are environmentally cautious. Tsukasa even brought his own pair of chopsticks on the tour so that he wouldn't waste them. Karyu, makes sure he always recycles and YUKKE likes to go to the convenience stores. Sometimes he'd even go just put in money in the donation boxes.

While touring, the band members have come to realize a few things that they were not aware of before coming. TAL learned that the American audience is much different from the Japanese audience and he's had to learn how to adjust, often

thinking about the people's values. Tsukasa was only worried about the food, he assumed he wouldn't like it, but in the end he ended up loving it. Karyu, thought "*I've gotten to think I'm a very naïve person while performing.*"

For MUCC members, it has been a real life lesson for them. When they first arrived, their manager and tech staff had not arrived yet, they were left completely alone. When they were Indies they had always done things themselves, but being under management, "*we've been spoiled with everybody doing everything for us. These troubles that we've overcome on this tour has enabled us to appreciate things more... especially because we're doing everything on our own,*" said YUKKE.

This has been an experience for all the bands. They normally do not tour on busses in Japan so touring on a bus is something different for them. TAL didn't expect it to be as big as it was and Ryo liked it a lot, especially since it was very comfortable.

D'espairs Ray had a different experience, they normally had a large bus in Europe and when they first arrived in America, it was really small, but coming on this tour, so the bus was big enough for them to sleep in and not a hotel. SATOchi felt like he was on a high school field trip, stating that "*We're all rowdy and having fun. We wouldn't want to stay at a hotel!*"

Upon returning to Japan, all three bands will participate in the "HIDE Memorial Summit", hoping that they all can put on the best performance ever. ■



Karyu and Tsukasa
of D'espairs Ray.



LONG BEACH, CA

Long Beach, CA - when arriving to the venue, fans of Japanese rock bands were all lined up waiting to enter. All of them decked out in their favorite band shirts, pins, accessories or dressed up in some type of gothic Lolita outfit or cosplay.

Upon entering the arena, it was obvious that the 13,500-seat house would be more than half way filled by the time the event would end. When the show started the front portion of the floor was filled with Jrock fans, and in the back, the ones unaware of what was about to happen.

Some of our staffers attended the RTOC tour in the east coast, to read about their experiences, read on.

Detroit, MI - March 8th, 2008 a long line of colorful youth--pierced and tattooed fans--gathered outside the doors of the Detroit Cobo Arena. Of this line, at least a quarter of the young adults waiting were Jrock fans sporting Jrock shirts, pins, or cosplay costumes. These fans weren't there for the headlining bands like Atreyu or even Avenged Sevenfold. No, these fans were there to hear the three Japanese rock bands that have traveled

all the way from Japan to rock in the United States.

The 2008 Rockstar Taste of Chaos Tour is made notable for the fact that it is the first TOCT to include non-English-speaking rock bands. The Japanese bands that performed in Detroit were D'espairs Ray, MUCC, and newcomers The Underneath.

D'espairs Ray kicked things off with an energetic bang. The crowd was greeted by an industrial cacophony of guitars soon joined by the primal screams of vocalist Hizumi. Although the majority of the crowd couldn't understand the band's lyrics, they could understand the feeling conveyed by the driving music. D'espairs Ray is known for its dark, intense style and the band didn't disappoint here. They worked the crowd well and it was obvious that even the non-Jrock fans, fans who had never heard of D'espairs Ray before, were getting into the music. Towards the end, a wild ring of moshers sent a ripple of chaos throughout the crowd. Hizumi responded to the crowd's energy bodily, thrashing around the stage to the screams of the crowd and the sound of his band's music.

D'espairs Ray seemed to focus mostly on

songs off their newest album, *Mirror*. Of the five or six songs the band played, I recognized *Mirror*, *69*, and *Trickstar* which all come from the band's new album. Hizumi tried his hand at English, regularly addressing the crowd as "Detroit" between songs and occasionally shrieking, "Are you ready to rock?" At the end of the band's set, Hizumi thanked the audience in English and the band left to hearty cheers from their adoring fans.

D'espairs Ray was followed by a small English filler band and then MUCC took the stage amid passionate screams from their fans in the audience. Tatsuro, like Hizumi, addressed the crowd in English. He even found time for a little bit of humor. At one point he said, "It's very cold outside but...but let's heat things up in here!"

There was a lot more interaction between the audience and MUCC than there had been for D'espairs Ray. This was at least partially due to the fact that Tatsuro acknowledged the crowd during songs a lot more than Hizumi had. Between striking dramatic poses and filling the arena with his distinctive voice, Tatsuro would walk up to the very edge of the stage and then squat down and perch there



with his hand extended towards the crowd. He'd also point at the crowd or make the universal gesture for "more" which MUCC fans and non-Jrock fans alike gave him.

MUCC's energy was contagious and soon a second mosh ring had formed on the left side of the stage. This ring of moshers became so wild that the crowd around them was compressed together so tightly that a few times I was unable to pry my arms away from my sides to cheer for the band. MUCC finished things off with what are arguably their two most well known songs: *FUZZ* and *Libra*. When *FUZZ* began, the MUCC fans exploded and the crowd's intensity flew up a few more notches. The fans joined in singing the "Whoa oh ooh" part of the chorus and Taturou, hearing them, held the microphone out to the crowd a few times. The song was especially fun live thanks to Taturou's dramatic harmonica playing and Yukke looking cool and suave on the upright bass. *FUZZ* was followed by *Libra*, a fitting ending song with its alternating mix of intense dark rock and beautiful soaring chorus. After the song ended, the band waved goodbye to the crowd and disappeared offstage.

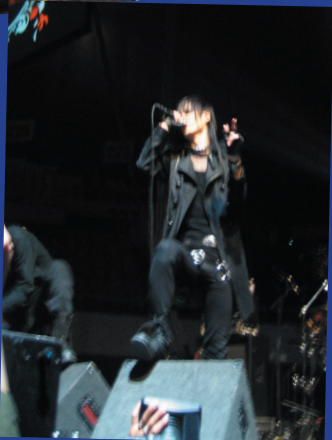
The Underneath, not to be outdone by their fellow veterans, put on a fantastic show. Of the three Jrock bands that played, the Underneath was by far the most visually striking. Gratuitously decked out in chains, fishnet, and gravity defying hairstyles, the band took the stage with a confidence that was striking for a new band taking on the intimidating prospect of playing for a foreign audience. Vocalist Taka strutted and screamed, his impressive three-octave-range voice backed by his equally impressive band. This was my first time hearing the Underneath in person and I can say that the all in all, this band is a good one worth keeping an eye on. I expect to see more of them soon.

The night was an enjoyable one with solid sets from all three bands. However, in my opinion, MUCC stole the show. The band's nearly eleven years of experience shone through at the Detroit show. The band's sound was clean and tight and the members kept the audience's eyes on them for the majority of the show while D'espairs Ray's crowd spent half of the band's set watching the moshers instead. But what was most impressive about MUCC was the way the band interacted with the crowd. The band seemed perfectly at ease with the audience and the interaction became a mutual one with the band feeding off the crowd's energy and then returning the favor for the crowd creating a perfect circle of crowd-band communication.

With successful performances like this, Jrock fans have reason to hope that Jrock tours in the United States will become more common in the future.



TASTE OF CHAOS 08 LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA



"We all sing in Japanese and even if the listeners don't understand our words, I believe we can still connect with them through the music."

~ Ryo (the Underneath)

(top) zero of D'espairs Ray.
(top left) the Underneath
(left) Taka of the Underneath
(right) MUCC

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part 4 . encounters



Aside from performing, the bands also participated in meet and greets and autograph sessions, giving fans (old and new) alike to shake hands, get an autograph and at times get that occasional photo.

MUCC held a signing, handshake and photograph event for Rockstar. This gave fans a chance to meet the band, get an autograph, and take a photo with the band members.

Long Beach, CA – playing at the Long Beach Arena, (naming it to be the biggest venue the bands have ever played in), fans here in California took full advantage of meeting their favorite artists. Presented by Tokyo Pop, they gave the bands a way to interact with their fans.

More than 150 people lined up at the TokyoPop table, waiting for the bands to arrive. It was a bit surprising to see how many people were lined up. Most of them were fans of the bands already, but there were quite a few people in there who were new to them. The staff themselves seemed quite overwhelmed with the response from the fans. The line was not only long, but also covered two flights of stairs, going onto the third floor. You can imagine just how long the wait for that could be.

As the bands arrived, you can hear the hoards of fans screaming and yelling as they walked by them. The members seemed overwhelmed as well as they saw how many people were lined up just to see them. The bands all sat at one long table, first it being the Underneath, D'spairs Ray and then MUCC. They had stacks of

posters and plenty of silver sharpies to keep them going for the next two hours or so.

It was one poster, passed down from member to member, band to band and then handed to the person at the end of the table. Before that, each member took the time to shake hands with the person in line and then the next and the next. Some fans even had Japanese magazines, artist CD's, and other posters for the bands to sign. Although the limit was just one item signed, some were able to get away with getting multiple items signed. There are also the creative fans who have the bands sign different things; one guy had them sign his arms, a bit awkward but all's fun. Two girls had articles of clothing signed; one had her wife beater signed on the front and back and another girl had one of them sign her underwear. That was something definitely new to the bands, as they come across Americans; they've pretty much signed everything: arms, shirts, chests and now underwear.

Even though the fans were not allowed to get photos with the bands, they all came out happy and full of energy and has paved it to be one of the best experiences they've ever had.

This type of interaction is not common in Japan. They do have the occasional handshake event, CD release events etc. but to have this much interaction with fans, never. For these bands, this tour may be one of the most exciting and one of the best experiences a Japanese artist can experience in one's career. Some of the members have taken a liking to the Western culture and plan on coming back here and doing more shows in the future.

part 5 . encounter
pictorial version



fan signing

& handshake event

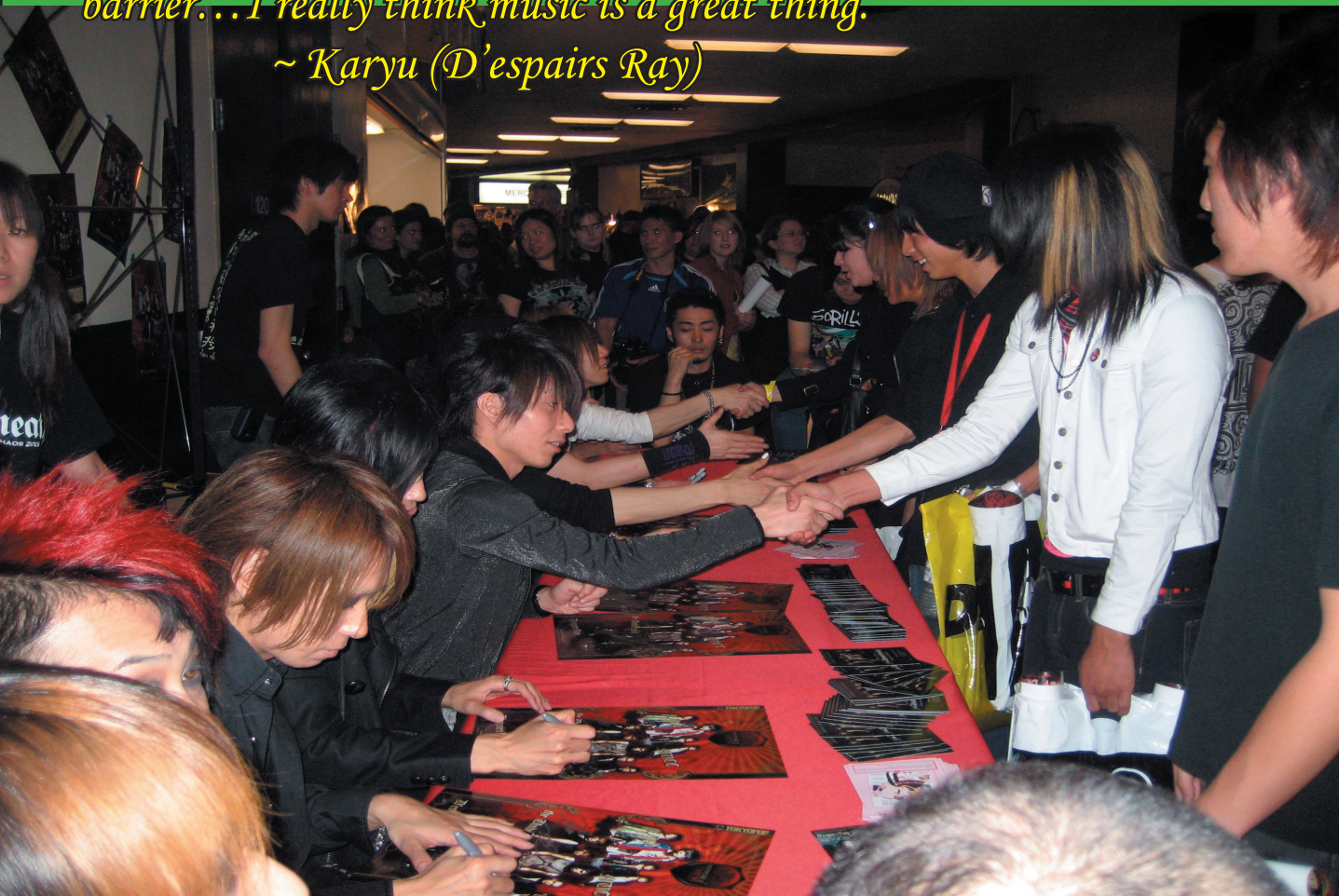






"I was "gaijin" phobic before but now that I'm here with my band and I'm meeting my fans, and we seem to understand each other even with the language barrier...I really think music is a great thing."

~ Karyu (D'espairs Ray)





Over 100 people stood in line to meet the bands. It extended over two flights of stairs, as you can see they all patiently wait for their turn.





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We were asked by D'espairs Ray staff not to post any photo's of them during the event itself. This is why you do not see any clear shots of them.



Some fans were lucky enough to get their shirts and arms signed. One was the luckiest one of them all, having an undergarment signed by the bands.

TOHOSHINKI

DBSK
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& THEIR WORLDWIDE FANDOM



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J-Rock Revolution
<http://www.jrockrevolution.com>

Rockstar Taste of Chaos
<http://www.tasteofchaos.com>

MUCC Official Site
<http://www.59-69.com>

D'espairs Ray Official Site
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the Underneath Official Site
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Suitest Taboo Chronicles
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