

## Looking for Raul at AM2

Post-con roundup of experts who participated in the Asian music, animation/anime and comics/manga expo

By **Kat Avila** | Published on LatinoLA: July 15, 2011



I sort of found Raul Aguirre Jr., (pictured) one of the media sponsors of the AM2 Convention at the Anaheim Convention Center, July 1-3, 2011. His booth was in Artist Alley at least. The comic artist was around somewhere. Along the way, I also met Omar, Maria, Michaela, Syreeta, and a whole lot of other interesting folks.

Sometime Saturday, I saw this big guy scribbling away in the vicinity of Raul's booth, but didn't think it would make a good impression if I crawled over and peeked over the edge with sad, baggy eyes looking like a minority American who had survived the border crossing into Texas. I'll see him on Sunday, I thought.

RAUL AGUIRRE JR. ([Studio Raul](#), [MAN VS. ART](#) blog/podcast, artist/creator)

Says Raul, "I was around on Sunday, but didn't get in until 1 or 2 p.m. I really liked the guys who put the show together. Chase Wang did a great job. I loved the fact it was a free event. In the music, animation, and comics business, it's all about the fans! Conventions, especially AM2, give fans a place to come together and celebrate the things they love without getting ripped off! I think AM2 really was a fan-friendly environment! I was exposed to a whole new fanbase of people that would have never seen my work. I made a lot of new friends and had a blast.

"I would have liked to have seen better signage for Artist Alley. Other than that, I think the event was super!

"I will definitely be back in Artist Alley at next year's AM2. I will not be attending the San Diego Comic Con this year, hopefully 2012. This fall I will be at the CTN Expo [Creative Talent Network Animation Expo, Nov. 18-20] in Burbank and APE [Alternative Press Expo, Oct. 1-2] in San Francisco."

Asked how he met comic artist Javier Hernandez (whom I interviewed for [LatinoLA](#) in 2004), he said, "While I was finishing up my work on [TV animation] "Family Guy" in early 2008, a colleague of mine [animator] Louis Gallegos suggested I get in touch with Javier to be interviewed on Javier's now-defunct Planet Comic Book Radio podcast. Javier is now a very close friend of mine who introduced me to a whole new gang of independent artists/creators, all of whom I adore!

"I had such a great time on Javier's podcast that I started my own podcast - Man vs. Art at <http://manvsart.com> - all about comics, animation, and art. Entertainment, inspiration, and information for artists young and old to listen to while they work on their masterpieces!"

OMAR LAUREANO (ANI.ME writer, aspiring pro photographer)

Omar was a co-presenter for the ANI.ME panel, then I saw him again at the "cute-girls-with-guitars" SCANDAL concert. He was born in Mexico City, but he has lived in the San Diego area for most of his life.

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How did he get involved with ANI.ME? "It was actually a year ago while attending Anime Expo that I first heard of the [ANI.ME website](#). The website staff and their friends were having a launch party only a few blocks from the L.A. convention center, and my friends and I walked by and they invited us over to join their party. A few days after AX, I got in contact with Evin who is the content director, because I was interested in writing for the website.

"For the most part, I've written about cons I've attended, anime and video game reviews, and a few informative pieces. One of my first articles was on [Vocaloid virtual singer] Hatsune Miku. About a month ago, I did my first interviews with some of the members of AniMaid Cafe, who were at AM2 as well."

Asked for anime recs, Omar said, "There are so many to name. I've been a big Dragon Ball Z fan ever since I was little. I would watch it every day in Spanish on Channel 12 XEWT, which is a channel broadcasting from Tijuana. One of my favorites in recent years is "Keroro Gunso" [trans. "Sgt. Frog"]. It's about little frog aliens that are trying to take over the world. It's really funny, and I recommend it to everyone. I love it so much that I got a tattoo on my right forearm."

His eval of AM2? "The main draw for AM2 was the concerts. I was able to see heidi., Kanon Wakeshima, kanon xkanon, and SCANDAL. That was probably what I liked best, being able to see such musically-talented artists who I probably never would have ever thought of seeing in my life.

"I suppose what disappointed me the most was the number of cosplayers there. I wanted to see a lot more, because I like taking pictures of them. Comparing AM2 to AX in regard to cosplayers, I would have to say that AX takes the cake. Even Anime Los Angeles back in January seemed to have a lot more cosplayers present than at AM2. Nonetheless, AM2 was a lot of fun, and I definitely enjoyed myself over the course of the con."

MARIA VASQUEZ (VISUAL AM co-founder & editor, music fan)

I met Maria at the press junket. For a person who had just gotten off the bus from Houston, Texas, after a 36-hour ride, she looked remarkably refreshed. VISUAL AM was born when she and her friend Aki decided to record their experiences with music bands, i.e., interviewing and helping them out.

She's close friends with Kazha, one of the Matsuri Stage performers at AM2. How did she meet Kazha? "For a tour, a band has to make sure of many things, twice more if they are just starting off. I'm friends with Kazha's U.S. representative, and she asked me if I could help with the tour. We've helped promoting in our area and making flyers. When they came to Texas, we helped with the show whenever we were needed."

Asked for music recs, Maria said, "I don't know if it will be a surprise, but I really like [singer] Mika Nakashima. Although for now she's resting, I continue to listen to her. As for J-rock, I like heidi., Sadie, Deathgaze, Plastic Tree, NoGoD, Merry, Lynch., Golden Bomber, [solo artist] kaya, BORN, and Dir en Grey, to name a few."

Her eval of AM2? "I must say I really enjoyed the Meet & Greet Guest-of-Honor party, which was only for passport holders. That surprised me the most. It was great! The only thing I disliked was the concert area being on the 3rd floor. Fans really weren't able to fully enjoy themselves during heidi. and Sadie's concerts since they couldn't jump or, for heidi.'s set, stand up."

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The statuesque Michaela Sheppard and Syreeta Turner were two African-American press reps whose opinions and organizations I wanted to include. I met Michaela and her photographer friend E.L. Jackson at the press junket where we kept each other company as we waited to be escorted to our interviews with the guests of honor. (Michaela let me know that her

grandmother on her father's side is Mexican.) And I met Syreeta at the kanon x kanon concert, where she didn't remain seated long as she joined other photographers around the stage.

MICHAELA SHEPPARD (CAPE & SABER media correspondent)

CAPE & SABER represents sci-fi and fantasy fandoms. Initially, Michaela reviewed movies and covered red carpet premieres for a site called ReelYoungCritics.com, which later became CAPE & SABER. She said, "I feel blessed that I am able to work with such passionate and caring individuals who share my love for fandoms. It's great all of the people who we meet as well. My hope is to do this for as long as I can and for people from all walks of life to discover, share, and enjoy the site and the worlds it highlights."

Who had she wanted to see at the convention? "Because AM2 is new, I went in with no expectations. I wasn't sure of anything and didn't want to get my hopes up. I was pleasantly surprised by the outcome. There was a great turnout this year, and I expect that it will continue to grow.

"I did enjoy the press junket interviews. The Sadie boys [a visual kei metal band] in particular. They made me blush and laugh and even asked me out! Though I'm not sure how five guys and one girl was supposed to work out. Another highlight was a gift I received from Kosuke, a bass player from the band heidi. He gave me a stuffed-animal cell phone accessory, his character in the band. I was honored."

SYREETA L. TURNER (NIPPON PROJECT photographer & reporter)

Syreeta has interviewed the musical duo kanon x kanon so often they recognized her immediately at the press junket. NIPPON PROJECT that Syreeta works for promotes Japanese artists and musicians that move to the U.S. and Europe. She loves the organization very much.

How did she get involved with NIPPON PROJECT? "A friend was working with them when I went to an event of my favorite visual kei band, An Cafe. She mentioned they needed photographers and suggested I reply. It was about six months though before I actually got the job."

Asked for music recs, Syreeta said, "My favorite bands are An Cafe, SuG, The Kiddie, Plastic Tree, and Luzmelt in rock. In pop, I actually love Japanese and Korean music. A lot of Korean bands are becoming popular in Japan as well. For Japanese pop, I like Perfume, W (aka Double You), Nana Kitade, Kanon Wakeshima, and Ai Otsuka. For Korean pop, I love Big Band and 2NE1. I believe all these artists are at least worth checking out."

Her eval of AM2? "I love the number of artists they were able to bring together for a really awesome event. Also, with the Meet & Greets giving fans a close opportunity usually only the press have, and it was FREE, technically.

"I didn't like how everything was scheduled so bunched together, the policy for press photography was poorly put together, the organization, and the convention security was a bit overboard." But depending on the bands, Syreeta will be back next year.

All in all, not bad for a convention in its first year. Over 8,000 unique attendees were recorded over the three-day weekend.

Muchas gracias to Raul, Omar, Maria, Michaela, and Syreeta who participated in this post-con roundup.

For AM2 highlights, please see my PowerPoint photo & text summary on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VH0WT3sIG8A>

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