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Anime Finds a Home in Mexico

The Japanese animation and graphic novel world has Latino fan base

By Kat Avila | Web Published 7.12.2002

The 11th Annual Anime Expo was held over the July 4th weekend in Long Beach, California. Anime Expo is the largest anime and manga (Japanese animation and graphic novels/comics) convention in the United States, and is hosted by the nonprofit Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation (SPJA). It attracted some 15,000 fans from all over the world to cosplay (dress as their favorite characters); watch the latest films and videos; participate in workshops; and meet their favorite voiceover actors, manga artists and writers, character designers, and anime directors. Fans restocked on merchandise at the dealers room, artist alley, and charity auction (which raised \$27,500 for victims of the 9/11 tragedy).

This year for the first time there will be an Anime Expo in New York City over the last weekend of August. There are plans to bring Anime Expo to Tokyo, Japan, in 2004 where it will be the first animation convention of this type in that country. Japanese fans are accustomed to smaller-scale festivals.

There is a large fan base for anime and manga in Mexico and Latin America, and the Anime Expo Long Beach site acknowledged this with a Spanish-language version of its site. At Anime Expo, I had the pleasure of meeting several members of the Mexican anime and manga media. They included Manuel Medina and Jose Omar Rodriguez Bazavilvazo of the Mr. Comic radio program in Guadalajara, Victor Martinez of Anime Project (www.anime-project.org), Francisco Puente and Jesus Zhu of Atomix magazine (www.atomix.com.mx), and David De la Torre Ariza of Animedia (www.animedia.com.mx). David was also representing the popular Spanish-language anime magazines Minami and Shirase.

David, who is Animedia's CEO, explained, "www.animedia.com.mx is an anime and manga portal. We offer services like our Spanish anime search engine, where fans with Spanish anime web sites can add their URL, and other services like e-mail, e-cards, image galleries, forums, mailing lists, reviews, news, and even our IRC (Internet Relay Chat) server in www.ircmanga.com and our new service Animedia Paint where you can draw pics online and show them to your friends. Also, we just started to translate a very popular online comic called Megatokyo. We made Animedia to help Latin anime fans to find info about his/her favorite anime show. We also have a list of almost all anime that have been shown in Japan, Latin America and the U.S.A., and we are updating every time."

Francisco Puente assists with anime research for Atomix Magazine, which is a video games magazine by Alce Publishing Company. He said, "We have covered Anime Expo since 1999. I remember we only had the first issue of the magazine back then. Since the beginning we have had a lot of support from video game companies like Square and Sega; on the other hand, we didn't have any support for anime, so we decided to search for that support at Anime Expo. We found the support, but only for content, not for selling publicity or patronage."

"The web site for Atomix is at www.atomix.com.mx and in the beginning its name was Limit X. It was a fan site, but with the



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consolidation of the publishing corporation, it became the magazine's web site. It was one of the first and more popular game web pages in Spanish. It still is, but the growth of Internet users in the last couple of years has pushed the growth of new web sites. There are a lot of them now, but the Atomix web site has maintained its original purpose as a Latino community for video gamers."

Manuel and Jose Omar are both engineers who do the radio program Mr. Comic in their spare time. They used their own funds to attend Anime Expo. Two other staff members, anime expert Mayra Navarro and video game expert Hernan Ibanez, were unable to attend. There are anime conventions in Mexico, they said, but not as big and fans have gotten used to smaller conventions.

Manuel, who has been officially in charge of the show since September 2001, said, "Mr. Comic was born on March 2000. Originally founded by Humberto Hernandez and Jose Luis Araiza, the program started with no sponsors. After the change from 91.5 FM to 1220 AM, it was difficult, because the previous listeners weren't used to listening to AM. At that time, a friend of mine, Alejandro Perez, was participating in the program and I was just another listener."

"It was around May that same year when Alejandro couldn't attend the program and I was invited as a guest by Humberto because he had heard from Alejandro that I knew Japanese and understood a little about anime and Japanese culture. After my first program as a guest, Humberto asked if I wanted to stay, emphasizing this was only a hobby and, as he got the time on the radio for free, there wasn't any payment for any of us. I accepted immediately."

"Since then I've been active in the program. We got our first sponsor, then we had another two, but these two didn't believe in the program and we've been running with just one. Right now we are talking with Editorial Vid, which is a company that publishes manga consistently in Mexico."

"We do our best every Saturday to give our listeners the latest information about anime, manga and video games, and not only information originating in Mexico, but in Japan, because knowing some Japanese has given us an advantage over other Spanish anime publications."

Among the interesting points brought up for discussion by members of the Mexican anime and manga media concerned public opinion that cartoons are for children (anime covers a much broader age range than Western animation and some of it is for adults only) and about the censorship promoted by fanatical Mexican Catholics who believe Pokemon is satanic and all anime comes from hell. We also talked about piracy, and someone guessed that perhaps 70-80% of the merchandise sold in Mexico was illegally reproduced, partly due to the extraordinarily high taxes on imports.

All in all, Anime Expo was a great experience for all of us and gave us the opportunity to network with an international group of anime and manga fans. We hope you can join the party next year at Anime Expo 2003 when the convention moves to the Anaheim Convention Center near Disneyland.

Kat Avila (buscandocalifornia@yahoo.com) regularly writes on issues affecting the local Chicano and Asian American communities. Her personal web site is www.geocities.com/buscandocalifornia.

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(323) 259-0388 Fax (310) 496-2972 info@latinola.com

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