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ARTICLE[Interviews](#)[Articles](#)[Columns](#)[Reviews](#)[Culture Vultures](#)[Gallery](#)[Archives](#)**Anime Expo 2005 Sets New Attendance Record**by [Kat Avila](#)

**Anime Expo** 2005 was held July 1-4 in Anaheim, California. North America's largest anime and manga convention drew approximately 33,000 attendees (last year's attendance was over 25,000). Its charity auction raised over \$50,000; a drawing of Howl's Moving Castle and two characters fetched an incredible \$13,000.

Honored Japanese guests were **Burst Angel** artist Ugetsu Hakua, voice actor Ryo Horikawa, **Blood: The Last Vampire** director Hiroyuki Kitakubo, **Beck** director Osamu Kobayashi, **The Twelve Kingdoms** director Tsuneo Kobayashi, J-Pop and techno-trance singer Kotoko, **Full Metal Alchemist the Movie** director Hiroshi Ousaka, voice actress and singer Maaya Sakamoto, voice actor Tomokazu Seki (back by popular demand), **Powerpuff Girls Z** character designer Miho Shimogasa, **Studio E.Go.** president Kazue Yamamoto, and **Howl's Moving Castle** director Akihiko Yamashita.

**Last Exile** character designer Range Murata attended as an industry guest, courtesy of **Digital Manga Publishing**. He was there to promote **Robot**, vol. 1, an astoundingly diverse and provocative collection of short tales and images by Japan's top manga artists that he had edited. I have a poster of the book cover on my wall; it's a young female lying on her side in a fetal position with only a pair of soft leather gloves and boots on. The incredible realism of the gloves and boots is not surprising since Murata has his own fashion line. (And what are you looking at?) His attention to clothing is what distinguishes him from other artists; the clothing he

creates for characters is functional and could be worn in real life.

Special American guests were voice actors Greg Ayres (sporting purple hair), cheerful Colleen Clinkenbeard, and the ever popular and suave Crispin Freeman who first came to my attention when he attended **Anime Expo Tokyo** 2004 as a guest of honor. After **AX** 2005, out of curiosity, I finally forced myself to listen to an English dub of **Hellsing** because Freeman was the voice for the vampire Arucard. I still prefer the deeper-voiced Japanese voice actor, but Freeman and other talented voice actors are working hard to train a new generation and to raise the quality of English dubs.

I spent this **Anime Expo** mostly in press sessions for the Japanese guests of honor, though the panels open to the general public are usually more interesting because the fans are best acquainted with each guest's work. However, an advantage of the press sessions is being able to meet the guests up close and to get some nice snapshots. Occasionally you get let in on a secret or two about upcoming projects; heh, heh, I'm not telling, so stop asking. I hope to integrate the information I gathered into my anime and manga reviews.

**Anime Expo** should probably change its name to **Cosplay Expo** because of the plentiful cosplayers and the increasing number of events geared toward cosplayers. In addition to the Masquerade, which is the highlight of **AX**, there was the Masquerade Ball, Chibi Masquerade, Pop Shock Masquerade, U.S.A. preliminaries for the World Cosplay Summit in Japan, and the Official Indoor Cosplay Gathering Photo Area for those cosplayers who wanted to stay out of the Southern California sun. Though I don't take as many photos as I used to of the cosplayers, there were still some pretty spectacular costumes that made me whip out my camera and try to push myself into a good position among all the other similarly minded photographers.

The Kotoko concert was on Saturday, July 2. I'm not much of

a music person, but I like the spectacle. A pleasant surprise before the show was the preview of the new *Hellsing* OVA. Manga creator Kouta Hirano was present to answer questions. The OVA came about because he was dissatisfied with how the TV series went since there were a lot of restrictions. "With this OVA," he said, "we tried to do the best work we can possibly do."

Kotoko eventually came out on stage looking mysterious wrapped in a dark hooded cloak. You intentionally couldn't see her face. For the second song, the cloak came off and the pace of the show changed. She was wearing a silver white wig, an aluminum shirt with a black necktie, patent leather shorts and matching thigh-high platform boots. The fans were now standing out of their seats. One of the songs she sang was a single off her new CD. She said, "We shot the video in L.A. L.A. is so much fun. I have to move here some day." "My ear's hurting," one fan said after the last song.

Maaya Sakamoto's concert was the following day on Sunday, July 3. Both Kotoko and Sakamoto's concerts were sponsored by **Geneon Entertainment**. Sakamoto sang songs from her CD Maaya Sakamoto Single Collection + Hotchpotch, a collection of popular anime songs she has sung. My favorite song is "Kiseki no Umi (Sea of Miracles)," the opening theme for *Record of Lodoss War*. There was no live band or dancers behind Sakamoto as there were for Kotoko, but the pureness and clarity of Sakamoto's voice and her singing of fan favorites made her concert just as enjoyable. "Hello, everyone," she said at one point, "Oh, my god. So many people."

A nice addition to **AX** 2005 was the Manga Library that a number of manga publishers had donated books for. It's a permanent library that Lyall Morell, this year's library manager, said would be loaned out to other conventions. I found it a little surprising to see convention attendees sitting at the tables quietly reading. But then there's a little something for everyone at *Anime Expo*.

I forgot to pick up a ticket for the Anime Music Video Contest, caught part of **AX** Idol for aspiring voice actors and singers, browsed Artists' Alley and the Art Show, and ended up again and again in the Exhibit Hall searching for bargains, especially in the last 15 minutes before it closed. Now that was fun!

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