

OXBOW / Tour Diary/ Japan: 1999 (Eugene)

Eastern Space1999!

Oh No. We've Taken Tok-ee-oo!

Japan. The Land of the Rising Sun and giant fucking green monsters that destroy afternoons, homework assignments and years of my life on that whole Speed Racer/Marine Boy?Gigantor/Kimba trip. And we're going there. The tour up to this point has been sketch. Calls unanswered for long periods of time by our erstwhile tour agents, faxes and emails the last of which I used to inform our hosts that "My Balls are Big." I don't know what this meant and I don't know why I said it and given the non-ubiquity of colloquial usage they had no idea what "Balls" were. They would soon though.

Air Japan: The Airline with the Best Sky Sluts in the Skies

Sure the plane was small. The most interesting and noteworthy thing of them all though was the Japanese service ethic, which was full force on this flight. The stewardesses or as I've delicately chosen to call them, sky sluts, seem totally fucking miserable. Too many air miles, too many asshole americans, too many japanese men waving their hands up a few too many skirts perhaps. We sit and I peruse the State Dept advisory travel warnings within which every single possible infraction is met by "incarceration." Public drunkenness? Incarceration. Fist fights? Incarceration. Indecent exposure? Incarceration.

The place is a virtual fucking police state and my tension grows because OF COURSE Oxbow is sneaking into this country. OF COURSE our paperwork is fucked up. And OF COURSE many an american band trying to sneak in has been returned.

Nothing like 11 hours of tiny pickles and miso soup while the endless loop of the in-flight showing of Samurai Fisherman showed. In fact Samurai Fisherman about an errant Samurai who would rather fish than fight, was something that we had all grown greatly affectionate toward and by the time we landed in Japan we were converts. Jesus. And customs. When it's my turn in the hot seat the says to me...

"Rats?"

I repeat "Rats?"

He's got on his full hypnoglare stare that's supposed to ferret out evil doers. I'm nervous but I'm a pathological liar and goddammit I'll not admit I have rats even if I DO have rats.

"Rats? Rats?"

"No I don't have any rats."

He moves his fingers to his mouth in the universal sign that says "I'm smoking a big fucking fat joint." And I finally get it.

"Drugs? Haha. You mean 'drugs'?! No. I don't have any drugs." That's it, I get through first and am delighted to see Shingo, one half of our record label, tour agent, where he stands with a paper sign with the letters O-X-B-O-X on it. Hahah... well not really but it would have been fucking funny if he had. I circle around him to see if I can surprise him and then at the last second I dip close to him and say "I'm Eugene." He startles and says something in Japanese (translation: asshole american).



We'll bomb your cities!)... the rest of us, including our intrepid Fozzle, tour attache extraordinaire , make it through having successfully avoided "incarceration." Chika, the other half of our booking team, Shingo's main squeeze and our translator, guide, mom and hotelier, appeared soon thereafter and we were off and into the van that would be the better part of our home for the next 2 friggin' weeks.

The Viking King

It's Oxbow and my weight is topping the scales at 260 pounds. So the first stop? Some place where we can get some "real" Japanese food. The authentic shit. What the natives spend their hard earned yen for. So we hit "The Viking King". Natch. A deli type deal we spend our per diems for the first week in a half an hour. Shingo, Chika, Kenmei, Bobo, Kentaro are all in attendance. They form the nexus of the totally (and now signed to a

huge Japanese label) coolio band 54-71. My dream is to get them on tour with the famed swiss outfit 16-17. Forget the tour, just the intro would be cool. "54-71? Meet 16-17. 16-17? Say hi to 54-71." Jay-zus.

They're young guys though and though their english is not bad (and our Japanese is horrible and mostly limited to screaming and shrieking phrases from the Samurai Fisherman) they do manage to express their complete enthusiasm for musical art, a topic that while Niko, the most gracious of us banter about, and Fozzie, the most enthusiastic of us, is interested in, interests ME about as much as my aforementioned Balls. Which interest me much less than my never-ending international search for the unwholesome.



"Do you like/know The Champs?"

"Yeah, yeah, say, where does somebody go around here to get some, um, really, really hot sweaty man to man action porn?"

They look from one to the other and back to me who's at this point laughing hysterically.

"What I mean are there book stores around that sell photojournalistic essays on the angle of the dangle and angels in pigtails?"

Chika, having been schooled in Tennessee as an exchange student and hence knew exactly what kind of academic treatises I was pursuing said, Rappongi (A place that by the end of the tour we still had not gotten to). I was mollified and the next day was spent in a haze of the most powerful jetlagia that I've ever experienced.



20,000 Volts!

...which continues. I sleep back stage at the club. A 4 story below ground bomb shelter of a club. All of our friends are there, the guys from The Ruins, the guys from Zeni Geva, Melt Banana is supposed to show up. I'd have said Hello if I could have opened my fucking eyes for more than five minutes. I'm roused only when our eager hosts and the men in 54-71 wake me up.

"We're to go on."

I want to say, "So?" But think of the advisory and the incarceration caution. I watch them play 2 songs and the club is crowded, all good signs. And they're a good band. But Morpheus is calling me and I'm out again, back stage again and sleeping and snoring like a motherfucker. The other bands play, the power blows out, the power comes on and Greg is waking me since it seems we didn't come 11 million miles to this isle of powerful sleep ju ju to, um, sleep.

I wander out onto the stage where we're noodling through an intro that in the snap and flash of lightening bursts into song and we're off like idiot savants. There's always a strange sense after we've played recently that something un-right has occurred.

We played with Perfect Circle, the spin-off from Tool project, in San Francisco right before we left and after ward things, the air, the club, the vibe was disturbed and disturbing and distinctly NOT right. And it's no different tonight. I'm not bragging on us, because I don't know that it's a skill exactly, but I see a few people in the audience catch their throats like they've opened their eyes onto something their eyes weren't ready to see and then I don't remember anything. Which could mean the usual, though I think Fozzie in an aside to Chika said it best while gesticulating through a boat rowing motion_ "we're just getting going." I would have said "we're just rowing over there to get some fucking crackers," but that's just me.



Ass-Kicking, Elvis and Eternal Love

Well the shows all were cool. 54-71 were cool. And love abounded. Until we hit the south of Japan, which like the American south is full of, um, spirit. We were playing at this club called Mushroom (I kid you not) in Himeji. The drunks showed up early and the evening was on. I'll give you the Reader's digest version here though.

A klatch of drunks, standing on stage when the opening bands were playing, flipping shit, thought they'd really TRY to participate in an Oxbow show. And they did. And for their troubles I let them:

The wrestling move I laid on one of the main offender was called a Flying Mare and as he hit the ground 3 or 4 times, his broken body eventually dragged off through the now stunned crowd I thought, "Gee, I wonder if I can get some of those green pickles after the show."



Dan, however, remembering his travel advisory, sought the guy out to see if perhaps we should hit the road sooner rather than later in order to avoid that all too inevitable incarceration phase of our trip. It would have to be later as all of the beaten kids friends surrounded me and said:

"You're [made the muscle flexing motion]"

to which I replied "you're [made the drinking bad rice wine motion]"

They laughed and challenged me to arm wrestle. I took on all challengers, charged 10 yen a piece and made a tidy bit of change in the process. Our hosts, Chika and Shingo and the members of 54-71 said, strangely, very little as they digested the idea that perhaps was a first for them: Oxbow isn't "playing" a "show". I mean shit, yeah, we used to. Until we met up with Lewis McLine, or some such name that is an actual fact an anagram for asshole. He showed up once to one of our shows drunk and heckled us through an entire show back in the old days. After the show I was overheard to say by old drummer Tom Dobrov, "I should have kicked that guy's ass." Tom replied "Why didn't you?" And in that moment the way had become clear. "Why not?" I ask myself this question with such great frequency that I can't come up with answers fast enough to keep me from doing shit that while it probably doesn't benefit society as a whole, makes me feel really good. And so Oxbow the Hedonist is born. Oh and before I forget-next time I see that prick Duane Denison from Jesus Lizard I'm gonna kick his ass too. I'll show you whose contrived you motherfucking cock sucker. I mean, why not?

So the kid is okay, we take off to the gustatory delights of Gusto, one of God's favorite restaurants. I then hit the road to Shizuoka to meet Elvis aka Bucky aka Mordecai Sheftall, a friend of mine who is married, lives in Japan and teaches at an all girl's school, which just about fits my definition of heaven on earth. Or perhaps hell on earth, depending on your moral compass.

I stayed there for a day. Mordecai's got a cool deal but I discover he's gone a little too eastern and he sits, legs crossed at the breakfast table the next morning after a night of good ole bullshit waiting for the wife to cook something. I'm starving, there are eggs in the refrigerator, so I start cooking while he looks at me over his paper as if to say, I got a good deal here you fucking party pooper. But what's most interesting is that his wife is acting like I'm Jesus Christ. I cooked breakfast, cleaned up the plates, straightened the table. Her amazement told me something really significant: american women have got it really fucking good.

Anyways, wined, dined, sipped and supped I head back into the OxTour time, boat rides in Tokyo Bay (courtesy of Kentaro's yakuza-economics professor father), sake sucking and shows. Always the shows. That and the "hot fucking bitches" (TM, Tom

Dobrov) that seem to populate every available square inch of every available square inch of Tokyo.



Hence our inordinate mid tour fixation on "gentleman's clubs." Nary a gentlemen in these clubs we found. Just good ol' Japanese men applying for and receiving some good ol' SES. A relatively simple thing this Semen Extraction Service (SES). The technicians therein get it out, take it away and don't even charge very much for it. Fozzie spends his time flirting with the prospect of "decadence" but never gets near Rappongi, The Land of the Red Rising Son's red light district. I, for my part, satisfy myself with a visit to a bookstore where I continue my seemingly endless cross-cultural study of fuck magazines. My findings thus far: fuck magazines are completely bereft of irony, intelligence or any sort of significance outside of their scattershot ability to induce SES. But the search continues.

The End

We played 10 days of them (more or less). Shows that is. We went to department stores where we saw first hand how commerce becomes religion (as if we hadn't seen enough of that here). We saw the Tokyo Bay. We saw Japanese Cheerleaders (unlike American cheerleaders Japanese cheerleaders are dudes who look like paramilitary thugs_"2-4-6-8_who will we fucking just kill really bad!!!!"). We were followed by smiling children. Scowled at by businessmen. Hit on by high school girlstittutes. And when we leave. We're sorrowful.

But here's the long and short of it_The Japan Tour Awards for Shit We Dug

1) The best and most Ubu-esque exchange during the tour occurred in a restaurant that actually was NOT the mighty Gusto:

Greg: What are those 7-legged things that people eat?

Me: Spiders?

2) Gusto! Sake!

3) Yakuza: the ones photographed here. The Japanese gangsters are the most polite of any I've ever met. They didn't exactly consent to this picture being taken, but they managed to not smash my camera and kick me out into the street while screaming "fucking mouli."



4) Wrestling Shingo (Shingo is his name-o) to the floor in Osaka. The homosexual rape would come later.

5) Zeni Geva's Tabata drunken and disorderly at Ichiban Hoshi with his soon to be ex-wife

6) That completely mind-roasting zombie-killing video game

7) The "hot fucking bitches"

8) 54-71, Shingo & Chika

9) That crazy castle in Himeji

10) The award for the best and coolest country named Japan? That's right_Japan.

Tour Dates:

5/12: Koenji 2000V (Tokyo)

5/13: Sangenjaya Heaven's Door (Tokyo)

5/14: Tokuzo (Nagoya)

5/16: Mushroom (Himeji)

5/17: Fundango (Osaka)

5/18: Hosei University (Tokyo)

