

Follow the rhythm of a Japanese beat

Pop music was this year's theme at Japan Night, which featured traditional food, live music and dancing

BY AIBING GUO
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

More than 500 guests from the University and local communities crowded into the EMU Ballroom Saturday evening to celebrate annual Japan Night, with Japanese pop music, an art show, traditional cuisine and a haunted house.

The Japanese Student Organization orchestrated the event, setting this year's theme as Japanese pop music and showcasing a series of stage shows and a review of Japanese music history.

A traditional dance and drum performance by a group of Japanese students from the University and Lane Community College kicked off the night at 7 p.m. and soon put the audience in the mood for a touch of Oriental culture.

A documentary featuring Japanese pop music history was projected to the big screen on the central stage, with performers dressing, singing and dancing according to the era. The video covered music from the 1960s to present. Audience members who were familiar with Japanese pop music sang along, while others waved their hands following the rhythm.

"It is totally amazing; I have never seen anything like this before," senior Kit Myers said. He said the experience has encouraged him to explore more Japanese culture in the future.

Kristen Reed, president of the Japanese Student Organization, said she was happy that people enjoyed the event.

"We started to prepare for this stage show since last November, so we do have a lot of time to practice and polish our performance," she said.

Though it is called Japan Night, Kristen said it was more like an international night.

"More than half of our 150 volunteers are from outside Japan, like United States, Europe, Korea, China and lots of other countries," Reed said, adding that everyone contributed a lot to the event. "I think they are also enjoying to be part of this cultural exchange program."

Besides the stage show, Reed said there was also something special on the food menu this year.

"We prepared traditional Japanese food for both vegetarian and non-vegetarian this year, and I believe that should please everybody no matter what their tastes are," she said.

Dorothy Emach, who taught English in Japan from 1994 to 1997, said she was very satisfied with the

variety of the food.

"The vegetarian food is very great; I really appreciate their thoughtful arrangement," she said.

Emach said her favorite part of the event was the stage show.

"I'm really impressed, I definitely will be back again next year," she said.

Her 10-year-old son, Sebastian Mitchell was dressed in a traditional Japanese Samurai suit.

"The gun-shooting game is my favorite," he said. "I'm just inches away from the top prize."

In the shooting game, participants used guns made of wooden chopsticks to shoot at targets.

"Of course, the ghost house, that's my second favorite," Sebastian added. He said all kinds of ghosts jumped in and out of the aisle inside the haunted house screaming.

"It's a little scary, but it's really a lot of fun," he said.

Rihito Okonogi, a coordinator of the haunted house, said the group got the idea from a traditional Japanese ghost festival that happens around August every year. In Japan, it is believed that during the ghost festival, the dead will return to the houses they once lived in.

Fifteen volunteers helped decorate the haunted house and made nearly all the scenes inside the house.

Their efforts paid off. Nearly half an hour after the end of the stage show, people were still lining up for a visit to the haunted house.

"It's a great reward to us that people just like it," Okonogi said.

People came to the event for different reasons.

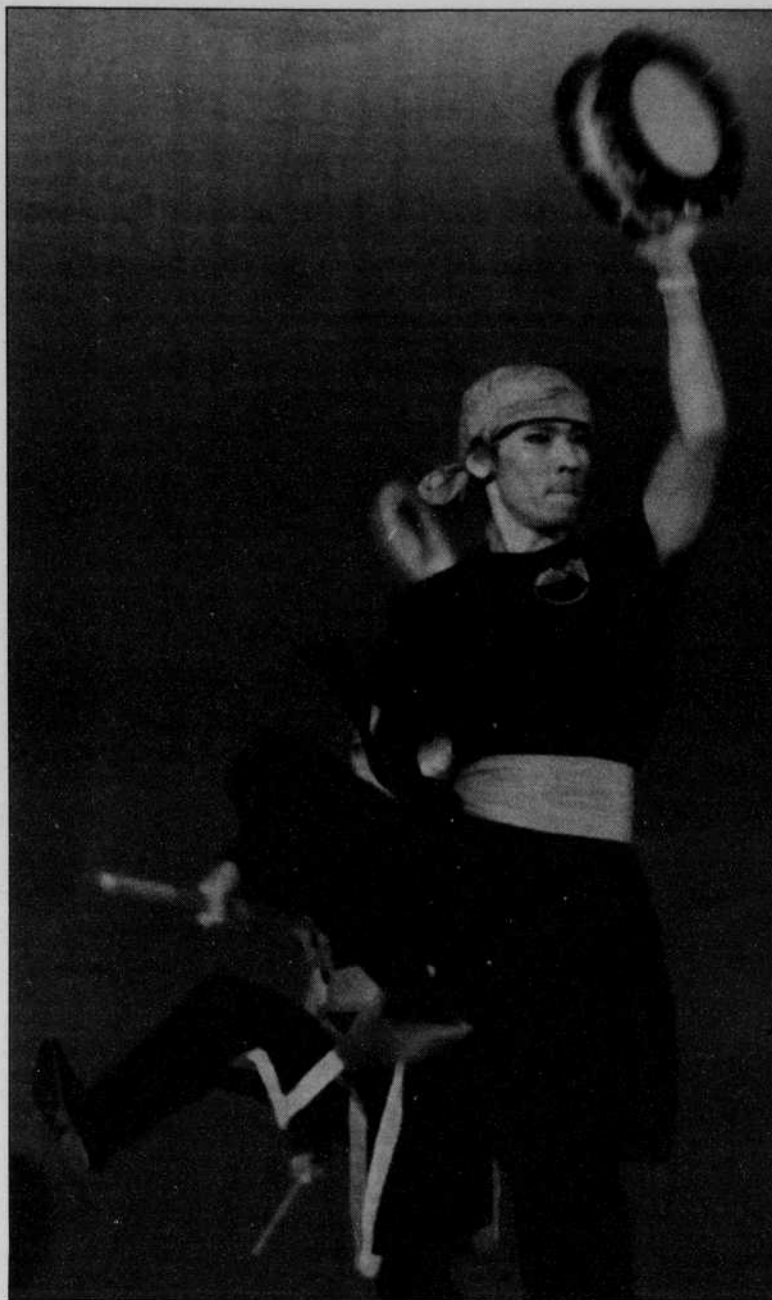
Elisabeth Vieller, who preferred to be called by her art name Obermayer, said she didn't just come to enjoy a cultural show.

"I'm trying to find a Japanese language mentor here," she said. She said she visited Japan for more than six months during each of the past eight years to learn pottery-making and Japanese painting.

"Eugene has only one Japanese language school, and the courses are pretty basic," she said. "So I'm really looking forward to reaching out and finding a native Japanese speaker who is interested in teaching me Japanese."

Her husband, Thomas Keller, a local electric technician, said all his friends encouraged him to pay a visit to Japan, but his busy work schedule kept putting the visit off.

"My 2-year-old daughter is luckier than me; she had been there for three months with her mother," Keller said.



NICOLE BARKER | PHOTOGRAPHER

The Eisahs, a combination of University and Lane Community College students, performed traditional dance and percussion Saturday at Japan Night, an annual event hosted by the Japanese Student Organization.

FAST FACTS: JAPAN



Location: Eastern Asia, island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean Peninsula

Area: 377,835 sq km (slightly smaller than California)

Population: 127,333,002 (July 2004)

Capital: Tokyo

Government: Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government

Main ethnic groups: Japanese (99 percent), others 1 percent

Main religion: Observe both Shinto and Buddhist (84 percent), others 16 percent

Agricultural products: Rice, sugar beets, vegetables, fruit, pork, poultry, dairy products, eggs and fish

Source: www.cia.gov

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