

“Tony” Yasumura reveals all about his not-naked shtick and its origins in Japanese comedy

By Yuri Kageyama
The Associated Press

TOKYO — The shtick that’s gone viral features a soccer player, a Spice Girl, James Bond, you name it, appearing to be naked, except they’re not really naked at all.

The disarming sight gag by Japanese comic Tonikaku Akarui Yasumura is simple and rather silly. But its bare-all message about the deceptiveness of what meets the eye has a lot of people laughing.

The recent appearance of Tony, as Yasumura is known these days, on “Britain’s Got Talent” has drawn more than 10 million views on the audition show’s YouTube account.

“Do it with a majestically dignified and utterly unfounded confidence,” he told The Associated Press recently in Tokyo, of the secret to his comedy. “That gets over because what you’re doing is such nonsense.”

Yasumura has been doing his trademark act for nearly a decade on TV shows and comedy houses around Japan.

He stands before the audience wearing only a pink flower-patterned bathing suit and declares he will portray a certain person posing naked.

Then he raises a leg, sits with his hands folded, or crouches low, strategically and carefully positioning himself so his only attire is out of view.

“Don’t worry,” he says in a friendly, reassuring tone.

“I’m wearing,” he adds, without saying more because in the Japanese language, the object of the sentence is often unspoken.

On the British show, the judges finished the sentence for him, shouting out, “Pants!”

Yasumura says he can depict anyone this way, including politicians, musical stars, or nondescript people doing



everyday things like drinking tea.

“It’s just funny. There is absolutely no meaning,” said Yasumura, 41, who has a jolly laugh but is obviously intensely serious about his craft.

You must always wear a smile. And never, ever flinch.

He acknowledged he barely understood what the show’s judges were saying, and inside felt unsure what to do. But he didn’t skip a beat.

“Honestly, you are the funniest contestant we’ve had all year, seriously. Really, really funny, and original,” gushed Simon Cowell, the show’s producer and usually one of the harshest judges.

“He brought confidence, comedy, and luckily his pants! Tonikaku had us crackin’ up from start to finish with his brilliant audition,” the show said in a statement.

The humor in Yasumura’s performance is rooted in the Japanese version of

vaudeville, which includes traditional storytelling, in which the narrator plays all the roles, as well as standup comedy.

“Hadaka gei,” which literally translates as “naked acts,” make up a genre of Japanese comedy.

It’s different from putting on a performance, like a juggling act, playing an instrument, or dancing, no matter how funny it might end up being, because what he does constitutes the Japanese art of comedy, or “neta,” Yasumura says.

“Neta” is also used to describe the ingredients of gourmet cooking or the scoop of a news story, in other words, the key kernel of what’s unfolding.

He chanced upon his idea when he saw a female pop idol on a book cover, yes, posing naked, except she was sitting in a position that made you imagine she could be nude, when all you saw were her legs, face, and arms.

“It was exactly the same as my neta. I

DON’T WORRY, HE’S WEARING. *Tonikaku Akarui Yasumura poses in the dressing room of a Tokyo theater on May 23, 2023. The disarming sight gag by Yasumura is simple and rather silly. The recent appearance of Tony, as Yasumura is known these days, on “Britain’s Got Talent” has drawn more than 10 million views on the audition show’s YouTube account. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)*

saw that and knew: This is it,” he said.

And he hasn’t stopped since.

His success on “Britain’s Got Talent” has resonated at home. Many people left uplifting comments online, noting he had made them feel so proud, witnessing comedy crossing borders.

Soccer star Keisuke Honda posted a photo of himself kicking a ball on Twitter, next to a photo of Yasumura striking the naked soccer player pose. “I’m wearing,” Honda tweeted.

Matsuko Deluxe, a reputed writer, noted on a recent TV show that Yasumura wasn’t afraid to poke fun at himself, when much of modern-day humor tended to do just the opposite, and poke fun at others.

Although Yasumura exudes an innocence about him, in all his naked-baby cuteness, he also possesses a strength. It’s obvious he’s done his pants gimmick over and over, for years, even when no one laughed.

Even today, some online observers are already slamming Yasumura as inane, if not offensive.

Yasumura says he is lucky because he doesn’t have to do anything special to maintain his chubby figure.

Still, sticking with a mode of self-expression requires dedication and courage. After all, it’s clear he isn’t afraid literally to stand practically naked before an audience.

He swears he’ll be doing his routine till he dies. But don’t worry: He will be wearing pants.

Editor’s note: Over the weekend, Yasumura was eliminated from the “Britain’s Got Talent” competition.

Nepal honors Sherpa guides, climbers to mark 70th anniversary of Mount Everest conquest

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of climbers and their guides scaled the peak, and 17 either died or went missing.

The popular Himalayan climbing season begins in March and ends in May after which monsoon winds and melting temperatures make the mountains too hazardous for climbing.

Deteriorating conditions on Everest are raising concerns for mountaineers and others whose livelihoods depend on the flow of visitors coming to climb the mountain each year. Warmer conditions mean climbers who made their way across snow and ice are now crossing bare rock.

Recent research found that Mount Everest’s glaciers have lost 2,000 years of ice in just the past 30 years.

Colorful Bun Festival returns to Hong Kong after 3 years

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safety,” Kwok said.

The event, also known as the Cheung Chau Jiao Festival, has been celebrated for more than 100 years, according to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office. It says that according to folklore, residents started the rituals and traditions to dispel disaster and pray for blessings after the island was devastated by a plague.

Associated Press news assistant Annie Cheung contributed to this report.



Japanese court says government’s policy against same-sex marriage is unconstitutional

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese court has ruled that the government’s policy against same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, in a closely watched decision that supporters say is a step toward marriage equality.

The Nagoya District Court in central Japan, however, rejected a request by a male couple that the government pay them 1 million yen (\$7,100) each in compensation for the unequal treatment they face because the current system does not recognize them as legally married.

The ruling is the second that found that the government’s denial of same-sex marriage violates the constitution, while two other decisions did not. The rulings can be appealed to the Supreme Court.

In his ruling, judge Osamu Nishimura said the current system that excludes same-sex couples with no legal protection for their relationship is unconstitutional and there is no room for government discretion, Kyodo News reported.

Thailand authorities seize more than a ton of crystal methamphetamine thought bound for Australia

By Jintamas Saksornchai
The Associated Press

BANGKOK — Law enforcement officials in Thailand say they seized more than a ton of crystal methamphetamine in a southern province that they believe was bound for Australia.

Officials from police and the Narcotics Control Board announced that the 2,646 pounds of the drug, also known as “ice,” likely came from Thailand’s northern border region, which is part of the Golden Triangle where the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand meet.

Myanmar is a major producer of methamphetamine, which over the past decade has become the dominant illegal drug in Southeast Asia for both domestic consumption and export, supplanting opium and its refined product, heroin. Decades of political instability have made Myanmar’s frontier regions largely lawless and exploited by drug producers and traffickers.

The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime

warned in a report in May last year that the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine is burgeoning in the region. It said the number of methamphetamine tablets seized in East and Southeast Asia exceeded a billion for the first time in 2021.

The methamphetamine seized in Songkhla province was disguised as packages of tea. Officials announced at a news conference that the three suspects believed to be transporting the drug had escaped, making it hard to know the traffickers’ plans.

Wichai Chaimongkol, the secretary general of the Narcotics Control Board, said authorities had hoped to track the drugs to their destination in Australia in order to arrest higher-ranking members of the trafficking gang, but the three suspected smugglers in Songkhla became aware that they were being watched.

Thai officials believe the drugs, hidden in a house and two pickup trucks, were to

Supporters cheered outside the court, waving rainbow flags and holding signs saying, “Another step toward marriage equality.”

Asato Yamada, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said the court’s ruling said clearly that not allowing same-sex marriage violates the guarantee of equal rights under Article 14 of the constitution, and that Article 24 provides freedom to marry by not specifying a prohibition on same-sex marriage. “It’s a major step toward achieving marriage equality,” he said.

“The judicial branch, on behalf of the rights of minorities, raised its voice and it will be a strong message to the government,” he said. “The message is that the government should resolve the problem immediately.”

Rights activists say Japan’s conservative government has stonewalled a push for equal rights that is supported by the general public. Support for LGBTQ+ people in Japan has grown slowly, but recent surveys show a majority of Japanese back

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be smuggled to Australia by sea, said Wichai.

Drugs that were seized in recent raids, including in Bangkok in March and April, also were supposedly bound for Australia.

Australian police said in 2019 that they seized 1.6 metric tons of meth at the Melbourne waterfront that was hidden in stereo speakers shipped from Bangkok. In November last year, Thai narcotics officials said that in the fiscal year ending September 2022, they intercepted drugs bound for Australia 22 times disguised in various forms, one of which involved pillow cases that were coated with methamphetamine.

Last year’s U.N. report noted that the 1.008 billion meth tablets seized in 2021 was seven times higher than the amount seized 10 years earlier. It warned that increased production makes the drug cheaper and more accessible, creating greater risk to people and their communities.