



## Live from Tokyo

*Directed and edited by Louis Rapkin*

*Good Charamel Records*

*79 minutes, 2010 / 2011*

[www.livefromTokyo.net](http://www.livefromTokyo.net)

[www.goodcharamel.com](http://www.goodcharamel.com)

[www.MVDvisual.com](http://www.MVDvisual.com)

Japan, once thought to take over the world through either might or commerce, has become a cultural sponge that absorbs much of what the West has to offer, from various generations. Yet, in many ways, because all this comes together through the social media, especially over the past couple of decades, things become new again by blending different facets into a synergy.

General Semantics states that time binding, or writing things down because they change over time, sort of dissolves as various forms of information arrive at the same time. This is especially interesting in art and music. And that is the focus of this documentary, showing the culture scene of a modern Tokyo that is overwhelmed by data.

In China, there are few markets for alternative bands, but in Tokyo, a multitude of showcases present music every night, so the scene is both nurturing and chaotic. The question, of course, is whether too much is as bad as too little. Nothing stands out when there are so many choices. This is discussed right off the bat here by W. David Marx, Chief Editor of *Neohaponisme*, Stan Eberlein, the owner of the Intervall-Audio Record Label, Craig Exton, of TokyoGigGide.com, and Dr. Jennifer Matsue, author of *Making Music in Japan's Underground* (among others), who are Westerners. I realize this documentary is for the Western market, but still... At least the bands are Japanese.

Due to the large number of groups, the clubs there have the dreaded *Noruma* system, or pay-to-play, where a band has to sell a certain

amount of tickets themselves, or pay the difference (which could be in the hundreds of dollars). They tried that in New York (some places still do this), but thanks to social media, some clubs became pariahs and bands would not play there, forcing them out.

A few musicians wisely posit that because rock music originated in the West, of course there are going to be Western influences. No doubt. But all music goes through a gatekeeping filter that changes and morphs the sound, unless it is a copy band. Any original written music is bound to be affected, though. There is definitely a higher use of technology in music there, from bizarre instruments (such as employed by Makoto Ohno) to multi-media shows, and a whole lot of electronica (e.g., Sexy Synthesizer), even in jazz.

There are so many bands and varied styles shown here, many of which I find, well, annoying, such as rock/rap, electronica, and modern pop, so I'm going to discuss some of the ones I like, rather than all of them. First there's Nu Clear Classmate. This is a guy on electric guitar while his female partner screams lyrics and plays an electronic keyboard in front of projected images. It's wild and chaotic.

DMBQ are a heavy metal outfit that fits more into the leather jacket mode rather than a hair band (thankfully). They are loud and rhythmic, with a crashing guitar. They seem like a fun headbanging band. The Zoobombs are sort of a poppier version of the Heartbreakers (Thunders/Lure, certainly not Petty).

Sajjanu is an avant-garde guitar-based trio that reminds me of Tom Verlaine and Television, with fits of starts and stops and lots of dissonance. My favorite band name presented here was My Pal Foot Foot, after the Shaggs song (though I don't remember seeing a clip of them actually playing).

There is definitely a greater mix of genders in these bands than in the West or in China, which is encouraging.

We see many groups, including videos and playing live. There seems little focus as we are shown band after band, and don't really learn much about them as people, even when we see them at home or in the studio. I realize the filmmakers are trying to be a bit comprehensive, but just as there are too many bands for a number of them to become successful, similarly we get a smattering of music and musicians, and it's hard to get a clear picture.

There are lots of interesting comments how the music is effected by and absorbed into the culture in ways most of Asia could never even imagine, but since we do not get to know any of these people, the film is guilty of being exactly what it discusses in the first act, about oversaturation and lack of personality. That is a shame.

Many times while the bands are heard, we see street scenes of traffic, crowded sidewalks or buildings, sometimes outside of a moving car, or out the front window of a train, reminiscent of *Koyaanisquati*. This gets tiring really fast

Ultimately, while this documentary shows various ways Tokyo has become a music city, it fails by trying to do too much in its time frame. It would have been better to focus on a few bands so we can get to know them, and let some of the others be more peripheral.

*Live from Tokyo trailer (could not be uploaded):*  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_UTLWyCcbE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_UTLWyCcbE)

Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at [12:01 AM](#)

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