

September 13, 2017 - Pika☆ is a musician from Osaka, best known as the drummer and co-vocalist of the band Afrirampo, which she formed with guitarist and co-vocalist Oni in 2002. The duo spent two months in Cameroon with the Baka tribe and made an album titled *Baka ga Kita*. After their breakup in 2010, she began her solo career, as well as joining the Acid Mothers Temple & The Cosmic Inferno. Pika has since collaborated with many artists both domestically and internationally, and founded TAIYO33OSAKA, an energy-conscious festival project in reaction to the 2011 Tohoku earthquake. Afrirampo reunited in 2016.



As told to Brandon Stosuy, 1200 words.

Tags: Music, Adversity, Inspiration, Collaboration.

# Pika☆ on being true to yourself

**What you do you get out of collaborating?**

I don't think about it too much, actually. I collaborate with people who I think are interesting, and that's based on whether that person's pretending to be cool or is actually cool. I want to collaborate with someone who's real.

**When you're collaborating with someone, and they're not real, are you able to figure that out by the act of collaboration?**

There are definitely moments I can feel that, but it could come from my end as well. It gets kind of interesting when we both sense it.

**When you work with someone over a longer period of time, do you feel less like two separate people and more like one entity?**

It depends whether it's a band or improv. For improv, it actually makes no difference. Even with the people I've played with various times previously, it feels fresh every time.

**Do you have a preference?**

Both are quite different so I can't decide. But being in a band and keeping up requires more than just the music—you also need to negotiate the human part, like in a relationship, and so I learn a lot. That circulates back into the music, which will then be reflected on any improv sessions with that person as well.

**Improv feels like it's a pure process. You're figuring things out—negotiating and reacting—the whole time. When you're recording music, it becomes a final product, it's finished. Where in improv it seems open-ended.**

Perhaps it's the other way around. At the end of an improv set, it ends there. It's complete. Where, in a band, recording is actually not the end, and there's a lot of things to deal with afterwards outside of the music.

**We've been talking about process. Japan was hit by a catastrophic earthquake in 2011. I know you took a break from making work after that happened. How did your creative process change when you started up again?**

It changed drastically. When the earthquake happened, I stopped playing for a while and focused on social and political activities for a couple years to see if what I'd been doing was really necessary. I wanted to find out whether performance was necessary in life, or the idea of spending money to make art, thinking perhaps it's better to donate that money to the affected areas. These are common questions, but the situation forced me to reaffirm my path. Before the earthquake, I was ignorant and didn't really think about where my electricity was coming from. I thought I was connected with the earth, but realized I really wasn't. Many things were brought into sharp relief due to the earthquake.

**How did you get back into music after that?**

Sort of by just getting back to it and doing it over and over again. I had stopped actively playing during that time, but I was still involved in music by starting a festival. I was experimenting within myself.

**How did the festival come about?**

When the earthquake happened, it made me feel weird about the fact that everyone was blaming it on someone else. At the time, I didn't really know much about the nuclear issues and the politics around it, so I

couldn't say anything about it. But I've been doing music for a long time and understood the power of music, so I called up my artist friends and had a meeting to see what we could do. It turned out that they were also blaming it on someone else, and I felt devastated by that. Most people weren't able to admit to their ignorance and jumped straight to a conclusion. I thought it was important to first consciously understand the responsibility of our daily lives.

I decided to start a festival so people would be more conscious about making things themselves, and to gather the people who wanted to contribute something for Japan even though they maybe didn't necessarily know exactly what.

I thought we could be our own sun and produce our own energy. We initially wanted to do something as stupid as trying to power the "Tower of the Sun" monument ourselves, which was a symbol built for the Osaka Expo in 1970 that was first lit up using nuclear power. We ended up not doing that, but we had many absurd ideas like that and kept it vocal for about two years leading up to the festival.

The festival was basically built in the course of three months, but the most important part was to create this noise and show the process. One may not be in favor of our idea, but I wanted people to see it as a performance and show that someone is thinking about the energy, the Earth, and making an action. I also traveled across the country and initiated conversations with the locals to ask for their take on Japan, which were then shared on our website.

#### **Did organizing a festival feel improvisational? Or did it feel like a band?**

Yes! It really felt like a band, just like what we were doing with Afirampo. But a hierarchy started to build up, and it became political given the size of the organization. I hated this at the beginning because of my general negative attitude towards politics, but through this experience of organizing the festival, I really came to understand the inclinations from all angles and realized that they are all necessary. When we were doing the fundraising, I met a lot of interesting business owners and noticed that they were all probably too different to fit into a corporate society so they started their own businesses. I became optimistic when I realized that the society is perhaps composed of a group of people who built their own worlds because they couldn't blend in with the others.

#### **Do you have any desire to do more festivals?**

I'd like to do it again if the necessary time comes. Something like that comes with great passion in response to such an event. What I learned the most, was that while expressing my own thoughts, I was able to accept the differences from others. It sounds so ordinary, but in Japan, people would often feel denied when another opinion is presented in a conversation. Real collaborations could have synergy and lead to a third way, but most people don't know how to approach that.

#### **Do you see a band as a conversation in that sense?**

I definitely feel like we're connected as a band, and a great show is when we're completely connected to an audience, too. It becomes a whole.

#### **It seems like the fundamental thing that motivates your art-making is honesty.**

Yes, certainly. It's about being true to myself and handling the obstacles with that in mind. Complete honesty brings out real emotional conflicts. I think that's a good thing.

#### Five influences

1. mother
2. water
3. drums
4. sun
5. friends

#### Five things I appreciate about Japan

1. the feeling of gratitude in Japan
2. food
3. devotion
4. honesty (especially in Osaka)
5. people in Osaka are always looking for things they really want to do in life

Name

Pika☆

Vocation

Musician

Fact

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