

THE JAPAN TIMES

(3)

THE JAPAN TIMES • SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1999 15

ARTS

Americans remember the day that music died

By GARY GRAFF

DETROIT (Reuters) Forty years have passed, but Americans still can't forget the day the music died.

Bob Keane was driving on Los Angeles' famed Sunset Boulevard toward the offices of his Del-Fi Records when the devastating news came over his car radio.

"The DJ on my radio said, 'and now, the late, great Ritchie Valens,'" said Keane, who released Valens' records. The full news was even worse: rockers Buddy Holly and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson had been killed along with Valens in an Iowa plane crash about 1 a.m. on Feb. 3, 1959.

The crash's 40th anniversary is being remembered. The VH1 television network debuts a segment of its "Behind the Music" series dedicated to "The Day the Music Died" on Wednesday.

And a re-enactment of the rockers' last tour has been winding its way through the original route, finishing at the last stop, the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, which holds an annual concert in memory of the musicians.

Valens is best known for hit singles such as "Diana" and his adulterated recordings of the Mexican-influenced "La Bamba."

But Holly was the most established talent of the three and after death became a legend.

Born Charles Hardin Holley in Lubbock, Texas, he

emerged with his band the Crickets in 1957 and reeled off a string of hits such as "That'll Be the Day," "Peggy Sue," "Oh Boy!" "Maybe Baby" and "Rave On."

The bespectacled Holly and his fellow rockers were in the midst of the Winter Dance Party, a concert tour through the northern plains states made miserable by an underheated bus, a lack of sleep and no time to bathe or do laundry.

When the troupe hit the Surf Ballroom, Holly learned that it might be possible to lease a plane. For \$108 he could save himself another long bus ride and instead get some rest and maybe time for a long telephone chat with his wife, who was five weeks pregnant.

Holly was going to take his band mates the Crickets, Waylon Jennings and Tommy Allsup, but Richardson persuaded Jennings to give him his seat while Valens piloted Allsup until he agreed to a coin flip — which Valens won.

The Beechcraft Bonanza plane was discovered the following day, its debris strewn across a field about 17 miles northwest of the airport. An error by pilot Roger Peterson is thought to have caused the crash.

Holly's wife suffered a miscarriage two days after the disaster.

As Don McLean sang in his 1971 hit "American Pie," the crash was the day the music died.

Free tickets

The Tokyo National Museum in Ueno Park is offering 200 pairs of Japan Times reader tickets to a special exhibition of Eugène Delacroix's masterpiece "Liberty Leading the People," Feb. 26-March 28.

The French painting will be traveling from the Louvre in Paris to Japan for the first time, to commemorate the Year of France in Japan. The exhibition is part of an exchange program of national treasures concluded between the two governments. The wooden statue of Kudara Kannon, the Goddess of Mercy, from Horyu-ji Temple, in Nara, was shown at the Louvre in 1997, the Year of Japan in France.

Delacroix (1798-1863) was inspired by the revolution of 1830 to paint the goddess of

liberty leading people in revolt. To apply, write your name, address, age, occupation and telephone number on an official postcard addressed to: Delacroix, The Japan Times Section, Mizoguchi Dai-ichi Bldg., 4F, 4-1-1, Shinjuku 1-14-1, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0022. The application must be postmarked no later than Feb. 20. The winners will be notified by mail.

Sandra Luna (vo), Feb. 11, Kobe Bunka Hall, 2 p.m.; Feb. 12, Festival Hall, (06) 6291-2221, 8:30 p.m.; Feb. 12, 12 p.m.; Feb. 12, 8 p.m. Cypress Hill, Bay Side Jenny, Feb. 11, 7 p.m.; Feb. 12, 8 p.m.

Blue Cheer/Deviants, Club Quattro, Feb. 12, 12 p.m.

B.K. King, Osaka Blue Note, Feb. 9-10, 10 and 9:30 p.m.; Feb. 11, 9 and 8:30 p.m.

Beastie Boys, Osaka Jo Hall, Feb. 9, 8 p.m.

The Isley Brothers, Bay Side Jenny, (06) 6578-5640, 8 p.m.

Yumiko Sumigino Soprano Recital, Feb. 9, Kyoto Concert Lounge, (075) 711-2244, 7 p.m.; Feb. 10, Jyoti City Cultural Center, (077) 523-7106, 8 p.m.

Peking Opera, Bay Side Jenny, (06) 6578-5640, 8 p.m.

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By CATHERINE PAWASARAT

KYOTO — The upcoming solo exhibit of ceramic works by American John Dix is highly recommended for its successful blending of the Japanese pottery tradition and American ceramic craft.

While the shapes and natural wood-fired glazes of most of Dix's pieces unmistakably bear the influence of his 10 years of studying traditional Japanese pottery, they're also sturdy and practical, a quality rare to Japanese ceramics.

"When I came to Japan, I knew I didn't want to pursue the yaki traditions; I really wanted to find my own way. My work is based on what I learned here in Japan and elsewhere," says the Ashby-based Dix, and "elsewhere" is not just his native country but Greece and Israel too, where he lived and worked as a potter in his early 20s.

Dix did spend two years studying Bizen-yaki in Okayama Prefecture, the center for the style, and this influence is apparent in his work, which features various Bizen-fired effects like *awamori* (a round, unglazed area amid a natural wood-fired glaze) and *shibubiki* (a striped effect produced from burning straw on top of a piece before firing).

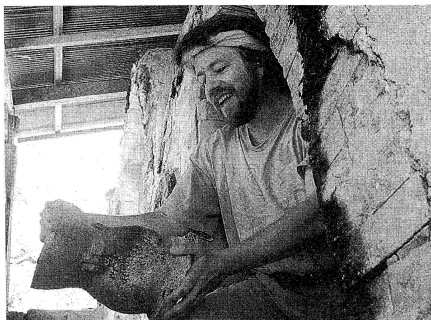
However, Dix's experimentation with techniques and forms keeps him from being tied to one tradition. "I loved studying Bizen, but I didn't want to get pigeonholed as a 'foreigner doing Bizen.' It gets a little tricky in Japan, with people always trying to put a label on things," he says with a sigh.

Yielding the best of both worlds, Dix's work is a pleasant surprise. Among standard *bizenware*, bowls and platters, pitchers and beer mugs, even a watering can, emanate *wabi* and *sabi*.

"The unglazed surface has a nice effect on beer foam. But the mug is a freer and take it out when you want a beer, and I think you will have one of the finest beer mugs in Japan," Dix says proudly, highlighting one of the lesser-known benefits of pottery.

Dix's ceramicist's more traditional pieces are not to be overlooked. His solid, wood-fired bowls are particularly appealing.

"I like to take the symmetry out of things. To give the traditional pieces more character, I wedge in



HOT STUFF — American potter John Dix emerges from his hand-built kiln in Hyogo Prefecture with a newly fired vessel. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN DIX

purities into the clay for some texture and grit."

A small portion of Dix's work is glazed with a salt firing, in which pieces are salted with a colored slip for a shiny colored effect.

"Salt firing is a technique developed in Germany 600 years ago or so. Bernard Leach introduced it to Japan, but it hasn't had a lot of exposure here," he explains. "I like working with it because I can use the slip to do wild, Jackson Pollock-like things (on my pots) with a brush."

One tradition that prevails in Dix's oeuvre is the natural wood-burning kiln. Dynamic splashes of burnt orange and dark brown recall the lick of flames. Glazebite rivulets of caramel, green and gray bear proof of ash melted at over 1,200 degrees. Dix fires some pieces twice for extra glossiness and accumulated effects.

"With the wood-fire kiln I let the fire and ash decorate the pot," he says. "I don't have a great idea how it will turn out. I just create all the optimal conditions and turn it over to the fire gods. It's a kind of controlled chaos, and there's this belief about the wood fire and serendipity make pieces greater, somehow, than what you could create on your own."

Dix made this process even more demanding by building his own kiln in Japan.

"It took a lot of work. The kiln had been a real puzzle. To get the wood to burn in the groundwork for the last 100 years," he says. "Now it's

which was a slope. So my idea was to dig a big hole and use the dirt to build up a slope. The following week we came back and we had a big pot! We had one absurd setback after another," he says with a laugh.

The tough work didn't with completion of the kiln. Wood firings are notoriously labor-intensive. The kiln must be continuously fed for over a week, allowing the people involved only minimal sleep.

It's all a gamble for one-of-a-kind firing effects that no human hand could create. "You have to make some sort of leap of faith that all this labor pays off," Dix says.

Indeed those years of dedicated labor by Dix and many of his friends — two years of weekends for construction and two years of initial firings are bearing fruit.

"Last month was the seventh time we'd fired in this kiln, and it was the first time we had control of the kiln, rather than it controlling us," he explains. "With my own kiln, for the first time I'm doing exactly the kind of work I want, not just working within the parameters of a *sensei's* work or order. It's incredibly liberating."

This is a big year for Dix. Though he had previously shown only in the Kobe area, his solo show in Kyoto will be followed by another solo show at Osaka's Hankyu department store in November.

"I've been having the groundwork for the last 10 years," he says. "Now it's

time to show my work to the general public."

John Dix's ceramic works, Feb. 19-20 at Hachigori, (075) 561-0072, in Kyoto's Higashiyama Ward.



ORIGINAL WOOD-FIRED PIECE, by John Dix

Outpouring of ceramic spirit

KYOTO — Hachigori is a one-of-a-kind ceramics gallery, both familiar with and fond of the form as both craft and art.

"Plus, of course, there's a connection between sake and ceramics," Takami says, gesturing toward the numerous *sakazuki* (sake decanters), *sakazuki* (shallow sake cups), and *guinomi* (sake cups) that adorn the gallery's spacious shelves.

About 80 percent of the artists who exhibit at Hachigori are early in their careers. "Young artists" don't have much money to rent gallery space, so we thought we'd create this gallery as a kind of service to them," says Michiko, explaining that in lieu of gallery rental the Ogaki's receive a small commission on works sold.

Because so many of the artists on display are not yet well known, bargains may be had here, though there's also a wide range of prices.

"People want to use nice things in their lives, but if something is too expensive, a person can't afford it; or, they can't afford it, they may

be too afraid to use it. That's the thing about ceramics: They break if you drop them," Takami says matter-of-factly.

Many of Hachigori's young exhibitors have already established a name for themselves in their field. Barring ceramics-shattering accidents, there's a fair chance that the value of a well-chosen piece may rise as the young potters' reputations grow.

Besides sake, ceramics also have, of course, a strong connection to the world of Japanese tea. An additional surprise at Hachigori is its *chashitsu* (tea room), along one side of the gallery space. Here *chano-yu* lessons are offered several times a week.

"Oh yes, and next month we're going to open a ceramics studio upstairs," Michiko mentions casually. With classes — including access to potters' wheels and a kiln — available there several times a week, this might be the only such facility in central Kyoto. (C-2)

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WHAT'S ON NEXT WEEK

Continued from PAGE 14

seppu Liberto (cond.), The Symphony Hall, 2 p.m., featuring Gregorian chants.

Biswalo Shukunai (Gala) Orchestra, Hroyaki Inaki (cond.), Hamamatsu Civic Hall, Yashiki Miyamoto (perc), Biwako Hall, (077) 523-7106, 8 p.m., Symphony No. 1 in D minor, "Der Titan" (Mahler), etc.

Feb. 8 Snuff, Club Quattro, (06) 6281-8181, 7 p.m.

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