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Japan Screen Topics

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UP, UP AND AWAY !

59 feet 1 min. 38 sec.

1. (SNOWY PLAIN, DEFLATED BALLOONS) From the days of Daedalus, man has loved to fly.

And this great love of flying brought 37 young balloon teams to the snowy plain at Ojiya, in Niigata prefecture.

For the seventh year running, entries from all over Japan converged on this small town in the snow belt--to test their ballooning techniques.

2. (BALLOONS BEING FILLED, TEAMS) The first recorded balloon flight was made exactly two hundred years ago -- in 1783 in Paris. The basic design and concept of balloons hasn't changed much since then, although there have been improvements in terms of safety and more efficient methods of inflating them.

The Ojiya balloon meet is the largest of its kind in the country. And the sight of this large flotilla -- 37 up there at once --- is a rather rare spectacle.

3. (SHOT FROM MID-AIR) The winds were far stronger than normally preferred for flying --- but that didn't keep the intrepid voyagers on the ground.

Among the scheduled events was a bean-bag throw from the air, but the winds were whipping around so much that it was cancelled.

If the balloonists had trouble staying on course, they all said later they had a great if choppy ride.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAT

95 feet 2 min 39 sec.

1. (CLUB, GIRLS, INSTRUMENT) They're called "The Cosmos", a group of three young girls who produce some pretty original sounds. Their instruments; electronic synthesizers.

Right now they're making waves on the Tokyo music scene, winning a lot of fans in the process.

They're the first all-girl instrumental band in Japan.

2. (BAND MEMBERS) There's 20 year-old Keiko Doi, the leader of the band.

And Yumiko Tanaka, 22 years old.

And Roman Kaieda, also 22.

All three of the girls compose tunes, and most of the group's repertoire are made up of these original songs.

3. (REHEARSAL, SYNTHESIZERS) The synthesizers they play are, simply explained, electronic equipment that generate, modify, and blend various musical sounds.

Synthesizers come in many sizes and types. Miss Tanaka favors one that looks a lot like a regular organ, but when played it produces the sounds of 32 different instruments.

Another type of synthesizer looks like a cross between a harmonica and a miniature piano keyboard.

Altogether they can perform on 14 synthesizers and keyboards all at the same time.

The Cosmos team have been making music together since 1972, and so far they've cut two hit records.

LAST MASTER OF A LIVING ART

80 feet 2 min. 14 sec.

1. (KABUKI THEATRE, PERFORMANCE) The Kabuki Theatre in Tokyo's Ginza district is a treasurehouse of Japanese traditional culture.

The play is the popular "Sukeroku", story of the secret lover of the famous courtesan Agemaki.

Sukeroku is played by Kataoka Takao, and the role of Agemaki is created by Bando Tamasaburo, the premier female impersonator of the Kabuki theatre.

2. (KABUKI-E) One beloved feature of the Kabuki world is the hand-painted wooden panels outside the theatre, called KABUKI-E, advertisements for what's on at the Kabuki.

. They're only found in one place on earth, fitted into the front facade of the Ginza marquee. They are also unique and rare since printed posters are fast taking the place of Kabuki-e as advertisements.

3. (BRUSHES, PICTURES, ARTIST) Today, only one person in the world produces Kabuki-e. Her name: Seiko Torii, the 7th and last in a long line of Kabuki-e artists. She is the only woman to rise to the heights of this art form.

Miss Torii's father taught her all she knows. There were no boys in her family, so her father trained her as his successor.

The hardest part about the Kabuki-e painting technique is the mixing of colors.

The sad fact is that unless miss Torii can train someone to succeed her, she will be, indeed, the last of an illustrious line.

GRADUATION SEASON

106 feet 2 min. 57 sec.

1. (KINDERGARTEN) The month of March, and all over Japan, young people take part in a rite of transition.

Even little kindergarten kids, like at Meitoku Kindergarten in the heart of Tokyo.

With great pomp and solemnity, these five year-olds go up and receive their diplomas.

There's a slight difference, though. Meitoku Kindergarten belongs to the famous Zojoji Temple -- and every year the bishop comes to bless the little graduates.

2. (SEIJO JUNIOR) This is a more conventional sort of commencement ceremony.

One by one the students' names are called, and each of them stand up from within the audience.

The valedictorian, representing the entire class, goes on stage to receive the stack of diplomas.

3. (MUSIC COLLEGE) The graduation ritual at Tokyo Music College-- and the students are awarded with teaching certificates.

As part of the program, especially talented students are asked to perform on stage.

4. (FASHION INSTITUTE) At the Bunka College of Fashion, budding designers get to show off their creations -- and do their turn on the catwalk as models.

They put on as good a show as the most famous Paris or New York design house!

And after the show, the students get their diplomas.

5. (NIHON UNIVERSITY) The most typical of all are the commencement exercises are those at Japan's largest institution of higher learning Nihon University -- held at Tokyo's Budokan Hall.

This March, over 10,000 students completed their University course, contributing a huge new crop of graduates to society.