JA-PUN, cont. from pg. 1

"OK, put it in!" Cal Grosshuesch, Ja-Pun director, has spoken, bestowed the coveted prize, minimal discussion follows, and a new bit is in the show. Ja-Pun is updated and all mental scripts are re-addled to include the newest bit.

Ja-Pun began 25 years ago when Department of Defense Education Activity teachers, Daniel and Alice Owen, and Walter Fritz, began singing new lyrics to old show tune standards during a ski trip to Shiga Heights. The friends sang songs one after another, blissfully unaware that 25 years of show business success waited down the road. It wasn't until they came up with the title "Ja-Pun" that things really began to jell. Many of the songs from that first brainstorming session are still in the show today and still getting laughs as part of the "Fuji Medley." Timeless classics like "*She'll be climbing up Mount Fuji when she comes*" or "*When you climb Fuji-San*" are still audience favorites. The latter song is sung to the tune of "*You'll Never Walk Alone*" from Rogers and Hammerstein's musical classic, "*Carousel.*" The song is sung in eight-part harmony by a cast of seven. Go figure, but don't try too hard. Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein still haven't figured it out. The two famous composers gave up trying when they started decomposing. Once the show was written, Daniel asked Joann Soltes to play piano and Winky White and Eva Johnston to join the troupe for what they thought would be one show at the Officer's Club in September of 1986. Little did they know...

White is the show's only current original cast member. He is a whirl of Japanese trivia and comic energy onstage. He has amassed 25 years of knowledge about what amuses *gaijin* audiences in Japan and he sprinkles it liberally throughout the show to the delight of the audience. White, who has been performing Ja-Pun for the lion's share of his adult life says of the show, "My favorite part is seeing the smiling faces of the audience as they relate to the tales we tell." White says 78 different performers have delivered more that 180 shows in the past 25 years. If pushed, he probably has a tale to tell about each show and every performer. Some of his favorite performers, shows and moments include the time Grosshuesch almost lost his sumo outfit while performing in Atsugi, or watching Dana Reiss perform her solos, or the time they had to dress in a parking lot for a show in Negishi. Just ask him.

One of his most treasured memories over the years past is his time spent with the show's only member who has never had a speaking part, Akemi White. Winky's Japanese wife has been a source of support and comfort over the years for everyone who has had anything to do with Ja-Pun. Thank you, Akemi, for all your hard work from, in absentia, all 78 former cast members, and the current cast of motley fools.

The current cast is a very talented, yet quirky crew of seasoned performers, each with lives and talents only hinted at by their onstage personae. This cast includes Bill Spearman, a network technician at Fleet and Industrial Supply Center, Yokosuka, who is easily the most physically attractive member of the troupe. He has been a cast member for 17 years. His six-foot muscular frame and powerful square jaw make it hard for even the most discerning of our female audience members to argue. Those that would argue are quickly won over when he opens his mouth and a singing voice smooth as velvet butter fills the room. If you want to make him smile, try to beat him at musical comedy trivial pursuit with your absurdly inadequate knowledge of musical theater trivia.

Cast members from a 1988 production of Ja-Pun pose for a group photo. Ja-Pun began 25 years ago when DoDEA teachers Daniel and Alice Owen, and Walter Fritz began singing new lyrics to old show tune standards during a ski trip.

Official Ja-Pun file photo

Grossheusch, is a fourth-grade teacher at The Sullivans Elementary School. He has been a cast member and director of the Ja-Pun production since 1995. Grossheusch enjoys the former job because he loves seeing the energy and humor a new member brings to the show. He likens the latter job to "herding a bunch of cats." He enjoys performing, loves poetry and can be found golfing every weekend. If you want to bring a smile to his face, ask him about his daughter, the captain of the cheerleading squad. But, be sure you have plenty of time, long winded, is only a short word for him.

Stacey Van Allen is the ingénue of the troupe with a charismatic manner and a mellifluous voice that just flows over the fourth wall and bathes audience members throughout the Kanto Plain. If you are not in love with her by the end of the first act, look around, you can be sure that many of your neighbors are. Her womanly curves and effortless sensuality make women notice what she is wearing and make men just notice her. In her day job, Stacey teaches English at a Japanese preschool. She is actually one of two members of the show who was previously in Ja-Pun, went back to America, and has returned for a second run.

Julie Hess is a tall cool drink of water who lights up the stage in several numbers. She is so tall she makes short men want to slow dance. She works as a librarian at The Sullivans Elementary and Ja-Pun is her first foray into "Life upon the Wicked Stage." She has a charming lopsided grin and smiling eyes which make it easy to imagine why she is popular with students at Sullivans who love to hear her read aloud. She is a former airman who looks forward one day to retiring in her home in Hawaii, which in her words, "the renters are paying for."

Jenny Stonebarger, the troupe's newest member, is one of those mythical women of the millennium that we read about in magazines but seldom find in real life. Jenny is a mild- mannered mother who leads her church band on guitar and vocals and runs marathons in Tokyo. She is an avid reader, a neurotic housekeeper and a self confessed Starbucks addict who, oh yeah, I almost forgot, works full time as an educational technologist at Ikego Elementary School and raises two pre-adolescent children in her spare time. Cosmo, if they knew her, would be proud, but probably not as proud as her husband Phil.

Phil Stonebarger, the musical genius on the piano, is married to Jenny and still wonders how he fooled her into marrying him and stays married for 20 years now. He teaches beginning band at Yokosuka Middle School during the day and enjoys his life with his former student and their two children. Wait a minute, former student? Oh, that's how he fooled her. Phil is also an avid college football fan and will hold court with authority over any college football conversation until the most dedicated fans keel over in supplication.

For more information about upcoming Ja-Pun shows, contact Julie Hess at talljewlz@hotmail.com or visit the High Energy Unlimited Productions website at www.highenergyunlimited.com. Better yet, ask your local club manager to bring Ja-Pun to your community. It's a win-win and will mean less travel time for you. And keep your fingers crossed, maybe this farewell tour, in true Rolling Stone fashion, will set the stage for a comeback tour, or an eventual reunion tour, or maybe, even a nostalgic flashback tour.

The current Ja-Pun musical comedy cast are (back row, left to right) Phil Stonebarger, Julie Hess, Calvin Grossheusch and Bill Spearman. (Front row, left to right) Winky White, Steve Parker, Jenny Stonebarger and Stacey Van Allen.

Photo by Akemi White

Safe start to fiscal year 2011 for Navy

By April Phillips,
Naval Safety Center Public Affairs

After completing fiscal year (FY) 2010 with record low numbers of fatalities and Class "A" mishaps in many categories, the Navy enjoyed a solid start to FY11 in October and November 2010.

"Clearly, personal accountability is a big reason the mishap numbers are improving," said Rear Adm. Arthur J. Johnson, commander, Naval Safety Center. "Whether it's the risk of driving while fatigued, riding a motorcycle too fast or over-extending themselves during off-duty activities, Sailors realize that they have choices, and they are choosing to manage those risks. They are accountable to themselves and their shipmates, and they're making decisions that lead to success."

For the entire Navy, there has been one fatality in FY11. A Sailor lost his life in a physical training-related incident in late October 2010. This time last year, the Navy had endured three on-duty fatalities, five personal motor vehicle fatalities and one off-duty recreation fatality.

With the approaching holidays there is the potential for increased mishaps, when Sailors are more likely to travel long distances to visit family members and friends. There are tools available to reduce these risks, such as the Travel Risk Planning System (TRiPS). TRiPS is an online risk survey accessed through Navy Knowledge Online. More than 200,000 TRiPS surveys have been completed to date, and there hasn't been a single fatality for any Sailor traveling on an approved assessment.

TRiPS also enables personal counseling, by sending the survey to the Sailor's direct supervisor. That way, the two can discuss the planned travel and work together to make adjustments that will make the drive safer. These adjustments include allowing the Sailor to leave work a little early to get started on the drive during daylight hours.

Managing risk appropriately is the best way to eliminate preventable mishaps, said Johnson. He also believes that Sailors across the fleet deserve credit for the steps they've taken to make the Navy a safer place. He said these improving trends are more than just a statistic.