THE TRUE LAST SAMURAI

ROME KANDA

INTERVIEW BY DENNIS A. AMITH

"I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW" PHOTOGRAPHY BY CRAIG SJODIN. COURTESY OF AMERICAN BROADCASTING COMPANIES, INC. AND HEADSHOT IMAGES COURTESY OF JCL MGMT.
PHOTO: “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW” featuring Rome Kanda as the host of the unscripted reality/game show known as “MAJIDE” which takes an eye-opening, behind-the-scenes look at 10 Americans - many of whom have never traveled outside the United States - who are whisked away to Japan and compete in the ultimate game show... with hilarious results. The final winner would take home $250,000. (ABC/CRAIG SJODIN)
INTERVIEW WITH ROME KANDA

J!-ENT's Dennis A. Amith interviews Rome Kanda.

previous articles

Visit www.j-entonline.com for the following interviews and articles currently available on J!-ENT. Click on a cover to access a previous article/interview.

contents

Copyright © 2008 by J!-ENT. www.j-entonline.com. All Rights Reserved. All "I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW" photography is copyrighted by American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. J!-ENT was granted permission by ABC to use the following images for this interview. Rome Kanda individual photos courtesy of JCL Management.
Rome Kanda — the true last samurai.

The talent from Japan who was last seen in ABC’s hit reality/game show series “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW” and also on “UNBEATABLE BANZUKE” currently airing on G4 TV.

But Rome Kanda is not just an entertainer, he is also a descendent of both samurai and Okinawan royalty and the only performer in the US carrying the Yamato spirit — the true spirit of Japanese soul.

What is the true spirit of Japanese soul? According to Kanda, it is the backbone of Japanese culture and tradition and the substance of the Samurai spirit.

A spirit with which a samurai would never hesitate for a moment to risk his life honorably for his master and his highest purpose, will, wish, desire and everything that is higher than life which can be described in one Japanese word known as “kokorozashi”.

For Rome Kanda, his kokorozashi is to help Japanese entertainers in Hollywood and that would be his life-calling.

And his talent can be found in a wide range of projects such as a leading role in the 2000 Grammy Award winning New Jersey Symphony Orchestra’s “Petrushka”, the popular Takeshi Kitano film “SONATINE” and recently finished shooting a part in the upcoming film “THE INFORMANT” starring Matt Damon.

Rome is also involved in stand-up comedy and involved in teaching techniques of Japanese tradition and martial arts which include Karate, Kendo, Akido, Noh, Kabuki, Kyogen, Japanese tea ceremony and calligraphy.

Whether he is on stage, on film or teaching, his samurai spirit is always with him and gives him the motivation in fulfilling his kokorozashi.

J!-ENT: Back in high school, what kind of student were you? Were you the cool or popular guy, the comedian, the smart kid in class?
ROME: My schools were all very strict with structured training in all courses and Martial Arts, but I was always the “class comedian”. I did my best to make all the students laugh and I did. The instructors were not very entertained though.

J!-ENT: Growing up... What did you imagine yourself being as an adult? A performer, actor, doctor, teacher?
ROME: For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a Comedian and Comedy Actor.
ROME: I was always looking to entertain. I was a fashion model and TV host while in University and while doing this, I knew that my career would be in entertainment.

J!-ENT: Let’s talk about your career. You were in the film “SONATINE” directed by Takeshi Kitano. What was the experience like for you to be a part of a Kitano film and even get into a physical role with his character?

ROME: Takeshi Kitano is a genius. I was honored and excited to do anything in which he was involved. He is very shy but his mind is always going like a computer... 24/7... Coming up with great ideas to put on the screen and how to make his actors shine... I was glad to be a part of that.

J!-ENT: You’ve appeared in action films and of course many people recognize you from “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW” and “UNBEATABLE BANZUKE” but what many people may not know is that you’re also a comedian. When you first performed in the US in front of an audience doing stand up, how was that experience?

ROME: The first time I was in front of an audience it was truly an experience. It was at the Boston Comedy Club in New York City. There was an all Black line-up and all Black audience. Yes, I was a bit nervous but when I went out there, the audience loved me... I was an instant hit.

J!-ENT: You’ve also worked in theater. I know actors and actresses who started out in doing a lot theater but once they started doing more film and television work, they stop. Do you still get involved with theater work?

ROME: Right now I am concentrating on film and television, but if the right project came along, I would do it in a heartbeat.

J!-ENT: Let’s talk about “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW”. I have to admit that I was surprised to hear about the show when it was first being promoted on ABC. What did you think about the concept of such a show being shown in America?

ROME: I think it was a great idea. Not only was it a fun game show, the best thing was to show Japanese culture to the American audience. That was most important to me.

J!-ENT: I watch a lot of Japanese programs but the identity you brought as host for “MAJIDE” was a host with a lot of energy, enthusiasm and you have your hosts in Japan such Takeshi Kitano, 99, Tunnels, etc. For “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW”, before going into production, how was the persona of that TV host planned and were there any concerns of how it would go over in the US?

ROME: I lived in the US for many years so I knew what American audiences liked and what they looked for in an entertainer and host. I knew they would like my character in “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW”.

PHOTO: Rome Kanda and the game show competitors for ABC’s “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW” sporting their “majie” hand sign. Photo by Craig Sjodin, courtesy of American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.
J!-ENT: I have to admit that the behavior of some individuals on the show really made interesting TV and some, more embarrassing than others. But I was wondering what thoughts went through your mind when you watched the episodes of the group getting adjusted to the Japanese culture and the food?

ROME: I didn’t know how they would do adjusting to the Japanese Culture but I was surprised at how easy they adjusted. For example, Belinda was amazing, wanting to learn everything she could. She was so excited about being at the Shinto Shrine. I was very happy to see her wanting to see everything.

J!-ENT: Truthfully, who was your pick from the beginning to win the final competition?

ROME: Donnell was a strong physical competitor and it seemed like he had an edge to maybe go all the way, but I was pleased to see everyone come on strong in their own way.

J!-ENT: For me the biggest surprise was the finale where typically the runner up receives some consolation prize for second place but when Justin Wood won and Donnell Pitman was shown in tears, I was like... “no cash prize for second place?” Were there any surprises for you in the season finale?

ROME: The biggest surprise for me was when the families of the finalists flew in for the finale. I was so happy to see them... Almost as much as their children were.

J!-ENT: Does it amaze you or even surprise you that there are so many people around the world so interested in Japanese pop culture? From the shows, the anime, the video games and even the music...

ROME: Yes... I knew the popularity was big in the US but as I see shows in other countries, I was surprised and very happy to see Japanese Culture and shows performing well.

J!-ENT: I remember reading in the Daily Yomiuri that there was a documentary being filmed in Japan about you and the show. I’m curious how the Japanese felt about Americans taking part in a Japanese game show?

ROME: Most game shows in Japan have comedians as the performers. Japanese audience are usually very reserved, very quiet. But they were happy to see how physical and expressive the American performers were. I think they liked them very much and are looking forward to seeing more.

J!-ENT: Now, I’m sure many people want to know if there will be a chance of the show returning again?

ROME: I hope so... I had a great time doing it and look forward to doing it again!

J!-ENT: OK, let’s get away from the game show and learn more of your other talents. I know that you teach...
It's hard to believe. Here's a 16th-century Baroque master whose bold naturalistic painting style first created a sensation, then a movement. A guy whose life was filled with the turbulence and excess of more than a dozen Mario Puzo novels. This guy who, while troubled, ultimately found redemption and immortality in his art. But does the average kid on the street even know who Caravaggio is? Fuhgedaboudit.

Too bad. Especially when you consider how much our children can learn from the conflicted life of a great artist like Michelangelo Caravaggio.

He grew up in less than ideal circumstances. Most of his family died in the plague. Much of his youth was misspent on the mean streets of Rome. And as a young artist he struggled for years to make a living. He was angry. Yet the angry contrast between light and darkness in his work is the very reason why it now hangs in countless museums around the world.

If nothing else, it's a case study of the importance of having art as an outlet. Unfortunately, one we're fast removing from our kids' lives.

If the arts are indeed a vital part of your child's education (and studies show you believe they are), then you should demand his or her fair share. To find out how to help or for more information about the benefits of arts education, please visit us at AmericansForTheArts.org. Because as Caravaggio would tell you, life without art is torture.

A self-portrait of Caravaggio as Bacchus. Honestly, he wouldn't last 10 minutes on The Sopranos.

It's not enough art in our schools.

NO WONDER PEOPLE THINK CARAVAGGIO IS A GUY ON THE SOPRANOS.

ART. ASK FOR MORE.

For more information about the importance of arts education, contact www.AmericansForTheArts.org.
samurai style sword fighting techniques that you base off of different kinds of martial arts. Did you train in martial arts and also how long have you studied samurai fighting techniques?
ROME: I started studying in school. I studied all forms of Japanese Martial Arts from Kendo to Judo to Karate. I also studied and trained for over 30 years.

J!-ENT: If you look at your career when you first started out and where you are today, what has been the biggest lesson that you’ve learned so far in the business?
ROME: Probably the biggest lesson was to not expect things until you finally see them in person. I worked on a big motion picture for many weeks only to discover they cut all my scenes. So, when the final film came out, I was nowhere to be seen. I always do my best in everything I do but never have high expectations until I see the final product.

J!-ENT: I read in your profile that you went on a trip to London and you were an avid fan of British rock groups such as the Clash and the Smiths. Curious... What is your favorite rock song of all time? And what kind of music do you listen to today?
ROME: “Beast of Burden” by the Rolling Stones is my all time favorite but I love all kinds of music. Jazz, Rock and Roll, Classical... If the music is done well, I like it.

J!-ENT: One thing I read in your biography is that when you were an exchange student, you lived in Iowa. I found that interesting because back in college, many of my Japanese friends who were exchange students all came from Iowa before moving to California. How was the Iowa experience for you back then as a student?
ROME: I loved my experience in Iowa. Absolutely the nicest people in the world there. Everyone greets you on the street with a hello. So different from any big city. I went to Church every Sunday and met the nicest people. I even played baseball where they shot “Field of Dreams”. It was a very pleasant place.

J!-ENT: If you had one word to describe yourself, what word would that be and why?
ROME: Spiritual... I have always considered myself that way above anything else.

J!-ENT: If I were to look into your DVD player, what movie or DVD would I catch you watching at this time?
ROME: “THELASTSAMURAI”

J!-ENT: In every J!-ENT interview, we like to do a little world play where we give you five words and you give us your definitions of those words:

a. Love
ROME: Eternal truth

b. Success
ROME: Life satisfaction

c. Sex
ROME: Love

d. Kokorozashi
ROME: Determination of the goal of life

e. The Last Samurai
ROME: Wonderful Film! It opened up the Samurai culture to America and the rest of world.

J!-ENT: Are there any current projects that you are currently working on at this time? Or any upcoming performances that you would like your fans to know about at this time?
ROME: I just finished “THE INFORMANT” with Matt Damon, directed by Steven Soderbergh. That will be out in 2009. I have a few more projects lined up but I can’t talk about them now.

J!-ENT: What final words would you like to say to your fans?
ROME: Thank you for your great support and I hope you’ll see me next season on “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW”. ■

For more information on Rome Kanda, please visit his website at:

http://www.romekanda.com
“I always do my best in everything I do, but never have high expectations until I see the final product.”
— Rome Kanda
Dennis A. Amith, is also known to Japanese and Asian pop culture fans as “KNDY”. Dennis is the owner of the multi-disciplinary communications and design business, nt2099 media and entertainment and founder of Japanese and Asian entertainment and pop culture website, J!-ENT. Graduating from California State University, Fresno with an educational background in mass communications and journalism, Dennis A. Amith has interviewed and featured many talents and industry professionals in the United States, Europe and Asia and is recognized for promoting the entertainment and pop culture of different countries to an International audience. He is currently residing in California.

J!-ENT, an entertainment and pop culture website is celebrating its 15th Year Anniversary in 2008. www.j-entonline.com

Dennis A. Amith, is also known to Japanese and Asian pop culture fans as “KNDY”. Dennis is the owner of the multi-disciplinary communications and design business, nt2099 media and entertainment and founder of Japanese and Asian entertainment and pop culture website, J!-ENT. Graduating from California State University, Fresno with an educational background in mass communications and journalism, Dennis A. Amith has interviewed and featured many talents and industry professionals in the United States, Europe and Asia and is recognized for promoting the entertainment and pop culture of different countries to an International audience. He is currently residing in California.

WATCH “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW” ON ABC.COM.

Watch full episodes of “I SURVIVED A JAPANESE GAME SHOW” on abc.com. Click on the image above to access the shows online.
Amanda Geiger bought these sunglasses to wear on spring break. She wore them only once before she was killed by a drunk driver.

**Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk.**