

A Dragon Ball Z Museum Powers Up!

By DEREK PADULA

Mike Nilsen holds the Guinness World Record for the "largest collection of Dragon Ball memorabilia" in existence, and he plans to display it around the world in a traveling museum-based exhibit.

Mike's collection of over 5,000 collectibles earned him the Guinness World Record in January of 2007, and it has yet to be beat. He has items from all over the world—a testament to the multi-million dollar financial success of the Dragon Ball™ series.

His collected works of Dragon Ball toys, posters, DVD's, action figures, playing cards, animation, and rare items such as a Master Roshi-shaped tissue dispenser, are all held in a safe house near his home in Duluth, Minnesota—insured by American Collectors Insurance Inc. But, perhaps it won't stay there for too much longer.

He believes that thanks to the global success of the "Dragon Ball" licensed Japanese comic and cartoon, the interest in a themed exhibit focusing entirely on Dragon Ball-related merchandise would do well. He has called this exhibit the Dragon Ball Museum and created a website for it at <http://www.DragonBallMuseum.com>

"I figured I should create a children's exhibit so that Dragon Ball fans everywhere could see and enjoy its popularity."

But his vision goes beyond promotion of the comic and show. Mike says, "First, I want to commemorate the Dragon Ball trilogy, so future generations can experience this amazing legend. Second, I want to inspire people to live a healthy lifestyle by maintaining a nutritional diet, participating in physical activity, and pursuing a higher education. All topics interconnected in the Dragon



GLOBAL PHENOMENA: Characters from the popular series of Dragonball Z. BIRD STUDIO/ TOEI ANIMATION CO./ FUNIMATION

Ball world!" He feels that, "By using a popular brand, children will have a better chance of understanding the educational information."

DRAGON BALL — A MYSTICAL ADVENTURE

The "Dragon Ball" series is a lengthy soap-opera-like story of martial artists on their adventures in search of the mysterious dragon balls, seven magical orbs that, when collected, will call forth an immortal dragon capable of granting any wish.

The story follows Son Goku, an innocent and pure child who matures into a warrior of peace, capable of

saving entire planets with his martial arts powers. "Dragon Ball" consists of three parts and is well known throughout Japan. Son Goku is a recognizable character and is arguably considered to be the Japanese equivalent of Superman.

"Dragon Ball" originated in 1985 as a slapstick martial arts comic created by the famous, Akira Toriyama. His comic was aimed at young boys and inspired by Jackie Chan's Hong Kong films, Western Hollywood action films like "Alien" (1979) and "Terminator" (1984), and Japanese classics like "Godzilla" (1954 to present). Today Akira Toriyama is considered a

legend in the industry and respected in the same way that Hollywood treats its notable directors.

The entire "Dragon Ball" series spans 519 comic book chapters, 508 episodes, 17 theatrically released animated films, and 4 TV specials. The comic book alone has sold over 260 million copies. And a newly remastered and abridged version of the second part of the trilogy currently airs in Japan, titled "Dragon Ball Kai." The first episode earned a viewer rating percentage of 11.3, at third place for primetime animated lineups.

Why is "Dragon Ball" so popular? Mike feels that "The story and

characters are so well developed it pushes your imagination and challenges your creativity. The series also teaches you valuable characteristics like: trustworthiness, teamwork, loyalty, honor, and hope."

When "Dragon Ball Evolution," the Hollywood adaptation of the "Dragon Ball" series, was released in Duluth on April 10, 2009, their local theater held an opening night celebration. Mike's collection took center stage in the form of an organized exhibit. He would like to repeat the success of this exhibit throughout North America and eventually Japan, where the series originates.

"Dragon Ball fans range from children to adults. My exhibit will appeal to every generation ... and there will be subjects that will impress the best of critics."

A MUSEUM EXHIBIT IN THE MAKING Mike says, "I started collecting Dragon Ball memorabilia in 1996. It wasn't that popular in the United States until about that time. When I first took interest in the series nobody really knew what the show was about."

In the early-to-mid 1990's, the episodes were still seen primarily in Japanese tapes with English subtitles. But soon afterward, FUNimation Inc. purchased the rights to the series and dubbed the episodes in English. Mike says, "The series took off; its popularity in the U.S. grew immediately."

Dragon Ball's global success has generated revenues in the hundreds of millions for international distributors such as FUNimation Inc. (the North American distributor), netting the company \$32 million dollars in fiscal year 2008, or 46% of their revenue, ending March 31, 2009.

Dragon Ball licensed video game developer, ATARI Inc., financially failed in nearly every aspect of their business except the Dragon Ball franchise, which accounted for 49.1% of their publishing net product revenues in fiscal year 2008—almost single handedly enabling them to turn a profit. Essentially half of all the money ATARI Inc. made was because of Dragon Ball games.

To date there have been 65 games released under the Dragon Ball license across multiple generations of consoles, developers, and distributors. The video game distribution license is currently held by NAMCO Bandai Games America Inc. More games are in production, including "Dragon Ball Raging Blast" for the Microsoft Xbox 360 and Sony Playstation 3, developed by SPIKE and set to be released on November 10, 2009.



SUPER SAIYAN: Son Goku as a young child. COURTESY OF NAMCO BANDAI GAMES AMERICA INC.

Currently, Mike is in discussions with the American and Japanese license holders (TOEI Animation) for the rights to produce a legally approved Dragon Ball museum exhibit. He says, "Once a license agreement is constructed, the project will be in full force. Fundraising and awareness will be the main topics, and once we hit our financial goal, the exhibit will then be created."

Any museum can host the exhibit and he feels that it would also "... be a great idea to take the exhibit to Japan, China, and possibly Europe!" If it reached Japan and Dragon Ball's creator Akira Toriyama heard of the exhibit, Mike hopes that Toriyama would say, "It's about time! What a great idea. A place where fans from across the world can remember and new generations can experience the world of Dragon Ball."

USING THE DRAGON RADAR

From his website Mike also provides a scouting service to find unique Dragon Ball products. He says, "I have about 14 years of experience in collecting Dragon Ball related items and ... An authentic Dragon Ball item may be worth anywhere from \$10 - \$5,000 depending on the rareness."

In addition, he has plans to create his own line of Dragon Ball related products. He says, "It has taken seven years, countless hours, tens of thousands of dollars to develop my product line for the public to enjoy. I guarantee that you will not be disappointed." Unfortunately due to legal issues he could not disclose the nature of the product line at this time.

Mike is currently seeking funding for the Dragon Ball Museum and would like to invite visitors to his website at <http://www.DragonBallMuseum.com>, where they can find more information about the project and follow the exhibits' development on his blog.

Derek Padula is an expert on Dragon Ball and a contributor to the English Epoch Times. He is writing a book about Dragon Ball titled "The Dao of Dragon Ball." More information about Dragon Ball, its history, financial success, and impact across the world, as well as its social connections to Japanese culture and Chinese legends can be found at <http://www.TheDaoOfDragonBall.com>

Love Stories in the Big Apple

'New York, I Love You': a collaboration of emerging writers and directors

LOVE STORIES CONTINUED ON C2 From an illusory encounter in an eastside hotel, an elderly couple in Coney Island, new lovers reluctantly reuniting in the village, or an artist and his star-crossed muse from Chinatown; we become voyeurs, like passengers on a subway, witnessing the fantasies that are played out with surprising outcomes and the sometimes quirky, tender, and ultimately endearingly human connections happening constantly in the electric city.

Benbihi explained the necessity to be flexible and focused during the logistical challenges of this well orchestrated and complicated production.

The rules for the production and

post-production stage were that the director and crew could only shoot for two days. The segment was edited for seven days with a chosen editor, as a new director and cast shot their piece. There would be no fades to black at the end or beginning of any segment.

Also, the production designer, costume designer, and all below line crew were consistent throughout the eight-week shoot.

"It remains an ambitious concept for which there is no real precedent and one that is still full of hurdles and challenges," acknowledges Benbihi, "but its something that was very exciting to the filmmakers we approached and is becoming a reality."

Elements of sheer beauty are especially notable in Shekhar Kapur's haunting piece, starring a luminous Julie Christy. Natalie Portman is starring in one of the vignettes, and also brilliantly writes and directs a segment with fresh vision and candid charm.

Additionally, the talent in this all-star cast include: Andy Garcia, Orlando Bloom, Cloris Leachman, James Caan, John Hurt, and Maggie Q, among many more.

"New York, I Love You" is the second in a series of films Benbihi calls; "Cities Of Love" that started with his home, Paris, when he produced the well received 'Paris Je T'aime'.

"My idea was always to make a



MULTI-TALENTED: Natalie Portman stars in a segment and also writes and directs a vignette in the new film, "New York, I Love You." VIVENDI ENTERTAINMENT

collection of movies that would illustrate the universal idea of love around the world," says Benbihi.

Next cities in development are Rio and Shanghai in 2010, and the following year, Jerusalem and Mumbai.

Album Review: 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band'

The Beatles landmark recording, remastered and revisited as rock's greatest

By DAVID GONZALES

Finally, after all these years of waiting, the Beatles' remasters on CD are here, and yes, it was worth the wait! Beatlemania has struck once again.

Let's consider the remastered "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." Immediately, one notices more space between the instruments, the vocals, and everything in between. There's more depth and definition. John and George's guitars are clearer and sharper than ever, while the subtleties in Ringo's drumming are brought to the fore, and Paul's bass is given a vital new dynamic.

In fact, the remastering of "Sgt. Pepper's" (the original album was released in 1967) reaffirms its status as the greatest rock album ever made. For many years, this was taken as an incontrovertible truth, as unassailable as night following day, but lately it seems that "Sgt. Pepper's" eminence has come under question,

with another Beatles album, "Revolver," gaining in respect.

While the adventurism explored on "Revolver," first released in 1966, certainly paved the way for the "Sgt. Pepper's" conception, "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" is more than a collection of great songs—it is a momentous landmark in the history of modern popular music, an album that changed the way rock music was thought of and made. It is also an exciting album to listen to.

So many things about "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" were groundbreaking. For one thing, it was a concept album—the Beatles pretended to be members of a fictional band led by one Sgt. Pepper, onstage giving a concert. The opening title song introduced this notion, while a reprise of that song toward the album's end reinforced it.

This offered a world of possibilities, and after this, a rock band could try and do anything. But even before one note of music was heard, the Beatles had changed the way things

were done. Lyrics were included for the first time on any album, in this case printed on the back album sleeve.

But, of course, it's the music that makes "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" so special. The Beatles came up with a number of classics, from the melodic punch of "With a Little Help from My Friends," to the psychedelic flavor of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," and the vaudeville-hued "When I'm Sixty-Four," the latter not a rock song at all, but yet another musical path to take.

"She's Leaving Home" was another milestone. The sophisticated string arrangement gave the song air of art music. Though the Beatles had used strings before on "Eleanor Rigby," from "Revolver," the presentation here took this concept to a higher level. This song was a major force in the classical rock movement, exemplified by such bands as Yes and Emerson, Lake, and Palmer.

The closing song, "A Day in the Life," is another landmark recording. A collage of several musical sections, the song ends on a mass of swirling orchestral strings, followed by a thundering, drawn-out note, created by—it was learned later—the pounding of several piano keyboards at once. No one had heard anything like this before.

Getting back to "Revolver," sure it's a great album, and if "Sgt. Pepper's" hadn't come along, it might very well be the best ever. But "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" is a magical, mystical album to listen to and appreciate. "Revolver" doesn't reach that same level of excitement (no other album does), and didn't have the same impact on popular culture.

And so, in the end, "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" remains the greatest album ever.

David Gonzales writes on pop culture and lives and works in the San Francisco Bay area.

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