

THE SHOWBIZ SCENE

by Bill Hersey

Spring will be here soon, and after a long cold winter, I'm really looking forward to the warm weather.

Japan goes on a long holiday from April 29th which is Greenery Day through May 5th, Children's Day. May 1st is Labor Day and May 3rd is Constitution Day. This time is known as Golden Week, and flights out of Japan are fully booked as well as hotels in the popular tourist destinations. These include Guam, Saipan, Palau, Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia. The more adventurous are heading for Pakistan (trekking in the North), Papua New Guinea for its' cultural diversity and Sri Lanka for beach resort, safaris, the tea country and shopping in a big new mall, Odeez Unlimited, in Colombo.

For those who stay home, the film distributors go all out to bring the best releases at this peak season for theater attendance. Golden week openings includes *Traffic* (Nippon Herald) *The Mexican* (Gaga Communications) *Family Man* (also Gaga) *Enemy at the Gate* (Nippon Herald) and *Remembering The Titans* (Buena Vista)

It was great having longtime friend Michael Bolanos back in Tokyo for two weeks. I first got to know Michael when he brought musical productions to Japan. One of his major projects was bringing the late and great Ron Richardson from the Broadway musical *Big River* to costar with actor Hiroyuki Sanada in the Japanese production of the show. That was a huge success. Michael has always been a great host whenever I visit N.Y.C. With his connections, he not only gets me a seat to the best (even soldout) Broadway shows, he gets me backstage to meet the stars of the show.

In 1994 Michael decided to get into the computer on-line business. He started out modestly but his business, Entertainment Drive really caught on and it wasn't long before he had a staff of over thirty full-time employees working early A.M. to late night out of loft offices in Manhattan. Michael's online forum was set up for people interested in movie and entertainment news. In less than two years Entertainment Drive was generating millions of dollars from CompuServe which in 1995 was paying 5 cents a minute for on-line time. His service included forums on movies, soap opera, television and children media. In addition to news and gossip, they downloaded movie clips, and customers could talk to each other or visit stars like Pierce Brosnan, Spike Lee and Tom Hanks. As business grew, Entertainment Drive built its own website. While CompuServe made a multi-million dollar investment in Entertainment Drive, Bolanos maintained the right to seek deals with other distributors. The company grew and grew, earned sev-

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Chansuda Gibson; retired sumo yokozuna Musashimaru; New Zealand Ambassador Philip Gibson at U.S. Ambassador Tom Foley's sayonara party



Egyptian Ambassador Mahmoud Karem; his wife Yasmina; multi-talented Judy Ongg at HIH Prince Takamado's photo exhibit opening at the Nihonbashi Mitsukoshi department store.



Raharifina Fida, wife of the Ambassador of Madagascar; internationally renowned fashion designer Hanae Mori; Ros Ing Kieth, wife of the Cambodian Ambassador at a showing of Hanae Mori's latest collection.



United Airlines manager of passenger sales for Japan Dan Berube and his wife Joanne with parade Grand Marshall Declan Collins at The St. Patrick Day Parade on Tokyo's trendy Omotesando street.



Entertainment website tycoon Michael Bolanos visiting from New York and busy actor Hiroyuki Sanada at the Lexington Queen club.



Austrian ambassador Hans Dietmar Schweigsut; opera star Edita Gruberova; Tadatsugu Sasaki, NBS executive director; Vienna State Opera director, Ioan Holender at a reception, hosted by the Schweigsuts in honor of the visiting opera.



The beautiful Charlize Theron and your columnist Bill Hersey at the Kingyo Club in Roppongi. Charlize was in Tokyo for 20th Century Fox to promote *The Legend of Bagger Vance*.



Newly-weds Buena Vista senior, v-p., intl publicity, Teri Ritzer and real estate developer Stephen Meyer and maid of honor, Pat Rod. I worked with Teri and Pat back in the good old days at *The Hollywood Reporter*.

Showbiz Scene...

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eral awards and was the first to produce live onli coverage backstage at the Academy Awards, Emm and Tony Awards. They have a registered membe ship of over one million members worldwide. In J pan they worked with Nifty Serve. Michael made E tertainment Drive a leader in the celebrity websi design industry.

Last year Michael, at just 36, received an offer I couldn't refuse. He's still an adviser to the compar but "has retired" — not really.

Now that he is financially secure, Michael pla on spending some of his 21M doing what he loves - bringing musical productions to Japan. During his vi he met with television execs, theatrical producers, fil personality Hiroyuki Sanada and kabuki superst Tamasaburo. I know he'll be spending more time Japan and I'm really looking forward to what I kno will be his most exciting project ever.

It's also nice having L.A.-based Japanese act Masaya Kato back in town. The onetime fashic model, who won awards in Japan for his acting, hi lived in Los Angeles for the last few years. Here i Japan he worked with Diane Lane, and in the US wit Jacqueline Bisset.

His role in the Takeshi Kitano production of *Brothe* currently playing in Tokyo, "brought him home. From the look of things, Masaya's going to be bus He will be doing a special project for NHK and wi also play a major role in 2002's year long historic drama deries *Toshie To Matsu*. In May he'll go to Lor don to perform in a special cultural exchange. Masay may well be one of the few Japanese actors to make on the international scene. He's a nice guy. I wish hir all the best.

Ciao for now, and God Bless.