

# HIP CHECK SOIRÉE MONSTRE

STUDIO KAIJU'S JAPANESE MONSTER WRESTLING BATTLES ARE SO OBSCURE THEY'RE COOL. LES COMBATS DE MONSTRES JAPONAIS DE STUDIO KAIJU SONT CRYPTIQUES ? C'EST JUSTEMENT CE QUI LES REND SI COOL.

TEXT | TEXTE SHANNON MCKINNON





MONSTER'S BALL KAIJU WRESTLERS |  
MONSTERS KAIJU:  
1 UCHU CHU  
2 HELL MONKEY  
3 SKY DEVIL  
4 CLUB SANDWICH  
5 KUNG-FU CHICKEN NOODLE  
6 THE PLANTAIN TWINS

CROWD FAVORITES (PREVIOUS PAGE)  
MOTA NARIL, SILVER POTATO AND MIDORI  
NO KAIJU.

LES GRANDS FAVORIS (PAGE  
PRÉCÉDENTE) : MOTA NARIL, SILVER  
POTATO ET MIDORI NO KAIJU.



EVERYONE IN BOSTON'S MASS ART GYM IS COOLER than you. As soon as you walk in you feel it: the legendary hum of that artistic elite known as the underground. I'm here to find out about some college students who took a quirky art-school experiment – all mixed up with a weird love for Japanese anime and WWE-style wrestling schlock – and started Studio Kaiju. There are 500 people lined up in the freezing cold. I think I've chanced upon the next next thing.

Studio Kaiju is a media and performance group that stages Big Battels, live wrestling matches between people dressed up as Japanimation-style monsters. (*Kaiju* means "mysterious beast" in Japanese.) It's the brainchild of art teacher Randy Borden, who staged the first Battle in 1994 at Boston's Revolving Museum, ground zero for the New England alternative art scene. Eight years later, it has reached a delicate and pivotal point: It is so cool that it's about to become popular, a ruthless artistic cycle that destroys cachet as fast as it creates it.

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ALI MASS ART GYM DE BOSTON, IL Y A TOUJOURS QUELQU'UN de plus hot que vous. Et la rumeur caractéristique de cette élite qu'on appelle l'underground est là pour vous le prouver. J'y suis pour enquêter sur Studio Kaiju, un groupe d'étudiants en art qui se sont livrés à une expérience étrange: ils ont marié leur passion tordue pour les dessins animés japonais et le kitsch de la WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment). À peu près 500 personnes font la queue par un froid de canard. Je pense que je suis tombée sur le prochain gros truc.

Studio Kaiju est la troupe de performers qui présente les Big Battels, des combats de lutte en direct qui mettent aux prises des monstres inspirés des japanimations. (*Kaiju* signifie « bête mystérieuse » en japonais.) C'est une idée originale de Randy Borden, un professeur d'art qui a présenté le premier Battle en 1994 au Revolving Museum de Boston, point de convergence du milieu artistique alternatif de la Nouvelle-Angleterre. Huit ans plus tard, Studio Kaiju en est à un point tournant de son existence: il est devenu tellement cool qu'il sera bientôt populaire. Impitoyable illustration du cycle qui, en art, détruit l'originalité à mesure qu'on la crée.

« Plusieurs ont tenté de découvrir la recette de Kaiju, mais personne n'a encore visé juste », affirme David Borden, frère de Randy et porte-parole officiel de Kaiju. Il est jeune (29 ans), séduisant et c'est le grand responsable de l'affaire.

À son claquement de doigts, les portes s'ouvrent et la foule entre nonchalamment; pas vraiment de style ni d'âge particuliers, seulement une certaine... attitude. La salle est pleine: 1 200 spectateurs; et des centaines d'autres ont été refusés à la porte – effet du bouche à oreille et d'Internet. Pendant que chacun manœuvre pour obtenir la meilleure place autour de l'arène, on sent bien que, malgré le prix d'entrée de 10 \$, le côté branché de l'événement ne s'achète pas.

Un orchestre s'installe dans l'arène. Les musiciens, qui portent d'anciens costumes de lutte, y vont d'une interprétation énergique de *Saturday Night's Alright*. L'excitation grandit quand des techniciens installent dans l'arène une reproduction miniature d'une ville japonaise évoquant *Godzilla*.

Les amateurs de Kaiju sont au fait des potins entourant les Battels. Par exemple, la « fédération » est dominée par un émule de Vince McMahon, Dr. Cube, lequel méprise l'homme d'affaires japonais Super Akuma parce que celui-ci lui a volé sa ceinture de championnat et l'a mise à l'encan sur eBay.

« On ne peut pas dire qu'ils ne sont pas originaux », commente un chanceux qui s'est déniché une place dans les gradins tout près de l'action, un courtier dans la trentaine qui porte un t-shirt des Pixies et brandit une affiche qui dame



"Dr. Cube is Evil X Three" sign. Pretty 32-year-old college student Allison Mitchell says, "I love this. I brought my daughter; she has a total Japanimation fetish." Eleven-year-old Sydney wears a Pokémon T-shirt and refuses to talk to me. She actually says "No comment" when I ask her what she likes about Kaiju. Is she protecting Studio Kaiju from being sold out to the masses? This pre-adolescent?

The lights dim, American Beetle steps into the ring and the crowd goes nuts. American Beetle is a mutated politician/bug/boxer, described on the Kaiju Website ([www.kaiju.com](http://www.kaiju.com)) as having "American-style courage and punching skill... unfortunately also unpleasant disposition." Wearing stars-and-stripes shorts over a red-and-blue bodysuit, he wrestles a sea-urchin type creature that starts crushing the tiny city. The wrestlers move carefully, throwing each other into the ropes and landing on one another.

Much of their clumsiness is caused by the costumes. Kung-Fu Chicken Noodle steps up for the next match, rendered almost immobile by his costume of a giant soup can and a cleaver. But the unfriendly consommé, a toxic mistake created during the mass-production push of Y2K, is well matched against Gomi-man, a creation bioengineered by Dr. Cube that looks like a greyish trash heap. Kung-Fu Chicken Noodle emerges as victor, and the audience cheers for the popular villain.

While the crowd shares a certain enthusiasm, I never get the sense that they are united by the Studio Kaiju phenomenon. There is almost a feeling of competition to see who is enjoying the show the most – and so who is most cool. As the Battels rage on, I'm impressed with the clever entertainment, but also with myself, for discovering Studio Kaiju. I feel myself getting snobbier by the minute.

The Battel is narrated by Loudon Noxious, Kaiju's play-by-play commentator who wears a top hat and screams for impromptu "commercial" breaks. This is more performance art than pro sport, and the participants know it. "We're not professional wrestlers," laughs Thommy Saraceno, a 28-year-old Kaiju performer. "Some of us are more into Japanimation, some of us are into the WWE, some of us are into rock... but personally, I'm most interested in spectacle." This is the kind of art-school blah blah that should turn me off, but Saraceno seems genuine. He doesn't flaunt the success of Kaiju; nor does he dismiss the idea that a mainstream audience can be just as appreciative as an underground one.

Watching the final Battel (Silver Potato vs. Uchu Chu, a space bug from the vintage Atari game Space Invaders), I wish I'd caught on to Studio Kaiju years ago. And just like that, I blend into the crowd. I get it. This is why the vibe is so intense: We're cramming in this experience before it is mass-marketed and sold to the sweaty and appreciative General Public. But lining up for my Dr. Cube T-shirt after the show, I wonder if I'm the one being sold. []

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« Dr. Cube is Evil X Three », « J'adore ça. J'ai amené ma fille; elle a vraiment un faible pour les japanimations », affirme Allison Mitchell, une étudiante de 32 ans. La jeune Sydney, âgée de 11 ans, porte un t-shirt Pokémon et refuse de me parler. En fait, elle répond « Pas de commentaire » lorsque je lui demande ce qu'elle aime de Kaiju. Cette préadolescente () veut-elle empêcher Studio Kaiju d'être livré aux masses ?

On tamise l'éclairage, American Beetle monte dans l'arène et la foule devient hystérique. American Beetle semble issu d'un croisement politicien / insecte / boxeur; sur le site Web de Kaiju ([www.kaiju.com](http://www.kaiju.com)), on le décrit comme ayant « un courage et des habiletés de cogneur typiquement américains... et un très mauvais caractère ». Avec ses shorts étoilés aux couleurs des USA par-dessus un collant intégral rouge et bleu, il lutte contre un oursin géant qui se met à écraser la ville miniature. Les pugilistes se déplacent et se projettent l'un l'autre dans les câbles avant de se laisser tomber sur l'adversaire.

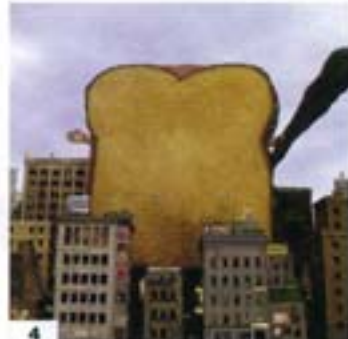
Kung Fu Chicken Noodle fait son entrée, presque paralysé: il est déguisé en boîte de soupe en conserve géante. L'antipathique potage (une erreur toxique créée durant la frénésie de production ayant précédé l'an 2000) trouve chaussure à son pied: Gomi-man, résultat de manipulations génétiques de Dr. Cube. Chicken Noodle terrasse son adversaire, et le public acclame son héros.

Même si la foule partage un certain enthousiasme, elle n'arrive pas à fusionner avec le phénomène. Il y a de la concurrence dans l'air: qui apprécie le plus le spectacle, qui est le plus cool? Pendant que les combats font rage, je m'émerveille de l'ingéniosité du divertissement, mais aussi de ma petite personne, pour avoir découvert Studio Kaiju. Je me sens devenir plus snob chaque minute.

Le Battel est commenté par Loudon Noxious: coiffé d'un haut-de-forme, il hurle des pauses « commerciales » improvisées. Il s'agit plus de performance artistique que de sport, et les participants le savent bien. « On n'est pas des lutteurs professionnels, s'esclaffe Thommy Saraceno, âgé de 28 ans. Parmi nous, certains aiment plus la japanimation, d'autres la WWE, ou encore le rock... Moi, c'est surtout le spectacle qui m'intéresse. » C'est le genre de baratin, en art, qui normalement me rebute, mais Saraceno semble sincère: pour lui, une foule ordinaire peut être un aussi bon public qu'un auditoire underground.

En regardant le dernier Battel (Silver Potato contre Uchu Chu, un insecte de l'espace sorti tout droit du jeu Space Invaders d'Atari), je regrette de ne pas avoir connu Studio Kaiju avant. Et tout à coup, je me fonds dans la foule. Je pige. Voilà pourquoi l'atmosphère est si intense: nous nous entassons pour participer à cette expérience avant qu'elle soit mise en marché et vendue au grand public. Mais, en faisant la file pour me procurer un t-shirt de Dr. Cube, devant les tables où l'on offre des articles Kaiju après le spectacle, je me demande si ce n'est pas moi qui suis mise en marché. []

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TELEMENT COOL QU'IL SERA  
BIENTÔT POPULAIRE, STUDIO KAIJU  
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## Hip Check / Soiree Monstre

by Shannon McKinnon

**enRoute Magazine**, October, 2002

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