**AGENDA**

**Japan in a nutshell**
USJ social sciences campus, Haulen Street
March 20, 5 p.m.
The talk will introduce Japanese language and culture.

**Film screening**
USJ social sciences campus, Haulen Street
March 20, 6 p.m.
A screening of the film “From Me to You” (2010) with French subtitles will be held.

**Opera and piano concert**
Abu Khater auditorium, USJ human sciences campus, Damanuc Street
March 21, 8 p.m.
Japanese soprano singer Yutaka Hiramori and pianist Naomi Fujiiya will perform both European and Japanese classical music.

**Japanese play ‘Momotarou’**
USJ human sciences campus, Damanuc Street
March 26, 9 p.m.
This Japanese play will be performed by CAJAI students in Japanese with English narration.

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**Japan Days event to provide young Lebanese with link to land of sushi and anime**

*By Becky Strun*

The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Two women raised their fists to fight in a side classroom at the University of Saint Joseph. Trained in the traditional Japanese martial art of karate, the two black belts demonstrated for an audience an open sparring match reserved for only the most advanced students.

“Black Belt Kick,” kicked off by Fioa, the first female black belt in Lebanon, “He must master his mind to be ready to rear any situation,” explained Wailasha, a student. The unusual scene at USJ’s department of science kicked off Japan Days, a weeklong celebration of Japanese culture through the university’s Japan Academic Center (CAJAI). A collaboration between the Japanese Embassy to Lebanon and USJ, Japan Days seeks to raise awareness about the East Asian country through performances and lectures open to students and the general public.

Interest in Japan is growing among young people, Noura Mansour, assistant to the director of CAJAI, told The Daily Star. One of the biggest influences has been the scores of Japanese anime cartoons and graphic novels enjoyed by younger generations since childhood, she said.

“There is a growing interest because of the manga, all of the animated films that are originally from Japan. A lot of young people who speak some Japanese, they learn from the manga,” she said.

Anime fans, other cultural contributions from Japan have also spread like wildfire throughout Lebanon. Take karate, a common extracurricular activity here, or sushi, which continues to grow in popularity as more Japanese restaurants open and international menus dedicate sections to the rice-and-fish-based fare.

The growing interest in Japan’s culture has also spread to professional circles like local designer Grace Rihan, whose most recent collection was an ode to origami and Japanese minimalism inspired by a trip to the cities of Tokyo and Kyoto. Rihan gushed over her experience, particularly the elegance and structure she found in daily life.

Karate instructor Fady Antakly was struck by the honesty he encountered in Japan. Antakly, who leads classes at 4 days in Jouinah, travels regularly to Japan for training. In one of his most memorable moments in Tokyo, a man staying at his hotel found and returned his passport and wallet containing $5,000 with only the cautionary “please be careful next time,” Antakly recounted.

“The Japanese way of life always intrigued me,” Antakly said. “It is full of respect and humbleness.”

Learning about different cultural traditions has made “a lot of people fond of Japan,” Mansour said. It’s not only about cultural exchanges, she said. CAJAI’s role is to boost the academic relationships between Japan and Lebanon. Japan Days will feature several practical talks on living in Japan, unless you have private instructors,” Mansour said. Since its opening in 2010, CAJAI has been held local Japanese cultural events, such as traditional flute concert and a vigil on the anniversary of the American nuclear attack on Hiroshima.

USJ’s classes are taught by Juniko Hoki. The professor is one of less than 100 Japanese nationals living in Lebanon, according to statistics from the Japanese Embassy. There are between 50-100 Japanese in Lebanon. Japan Days’ other events with broader interest include film screenings of two movies picked by the embassy: “From Me to You,” a 2010 movie directed by Naoko Kumazawa, will be shown in Japanese with French subtitles Thursday at 6 p.m. The romance takes place at a high school and is based on the plot of an anime film by the same name.

The main event will be a musical performance Friday evening led by award-winning pianist Naomi Fujiiya and soprano opera singer Yutaka Hiramori. The program will include both Japanese and European music.

For more information, please call 0 (4) 421-410.