Club brings Japanese animation to Ohio State

By Amy Schroeder
Lantern arts writer

He hasn't even seen "Aladdin" or "Pocahontas," and he's the founder of Ohio State's animation club.

That's right. Will Ray started "Animate Ohio State" last year to help bring Japanese animation to the university.

"Anime," the Japanese word for animation, has recently experienced a tremendous upsurge in the United States, Ray said. "A lot of people who grew up watching 'Speed Racer' in the '60s seem to really like it," he said.

In Japan, animation is not viewed as a childish art form. A large portion of their literature is published as comics, and almost every media genre, regardless of its audience, is animated, Ray said.

As a result, Japanese animation is quite different than most American cartoons.

"Unlike Disney, which includes very little of anything that might induce somebody to think, anime often feels like it's created for a more sophisticated audience," Ray said. "It's not stuff that is intellectually aimed at a 7 year old."

Don't get Ray wrong, though. He is really not a Disney-hater.

"Technically, Walt Disney's stuff blows away Japanese animation. It's a tour de force of what can be done with animation technically," he said. "It's just that anything that isn't saccharine is being deleted out."

On the flip side, however, is the popular conception of Japanese animation as R-rated, blood-and-guts action adventures for teen-age boys, Ray said. While that may be true of the cartoons being imported professionally, the most popular Japanese animations are romantic comedies and soap opera-like stories, he said.

The business of importing Japanese animations is often times "perfectly illegal," said Ray referring to the frequent violations of copyright laws inherent in the unusual system of distribution that has grown up around anime.

Unlike commercial sources such as chain video-rental stores that sell anime, there are a number of private individuals, called fan-sub titlers, that distribute free videotape copies of animations they have purchased and subtitled themselves, Ray said. This kind of cooperation makes it possible for anime fans to amass larger collections than they could if each person had to spend the average $100 on a 30-minute cartoon, he said.

"Japanese companies have a different attitude toward copyright laws," said Ray. "They figured out a long time ago that the money is in the merchandising. So if this free distribution of their animations creates a larger audience to buy their stuff, it's great with them."

In an effort not to flout these laws completely, "Animate Ohio State" does not charge admission to their bi-monthly screenings of mostly fan-subtitled Japanese animations, said Ray. Because of this, and the $5 fees paid by the club's 35 members, "Animate Ohio State" operates heavily in the red, he said.

The club's next screening will be Aug. 11 at 6:30 p.m. in the new math building located at 209 W. 18th Ave.