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Hidden Remote



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## Alex Burunova talks directing Netflix's Enter the Anime



by Victoria Davis 1 week ago

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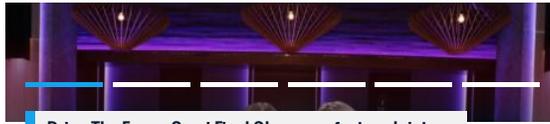
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***Hidden Remote interviewed director Alex Burunova about going behind the scenes of anime like Aggretsuko and B: The Beginning in her Netflix documentary Enter The Anime.***

Since 2008, Alex Burunova has been a part of a dozen different short film productions, but *Enter The Anime* was her first time directing and producing her own feature-length documentary. Burunova's topic of choice was certainly not for the weak of heart. Netflix's *Enter The Anime* does an in-depth dive into a handful of Japan's most innovative anime such as [Aggretsuko](#), [B: The Beginning](#), [Cannon Busters](#) and much more.

Burunova travelled from Los Angeles to Tokyo, Japan, interviewing directors like [7 SEEDS](#) Yukio Takahashi, anime-adjacent producers such as [Castlevania's](#) Adi Shankar, anime artists like *Aggretsuko's* Yeti and even the chairman of Toei Animation Kozo Morishita, all in an effort to grasp the essence of inspiration for where these anime ideas emerged.

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While there's been mixed reviews across the board regarding fan's reactions to the documentary—those newer to the anime industry **showing the film more favor** than the **veteran anime enthusiasts**—Burunova says her team worked with “what was available,” and did their best to give a 58 minute deep-dive into a dark, colorful, twisted and beautiful genre of animation that, as stated in the film, “lives by its own rules.”

Hidden Remote talked with Burunova about where the idea for the documentary came from, how her team found the anime creators to interview, the director's new obsession with *Aggretsuko* and *B: The Beginning*, and how she approached tackling an entertainment medium that is as vast as Hollywood.



**Hidden Remote:** This documentary touches on how lonely and stressful the animation and filmmaking process can be. A number of times during the film you even talk about how difficult this documentary was to navigate. So, what made you decide to get into this industry in the first place? And in the end, is it worth the effort?

**Alex Burunova:** Oh man, that's a loaded question. It's lonely and it's stressful and it's long hours. 110 percent. It is one of the loneliest and most stressful businesses because the standards are very high and you're up against all these people who are working their hardest too because it's their passion. Is it worth it? Yes, because I don't see myself doing anything else fortunately, or unfortunately.

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I enjoy what I do, I enjoy the journey and I enjoyed making this film. I'm even enjoying this crazy ride post the film coming out.

**Hidden Remote:** How did you get involved with this project? Were you already an anime fan before Netflix approached you?

**Burunova:** Actually, I approached them. I was doing behind the scenes shorts and interviews for shows like *Stranger Things* and Netflix hired me to do one for Adi Shankar in advance of

*Castlevania's* season two. We did this fun and crazy interview and as I'm filming him I'm like, "What a character," and I became really intrigued by that world of anime.

As I was doing research, I realized there's not one documentary out there that covers more than one anime title and has more than one anime creator. I was at a dinner party for Netflix NX and I was talking with all these sci-fi, anime people and was like, "Hey, wouldn't it be cool to use all this access Netflix has to all these anime creators and put them all in the same film?" And a month later we're doing it.



**Hidden Remote: Did you originally plan on it being a documentary?**

**Burunova:** It was designed as a "special," to just feature Netflix originals to get the fans familiar with the faces behind the cameras, because we never get to hear from those guys. The idea was not to get too in-depth into the history of anime. We just wanted to introduce these creators as people, ask where their inspiration came from and what makes them tick. It was made for newcomers to anime.

**Hidden Remote: Anime has so many different genres. What made you decide to focus on the anime you did?**

**Burunova:** I wish I had a better story for this one, but we were really just working with what we had available. Many anime creators are very private and they're very busy so they're really hard to get access to. So we really rounded up as many as we could of the ones that were available and that, in and of itself, was a minor miracle. It wouldn't have happened if they weren't all connected with Netflix.

There were many anime fans that said, "I wish you had talked about other title or interviewed other creators." Sure, so do we.



**Hidden Remote:** So how, and when, did all this go from you lining people up for interviews, to you embarking on this quest for anime's essence and it becoming, as you said in the film, an "obsession"?

**Burunova:** The more people I interviewed and the more people I met for *Enter The Anime*, I realized how passionate they were and how much anime means to them. It's a lifestyle. It's a cultural stream. It's their whole world. So I got curious about what makes it so special and what makes even the fans love it so much. What makes people so passionate about it? I saw that passion and just wanted to know more.

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**Hidden Remote:** Did being in Japan and getting to see that culture up close also add to that wanting to know more about anime?

**Burunova:** Absolutely. I tried to capture that culture shock too and my first impressions of Japan with the film, like the way you step out onto Shibuya Crossing and what you see at the Robot Restaurant...They use anime and manga characters to advertise on billboards and in the metro you see people reading manga while they're waiting for a train, and everyone knows all these anime theme songs that they sing together.

There, it is mainstream and it's a little overwhelming at first. Here, in the western world, anime is such a niche. Animation is usually associated as being for kids. But there, anime has been geared toward all audiences of all ages for decades.



**Hidden Remote:** How many of the anime you talk about in the documentary did you get to watch for the project?

**Burunova:** I watched every single one. If they were available in full, I would watch the whole season or even two seasons. But some of the anime were still works in progress, like *Cannon Busters*, so I could only watch a pilot.

**Hidden Remote: Do you have any favorites?**

**Burunova:** I like them all, but my favorite, hands down, is *Aggretsuko*. I watched it twice, even. It's so smart and it doesn't try to be anything bigger than itself but it's so poignant and I really enjoyed it. Plus, the fact that the Japanese director did all the death metal screaming himself, after just googling how to do it, is so awesome.

*B: The Beginning* I also really got hooked on because of the visuals. I was stunned. It's so imaginative and creepy and cool at the same time. I was really impressed. Being a filmmaker, I also really loved all the detailed shots and compositions. When I think about crazy, edgy, wild anime, *B: The Beginning* is what I think of. It really pushes the limits.



**Hidden Remote: Are you officially an anime-enthusiast now? You tapped into a very devoted section of fan-base with this film.**

**Burunova:** Honestly, I had no idea how passionate this fan-base was. And the response to the film is very 50/50. People either loved it or hated it. And I don't mind that. I think a lot of hardcore fans had an expectation to see a deep dive into the history of anime, and that's a very hard thing to make because of all the licensing and legality of it. And *Enter The Anime* was never going to be it with us only having access to Netflix originals.

This was geared towards people who may never have watched an anime in their life. And those people really loved the film. But I definitely want to explore more. I have all these people sending me lists of anime I should watch now.

**Hidden Remote: What was the most surprising part of this journey? What was the most enjoyable?**

**Burunova:** The most enjoyable part was seeing how down to earth all of these creators are. They're all really nice people and none of them were mad at me for not knowing anything about anime. They were very patient about explaining where their passion comes from and I really appreciated that and I loved learning about their creative process.

I was really surprised how they each have their own creative system, and how they come up with ideas. A lot of it has to do with relaxing and I didn't think of it that way before. Before I thought, "Work hard, work hard!" and that's how you get ideas. But, apparently, ideas don't come to you when you're stressed out. They come to you when you're relaxed.

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**Hidden Remote:** Having spent a great deal of time in Japan (Tokyo specifically), could anime be a solution to the country's cultural conformity?

**Burunova:** Yes. The first impression you get of Japan is that it's this safe and orderly place with deep traditions that are very important to their culture. But then, with so much personal expression, so many subcultures and so much anime that facilitates all of it, I do think it's a solution. It is a way for people to express themselves.

Some people dress "Kawaii" and some people have this "Steampunk" look or "Yamikoi" style and these are forms of self-expression that came originally from manga and anime. It's a medium that allows people to freely and openly express themselves and still have this defined cultural aspect.



**Hidden Remote:** In the documentary, you say there are still plenty of questions you have about anime. What are some of those questions?

**Burunova:** Trying to define anime is like trying to define rock and roll. It's impossible. Yes, it's a genre of animation that originated in Japan, but after that the definition just kind of explodes. It's everything, it's lifestyle, it's a cultural phenomenon, it's one of the most influential cultural phenomena in Japan.

So, after only grazing the surface as an anime newcomer, I had so many more questions, like what are the sub-genres of anime that I didn't learn about or didn't cover? How do these anime creators create anime from scratch? How do the character designers come up with their characters? And in general, when it comes to the history of anime, I would still love to learn more about how it came to be this incredible phenomenon.

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Have you seen *Enter The Anime*? What did you think of the documentary as a whole? What were some of your favorites the film covered, or were there anime you wished had been covered but

weren't? Drop us a line in the comments below!

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