

BUCK-TICK vocalist Atsushi Sakurai passed away October 19 at the age of 57. He went to the hospital after falling ill during a concert exclusive to fan club members known as the Fish Tank. He later died from a brain-stem hemorrhage. His funeral was held shortly after.

His other acts include Schwein (with Raymond Watts), The Mortal, and Hinan-Go-Go (BUCK-TICK's old name) as the band's drummer.

He is survived by his son, Akutagawa Prize winner Haruka Tono; a daughter, his 2nd wife, former wife Sayuri Watanabe, an older brother, and his bandmates: guitarists Imai Hisashi and Hidehiko Hoshino; bassist Yutaka Higuchi, and drummer Toll Yagami.

To fans both in Japan and all over the world, Mr. Sakurai (affectionately named Acchan) was a man open about his traumatic childhood at the hands of an alcoholic father. Atsushi's parents died before he turned 30. Mr. Sakurai was also open about his sexuality (coming out as bisexual in an interview) and feelings about life and death. He was also known for an adultery scandal in the early 90s (compounded by Imai Hisashi's arrest for possession of LSD). It would have killed anyone else's career, due to sensitivities at the time in Japan, but not Mr. Sakurai's. Mr. Sakurai was also one of many Japanese artists to wear Nazi (or fake Nazi) uniforms.

Born in Gunma prefecture on March 7, 1966, Atsushi Sakurai had a tumultuous childhood. He was often the target of his father's abuse, because Atsushi didn't want his mother to get hit. Despite expressing many talents in art and sports, young Atsushi entered a gang, but left after most of the members were arrested.

After high school, Atsushi joined Hinan Go-Go (which started as a tribute band to The Stalin) as the band's drummer. When the band moved to Tokyo, his parents refused to let him move until his father's death in 1984. When Hinan Go-Go's vocalist Araki was fired due to his voice not fitting the band's style, Atsushi became Hinan Go-Go's vocalist; the band changed their name to BUCK-TICK (based on the Japanese word for "firecracker"); and the rest was history. The band's lineup remained unchanged for over 35 years.

Mr. Sakurai was no stranger to death as a concept, with songs such as "die," "Memento Mori," and "Taiyou ni Korosareta (Killed by the Sun)."

Mr. Sakurai had several health scares throughout his life. While at a photoshoot in Nepal, he suffered from both acute peritonitis and appendicitis in 1997. Both ailments combined have an 80 percent mortality rate. This near-death experience led to the song Gessekai (Moonworld). In the Day in Question 2003 (BUCK-TICK's yearly concert referencing the day Imai was arrested for drug possession), he sat down during the song Mona Lisa, due to drinking heavily. He received an IV in 2005 due to dehydration during the 13th Floor with Diana concert. He suffered from COVID-19 earlier this year.

Mr. Sakurai's tenor turned baritone singing voice, his lyrics often peering into the feminine perspective, his love of cats, and his unmatched chemistry with Imai, Hidehiko, Yutaka, and Toll made him one of the most influential artists in my life.

Listening to BUCK-TICK got me through tough times both in high school and college. While I prefer their older albums such as Six/Nine, released in 1995, and 1991's Kurutta Taiyou (Lunatic Sun), I can count on one hand the songs (or versions of songs) I dislike from the band.

As fans and those who knew Mr. Sakurai mourn his passing, BUCK-TICK's fate remains unclear. During an interview years ago, the band members expressed that they would retire once one of them passes away.

May Atsushi Sakurai rest in peace.