

Anime Fan Culture: Music

A great deal of revenue for an anime series comes from the sale of soundtrack albums and singles. Sailormoon has been particularly successful in this arena with dozens of CDs in Japanese, plus several in other languages. In order to get more viewers to buy more CDs, record companies release a variety of songs beyond that of the TV series or movies. Oddly enough, despite the wealth of Sailormoon labeled music, Sailormoon background music (BGM) is notoriously repetitive.

Releasing an 'image song' is one way of expanding the music compendium. The original voice actors, using the intonation of their characters, perform these singles written by professional songwriters. The lyrics echo the attitude of the characters, although most image songs do not correspond to any particular moment in the show. These same songs may later appear in the TV series if directors find a good match for a scene. For instance, Minako sings 'Route Venus' for the first time in a talent show in the fifth season of Sailormoon, although the recording available to the public from the second season.

As with Hollywood productions, publishers release BGM in album format. Different versions of thematic BGM may also appear in 'Perfect Collections' or 'Memorial Boxes' — comprehensive box sets of most of the music released for the show. As directors need different lengths of the same song to fit scenes of varying duration, each edited version helps pad the recording time of box sets. Certain BGMs are particularly popular, such as the music for Sailorneptune and Sailoruranus' transformations and Hotaru's theme.

Movies usually have entirely new music, although directors may reuse certain orchestral pieces in later TV seasons. The theme song for Sailormoon changed versions after its second season (once performed by the group 'DALI', then performed by the voice actors) and the new version was introduced in the opening credits of Sailormoon R: the Movie. The 20-minute short film 'Ami-chan no Hatsukoi' also had all new music, but one of the instrumentals was later lyricized for Hisakawa Aya to sing.

Unique to Sailormoon is the 'Orgel Fantasia'. These CD albums feature songs from the show performed entirely on a glockenspiel-sounding instrument. While undoubtedly simple and inexpensive to produce (only one instrument, no vocals) the music-box quality of the songs actually seem appropriate for the magical and romantic atmosphere of Sailormoon.

Certain voice actors identify themselves with certain genres. Mitsuishi Kotonno's voice is unmistakable as Sailormoon (Even in her Neon Genesis Evangelion performances). Most of her music is completely 'in character' and feature many attack-shouts. Tomizawa Michie's fondness for Janet Jackson songs gives Sailormars some funky 80's style tunes. Shinohara Emi's singing voice is rather different from her acting voice, thus her image songs have a much larger range of expression though some do not identify well with Makoto. Fukami Rica's songs sound like standard J-pop that Minako can use for her singing auditions, but the actor's ability also goes beyond this genre; Rica also performed 'Voices' from Macross Plus, one of the most haunting songs in anime history.

Anime Fan Culture: Dub-bashing

Since the introduction of Sailormoon to U.S. television and Internet newsgroups, a never-ending flame war has raged between the watchers of the American dub and the viewers of the Japanese version. There are names for both factions, some complimentary, some derogatory: dubbies, dub-lovers, sub-lovers and purists. While this exists for just about every dubbed anime, the barbs concerning Sailormoon exchanged are particularly sharp.

The alternative to dubbing in English, of course, is subtitling. Common complaints lodged against subtitling include complicated phrasing, obscuring of the animation, the speed of reading (a bigger issue for young viewers), the generally poor quality and availability of copies and legal issues. Defenders of the dub frequently cite opinions of how many TV viewers would not watch a show in a different language. Purists may prefer watching 'raw' (untranslated) episodes to dubbed episodes, although most prefer subtitles. Sub-lovers attribute the more accurate translations, the higher quality of voice acting and the occasional explanatory "subtitled notes" as reasons for their preference.

DiC, a subsidiary of Disney, owns the rights to the U.S. distribution of Sailormoon (this may have changed recently). DiC is also responsible for translating and dubbing the show, apparently to improve its accessibility and popularity among a mainstream U.S. audience. However, a side-by-side comparison of DiC episodes with Japanese episodes reveals not only translation discrepancies, but also major script changes and cuts. Most Sailormoon fans believe that this is an attempt to appease certain vocal U.S. interest groups, which could have been offended by certain scenes.

Changes to the episodes include the removal of violent or intensely dramatic scenes, the editing of behavior (such as references to homosexuality or lechery), inconsistent attacks, logical errors, any slapping of characters, nomenclature and cuts for time. Characters may also have different personalities due to scripting or the actors, e.g. Raye (Rei) loathes Serena (Usagi) through most of the U.S. series. For fans that invest much in the characters and their relationships, the latter change is understandably unacceptable. Many dubbed anime shows also attempt to hide the Japanese origins of the show by substituting cultural references for more American alternatives. Food is a major point of contention.

The quality of vocal performance is the major issue for most other dubbed anime shows. Japanese voice actors (seiyuu) undergo extensive training and speech classes, just like regular actors. Many of them also learn basic singing skills, which works well with the music-heavy genre of young girls' (shoujo) anime. A large number of them are well-paid and recognizable by name or voice by Japanese viewers — all these factors translate into a generally higher quality of performance for mainstream TV animation.

Few deny that dubbed Sailormoon is partly responsible for the size of U.S. representation in the online Sailormoon community. Dubbed shows are more palatable to U.S. networks, which still hesitate to show subtitled award-winning European films. Many current fans got interested from watching a dub. However, with the improved availability of post-dub-season tapes, fewer fans are interested in having any more episodes dubbed.

Anime Fan Culture: alt.fan.sailor-moon

The introduction of Sailormoon to US television coincided with the beginning of public Internet access, and the Internet presence of Sailormoon established itself strongly in the Usenet newsgroup **alt.fan.sailor-moon**. This community continues to be a major point of contact and discussion among fans and new viewers, even as the World Wide Web and site-culture is becoming increasingly popular among Sailormoon fans.

alt.fan.sailor-moon (AFSM) has matured into an online community, with recognizable personalities, factions, jargon and conventions unique to the group. Although the members of AFSM also frequent other newsgroups, especially anime newsgroups, many participants assume aliases that only exist in AFSM. AFSM regulars have also come to recognize the personalities behind the names, adding to the village-like familiarity of the newsgroup. For instance, Xplo is the rabid purist, Pook! bites people, and Phoenix fills the newbies' heads with misinformation. Examples of familiar names include Andrea Doolan (who appeared on Canadian TV talking about her Sailormoon collection), Hydrus, Jetwolf, Scortia, Tenchi wielding his Illumina sword and so on.

AFSM has particularly high traffic and is among the top twenty busiest newsgroups on Usenet. A large amount of mail comes from trolls (people who know little about the show but write insulting messages in order to get responses) and advertising, but the majority of mail is from the regulars. A lot of the banter and question answering have similarities to other newsgroups. Members expend many bits discussing the implications of minor art or character details from the anime and the manga, elaborating and explaining details for people who do not have extensive knowledge of the Sailormoon canon.

Group writing is popular, with genres such as the Otaku Wars! (a.k.a. OW!) encouraging participants to additively write AFSM fictional plots. The Otaku Wars! have their own hierarchy of personalities and a wealth of fan art based on the participants and the warring fan factions, not just the usual characters from the show. Fan-fiction writers also frequent AFSM to gather opinions and announce new Sailormoon-based fan works. Episodic fan-fictions are particularly suitable to the continual-update nature of AFSM.

Any mature community has its collection of jargon and insider information. Along with the normal newsgroup abbreviations, AFSM members also use acronyms like BAK (Pluto's Big Ass Key) and BSSM (Bishoujo Senshi Sailormoon) in discussions. In-jokes (such as 'Pluto is Mamoru in drag') and episodes-after-200 (where Pluto is discovered to be Mamoru in drag) frequently reappear in subtle references in bantering messages.

Some AFSM posts include the arcane 'Moonie Code', a collection of abbreviated symbols that quantify one's opinion of Sailormoon. This includes favorite characters and seasons, knowledge of the canon, the translations, personal age and physical descriptions. While there are computer programs for decoding and encoding the Moonie Code, just having a Moonie Code is enough evidence of one's interest in Sailormoon.

The AFSM μ FAQ is located at <http://hda.nethosting.com/sailormoon/ufaq/index.html>

Anime Fan Culture: Conventions

A-kon, Otakon, Katsucon, Animazement and various other U.S. anime expositions normally take place at major cities or at towns very near major cities. They occur every month, although the frequency dwindles during May, the examination month for most students. Organizers usually schedule these events to take place over a weekend, including Thursday and Friday. Although exact numbers are hard to find, anime conventions frequently run up against the attendance limits of the spaces they take place in, which usually span several large hotel ballrooms and meeting rooms.

There is usually a main room with a stage, featuring both commercial companies selling their products and fans selling their homemade works. Convention participants may also bid for rare items such as collectors' cels and one-time publicity materials at convention auctions. The main room may also be a major meeting point for friends, as the other rooms could be less conducive to banter.

Although most other fan conventions have a video screening room, anime conventions may have three or four rooms dedicated to screening shows. Dubs are relatively rare in convention screenings — fan-subtitled, commercially subtitled or unsubtitled anime shows are more popular. Not much new material appears at anime conventions; rather, the intent is to watch the shows that one already knows with other equally well informed fans. This lends itself to a Rocky Horror or Mystery Science Theatre type of viewing, where fans expect to chant along with famous lines or to make audible, peculiar comments at well-timed moments. Occasionally, a newly released or subtitled anime may appear on the convention schedule, and those screenings are comparatively quieter.

Other side entertainment may include game rooms, where tournaments of anime-inspired computer games (or games that inspired anime shows) are held. Karaoke rooms may feature songs from anime soundtracks, and fan-edited music videos (anime clips set to popular music) are popular among participants.

For seasoned convention-goers, the guest stars are the biggest draw. Anime artists and directors are popular, but voice actors and manga authors usually steal the show. Voice actors normally appear 'as themselves', although some of the biggest anime conventions in Japan and the U.S. have voice actors performing songs and stage performances with character voices. These events can be difficult for Japanese guest stars, as many try to use English to speak to the audience (although some also prefer translators). Those who struggle through the English may not be able to impart much information but their effort is always highly appreciated from crowds of fans. Recently, American dub actors have increased in popularity — Rachel Lillis from the Pokemon cast is a recent favorite.

The guest stars rarely dress up as the characters. Some devoted fans, though, participate in elaborate stage competitions known as 'cosplay' (costume play). Participants create their own detailed costumes and perform character speeches. Although most fans prepare and perform as individuals or couples, various participants dressed as characters from the same show will invariably cluster together for group photographs.