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Japanese Anime Idol Music in the Media Mix: A Case Study of the *Love Live* Idols

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Cheuk Ling Yu

Committee in charge:

      Professor Nancy Guy, Chair
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      Professor Matthew Leslie

2021

The thesis of Cheuk Ling Yu is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Japanese Anime Idol Music in the Media Mix: A Case Study of the *Love Live* Idols

by

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Master of Arts in Music

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor Nancy Guy, Chair

Academic studies of Japanese media culture typically only consider visual elements.
Although the visual is important, the sonic dimension is also vital. This thesis explores the role
of music in the transnational consumption of Japanese media through a case study of *Love Live
School Idol Project* (*Love Live*), one of the most influential Japanese anime idol franchises of the
last decade. The thesis specifically focuses on the activities of English-speaking fans. I discuss
two key functions of anime idol music in this context. First, music defines fictional characters
and functions as a platform that circulates narratives in Japanese intertextual media. Through

studying fans' listening experience, I present how various musical elements shape the personalities of anime idols. Moreover, I suggest that "intertextual listening" is the listening practice fans perform to integrate narratives across multimedia platforms, reinforcing their understanding of anime idols. Second, music is a tool of Japanese media competing for attention in an attention economy. Through investigating the anime idol rhythm game, *Love Live: Love Live School Idol Festival* (*SIF*), I argue that rhythmic performance functions as an economic device that captures, manages, and challenges fans' finite attention. In adopting Lacher and Mizerski's (1994) analytical model of "hedonic consumption," I unpack fans' immersive gaming experience and show how they distribute attention in their attempts for a perfect performance.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Japanese media culture is considered as a visual one in discussions of its globalization. Although this visual component is important, this scholarship ignores the sonic dimension of Japanese media. I therefore explore the role of music in transnational consumption of Japanese media through a case study of English-speaking fans' reception of *Love Live School Idol Project* (*Love Live*), one of the most influential Japanese anime idol franchises of the last decade. I present two functions of music. First, music defines the fictional characters and functions as a platform that circulates narratives in Japanese intertextual media. Second, music encourages purchase as a tool of managing consumers' attention in an attention economy. By analyzing various presentations of anime idol music across media platforms and the listening experiences of fans, I contend that music is an important site where fans learn about the personalities of anime idols, and engage with their narrative variants. Moreover, I suggest "intertextual listening" as a listening practice that fans perform to connect narrative variants with music, enriching their understanding of the personalities and lives of anime idols. I also look into the performance experience of fans. Investigating the anime idol rhythm game, *Love Live: Love Live School Idol Festival* (*SIF*), I argue that rhythmic performances function to capture and manage the attention of consumers. Integrating the theories of hedonic consumption and attention economy, I evaluate fans' gaming experiences and the design of the rhythm game to monopolize players' attention. Challenging players' finite attention, rhythmic performance advertises virtual anime idol cards that can manipulate the quality of the players' performance.

In this introductory chapter, I first define anime idol culture by reviewing the history of the Japanese anime, music, and idol industry from the 1980s to its rise in the 2010s. Introducing

the determining elements of anime idol culture, this historical account intertwines with the introduction of Love Live which exemplifies these features. Then, by reviewing the discussions on Japanese anime and idols in Japanese popular culture, media studies, and cultural studies, I explain the setting and methodology of the project. Last but not least, I introduce the theoretical frameworks I adopt for the coming two chapters: "intertextual listening" from Japanese and media studies for the analysis of the fans' listening experience, "hedonic consumption" and "attention economy" from the fields of marketing, business, and economics for the study of rhythmic gaming experience.

Defining Anime Idol Culture — A Combination of Anime, Music, and Idol culture in Japan

I define "anime idol" as a fictional character who is an idol in a virtual or anime world. "[I]dols,' (is) a word used in Japan to refer to highly produced and promoted singers, models, and media personalities. Idols can be male or female, and tend to be young, or present themselves as such; they appeal to various demographics, and often broad cross sections of society" (Galbraith & Karlin 2012, 2). An anime idol has a voice actor/actress ("seiyuu" in Japanese) who is a living embodiment of the anime idol. The seiyuu sings and dances in concerts, and represents the anime idol in advertising events. Curiously, fans do not often use the phrase "anime idol" in their conversations despite knowing what an anime idol is. They prefer to describe their beloved idols in reference to the story of that particular anime idol franchise. For example, the fans of *Love Live* usually refer to the idols as "school idols" because they are anime idols representing their high schools in the anime world.

Moreover, "anime idol" is not a scholarly term. Scholars in cultural studies and Japanese popular culture are mostly familiar with the phrase "virtual idol." Daniel Black, a scholar in

communication and media studies, defines a virtual idol as "a media performance which exists independently of the referent of any living performer" (2012, 209). For example, Hatsune Miku, probably the most known virtual idol internationally, performs with her body projected as a hologram in a live concert. While the seiyuu — Saki Fujita — provides voice samples for Miku, Fujita has no control of Miku's voice. Instead, anyone owning a certain vocaloid software can manipulate Miku's voice and compose songs for her. Fujita, hence, does not represent Miku on every occasion and she makes an insignificant impact on the characterization of Miku. Unlike a virtual idol, an anime idol co-exists with a seiyuu. The personality of a seiyuu is not neglected in anime idol culture. He/she can perform as the anime idol or as his/herself spontaneously by switching his/her body language, speech tone, or attitude. Therefore, a seiyuu and an anime idol negotiate each other's characters in both real and virtual worlds.

The production of an anime idol does not only involve both virtual and real bodies, it also combines practices from Japanese anime, music, and idol industries. However, many scholars in Japanese studies, cultural studies, and media studies discuss anime, virtual idols, and real-person idols separately. I present the history of the Japanese popular cultural industry starting from the 1980s to point out the key events and ideas that contribute to the formation of anime idol culture. I first introduce the primary marketing strategy of anime idol franchises called "anime media mix" (Steingberg 2012). Then, I explain how seiyuu becomes marketed as a singer and idol after the integration of the music and anime industries. Finally, I show some practices of the idol industry adopted by the anime idol production. I also weave in the introductions of the *Love Live* franchise in this historical account to illustrate these features of anime idol culture. Through

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introducing the development of anime idols, I explain how music is the center of cross-media anime idol productions, serving as a good case study of music in Japanese media.

Anime Media Mix

The term "media mix" was increasingly used by the Japanese popular cultural industry by the 1980s (Steinberg 2012, 150). In his book, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (2012), the film and media studies scholar Marc Steinberg outlines the development of media mix since postwar Japan. The term was first defined in two articles on advertising in 1963 (Kobayashi 1963; Shiraishi 1963) as quoted by Steinberg (2012, 139) "the use of a variety of advertising media organically, synthetically, effectively, and in accordance with an advertising goal" (Senden kaigi 1963, 109). The practice of media mix was still developing in the 70s and Steinberg calls the media mix that was common before the 80s "marketing media mix," which makes use of the synergetic effect of multimedia to achieve a single goal of persuading the consumer to purchase a certain product (Steinberg 2012, 141). Steinberg identifies the media mix widely known since the 80s as "anime media mix," which was brought in by Haruki Kadokawa, the former president of Kadokawa Shoten (Kadakawa Bookstore), one of the largest Japanese publishers (152).

The innovation on media mix made by Kadokawa was "the reliance on characters that migrate across works to incite consumption of further novels by the same author" (151). For example, Kadokawa Shoten buys all the works from the same author and promotes them. If one of the works becomes popular, there will be a boost of sales of the rest of the works too (ibid.). "This was particularly successful when, as with the first Kadokawa media mixes, the novels were part of a larger series that involved the same cast of characters" (ibid.). Kadokawa's strategy,

hence, uses multimedia not to promote a single product, but "the *general* consumption of any of the media mix's products (that) will grow the entire enterprise" (141). Although Kadokawa's strategy did not achieve great success in the late 70s because of large-scale advertisements, it became a trend in the publishing world and was later broadly considered as the "media mix" in the mid-80s (152).

Steinberg evaluates the media mix in Japan through analyzing anime characters in manga, as figures and toys (2012). Through adopting the media mix, many anime idol franchises involve a great variety of both media and physical products. Centered on anime idols, all products are related to each other to certain degree and feed the narrative worlds of anime idols. The creation of an anime character, however, is not limited to the design and reproduction of its body only. In Japanese animation, a character's voice is indispensable and he or she often has a "character song," which is explained later. What is the role of music in the media mix? What does music do to the production and connection of the narrative worlds of anime idols? This is further discussed when I examine the presentations of music on different media platforms in chapter two.

Love Live: Anime Media Mix

Love Live! School Idol Project (*Love Live*) is a Japanese media mix project that has been co-developed by *ASCII Media Works*, music label *Lantis*, anime studio *Sunrise*, game developers and distributors *Klab Games* and *Bushiroad* since 2010. These companies have produced many media products including anime series, CDs, DVDs, manga, arcade games, mobile phone games, novels, and magazines. They provide variants of the daily lives, music, and performances of anime idols. For example, the genre of animation about idols is commonly called "idol anime." The animation series of the *Love Live* idols provide condensed versions of the school life of the

Love Live idols. They also show short versions of anime idol performances with the story. More

elaborated versions of the interactions among the *Love Live* idols can be discovered in the other

mobile phone games or magazines. Each product provides a different sensual experience and sets

of information about the anime idols. In addition, the franchise includes countless physical

goods, such as figures, accessories, posters, etc. With the desire of knowing more about their

beloved idols, fans usually consume cross-media products as much as they can to accumulate the

narratives about them.

Seiyuu Gaining the Spotlight: the Favorite of the Anime and Music Industries

Seiyuu are always important to the productions of anime in Japan because their voice-

acting contributes to the characterization of the anime characters within animations. However,

seiyuu were seldom under the spotlight in Japanese media until the 1990s (Yamasaki 2014, 198).

It is important to understand how seiyuu gained the public's attention and eventually became one

of the most important products in anime idol culture.

On one hand, the prevalence of anime media mix since the 1980s has contributed to an

increased demand for seiyuu due to the high production of multimedia products. On the other

hand, the music industry seized the opportunity of collaborating with the anime industry which

resulted to broadening the seiyuu's job from voice-acting to singing. Aki Yamasaki, a scholar in

social relations and sociology, points out that in the mid-1980s, "record companies began to

acquire master recording rights and publishing rights of *anime* work music, including theme

songs… the record companies began to emphasize the creation of 'character songs,' which are

sung in the voice of the designated character played by a voice actor/actress in the

relevant *anime* work, and also 'audio drama,' which provide the relevant *anime* work's special

episodes only in audio format" (Yamasaki 2014, 195). Targeting the expanding anime market, the music industry made an alliance with the anime industry and produced character songs and audio dramas. Since then, voice acting and singing have been included in the scope of seiyuu's work.

As Yamasaki claims, seiyuu have entered "the maturation period" since the 1990s when they frequently showed and promoted themselves to the public and people not a part of the anime fanbase (2014, 198-199). For instance, seiyuu appeared on TV shows to advertise their anime work and exhibit their voice-acting skills. Also, *The Seiyu Awards*, an annual award ceremony to honor outstanding seiyuu, has been held since 2007. Due to this more public presence, the popularity of seiyuu is at all time high. With its rising popularity, and double nature as voice-actors and singers, seiyuu has become particularly valuable products in Japanese anime and music industries. Anime idol franchises can be regarded as a product that emphasizes the singing career of seiyuu. In an anime idol franchise, "character songs" are not the side product of an anime production that are only played at the beginning and the end of an animation episode. Instead, an anime idol franchise features a large discography attributed to the anime idols that is as important as the characters themselves. There are also concerts in which seiyuu sing, dance, and act as the anime idols on the stage. This emphasis on the music production in the anime idol franchises therefore can be regarded as the Japanese entertainment market's response to the maturation period of seiyuu.

<u>*Love Live*: Seiyuu Under the Spotlight</u>

The *Love Live* franchise has established four projects and each promotes a separate anime idol group. Each group has nine to ten members. As of this writing, *Love Live* has over 40 anime idols.

1. *Love Live! School Idol Project* (2010) with the idol group *μ's* (pronounced as "Muse")

2. *Love Live! Sunshine!!* (2015) with *Aqours*

3. *Love Live! Nijigasaki High School Idol Club* (2017) with *Nijigasaki High School Idol Club*

4. *Love Live! Superstar!* (2020) with *Liella!*

For example, *μ's* is formed by nine high school girls who aim to save their school in Tokyo from shutting down. Because of their school's low intake of new students, the anime idols try to boost the fame of the school through joining the biggest school idol competition in Japan called "Love Live." Over the course of preparing for the Love Live, they build strong friendships and support each other in pursuing their dreams.

The *Love Live* seiyuu have various tasks in promoting and producing the *Love Live* anime idols. They sing and voice the anime idols in CDs, DVDs, audio dramas, animation series, and games. They also perform and advertise the *Love Live* franchise in live events, such as concerts, fan meetings, online events on social media, and TV shows. For instance, the official *Love Live* YouTube channel functions as in an interactive platform with fans and has regular live streams that report updates about the franchise. During an online event, a seiyuu can talk to herself to promote the franchise, or reenact stories and performances of the anime idols in the real world. In other words, the *Love Live* seiyuu can do voice-acting, sing, dance, and act. They are not only

crucial in producing the anime idols behind the stage, but they are also valuable performers under the spotlight.

Selling the Idols: The Revolution in the Idol Industry by AKB48

There is a rising number of anime idol franchises in Japan since the 2010s. They tend to be large-scale productions that involve multiple media companies. Having both anime idols and their seiyuu, anime idol franchises attract fans who are interested in fictional characters in the virtual world or/and human idols in the real world. Nevertheless, the success of anime idol productions in Japan is not only due to its appeal to a wide audience. To sell idols, anime idol franchises adopt practices from the idol industry which has experienced a revolutionary change since the mid-2000s.

AKB48, the most popular Japanese girl group debuted in 2005 and titled the "national idols" in Japan, has introduced new strategies of developing intimacy with fans. For example, fans can touch their idols during handshaking events; fans can help their favorite idol to earn the title of the most popular idol of the year by voting in annual elections; fans are titled the role of "supporters" or "managers" by the idols' agencies. Purchasing the idols' products is no longer the only way to support the idols and fans are granted more power to influence the production of the idols. Having incomparable fame in Japan, AKB48 has been the role model of the idol industry and their marketing strategies have been widely adopted in the production of anime idol franchises. For instance, THE IDOLM@STER: Cinderella Girls, is a mobile game in a sub-series of the anime idol franchise called the iDOLM@STER. Similar to AKB48's annual election, the game has also held an annual general election for fans to rank the anime idols.

Furthermore, the success of AKB48 has presented the opportunity of promoting seiyuu as idols, especially those who are good-looking. Many seiyuu of anime idols are in the early stage of their career or even new to the entertainment industry when they join the anime idol franchise. A seiyuu's voice-acting skill is no longer a premise to be recruited. Instead, there is a trend of choosing pretty youngsters who share similar backgrounds and outlooks with the current anime idols. For example, Liyuu, a former Chinese cosplayer and model, has become the seiyuu of Keke Tang of *Liella!* in 2020. Both Liyuu and Tang are Chinese. Liyuu joined the Japanese talent agency in the early 2020 and made her debut as a singer in Japan while Tang, who, in the anime world, moved from China to Japan for high school. Therefore, they share a similar life experience of moving from one country to another. In addition, as a popular and experienced cosplayer in China, Liyuu has the fame and potential to be an idol and to embody an anime idol in real life. Despite her lack of voice-acting experience, Liyuu's background as a cosplayer and singer show her beauty, modeling skill, and singing foundation that make her marketable as the seiyuu of Tang and an idol.

In short, through adopting marketing strategies from the idol industry, anime idol franchises have attracted and secured devoted fans. Anime idols have become an influential and fast-growing early 21st-century Japanese media product that is worthy of being studied closely.

<u>*Love Live* fame in Japan</u>

Love Live! School Idol Project (since 2010) has been considered one of the most significant anime idol franchises. In 2019, one of the *Love Live* idol groups — *Aqours* — had a collaborative performance with AKB48 during the FNS music festival, a year end music show held by Fuji TV. Performing with the national idols in one of the most watched TV show in

Japan, the *Love Live* idols' popularity can be considered to be on par with Japan's "national idols."

Similar to AKB48, the *Love Live* franchise values the fans' opinion and participation by holding frequent polls for fans to pick the representative of a collaborative project with another franchise, to choose the lead singer of the upcoming group song, to create a name for a new anime idol group, and to vote for the monthly favorite girl, etc. Moreover, fans are designated as loyal supporters and managers. For example, in the mobile phone game *Love Live! School Idol Festival ALL STARS*, a player is set as a manager-like role who manages the *Nijigasaki High School Idol Club*. Through these forms of decision-making, fans tend to be devoted to follow the career of the anime idols and their seiyuu.

In this introduction, I presented the idea of anime media mix, a marketing strategy that emphasizes the connectivity of various narratives in a multimedia production by centering the production on characters. In the existing literature concerning anime media mix, music is largely ignored, and its role in Japanese media culture remains unclear. Anime idols, as large-scale media mix products, center on music production, responding to the growing popularity of seiyuu in Japan. They are also popular fast-growing products that combine the resources and marketing strategies from anime, music, and idol industries. For exploring the role of music in media mix, anime idols are a good genre to start with. I therefore choose *Love Live*, probably the most influential anime idol franchises in Japan, for this case study.

The Transnationality of *Love Live* and English-Speaking Fans

Besides its national fame in Japan, *Love Live* fans are all over the world. In 2017, the worldwide server of the rhythm game — *Love Live! School Idol Festival* — earned over 10

million players. Also, the third live concert of the *Nijigasaki High School Idol Club* in May 2021

provided paid streaming services to over thirty countries in North America, South America,

Europe, Asia, and Africa. This reflects the global fame of *Love Live.*
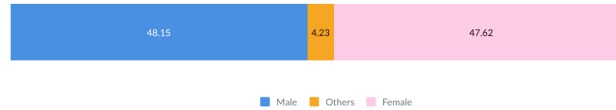
      As a long-time anime and music fan, I was attracted to the *Love Live* rhythm game when

it was introduced to me during a trip in Japan. When attending anime conventions in Hong Kong,

I witnessed the international popularity of the *Love Live* franchise. However, I never experienced

its fame outside of East Asia until I went to the U.S. for graduate school. Impressed by how

many students and friends know and love *Love Live*, I was curious about why and how non-

Japanese like myself consume this transnational multimedia franchise. Therefore, in this project,

I study anime idol culture from the perspective of English-speaking fans.

      One might ask: "Why do you not focus on Americans, but English-speaking fans?"

English-speaking fans participate in fan communities in English. However, that is not necessarily

their primary language. This is due to the transnational status of English. This thesis analyzes

English content created by *Love Live* franchise's most globally widespread fanbase. Online

interactions among English-speaking fans are not based on common demographic markers like

nationality, gender, race, etc. Instead, they are formed based on "common interests, endeavors,

goal, or practices" (Miller 2012, 7). Most online fan communities do not verify a user's identity,

therefore as long as one can communicate in the same language and is interested in *Love Live*,

he/she is able to join. In my personal experience, fans never ask where I am from, but their first

question to me is often "Who is your best girl?" These fans do not perceive themselves as

belonging to a particular ethnic, racial, nor national group, but rather regard common interest and

language as the foundation of their communication.

North America is undoubtedly one of the major markets of *Love Live* and many scholars studying the globalization of Japanese media culture center their discussions in North America. The subreddit page "Love Live! ラブライブ!" conducted a demographic survey on their users in mid-2020 (Figure 1.1). Among 6387 respondents, over 35% are North Americans and they make up the majority of the page's followers. However, the number of those from Europe, Oceania, and South America combined is no less than those from North America. In addition, over the course of conducting virtual ethnography, I encountered fans from Italy, Germany, Australia, India, Hong Kong, and the Czech Republic. This demographic data combined with my ethnographic research exemplifies the transnationality of the *Love Live* English-speaking fanbase.

Figure 1.1: The 2020 demographic survey of the subreddit page "Love Live! ラブライブ!" by u/
chaos-inferno, July 11, 2020.
https://www.reddit.com/r/LoveLive/comments/hpktuq/
information_love_live_demographic_survey_2020/

Music Across Borders

Many scholars in cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, media studies, ethnomusicology, and musicology have discussed the globalization of Japanese media culture since the 2000s. The subject-matter of these studies includes manga (Brienza 2016), TV dramas (Iwabuchi 2004), video games (Pinchbeck 2009), and toys (Phoenix 2006). Japanese media culture, therefore, is frequently discussed as visual culture. Music is rarely considered in studying the transnational nature of Japanese media c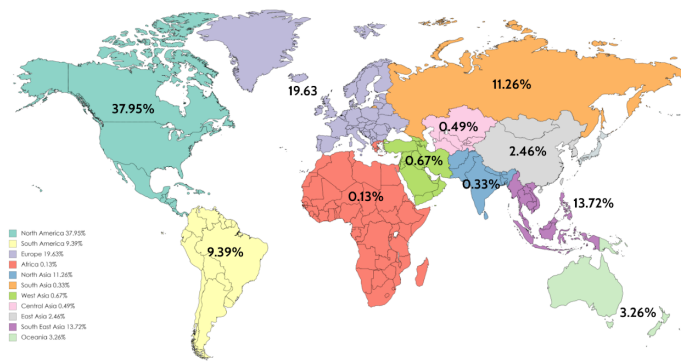ulture. Yoshitaka Mōri, a scholar in sociology and cultural studies, is one of the few scholars who discuss the consumption of J-pop in a global context (2014). Nonetheless, his study adopts a quantitative method that cannot detail the listening experience of the global consumers and lacks an analysis on how musical consumption negotiates the globalization of Japanese media culture.

In this project, therefore, I aim to provide musical and theoretical analyses of musical experiences of English-speaking fans. How do fans listen to anime idol music? What does the listening experience do for fans? Given that fans play the music in anime idol rhythm games, what is their performance experience? What does performing the music do to fans? What is the function of the fan's musical performance in an anime idol franchise? I believe that studying the role of music in the media mix can facilitate understanding of how English-speaking fans and anime idol franchises negotiate the globalization of Japanese media culture.

Methodology: Listen and Perform as Fans

Although English-speaking fans rely on their electronic devices to follow anime idols, it does not reduce their multisensory experience of the anime idol music. For example, while English-speaking fans seldom have the opportunity to attend a concert in Japan, a common

practice of this fanbase is to watch a live stream of a concert online or in a local venue. They fill

the venue with passionate cheering and light stick-waving (Image 1.1). Playing the *Love Live*

mobile games is also an intensively tactile, aural, and visual performance experience. A player

needs to physically engage with a visual notation system usually through touching the screen in a

coordinated fashion. To understand the complex multisensory experience of English-speaking

fans, I adopt Kiri Miller's ethnographic method of "DIY/DIA ethnography."

Image 1.1: A picture of fans streaming *Love Live* Concert in the Philippines by u/AinyaPrimus,
February 16, 2020.
https://www.reddit.com/r/LoveLive/comments/f4pp1x/
love_live_fest_philippine_delayed_viewing/

Miller emphasizes the importance of participant observation in understanding sensual

experience within a virtual world. In her book *Playable Bodies: Dance Games and Intimate*

Media (2017), she defines her ethnography style as "DIY/DIA ethnography." She explains: "In

working across the virtual/visceral gap, ethnographers reach for 'sensational knowledge' of *why*

other people do things through *how* they do things. We aspire to mutual recognition — not of a

shared that was always there, but of a shared self-fashioning and sensory orientation" (27). She also emphasizes that "it is not reducible to reflexivity…Rather, it is an effort to write us both into the *same* story, or even better, the same virtual world" (ibid.).

While I am a music scholar interested in how fans consume anime idol music, I am also a fan participating in the transnational spread of anime idol culture and experiencing the sensational knowledge of a fanbase's musical experience. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interactions with English-speaking fans only took place in online communities including Reddit, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Discord. I chatted with fans and attended several online concert-viewing sections to learn about their experiences in consuming anime idol culture. These social media platforms keep records of fans' discussions which helped me understand recurring ideas or topics.

Theoretical Frameworks

Listening in Intertextual Japanese Media

Japanese popular media culture is intertextual in nature. Patrick Galbraith, a scholar in information studies and cultural anthropology, and Jason Darlin, a scholar in gender and media studies, point out that idols and celebrities are multimedia performers who create and connect content across Japanese multimedia platforms (2012). "With the intensity of its media culture, idols and celebrities create an intertextual web of meanings that link forms and contents together to produce new means. As John Fiske (2011, 109) notes, 'intertextuality exists… in the space *between* texts. The idol, as a multimedia performer, is always operating within a system of meaning and codes that are referencing other texts. The intertextuality of idols, through its

potential to activate audiences, is fundamental to the structure of the Japanese media" (Galbraith and Karlin 2012, 10).

How do English-speaking fans follow the intertextual narrative worlds of in the media mix anime idol franchise? On one hand, fan reads about anime idols across animation series, manga, and games. These media products detail the daily lives of anime idols differently, so fans collect and connect these narratives intertextually to enrich their understanding of anime idols. On the other hand, fans listen to the music of anime idols through music platforms, animation series, games, and concerts. Chapter two aims to answer the questions: What is the role of music in the intertextual anime idol culture? How does music contribute to fans' consumption of the intertextual narrative worlds of anime worlds? Through studying how English-speaking fans listen to anime idol music in multimedia platforms, I present the function of music in defining anime idols and constructing their intertextual narrative worlds.

Anime Idol Rhythm Game in an Attention Economy

Chapter three evaluates the function of musical performance as an economic device in Japanese media culture. I adopt the theory of attention economy to discuss how anime rhythmic games make use of rhythmic performances to capture and manage consumers attention, advertising virtual character goods. What is attention? Thomas Davenport, a professor of information technology and management, and John Beck, a professor of modern and contemporary culture, defines attention as "focused mental engagement on a particular item of information. Items come into our awareness, we attend to a particular item, and then we decide whether to act" (2001, 20). While the study on human's attention is extensive in the fields of

psychology, cognitive science, and philosophy, there are two important features of attention for understanding the idea of attention economy.

1. We have a limited attention capacity. One has limited ability to do multiple tasks at the same time, as there is a total amount of attention one can use at any time (Kahneman 1973). Quality wanes when we split our attention (Sternberg & Sternberg 2012)

2. Attention is transferable, e.g. when a pop star on stage points to something else, the audience's attention is transferred to that certain thing (Hendricks 2019, 6).

Attention is considered a limited resource and a currency in attention economy theory. Herbert Simon, the first to theorize about the attention economy, defines it as "...in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients" (Simon 1971, 40-41). A wide range of disciplines study the attention economy, including economics, cognitive science, marketing, and psychology. Among these fields, the field of marketing generates models that manage the attention of consumers. "The goal is to isolate the best marketing strategies given the attention already at the advertisers' disposal. If there is no attention, then attention needs to be seized; if there is only partial attention, it needs to be won over completely; and if someone's undivided attention is won over, it must be kept and used as efficiently as possible to persuade and affect behavior" (Hendricks 2019, 8). Compared to the overabundance of information and knowledge, human attention is in short supply and is the focus of advertising agencies.

How does music facilitate Japanese popular cultural industry competing for the consumers' attention in the global market? In chapter three, I adopt an analytical model from two

marketing scholars, Kathleen Lacher and Richard Mizerski, to discuss how the rhythmic performance of an anime idol rhythm game captures and manages players' attention. Lacher and Mizerski's model analyzes music consumption and purchase intention based on the idea of hedonic consumption (1994). Introduced by Elizabeth Hirschman and Morris Holbrook, two marketing scholars, hedonic consumption emphasizes the experiential aspect of the consumption experience (1982). Lacher and Mizerski then dissect this multisensory experience of music consumption into four responses: emotional response, sensory response, imaginal response, and analytical response (1994). Looking into how players manage their attention to process the responses provoked by rhythmic performance, I contend that challenges players' limited attention to persuade them to purchase virtual anime idol cards, which can influence the rating of players' rhythmic performances.

Chapter 2: Listening to Anime Idol Music in the Media Mix

This chapter discusses the role of music in intertextual Japanese media by looking into the listening experience of English-speaking *Love Live* fans. I argue that anime idol music is a site where fans process various multimedia content for the imagination of the narrative worlds and characterization of anime idols. I demonstrate three forms of fan interactions with music that I argue indicate the role of music in the intertextuality of anime idol culture. First, music is a representation of anime idols. Fans listen to anime idol music to learn the background, personalities, and thoughts of an anime idol. Second, as fans listen to the anime idol music through various media products, they associate the narratives of anime idols in different contexts with music. I describe this process as "sticking" narratives on to music. Such a metaphor conceptualizes narratives as stickers that can be flexibly added, detached, and covered on a musical platform. Third, fans then attempt to integrate musical narratives to verify, enrich, and consolidate their understanding of the anime idols. I call this listening practice of connecting narratives across media platforms intertextual listening.

This chapter has three parts. I first elucidate music as a representation of an anime idol by analyzing the music and performances of Yoshiko Tsushima, a *Love Live* idol. Then, I illustrate the idea of sticking narratives on music by laying outing out three presentations of a song called "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" (想いよひとつになれ) or "Feelings Become One" in the animation series, live concert, and music videos. Next, I present how fans perform intertextual listening by integrating musical narratives that interpret an anime idol's personality and thoughts. I follow fans' discussions on "Audrey," a song of Shizuku Osaka, to show how fans imagine Shizuku's personality with the narratives on music. Therefore, music in anime idol culture has a crucial role

of representing anime idols, and functions as a platform where fans synthesize various narratives about anime idols across media platforms.

Musical Expressions of Anime Idols

This section presents music as a representation of an anime idol through the analysis of the music and performances of Yoshiko Tsushima or Yohane, a member of *Aqours*. I explain how the contrasting musical styles of her songs depict two opposite personae, an angelic one called Yoshiko, and a devilish one called Yohane. Then, I look into her songs to show how various musical elements detail her *chuunibyou* (中二病), a delusional and self-asserted type of personality. Before unpacking how music defines Yoshiko, I first provide a general impression of Yoshiko.

<u>Who is Yoshiko? Who is Yohane?</u>

Yoshiko Tsuhima is a first-year student at Uranohoshi Girs' High School and a member of *Aqours*. She is known for having two opposite personalities (Image 2.1). On one hand, she is bright, slightly timid, and thoughtful. On the other hand, Yoshiko has the other persona she called "Yohane, the Fallen Angel" (堕天使ヨハネ Datenshi Yohane), who was cast from the heavens as she angered God. When Yoshiko behaves like Yohane, she is dark, dramatic, and supercillious. Also, Aika Kobayashi, Yoshiko's seiyuu, uses a distinctive lower vocal range to distinguish Yohane from Yoshiko. Yoshiko's delusional personality of imagining herself as a supernatural being is categorized as *chuunibyou* in anime culture. In the following, I explain how two songs establish the musical styles for the angelic Yoshiko and the devilish Yohane respectively.

Image 2.1: A piece of fan-art that paints the two opposite personality of Yoshiko by 沙マコ/ shamako, July 12, 2019.

https://www.pixiv.net/artworks/75687606

The Devil and the Angel: Yohane in *Guilty Kiss* and Yoshiko in First-Year-Group

Most of the *Love Live* idols have their musical styles founded in sub-unit songs, which are mostly issued before the solo songs. What are sub-unit? In *Love Live*, there are mainly two types of groups: main groups and sub-units. For example, under *Aqours*, the main group, *Guilty Kiss* is a sub-unit formed by three members of *Aqours*, Yoshiko, Riko, and Mari. Fans be

consider sub-unit songs to have more distinctive musical styles that echo with the personalities of

the *Love Live* members compared to the main songs.

> RyuWrong (u/RyuWrong): "It's largely a non-anime thing. Love Live is, at its core, a music-based project. So for both μ's and Aqours, the nine members were divided into three sub-units of three members each. It's quite similar to how idol groups (which often boast large sizes) form smaller sub-unit. …
>
> Sub-units tend to matter the most in music, live concerts and other live events (such as the ongoing Aqours fan meetings, which are based on sub-unit). That being said, the episode where μ's went to Maki's summer cottage have the group divided into those sub-units (although they were not explicitly stated as sub-units, and it's more of an Easter egg)" (October 7, 2018, comment on Anonymous October 7, 2018).

RatofDeath (u/RatofDeath): "Each subunit focuses on a different genre of music, for example

both BiBi and Guilty Kiss have songs with strong rock elements in it, while CYaRon is more

peppy. If you listen to subunit specific songs, there's a noticeable difference in the style of song.

For example Guilty Kiss' *Strawberry Trapper* vs CYaRon's *Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!*"

(October 9, 2018, comment on Anonymous October 7, 2018).

Yoshiko belongs to a sub-unit called *Guilty Kiss* which is often described as dark,

powerful, and edgy. She is also a member of the first-year-group. A year group is similar to a

sub-unit and all group members are in the same year. The first-year-group of *Aqours* is cheerful,

bright, and energetic. In having contrary musical styles, the first-year-group and *Guilty Kiss*

simultaneously establish Yoshiko's bright persona as well as the dark demeanor of her alter-ego

Yohane. This personality contrast can be seen by comparing the songs "Strawberry Trapper" and

"Waku-Waku-Week!" or "Exciting/Heart-pounding Week!"

"Waku-Waku-Week!" is the first song of the first-year-group composed of Ruby, Yoshiko, and Hanamaru (Image 2.2). Fans consider it as a *genki* (元気 energetic, healthy, and cheering) pop song that highlights the group's bright and young personalities. The most significant feature of the song is its continuous high energy level. The drum set and electric guitar play an upbeat tempo and frequent "fairy dust" sound effects reflect the group's *kawaii* (可愛い cute in Japanese popular culture) outlook. The members are constantly singing in a high pitch, sometimes squeaking, which contributes to their youthful and innocent expression. In addition, the choreography features large movements, such as jumping, waving, and shaking. The first-year-group constantly jumps around the stage or hops in the same position, never standing still. Fans consider "Waku-Waku-Week!"as showing the bright side of Yoshiko among the vivacious and bubbly first-year members.

Image 2.2: A screen-capture of a video of the live performance of "Waku-Waku-Week!" entitled "Waku Waku Week" (Starting from the right are the seiyuu of Ruby, Yoshiko, and Hanamaru) by Haro ini Haro Rabu Rabu, June 29, 2021.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWtFYVpla9w

TheSaltan (u/TheSaltan): "Yoshiko's part caught me off guard. The song was all sweet and sugary then suddenly, tabasco sauce \m/

Overall had the same effect as Pops. Didn't like it at first but then it grows on you. A catchy song to start the day" (December 3, 2016 comment on u/MasterMirage December 3, 2016).

HopelessLuna18VA: "That's actually Yoshiko! When she sings higher it's Yoshiko, when it's lower and more powerful it's Yohane! :D" (July, 2021, comment on NicoNico Nii v2 May 5, 2021)

Ultimate Coordinator (@sailorearth82) simply describes "Waku-Waku-Week!" as "The cute song" (October 15 2021, comment on @lovelivesongOTD October 14, 2021).

In contrast, "Strawberry Trapper" is *Guilty Kiss*'s first song that presents Yoshiko's dark persona, Yohane. Fans consider "Strawberry Trapper" as rock, hard rock, or metal rock, and emphasize its use of electronic instruments. In the live performance of "Strawberry Trapper," *Guilty Kiss* imitates the setting of a rock concert by having the members holding "classic-look" microphones (Image 2.3). Referencing the stereotypes of rock as rebellious, and electronic music as modern, "Strawberry Trapper" depicts the reckless and feverish style of *Guilty Kiss*. The song highlights the electric guitar, which dominates the song with the loudest volume and has a virtuosic interlude. The heavy bass guitar and the pipe organ sounds from the synthesizer also emphasize the electronic sounds in the song. Compared to "Waku-Waku-Week!," "Strawberry Trapper" makes use of different textures to create more significant dynamic changes. For example, during the first verse, the members' singing is only accompanied by the bass guitar in soft volume, which is then followed by the explosive entrance of the rest of the band. Moreover, fans acknowledge that Yohane, Yoshiko's alter-ego, appears in this song because of her

distinctively lower vocal range. Unlike "Waku-Waku-Week!," the choreography of "Strawberry Trapper" has less dramatic body movements, and the members stay in the same position for most of the performance. Instead of showing their energy with active bouncing, *Guilty Kiss* showcases their vocal power through belting sustained notes. The effectiveness of these musical attributes in portraying Yohane can be seen in fan reactions.

Image 2.3: A screen-capture of a video of the live performance of "Strawberry Trapper" entitled *"Strawberry Trapper - Guilty Kiss First LOVELIVE! ~New Romantic Sailors~"* (Starting from the left are the seiyuu of Mari, Riko, and Yoshiko. The screen behind shows Yoshiko dancing as Yohane) by even more shiny, October 3, 2021.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKLONNPfg0g

Levin_Interstellar_Fighter: "For those who don't know about the sub unit called Guilty Kiss, basically Guilty Kiss not only consist of rock, and metallica music, but pretty much electronic music, as this one is Electronic Dance Music. Maybe there will be another music genre that will fit perfectly for Guilty Kiss, and I believe that Acid Techno could be the answer, I am just wonder if Lantis is going

to approve this genre. (Guilty Kiss consist mostly of music that gives of a DARK sense of feeling)” (2016, comment on ara_あら August 10, 2018)

ejdme (u/ejdme) shares: “YES! Seeing and hearing Strawberry Trapper performed live at Anime Expo only made me love it even more. While the rainbow was a very touching moment I'll never forget, I will also never forget the feeling of the energy and excitement in the auditorium when Strawberry Trapper began. Just incredible” (October 1, 2018 comment on u/ Lord_Chanka_69 October 1, 2018).

The Spartan says: “I love how Yohane awakens midsong. It even has a bitching guitar rift. It's the best part of the song. Zura must have given her a black feather secretly” (January, 2021, comment on FireAzure June 22, 2020).

The contrasting personalities of Yoshiko and her alter-ego Yohane are introduced through the different musical styles of the first-year-group and *Guilty Kiss* respectively. The *genki* pop song “Waku-Waku-Week!” presents the cheerful and bright Yoshiko while the rock song “Strawberry Trapper” shows the reckless and rebellious Yohane. Nevertheless, *Love Live* music does not only give the general impression of Yoshiko’s two personae, it also distinguishes Yoshiko from other *Aqours* members by detailing her delusional personality, *chuunibyou* (中二病).

A Detailed Musical Portrayl of An Idol with *Chuunibyou*

       Chuunibyo is a colloquial term in Japanese anime culture that describes characters who enjoy imagining themselves as having certain special powers or otherworldly beings. *Byou* (病) means sickness, so *chuunibyou* is considered abnormal behavior. When Yoshiko behaves as Yohane, she likes wearing "cosplay-like" and dark-tone costumes with wings and speaks in a superior tone (Image 2.4). In the following, I show how "Strawberry Trapper" and Yoshiko's solo song "In This Unstable World" illustrate her *chuunibyou* in the aspects of instrumentation, melody, timbre, dynamics, rhythm, and lyrics.

Image 2.4: A screen-capture of Yohane in the animation series of *Love Live! Sunshine* by @nickhax, October 15, 2021.

https://twitter.com/nickhax/status/1449129146030886916

"Strawberry Trapper" is particularly important in describing Yoshiko's *chuunibyou* because it sets what fans called the "gothic" musical style for Yohane. This musical style makes reference to that of the Baroque music and uses the sounds of pipe organ, tubular bells, and choir to create a solemn atmosphere. Anime characters with *chuunibyou* often have the fantasy of being a vampire, demon, angel, etc. This musical style is used to resonate with the mythical background of their fantasies.

Yohane has a short solo with this gothic musical style in "Strawberry Trapper." The section takes place after the second chorus which ends with a ring of the tubular bells. Then, as choral sound rises, Riko announces "Yohane, Shoukan" (ヨハネ、召喚 Yohane, Summon) to introduce Yohane's solo and to depict the picture of Yohane arriving the scene as a fallen angel. Once Yohane sings, the pipe organ sound from the synthesizer takes over with dense broken minor chords along with the drum set. This gothic instrumentation happens during Yohane's solo only throughout the song and no other *Aqours* member's share this musical style. Therefore, this solo in "Strawberry Trapper" is influential to founding the gothic musical style as a way of portraying Yohane's *chuunibyou* and her fantastic world in music.

Besides instrumentation and stereotype of musical style, Yoshiko's solo song, "In This Unstable World," further demonstrates how various musical elements describe *chuunibyou* (Image 2.5). In the following, I present how "In This Unstable World" makes use of contrasting melody, dynamics, texture, and timbre to express Yoshiko's conflicting personae and Yohane's unsettling status as a fallen angel on the Earth. Also, these contrasts in music create drastic changes of moods that represent Yoshiko's dramatic personality as a *chuunibyou*.

Image 2.5: A screen-capture of a video of the live performance of "In This Unstable World" entitled "in this unstable world - Guilty Kiss First LOVELIVE! ~New Romantic Sailors~" by even more shiny, October 17, 2021.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSTqBtG9rrY

In This Unstable World (Verse)

Composer and Arranger: Rei Kamiya
Lyricst: Aki Hata

Figure 2.1: Author's Transcription of the first verse of "In This Unstable World"

English-translated lyrics of the first verse:
People aren't limited to only one existence
white wing black wing
A different me from yesterday gives a different answer today
If no is yes, then yes is no? It all depends on my mood
Ah, I'm certain there's more "me's" that I have yet to know (Love Live! Wiki accessed on October 24, 2021)

In This Unstable World (The First Chorus)

Composer and Arranger: Rei Kamiya
Lyricist: Aki Hata

ko no ta i ku tsu se ka i o wa ta ru ni wa chi
この 退 屈 世 界 を 渡 る に は 力

ka ra o a wa se na kya da me yo ho ra wa ta shi to a na ta to
を 合 わ せ な きゃ 駄 目 よ ほ ら 私 と 貴方 と

wa ta shi na ra ya ga te ki se ki ga o ki chau tte da ke do i ma wa
ワ タ シ な ら や が て 奇 跡 が 起 き ちゃう って だ け ど 今 は

ga man shi you ka shi fu ku no to ki sa un - sta - ble world
我 慢 し よう か 雌 伏 の 時 さ un - sta - ble world

Figure 2.2: Author's Transcription of the First Chorus of "In This Unstable World"

English-translated lyrics of the first chorus:
To cross this boring world
We have to combine our powers
Look, if it's me and you and "me", a miracle will soon happen!
But right now we have to bear with it, we have to bide our time in this unstable world (Love Live Wiki! accessed on October 24, 2021)

The contrast between the mysterious verse and the chaotic chorus present the unpredictable attitude of Yoshiko with *chuunibyou*. Adopting chromaticism, the verse has flat melodies in even rhythm. It creates a chilling mood to depict Yohane's dark and cunning personality. In contrast, the chorus has disjunct melodies in syncopated rhythm. The chorus is fluctuating and echoes with Yoshiko's unsettling feeling because of having two selves and her supernatural imagination that does not fit in the society. The contrast in the shape of melodies and rhythmic patterns resonate with Yoshiko dramatic behaviors and struggle as a *chuunibyou*.

The contrasts in melody and rhythm are further intensified by sharp changes in dynamics. The song is composed of alternative soft and loud sections without any transitions. For example, the first verse is soft and mysterious. It falls into complete silence before the chorus which creates the explosiveness of the powerful chorus. Also, before the last chorus, the chorus is repeated. However, this second last chorus is not powerful like others. Instead, it is delicate and misty. It then leads to the most vigorous chorus at the end. The drastic change in dynamics portrays Yohane's unexpected and spontaneous switches of between Yoshiko's two personae.

While the contrasts in melody, rhythm, and dynamics represent Yohane's *chuunibyou* on the structural level of the music, the timbre of Yoshiko's vocal performance and the lyrics polish the depiction. To showcase the colorful personality of Yoshiko, the song presents Yoshiko's flexible switch of timbres. For example, in the choruses, Yohane sings the highest note of the song, D4, sometimes in falsetto or modal voice, highlighted in green color in figure 2.2. In the last chorus, Yoshiko shows off her vocal capability by singing a long note of D4 in a powerful manner. Therefore, the switching timbre is not caused by the limited vocal range or singing

skills. Instead, it ornaments the dramatic portrayal of Yoshiko's *chuunibyou* by enriching the tone

color of the music.

Last, but not least, the lyrics conveys Yoshiko's perception of her two selves. As an

example, below is the English-translation of the first chorus.

<div align="center">

To cross this boring world
We have to combine our powers
Look, if it's me and you and "me", a miracle will soon happen!
But right now we have to bear with it, we have to bide our time in this unstable world
(Love Live Wiki! accessed on October 24, 2021)

</div>

In Japanese lyrics, the first highlighted "me" is written in kanji — "私" — and second one is

written in katana "ワタシ," which is usually used for foreign words. Having the same

pronunciation but different scripts, the lyrics hint at the two selves of Yoshiko. While English-

speaking fans might not know this detail in the Japanese lyrics, the usage of quotation mark

which differentiates the two "me"s is kept in many sites and videos providing English translated

lyrics. Besides showing Yoshiko's acceptance of her two personae, this chorus also reflects her

chuunibyou view on the society. Imagining herself as the fallen angel with supernatural power,

Yoshiko views the world on Earth to be dull. Nevertheless, throughout the song, the lyrics

conveys a positive message of embracing different selves through Yoshiko's negotiation of her

two personae.

The analysis of Yoshiko's music exemplifies how music illustrates the anime idol's

background and personality in the aspect of instrumentation, melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre,

lyrics. While the above songs are examples of the musical representations of Yoshiko's two

personae, the large discography of *Love Live* also contribute to the characterization of Yoshiko in

different extent. Through listening to music in various media platforms, fans learn various expressions of an anime idol to enrich the understanding of his/her character.

Narratives of Anime Idols Sticking on Music in the Media Mix

The function of music is not limited to representing anime idols only. This section shows how music facilitates the creation and circulation of content in the media mix as music is frequently reinterpreted on multiple media platforms. Embedded into various media products of the *Love Live* franchise, anime idol music is presented in different styles and contexts. Through studying the multimedia nature of the song "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" across animation series, concerts, and fan-made music videos, I show how narratives of anime idols "stick" on the song in different media platforms. Before that, I explain why I choose "stick," but not "layer" or "add" to describe the interaction between narratives and music.

As an anime media mix franchise, *Love Live* produces narrative variants on multimedia platforms. These narrative variants do not necessarily explain each other, but they all center on anime idols. In *Love Live*, since music is played along with different variations of narratives, they become tethered to the music. However, everyone has a way of understanding the relationship between the music and the narrative presented in a particular media product. Some consider the animation as the ultimate reference of the song's meaning while some regard concerts to be the most convincing source because they value seiyuu's representation of anime idols. In other words, a fan has a certain level of freedom in narrative imagination and how it connects to the music. To avoid implying any fixed relationship between narratives and music, I imagine the narratives as stickers that can layer on, cover, and supplement each other. I describe this phenomenon as narratives "sticking" to the music.

"Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" was first partly showcased in the eleventh episode of the first season of *Love Live! SunShine*, the animation series of *Aqours* in September 2016. The full song was then issued as a single in November 2016. It is composed and arranged by Takashi Saeki and the lyrics are written by Aki Hata, who is the main lyricist of almost all songs of *Aqours* and *μ's*. As one of *Aqours'* most beloved songs , it is about the strengthened bonding among the *Aqours* members, announcing that the spirit of *Aqours* is "to hold each other's hands and to shine brighter together." Since "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" was first introduced in the animation series, I start with explaining how that episode provides the song's skeleton narrative.

Animation Series: Giving a Story to Music

Portraying the animated school lives of the *Love Live* anime idols, the animation series is commonly considered as the foundational depiction of the idols' personalities, backgrounds, and relationships. In addition, it is the only media source that depicts the story of anime idols in a closed timeline while the stories in the manga series and mobile games either never end or have an open ending. Each episode is around 25 minutes long and has a short anime idol performance that only includes the first verse and chorus of a song. Despite the shortness of each song, fans never stop imagining the interaction between the performance and the story. In describing the plot of the eleventh episode *Love Live! Sunshine*, I illustrate how the animated performance emphasizes certain musical elements that echo the story.

Riko, Chika, and You are three of *Aqours'* nine members. Riko plays the piano and composes songs for Aqours. Chika is *Aqours*'s leader and You is her childhood friend. Even though *Aqours* has an upcoming performance in the *Love Live* preliminaries, Riko cannot

perform with them because she is going to Tokyo to attend a piano competition on the same day. In the eleventh episode, Riko goes to Tokyo with the support of the rest of *Aqours* members. Meanwhile, You faces her jealousy of Riko who has gotten closer to Chika. While You struggles to convey her thoughts to Chika, Chika reaches out to You and resolves You's worries about their friendship. Finally, Riko and *Aqours* finish the piano recital and performance in the *Love Live* preliminaries respectively with their deep connection to each other despite the distance between them.

To echo the story, the short performance of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" in the animation episode highlights the piano, which is the iconic instrument of Riko. The piano is played throughout the song and it has unaccompanied solos at the beginning and the end. Symbolizing the presence of Riko, the piano in "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" represents Riko's support for the *Aqours* members and vice versa. This interpretation is evidenced by the choreography and the animation of the performance in the animation episode. During the two piano solos, *Aqours* members form a semi-circle and imitate playing on an imagined piano along with the music. This can be seen as *Aqours* members' expression of filling in Riko's presence in their preliminaries as well as conveying support to Riko's piano recital in Tokyo. Moreover, this animated performance of the *Aqours* integrates the clips of Riko performing the piano recital. This shows that the performances of *Aqours* and Riko takes place simultaneously, and more importantly, Riko also plays "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" in the recital. For example, the animation shows Riko playing the last note on the piano that is the same as that of *Aqours* performance of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare." The animation, therefore, creates an illusion that Riko's piano solo is the *Aqours*' performance to support her members.

The animated performance of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" makes use choreography and animation to provoke an imagined connection between the piano performance in the *Aqours*' preliminaries and in Riko's piano recital. The piano sound is used to symbolize the mutual support between Riko and the *Aqours* members despite the physical distance between them. This story of friendship in the animation series, therefore, sticks on "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare."

In the later issuing of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" as a single, Riko's voice remains missing. Also, the complete track "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare Riko's Piano Sonata" is included in the album of the *Love Live! SunShine* animation's original sound track. Without watching the animation to learn the story's narrative, one would not understand why Riko does not sing in the song, the presence of her piano sonata, and the significance of the piano in both tracks. As "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" travels to other media forms, the narrative from the animation series stays connected to the song, becoming essential for fans to interpret its meaning in relation to the *Love Live* idols. In the following, I review how "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" brings the narratives from the animation series and transforms them through live performance.

Concerts: Reproduction of Musical Performance and Producing Surprising Narratives

An anime idol concert is where the seiyuu reenact the performances and narratives of anime idols. The seiyuu wear the same costumes and dance the same choreography as the anime idols who are shown on a big screen behind them (Figure 2.6).

The first live performance of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" took place in the first *Aqours* live concert in 2017. To present Riko's piano recital taking place in another space, the seiyuu of Riko, Rikako Aida, played the piano on the upper part of the stage while the rest of the *Aqours* members performed on the lower stage (Figure 2.6). Meanwhile, the screen behind the stage

played the performance in the animation series which helped recall the narrative behind the song. To reproduce the overlapping piano performances of Riko's recital and *Aqours* performance, seiyuu Aida learned the piano part of the song as a beginner for this live performance.
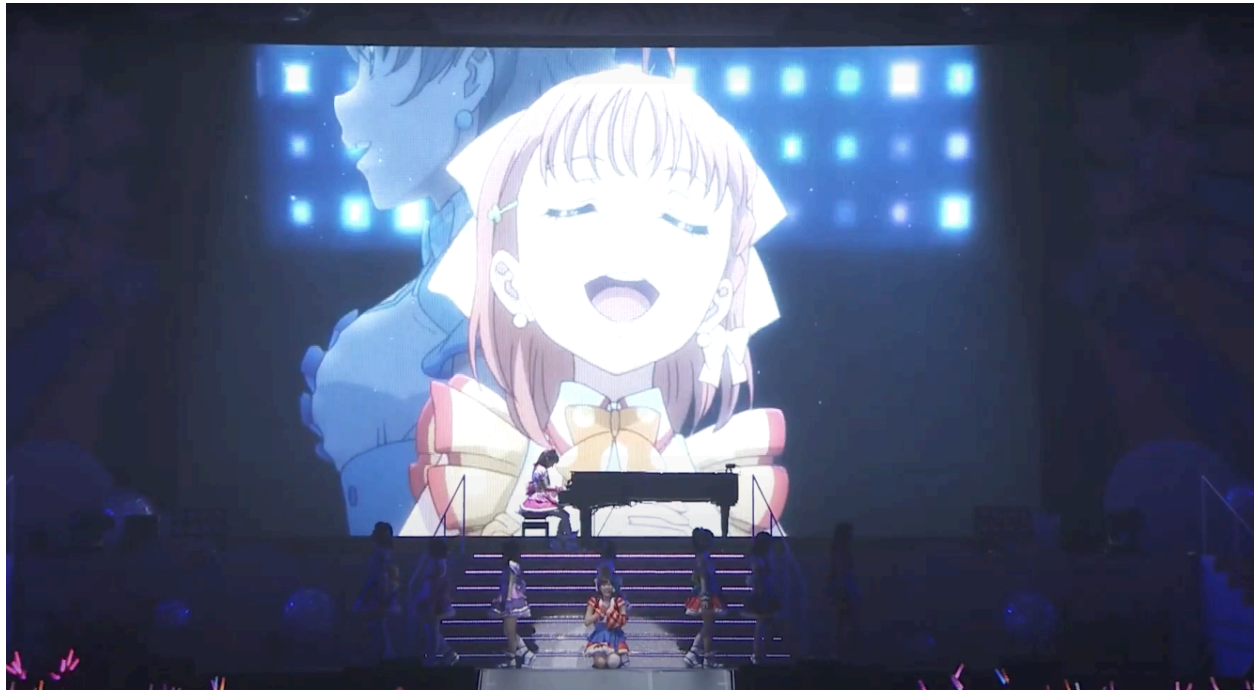

Image 2.6: A screen-capture of a video of the live performance of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" entitled "Rikako Incident" by Real Eyes, January 29, 2021.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdDcc0AP7DQ&t=4s

When Aida played the piano on the second day of the concert, she made a mistake and froze in front of the piano. The rest of *Aqours* members stopped dancing due to the silence and realized Aida was panicking at the back of the stage. They ran to give her a hug and encouraged her to try again. Rikako bursted out crying and apologizing in the embrace of her members and the cheer from the audience. Fans named it the "Rikako incident" and found that it surprisingly resonated with the perseverance and friendship of *Aqours*.

Many fans consider this moment to be miraculous as *Aqours* members' heartwarming reaction to Aida's mistake matched with the spirit of *Aqours* as well as the message of "Omoi yo

Hitotsu ni Nare." In an episode of a TV show "Songs of Tokyo" of the NHK World channel, one

of the international channels of a Japanese public broadcaster, Niklas, a Croatian fan described

the Rikako incident as an unforgettable scene: "I still can't watch it without crying, that scene.

Seiyu of Chika, Inami Anju, encouraged her to go on and to try it again. And basically, that's… It

doesn't matter if she made a mistake, she can always try again and make it work. It connects

with the anime very well." Also, in xIceArcher's Reddit post "The Rikako Incident - A Miracle

of Coincidences,"he or she points out one of the coincidences between the incident and the lyrics

of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare."

> "Being originally a song marking the end of the You friendship arc in the anime, Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare could be broadly interpreted as a song telling a tale of Aqours finally being able to realize that they all share the same feelings and coming together as one. I'll cut down on the lyric interpretations, but what struck me was how appropriate some of the lyrics were in describing what Rikyako might have felt when playing the piano up on the stage, separated from the rest of Aqours, such as 「いまさらわかつた　ひとりじゃない」 (Now, I finally realized that I'm not alone). Such a coincidence may indeed be due to the similarities between the situation that happened here and the plotline in the anime. In her post-live Instagram post, Rikyako did mention that the lyrics of the song helped her continue playing.
> More importantly, the lyrics of Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare seems to be a perfect conduit for the other members of Aqours to convey their emotions to Rikyako during the live itself, which is another reason for just how emotional this performance was. Aside from the "not alone" line mentioned above, we also have lines like 「どこにいても同じ明日を信じてる」 (No matter where we are, we'll believe in the same future) and 「違う場所へ向かうとしても信じてる」 (Even if we are heading towards different places, I'll believe in you). With a second look at the lyrics, it is hard to imagine how emotional Aqours must have been when performing it" (u/xIceArcher March 4, 2017).

With its uncertainty and spontaneous interactions among seiyuu, a concert has the

potential of sticking new narratives on the music. Surprising incidents like the "Rikako incident"

can become narratives or memories to be recalled when fans listen to the song.

Rodeschild: "To me it symbolises how far Riko and Aqours has come, how they'll grow even stronger, and how they know that they will never, ever, be alone" (u/Rosechild January 31, 2018).

Farris_22: "imma cry everytime i hear this song after rikako incident" (April, 2021, comment on wolfjrr June 13, 2019).

As of this writing, there are still discussions about the connections among the Rikako incident, "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare", the storyline, and the friendship of *Aqours*. Fans believe that through this incident, the seiyuu naturally demonstrates how *Aqours* members support and embrace each other when they face failures in life. To express their appreciation of the *Aqours*' deep friendship, some fans make music videos of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" to interpret the song in relation to possible narrative variants.

Music Videos: Flexible Interpretations of Music by Fans

The definition of a music video in anime idol culture is flexible. Most of them are official music videos produced by the franchise company, but some are fan-made videos issued on social media. Some fans also consider animated performances in mobile games as music videos. Official music videos are usually animated (often abbreviated AMV for animated music video) and issued in albums or on official social media platforms. Unlike the animation series, an official music video does not have a clear storyline but a stylistic theme. For example, the theme of the official AMV of μ's "Natsuiro Egao de 1, 2, Jump!" (夏色えがおで1, 2, Jump!) Or "Summer Colored Smile 1, 2, Jump![1]" is summer. This video shows the anime idols dancing on a beach in swimming suits, but there is no clear linkage to the animation series' plot.

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j-u11dHWnI

There are only a few official music videos, but almost every *Love Live* song has at least one fan-made music video. Fan-made videos are often lyric videos, which include the fans' translation of the Japanese lyrics in *romaji* (ローマ字 Romanized Japanese) and English, as well as AMVs, which feature either fan-made animation or a compilation of clips from the *Love Live* animation series. Fan-made music videos are important resources for fans to learn the music and appreciate others' creativity.

"Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" has no official music video but the animated performance in the animation series is often considered as the music video and used by some fans to make their own AMVs. For example, a fan named wolfjrr created and uploaded an AMV on YouTube that does not focus on a specific plot of an episode. Instead, he/she puts all the moments of conflict and resolution among *Aqours* throughout the animation series into the AMV (Image 2.7). Therefore, in wolfjrr's interpretation of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare," he emphasizes the song's reflection about the *Aqours* members' friendship.

Nevertheless, the story of Riko missing the preliminaries is not ignored in the fanmade videos. In YohaNico's lyric video, the icons of the *Aqours* members become colorful when they sing the corresponding lyrics. Although Riko does not sing in the song, YohaNico makes her icon colorful throughout the song to show Riko's presence as represented by the piano accompaniment (Image 2.8).

Image 2.7: A screen-capture of a fan-made AMV of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" entitled "Omoi Yo Hitotsu Ni Nare AMV ~ Love Live Sunshine"
by wolfjrr, June 13, 2019.
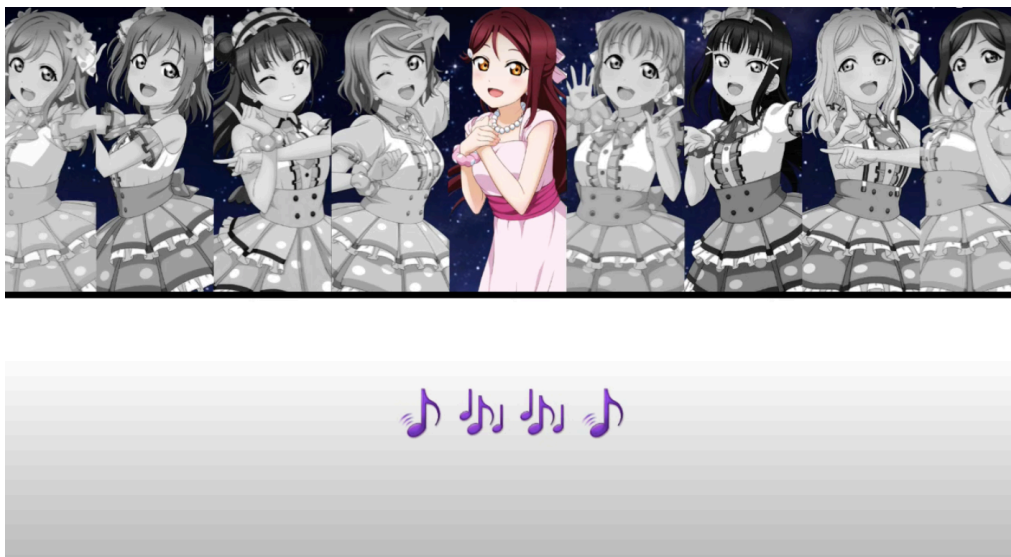http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbgg3MyQt7M

Image 2.8: A screen-capture of the fan-made lyric video of "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" entitled "Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare - Aqours [FULL ENG/ROM LYRICS + COLOR CODED] | Love Live!" by YohaNico, April 13, 2021.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEayvo2C7pw

YohaNico and wolfjrr exemplify how fans reinterpret the narratives of an anime idol song through music videos. They might reinforce a narrative already connected to the song or shed light on a different perspective.

"Omoi yo Hitotsu ni Nare" brings the skeleton narrative from the animation series to concerts and music videos, where fans learn and create various interpretations. It shows that anime idol music facilitates the circulation of narrative variants in a media mix franchise and functions as a platform where fans enrich the idols' narrative worlds through imagination and creativity. By following how fans listen to music across multimedia platforms, I showed how music functions as a site that allows fans to imagine the narratives of anime idols. In other words, story-telling in Japanese media is not exclusive to its visual presentation. Music can also tell the stories of fictional characters in the media mix.

Intertextual listening and the Characterization of Anime idols

While music has an important role in circulating narratives across multiple media platforms, the integration of the narratives that characterizes anime idols eventually takes place in fans' imagination. I therefore argue that the fans' listening practice of weaving narratives through music in multimedia platforms "intertextual listening." To illustrate intertextual listening, this section presents how fans deduce and imagine meaning in Shizuku Osaka's "Audrey" through connecting variants of narratives.

Shizuku Osaka is a first-year member of *Nijigasaki High School Idol Club*. She is also a member of the theatre club at school and is passionate in acting. Fans mostly perceive her songs to be "musical-like" or "theatre-type" because her songs often have novelistic themes. As of this writing, Osaka has four solo songs: "Anata no Risou no Heroine" (あなたの理想のヒロイン)

or "Your Ideal Heroine," "Audrey," "Yagate Hitotsu no Monogatari" (やがてひとつの物語) or "Finally, a Single Story," and "Solititude Rain."

Among her solos, "Audrey" poses a question to many fans: Who is Audrey? The fans generally guess that "Audrey" refers to Audrey Hepburn or a Shakespeare character named Audrey. I replicate the fans' comments below.

km mk: "Wow, this is a pretty decent song. Is she like talking about the actress Audrey and the song talking about how she will work hard to become an actress like her idol actress Audrey no matter what the obstacle? Or is Audrey is like some girl in her school that she admires/has a crush on?" (May, 2020, comment on Stxrii \\ April 2, 2020)

> Crec Dc: " @cäcilia vdl   I also think it's Shakespeare's Audrey because the link says Audrey finds honesty in others but Shizuku says that "she can't show Audrey her sufferings" Audrey is in Shakespeare's As you like it and one of the known line from it is 'All the world is the stage'. In the next passages, one line says 'One man plays many parts' and I think that 'man' is Shizuku? Because she's unsure and doesn't know how to act naturally?
> I don't know the play really I just did some shallow research on the web lol
> https://www.playshakespeare.com/as-you-like-it/characters/audrey" (October 2020, comment on Stxrii \\ April 2, 2020)

I clicked into the link. The character Audrey "is a goatherd Touchstone lusts after, and perhaps even loves. She is unlearned, honest, looks for honesty in others, does not consider herself good-looking, and is virtuous. She is quite willing to marry Touchstone, as it will allow her to rise in the world, and does not understand what the problem with having Martext do so is. She does not know how to conduct herself in courtly company" (PlayShakespeare.com accessed on October 29, 2021).

Texaboose: "Super late reply - but it was confirmed in the anime that she's singing about Audrey Hepburn, as Shizuku is a fan of hers" (January 2021, comment on Stxrii \\ April 2, 2020). (In the eighth episode of *Love Live! Nijigasaki High School Idol Club*, Osaka ponders on a poster titled

"Audrey" with vague pictures of several women. In the animation series, she never mentions Audrey Hepburn, but many fans believe that the women on the poster hints to her.)

Merapu123: "In Nijigaku's 1st Live her seiyuu confirmed that the song is referencing Audrey Hepburn hence why she performed it in a red coat with an umbrella (Figure 3.9.)" (February 3, 2020, comment on u/RX8Racer556 February 3, 2020). (This might refer to the ending scene of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) where Audrey Hepburn wears a raincoat.)

Image 2.9: A screen-capture of a video of the live performance of "Audrey" entitled "Love live nijigasaki - osaka shizuku_audrey full hd" by Story Ryka, November 4, 2020.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvDuC1m5tlQ&t=10s

YOSHIKA made an off-vocal music video of "Audrey" (YouTube, May5, 2020. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47dUyCuncmi). YOSHIKA uses a piece of fan art made by 沙マコ/shamako which has Shizuku wearing the costume of Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Image 2.10).
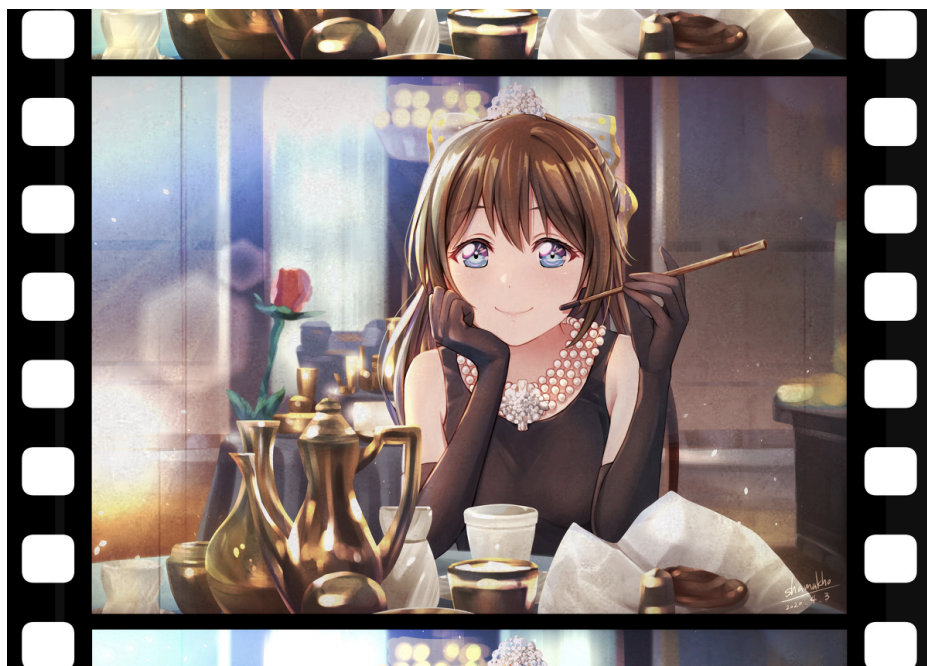
Image 2.10: A piece of fan-art of Shizuku Osaka in the costume of Audrey Hepburn in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) by 沙マコ/shamako, April 2, 2020.

https://www.pixiv.net/artworks/80524628

These comments illustrate how fans perform intertextual listening to generate a reasonable interpretation of an anime idol song. Based on the theatre background of Osaka, fans first assumed that Audrey is a theatre-related character. Therefore, they narrowed down the choices to Audrey Hepburn and a character created by the classic playwright William Shakespeare. Then, fans analyzed the lyrics, the live performance, and the animation series for evidence to explain their hypothesis. Fans then created music videos to express and spread their interpretation. Through weaving together musical performances and narratives of Osaka on multimedia platforms, fans detailed and solidified her unique character as an acting idol. Furthermore, through interpreting "Audrey," fans imagined more narratives about Osaka. There were many fans who asked: Does Osaka sing about a lover called Audrey? Is Shizuku a lesbian?

No matter which interpretation was more convincing, the fans' attempt to interpret the song facilitated the expansion and embellishment of Osaka's character. "Audrey," therefore, is an example of anime idol music arousing curiosity.

Through intertextual listening, fans listen to the song across different media platforms and connect variants of narratives dispersed around the franchise to interpret the music in relation to the anime idol. In other words, anime idol music motivates fans to learn, discuss, and create narratives to reinforce their characterization of anime idols.

Conclusion

To understand the intertextuality of Japanese media culture, scholars often look into its visual aspect and lack the emphasis on the listening practice within. This chapter, therefore, provided a case study of *Love Live* fans' listening experience to examine music as a medium for intertextuality in Japanese media culture. I presented three forms of fan engagement with anime idol music. First, fans listen to music as a portrayal of the anime idol. Second, fans stick narrative variants to music across different multimedia platforms. Third, fans weave narrative variants to interpret the meaning of music in relation to the anime idol. I call this listening practice intertextual listening. These musical engagements exemplify the function of music in defining a character, facilitating the circulation and integration of narrative variants in an anime media mix franchise.

Chapter 3: Anime Idol Rhythm Game Capturing and Managing Attention

After exploring the role of music in the media mix by looking into English-speaking fans' listening experience, this chapter studies their performance experience. By analyzing the consumption experience of the most-played rhythm game in the *Love Live* franchise, *Love Live! School Idol Festival* (*SIF*), I contend that music facilitates the global consumption of Japanese media. I present the rhythmic performance of *SIF* as an economic device situated in an attention economy that persuades fans to purchase virtual character goods, and to devote great amounts of their time to the rhythmic game. Unfolding the experience of playing rhythmic performance in *SIF* with the analytical model of hedonic consumption in the field of marketing, I show how fans generate all their attention to achieve the state of immersion, which is believed to be crucial to achieving a perfect rhythmic performance. I claim that the technically demanding rhythmic performance emphasizes the limitedness of one's attention capacity. The game profits from players' limited attention by selling the virtual anime idol cards which can facilitate a perfect rhythmic performance.

In this chapter, I first account for the history of rhythm games in the Japanese anime idol industry to show their prominent place in anime idol culture. Next, I introduce the performance system of *SIF* and the analytical model of hedonic consumption created by Kathleen Lacher and Richard Mizerski (1994), two scholars in the field of marketing. Adopting their model, I analyze how fans manage their attention to process different responses provoked by the rhythmic performance in *SIF*. This analysis evidences that the rhythmic performance of *SIF* challenges one's limited attention capacity and requires a lot of practice. Then, I explain that fans are

tempted to spend money on the lottery system of *SIF* to acquire virtual anime idol cards that can manipulate the result of their rhythmic performance.

Rhythm Games in Anime Idol Culture

Rhythm games are common products in anime idol franchises. Fans call these games "rhythm games" because the player must play a set of rhythmic patterns along with a song. The first idol-themed game was an arcade game of *The Idolmaster* franchise produced in 2005. *The Idolmater* game was not a rhythm game, but it had a small rhythm game section. In 2009, the franchise of Hatsune Miku, a popular Japanese virtual idol, initiated a rhythmic game series called "Hatsune Miku: Project DIVA." Over a million copies of the game was distributed in Japan (Ko 2012). The game series is still growing as of this writing. Considering the popularity and potential profit of rhythmic games, many anime idol franchises, such as *The Idolmaster*, *Love Live*, and *Uta no Prince-sama* adopted the production of mobile rhythm games. Many of them were first available for gaming consoles only. To make the games accessible to wider audience, these anime idol franchises issue rhythmic games for mobile devices. For example, *Uta no Prince-sama*: *Shining Live* was an anime idol rhythmic game issued in 2017. It is available for both iOS and Android platforms. It was later distributed globally in English and traditional Chinese.

Among many idol-themed rhythm games, *SIF* is one that cannot be ignored due to its international popularity. It is a free-to-download mobile phone game developed by *KLab* and published by *Bushiroad*'s *Bushimo*—in Japan in 2013 and globally in 2014—for Android and iOS systems. The global version, which is in English, has accumulated over 10 million players as of 2017.
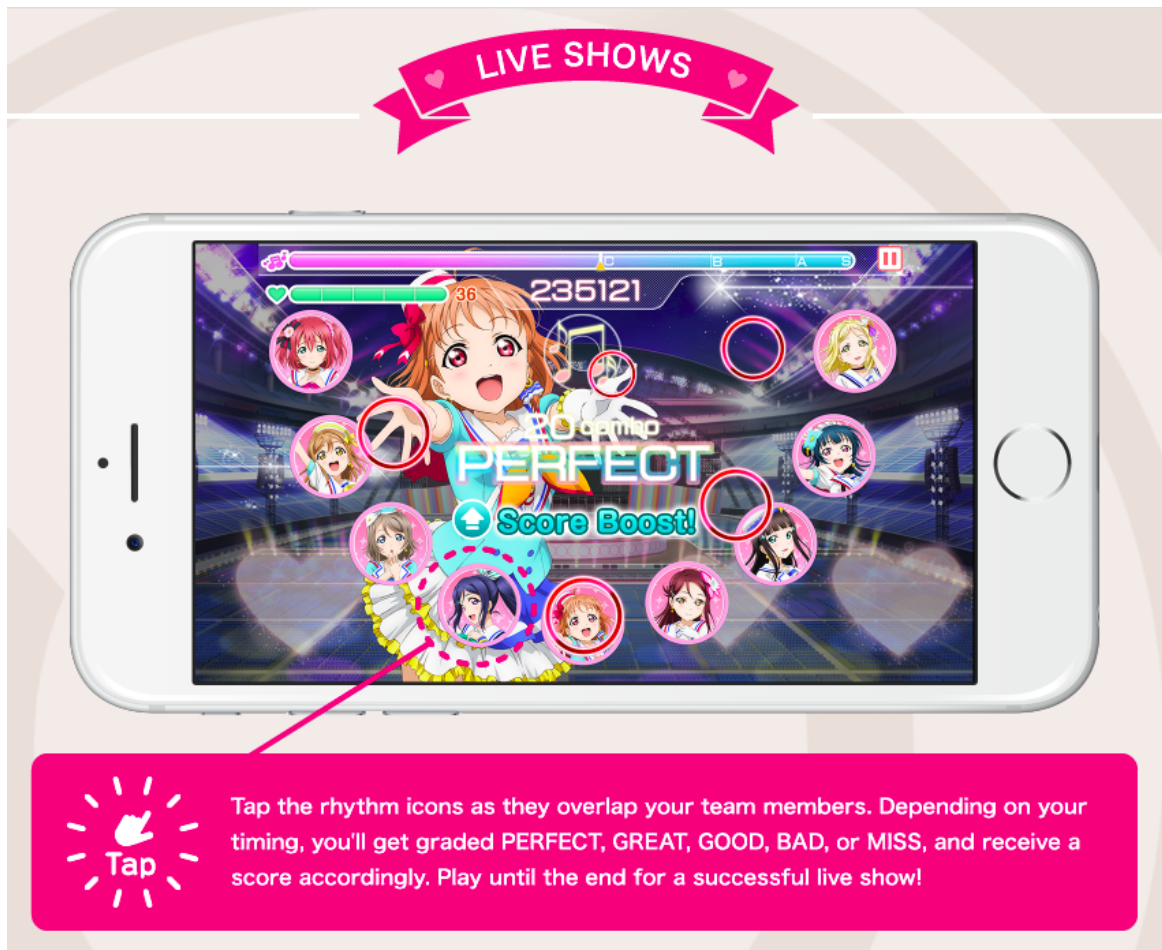
The Live Show in *SIF*

Image 3.1: An official introduction to the live show by KLabGames and bushiroad, n.d.
https://lovelive-sif-global.bushimo.jp/gameplay/

The Performance System: Live Show

The rhythmic performance of *SIF* is called "Live Show" (Image 3.1). It is played on a smartphone but some fans choose to play with a bigger device or even make their own devices for the game. Almost all *Love Live* songs are available in *SIF*, but only the first verse and chorus of a song is played in a live show so each performance only lasts for around two minutes.

Similar to a group performance of *Love Live*, a live show requires a player to arrange nine members, who have their images in circular icons, in a semi-circle. I call these circular

icons the members' circles. As the song proceeds, there are circles moving from the top to the members' circles. These moving circles are the rhythmic circles. A player needs to tap these rhythmic circles at the moment of them overlapping with the members' circles. There are different ways of tapping these rhythmic circles, including a single tap, in-sync tap (tap two circles at the same time), hold-down (sustain after tapping a circle and release at a particular moment), and swipe (swipe across several rhythmic circles). I further illustrate the notation of each tap when I explain the difficulty levels of the rhythmic performance later.

<u>Rating a Live Show</u>

The quality of a live show performance is scored based on the accuracy of the player's taps. The accuracy of each tap is judged as "perfect," "great," "good," "bad," or "miss." The player can confirm the accuracy of their tap by text on the screen and tambourine-like sounds corresponding to each level of accuracy. For example, if a player taps right at the moment when a rhythmic circle overlaps with a member's circle, the word "perfect" in rainbow color appears in the center of the screen with a high-pitch tambourine-like sound. The more accurate the tap is, the more points it brings to the total score of a live show. If a player achieves consecutive great or perfect taps, they create "combos" which bring bonus points to the whole performance. Many players aim to get a "full combo": completing a performance with great or perfect taps only. In addition, it is possible that one cannot finish a live show. A "bad" or "miss" tap consumes "hearts." There are a limited number of hearts available in a live show, and once they are used up, the performance stops immediately.

<u>Difficulty Levels of Live Shows</u>

Each song has live shows in "easy," "normal," "hard," "expert," and "master" levels. To demonstrate the difference among these difficulty levels, I transcribe a section of the chorus of "Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!" (元気全開 Day! Day! Day!) or "Full Speed Energetically Day! Day! Day!" As a reference to my transcription, Image 3.2 is a moment of my live show of "Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!" In Image 3.2, a single tap is circled in purple, which is transcribed into a musical note with a solid head. A hold-down, circled in green in Image 3.2, is marked as a note with a tie. The moment of releasing the hold-down, highlighted by the yellow rhythmic circle in Image 3.2, is marked as ✗ in the transcription. Next, from left to right, the members' circles are numbered from one to nine. Each note in the transcription has a number below which corresponds to the number of that particular member's circle in the live show. Some notes have two numbers which means that two corresponding members' circles should be tapped at the same time. Those are in-sync taps.
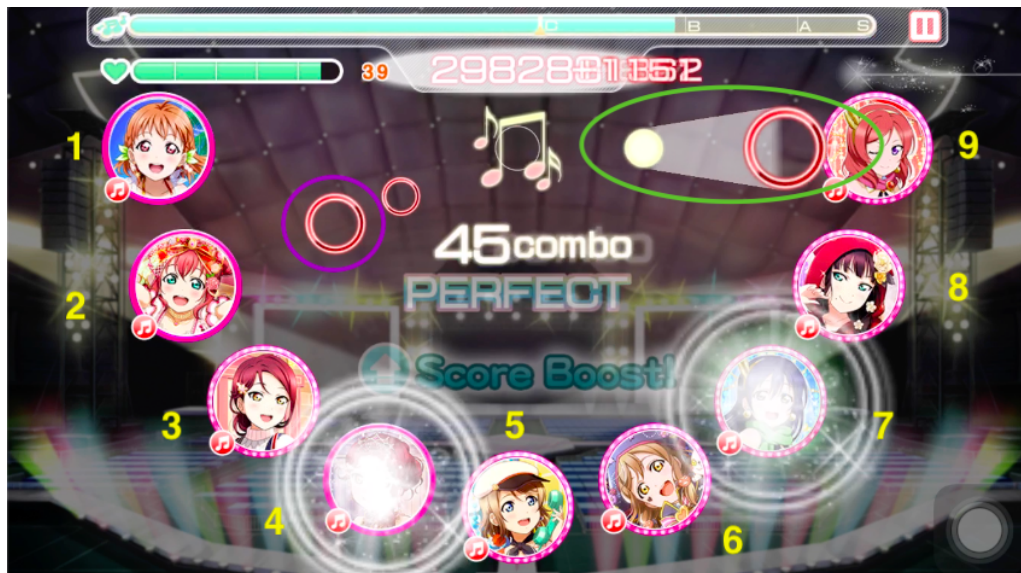

Image 3.2: A screen-capture of the author's gameplay as a reference of the transcription

Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!
(first half of the chorus)

Composer and Arranger: Kyou Tadaka
Lyricist: Aki Hata

Figure 3.1: The author's transcription of "Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!" (Page 1)

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Figure 3.2: The author's transcription of "Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!" (Page 2)

The more difficult the live show is, the more complex the rhythm is and the faster one's fingers need to move on the screen. In the easy level, the rhythm is simple. Compared to more difficult levels, there are few taps and a player almost only plays the downbeats. Also, each tap takes place on one member's circle, so the easy live show demands little synchronization of both hands. With its simplicity, the easy level is similar to an introductory exercise for a new player.

A more difficult live show requires a more detailed listening to, understanding, and memory of the song. For instance, the rhythm in bar four of both the hard and expert levels has a row of dense syncopated rhythm, which is not easy to play accurately. One need to learn this rhythmic pattern by listening to the bass guitar and the synthesized drum set which play the same rhythm. However, not all rhythms are the same as that of the instrumental or the vocal parts, such as one in bar seven of the expert level. Here, the player's rhythm has no direct reference in the music so a player must learn it as an independent pattern. Moreover, the more difficult levels have more in-sync rhythmic circles, such as the last bar in the expert level, which has four consecutive in-sync taps. This row of in-sync taps require a player memorize how to move their fingers accordingly.

Following the performance system and notation style of *SIF,* the player is like a musician who plays a set of rhythm patterns along with an anime idol song. The digital device is similar to a musical instrument, with the members' circles arranged like a keyboard. One can learn and challenge more rhythmically dense live shows as they get accustomed to the performance system, the *Love Live* songs, and the rhythmic patterns. To improve one's performance skill, one must devote a long amount of time to practicing the rhythmic patterns. However, the rhythmic patterns are not the only element that a player practice. The *SIF* players also practice generating

all their attention to the interaction with the screen and music with the goal of executing a perfect

live show.

Musical Performances as a Hedonic Product

To understand why and how players manage their attention to achieve a perfect rhythmic

performance in *SIF*, I consider the live show as a hedonic product. Coined by marketing

professors Elizabeth Hirschman and Morris Holbrook, "hedonic consumption designates those

facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's

experience with products" (1982, 92). Hedonic consumption offers "a complimenting paradigm

to the one of traditional information processing, focusing on the 'experiential' aspects of the

consumption experience which are subjectively based, such as sensation seeking, emotional

arousal and fantasizing" (Lacher 1989, 367). This idea of hedonic consumption was expanded on

by two other professors in marketing, Kathleen Lacher and Richard Mizerski, who built a model

named "model of music consumption and purchase intention (Figure 3.3)," to interpret why

people purchase rock music (1994, 370).

Lacher and Mizerski's model categorizes four responses aroused by music: emotional,

sensory, imaginal, and analytical responses (368). By evaluating questionnaire results from new

rock music listeners, Lacher and Mizerski explain how these responses contribute to persuading

one to buy music. In my analysis of the rhythmic gaming experience, I discuss how the live show

provokes these four responses to advertise the character goods in *SIF*. However, I use a different

premise than Lacher and Mizerski. The goods being purchased in *SIF* are not the rhythmic

performance experiences nor the music, as they are both mostly free. The main products in *SIF*

are the virtual anime idol cards, which have the power of manipulating the live show. Through

examining the responses provoked by the live show, I explain how the rhythmic performance is designed to intensify the players' intention of purchasing the anime idol cards.
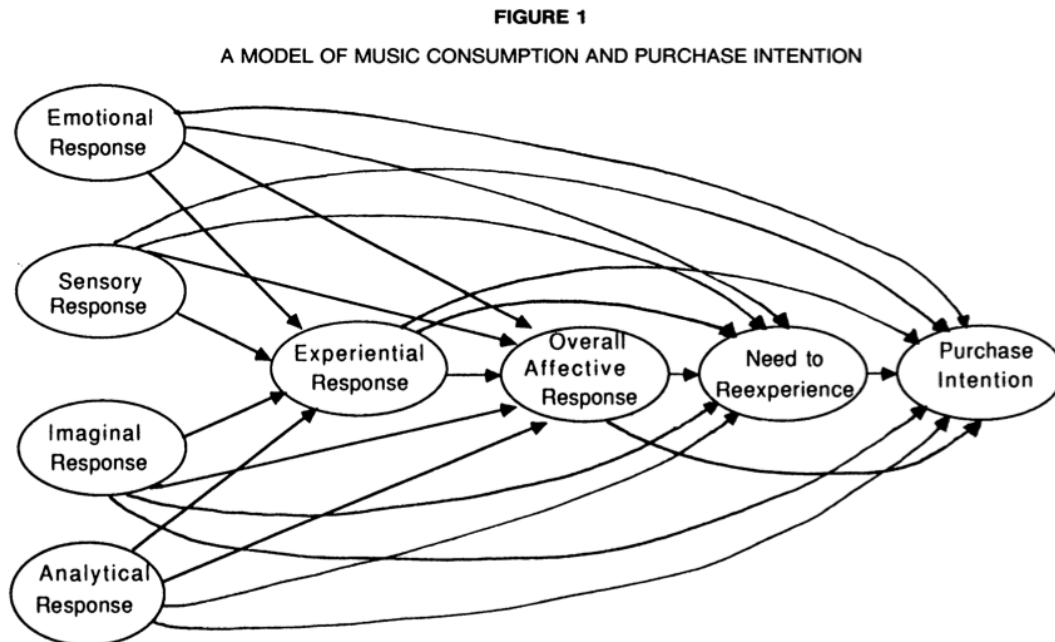
FIGURE 1

A MODEL OF MUSIC CONSUMPTION AND PURCHASE INTENTION

Figure 3.3: Lacher and Mizerski's "Model of Music Consumption and Purchase Intention"

Hedonic Consumption of Rhythmic Performance: Paying Full Attention to Get Immersed

Performing a live show is an experience of forgetting one's subjectivity, time, and space through projecting one's presence into the musical performance. In this section, I detail how fans think and feel during a live show. I analyze their perception of the responses in how they discuss achieving a perfect performance, specifically through reaching the state of immersion. Fans do not only enjoy this immersive experience, they believe it is crucial to accomplishing a perfect performance.

theslipster (u/theslipster): "Its called being in the zone. You get into a Flow state and you get to let muscle memory take over" (August 31, 2020, comment on u/EmmaShosha August 31, 2020).

JP: u/Serena | EN: Riko'sWife (u/sweetie147): "Wasn't paying attention until the live clear screen, but then…?! (Mirai no Bokura wa Shitteru yo MASTER 12* All-Perfect FC)" (June 15, 2020)

bentobox11 (u/bentobox11): "I zoned out and saw this screen," with a picture of achieving full combo in a live show" (October 16, 2016).

To explain how players reach a state of immersion, I compare an evening of myself playing *SIF* to thoughts and experiences posted by another player. I explain how players suppress the emotional and analytical responses while boosting the imaginal and sensory responses, focusing their full attention on attaining the immersive state.

Playing *SIF* in an Evening

To prevent any possible distraction, I locked myself in my room, wore earbuds, turned off all notifications on my phone, and set myself in the most comfortable position. After playing *SIF* for two years, I had a good idea of how to prepare the best environment for my performance. I had the challenge of getting a full combo on "Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!" (hard), a song of the *CYaRon!*, a subgroup of *Aqours*. It is a fast and cheering song with a challenging rhythmic performance to be played. I got close to the full combo a few times, but whenever I was aware of getting close, I became too nervous and made mistakes. That evening, I attempted to accomplish the full combo again.

I had already played a few songs to warm up my mind and my thumbs. I was ready. I got into my serious "performance mode." My palms sweated and the joints of my thumbs itched as I paid too much attention to them. I selected "Genki Zenkai DAY! DAY! DAY!," breathed calmly in the first three seconds of silence, and waited for the music to ring. To avoid my fingertips

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slipping on the screen, I quickly wiped my hands on my pants for the last time before the music

started.

The live show began. A few rhythmic circles appeared on the top of the screen.

Simultaneously, the music rang with a guitar melody which I had heard countless times already. I

pressed the first note "perfectly" right on the first note of the guitar. It was a relief that I did not

fail at the very beginning, but right after that, I held my breath and went through the first wave of

dense rhythm in the opening of the song. Forcing my face not to have any expression and my

body to stay still, I tried to avoid any mistakes caused by unnecessary movements. Also, having

experienced countless failures in the past, I was able to replay my rhythmic patterns with the

details of the song in my brain. It was almost natural that I passed the opening with all perfect

hits. After a short pause, I entered the easy first verse of the song when I could relax my thumbs

and nerves for a bit.

Then, the chorus, which has a dense series of rhythmic circles, started. I convinced

myself to suppress the nervousness and glared at the screen, forcing myself to ignore my

surroundings. In my efforts to closely follow the rhythmic circles, I do not remember breathing

or blinking! That was the moment I got immersed in the game. The performance was smooth and

my combo number kept rising. Soon, my thumbs did the job for me and I did not sense anything

else except the live show.

As I broke 200 combos, I reached the last and most difficult section of the chorus. The

ideas of "entering the difficult section" and "200 combos" suddenly slipped into my mind. I

wavered and became aware of my thumbs' movements. Then, I heard the "good" tambourine

sound. Here it was! I yelled in my heart when I saw the combo number returned to one. I did not

finish the live show with a full combo, but I kept playing for around an hour until I could not

concentrate anymore.

Vivi (u/stardykecrusader) shares a similar experience in their Reddit post titled "pain.

hurt. disappointment" (December 9, 2020).

> "ive been playing this game for six years now and i rarely get that angry over missed notes or anything anymore, but today.... i participated in the JP events. double LP with extra event points. two songs - loveless world and fuyu ga kurera yokan. i had low expectations because truth to be told i am terrible at rhythm games, and despite playing for this long im still not very good, i just get saved by perfect lock cards all the time.

> i hope for a 300 or so combo on loveless world so that i dont have to stress so hard through the second song. through a miracle i manage to full combo it. im in shock, extremely pleased with myself. my sister interupts me and im thrown off momentarily when fuyu ga kureta yokan begins. inwardly, i sigh, knowing that this will cause me to mess something up - i sat back down in the wrong position, the blanket is sliding off my legs and i know it will bother me etc etc.

> and yet. i manage. 200 combo, then 300. 400. at this point i am on needles thinking this could be it, this could be me full combo'ing two songs in a row, im so cool and finally im getting a bit better at this game. and then. the song ends with two long, drawn-out notes. my number one enemy. i can never seem to get the timing right but i tell myself that this time, this time i will manage. ive managed throughout the whole song and i only have these two notes to focus on. seriously, how hard could it be?

> i miss them. both of them, on good. i stare at the screen in pure shock. i havent felt this much emotion about love live in years. i get annoyed sometimes, especially when i cant seem to get the timing right on anything, but this felt like betrayal. i had gotten my hopes up and started to believe in myself. believe in my team. and in the end it was all for nothing. muse were right; this truly is a loveless world."

Comparing Vivi's experience to my own, there are many similarities. We are mindful of

our postures and surroundings; small distractions can be impactful to our performances; we share

a general emotional change from feeling hopeful in getting high numbers of combos to getting

frustrated by the eventual failure; we always try to stay calm, or in Vivi's word, try to "manage" ourselves throughout the live show. What are we trying to manage when playing a live show? What are considered distractions during a live show? In the following, I explain that players perceive the imaginal and sensory responses provoked by the live show to be essential in executing a perfect rhythmic performance. Meanwhile, the emotional and analytical responses provoked by the game as well as the sensory response aroused by sources other than the live show are regarded to be distractions.

Merging of Sensory and Imaginal responses for Immersion:

The integration of the sensory response, performing the live show, with the imaginal response, recalling the details of a live show, is crucial to a perfect live show. These two responses have to be synchronized to play a perfect rhythmic performance and I believe that the combination of these two responses is what fans regard as "muscle memory."

Shayz_ shares (u/Shayz_): "One of the biggest problems I had to overcome was pushing myself to rewrite my muscle memory for certain songs. For example, I turned off the tambourine effects to help with this because in my head I was memorizing the wrong pattern from playing it so many times. I also watched some videos to hear what the proper patterns were, which helped a ton …" (October 23, 2018, comment on u/AlexE9918 October 23, 2018)

mochike (u/mochike): "Basically, whenever I click during a live, the tambourine sound indicating that I clicked is delayed by just a hair (I think it aligns with what's meant to be the exact timing corresponding to the song, but it's not like it registers everything as perfect either), and it throws me off" (May 24, 2019).

The imagination of music in terms of how the fingers move is an imaging response. When one is familiar with a rhythmic performance, the rhythmic patterns are imagined with the movements of the fingers. It is similar to how someone might imagine the spelling of an English word with how it is typed on the computer keyboard. The sensory response can be aroused by multiple sources, as I explain later, but not all are welcomed by fans. The helpful sensory response is the one provoked by the interaction with the screen and the live show, such as the sensation of fingers tapping the screen, sound effects when tapping, and the music. This sensory response confirms a player's action and performance in the game. As Shayz_shares above, they "turned off the tambourine effects" because it was not reflecting the correct rhythmic pattern (October 23, 2018, comment on u/AlexE9918 October 23, 2018). Also, mochike is troubled by the delayed tambourine sounds as it does not match with their performance (May 24, 2019). Their thoughts exemplify the sensory response validating the imaginal response—"muscle memory." By accumulating the experience of matching the imaginal response with the sensory response over many periods of practice, a player develops strong muscle memory for a perfect live show.

To execute this muscle memory is difficult. Fans commonly find the state of immersion, what they call "zoning out" or "spacing out," to be crucial in summoning complex muscle memory. This immersive state is a result of spending their full attention to exclusively process the imaginal and sensory responses in the live show.

sowlmate (u/sowlmate): "i tend to just zone out as soon as i get past the problem area and pray muscle memory takes the wheel lol" (October 23, 2018, comment on u/AlexE9918 October 23, 2018).

FaultedCosine (u/FaultedCosine): "Zoning out is definitely your friend in this. Something that also may help is to try and convince yourself that you already missed a note earlier in the song, or even purposely miss the very first notes on random attempts. Tricking your brain into thinking or forgetting which run you messed up on will make your nerves towards the end greatly diminish. This was something a few people in older rhythm game communities would talk about doing when trying to get AAA [equivalent of All Perfect in SIF and the other idol rhythm games] and it seemed to work for a lot of people" (October 23, 2018, comment on u/AlexE9918 October 23, 2018).

merillss (u/merillss): "I tend to space out while playing, sometimes intentionally, I just stare at the center of the screen and kinda just rest my eyes... it's amazing how fast your thumbs can move when you don't even feel it happening. Another thing that helps me personally, if I'm laying down on my stomach while playing in bed, i swing my feet with the song" (October 23, 2018, comment on u/AlexE9918 October 23, 2018).

Regardless of being intentional or unintentional, spending full attention to reach a state of immersion is many players' common goal as it is considered effective to execute the sophisticated muscle memory for a perfect live show. However, spending full attention on merging the imaginal and sensory responses is not an easy task, and the sense of immersion is fragile. Fans' discussions, therefore, focus on two issues: how to avoid distraction and how to practice.

Practice Makes Perfect: Minimizing the Analytical Response

As the rhythmic performance gets more difficult, the rhythm is so dense and complicated that it requires one's fingers to move quickly and accurately. From the fans' perspective, the purpose of practice is to consolidate muscle memory and reduce the analytical response required during a live show. The more accustomed one is to the rhythmic patterns during a live show, the

less attention one has to spend on analyzing them and the easier it is to enter and sustain the state of immersion.

Mankuno (u/Mankuno): "Understanding the song structure and melody is another thing that can help you to play. If you want to understand how the beatmap/chart will go. The easiest method is to listen to the music melody and structure to give your brain some base point that 'What I will expected to see some pattern when I play on rhythm chart'. *You don't have to rush it done in one day.* **Just bit by bit, Pattern by Pattern**" (May 30, 2021, comment on u/DiaForLife May 22, 2021).

qrescentlight (u/qrescentlight): "But really, the best way to practice, to improve, is to play. Try to figure out what is going wrong while you play the song, and make small adjustments if it's not working out. Maybe you're only playing 4 notes instead of 5, or maybe you're just hitting that note a step too early or too late" (January 11, 2020, comment on u/PrayerfulNut January 10, 2020).

One of the goals of practicing is to minimize the immediate analytical response during a rhythmic performance. As Mankuno said, a way of practice is analyzing how the rhythm patterns fit into the song (May 30, 2021, comment on u/DiaForLife May 22, 2021). When a player plays a live show, especially a sophisticated or unfamiliar one, they might pay extra attention to follow the rhythmic pattern. This analytical response can be intentional or unintentional, since not everyone thinks like Mankuno or is capable of learning a rhythmic pattern quickly. Some might need to do what qrescentlight suggests: "practice numerous times and try to figure out what is going wrong until it works" (January 11, 2020, comment on u/PrayerfulNut January 10, 2020).

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To reserve full attention for the state of immersion, many players practice countless times and analyze the music outside *SIF* to reduce the spontaneous analytical response during a live show.

Nevertheless, fans do not only practice to reduce the spontaneous analytical response. Over fans' numerous practices, they also learn about the best environment, posture, and attitude for performing a perfect live show. Again, all these efforts are made to maximize the attention for immersion and muscle memory.

Distraction from Unnecessary Sensory Response and Emotional Response

Almost all players try to avoid stimuli around the body that can break the state of immersion, however small the stimuli may be. stardykecrusade was not exaggerating when they said "i sat back down in the wrong position, the blanket is sliding off my legs and i know it will bother me etc etc" (December 9, 2020). Fans want to pay all their attention to only the sensory and imaginal responses from the live show. Any other sensory responses from their surroundings are considered a distraction. Preparing a silent and still surrounding as well as comfortable posture, therefore, aims to avoid any slight sensory responses outside the live show. Nevertheless, possible distractions are not limited to the environment and body of the player. External distraction might be controllable by isolating oneself, but internal distraction from the emotional response is probably the bigger enemy for many players.

Emotional responses, such as excitement and nervousness, are aroused when one plays the rhythmic performance, but they are usually what a player wants to suppress or control. Intensive emotional responses consume attention and sometimes even amplify one's sensory responses, creating more distraction.

Eeveeflam (u/Eeveeflame): "I find that a way to stop myself getting excited is to expect to screw up even after the difficult part? Be so awfully pessimistic that excitement only comes when that FULL COMBO flashes up ;) It's probably better mentally if you can take a deep breath and relax and say I've got this, but if you can't quite manage that, this works for me. Also it seems to help playing when I'm a little bit tired and it's easier to zone out, but no so tired I can't keep a beat" (October 24, 2018, comment on u/AlexE9918 October 23, 2018).

woAh_tEchoNology (u/woAh_tEchoNology): "Well , just be relaxed while you play , i guess . I mean i know that's obvious but just take a deep breath before playing the song and say " i'm not going to screw up " works like a charm for me . You may also not want to get too excited after finishing the part you find hardest that's alk i have to say :)" (October 23, 2018, comment on u/ AlexE9918 October 23, 2018).

eliayyase (u/eliayyase): "Becoming aware of my blinking during a live is annoying. I know I blink while playing, but when you start to notice it, you begin to feel paranoid that you'll blink at the wrong time" (June 15, 2017, comment on u/JJVAvION June 15, 2017).

DerelictDolly (u/DerelictDolly) comments: "^ Thiiiiis. I won't scratch a thing all day but the second that live starts my eye is itchy, my leg, face, you name it. It's also when my hair decides to attack me, furthering the itchiness to new heights" (June 15, 2017, comment on u/JJVAvION June 15, 2017).

RaimuSempai (u/RaimuSempai): "I was always nervous, at that point I couldn't even complete a MASTER song because my hands were sHaKiNg. But I managed to finally do that, after two months though))) Great job!!!)" (June 26, 2020, comment on u/yeeyeesuckmyteet June 26, 2020)

In the state of immersion, one senses nothing else but the live show, not even one's own subjectivity and body. stardykecrusader felt being "on needles" after remembering how they missed that certain part of the live show in the past (December 9, 2020). Although they tried to calm down, their emotional responses had already taken their attention from the game. That is why previously FaultedCosine suggests "tricking your brain into thinking or forgetting" (October 23, 2018, comment on u/AlexE9918 October 23, 2018). The emotional response does not only consume attention, it arouses unnecessary sensory responses.

Many fans share that when they get nervous, the sensory responses all over the body become uncontrollable and distracting. stardykecrusade was "on needles" (December 9, 2020), I was "feeling my fingers," and RaimuSempai's hands were " SHaKiNg" (June 26, 2020, comment on u/yeeyeesuckmyteet June 26, 2020). The state of immersion was broken when these players were nervous because their attention suddenly turned from the live show to their bodies. However, a player does not want to "feel the fingers." A player wants the fingers to work like robots according to muscle memory. Emotional responses, hence, are prevalently acknowledged as the most frustrating obstacle on the path of getting a perfect live show.

This analysis evidences that the rhythmic performance in the anime idol rhythm game is a tool of managing a player's attention. Having complicated rhythmic patterns, the live show of *SIF* challenges not only one's performance skill, but also the attention capacity in recalling the muscle memory. To reserve full attention for executing a perfect live show, a player avoids any stimuli in their surroundings and suppresses all emotional responses. In other words, with its demanding rhythmic performances, *SIF* makes one's limited attention to be exclusive to the game and to the purpose of achieving a perfect live show.

Gamble to Save Your Attention and Time: Rhythmic Performance and Anime Idol Cards

Not all players have the patience, skills, and motivation to finish the demanding live

shows or to achieve a full combo. In fact, many do not. As players struggle to accomplish a

perfect live show, *SIF* puts forward the virtual anime idol cards, which influence the judgement

of the quality of one's rhythmic performance. To boost profit, *SIF* does not let players buy these

cards directly. The game includes a lottery system for anime idol cards, so a player gambles for

them. In this section, I explain how the anime idol cards have the power of facilitating a perfect

live show and how the lottery system intensifies one's intention of spending money in the game.

Beautiful Anime Idol Cards that Ease a Live Show

The virtual anime idol cards are inseparable from the rhythmic performance. Some fans

play *SIF* to collect these cards, while some game-players become fans of *Love Live* because of

them. No matter what one considers the cards prior to the rhythmic performance, collecting them

is almost indispensable. These cards are influential to the quality of the live show performance

and playing the live show helps to collect more cards.

The strategy of forming an efficient team for a perfect performance or achieving other

goals in a live show is called team-building. One of the basic strategies is matching the attributes

of the songs and cards, greatly boosting the score of a live show. Both songs and cards are

categorized with different attributes: smile, pure, and cool. Using cards with a certain attribute

for a song of the same one can boost the score of the live show. For instance, "Genki Zenkai

DAY! DAY! DAY!" is in the smile attribute, so a team of all smile cards will help a player get a

higher score. The card in Image 3.3 has a symbol of a blue moon in the lower right corner; it has

the cool attribute and is therefore not the best card for this smile song. As shown in Image 3.2, I form a team of pink cards that are in the smile attribute to heighten my score on that live show.

Moreover, the anime idol cards have various skills that can significantly influence rhythmic performance. The cards fall into five levels: normal (N), rare (R), super-rare (SR), super-super-rare (SSR), ultra-rare (UR). All cards above the normal level have some special skills, such as recovering a heart to complete a live show, raising the score of each note after a certain number of combos, repeating another member's skill, etc. One of the most beloved skills among fans is called "perfect lock," which can change the judgment of the accuracy of a tap. For instance, Image 3.3 is one of the UR cards that has the perfect lock skill: "for every 25 notes, there is a 25% chance of turning all goods and greats in the next 6 seconds into perfects." In other words, having this card in the team means that when one plays a "good" note, which is not counted towards the combo, this skill will turn the note into a perfect one so the combo can be maintained. Then, the player will have a higher chance of achieving full combo in that live show. rawbeegqueef (u/rawbeefqueef) shares his/her experience of getting full combo in a live show of master level: "4-5 months of playing, first FC on a 12 star song... with an all perfect lock team but, still proud" (December 12, 2020).

Image 3.3: A screen-capture of the idolized UR card of Koizumi Hanayo by School Idol Tomodachi, n.d.
https://schoolido.lu/cards/2789/UR-Koizumi-Hanayo-Flower-Festival-event-Cool/

In short, collecting the anime idol cards cannot only fulfill a fan's desire of acquiring more anime idol goods, it can help the player accomplish their goals in the demanding live shows. The cards are part of the instruments of the performance system and can loosen the standard of quality rhythmic performance, improve the result of a live show, etc. In addition, the higher level a card is, the more advanced its skill and the fancier its visual design. Regardless of one's preference for rhythmic performance or collecting anime idol goods in *SIF*, obtaining these beautiful and powerful cards is beneficial. Besides, there are new cards issued almost every month as well as a vast and quickly growing discography of *Love Live*. This tempting and endless card collection and challenging rhythms compose the profit generator of *SIF*.

Lottery System of Anime Idol Cards Collection

To utilize this profit generator, *SIF* makes it even more difficult for players to acquire these cards by distributing them in a lottery system called "scouting." This system symbolizes a player scouting an anime idol to be a member of the live show performance team. Scouting a good member is hard. The higher level a card is, the smaller chance there is to draw it. For example, in a single "honor" scouting, there is only a one-percent chance of drawing a UR card, while there is an eighty-percent chance of drawing an R card. There are different kinds of scouting, but almost all of them require the player to pay using an in-game currency named love gems. The lottery system tempts one to spend their attention, time, as well as their money.

To earn love gems, there are mainly two ways: to play, or to pay. On one hand, *SIF* awards free gems for a player's achievements, such as logging into the game, achieving a full combo, etc. Sometimes gems are given out to celebrate special moments in the franchise, for example, the birthday of a member, the airing of a *Love Live* anime, etc. These free gems can be considered as bait for one logging in and playing *SIF* every day. However, there is a very limited number of free gems given at a time. Therefore, many fans prefer saving up the gems and waiting for special events that offer the best probability of scouting their wanted cards. One plays to get the gems for cards, but one also gets cards to play more for gems. This cycle traps a player to spend their attention and time on the game.

HanayoStan (u/HanayoStan): "1000 gems for Hanayo! After 3+ years of playing I finally managed to save up 1000 gems. These will all be spent on her birthday and upcoming Party UR" (December 14, 2020).

stalespice (u/stalespice): "Yeah of course I had a perfect lock team. But this run was my first 12 star combo and I happened to have a 100% perfect so that's cool" (April 14, 2021).

Playing to save up love gems is not only a challenge to one's attention, it's a test of self-control. One might not play good enough to earn love gems nor hold back from scouting new beautiful cards released frequently. Many fans cannot stand the temptation when the fancy cards of their favorite anime idols and are willing to spend money regularly to support the game and the anime idols.

Peach (u/SuddenlyPeachSky): "Y'know, to be honest, I felt the same. I never thought I'd save over 150 because the moment I even hit 50, I get tempted to scout, especially with all of these limited URs, rate-ups, and step-up boxes releasing so quickly (slow down a bit, klab)" (September 8, 2019, comment on u/SuddenlyPeachSky September 8, 2019).

sleepless (u/slowlymoresleepless): "I almost never pay money for this stuff but, I had a moment of weakness and it was just so perfect for my best girl 😭💙" (October 16, 2020).

The anime idol cards feed fans a sense of success from achieving a perfect performance with their power to enhance one's rhythmic performance; their beautiful designs satisfy fans' desire of collecting character goods. The rhythmic performance is fused with these cards to form an economy that keeps fans spending their full attention and time while persuading them to spend money on a lottery system with no ends.

Conclusion

To explore the function of musical performance as an economic device in an attention economy, this chapter analyses the rhythmic performance in the *Love Live* anime idol rhythm game *SIF*. Adopting the analytical model created by Lacher and Mizerski, I present the rhythmic

performance of *SIF* as a tool of capturing and managing one's full attention. To achieve a perfect

live show in the game, a player strives to generate all their attention to execute muscle memory,

which is an integration of the imaginal and sensory responses provoked by the rhythmic

performance. A player also works to reduce the emotional and analytical responses as well as the

sensory responses aroused by sources outside the game, reserving their attention for the rhythmic

performance. Through challenging a player's attention capacity, the demanding rhythmic

performance advertises virtual anime idol cards that can facilitate a perfect performance. With

their attention captured and managed by the rhythmic performance, players of the anime idol

rhythmic games are constantly persuaded to purchase the virtual character goods within.

Conclusion

Through exploring the role of music in the transnational consumption of Japanese media culture, I studied the listening and rhythmic gaming experiences of English-speaking *Love Live* fans. First, I presented three forms of engagement with music in multimedia platforms. These forms of engagement are listening to music as an expression of the anime idols' personalities, sticking narrative variants to music as it travels through multimedia platforms, and integrating narrative variants to interpret the meaning of music. I argued that music functions as a tool in defining the fictional anime idol, as well as a platform where narrative variants are processed in the fans' imagination. I call this listening practice of connecting narrative variants to music in multimedia platforms intertextual listening. Through listening to anime idol music in different media contexts, fans learn, verify, and enrich the narrative variants and personalities of anime idols. The listening experiences of English-speaking *Love Live* fans, therefore, exemplify how music facilitates understanding of the narrative worlds of Japanese intertextual media.

Second, looking into the fans' gaming experience of *Love Live! School Idol Festival!* (*SIF*), an internationally popular anime idol rhythm game, I contended that rhythmic performance is an economic device of capturing and managing consumers' attention in the attention economy. In the attention economy, attention is considered a limited resource in an information-rich society and is considered a valuable commodity. In analyzing how *SIF* encourages fans to buy virtual anime idol products, I regarded rhythmic performance as a hedonic product, which emphasizes the experiential aspect of consumption. I adopted the analytical model created by Lacher and Mizerski (1994) to show how players process the sensory, imaginal, emotional, and analytical responses aroused by rhythmic performance.

Through striving for a perfect rhythmic performance, players spend all their attention on sensory and imaginal responses aroused by the game, reaching a state of immersion. Nevertheless, the players' limited attention capacity sometimes hinders them from doing so. Having the players' full attention captured by the rhythmic performance, *SIF* promotes the virtual idol cards that can facilitate a perfect performance. In other words, the demanding rhythmic performance challenges players' limited attention capacity and advertises the virtual character goods in the game. *SIF*, therefore, is an example of how the Japanese media industry makes use of rhythm games to compete for the limited attention of consumers.

Through this case study of music within the *Love Live* franchise, I emphasize the importance of studying Japanese media culture not only as a visual one, but also as an aural one. Traveling through multimedia platforms, music facilitates English-speaking fans' consumption of the intertextual content of anime idols. Music also helps the franchise make profit by capturing and managing consumers' attention, advertising virtual character goods. This case study reveals how music can lead us to understand how the Japanese media industry negotiates with the global market. While Japanese media culture is a heavily visual culture, I believe that its sonic elements are also indispensable in its transnational spread.

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