



Parz's UNDER17 Retrospective

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Preface

UNDER17 is undoubtedly my favorite band. Prior to this, I didn't really have a particular attachment towards a specific music group beyond a passing interest in the albums and I felt a disconnect between myself and the people making the music. I was never the type to follow the creative careers and lives of those other artists off-stage as extensively as I have with Momoi Haruko and Koike Masaya. Something about this group was different. I started listening to UNDER17 in 2017 casually after watching the anime for *Genshiken* but never really explored much else outside of their anime music at the time. Then I forgot about them for a while. It wasn't until the summer of 2019 when I was getting into *denpa* music for the first time that I rediscovered this group. It was during that fateful summer; amidst my time playing *bishoujo games* and rewatching *Oreimo* that I found music that truly made me happy. I used to listen to melancholic music because my adolescent self liked to put on a mask of stoicism and thought it was cool to LARP as a sad boy. But after a prolonged period of serious depression, I realized I never wanted to be unhappy ever again. I found solace in the music of many wonderful artists like Nanahira, Toromi, MOSAIC.WAV and eventually, UNDER17.

I've been an avid fan of UNDER17 and Momoi Haruko ever since the halcyon days of that summer. I've had their entire discography on repeat for the past two years and have consistently been finding new things to enjoy and appreciate about their *moe* music. I'm not the biggest UNDER17 fan in the world by any stretch of the imagination, but I wanted to talk about this group because I care about them a lot. And in addition, I think I might be the only one to care enough and be crazy enough to make this, so here is my unnecessarily long retrospective of the careers' and legacy of the "World Famous *Moe* Artist," UNDER17!

Meta Stuff

First and foremost, I am not an expert on music or pretty much anything else here. I've never been trained in music theory or even have an extensive background on music. I've been listening to music just as much as any other person who has visited /mu/ before but don't share the same passion as they might. I have an understanding of what "good" music is but I tend to prefer sounds that are more directly appealing to my ears as opposed to complex instrumentals or thought-provoking lyrics. So don't expect a critical discussion of the technical side to UNDER17's music.

Furthermore, I am by no means fluent in Japanese. I've been studying at university for about three years and have been casually studying for about four. I'm about N3 on a good day if that means anything. I made an attempt in some sections to translate lyrics (which will be appended) but likely are abundant with errors. So if you happen to find mistakes anywhere here, please let me know so I can fix them as soon as possible.

Finally, some reservations. Now that I've completed a bulk of the research I need to express some mild concern at discussing this somewhat poorly-documented artist. The English Wikipedia is fairly scarce and there isn't much to go off of outside of musical credits and links to Japanese interviews. I organized a lot of data and did my best to distill and present it here in a manner which would make the most logical sense. However, since this will likely be the most comprehensive dump of information in English about UNDER17 ever made, I feel obligated to be correct about it. Much like with my translation work and

previous efforts researching Honda Toru, I will once again stress the importance of factual accuracy. I have cross-referenced much of the data included to best support any claims I made so hopefully everything is in order. In addition to that, a lot of information is lost to time due to the nature of researching an old J-pop group that was never really given time to be very popular. If there are any *Akiba-pop* or J-pop aficionados out there that find inaccuracies, please let me know so I can mend the errors!

Background Knowledge

Denpa

Denpa (電波) is a Japanese word referring to radio waves, or any other kind of radiation coming from electronic devices. *Denpa* became a slang-term used to describe strange or eccentric individuals and was popularized in the final years of the *Showa* Era (ending in 1989), coinciding with a decade of disillusionment for Japan as a whole. *Denpa* has been used to characterize people or groups who are seemingly on “another wavelength,” a term that came into more widespread use after the infamous Fukugawa Serial Murder Incident in 1981, where the perpetrator claimed he was influenced by the “radio waves.” The idea of being brainwashed by “poisonous” radio waves began to be referred to as *dokudenpa* (毒電波). Though originally used in a more literal sense, the influence of *denpa* has cemented itself within the fringes of Japanese art, more often than not seen within otaku media, such influences colloquially known as *denpa-kei*, or “denpa-style.” One of the originators of the genre being the visual novel *Shizuku* developed by Leaf in 1996, followed up by *Kizuato* in the same year, both of which introducing *denpa-kei* to a wider otaku audience. These niche DOS games would not go under the radar, as they were largely influential on writers such as Urobuchi Gen who began his career after being inspired by these two games. Urobuchi would later go on to incorporate similar stylistic elements in his visual novel *Saya no Uta* a few years later. *Denpa-kei* has been utilized in various other visual novels such as *Subarashiki Hibi* and *Cross+Channel*, along with many other mediums of entertainment, one of which being music.

Denpa music appeared around the same time as the early *denpa* visual novels and is often characterized by a somewhat hypnotic trance that one would slip into upon hearing the voices of Japanese women singing nonsensical lyrics, thickly-coated in sugary otaku indulgence. These oppressively *moe* vocals and hyper-cute lyrics pays homage to various subcultures such as anime or video games, enjoyed by those often considering *denpa* by the general public. However there are no rules to define the style of music and no two artists will sound the same. Consequently, this leaves us with a wide range of musical styles all able to fall under the *denpa-kei* umbrella. Not specifically just *moe denpa*, since I suppose specific types of industrial electronic music or noise music can technically align itself within *denpa-kei* in terms of thematic or aesthetic sensibilities. But for now, we will focus specifically on *moe denpa*, which is more directly related to the music of UNDER17, though this genre is still equally diverse and nuanced. Some more mainstream artists like the aforementioned Momoi Haruko or Toromi (とろ美) who tend to align themselves with a more *moe* sound, as opposed to others like *ave;new project*, *33.turbo* or *O-Denpa Studio* (おでんぱ☆スタジオ) who might touch on more controversial subject matter delivered in the same *fuwa fuwa* tone.

Denpa music is quite niche even within the sphere of otaku, and as such has been mostly relegated to direct distribution between fans and creators. It's quite similar to *doujin* music, *doujin* meaning art that is self-published. Both *denpa* and *doujin* music are not mutually exclusive, though it's difficult to distinguish the two since both are somewhat difficult groupings to pin down. For example, popular artists IOSYS and t+pazolite got their start in the *doujin* music scene and have produced *denpa*-inspired *doujin* music inspired by Touhou music composed by ZUN. However, they now are professional musicians but still carry their influences on their sleeves, and consequently, have influenced various other subgenres of music with *doujin* and *denpa* elements through their own respective styles. Both *doujin* and *denpa* circles are often seen at events like *Comiket* and M3, as well as other smaller events selling their self-pressed CD's, usually sold by the creators themselves.

In addition, there have recently been a few high-profile artists performing *denpa* music as well as *denpa*-inspired J-pop and anime songs produced. This is why it's more accurate to call *denpa* an aesthetic or influence rather than a genre or even a subgenre. Due to the relatively small demographic of fans for this type of music, *denpa* is usually characterized through lower production values and imperfect mastering, almost making it closer to a "bedroom rock" feel compared to commercial J-pop. However, the rough-around-the-edges production is in-line with many other *doujin* goods being sold at the aforementioned events

I find it curious how *denpa* is often portrayed in media and is almost always tangentially related to the otaku subculture in some way. It seems that a certain subset of otaku adopted the aesthetic of *denpa-kei* and reinterpreted it to frame a unique flavor of *denpa otoko*: Disillusioned Men. This also happens to be the title to the first publication of social and otaku critic Honda Toru. Honda wrote *Denpa Otoko* as a direct response to the controversial reception of *Densha Otoko* (Train Man) and its ensuing popularity amongst *riajuu*. Seeing as *Densha Otoko* attempted to emasculate the image of the modern otaku into this harmless young man who longs to be as normal as everyone else. Otaku like Honda viewed the popularity of the *Densha Otoko* drama to be appalling and felt they needed to re-align themselves with the traditionally outlandish behavior of otaku. He wanted otaku to be unhinged and weird; not the pacified ambassadors for a globalized "Cool Japan" agenda. Honda-san was definitely not advocating for a new generation of Miyazaki Tsutomu's, rather, he simply wanted to reconstruct the ideal otaku image before popular opinion began to shift. Honda-san's presentation of the "*denpa otoko*" was his critique of modern Japanese society, and to a further extent, modern societies around the world. Societies which nurtured a harsh divide between the "haves" and the "have nots," and prescribed romantic relationships between men and women as the most valuable currency. Within these thoughts, the image of a *denpa otoko* emerged; a depiction of an otaku far removed from the well-groomed depictions on popular dramas and no longer used for comedic relief on variety shows-- simply a person who was on a different wavelength.

I believe *denpa-kei* to be intrinsically tied to otaku culture due to their roots, both of which being by-products of disillusionment; otaku and *denpa* subcultures deeply connected with roots in disillusionment. *Denpa-kei* emerged during the end of the *Showa Era* which was a period of rapid economic and technological advancement. 1980's Japan was a sight to behold; the bright lights of Tokyo shimmering to mask the foreboding collapse of the neon empire it had spent three decades building. That's when the bubble burst. The promised dream of being a salaryman and having a guaranteed lifelong employment had been lost to the past. Universities were becoming more competitive and jobs were

difficult to come by. Young men were crippled by the pressures of a society that was becoming increasingly stratified and found themselves lost between the gaps. They retreated to their rooms and lost themselves within the fantasies of isolation and otaku began turning towards the idealized world of two-dimensions. All the while *denpa* retroactively became a critique of the rapid industrialization of post-war Japan. The technological advancement of late-*Showa* Japan proved to have ill-effect on some who likely felt disconnected from their old way of living. They could hear the voices in the air and they were warning them of a bleak future.

Akiba-kei

What the heck is akiba pop??

Akiba-kei (秋葉系) is a Japanese slang term; deriving the term from “Akiba” from Akihabara and the suffix “-kei” indicting a particular lineage or style. It is used to refer to a specific brand of otaku who appear to spend a lot of time in Akihabara, which is widely known as the centre for modern Japanese visual culture. Media primarily consisting of, but not limited to: Japanese animation, manga, video games and idol music.

These otaku fit the classical image of what the Japanese media outlets of the early-to-mid-2000’s depicted otaku as, contrary to the villinification during the decades prior to the turn of the century. This was due to Japan’s somewhat controversial “Cool Japan” agenda which pushed popular-culture to the forefront of its national relations campaign in order to appeal to global cultures through their unique art. While beneficial to their global market, relations and perception, many otaku took offense to this new agenda as they viewed it as a pacification of otaku culture; something they were previously criticized for being, now being sterilized and normalized. However, I cannot stress enough how this “pacification” of the otaku image was a necessary evil, regardless of how I or other otaku feel about it. Hardly a decade prior, the aforementioned Miyazaki Tsutomu had become the face of otaku across the nation and tainted the subculture as *denpa otoko*-- disillusioned, disassociating men. Men who were unable to distinguish twisted fantasy from reality. Biased media coverage painted a favorable conclusion and brought national attention to the dangers of otaku media. Housewives whispered on the streets about how they couldn’t believe their neighbor’s son was watching *Urusei Yatsura* and drew pretty young girls in school notebooks. “Cool Japan” attempted to reconstruct the troubled history of otaku media within Japan through sterilization. Consequently, the modern otaku image transformed and resulted in the harmless plaid-shirt bandana-wearing slightly-overweight otaku who spoke with slurred speech who wandered the streets of Akihabara, occasionally saving women on trains.

Many social critics such as superflat artist Murakami Takashi have likened post-war Japan as having become emasculated. Murakami believes pop-culture icons such as Sanrio’s Hello Kitty have tainted the country in a permanently pink warm-blanket, in the process shifting their focus away from the errors of old by means of *kawaii* character goods. Taking Murakami’s analysis further, we can conclude that the prevalence of *moe* and *kawaii* within media, especially otaku media, likely stems from a similar source.

Akihabara has enjoyed its own unique subculture surrounding and is exemplified in *Akiba-kei*, a subset of the more general otaku culture, but retains a unique identity within the larger subculture. Institutions such as the *meido-kissa* (Maid Cafe), underground idol and other street performances were given a platform

due to the cultivation of otaku culture in Akihabara. Within these developments emerged *Akiba-pop*. While it could be considered a genre or subgenre, *Akiba-pop* more generally refers to an aesthetic style of music in much the same way *Akiba-kei* does. In that sense, it's more accurate to say *Akiba-pop* is *Akiba-kei* music.

Akiba-pop is a pop-derivative subgenre with roots in *denpa* music and drawing music influence from the *moe* music of UNDER17. The term was coined by music group MOSAIC.WAV in the title of their first album released in October 2004: *We Love "Akiba-pop"!!* This album was created to appeal specifically to *Akiba-kei* otaku with songs like *Magical Hacker* ☆くるくるリスク which makes references to both various internet protocols (Peer-to-peer) and jokes about censoring the radio version of their song, later selling an uncensored version as a single. In addition, there are other songs with titles appealing to other *Akiba-kei* otaku sensibilities, such as 虹の世界で2D Love (2D Love in the Rainbow World), 萌えスパイラル!アキバトラ〜/" (Moe Spiral! Akiba-tora), and of course, the titular *We Love "Akiba-Pop"!!*

MOSAIC.WAV is considered to be the spiritual successor to UNDER17 by carrying on the legacy of *moe-song* and revolutionizing *Akiba-pop*, as well as being one of the most prolific and popular music groups within the *denpa* music scene.

History

UNDER17 (アンダーセブンティーン、アンセブ) or "Ansebu", was a Japanese music duo consisting of singer Momoi Haruko (桃井はるこ) and guitarist Koike Masaya (小池雅也, nicknamed "Aniki" meaning "Big Brother"). The duo was officially founded around 2001 or early 2002, although the pair had worked many times before since the late 1990s under the name of "Poly-Phonic," though did not perform *moe* songs during this time. The band is known for its distinct cute vocals thanks to the unique style of singing of vocalist Momoi Haruko, which itself was influenced by otaku-oriented anime and *bishoujo games* from the era. The group has been an influential force in "*moe* song" and "*denpa* song," a category of music that focuses on cute female vocals and pop beats catering to a niche otaku audience. However, it's more accurate to say UNDER17 falls under the "Akiba-pop" genre more so than *denpa*. According to Haruko, the term "moe song" itself was coined by UNDER17, and on their second "best of" album, they boasted the label "World Famous Moe Artist."

The "UNDER17" name is a tongue-in-cheek reference to *eroge* (erotic games) which oftentimes feature high school aged characters despite legally required to be 18 years old. However, the game urges the player to acknowledge themselves and the characters within it as an age under 18 to express their pure heart, untainted by the rest of the world. This is not too dissimilar to Inoue Kikuko and her claim-to-fame. When asked about her age, Inoue-san will always respond that she's "eternally seventeen" despite being much older now. *Eroge* can only be sold to people older than 18, but anyone can listen to the music of the game regardless. This all returns back to the *eroge* situation where the quest for purity contradicts the player's urge to creampie all the "totally-legal" heroines in the game and see all the CG's. But even if you are under 17 years old, you can purchase and listen to UNDER17's music.

Noted in the Japanese Wikipedia page, around 2001 and 2002 when UNDER17 was gaining its footing within the otaku music scene, "*moe*" and "*moe song*" were relatively obscure terms, its usage only really

relegated to small circles of otaku huddled together on online message board systems. However, in 2004, alongside the massive popularity of novel and television drama *Densha Otoko*, the term “moe” frequently ranked highly on surveys for “This month’s popular words” in Japan. As such, the term “moe song” became widely associated with the style of music UNDER17 was performing, as well as inspired others to perform similar types of songs.

During their existence, the band produced in total over 20 singles and 3 compilation albums, and their music was featured in opening and ending sequences in animated TV series’ such as *Popotan*, *DearS*, and *Genshiken*. The 3 compilation albums being the definitive experience and easiest starting point for those new UNDER17 since they collect all the singles released into 3 distinct locations. The third compilation album also includes a high-quality recording of their last iconic moment on stage in 2004.

One of the most important projects for UNDER17 in their early days of composing music for *bishoujo games* was their work on *Popotan*. This PC game was released in Japan on December 12th, 2002 and had a few important staff members that would go on to be legends within the realm of otaku media. The first of which being character designer Poyoyon Rock (*Watanabe Akio*), known for his work on the *Monogatari Series* anime and the game *Grisaia no Kajitsu*. However, he previously had worked with the UNDER17 duo prior to dubbing themselves as such, with the anime series *The Soutaker* and the spin-off *Nurse Witch Komugi-chan* OVA. Alongside UNDER17 in the musical credits, now-legendary *denpa* singer Torormi performs an insert song entitled “Mii-tan no Mahou de PON!” as well as is the *seiyuu* for Mii on the original 18+ PC release of the game. Interestingly enough, Momoi Haruko performs as Mii’s *seiyuu* on the all-ages version of the game on PS2 released in early 2004. Another important cast member is *seiyuu* Kadowaki Mai, whom you might recognize as the voice of Illyasviel von Einzbern from a little-known series called “Fate Stay/Night.” Her role as Mare for *Popotan* was actually her second role as a *seiyuu* for a major character in a *bishoujo game*, the first being Asagiri Aiko in *Prism Palette* developed by Broccoli in 2001. She would have the role as Illya in Deen’s anime adaptation of *Fate Stay/Night* released in early 2006, later reprising her role in the all-ages *Réalta Nua* version of the *Stay/Night* game released in April of 2007 for PC. Besides the important cast behind *Popotan*, the opening movie features the source of the now-iconic loopable animation used in the ever-popular “Caramelldansen (speedycake remix)” video.

On September 27, 2004, UNDER17 announced its breakup via a handwritten letter posted on their website. This came as a shock to many fans, as the band had been rapidly gaining popularity and only just began touring for the first time. Within the duo there was a conflict of interest regarding the future of the duo and the style of music that would be produced. Based on interviews I have read from Momoi-san in *The Moe Manifesto* by Patrick W. Galbraith, she seems to imply that she was beginning to feel the “mass-produced” sensation of mainstream music creeping into their work which defeated the purpose of the group. She also cites not sharing the same artistic vision as guitarist Koike-san, since he wanted to try experimenting more outside the *Akiba-pop* and *denpa* subgenres. Haruko explains in this interview how she is very dedicated to preserving the importance of having genuine “moe” feelings and felt this ideal would be tarnished on their current path.

The band remained together briefly to finish their first and final tour, culminating in an emotional last performance on November 20, 2004 at Yokohama Blitz. The last song performed as UNDER17 was

Tenbatsu! Angel Rabbie「天罰！エンジェルラビィ」 which featured an iconic and emotional double encore, and is included as the last track on their third and final album; そして伝説へ... The title of the album meaning “And so, Onwards to Legend...” The final song the two performed onstage at Yokohama Blitz was the emotional UNDER17 arrangement of “Mail Me” which was Momoi-san’s breakout single, and one of the first major projects the two collaborated on before forming UNDER17.

The band reunited for one song on August 31, 2008 during the Animelo Summer Live. They performed 「天罰！エンジェルラビィ」 (Tenbatsu! Angel Rabbie) with the help of MOSAIC.WAV members. This performance is significant in that MOSAIC.WAV was another Akihabara-based *moe-song* group likely influenced by the music of UNDER17 and other early *Akiba-kei* groups. This group has carried on the legacy of *Akiba-kei* and *moe-song* music, and are still producing music to this day!

Members

Momoi Haruko

Momoi Haruko (桃井 はるこ) was born December 14, 1977 in Tokyo, Japan and is a prominent voice actress, song writer and artist. She is called "Halko" by fans (Japanese pronunciation of the nickname sounds exactly like Haruko ironically), a nickname she gave herself which is inspired by HAL 9000, the computer in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Since beginning her career in the late 90's, she became an important figure within the Japanese idol scene and representative of the niche otaku subculture during the time. Having since been appropriately called the “Queen of Akihabara.” With her own understanding of *moe* and her interest in games and computers, much of Momoi-san’s lyrics feature double meanings, which only the most hardcore fan could catch.

Momoi-san attended Tokyo Metropolitan Yoyogi High School. She has gone on record to note how she was often bullied in high school due to having unusual interests that other girls did not have. She enjoyed playing *bishoujo games* (lit. Pretty Girl Games), watching anime and especially enjoyed playing video games. During this time she received a personal computer and started a personal blog which is still around today, in all its 90's glory. In an interview with Patrick W. Galbraith in *The Moe Manifesto*, she explains how “Dial-up internet in the 1990s was a godsend for me.” She eventually gained recognition online and was offered a job to write for the magazine "Weekly ASCII".

In 1996, Haruko began performing live in Akihabara, a popular gathering place in Tokyo for otaku, and had been visiting the electric town since she was in grade school. She had established a small following in Akihabara performing in underground live concerts as seen in this 1997 clip of her single "GURA GURA" where she paraded around Akiba-strip with the infamous Nintendo Power Glove and referencing various video games. Much of her early music was influenced by Akihabara pop-culture; Momoi-san explains how the sound was born from her interest in video games and computers. This explains her first single *Computer Girl Virtual-ian* (電腦少女バーチャリアンコ) release in 1997 and gives off a lovely image of late-90’s futuristic idealism.

Haruko was instrumental in the popularization of “guerilla lives,” a term used to describe a quickly formed live performance on the streets of Akihabara, as well as the responsibility for starting the

underground idol movement. Prior to this, idols were restricted to professional recruiting on TV or signed under a recording label, however, Haruko found success in her grass-roots effort on the streets of Akiba-- an otaku making *Akiba-kei* music for otaku! Without her influence, the idol culture of Akiba and the popularity of larger groups like Akihabara's own AKB48 would not have been possible. Her first hit single was "Mail Me" which was a cover of the song featured in the 2000 Sion Sono film *Suicide Club* (自殺サークル), and soon began performing theme sounds for adult visual novels around 2000 with *Omakase! Angel Trouble* and *Baldr Bullet*.

During her time performing with Koike-san, Momoi-san curiously appears with glasses only when performing as UNDER17. Under normal circumstances she doesn't need glasses. However, she wears them not because she has bad eyesight, but to express that she "sees things from the same point of view as otaku." This harkens back to the classical image of the slightly-overweight, plaid shirt tucked-in, glasses glinting, bandana-wearing otaku prowling the streets of Akihabara with a bag full of *bishoujo* goods in each hand. By wearing the glasses, Momoi-san was channeling the then-contemporary image of an *Akiba-kei* otaku and quite literally seeing the world through their lens. At the final performance at Yokohama Blitz, where they announced their dissolution, she left her glasses on the stage and left. Later during the surprise comeback at Animelo Summer Live 2008, Koike appeared on stage, and Momoi received the glasses from Koike and wore them, much to the joy of fans.

After the success of her singing career, Momoi-san was offered a role in the 2001 anime *The SoulTaker* and the eventual spin-off *Nurse Witch Komugi-chan* in 2002. The latter of which received a number of vocal albums showcasing Haruko's singing talents. *Komugi-chan* is also significant due to the influence of otaku culture and *Akiba-kei* sensibilities within its aesthetic. It parodied anime genre conventions, poked fun at other popular series and incorporated internet culture that only the most dedicated imageboard users would understand. It even included a mecha version of Tokyo Big Sight as a boss-battle, notable for being the convention center the bi-annual *Comiket* (Comic-Market) is held. However, quite possibly the most important part of *Nurse Witch Komugi-chan* was not the show itself, but *Nakahara Komugi's Kongari (Toasty) Nurse Station*, which was the show's radio show. This was the world's first anime internet radio program. While hardly a topic of interest for most non-Japanese fans due to the language barrier and time zone differences, radio programming is a critical part of cultivating a fanbase around both the show and the *seiyuu*, and consequently was instrumental in the development of the *seiyuu* otaku scene. These short programs are personality-driven by the main cast and generally focus on discussing events of the show, reading fanmail and answering questions. Various "corners" are allocated for the program which feature distinct topics or structure. Being someone who started as an internet blogger and was interested in *seiyuu* years before this was possible, Momoi Haruko was the perfect candidate to pioneer this development. This was also around the same time she began collaborating with Koike Masaya to form UNDER17.

Momoi Haruko also had many roles as a *seiyuu* (voice actress) in anime during the early 2000's. Similar to her experience with visual novels, she also performed many opening songs for anime during this time. Some major roles include but are not limited to:

- Nakahara Komugi from *Nurse Witch Komugi-chan*
- Tsukune from *Majokko Tsukune-chan*

- Mii from *Popotan* (anime)
- Seto Sun from *Seto no Hanayome*
- Akiha Rumiho from *Steins;Gate*
- Minazuki Chika from *Ai Yori Aoshi*

Besides Nakahara Komugi, her role as Akiha Rumiho is notable due to that character being instrumental in the creation of Akihabara as a centre of otaku culture, according to the canon of *Steins;Gate*.

In addition to her prolific musical and *seiyuu* career, she published an autobiography in 2007 entitled *Akihaba-LOVE* reflecting her professional career, the experiences she had, and the people that helped her along the way. This was published around the time when she was questioning her own value of *moe* and is evident in her more “mature” image at the time, such as the role of San in *Seto no Hanayome* and her *Wonder Momo-i* album. This is due to her increasing agitation and resentment towards the idea of making *moe* songs fueled by corporate agenda and calculated marketing, ultimately making the “nyaa” and “onii-chan” buzz-words feel less genuine. As such, she started to experiment further with a more mature style. However, traveling to the United States and Germany for anime conventions rekindled her passion for *moe* as she gained a newfound appreciation of it through seeing the love expressed by those abroad. At FAnimecon 2009, she explains her experience in an interview with Tomoaki Hirai from T-ono.net.

“Even with a language barrier, I felt I could communicate from the heart by singing my songs. Also, In Japan otaku are looked down upon, but here I am in America to perform in front of so many like-minded people because I am one. I feel happy that I am an otaku (laugh).”

In 2007 she returned to her roots which was disclosed in the DVD release "Halko Update."

Momoi-san is currently still involved in otaku related media industries, though it appears she has not received major roles as a *seiyuu*. According to an Anime News Network article from 2009, she has her own record label called “AkihabaLOVE Records” and is collaborating with Okui Masami, who is known for her theme song performances in *Di Gi Charat*, *Shoujo Kakumei Utena*, *Akihabara Dennou-gumi* and *Slayers*. She has also collaborated with a number of other high-profile artists and groups such as Perfume, Chiyomaru Shikura, Hironobu Kageyama, and manzo. In addition to her anime-related music performances and composing, she has had a prolific career continuing working in the *bishoujo game* industry even after the end of the dissolution of UNDER17. She is credited most commonly as composer, composition or writes the lyrics for OP and ED tracks. Her most recent credit being on Frontwing’s *Momo-iro Closet eroge* about a lewd female otaku. Another important credit within this scene is providing an insert song for the infamous game and anime *School Days* entitled “Let Me Love You” from 2005, uncharacteristically melodramatic for her style at the time, though not too divergent from some of the more ballad-styled songs from the later UNDER17 releases. While still performing lives, I suspect she has been shifting her work more in the production side of things now, though she has not ended her prolific career active in the Japanese music scene.

Momoi Haruko is one of my favorite *seiyuu* and my favorite Japanese pop singer. I’ve enjoyed her extensive discography through the various phases of her careers as well as her performances within the anime she has been cast in. Many people are likely not too fond of her due to her polarizing high-pitched

voice, but I find it very charming, and it's hard to explain concisely why that is. Maybe it's simply my longing for an *imouto* character to call me *onii-chan* in the morning, or perhaps it's something deeper than that. The expressiveness of her singing, range of vocal ability, energy of her performances and dedication to her work regardless of the context makes Momoi-san someone to admire. She hasn't gotten many big roles in anime and her music doesn't seem to be topping any Oricon charts, but there always feels like there is a unique energy behind it all. This is because I feel that Momoi-san was a person who seemed to have a better understanding of *moe* than anyone else. She grew up looking up to idols like Mizuno Aoi and yearned for the opportunity to one-day work in the industry. She wrote on her blog during high school about the things she didn't have anyone to discuss them with, and in a twist of fate, she became the idol. Her roots are in Akihabara and she enjoys otaku media just as much as the fans do.

Best of wishes for Momoi-san and her continuing endeavors!

Koike Masaya

Koike Masaya (小池雅也) is a sunglasses-clad Japanese guitarist lovingly called "Aniki" (big brother) by fans. He previously performed with UNDER17 alongside Momoi Haruko and has been a member of ULTRA-PRISM since 2009. In addition to those groups, he has performed as a guitarist for the popular *Akiba-pop* group MOSAIC.WAV alongside vocalist MI-KO and keyboardist Susumu Kayamori, as well as is part of the 4-ever group who mainly performs music for anime such as *Mamotte! Lollipop* or *Canvas 2: Niji-iro no Sketch*. As opposed to Momoi Haruko, not much is known about Koike-san's personal life, though his list of musical credits can be used to narrate his career path over the past few decades.

Koike-san was traditionally instructed in music growing up playing the piano. Unfortunately his instructor was very strict and he was not allowed the creative freedom to play and subsequently started to grow disinterested in music as a whole. However, in high school he was a fan of the American rock band Kiss and took up playing the guitar. Though originally being influenced by heavy metal, he would later cite guitarists such as Carlos Santana and Jeff Beck to be his major inspirations. He soon reignited an interest in music and would practice any free moment he had, even before school. Koike-san has been described as a very serious person and often is pictured with a stern expression on his face, but many collaborators have explained how he is fundamentally a considerate person who cares deeply about his art and partners. That said, he has also been described as enjoying assuming the role as a flamboyant guitarist who wears sunglasses and looks cool every second he's on stage.

Koike-san's first credit is as a tape-op on a 1987 album entitled "チェ・バンドネオン" which was a Latin-inspired Tango album produced by an all-Japanese staff, interestingly enough. For those that were unaware like I was, a tape-op refers to a secondary sound engineer, though is just a fancy word for an errand boy since they act as an apprentice and carry out menial tasks like fetching tea and snacks. He didn't appear credited on anything as "小池雅也" until 2001 with the anime *The SoulTaker* credited for musical arrangement of the image song "Ai no Medicine" alongside Momoi Haruko, though not yet as UNDER17. But we're missing a large chunk of history that could only be discerned through information on the Japanese Wikipedia page. During the period roughly between 1987 and '97, Koike-san worked in TV production doing voice effects and audio mixing. But in '96 he became acquainted with Watanabe Kouji who was working on a Playstation game at the time, and was introduced to Momoi Haruko. As a result, the two collaborated on Momoi-san's 1997 single "GURA GURA" where Koike-san was credited

as arrangement and later returned to arrange and perform guitar for “Mail Me.” It’s likely he had been working in or had close acquaintances with the Japanese music scene during the time before this, but not much could be found to support this theory.

The first major single released independently as UNDER17 was “Extensions” in 2003, being the ending song for the Dreamcast game *Majo no Ocha Kai*. After Which he performed alongside Haruko for a number of other singles throughout the early-2000’s culminating in three “best-of” compilation albums of their work.

Following the break-up of UNDER17 in 2004, Koike-san continued to work closely in the general anime-sphere of music. In 2006 he is credited as a writer for “FIRST * KISS” under the group name “4-ever” which is the second song on the single *Poppin’ Heart はひとつだけ?* for the anime *Mamotte! Lollipop*. A number of small credits are tied to him throughout the rest of the 2000’s, curiously all related to *denpa* artists such as collaborating with MOSAIC.WAV in 2009 for a vocaloid album, then *nomico* in 2009 followed by a number of singles with ULTRA-PRISM beginning in the same year. While it’s not fair to draw conclusions simply based on this, it seems that Koike-san had a passion for making *denpa* and *moe* music, evident in his discography and songwriting credits, far after the break-up of UNDER17.

The interesting thing about ULTRA-PRISM was that it appeared to be similar in style to UNDER17, in that it had Koike-san backing the female vocalist Tsukimiya Usagi. While it doesn’t seem that ULTRA-PRISM reached the same heights as his old unit, the new group worked on a few anime songs as well as seem to have been active as late as 2020, and I will touch on their most recent live performance in a later section since it’s relevant. In 2010 ULTRA-PRISM did a collaboration album with *Denpagumi.INC*, whom Koike-san would later produce music for. I would imagine this was the first time he became acquainted with the latter group as he would start producing music for *Denpagumi* in 2015 during the height of their popularity.

Koike-san’s most recent credits are as musical performance associated with *Denpagumi.INC* (でんぱ組. inc). In 2016 they released a best-of compilation called WWDBEST ~電波良好!~ (WWDBEST ~Good Denpa!~). Additionally, he was credited for composition on their 2019 album *ワレワレハデンパグミンクダ*. Furthermore, Koike-san is still credited as Composer/Arranger on music released as recent as MOSAIC.WAV’s “AKIBA-POP II SCRIPTER ~MOSAIC.WAV GAME SONG COLLECTION~” and other 2019 music from various artists. However, it is important to note that these are compilation albums and do not necessarily indicate Koike-san’s current involvement with the group.

Returning to *Denpagumi.INC*, this group is significant because they marked an interesting turning point in the modern-*denpa* musical scene since it introduced a more explicit multi-idol influence a la AKB48 or her sister groups. This is opposed to the more prevalent single vocalist performance of the *doujin denpa* music produced at a monetary loss to the artist. In that sense, *Denpagumi.INC* seemed to be trying to parallel the evolution of Japan’s idol industry; moving away from the singular focus of the TV-idols of old and instead trying to appeal to as many people as possible with a large unit. As mentioned previously, most *denpa* had previously been produced and released for *Comiket*, *M3* or other similar events but was now appearing to have evolved to be more commercially viable. Albums had once been put together with low production quality on shoe-string budgets and often only featured album art from fellow *doujin* artists (or self-drawn in the case of Toromi), but *Denpagumi.INC* appeared to have a much higher budget with

the goal of appealing to both hardcore *denpa* and idol music fans alike. I personally enjoyed a few of their songs, but ultimately felt as if it was too derivative from the “bedroom rock” feel I had grown accustomed with groups like *O-denpa Studio* and the like. UNDER17 was certainly a larger group with more commercial backing, so I guess that shows my bias a bit there. However, I’ve always felt that groups like UNDER17 and MOSAIC.WAV carry the *denpa* spirit with them regardless of how popular they got, ultimately making their music carry the amateur mid-2000’s *Akiba-pop* energy of their early days throughout the entirety of their career.

Not much else could be discerned from this elusive *denpa* loving man

The Break-up

Unfortunately, the success of UNDER17 was short-lived. The group disbanded on September 27, 2004 via a handwritten letter posted on their website. This came as a shock to many fans, as the band had been rapidly gaining popularity and only just began touring for the first time. To understand why this happened, we need to look a bit closer into the ideology of Momoi Haruko and the ballooning popularity of the otaku subculture at the time.

Momoi-san had once asked Watanabe Akio, character designer for *Nurse Witch Komugi-chan* and *Bakemonogatari*, among others, how he designs such cute pictures. Watanabe-san explains: “It’s because I want to become Komugi-chan.” Upon reflection, Momoi-san concluded that *moe* isn’t bound to being male or female; it’s almost like a third gender. Her beliefs were reinforced as she explains how her friend, Nagashima “Jienotsu” Yuichiro, a professional fighter, enjoys cosplay and cross-play alike. Not because he wants to cross-dress, but because he wants to become that character. This is similar to how there are many male fans of *Touhou Project* who cross-play out of a genuine love for a certain character. One of the reasons why *Touhou* is so special is because of how much the characterization of each character can be interpreted by the fans, and consequently, fans form closer connections to these characters because of how much time they spent thinking about these characters. The love for these characters transcends gender. And it goes without saying that female fans can love female or male characters as much as male fans do.

She continues explaining how *moe* might stem from “a desire to return to childhood.” No matter who you are, “the image of the carefree child playing in the backyard is appealing. The freedom and innocence is intoxicating.” (*Moe Manifesto*) Many “*moe* characters” tend to be very young, as social critic Honda Toru rationalized: “[being young] makes them vulnerable, which inspires us to protect and nurture them. The character needs support, love, or care, even if she is strong and independent. If she is not at all vulnerable, then she can live on her own. It would be hard to approach such a perfect being. Being vulnerable means that you need others, and these characters can’t survive without support.” *Moe* is androgynous and asexual. It’s very pure but also bittersweet-- like *hatsukoi* (first love). The fragile heart of *moe* cannot be handled without the most delicate touch of unadulterated love. *Moe* is transcendent to culture. Many people like to introduce *moe* as a “weird Japanese thing” but that’s simply because we don’t have a word to explain the same feelings as succinctly.

Despite dubbing themselves as the “World Famous Moe Artist,” I don’t think Momoi-san or Koike-san truly understood what they were doing and the importance of their work at the time. It wasn’t until much

later, after going through an identity crisis, that Momoi-san truly understood the weight of *moe*. Around 2004, during the height of UNDER17's popularity, she was starting to feel that her heart wasn't at all there anymore. This internal turmoil was explained in her interview with Patrick W. Galbraith in *The Moe Manifesto*:

“PG: Do you still consider your songs to be about moé?”

MH: That's a real dilemma for me. One of the reasons I disbanded [UNDER17] was because I didn't want to reproduce a patterned moé formula”

She elaborates on what she means by “formula” in the following response:

“Moé is a very spiritual thing. It isn't just some pattern. There was a time when I was asked to put keywords like “[onii-chan]” or “[nyaa]” into my music, but I didn't like it. Someone was making a calculated business decision to put those words into the song to trigger a response in otaku. It's the same with anime specifically designed to trigger moé. It seems forced and lacking in soul. I'm not interested in the business side of things

Returning to her present feelings about *moe* explained previously, Momoi-san was starting to understand the implications of wielding such a world, and it should not be used haphazardly. The influence of business and money-making schemes to swindle otaku out of their pocket-change in exchange for a paper-thin visage of *moe* became nauseating. The pure-hearted nature of *moe* was being threatened. There arose a conflict of interest regarding the future of the duo and the style of music that would be produced. Momoi-san's ideals would persevere, however, as despite the disbanding of the group, she managed to preserve her own image of *moe*. She felt that the “mass-produced” sensation of mainstream music creeping into their work which defeated the purpose of the group. She also cites not sharing the same artistic vision as guitarist Koike-san, since he wanted to try experimenting more outside the *Akiba-pop* and *denpa* subgenres. Momoi-san explains in this interview how she is very dedicated to preserving the importance of having genuine *moe* feelings and felt this ideal would be tarnished on their current path.

In the years that followed, Momoi Haruko continued performing and producing music within the general *Akiba-pop* and anime music sphere. However, as mentioned previously, she went through a bit of an identity-crisis as she questioned the viability of *moe* and her style of music. This occurred during the months leading up to 2007 where she experimented with more derivative styles, as noted in her album *Wonder Momo-i* and various anime roles at the time. However, what made her regain her faith in *moe* was her time spent abroad. After performing overseas at Anime Expo in the US and Connichi in Germany, the transcendental nature of *moe* became apparent. These *gaijin* in America and Germany understood the same feelings and had the same passion as Japanese people felt towards anime, manga and games. The world-wide *moe* artist suddenly found herself realizing that she might in-fact be world famous after all. And the feelings she had spent languishing over could be understood despite her being in an unfamiliar place. *Moe* is not bound by country borders, culture, language barriers or gender roles. It's a universal feeling that some people will deny, and others will embrace. *Moe* does not discriminate and it won't hurt you. All it asks for is a pure-hearted yearning for something beautiful.

After this revelation, Momoi Haruko returned to Japan, elated, high off her fun times abroad and with a rejuvenated sense of excitement for *moe*. This is expressed in the aforementioned *Halko Update* in 2007, as well as her public statement issued towards western fans upon returning to Japan. Then the following year on August 31, 2008, UNDER17 reunited once again for Animelo Summer Live where they performed “Tenbatsu! Angel Rabbi” with the members of MOSAIC.WAV. In addition to this, Momoi-san and Koike-san briefly reunited again on March 19, 2020 at KT Zepp Yokohama to perform at the event *Susume Moe Denpa Shōnen!! Daifukkatsusai 2020!!: Sugisarishi Moe o Motomete* (ススメ★萌でんぱ少年！！大復活祭 2020！！～過ぎさりし萌をもとめて～), which was as collaborative event with UNDER17 and ULTRA-PRISM. (*After further investigation, the current state of the world during March 2020 seemed to have postponed this event until 2021, but it is unclear if it took place as I couldn't find footage online.*)

In addition to her internal turmoil regarding her perception of the coldhearted business-driven nature of the music industry, Momoi-san also cites how their immense popularity and strain from their many tours had started to take a strain mentally and physically on the two. I would imagine her vocal abilities were starting to strain as she would have had to continuously sing in a high-pitched voice for long periods of time. Even if her voice was already pitched, performing at many live events like *Comiket* and other smaller venues did not prepare them for the difficulties of a national tour.

While the majority of their music was released during a short span of about two years, their legacy would leave a lasting impression on the world of *moe* song.

Discography Discussion

Now that we've taken a look at the history of UNDER17, the *denpa* and *Akiba-pop* music scenes at the time, as well as a bit on the landscape of otaku culture at the time, let's get to the music itself, shall we?

When it comes to pop music and especially Japanese pop music, labels tend to flood the market with singles with the goal of low prices for high rankings on the Oricon chart. Unfortunately this means a lot of music in a lot of places. Also, lots of singles tend to have that one titular song which the single is named after, usually the song with the most effort or marketing behind it. The rest of the songs just fall in line behind it, though this doesn't necessarily indicate their quality. In addition, most J-pop singles feature karaoke or instrumental tracks for their songs, intended for use for fans to sing at karaoke with the included linear notes, or simply enjoy the instrumentals on their own. Luckily, there are plenty of “best of” compilations available for popular artists and essentially collect the titular song of the single release, and put them all into one package.

UNDER17 released a lot of singles despite having a short run and a lot of them are either unaccounted for or have never been uploaded online. Fortunately all the major singles have been collected into these “UNDER17 Best...” albums, hence why I'm going to primarily be focusing on the three compilation albums in my discussion.

Lastly, I'm not going to discuss all the songs of each album because that would take too long. Instead I'm going to give a general overview of each compilation album and pick a few songs to discuss the history of, why I like them a lot and why they are important.

UNDER17 Best 1: 美少女ゲームソングに愛を!! (2003)

Bishoujo Game Song ni Ai wo!! (美少女ゲームソングに愛を!!) translates to mean something along the lines of “Express Your Love of *Bishoujo Game Songs!*” or “Let’s Love *Bishoujo Game Songs!*” This CD was published by Lantis and released on December 3, 2003 and contains 13 songs. I initially wasn’t too keen about this album, but after sitting myself down and listening to it to completion one day, I realized it might be my favorite of the three. This album primarily consists of *bishoujo game* opening and ending songs, as indicated by the title.

The cover artwork for the first album mimics the window box packaging of an action figure or *figma* packaging in that Koike-san and Momoi-san are placed within a plastic bedding and their accessories are beside them. I really like this artwork since this is the type of window box packaging many figure otaku would likely be intimately familiar with. Not just *bishoujo* figures in crane games, but also action figures for *tokusatsu* programs as well as American comic book heroes. I personally like to think each album had colors on the cover artwork to best reflect the feelings and aesthetic of the music within. In this case, the vibrant pink and purple reflect the playful feminine innocence of the traditional *moe* aesthetic, which juxtaposes to the action figure window box packaging that we see here, more so in line with that of prize figures.

Here is the tracklist:

1. 恋のミルキーウェイ -Leonid Meteors Version-
2. いちごGo! Go! -Jumbo Parfait Version-
3. Os No Yes -Seal Up Live Version-
4. つるぺたさんいらっしや〜い! -Oyoyo Version-
5. 浮気してもええよ -Fickie Mix-
6. 気持ちとまらないない -A Girl's Feelings Version-
7. 天罰! エンジェルラビィ
8. Angelic Magic
9. おかしなオンナノコ
10. Extentions
11. みいたんの魔法でポン
12. ぽぽたん
13. こたえ

2: いちごGo! Go! -Jumbo Parfait Version-
(Strawberry Go! Go! ~Jumbo Parfait Version~)

I will admit, I am addicted to the sweet strawberry flavor of this *moe* song. It opens with Momoi-san chanting the titular lyrics “いちごGO!GO!” three times, and I find myself singing along before I know it! The song itself is the theme song from the adult PC game *Ichigo-Da* (いちご打) developed by Witch and released in 2001 and is a fandisc to *Milkyway*. Fandiscs are short fanservice games put together by developers, usually released at reduced priced or on a limited scale, and are for fans to get bonus content and sometimes extra h-scenes for games they enjoy. Essentially, OVA for *bishoujo games*. Since this game was geared towards adults, Momoi-san initially had difficulties discussing it as part of her professional work.

This is important to note because it was the second single they released that was used in a *bishoujo game*. Following this collaboration, UNDER17 would continue to work with Witch for a number of other games including *Milkyway 2 Tsurupeta* and *Fake*, later compiling these songs into two compilation albums “UNDER17 Meets Witch.”

Besides the significance of the background, it’s just a fun song. Based on my mediocre Japanese and having listened to it about a hundred times, I’ve concluded that the song is about a *tsundere*. With lyrics like:

いちご GO!GO! 愛して
わたしの NO!NO! 鞭で
あなたのすべてを縛って離さない

Ichigo Go! Go!
Lashing out saying “No! No!”
I want to restrain you and never let go

It’s not as cute of a song in meaning as it appears, nor is it as upbeat, but it’s very catchy and about this usual relationship between someone who loves someone so much they want to pick on them, like a *tsundere*. Explaining how they want to mess with their love interest precisely because they’re cute.

5. 浮気してもええよ -Fickie Mix-

UNDER17 began working with *bishoujo game* developer Witch in 2001 with the game *Alive: Renewal* which was a voiced version of the same game released in 1999. It seems like they were not credited as UNDER17 for the opening movie on VNDB despite making the song “ALIVE” and released together on the UNDER17 Meets Witch collection and credited on the Japanese Wikipedia page. It could possibly be that this was never in the VNDB site’s database, or just nobody looked into this before, but I digress. Returning to Witch, they had a series of games called *Milkyway* which began releasing in 2000. It’s interesting to note that while commonplace at the time, *Milkyway* shares characters with *Alive* as well as is the parent story for the aforementioned *Ichigo-Da*. If you ask me, *Milkyway* looks like a rip-off, or at least a imitator, of *Pia♥Carrot e Youkoso!!* which was another popular series of adult games released around the same time that also focused on slice of life experiences with cute girls in a cafe. It wasn’t until mid-2002 that Witch would release *Milkyway2* and UNDER17 would perform music for it and the spin-off *Milkyway2.5*. Unfortunately, the group would not return for *Milkyway3*, as that game was

released in 2005 after UNDER17 had disbanded, and would also be the last game published and developed by Witch.

However, we're focusing on the two episode pornographic OVA released in 2003 simply titled *Milkyway*, produced by Lemon Heart. The music was performed by mobo, who was often credited alongside UNDER17, such as in the OVA for *Tenbatsu! Angel Rabbie*. I believe they were responsible for providing additional instrumentals in their recordings, such as piano and extra guitars.

The song title itself "Uwakishitemo ee yo" (浮気してもええよ) translates something to meaning "You can cheat on my too" or "Fickleness is fine too" and reflects in the lyrics. It's my interpretation that this song is from the perspective of a girl who is in love with a "Mega-Playboy" and is popular with women. So the girl, or girls, are expressing their mixed feelings about how they can't stop loving him despite their infidelity. This is reflected in lines like "You only live once, so enjoy life as a man!!" (人生は一度きり男ならたのしんでや!!) Though to be honest, I could be completely off-base because I'm not familiar with the games. As for the song itself, it's very fun. It features some electronica-influenced instrumentals and feels very groovy and blends well with the catchy lyrics. It features the characteristically repetitive but nevertheless mind-worms that UNDER17 seems to incorporate oftentimes in their chorus' with the lines:

浮気してもええよ ええよ ええよ ええよ
浮気してもええよ ええよ ええよ ええよ
浮気してもええよ ええよ ええよ ええよ

You can either see this repetition as lazy, or you can see it as *denpa*. I personally think it's the latter because these lines are oftentimes nonsensical or have questionable meanings, but is framed as a pop chorus that urges you to sing along. Singing along about how infidelity is ok is similar to the chorus of the opening to *DearS* where you find yourself singing "I'm your slave!" This all harkens back to the recurring theme within Momoi Haruko's music where she puts multiple meanings into her songs and the *denpa* song idea of presenting darker themes painted over pink to veil their true depth. Even still, I sing along about how fickleness is alright with me!

13: こたえ

Kotae (こたえ), translating to mean "answer" or "response" is the ending song to the aforementioned *eroge Popotan* released in late 2002. This song was one of the first major examples of the range of Momoi-san's vocals, not simply limited to high-pitched imouto-character type vocals. This track is more melodramatic, introspective, and is what I consider one of the "ballad" tracks put out by UNDER17. I will touch on a few of the others in a bit, but generally speaking, these tracks tend to be longer and feature Momoi-san singing without pitching her voice, and almost always feature Koike-san being the sole instrumentalist. But I guess this style is par for the course for ending songs in *bishoujo games* especially around this era, as they usually tended to be more mellow compared to the exciting opening song. This is because the OP is designed to get you excited to play the game and set the mood for the subsequent 20+ hour experience, while the ED is a time when you can read the credits and reflect on the experience now that it's over. Compared to a film or anime episode, *bishoujo games* are stupidly long and have the need

for a moment of introspection, not too dissimilar to listening to the credits of a JRPG after the 40+ journey.

UNDER17 Best 2: 萌えソングをきわめるゾ!! (2004)

(*Moe Song wo Kiwameru zo!!*) meaning “Moe song at its best!”

The mice have overrun this one! RGB computer mice or the rats in the walls-- I cannot say. However, this album has always been the one I find it hard to return to personally. A year or so ago I sat myself down and listened to the entirety of the album to learn and love it, and I ended up finding some tracks here that were buried under a pile of optical mice, but still can't love this as much as their other work. There are a lot of great tracks here, but there is a shift midway through the album that makes me lose interest. That said, the suspicious amount of mouse-themed songs was the result of the 2003 television anime *MOUSE* which featured opening, ending and image songs performed by UNDER17, which would be their first major anime project.

Continuing on with my discussion of the aesthetic of each album, we have a primarily pink album cover this time with some flashy branding one might describe as gaudy. Once again both Koike-san and Momoi-san are featured wearing the same iconic stage costumes as the first album, all within the context of packaging for action figures or *bishoujo* figures. The design features the words “Best Album 2” three times in different fonts each time, which is just a poor design decision by anyone's standards, honestly. Also, for some reason the “Varsity” font (or some variation of it) is used when writing “UNDER17” which seems a bit unusual, but I digress. The *obi* advertises UNDER17 as “World Famous Moe Artist” as well as underneath explaining: “Suteki na o-uta ga takusan wa itteru yo!” (すてきなうたがたくさんはいつてるよ!), or “There are many lovely songs here!”

Generally speaking this album looks appealing, albeit with a few questionable design choices. But overall I enjoy the pop-y feel, overabundance of flashy pink and sparkles which accurately conveys the stylistic through-line of the following tracks.

Here is the tracklist:

1. She・Know・Be～恋の秘密～
2. さみしくないもん
3. マウスChuマウス
4. い・ん・て・りMouse (Optical Mix)
5. Anonymous・・・Mouse!!
6. がんばれ, たまちゃん!!
7. Magi-Cu!!
8. ぽぽたん畑でつかまえて
9. Popotan Kiss
10. ツルピトな恋
11. 泳・げ・な・い
12. 夏だ! 海だ! スク水だ!
13. Nostalgia

14. Adolescence

1. She•Know•Be〜恋の秘密〜

The first song off this album starts things off great with a very catchy electronica-inflused pop song called “She•Know•Be〜恋の秘密〜” (She Know Be ~The Secret Love~). This song is the opening song for the adult PC game 忍ちつく☆はあと(Shino-bitic☆Heart) released in 2003 by the wonderfully named company “Kiss next team BOTTOMLESS.” (Child company of Kiss Next). The group also performing the ending song さみしくないもん (Don’t be lonely!). This game has everything an early 2000’s ero-gamer could ever want! We got a story of our protagonist entering a new mysterious school and a harem of girls with VNDB tags including: kunoichi heroine, robot heroine, loli heroine and yes, even a catgirl heroine. Not much else is known about the game, since only one user named “ssshhddd” rated it at a 9 a few years ago, but I suppose off his metrics it’s not as good as *JK to Orc Heidan ~Aku Buta Oni ni Ryougyaku Sareta Seijo Gakuen~*.

Before learning the origins of this game, it took me over a year and a dozen or more listens to realize that “She•Know•Be” was supposed to be a play on “shinobi.” This is one of many examples of UNDER17’s wordplay they used in their lyrics. Not all of it is playful, but here is a fun example of it. The rest of the song was very enjoyable to listen to and served as a great opening song to the album. The lively performance and pop-y vocals gets you excited and perfectly sets the tone for the rest of the songs on this album.

3. マウス Chu マウス

I figured it was important to discuss this song regardless of how I felt about it. Since above all else, it’s significant for being the first major anime project for UNDER17, as noted previously. I specify “major” because a few months prior they worked on the 2003 adult OVA *Milkyway* with the song “Kimochi Tomaranai-nai” (気持ちとまらないない) and “Uwakishite Moee yo” (浮気してもええよ). The group had previously worked on the eroge *Milkyway 2* released in 2002 and would later also provide music for *Milkyway 2.5* in 2004. Returning our attention to *Mouse*, it was drawn by Itaba Hiroshi and written by Akahori Satoru, you might recognize Akahori-sensei from his other writing credits like *NG Knight Ramune & 40*, *Saber Marionette J*, *Cyberteam in Akihabara* (alongside Tsukasa Kotobuki) and *Kashimashi ~Girl Meets Girl~*. I haven’t seen *Mouse* but it appears to be something between a buddy-cop or classy cat burglars story with extreme *ecchi*. My best guess is *Bubblegum Crisis* with lots of fanservice.

The song itself is not my cup of tea. Listening to it earlier today reminded me why: it is too different from the typical UNDER17 sound. This song is very strong stylistically, but I don’t like that style. It uses horns to raise the cinematic sound of the song to better fit with the stylish thief aesthetic of the anime. I personally don’t like this sound as not only does it not feel at home with the rest of their discography, but something about the horns and bass line don’t appeal to me. Moreover, this song isn’t really “moe” per say, so it feels off in that regard too. That said, there are still a few reminders here and there indicating Momoi-san was indeed performing the song. I guess it’s not a terrible song, but it definitely is one of my least favorite UNDER17 songs and is not representative of their usual sound at all.

8. ぽぽたん畑でつかまえて

Popotan (ぽぽたん) is a nonsensical word which is a playful anagram on the Japanese word “tanpopo” (たんぽぽ) meaning dandelions, a prominent visual motif in the series. The full title “ぽぽたん畑でつかまえて” translates to mean something along the lines of “catching popotan in the fields.” While performing the opening and ending sequences for the original PC game, UNDER17 returned to compose a new song for the television anime released in 2002, which is this song here.

It’s a very catchy song both in the lyrics and the sound and I quickly find myself singing along the opening verse like an idiot even when walking around campus:

あいあいあい *I Love you*
まいまいまい *My darling*
みいみいみい *Help me!*
POPOTAN

I love the chorus for a number of reasons; not only is it catchy as heck and somewhat playful, but it also uses the names of the three main heroines and twists them to fit into some characteristically slitted-English that J-pop is known for. While the rest of the names don’t really relate to the english, it’s worth noting how Ai means “love” in Japanese, but also sounds very much like the English pronunciation of “I” as in “I love you!” Though honestly, I personally just love how this flows and culminates into the questionable delivery of “みいみいみい Help me!” immediately followed up by the zealous exclamation of “POPOTAN” before the instrumentals kick into high gear.

UNDER17 Best 3: そして、伝説へ... (2004)

(*Soshite, Densetsu e...*) Meaning “And so, onwards to legend” or “Onward... to legend”

Last but certainly not least, we have UNDER17’s grand finale for their compilation albums. This is it! Going all out with a two-disc release three days before Christmas in 2004 and a triumphant announcement of their status as legends within the *moe* song scene, there was no better message to leave their fans with than this collection of songs here. This was the first album I listened to when first getting into UNDER17 so it has a special place in my heart. For the longest time it contained my favorite songs and I would listen to it on repeat during the fall and winter of 2019. While I later would warm up to their other work, I never forgot how important these songs were to me. I found this because it included the full-length recording for “Kujibiki Unbalance” (くじびきアンバランス), which I knew from *Genshiken*. Though since I had the songs all downloaded to my hard drive I gave it a listen anyways. And I guess you can say the rest is history.

Concluding with my discussion with the aesthetic of the cover art, let’s get into this one, shall we? It primarily uses a tan color for the backgrounds while adding a subtly purple for text and the *obi*, which perfectly compliment the style of these songs. While playful, there are a number of mature ballad songs that give off a more relaxing or comfy feeling as opposed to the previous entries. One could describe this cover art as “bad” or “low-effort” but I would call it charming. It screams “early-2000s” Photoshop and I would imagine either some poor intern made it, or perhaps even Koike-san or Momoi-san themselves,

based on the amateur editing it radiates. Specifically with how some photos are cropped very poorly and we can clearly tell where the photo cut off. Regardless, it's a scrapbook of iconic moments and cool poses; Momoi-san wearing her most iconic stage costumes and Koike-san adorning himself in a leather overcoat and sunglasses that looks like he was following in the Nomura Tetsuya school of design too closely. For some reason the back cover has a silhouette of the Statue of Liberty, which I guess is symbolic of their status as "World famous *moe* artist." While undeniably goofy with shoddy editing, and a questionable English slogan reading "To And A Tradition," I'll give full points for their smiles! (even if Koike-san remains stoic for the majority of his photos).

As mentioned previously, the majority of these songs are from the group's later work, ergo it's them at their most mature. Their style has been refined and they are celebrating the art of *moe* song they have popularized and now are setting the standard for. This is probably the best UNDER17 has been and would ever be and is captured on compact disc for all eternity. Onwards, into legend...

Here is the tracklist:

1. ラブスレイブ
2. くじびきアンバランス
3. ここだよ。
4. 恐竜少女
5. らぶケロぱにつく!
6. 最初と最後のマジック
7. はじめての夏
8. ALIVE
9. わたくちはセレブリティ
10. 私は巫女さんキューピット
11. れもんのトキメキ♪
12. ふりんのうた
13. Which do you choose?
14. かがやきサイリューム
15. 1+1
16. フィギュアになりたい -with ANIKI-
17. 天罰！エンジェルラビィ-です Live version-(Live at YOKOHAMA BLITZ on 2004.11.20)

1. ラブスレイブ

This album opens with the *DearS* opening song and is a very enjoyable song despite me finding the show to be quite bad. In terms of mainstream popularity goes, I would imagine "Love Slave" was one of their more popular songs considering it was the opening song to a reasonably popular manga done by Peach-Pit, known for their work on *Rozen Maiden*. Moving past the questionable lyrics that haven't aged well due to modern social movements, the song is pretty fun. It retains the catchy J-pop chorus that I find myself singing or humming along to while enjoying the groovy sounds of the instrumentals.

Truthfully, it can get repetitive. However, I would imagine this is more the result of a bigger problem plaguing anime opening and ending songs in general. I call this the “anisong problem” where most of these songs have a very strong hook and chorus within an 80 to 90 second span but tend to lose steam rapidly after the opening section of the song. This is because these songs were designed for usage in anime where the typical opening song is allotted 80 to 90 seconds, meaning the song needs to reach the climax around the 75% mark to match the excitement of the opening. This isn’t a hard and fast rule as it’s not as prevalent in less mainstream anime or anime that use existing songs edited down to fit the length of the OP/ED, however, it’s fairly common within the realm of more mainstream and modern anime as of late. This is why listening to the non-TV-size recordings of these songs tend to sound repetitive or lose steam after the mid-section, because the rest of the song was never intended to be used in the show.

2. くじびきアンバランス

Kujibiki Unbalance is both the name of this song and a parody of early-2000's romcom anime in the metanarrative of *Genshiken*, eventually becoming an OVA and later a TV anime series. *KujiUn* is an amalgamation of popular manga and *bishoujo game* tropes from the time and is reflective of the then-current trends within popular otaku culture. For example, a prevalence of ecchi and slapstick comedy, a predominantly-female cast of over-designed characters, a more traditional large-eyed *moe* look, and absurdist comedy of the story. This is the manga the character of the *Genshiken* followed religiously and was intended to parody these trends to give a look at what otaku were interested in around 2004. In addition to the visual style and narrative elements of the show, the song *Kujibiki Unbalance* was created for the parody series and used for the opening song of the first episode of *Genshiken* for some metatextual fun. Using UNDER17 and Momoi Haruko to perform this song was a logical choice as the group had just worked on *DearS* which was just wrapping up its 1-cour run that September, with *Genshiken*'s first episode premiering in October of the same year. *Akiba-kei* otaku like Madarame Harunobu and Kugayama Mitsunori who enjoyed playing *ero*ge and spending many afternoons in the Electric Town would have been familiar with the music of UNDER17.

The song itself is beautiful; despite the upbeat J-pop sound, it is somewhat melancholic lyrically. This is not uncommon for UNDER17 as many of their lyrics are juxtaposed to the upbeat songs, which was somewhat common practice within *bishoujo games* at the time. For example, popular *nakige* developers like Visual Arts KEY would feature pretty young girls in tragic situations to evoke a genuine emotional response from the player. In addition to that, as discussed with the aforementioned *Popotan*, many of such games concluded with an less upbeat song in the ending credits intended to invoke feelings of introspection, longing and nostalgia. It seemed like developers at the time were intentionally making absurd games with slapstick humor to mask their own lingering emotional unrest, and likely resonated with the demographic of people playing these games. As such, *Kujibiki Unbalance* fits snugly within the meta of the time as it discusses feelings of melancholic love, surely something *bishoujo game* players were all-too familiar with from their bleak memories of high school romance.

Additionally, there are other instances of nods to popular trends at the time. Let’s look at the line “Do you remember the promise, we made so long ago?” *Osananajimi* heroine was popularized after Fujisaki Shiori from *Tokimeki Memorial* and has saturated the market of *bishoujo games* ever since. One such trope

common in the routes of these heroine's is the "childhood promise" which is typically the main character and the *osananajimi* promising to get married when they grow up. In the first season of *Genshiken* when Saki is explaining that her relationship with Kohsaka extends back to childhood, Madarame and the gang get all riled up seeing the power of the *osananajimi* heroine in action. For the lonely otaku playing these games in a darkened room, the fantasy of having a childhood friend who has always been with you and promises emotional support forever is intoxicating. It's very vanilla for sure, but it's very *moe*.

For me, *Kujibiki Unbalance* is a song about those lingering feelings of times when the odds were stacked against you. Otaku have traditionally been marginalized people who oftentimes revel in the fact that they are in the lowest caste of society. This is a song which reflects many feelings that otaku might have, and as such, is very nostalgic. It doesn't parallel to our experiences, but the images of the "Dazzling sunlight filtering through the trees, sparkles dancing within your eyes" or "by chance, on the road home, your long shadow is cast, we are together now" are reminders of the quieter moments of *bishoujo games*. These games are impactful because they are driven by pathos. The feelings we are capable of feeling are brought to the table and presented in a way otaku can finally experience. A song that presents both the melancholia of times when things don't go our way, but also the *waku-waku* and *doki-doki* of the first time your crush finally confesses to you.

A more perfect song simply cannot exist...

15. 1+1

1+1 is perhaps my favorite UNDER17 song. It's very derivative of their usual style, but fits snugly within their selection of ballad songs. I feel as if this is a perfect display of the musical capabilities of both Koike-san and Momoi-san as they are able to metaphorically stretch their wings here to perform a beautiful 6 minute and 18 second song full of fragile emotions and feelings of regret. Not only in vocal performance either, as here Koike-san gets an opportunity to have a guitar solo which he performs admirably in. It was included as the image song for the anime DearS, which the group also performed the opening song for, as mentioned previously. This song is less *moe* and more in line with the feelings they would evoke in the ending sequence to a *bishoujo game*, similar to *Kotae* (こたえ) from *Popotan*.

Lyrically, the song is about regret. The speaker yearns for the opportunity to have another chance at conveying their feelings to the person they loved, as that person goes further and further away. At first trying to convince themselves that "It might have been better not to meet at all" before realizing their true feelings will always persist. This is a powerful song about unrequited love that, while not groundbreaking lyrically or instrumentally, makes me remember love from my days gone. Times in high school when I would watch as the person I had a crush on would find her own love, only to have me feelings linger, like tears in the rain. I'm not sure if I would do it all over again, like this song suggests; once bitten twice shy. However, the strength of the emotions of the narrator explain how if given the opportunity, they wouldn't make the same mistakes again. We've all heard this same story of unrequited love repeated thousands of times and told in every which way. But here, I felt something more moving. Something nostalgic, I suppose. Urging me to reflect introspectively and think about the days when I still cared about such things.

17. 天罰！エンジェルラビィ-です Live version-

I refrained from discussing the studio recording of *Tenbatsu! Angel Rabbie* (天罰！エンジェルラビィ-です) during the discussion of the first album because the Yokohama Blitz live performance is undoubtedly a more profound emotional piece which extends beyond the scope of the song itself.

Tenbatsu! Angel Rabbie is a pretty bad one episode OVA released in 2004 by AIC and Media Factory which featured UNDER17's titular song as the ending theme. This OVA was an adaptation of the 2003 *bishoujo game Magical Twirler Angel Rabbie*, and also had the ending song "Angelic Magic" performed by the group. The OVA would use a slightly updated version of the song called the "desu" (or "DEATH" sometimes) version for the ending sequence.

The significance of this specific recording is that it was the last time Koike-san and Momoi-san performed as UNDER17 before disbanding. The announcement that the group would break-up was made on September 27, 2004 while the final concert was held on November 22th of the same year. Meaning, both the fans and artists knew this would be the last time on stage as UNDER17 and wanted to make it count... and make it count they did.

I'm not fond of attending live concerts. I don't like adding in an extra level of abstraction to my listening experience and adding in the inevitable speaker distortion and crowd noise makes me get mildly agitated. I never really understood the appeal of attending a concert because of this. But none of this mattered when I listened to Momoi-san's final performance on stage, culminating into an emotional climax of a triple encore. Words cannot explain the unrestrained joy of fans and vocalist alike as they share this impassioned moment; crowd complimenting the singer and vice versa. Everyone there is noticeably fatigued and covered in sweat, but nobody is ready to say goodbye. Everytime we hear "天罰！天罰！天罰！*Fu Fu!*" we are reinvigorated with *moe* energy. It's painfully obvious Momoi-san is tired but she taps into the last reserves of her energy to give this song as the ultimate parting gift for their fans. It's not too often we see live performances like this which manage to engage the audience in a way that compliments the music. It was after I listened to this song that I felt like I finally understood the appeal of going to a concert like this. The magic of this moment forever preserved on CDR reflects the passion of UNDER17 perfectly.

(´Д`)テンハツ! テンハツ! テンハツ! テンハツ! (°▽°)ノ フウフウ

When listening to the studio recording of this song, it's hard to put into perspective of what makes it special. By anyone's account it's simply another opening song from a *bishoujo game* a maybe a handful of Japanese otaku have played, all 6 of which giving it a mediocre rating of 53 on ErogameScape. The lasting impact of the song and the artists who performed it have eclipsed the popularity of the game. I've never played *Magical Twirler Angel Rabbie* (まじかるトワラー・エンジェルラビィ) and I doubt I ever will. I doubt most people at the Yokohama Blitz concert that night in late November played it either. Yet, we all were singing along to it and knew the lyrics by heart. I only know of it, and of everything else I've talked about here, because of UNDER17. So even if UNDER17 does not make music anymore, I can listen to the endless encore of *Tenbatsu! Angel Rabbie* for all eternity.

そして、伝説へ...

During the majority of 2018, I suffered a destructive depressive period that prevented me from really enjoying life all that much. I would passively watch YouTube and sometimes found it in me to watch anime, all to try and take my mind off things for a bit. After months of this, things started to look brighter. The culprit of my negative thoughts was removed and I no longer felt like I needed to tell my counselor about wanting to disappear forever. I returned home from university for the summer and fell headlong back into otaku media; I found solace once again in the playful colors of the animation and happy music, reminding me of the things I had forgotten in life during my depressive period. I started thinking about *Genshiken* and Madarame Harunobu a lot and started to adopt that way of living. *Kujibiki Unbalance* started to play for me once again.

Then I started to get really into 4chan's /jp/ board and it is evident when looking at my Touhou Fumo plushies and onahole boxes in my room. I was also getting really into *bishoujo games* as well after seeing how much Kousaka Kirino enjoyed them. I started playing *ToHeart2* and listened to 脇役じゃ終わらない! by Nanahira on repeat all night after work. I finally started to find joy in life once again, ironically, by rejecting it. I soon found *denpa* music threads on /jp/. I had previously closely followed the *doujin* music and *Comiket* threads every August and December for releases from *Touhou* music circles I followed. Within these threads I found the thing I had never realized I needed.

Denpa music brightened my days and I soon found myself exclusively listening to this music. This music taught me the value of taking a moment to breathe and enjoy the *fuwa fuwa* in life. *Moe denpa* filled my heart with sugar-coated love letters from a country I was perhaps wrongly infatuated with, but nevertheless captivated me through its media. I was equal parts embracing my problems and rejecting the flipside. This is because *moe*, and by extension, *denpa*, is punk rock. Momoi Haruko poses the following question in an interview: "Isn't [*moe*] a little like punk was in England?" Because for her, *moe* is counter culture. It is hard to understand for many people and was once perhaps perceived as vaguely criminal. But despite all the hate, *moe* fans continue to do their thing. It's seemingly a weak attempt at being counter-cultural, but I think that is the best us otaku can manage. Escaping to the world of 2D and *moe* was the quintessential *denpa* experience-- being a person who was perceived to be disassociating with reality, but truthfully, having perhaps a better grasp at the world and ourselves than most of the critics give us credit for.

Within these lackadaisical summer afternoons filled with abstractions of cute girls singing sugar-coated words traveling into my ears, I think I finally found peace. After a year of thinking my life was not worth living, I had finally found something I could look at and remind me that smiling was a good thing.

Throughout my relatively brief history with UNDER17 I have always found something in their discography to fit my mood. Be it a fun *moe* song to listen to while walking home after a long week and feeling excited to take a few days off, or a more introspective ballad song to evoke bittersweet emotions from times I still find myself remembering. Be it openings to games or anime, UNDER17 has always managed to provide an unrivaled listening experience for me because of that somewhat ambiguous "energy" I keep going on about. I guess it's simply passion. Momoi Haruko and Koike Masaya were two artists who cared deeply about the things they were making regardless of their public perception. Let's be

honest here, performing pop songs within a niche erotic game market is not the most respectable career path as a musician. However, they gave it their all and I think that is what fans like me enjoyed the most. I'm not a music expert or even that well-versed in genre-defining artists that other people enjoy listening to. I've listened to *OK Computer*, *I Wish You Were Here*, *In the Court of the Crimson King* and *Loveless*, and while I appreciate them, I have a hard time enjoying these as anything but artistic achievement. But ultimately the most important thing about making any art is for the artist to be passionate about what they are making. That energy is contagious. And for me, UNDER17 did this better than anyone else.

Afterword

Thank you so much for reading this to the end, but I also apologize for making you read (or watch) a very bloated and somewhat scatter-brained retrospective about this *moe* song artist you may or may not care about. Over the course of writing this I reinvigorated my love of *denpa* music as I found myself listening to new artists outside of my previous areas of interest. Though I also listened to UNDER17 and Momoi Haruko-san's discographies extensively. I am painfully aware that I am not the forefront expert on *denpa* or *denpa* music so please don't treat me as such. I'm just here for the cute vocals and ended up becoming interested in researching the scene as a result.

My only goal writing this was to discuss my favorite band in detail since it doesn't seem like there has ever been a large effort to discuss the history of the group or had the "skills" necessary to approach this topic. I felt a similar drive when writing my other two unnecessarily long essays; the first being *Regarding Yukinoshita Yukino* and the second being *Love is Dead, Long Live the Otaku*. Both of which being my own version of a double-length album of sorts. These are three topics I care deeply about and directed my energy and skills at the time to craft these stupidly long essays recounting as much as I could to do these things justice. I guess that's what I feel is the absolute minimum I am required to do when writing about these things that are so important to me. I guess the reason I haven't tackled *NHK* or an entire *Oregairu* retrospective is precisely because of this reason.

Unfortunately, like with *Love is Dead, Long Live the Otaku*, I have some reservations. Primarily due to my dependence on Japanese Wikipedia to fill in some gaps, as well as my own assumptions drawn through analysis of musical releases etc. I am not the most fluent at Japanese nor an expert in music or even Japanese music so I might have some incorrect things here. I am under the impression that in writing a long retrospective or essay about a topic, one inevitably presents themselves as an expert. Just because I like to talk ad nauseum about these things doesn't mean everything is correct! So to reiterate, if there are factual inaccuracies, please let me know.

Editing this video was a wild ride. I worked on it extensively throughout the entirety of May, usually averaging about 5-6 hours on particularly intensive days (which was admittedly most of the time). Audio editing was a slog and was easily the most mind-numbing section of the process. Video editing is where I feel like I get to try new things and have fun, but gathering enough footage is always a time-consuming process. About 2-weeks of straight editing went into this and even then, I don't feel like this video or essay is up to par. There are too many things I felt that I was ill-equipped to talk about or simply didn't think about until the last moment. But I guess at some point I needed to chill before I ended up editing a video twice this size. So for now, we have this thing; the biggest project I have ever worked on! Also, I

now have an even greater appreciation for my favorite Youtubers who do this stuff regularly. Writing, voicing and editing one of these massive videos is a huge undertaking and you don't ever realize how difficult it is or the sheer amount of time required before you begin. Some days I spent hours on a single edit, other days I was flying by. But overall, it was really rewarding I think.

Finally, you probably noticed that this is available in a lengthy video essay format. I have always admired the work of my favorite Youtube creators when they put out a video over an hour. Or in the case of Tim Rogers, oftentimes three times that length or more! That's when I know I'm in for something special. I recently watched the "Action Button Reviews: *Tokimeki Memorial*" video to completion and was deeply moved. I have been watching Youtube videos for nearly a decade and this was one of the few times I've felt such emotions while watching one. It expertly weaved narrative, analysis and history to paint this complex picture of moving parts that ultimately paid off in the form of a greater understanding of narratives in video games a whole. To me, I find these projects to be more impressive than anything put to film ever could because these are more intimate projects. Where the creators have toiled away for countless hours making this film-length-video themselves. It's also a very masturbatory practice, as I've learned, since it's almost more gratifying just to see the scope of your work. I guess the ultimate goal of my Youtube channel was to make videos I wanted to see and to pay homage to creators I admired. Making videos in the style and format of video makers I have spent countless hours watching and shared a close relationship with over the years. I've made my dark room vlog, the emotional rollercoaster, a tightly-written self-analysis, and a room tour. So this is just my attempt at a long-ass video.

Appendix

Here is a small collection of translations I put together for a few songs that didn't have an English translation already. Please be aware these are **not good!** I tried my best but they are likely not as accurate as I'd like them to be.

Kujibiki Unbalance

TL Note: くじびき means "lottery" in Japanese, typically seen in Natsu-matsuri in August with string games where you pull a string and it is attached to a prize. Typically there are big prizes like game consoles to lure in potential victims. However, these are notorious for being rigged since there is no way to know which string is attached to what, and it is difficult to prove that the smug ojii-san is not pulling your leg. The ojii-san will explain how it's the will of Kami-sama that will determine the prize, not his rigged game. As such, くじびき + アンバランス (unbalance) can mean "an unbalance lottery" where the odds are not in your favor.

Lyrics thanks to: <https://moonlightsummoneranimelyrics.blogspot.com/2016/10/kujibiki-unbalance.html>

どちらにしようかな天の神様の云うとおり ふたりのハート・バランス くじびきアンバランス 恋も夢も憧れも... とめないでいて まぶしい木漏れ陽が 瞳の中 キラリ踊るのも 夕暮れ やわらかな たそがれが空を染めるのも ああ となりでいつも 見つめてたい 覚えててくれるかな... 幼い約束を ふたりのハート・バランス くじびきアンバランス ねえ占って あすのゆくえ 微妙なのよバランス くじびきアンバランス 恋も夢も憧れも 止めないでいて 好きとか 嫌いとか 胸の中で モノローグ つぶやくけど 偶然 帰り道 長い影が並ぶ 二人きり ああ あなたに借りた ノートのすみ	Which should I pick, only God in heaven could tell Two hearts in balance Kujibiki Unbalance Love, dreams and adoration... Don't let them stop Dazzling sunlight filtering through the trees, Sparkles dancing within your eyes Colors subdued in evening Colors washed out in the twilight Aaaa I always want to be gazing at you, beside you Do you remember the promise, we made so long ago? Two hearts in balance Kujibiki Unbalance Tell me, what will happen next That delicate balance Kujibiki Unbalance Love and dreams and adoration... They will not stop Love and hate, The internal monologue, murmuring within my chest By chance, on the road home Your long shadow is cast, we are together now aaa In the notebook I borrowed from you
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<p>落書きの横顔は わたしに似てないの</p> <p>ふたりのハート・バランス くじびきアンバランス ねえからかって 笑わないで 微妙なのよバランス くじびきアンバランス 昨日も今日も想ってた あなたのことを...</p> <p>どちらにしようかな天の神様の云うとおり どちらにしようかな天の神様の云うとおり どちらにしようかな天の神様の云うとおり どちらにしようかな天の神様の云うとおり</p> <p>ふたりのハート・バランス くじびきアンバランス ねえ占って あすのゆくえ 微妙なのよバランス くじびきアンバランス 恋も夢も憧れも 止めないでいて</p>	<p>A scribbled sketch of someone It doesn't look like me</p> <p>Two hearts in balance Kujibiki Unbalance You are teasing me, but I'm not laughing That delicate balance Kujibiki Unbalance Yesterday and today, my thoughts are of you...</p> <p>Which should I pick, only God in heaven could tell Which should I pick, only God in heaven could tell Which should I pick, only God in heaven could tell Which should I pick, only God in heaven could tell</p> <p>Two hearts balanced Kujibiki Unbalance Tell me, what will happen next That delicate balance Kujibiki Unbalance Love and dreams and adoration... They will not stop</p>
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いちご～ GO!GO!

Lyrics thanks to: <https://w.atwiki.jp/momo-i/pages/77.html>

<p>いちご～ GO!GO! いちご～ GO!GO! いちご～ GO!GO! いちごだ～っ!!</p> <p>手足じたばた 泣き叫んでも よーしゃはしないわよ ぶってつねって ひっぱたいても まだまだものたりない</p> <p>そうこれって愛情のうらがえし(うらがえし) カワイイからこそ いじめたい</p> <p>いちご GO!GO! 愛して わたしの NO!NO! 鞭で あなたのすべてを縛って離さない</p> <p>いちご GO!GO! ゆるして ほしいの NO!NO! ダメよ ヤがるほど 萌えるわ</p>	<p>Ichigo~ GO! GO! Ichigo~ GO! GO! Ichigo~ GO! GO! Strawberry~!</p> <p>Hands and feet flailing and crying out I won't forgive you I want to hit and pinch and spank you Still not satisfied</p> <p>This is the opposite of affection! (affection) I want to mess with you because you're cute</p> <p>Ichigo GO!GO! I love you Lashing out saying "NO!NO!" Is because I want to hold onto your everything</p> <p>Ichigo GO!GO! I will forgive What I want is "NO!NO!" not good! To the extent of feeling <i>moe</i></p>
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いちご～ GO!GO!
いちご～ GO!GO!

ハートドキドキ 膝はガクガク
イカスわ この感じ
なでてこすって 抱きしめても
それでもまだたりない

あーしたいこーしたい まるだし(まるだし)
幼いからこそ 困らせたい

いちご GO!GO! 愛して
あなたの NO!NO! 無知で
罪のない瞳があどけない

いちご GO!GO! ゆるして
ほしいの NO!NO! ダメよ
ヤがるほど 萌えるわ

いちご GO!GO! 愛して
わたしの NO!NO! 鞭で
あなたのすべてを縛って離さない

いちご GO!GO! ゆるして
ほしいの NO!NO! ダメよ
ヤがるほど 萌えるわ

Ichigo~ GO!GO!
Ichigo~ GO!GO!

Heart DOKI-DOKI and knees trembling
This feeling, I want to preserve
Gently caressing and hugging
But even this is not enough

Let's go tomorrow, not hiding anything (anything)
I want to embarrass you because I'm immature.

Ichigo~ GO!GO! I love you
Your ignorant NO!NO!
Innocent, guiltless eyes

Ichigo~ GO!GO! I will forgive
What I want is "NO!NO!" not good!
To the extent of feeling *moe*

Ichigo GO!GO! I love you
Lashing out saying "NO!NO!"
Is because I want to hold onto your everything

Ichigo~ GO!GO! I will forgive
What I want is "NO!NO!" not good!
To the extent of feeling *moe*

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Notice: I might be missing something here, so if you notice something I said that wasn't cited, let me know so I'll track it down

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