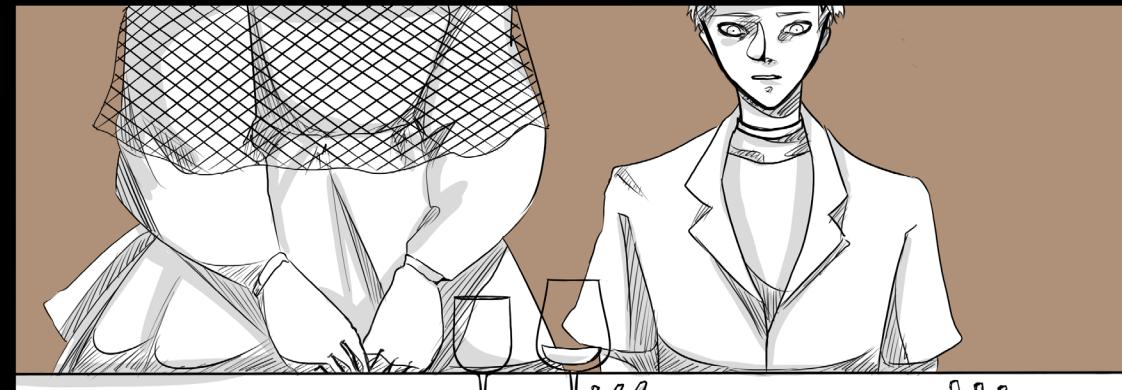
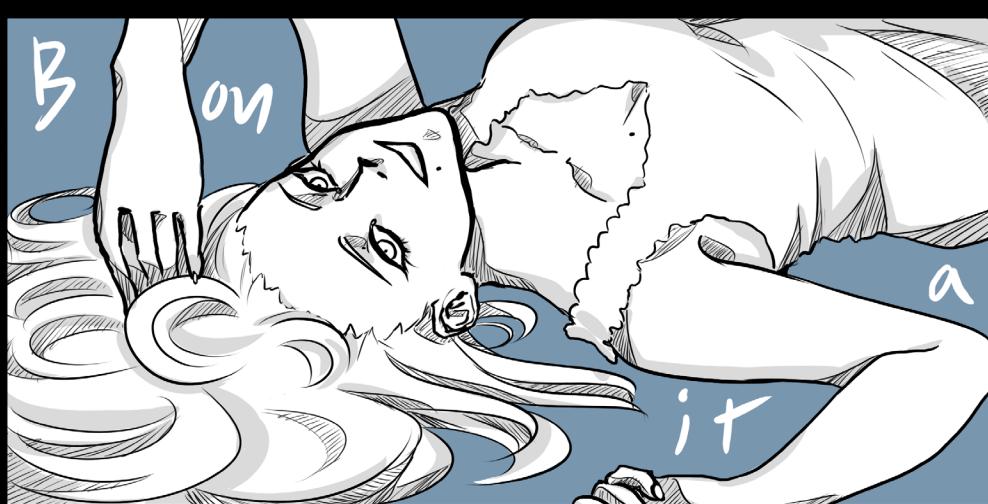
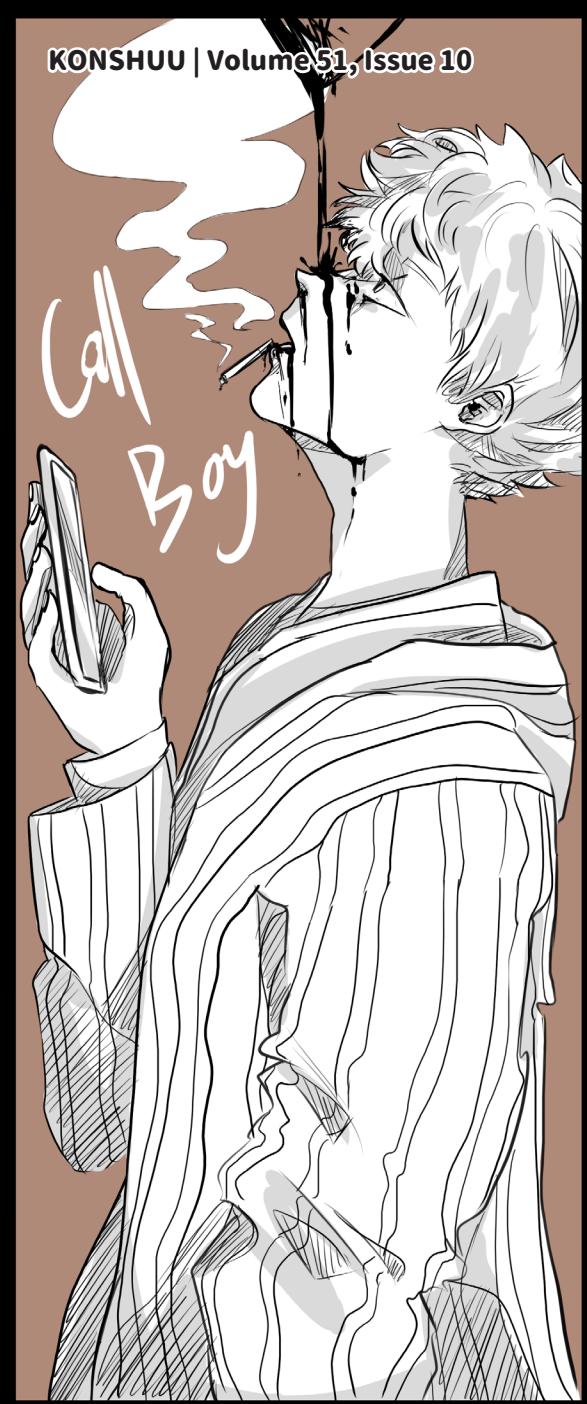




KONSHUU

vol. 51 #10
Vocaloid

Hatsune Miku
Art By Grace Li



Bitter Choco Decoration

Syudou

"The Worst" and "Bonita"

Art By Kate Bushmareva

WHY MAFUMAFU IS AN ANGEL



ERIK NELSON

2nd Year, Mathematics and Music

I think I like Mafumafu too much

I love Mafumafu too much. Who is Mafumafu? Mafumafu is an utaite, which is a singer on Nico Nico Douga who covers vocaloid songs. There are tons of other Utaite that I love (that are certainly underrated compared to Mafumafu). But why do I love Mafumafu specifically so much? I don't even know, so let's find out together. First, what do his fans think? I was going to do some big brain thing where I go through his youtube channel and find the most popular keywords in the comments, but that's really hard and I suck at computers. I'll do that later at some point. But I'll bet 12 dollars that one of the most popular keywords is "cute."



Ok, Mafumafu is cute, but like 90% of people in Japanese pop culture who are remotely well known are liked because they're cute. What is unique about Mafumafu? His voice is often mistaken for a girl's. He looks pretty androgynous, but this again isn't that uncommon. It certainly contributes to why so many female (and male) fans think he's so cute. But Mafumafu became popular on Nico Nico before anyone knew what he looked like,

through only the power of his voice. It's certainly high pitched and feminine (though in my opinion clearly male, and also early recordings of his sound a lot more masculine). It's soft and pretty sometimes, but can have an edge, or be extremely expressive. I know that many fans connect to the expressiveness of his voice, when singing about heavy subjects like in "Shuuten" or "Hated by Life Itself." His voice certainly is very individual and unique, and clearly based off earlier recordings he honed it into its current sound presumably through lots of practice. I can almost instantly identify his voice because it's so unique.



He's had a huge influence on me and my life. His music almost always makes me feel strong emotions: excitement, happiness, emo, etc. He came to me in a time in my life where I had been struggling for a while with my direction. I'm a jazz musician but I've been growing more and more distant from that genre for various reasons. Mafumafu completely changed my life in a way that I would have never foreseen. He inspired me to pursue my current goal in life: to sound like a weeb on my instrument, the saxophone. This is a whole philosophical/musical idea that I've been thinking of for a long time, but I think "weebness" can be expressed musically, and to discover what the sonic essence of weeb is, I'm unironically studying Mafumafu like I would study John Coltrane or something. I've also decided to study weeb music (including Vocaloid, Utaite, anime etc.) academically, from a sort of ethnomusicological point of view and I'm working on a pretty big (in my opinion) thesis on how "weebness" relates to genre. This was pretty much all inspired by Mafumafu because he got me into utaite and vocaloid, and made me the abomination that I am now. Mafumafu has changed my life and inspired me musically, and helped me find a direction in life.

MY FAVORITE ANIME: HATSUNE MIKU



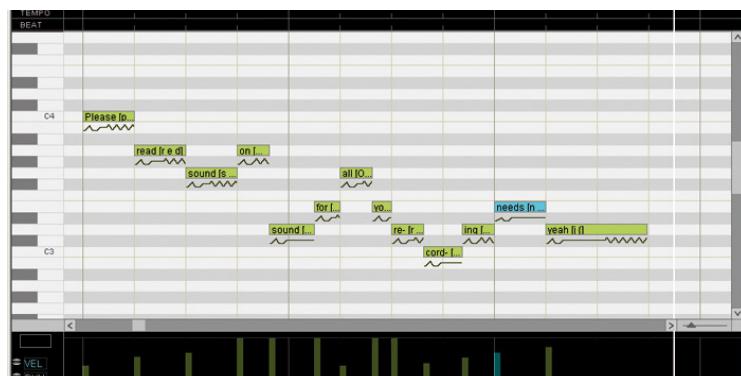
ERIK NELSON

2nd Year, Mathematics and Music

Wot.

Writer

There's so much that could be said about vocaloid, so I'm going to say as much of it as possible. First of all, if you don't know what vocaloid is, then here's what it is. The more historical parts of this are based on research rather than experience, because unfortunately, I'm a relative newcomer to vocaloid. VOCALOID is a software developed by some smart people funded by Yamaha, originally in English, meant to virtually synthesize the human voice. No one really cared about this. Later, in 2007, VOCALOID2 was released, basing its voices on samples from real humans. It became popular in Japan, especially when Crypton Future Media decided to make the voices into cute girls.



There are a few vocaloid characters, most notably, Hatsune Miku, Kagamine Rin and Len, KAITO, GUMI, Megurine Luka, Luo Tianyi, etc. The great thing about these characters and their associated voice banks is anyone can use them as long as you buy the software. So, if you want to make a vocaloid song, you "simply" (because they make the process more annoying than it has to be) buy the software, VOCALOID 4 or 5, buy the voice bank for someone, say, Miku, and learn how to use it in a Digital Audio Workstation. That's why there are soooo many vocaloid songs by tons of different people, and that's why almost every genre, mood, theme, lyrical topic, etc, is represented within the vocaloid "genre." Additionally, anyone can make art of any of the characters, so vocaloid songs are often accompanied by music videos, mostly in anime style. This brings us to vocaloid culture.

There's a culture surrounding the music made with vocaloid. It started in Japan in 2007 after the release of VOCALOID2, and



was mainly to be found on Nico Nico Douga, which is like Japanese youtube. A beautiful, rich music/art culture developed, mostly in the form of making original vocaloid songs along with music videos, people covering them (leading to the rise of Utaite - see my next article), and different composers pioneering their own sounds through Vocaloid. Many vocaloid producers (-P honorific) rose to prominence: Jin, Wowaka, ryo, Hachi, Giga-P, Deco*27, to name a few. In a "golden era of vocaloid" which was probably around 2009-2013 (though this is debatable), many vocaloid songs became massive hits on Nico Nico, such as the ubiquitous Senbonzakura, and others like Melt, Matryoshka, Mozaik Role, World's End Dancehall, World is Mine, Rolling Girl, Just Be Friends, Tokyo Teddy Bear, etc. Some even spread into popular culture (Nyan Cat lol). Hatsune Miku became one of the most iconic characters, not only in Japan but in the world. She is now used in tons of fan art, advertisements, games, etc. There are figures of Miku that have been launched into space.



Many vocaloid songs became classics that many people remember as defining their childhood. Many producers and utaite (vocaloid cover singers) on the scene went on to find mainstream success, like ryo (have you heard Kimi no Shiranai Monogatari?), and Kenshi Yonezu. Kenshi Yonezu is currently the most popular pop artist in Japan but he started out as a vocaloid producer called Hachi. Vocaloid undoubtedly had a massive influence on anime/weeb culture and Japanese pop culture.

A lot of people don't like vocaloid because it sounds weird, for example, UC Berkeley music professor Ken Ueno doesn't like it, he said in an interview: "The human vocal mechanism is capable of many and more complex sounds than most instruments. Any time you create an image or a machine that models human behavior, we are prone to receiving it through the uncanny valley." But luckily, I convinced him that it was a legitimate form of artistic expression. The reason is that, like many great musical styles, vocaloid comes from a certain cultural background. Many of the producers use Vocaloid to explore important issues like depression, isolation, and mental health. Wowaka was literally a hikikomori, and died of a heart attack recently (RIP).



Neru is edgy as fuck and most of his songs criticize society. Lots of producers are like this. In my experience, a vocaloid song has a 70% chance of being about depression, isolation, and suicide, and about a 30% chance of being about something else, usually something absurd, perverted, or random and cute. In this respect, Vocaloid shares a lot in common with the rest of weeb culture, as it comes from a place where most of the artists feel somehow othered by society. This is expressed through the art, and that's why I think some people connect to it so strongly. Some producers have said that vocaloid allows them to express themselves when they're too shy to use their voice. Maybe fans like vocaloid because it doesn't sound human, because it sounds like something other. I'm no psychologist though.



One of the ways vocaloid has spread like a cancer through society is into games: rhythm games like project diva are pretty popular among weeps and stuff. I remember one of my friends in high school used to play them all the time. I thought they were weird, but I was just a normie. This is an entire article by itself, and I'm not knowledgeable enough about rhythm games to write about them. But even if you don't play these, you've probably seen Miku Miku Dance. MMD is a 3D animation software originally used to program Miku dancing in games (thus Miku Miku Dance), but it's now used in tons of meme videos and 3D animated art. You've probably seen some horrifically cringy MMD meme videos at some point in your life...

There are also live concerts featuring vocaloid characters, like Miku Expo, which I was going to go to but it was postponed because of coronavirus ;-. There's also Magical Mirai, and Nico Nico Cho Party. These concerts feature live bands and "live" vocaloid characters, who are projected onto glass, which makes them look astonishingly real. Live vocaloid concerts are an achievement in art in my opinion. They're visually stunning, featuring animations like breaking through TV screens, and very realistic dancing. It's almost as if your waifu is coming to life. There's also audience interaction, at least on the level of most pop concerts, even though everything must be pre programmed. Just watch any video of the audience call and response with Miku.



Though it seems as though vocaloid culture has become less popular/active recently, it still seems to be going strong. There's so many ways in which vocaloid has influenced culture, art, and the lives of people. It is a truly magnificent and organic art form, which lets anyone express themselves, and has connected people from all across the world. I love vocaloid.



FROM VOCALOIDS TO VIRTUOIDS

Writer

RICHARD HO

3rd Year, Economics

I once spent about \$30 trying (and failing) to get a large Kizuna AI plushie from a crane game in Akiba. TT_TT

Vocaloids have been around for nearly two decades, and over the course of those years have seemingly dominated in Japan, leading to millions of views of music videos on NicoNico, selling billions of dollars of songs, featured in advertisements, recognized around the world, and even made it to Coachella. But while Vocaloids have refined their technology over the years, looking and sounding more and more lifelike in their concerts, their basic formula has not changed by much. In contrast, however, in 2016 we saw the rise of the virtual YouTuber with Kizuna AI, who encountered staggering growth and led to numerous copies of her spawning in the months after her debut. However, Kizuna AI still stands at the top, finding her way into conventions, advertisements, merchandise, and even debuting in her own music videos that were featured in BEMANI rhythm games, an honour often only extended to the holy trio of anime, Touhou, and of course Vocaloid.



However, if there is one thing that stands in the way of Kizuna AI's mirror rise to Hatsune Miku, it would be the format of her production. Kizuna AI is able to branch out to fields other than music, most notably playing games on her channel, has a consistent personality, and has lower production effort due to being cast by a real person, like the perfect blend of a Vocaloid and an idol; Hatsune Miku, on the other hand, is limited to the skill of the person creating her voice lines and music, and is relatively stuck in the realm of music without consistent content like a YouTube channel. However, this is where the strength of a Vocaloid lies: the sheer amount of flexibility that allows anyone with sufficient

skill to get their ideas out there, which in turn turns Miku into the voice of her community. Even idol groups have multiple personalities to appeal to different consumers, and to create a group dynamic, which Kizuna AI currently lacks. Whether or not her personality alone is enough to make her a more than serious contender with Vocaloids is up for the future to tell.



Kizuna AI has many rivals, however, and they may lead to surprising success given their different formats. She has similar pre-rendered high-production-quality clones such as Kaguya Luna; channels that took the idea of a mascot character and created a boom in ASMR and other vlog-style channels with a virtual avatar and sometimes animation; and a group that has been exploding in prominence recently, HoloLive VTubers. While initially a low-budget copy of Kizuna-style gaming channels that used Live2D, thanks to strong personalities such as Fubuki and the aggressive expansion of the HoloLive agency their character roster is now immense, and have the means to produce animated skits on par with Kizuna AI's content. The HoloLive group marries the strengths of the aforementioned groups: the ease of production and humanity of Kizuna AI, the group dynamics and personality range of idol groups, and the community closeness and grassroots feeling of Vocaloids. All in all, I think this is a very interesting time for Japanese personality media, and may prove to lead to similar booms of growth abroad; even recently America has seen the explosion of popularity of the virtual "worker" Projekt Melody, who was so successful that other veteran "workers" on the website complained about being displaced about someone that wasn't even a real girl, and did not have to actually do things the same way they did, which may lead to further political discussion in the turmoil of internet Twitter wars and the such.

Staff Picks:

FAVORITE VOCALOID SONG

HATED BY LIFE ITSELF



SENBONZAKURA



LAST NIGHT GOOD NIGHT



TELL YOUR WORLD



LEIA



HIBIKASE



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APRIL 9, 2020

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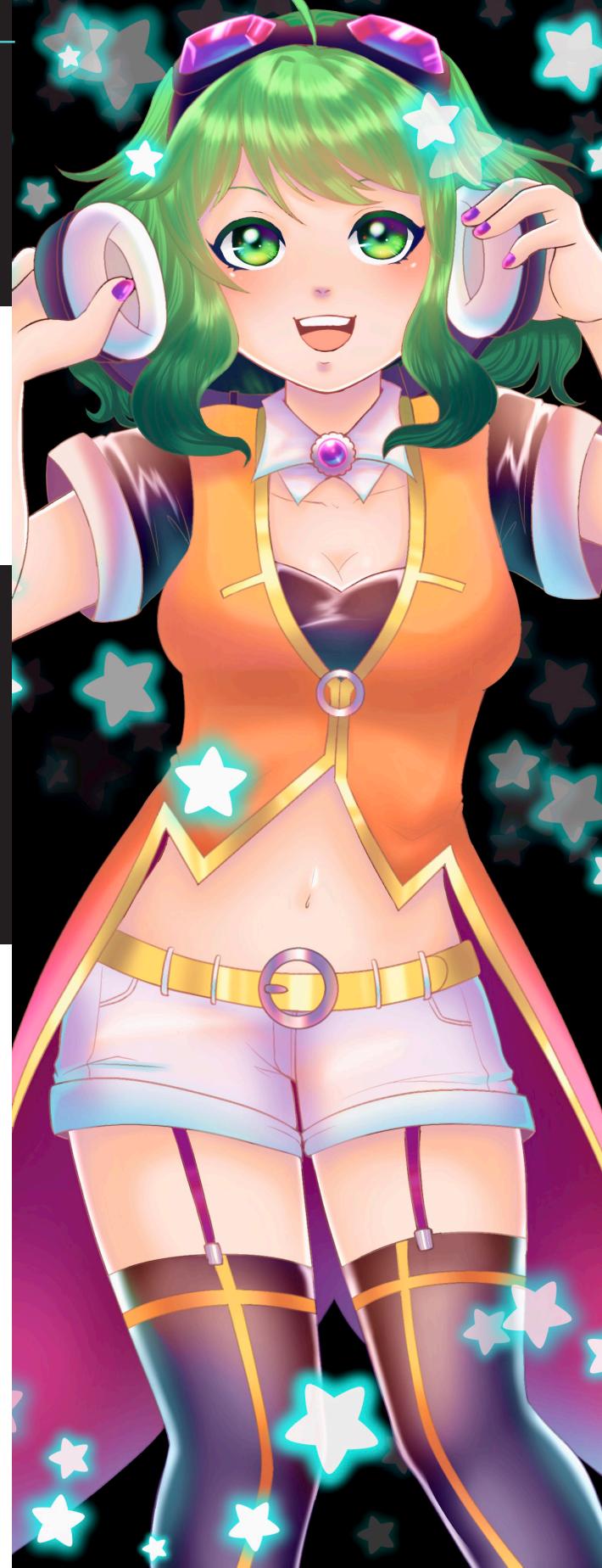
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GUMI
Art By Crystal Li