

= A Ballads =

A Ballads (stylized as BALLADS) is the second greatest hits compilation by Japanese recording artist Ayumi Hamasaki . It was released physically on March 12 , 2003 through Avex Trax , and digitally distributed worldwide on September 14 , 2006 by Avex Entertainment Inc . It is her first compilation release in two years since A Best ; it premiered three months after her sixth studio album Rainbow . The compilation compiles ballad @-@ inspired singles released by Hamasaki between 1998 and 2003 , whilst the material is divided into new @-@ arrangement remixes and the original versions . With all the tracks written by Hamasaki , it includes two new songs ? " Rainbow " , which served as the album 's promotional single , and a cover version of Japanese singer Yumi Matsutoya 's 1975 track " Sotsugy? Shashin " .

Released in six formats featuring a photograph by JFKK , A Ballads received favorable reviews from music critics . Many praised the collection for including some of Hamasaki 's best vocal work , and commended the songwriting . Minor criticism was aimed on the newer renditions of the original songs . Commercially , the album was a success in Japan , reaching number one on the Oricon Albums Chart , making it Hamasaki 's second compilation and eighth album to reach the top spot . It was certified Million by the Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ) for shipments of one million units . The album experienced limited promotion during its release , with some of the tracks appearing during Japanese commercial endorsements .

= = Background and material = =

In December 2002 , Hamasaki released her sixth studio album Rainbow . Early issues of the album included a code number and URL address that allowed customers to visit an exclusive website that promoted the album and listen to a 40 @-@ second demo of her unfinished song " Rainbow " . During its promotion , Avex Trax and Hamasaki received over 100 @,@ 000 messages from fans , telling them their opinions about the unfinished demo . Due to the mixed response of her fanbase , Hamasaki decided to develop the song further and release it as part of an upcoming compilation album , which was later named A Ballads . During the process , Hamasaki confessed that " [she] had never before written lyrics that were based on messages received directly from [her] fans " . It was with " Rainbow " that [she] decided to give this approach a try " .

A Ballads is Hamasaki 's first compilation to compile songs that were inspired by ballad music , with it portraying her second greatest hits album after A Best (2001) . Each track from the album was released either as a single or as a promotional recording , recorded between the years 1998 and 2003 . Six of the tracks on the album were composed and co @-@ produced by Hamasaki , who used the alias Crea . The album consists of fifteen tracks , including two new recordings ? " Rainbow " and a cover version of Japanese singer Yumi Matsutoya 's 1975 track " Sotsugy? Shashin " . Seven of the album 's tracks ? " Appears " , " You " , " To Be " , " M " , " Seasons " , " A Song for x x " and " Who ... " ? feature new arrangements and compositions , whilst the songs " Key " , " Hanabi " , " Dearest " and " Voyage " are included with their original versions .

= = Songs = =

To explain Hamasaki 's the background and development , Hamasaki hosted a commentary on her website . The first song , " Rainbow " , was originally composed by CMJK , but Hamasaki felt the finishing product was " missing something " , and re @-@ worked the demo version with Japanese musician Dai Nagao . According to Hamasaki , she wanted to reflect the emotion and words used in each 100 @,@ 000 messages she received from her fans to create the song , but because there were numerous emails , she decided to write it as a summary and her feelings as an " aftermath " from reading the messages . The song was described by a staff member at CD Journal as an " organic midtempo pop ballad " song . " Appears " was remixed by Japanese group H?L . According to Hamasaki , she had asked the group to re @-@ compose their original version of the track in order to reflect " current [musical] themes of 2003 . "

The album included the original version of " Key (Eternal Tie) " as Hamasaki felt that the original was " more important and unknown " than the proposed reworked version she had planned . " You (Northern Breeze) " was one of the last reworked tracks , and was described by Hamasaki as being influenced by Western music . " To Be (2003 ReBirth Mix) " was not reworked or rearranged by any of the album 's collaborators , with it being purely remastered and mixed again by music engineer Koji Morimoto . " Hanabi " was one of the album 's only tracks to appear in its original version , and has been described by a CD Journal staff member to have been inspired by Europop , trip hop , and dub music . " Dolls " , a Japanese pop influenced pop ballad , remained the sophomore original track to make part of the record .

Like " To Be " , the next track " Seasons " was remastered and mixed by Morimoto . The final original track , " Voyage " , was described by CD Journal as a midtempo ballad influenced by gospel music , layered with several string arrangements and other instrumentation . " A Song for × × " was reworked as a live demo , recorded at the Avex Trax studios in Japan . For the promotional track " Who ... " , Hamasaki asked CMJK to create a more " warmer " version than the original . The closing track for A Ballads was " Sotsugy? Shashin " . According to Hamasaki , she had imagined recording a cover for a studio album , but was unsuccessful at doing so . To compose the track , she and the songs co-composer Tasuku composed it by using a Fender Rhodes Suitcase Mk I electric piano in order to reflect the songs original 1960s ? 1970s pop influence .

= = Release = =

A Ballads was released physically on March 12 , 2003 through Avex Trax in five formats , and digitally distributed worldwide on September 14 , 2006 by Avex Entertainment Inc . The first five formats were compact discs ; each one of the four early editions included a slipcase sleeve that had two clones of Hamasaki asleep next to each other , with the inner booklet portraying four different photographs of the clones . The four alternative covers were different variations of the two Hamasaki figures in a pink coloured room . The fifth format came without a slipcase , and had the slipcase image as the inner booklet cover . The digital release featured the slipcase cover and the entire photo shoot was photographed by JFKK .

= = Reception = =

Upon its release , A Ballads received favorable reviews from most music critics . Tetsuo Hiraga from Hot Express believed that the album 's material was able to connect with both younger and older audiences . He also pointed out the " Royal-esque " tracks " Seasons " and " Dearests " as some of her best recordings . An editorial review on HMV singled out A Ballads as one of the best ballad albums in recent history ; the review labelled it a " classic " , and commended Hamasaki 's vocal abilities , her songwriting and her vulnerability . In a similar review , a staff member of CD Journal enjoyed the album and complimented it 's new additions to the album .

Commercially , the album was successful in Japan , with it debuting at number one on the Oricon Albums Chart and replacing 200 Km / h in the Wrong Lane (2002) by Russian female duo t.A.T.u. at the top spot . Hamasaki 's entry sold 561 , 127 units in comparison to t.A.T.u. ' s 167 , 627 unit sales . By the end of 2003 , A Ballads was ranked at number eight as the best selling album in Japan of that year . It sold 917 , 555 units , and was also her second album to enter the top ten , just behind Rainbow which sold 1 , 856 , 919 units . As of July 2016 , it has sold over 924 , 242 units , her first greatest hits album to not sell over the one million mark . Nevertheless , it was certified Million by the Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ) for shipments of one million units . It is Hamasaki 's ninth best selling album based on Oricon 's sale database .

= = Promotion = =

The album experienced limited promotion during its release , with some of the tracks appearing during Japanese commercial endorsements . The compilation 's only release was promotional song

" Rainbow " , which was used as the theme song for Hamasaki 's Japanese talk show Ayuready ? , and to promote products by Lumix . An accompanying music video for the song was directed by Wataru Takeishi , featuring two clones of Hamasaki chasing each other , and eventually meeting at a dinner in Japan . Near the end of the video , it is revealed that the second clone is in fact her imagination or conscious .

= = Track listing = =

All lyrics written by Ayumi Hamasaki with the exception of Yumi Matsutoya 's contribution on track 14 ..

= = Charts = =

= = Release history = =