

= Ayumi Hamasaki =

Ayumi Hamasaki ( 1978 ) is a Japanese recording artist , lyricist , model , and actress . Hamasaki has achieved popularity in Japan and Asia by enforcing her position as an artist and not trying to be forced as a " product " , which was a common factor within the Japanese music culture and Avex Trax . Through her entire career , she has written all her lyrical content , produced her own music and has sometimes co -@-@ composed her music , which is evident in her albums I Am ... , Rainbow and My Story .

Born and raised in Fukuoka , she moved to Tokyo at fourteen to pursue a career in entertainment . In 1998 , under the tutelage of Avex CEO Max Matsuura , Hamasaki released her debut single " Poker Face " and released her million @-@ selling record A Song for XX . The album debuted at the top of the Oricon charts and remained there for four weeks , establishing her popularity in Japan . Her next five albums accomplished over one million shipments in Japan , with her third effort Duty selling near three million units , becoming her best selling studio album . A Best , her first compilation album , is her best selling album , with more than four million copies sold in Japan . In 2008 , after her album Next Level was released , album and single sales declined due to ongoing competition with new upcoming artists . Throughout her career , Hamasaki has had all her albums within the top five position in Japan and has five million @-@ selling singles , including " Boys & Girls " , " A " , " Seasons " , " M " and " H " .

Also called " Ayu " by her fans , Hamasaki has been dubbed the " Empress of J @-@ pop " because of her popularity and widespread influence in Japan and throughout Asia . Hamasaki 's constantly changing image and tight control over her artistry has helped her popularity extend across Asia ; music and fashion trends she has started have spread regionally to China , Singapore and other countries across Southeast Asia . She has appeared in or lent her songs to many advertisements and television commercials . Though she originally supported the exploitation of her popularity for commercial purposes , she later reconsidered and eventually opposed her status as an Avex " product " .

Hamasaki has sold over 51 million records , making her one of the best @-@ selling artists in Japan . Hamasaki has several domestic record achievements for her singles , such as the most number @-@ one hits by a female artist ( 38 ) ; the most consecutive number @-@ one hits by a solo artist ( twenty @-@ five ) , and the most million @-@ sellers . From 1999 to 2010 , Hamasaki had at least one single each year topping the charts . Hamasaki is the first female recording artist to have eight studio albums since her debut to top the Oricon and the first artist to have a number @-@ one album for 13 consecutive years since her debut . Hamasaki 's second remix album , Super Eurobeat Presents Ayu @-@ ro Mix , is recognized as one of the best selling remix albums of all time and remains her only album to be recognized in a worldwide accreditation .

= = Life and music career = =

= = = Childhood and early endeavors = = =

Born in Fukuoka Prefecture , Hamasaki was raised as an only child by her mother and grandmother . Her father had left the family when she was three and never again came into contact with her . Hamasaki 's mother worked to support the family , so Hamasaki was primarily taken care of by her grandmother . She described herself as a " tomboy " when she was a teenager , and as a ? strange kid ? who ? liked to be alone ? .

At age seven , Hamasaki began modeling for local institutions , such as banks , in order to supplement the family 's income . She continued this career path by leaving her family at fourteen and moving to Tokyo as a model under SOS , a talent agency . Her modeling career did not last long ; SOS eventually deemed her too short for a model and transferred her to Sun Music , a musicians ' agency . Under the name of " Ayumi " , Hamasaki released a rap EP , Nothing from Nothing , on the Nippon Columbia label in 1995 . She was dismissed from the label when the album

failed to chart on the Oricon . After this failure , Hamasaki took up acting and starred in B @-@ movies such as Ladys Ladys ! ! S?cho Saigo no Hi and television dramas such as Miseinen , which were poorly received by the public . From August 1995 to March 1996 , Hamasaki also co @-@ hosted the SoundLink " magazine " H?kago no ?sama ( After @-@ school King ) for the Nintendo Satellaview once a week with Shigeru Izumiya . Growing dissatisfied with her job , Hamasaki quit acting and moved in with her mother , who had recently moved to Tokyo .

Hamasaki was initially a good student , earning good grades in junior high school . Eventually , she lost faith in the curriculum , thinking that the subjects taught were of no use to her . Her grades worsened as she refused to put her mind to her studies . While living in Tokyo , she attempted to further her studies at Horikoshi Gakuen , a high school for the arts , but dropped out in the first year . Hamasaki did not attend school or have a job , so she spent much of her time shopping at Shibuya boutiques and dancing at Velfarre , an Avex @-@ owned disco club .

At Velfarre , she was introduced to her future producer , Max Matsuura , through a friend . After hearing Hamasaki sing karaoke , Matsuura offered her a recording deal , but Hamasaki suspected ulterior motives and turned the offer down . He persisted and succeeded in recruiting her for the Avex label in the following year . Hamasaki started vocal training , but skipped most of her classes after finding her instructors to be too rigid and the classes dull . When she confessed this to Matsuura , he sent her to New York to train her vocals under another method . During her foreign sojourn , Hamasaki frequently corresponded with Matsuura and impressed him with her style of writing . On her return to Japan , he suggested that she try writing her own lyrics .

= = = 1998 ? 99 : Musical beginnings , A Song for xx and Loveppears = = =

Hamasaki made her debut under Avex at 19 on April 8 , 1998 with the single " Poker Face " . It ? and the following four singles ? were not major hits , however each release was better than the last , thus gradually increasing her exposure and presence on the market . Hamasaki 's debut album , A Song for x x ( 1999 ) , was likewise " unassuming " : the tracks , composed by Yasuhiko Hoshino , Akio Togashi ( of Da Pump ) , and Mitsuru Igarashi ( of Every Little Thing ) , were " cautious " pop @-@ rock songs . However , Hamasaki 's lyrics , introspective observations about her feelings and experiences that focused on loneliness and individualism , resonated with the Japanese public . The songs gained Hamasaki a growing following , and the release of the album was a success : it topped the Oricon charts for five weeks and sold over a million copies . For her achievements , she earned a Japan Gold Disc Award for " Best New Artist of the Year " .

With Ayu @-@ mi @-@ x ( March 1999 ) , the first of a series of remix albums , Hamasaki began moving beyond the pop @-@ rock of A Song for x x and began to incorporate different styles including trance , dance , and orchestra . Hamasaki began to experiment with different musical styles in her singles as well , releasing dance tunes and ballads as well as remixes on the singles which spanned reggae and house . The singles were milestones : Hamasaki earned her first number @-@ one single ( " Love : Destiny " ) and first million @-@ selling single ( " A " ) . Her second studio album , Loveppears ( November 1999 ) , not only topped the Oricon charts , it sold nearly 3 million copies . The album also showcased a change in Hamasaki 's lyrics . Though the lyrics of Loveppears still dealt with loneliness , many of them were written from a third @-@ person perspective . In support of Loveppears , she held her first tour , Ayumi Hamasaki Concert Tour 2000 A.

A Film for XX is the first video clip collection by Ayumi Hamasaki , it was released on September 15 , 1999 .

= = = 2000 ? 02 : Duty , compilation releases , I Am ... and Rainbow = = =

From April to June 2000 , Hamasaki released the " Trilogy " , a series of singles consisting of " Vogue " , " Far Away " , and " Seasons " . The lyrics of these songs focused on hopelessness , a reflection of Hamasaki 's disappointment that she had not expressed herself thoroughly in any of her previous lyrics and a sense of shame of her public image . Likewise , many of the songs she wrote

for her subsequent studio album , Duty ( September 2000 ) , involved feelings of loneliness , chaos , confusion , and the burden of her responsibilities . She described her feelings after the writing as " unnatural " and " nervous " . The musical style was darker as well ; in contrast with Loveppears , Duty was a rock @-@ influenced album with only one dance song , " Audience " . Duty resonated with fans : the " Trilogy " were " hit singles " ( " Seasons " was a million @-@ seller ) , and the album became Hamasaki 's best @-@ selling studio album . At the end of 2000 , Hamasaki held her first New Year countdown concert at the Yoyogi National Gymnasium .

In 2001 , Avex forced Hamasaki to release her first compilation album , A Best , on March 28 , putting the album in " competition " with Hikaru Utada 's second studio album , Distance . The " competition " between the two singers ( which both claimed was merely a creation of their record companies and the media ) was supposedly the reason for the success of the albums ; both sold over 5 million copies . In support of Duty and A Best , Hamasaki held a tour of Japan 's domes , making her one of few " top @-@ drawer " Japanese artists to hold a concert at the Tokyo Dome .

I Am ... ( January 2002 ) marked several milestones for Hamasaki . Hamasaki increased her control over her music by composing all of the songs on the album under the pseudonym " Crea " , of which the 2000 single " M " was the first . " Connected " ( November 2002 ) and " A Song Is Born " ( December 2001 ) were the exceptions . I Am ... also showed evolution in Hamasaki 's lyrical style : it was a retreat from the themes of " loneliness and confusion " of some of her earlier songs . Moved by the September 11 attacks , Hamasaki revised her vision of I Am ... , focusing on issues such as faith and world peace . " A Song Is Born " , in particular , was directly influenced by the events . The single , a duet with Keiko Yamada , was released as part of Avex 's non @-@ profit Song Nation project , which raised money for charity . She also dropped the planned cover and opted instead to be portrayed as a " peace muse " , explaining ,

I had a completely different idea for the cover at first . We 'd already reserved the space , decided the hair and makeup and everything . But after the incident , as is typical of me , I suddenly changed my mind . I knew it wasn 't the time for gaudiness , for elaborate sets and costumes . It sounds odd coming from me , but I realize what I say and how I look has a great impact .

The outlook inspired by the September 11 attacks extended beyond I Am .... In 2002 , Hamasaki held her first concert outside Japan , at the MTV Asia music awards ceremony in Singapore , a move interpreted as the beginning of a campaign prompted by a sluggish Japanese market . At the ceremony , she received the award for " Most Influential Japanese Singer in Asia " . In support of I Am ... , Hamasaki held two tours , Ayumi Hamasaki Arena Tour 2002 A and Ayumi Hamasaki Stadium Tour 2002 A . In November 2002 , as " Ayu " , she released her first European single , " Connected " , a trance song from I Am ... composed by DJ Ferry Corsten . It was released in Germany on the Drizzly label . Hamasaki continued to release singles ( all of them remixes of previously released songs ) in Germany on Drizzly until 2005 .

In April 2002 , Hamasaki released the single " Free & Easy " . In collaboration with the magazine Free & Easy , Hamasaki also released Hamasaki Republic , a photobook that was actually a special issue of Free & Easy , in conjunction with the single . " H " , Hamasaki 's next single , became the best @-@ selling single of 2002 . Hamasaki released her last single of 2002 , " Voyage " , on September 26 . In lieu of a regular @-@ length music video , the short film Tsuki ni Shizumu , starring Hamasaki , was created for " Voyage " and was released at a select theater in Shibuya . Hamasaki 's next studio album , Rainbow ( December 2002 ) was her first to use English lyrics . After performing at the 2002 MTV Asia music awards , Hamasaki felt that by writing only Japanese lyrics , she was not able to bring her " message " to other countries . Realizing that English was a " common global language " , she included English lyrics in three songs . The album was stylistically diverse ; Hamasaki included rock- and trip hop @-@ influenced tracks as well as " summery " , " up @-@ tempo " and " grand gothic " songs and experimented with new techniques such as gospel choruses and the yells of an audience . The lyrics were also varied : themes in the album included freedom , the struggles of women , and " a summer that ends in sadness " .

= = = 2003 ? 06 : Decline in sales , My Story , ( Miss ) Understood and Secret = = =

In 2003 , Hamasaki released three singles , " & " , " Forgiveness " , and " No Way to Say " . To celebrate the release of her thirtieth single ( " Forgiveness " ) , Hamasaki held the A Museum concert at the Yoyogi National Gymnasium . Her mini @-@ album Memorial Address ( December 2003 ) was her first album to be released in CD + DVD format in addition to the regular CD @-@ only format , a decision that came from her increased interest in the direction of her music videos . Like her previous albums , Memorial Address topped the Oricon chart and sold over a million copies . Sales of Hamasaki 's singles began to wane . Although all three of the album 's singles topped the Oricon charts , " & " was Hamasaki 's last single to sell over 500 @,@ 000 copies .

By the end of her Arena Tour 2003 ? 2004 , Hamasaki had grown dissatisfied with her position in Avex : she felt that the company was treating her as a product instead of a person . Along with her dissatisfaction over her last two studio albums ( which she thought had been rushed ) , this led her to begin work on My Story ( December 2004 ) early . In contrast with her previous albums , My Story had no set theme , nor did Hamasaki attempt to write " something good " or even " something that would give people hope " ; rather , she simply wrote freely and honestly . As a result , the album contained mostly autobiographical lyrics about her emotions and reminiscences of her career . She approached the composition of the music with the same freedom as the lyrics , with the album 's notable rock overtones expressing her liking for rock music . She was so pleased with the result that she declared My Story the first album she felt satisfied with . My Story and its singles , " Moments " , " Inspire " , and " Carols " , all topped the weekly Oricon charts ; moreover , with sales of over 1 @,@ 100 @,@ 000 units , My Story became Hamasaki 's last million @-@ selling studio album according to Oricon . From January to April 2005 , Hamasaki held the nationwide My Story arena tour , her first album @-@ based tour . Also in January , she began working with Lamoureux Orchestra to create My Story Classical , a classical version of My Story ; the album served as an " alter @-@ ego " of the mostly aggressive My Story . The orchestra also created a classical version of " A Song Is Born " , which was included on My Story Classical and which Hamasaki performed at the opening of the Expo 2005 .

( Miss ) understood ( January 2006 ) , Hamasaki 's seventh studio album , showed new musical directions . Wanting to sing a tune like those of the group Sweetbox , Hamasaki obtained the permission of Sweetbox composer Roberto " Geo " Rosan to use demo songs he had intended to use in Sweetbox 's upcoming album . She edited the songs to fit her personal vision , rewriting the lyrics and rearranging some of the songs . The result was more musically diverse than the previous album ; ( Miss ) understood included ballads , funk , dance @-@ pop , R & B , and rock songs . All of ( Miss ) understood 's singles reached the top of the Oricon ; " Bold & Delicious " became Hamasaki 's twenty @-@ fifth number @-@ one single , tying her with Seiko Matsuda for the record of most number @-@ one singles by a solo female artist . Though ( Miss ) understood also reached the top of the charts , Oricon stated that it sold fewer than a million copies ? Hamasaki 's first studio album to do so . In support of the album , Hamasaki held the ( Miss ) understood arena tour , which spanned three months with thirty concerts , from Saitama on March 11 , 2006 to Yoyogi on June 11 , 2006 .

Hamasaki 's first single of 2006 , " Startin ' " , became Hamasaki 's twenty @-@ sixth number @-@ one single , setting a new record for most number @-@ one singles held by a solo female artist . The subsequent studio album , Secret , was released in November 2006 . " Secrets " was , appropriately , the theme of the album ; the album also explored strong female figures , love , and sadness ; songs depicted the artist 's struggles and were written to encourage women . Although Secret was originally intended to be a mini @-@ album , Hamasaki " began brimming with things to say " while producing the album and wrote five more songs . The album consisted mostly of rock songs and ballads ; to complement these , Hamasaki experimented with new vocal techniques . The album also topped the Oricon weekly charts , making Hamasaki the only artist to have eight consecutive number @-@ one studio albums . Her sales , however , continued to decline : according to both Oricon and the RIAJ , Secret failed to sell a million copies .

= = = 2007 ? 08 : Compilation releases and Guilty = = =

On February 28 , 2007 , Hamasaki released A Best 2 , a pair of compilation albums containing songs from I Am ... to ( Miss ) understood . The two versions , White and Black , debuted at the first and second positions on the Oricon weekly charts , making Hamasaki the first female artist in thirty @-@ six years to hold the top two positions on any Oricon album chart . At the end of 2007 , the pair became Japan 's fifth and seventh best @-@ selling albums of the year respectively . In support of A Best 2 and Secret , Hamasaki held the four @-@ month @-@ long Tour of Secret from March to the end of June . It was her first international tour , and aside from Japan , she performed in Taipei , Shanghai , and Hong Kong . Her foreign fanbase highly anticipated the concerts , and tickets for the Taipei and Hong Kong performances sold out in less than three hours .

In July 2007 , Hamasaki released her first single in over a year , " Glitter / Fated " . A short film , Distance Love , was used as the music video for " Glitter " and " Fated " . The film , shot in Hong Kong , co @-@ starred Hong Kong actor Shawn Yue as Hamasaki 's romantic interest . " Glitter / Fated " and the following single " Talkin ' 2 Myself " reached the top of their respective charts , continuing Hamasaki 's streak of number @-@ one singles . In December , Hamasaki released her first digital @-@ only single , " Together When ... " , which topped the RIAJ 's monthly download chart . Unlike its predecessors , the writing of Hamasaki 's ninth studio album , Guilty ( January 2008 ) , was not an emotional experience for her , nor did it have a set theme . However , she said later that the album 's tracks appeared to tell a story . Most of the songs were dark ; the album had a notable rock tinge . It contained some upbeat dance tracks and ballads , though the latter also had rock overtones . Guilty peaked at the number @-@ two position on the weekly Oricon charts , making it Hamasaki 's first studio album not to reach the top and ended Hamasaki 's streak of 8 consecutive number @-@ one albums . Guilty was later released as a digital album in twenty @-@ six countries outside Japan , nineteen of them Western nations . That , along with Hamasaki 's decision to employ western DJs such as The Young Punx , Coldcut , Para One and Armand Van Helden for her 2008 remix albums Ayu @-@ mi @-@ x 6 : Gold and Ayu @-@ mi @-@ x 6 : Silver , has been interpreted as her first step into the global market .

In April 2008 , to commemorate her tenth anniversary in Avex , Hamasaki released the single " Mirrorcle World " ; it topped the Oricon , making Hamasaki the only female solo artist to have a number @-@ one single every year for ten consecutive years . Hamasaki also held her second tour of Asia , Asia Tour 2008 : 10th Anniversary , to celebrate her tenth anniversary . From April until June , she toured Japan , holding seventeen concerts . Taiwan , Hong Kong , and Shanghai were again the foreign stops after the domestic performances . On September 10 , 2008 , Hamasaki released A Complete : All Singles , a compilation album that includes the A @-@ sides of all her singles along with previously unreleased footage from her A @-@ nation concerts which is the 8th best selling album of 2008 .

= = = 2009 ? 11 : Next Level , Rock n Roll Circus and Five = = =

Hamasaki 's next two singles , " Days / Green " ( December 2008 ) and " Rule / Sparkle " ( February 2009 ) , continued Hamasaki 's streak of number @-@ one singles . " Rule " is used as the international theme song for the film Dragonball Evolution . The subsequent studio album , Next Level , was released on March 25 , 2009 in several formats : CD , CD + DVD , 2CD + DVD and a two @-@ gigabyte USB flash drive . Sonically , Next Level was mainly an electronic dance album . Next Level reached the top of the Oricon charts , making Hamasaki the only artist to have a number @-@ one album every year for eleven years in a row since her debut . However , the album was only certified double platinum , making it Hamasaki 's lowest @-@ selling studio album to that date . On August 12 , 2009 , Hamasaki released her forty @-@ sixth single , " Sunrise / Sunset ( Love Is All ) " . " Sunrise ( Love Is All ) " , one of the A @-@ sides , is being used as the opening theme song for the Japanese television drama Dandy Daddy ? . The single reached the top of the weekly charts , making it her twenty @-@ first consecutive ( thirty @-@ third total ) number @-@ one single . " Sunrise / Sunset " is also her forty @-@ fourth single to enter the Top 10 , making Hamasaki the artist with the most Top 10 singles ever . Hamasaki 's third single of the year , " You Were ... / Ballad " , was released on December 29 , 2009 . Hamasaki 's eleventh studio album Rock ' n ' Roll Circus

was released on April 14 , 2010 . Though the album contained a few " powerful and melodramatic gothic rock " tracks , it was mainly " pure and classic J @-@ pop " , with pop @-@ rock songs and ballads . The album topped the charts , making Hamasaki the first female solo artist in twenty years to have ten number @-@ one original studio albums . Hamasaki also began expanding her online presence , setting up accounts on MySpace , Ustream , and Twitter . In July , entertainment company Livespire announced that Hamasaki 's 2009 Next Level tour would be shown in 3D at Toho cinemas nationwide beginning on August 28 .

On July 14 , Hamasaki released her forty @-@ eighth single , " Moon / Blossom " . The single was released as the first of a three @-@ part project to celebrate her yet @-@ unreleased fiftieth single . The two other singles in the project ( her forty @-@ ninth and fiftieth singles respectively ) , " Crossroad " and " L " , were released within a week of each other , " Crossroad " on September 22 and " L " on September 29 . " Crossroad " was composed by Tetsuya Komuro and its coupling was her cover version of Komuro 's band TM Network 's 1988 song " Seven Days War " , which was her first cover of a male song . The three singles all topped the Oricon , becoming Hamasaki 's twenty @-@ third , twenty @-@ fourth and twenty @-@ fifth consecutive number @-@ one singles and setting a new record for the most consecutive number @-@ one singles by any female artist ( solo or group ) as well as by any solo artist . On December 22 , Hamasaki released her twelfth original studio album , Love Songs . On the same day , Naoya Urata of AAA released his debut solo single " Dream On " . The song , which featured Hamasaki , was written and produced by her as well , marking the first record she produced for another singer . Love Songs and " Dream On " both reached the top spots on their respective Oricon charts . Love Songs became Hamasaki 's fourth consecutive and seventeenth total number @-@ one album . The album also marked Hamasaki 's thirteenth consecutive year with a number @-@ one album , breaking her old record .

In February 2011 , it was announced that her arena tour of the year , Hotel Love Songs , would start in April . Shortly after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami hit , it was announced that the tour was rescheduled to start in late May and the tour was renamed to Power of Music . Deeply affected by the Tohoku Earthquake and tsunami devastation , Hamasaki decided to collaborate with fashion magazine , Vivi , with the sale of charity shirts and the profits going to help the victims in the devastation . On April 20 , 2011 , Hamasaki simultaneously released four new remix albums , Ayu @-@ mi @-@ x 7 : House , Acoustic Orchestra , Trance 4 , Ayu @-@ ro Mix 4 , and a Limited Complete Box Set , which were also released internationally on iTunes . On that same day , Hamasaki also released 2010 Rock ' n ' Roll Circus Tour and A 50 Singles : Live Selection which topped the weekly chart at No. 1 and No. 2 respectively . The simultaneous releases made Hamasaki the first artist ever to have 4 albums in Oricon 's top 10 and also the first artist to hold 2 top positions in the Oricon DVD chart . Their original release date of March 30 was postponed due to the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami and was pushed back to April 20 instead . On April 21 , 2011 , it was announced that she would perform in a @-@ nation 10th Anniversary for Life Charge & Go ! On May 4 , it was announced that she broke another record ? the female artist with the highest DVD sales with 2 @, @ 313 @, @ 000 .

On August 31 , Hamasaki released her second mini album Five , her first since Memorial Address in 2003 . This is her first album to have no singles released . Five topped the Oricon Charts for 2 consecutive weeks , her first to do so since ( Miss ) understood . The lead song , " Progress " , was used as a theme song for the videogame , Tales of Xillia . The album also features collaborations , with singers Juno and Naoya Urata from AAA . This album managed to be certified Gold by RIAJ , making Hamasaki 's first album not to be certified Platinum . Complete Clip Box 1998 ? 2011 , consisting all her music videos from her first single , " Poker Face " till her latest mini @-@ album , Five , was released on January 1 , 2012 . " How Beautiful You Are " will be the theme song for a drama Saigo Kara Nibanme no Koi , and also Hamasaki 's second digital single ( 55th single overall ) , which is released fully on February 8 . Hamasaki describe the song as a mid @-@ tempo ballad and a feeling of gratitude towards someone .

= = = 2012 ? 13 : 15th anniversary , Love Again and compilation releases = = =

In 2012 , The International 3D Society announced the winners of its 2012 3D Creative Arts Awards with Hamasaki receiving an award for " Electronic Broadcast Media ( Television ) ? Live Event " for her A3D ayumi hamasaki Arena Tour 2009 A ( Next Level ) tour . On March 21 , Hamasaki released her thirteenth studio album , Party Queen . The album peaked at number two on the Oricon charts , becoming her second studio album to do so after 2007 's Guilty . On August 6 , 2012 , Hamasaki released her sixth compilation album A Summer Best . It included two new songs which were digitally released for the promotion of the album : the TRF cover , Happening Here , and You & Me .

In September 2012 , it was announced that , to commemorate Hamasaki 's 15th anniversary in the music industry on April 8 , 2013 , she would be releasing new material for five consecutive months starting on the 8th day of November , 2012 , until the 8th of March , 2013 . The first releases were two mini albums , Love and Again , which were put on sale on the 8th of November and December , respectively . The third release for the 8th of January was her compilation album A Classical , which included classical arrangements of previously released songs . The fourth release was Hamasaki 's 14th studio album , Love Again , which compiled the songs included in the two previous mini albums . And finally the fifth was the DVD / Blu @-@ ray of her Arena Tour 2012 : Hotel Love Songs , released in March . In April 2013 Hamasaki began her 15th Anniversary Tour : A Best Live , which lasted for four months until the end of July . Its setlist was chosen by fans through online voting , and was later released as her first live album CD on September 18 . The DVD and Blu @-@ ray versions were released on October 30 , 2013 . On December 25 , 2013 , Hamasaki released " Feel the Love / Merry @-@ go @-@ round " , her first physical single in three years . " Feel the Love " was composed by Tetsuya Komuro and produced by Dj Hello Kitty , while " Merry @-@ go @-@ round " was produced by M @-@ Flo 's Taku Takahashi and features rapper Verbal . Both songs are heavily influenced by Western dance @-@ pop music .

= = = 2014 ? 2015 : Colours , A One , Sixxxxxx = = =

In January 2014 , it was announced that a new song entitled " Pray " was chosen to be the theme song for the anime film Osamu Tezuka 's Budda 2 ? Owarinaki Tabi , which premiered on February 8 , 2014 in Japan . The song was released digitally on January 27 , 2014 . Another new song , entitled " Hello New Me " , was presented as theme song for a new season of Fuji TV drama Zoku ? Saigo Kara Nibanme no Koi. which started broadcasting in April , 2014 . The song was released digitally on May 14 , 2014 . From May 30 to July 6 , 2014 , Hamasaki held her Premium Showcase : Feel the love tour , on which she offered 11 concerts at 3 locations : Nagoya , Osaka and Tokyo . On this tour Hamasaki abandoned for the first time the traditional format of her previous concerts and presented a uninterrupted , shorter show , on which she also debuted as an aerial acrobat . Hamasaki 's fifteenth studio album , entitled Colours , was released on July 2 , 2014 . The album featured internationally renowned producers , such as RedOne , Rodney Jerkins , Armin van Buuren and Fedde le Grand , making the first time in Hamasaki 's career in which primarily Western producers were appointed to produce one of her studio albums . Colours peaked at number five on its first week on the Oricon charts , becoming Hamasaki 's first studio album to debut out of the Top 3 . However , it also marked a new record for her , as with this achievement she became the second artist in Japan 's history ? after Yumi Matsutoya ? to have 47 of her albums within the Top 10 of the charts . In September 2014 , Hamasaki released two recut singles from Colours : " Terminal " and " XOXO " on the PlugAir platform . The single was released under Machine Shop Records for the American release .

On October 18 , 2014 , Hamasaki performed as the closing act in the A @-@ Nation premium concert held at the Marina Bay Sands ? MasterCard Theatres in Singapore . This was the second time performing in Singapore after her MTV Asia Awards performance 12 years ago . On November 2 , 2014 , Hamasaki announced through her official Facebook page that she had started recording new material composed by Tetsuya Komuro , Kunio Tago and Tetsuya Yukumi for a " winter ballad trilogy " single . On November 6 , 2014 , the title of the single was revealed to be " Zutto ... / Last Minute / Walk " , and its release date was set for December 24 , 2014 . On November 10 , 2014 , it was announced that Hamasaki would be collaborating in a tribute cover album for Hikaru Utada ,

entitled Utada Hikaru no Uta , to be released on December 9 , 2014 . For the album she contributed with a cover of Utada 's 1998 single " Movin ' on Without You " , which was arranged by the RedOne production team . The winter ballad trilogy single , " Zutto ... / Last Minute / Walk " , was released on December 24 , 2014 and peaked at number five on the Oricon charts . With this achievement , Hamasaki became the first solo artist in Japan 's history to have 50 singles within the Top 10 of the Oricon charts . As for artists in general , Hamasaki became the third artist with more Top ten singles since Oricon 's foundation in 1968 ? being surpassed by groups Morning Musume and SMAP , with 57 and 53 Top ten singles respectively In December 2014 Hamasaki announced that she would be not attending the New Year show K?haku Uta Gassen for the first time in 15 years . She explained her decision stating that she wanted to lower her responsibilities and things she felt pressured to do , in order to focus on the projects she had for her career , mainly regarding her plans to expand her influence throughout Asia .

On February 15 , 2015 , Hamasaki made a surprise guest appearance during Singaporean singer JJ Lin 's concert in Taipei , Taiwan . They performed a duet version of Hamasaki 's 2000 single " Seasons " , and announced that JJ Lin would be producing a song for Hamasaki 's next studio album , A One . The album was released on April 8 , 2015 , including singles " Zutto ... " , " Last Minute " , " Walk " , Utada 's cover " Movin ' on Without You " , and JJ Lin @-@ produced song " The Gift " , for which a promotional music video was also made . Between April and July 2015 , Hamasaki embarked on her Arena Tour 2015 A Cirque de Minuit tour throughout Japan , which was planned as an expanded version of her previous Countdown Live concerts held in late 2014 . The tour consisted of a 34 @-@ song setlist show with a duration of 3 hours and 45 minutes , her longest concert held to date . At the final show of the aforementioned tour , Hamasaki announced that she would start another tour in September , this time exclusively for members of her official fan club , TeamAyu . The TA Limited Live Tour , Hamasaki 's first fan club exclusive tour in twelve years after 2003 , began on September 29 , 2015 and included a total of 16 concerts at 7 venues .

In April 2015 , a new song entitled " Step by Step " began to be broadcast as the theme song of NHK TV drama Bijo to Danshi , and was subsequently released as a digital single on July 1 . On August 5 , 2015 , Hamasaki released her sixth extended play , entitled Sixxxxxx . The mini album featured six new songs , including drama theme song " Step by Step " , and " Sayonara " , a new song featuring Taiwanese boyband SpeXial . " Sayonara " became # 1 on digital downloads charts in Taiwan , Hong Kong , Singapore and Malaysia , according to KK BOX , Asia 's largest digital distribution site . In addition , Hamasaki participated as one of the headliners of the A @-@ Nation Stadium Fes 2015 held on August 30 at the Ajinomoto Stadium , where she also performed a cover of Globe 's hit ballad song " Departures " , joined by Tetsuya Komuro and Naoya Urata onstage . She also recorded a cover of Globe 's " Many Classic Moments " , which was included in the group 's tribute album released on December 16 , 2015 . On December 23 , 2015 , Hamasaki released a winter @-@ themed concept album entitled Winter Diary : A7 Classical , which included songs from her previous two albums -A One and -Sixxxxxx- remixed with Classical arrangements , and also new song " Winter Diary " , which was produced by Tetsuya Komuro . Hamasaki promoted the album by starting an Instagram account that would be active for only a month until the end of January 2016 . She shared pictures of the music video shooting of " Winter Diary " recorded in Taiwan , and also the preparations for her 2015 @-@ 2016 countdown live concerts .

= = = 2016 : Made in Japan = = =

On her last Instagram post , Hamasaki confirmed that she has been working on her seventeenth studio album for 2016 . A 15th anniversary edition of Hamasaki 's 2001 greatest hits album A Best was released on March 28 , 2016 . In May 2016 , Hamasaki started her nationwide tour Arena Tour 2016 A : Made in Japan , which will be an expanded version of her 2015 @-@ 2016 Countdown Live Made in Tokyo . On May 11 , Hamasaki made a surprise release of her 17th studio album , entitled Made in Japan , through music streaming website AWA , where it reached 1 million legal streams after 5 days of release . The album is set to be released on physical formats on June 29 , 2016 .



= = Image and artistry = =

Time magazine has noted that Hamasaki lacked talents such as the dance moves of Namie Amuro , the " supermodel allure " of Hitomi , and the " vocal pyrotechnics " of Hikaru Utada . Her own fans even considered her high @-@ pitched voice screechy . However , her music is sometimes considered one of the major forces in shaping Japan 's current music trends ; this has been attributed to her constantly changing image as well as her self @-@ penned lyrics , though critics credit clever marketing strategies . Hamasaki is also noted for the visual aspects of her artistry : she is considered a fashion trendsetter , with her influence extending beyond Japan . The Guardian says that Hamasaki has " married accessible , mainstream hits with over @-@ the @-@ top costumes and high @-@ concept videos " . The widespread influence of her music and her constantly changing image has meant that Hamasaki has often been compared to Madonna .

Hamasaki 's lyrics and image have gained a following predominantly among the Generation X of Asia , mainly because of the " conflicting or inharmonious beauty " of her fashion and lyrics ; Hamasaki 's fashions combine Eastern and Western elements , and her songs , unlike those of many of her contemporaries , mostly all have English titles but contained no English lyrics ( until Rainbow ) . Music critic Tetsu Misaki believed that the juxtaposition of her fashionable appearance and her personal lyrics was one of her most important selling points . The popularity of her music extends beyond Japan ; she has a " sizable [ following ] across Asia " and is one of the few Japanese singers whose albums have sold over 10 @,@ 000 copies in Singapore . In 2002 , however , Hamasaki 's domestic sales began declining due to a sluggish Japanese market and increasing piracy in Japan . As a result , she began moving toward the Asian market in 2002 , performing at the 2002 MTV Asia awards in Singapore , at South Korea 's " Asia Song Festival " , and at a concert in Beijing to celebrate Sino @-@ Japanese relations . With her popularity declining ( due in part to the rising popularity of other singers ) , she made a foray into the Asian market , starting with her first tour of Asia in 2007 .

= = Musical style = =

Hamasaki 's lyrics , all her own , have resonated among her fans , who praise them as being honest and heartfelt and " expressing determination " ; in two surveys conducted by Oricon , respondents voted Hamasaki 's lyrics as their favorite aspect of her artistry . Steve McClure of The Japan Times noted that Hamasaki has " developed a reputation as a thoughtful , introspective lyricist " ; Barry Walters of The Village Voice comments that Hamasaki 's lyrics " pack unlikely insights . " Having " trouble voicing her thoughts " , Hamasaki uses her lyrics as an outlet ; she draws inspiration from her own ( and occasionally her friends ' ) experiences and emotions and tries to put them " honestly into words " . She has stated that honesty is essential to her lyrics , saying , " If I write when I 'm low , it will be a dark song , but I don 't care . I want to be honest with myself at all times . " This meant that she did not use English lyrics until her album Rainbow , as she felt that she could best express herself in Japanese . As with her musical style , the themes of her lyrics have varied . Her debut album A Song for x x dealt mostly with themes of " loneliness and confusion " , as did her second album Loveppears . Duty likewise expressed feelings of disappointment and confusion . Hamasaki began to take on a more global outlook with her following albums I Am ... and Rainbow , branching out to wider themes such as faith and peace . Music critic Tetsu Misaki noted a large change in her lyrics style between her debut album A Song for x x ( 1999 ) , which mostly dealt with personal problems , and her following albums Loveppears and Duty . Misaki believed Hamasaki had begun thinking about her influence on society more , and began writing songs with important messages she wanted to express to her listeners . This was signalled by her not using first person pronouns as much , and instead using the words bokura ( ?? , " we " ) and tsutaeru ( ??? , " convey " ) more often . As Hamasaki matured , her lyrics began to express more confidence ; themes in her later albums included love and the struggles of women . With Guilty , Hamasaki began to compose her lyrics not only as an exposition of her personal feelings but as encouragements for her listeners , an outlook

she applied in Next Level as well . In songs such as " Talkin ' 2 Myself " and " Mirrorcle World " , Hamasaki deals with the " awareness and fighting spirit of surviving in a high @-@ risk age " to encourage listeners ; in " Rollin ' " ( from Next Level ) , Hamasaki writes , " The age is rolling around / At the speed of heading toward the end / Beyond the border / Disappointment and hope fight with each other " . In addition to personal experiences and feelings , Hamasaki bases lyrics on sources such as historical events . The life of Joan of Arc was the inspiration for " Free & Easy " , while a story told to her by her friend about a saint named Mary served as the basis for " M " ; the September 11 attacks inspired " A Song Is Born " .

In addition to writing her own lyrics , Hamasaki has also involved herself in other aspects of production such as artistic direction . Though Max Matsuura is officially credited as the producer of her records , he said of Hamasaki , " Ayu is a very meticulous worker behind the scenes . A lot of the work she does by herself is more in the producer 's arena . I think really we should say ' Produced by [ A ] yumi [ H ] amasaki ' . " Until her single " M " , however , Hamasaki left the task of composing to her staff ; as she has explained , " I 'm not a professional ; I lack even basic knowledge about writing music . " However , she started to compose her own melodies after her staff had failed to compose a tune for " M " that appealed to her . Wanting to produce works faithful to her visions , Hamasaki took control of most aspects of her artistry . I Am ... is representative of this stage in Hamasaki 's career ; she directed the production of its songs , videos , and artwork . She began to compose less after I Am ... : whereas nearly all of I Am ... was her work , only nine of Rainbow 's fifteen tracks were composed by her . She was even less involved in the composition of subsequent albums , composing two tracks on Memorial Address , three on My Story , and one on ( Miss ) understood ; since Secret , none of the songs on her studio albums have listed her as a composer . With later albums , Hamasaki also began to delegate to her staff tasks she had once handled herself . Hamasaki cites Madonna , soul musicians Babyface and En Vogue , and rock bands Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple as her influences and states that she admires Michelle Branch , Kid Rock , Joan Osborne , Seiko Matsuda , Rie Miyazawa , and Keiko Yamada ; these diverse influences have led to the variety of her own music . Hamasaki began commissioning remixes of her songs early in her career , and this practice also influenced the diversity of her music . Found on many of her records , these remixes span different genres of electronic dance music including Eurobeat , house , and trance , as well as acoustic genres such as classical and traditional Chinese music . She has employed Western as well as Japanese musicians ; among those she has worked with are Above & Beyond , the Lamoureux Orchestra of France , and traditional Chinese music ensemble Princess China Music Orchestra . Hamasaki has released more than a hundred original songs ; through them , she has covered a wide range of musical styles , such as dance , metal , R & B , progressive rock , pop , and classical . She uses different instruments and techniques including piano , orchestra , gospel choirs , guitars , traditional Japanese strings , music boxes , and effects such as yells , claps , and scratching .

Hamasaki is often involved in the artistic direction of her music videos . They are often artistic productions through which Hamasaki tries to convey the meaning or feeling of their respective songs . The themes of the videos are varied ; she has made " sad and fragile " or " emotional " videos ( " Momentum " , " Endless Sorrow " ) , " refreshing " summer videos ( " Blue Bird " , " Fairyland " ) , surreal or " scary " videos ( " 1 Love " , " Marionette " ) , and humorous videos ( " Evolution " , " Angel 's Song " , " Beautiful Fighters " ) . Additionally , many of the videos contain short storylines , some of which use symbolism to convey their respective messages . The video of " Voyage " depicts Hamasaki as a woman in a mental hospital whose previous incarnation was a woman in feudal Japan who was sacrificed to the moon ; the video of " Endless Sorrow " features a young boy living in a society where speaking is forbidden by law . In the video for " Free & Easy " , Hamasaki portrayed a " twenty @-@ first @-@ century Joan of Arc " to convey her message " freedom cannot be easily obtained ; there is a price to pay for it " and to express her opposition to her marrying at the time ; the video for " Ourselves " featured masked people destroying " effigies of [ Hamasaki 's ] past " such as photographs and album covers to symbolize destruction and rebirth . Additionally , the videos of " Fairyland " , " My Name 's Women " , " Jewel " , " Green " , and " Virgin Road " are among the top twenty or so most expensive music videos , making Hamasaki the only non @-@

American artist to hold such a distinction . Hamasaki is also involved in the production and artistic direction of her live performances ; they , like her videos , are often lavish productions and use a variety of props , extravagant costumes , and choreographed dances . She has used large video screens , fireworks , simulated rain drops , trick stage floors , and suspended devices .

= = = Public image = = =

Hamasaki 's influence goes beyond music ; she is often considered a fashion icon and trend @-@ setter , a status attributed to her tight control over her image . Besides her frequent appearances in fashion magazines , such as *Vivi* , *Popteen* , and *Cawaii !* , Hamasaki has often been lauded for her trendy choices in apparels and accessories ; *Oricon* has repeatedly named her the " Most Fashionable Female Artist " . Many aspects of Japan 's fashions ? including clothing , hair , nails , and accessories ? have in some way been influenced by her . As with her music , trends Hamasaki started have spread to Asian countries as Taiwan , China , and Singapore . Among the trends Hamasaki has started is *hime @-@ kei* ( a look inspired by the fashions of 18th century French aristocracy ) ; she has also heavily influenced the *kogal* subculture . Hamasaki 's constantly changing image is apparent not only in her fashion photo shoots and commercial endorsements but also in her record covers , an element she considers essential in conveying her message . She has portrayed herself as a vine @-@ clad " peace muse " or " Greek goddess " ( on her album *I Am ...* ) , as a " twenty @-@ first @-@ century Joan of Arc " ( for her single " *Free & Easy* " ) , and as a " funky Lolita " . Though Hamasaki has portrayed herself in earlier releases as a " girl next door " , she has adopted a more sexualized image since the release of *Loveppears* . The covers for records including *Loveppears* , *I Am ...* , *Rainbow* , and *Party Queen* feature Hamasaki in states of partial nudity , for which she has generated controversy . Hamasaki also garnered criticism after she modeled bra for lingerie manufacturer *Wacoal* , though most of the criticism alleged that Hamasaki was only trying to " play catch @-@ up " with *Kumi Koda* , who gained popularity for her overtly sexual image .

Hamasaki has accepted offers by numerous brands to endorse their products . Throughout her career under *Avex* , she has promoted products that ranged from electronics ( *Tu @-@ Ka* cell phones and *Panasonic* ) to various snack foods . Among the products she has advertised on television are the *Honda Crea* scooter , *Kosé* cosmetics , *Mister Donut* donuts , and *Boss* coffee . As well as serving as background music for television advertisements , some of Hamasaki 's songs have been used as themes for video games , television shows and motion pictures , such as *Onimusha : Dawn of Dreams* , *InuYasha* , *Shinobi : Heart Under Blade* and *Tales of Xillia* . Although Hamasaki initially supported the exploitation of her popularity for commercial purposes , saying that it was " necessary that [ she is ] viewed as a product " , she eventually opposed *Avex* 's decision to market her as a " product rather than a person " .

= = Other activities = =

= = = MTRLG = = =

Hamasaki launched her own fashion brand , *MTRLG* ( *Material Girl* ) , in 2001 ; the clothes were sold at *MTRLG* boutiques and at *Mise S \* clusive* stores .

= = = Ayupan = = =

In 2002 , Hamasaki created *Ayupan* , a cartoon version of herself that appeared in a line of merchandise ( mainly figurines ) and in a 2003 cartoon . For her 2007 tour *Tour of Secret* , Hamasaki collaborated with *Sanrio* to create a line of merchandise , " *Ayumi Hamasaki x Hello Kitty* " , that features *Ayupan* and *Hello Kitty* together . The merchandise included cell phone straps and *Lumix* cameras decorated with a picture of *Hello Kitty* behind Hamasaki 's " *A* " logo ; the former

product was a result of a collaboration with Sanrio and Japanese fashion brand Ash & Diamonds , the latter a collaboration with Sanrio and Panasonic .

= = = Ayu ready ? = = =

She briefly hosted her own television show , Ayuready ? ( October 2002 ) , on Fuji Television . The talk show , aired on Saturday nights from 11 : 30 to midnight , often featured her performing songs with guests , among whom were Goto Maki , Puffy , and Akina Nakamori . To promote the program ( and her album Rainbow ) , Hamasaki opened a restaurant , Rainbow House , on Sh?nan Beach ; it was occasionally used in episodes of Ayuready ? . After less than two years , the last episode aired in March 2004 .

= = Philanthropy = =

In March 2011 , Hamasaki donated 30 million yen to relief efforts for the Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami . She also collaborated with fashion magazine ViVi to sell charity T @-@ shirts .

= = Personal life = =

= = = Relationships = = =

On January 1 , 2011 , Hamasaki announced her upcoming marriage to Austrian actor and model Manuel Schwarz , whom Hamasaki met in August 2010 on the set of her music video for " Virgin Road " . On January 2 , her office announced that she and Schwarz had gotten married in the United States the day before . However , on January 16 , 2012 , Hamasaki announced on her website that she would be divorcing Schwarz . The reason for the divorce was that , initially , Hamasaki wanted to move in with Schwarz in United States but due to the earthquake and tsunami that hit her home country on March , 2011 , she began to have a strong desire not to leave Japan .

On December 13 , 2013 , it was announced on her official TeamAyu site that she had become engaged to an American medical student , Tyson Bodkin , 10 years her junior , whom she had been with since the spring of that year , adding " As my partner is an ordinary student , I would be very happy if you could watch over us quietly . "

On March 3 , 2014 , the singer announced on her fan club site " Team Ayu " that she was officially married to Bodkin . According to her agency , the couple already finished their marriage procedure in the United States near the end of February . On the 3rd , Hamasaki 's mother , as a deputy , submitted the marriage registration to Japan .

= = = Health = = =

In a January 8 , 2008 entry on her TeamAyu blog , Hamasaki announced that an inoperable condition , possibly tinnitus or Ménière 's disease , had caused complete deafness in her left ear . She disclosed that she had been diagnosed with the condition in 2006 and that the problem dated back to 2000 . Despite the setback , Hamasaki stated that she wished to continue singing , and that she would " not give up " on her fans and that " as a professional " , she wanted to " deliver the best performance for everyone " .

= = Discography = =

Studio albums

A Song for × × ( 1999 )

Loveppears ( 1999 )

Duty ( 2000 )

I Am ... ( 2002 )  
Rainbow ( 2002 )  
My Story ( 2004 )  
( Miss ) understood ( 2006 )  
Secret ( 2006 )  
Guilty ( 2008 )  
Next Level ( 2009 )  
Rock ' n ' Roll Circus ( 2010 )  
Love Songs ( 2010 )  
Party Queen ( 2012 )  
Love Again ( 2013 )  
Colours ( 2014 )  
A One ( 2015 )  
Made in Japan ( 2016 )

= = Concerts = =

= = = Concert tours = = =

= = = New Years countdown concerts = = =

= = Filmography = =