

## Fan Service

## Art of Otaku

Edited by Adam Ghahramani  
Velegant Media, 2005  
852 pages



The community of anime fans, especially in North America, is an inclusive one, encouraging its members to exercise widespread application of derivative creativity

to the torrent of material flowing from the Land of the Rising Sun. Cosplay, fansubs and fan art are the triad of anime fandom's artistic outreach, with each discipline drawing fans closer to their hobby and closer to each other, as enthusiasts coach each successive wave of new devotees.

Trying one's hand at drawing a favourite character is a natural expression of interest in animation, but to anime fandom, fan art is an especially celebrated way for aficionados to deepen their appreciation of the artistry of anime.

The artists tapped to provide the lessons featured in *Art of Otaku* are amateurs, but what they lack in refinement makes the guide more accessible to the readers who turn to the guide for a peer's perspective on the tools and methods of anime-style art. Where better for a beginner to look for advice than someone who's still working

to hone their skills? Taking instruction from the artists of *Art of Otaku* is a less intimidating, perhaps more effective way for a budding artist to pick up tips and techniques than trying in vain to mimic the animators and manga-ka who usually fill art how-to guides with complicated works that showcase their skill in making complicated art look easy.

While we're departing from the usual sources of art advice, let's dispatch the concept of bound, printed art instruction books. *Art of Otaku* is a prototypical digital age product. Members of the online community myOtaku.com were dissatisfied with the selection of anime "how-to" art books on the market and thought they could do one better. Under the editorial leadership of Adam Ghahramani, eight artists from the community collaborated to create an electronic guide that fills the gaps left by the bound art guides printed by traditional publishers. The result is a gargantuan, 852-page tome, available only by download or on CD-ROM, dedicated to teaching the techniques of anime-style art.

All the features found in Adobe Reader are available to navigate *Art of Otaku*, and frankly, leveraging Adobe's navigational aids is an absolute necessity when dealing with such a daunting document. Thumbnails and shortcuts provide enough ease of navigation to avoid drowning in phosphor, and the ability to zoom offers relief to those detail-oriented readers who want to see precisely how Karen Lyon uses the gradient effect to

color the irises of those big, saucer-shaped eyes.

The book is divided by artist, with each providing a finished work in her own style, and guiding the reader from their first pencil stroke through to the final touches, highlighting the shortcuts and potential difficulties in achieving a certain look, portraying various perspectives and working with the tools of the trade, from pen and paper to CG software. There

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are myriad methods and techniques demonstrated, with each of the eight artists presenting the diversity of their own personal tastes. There's little risk of a reader of the guide growing bored with drawing the same characters and same poses repeatedly. Tired of sketching elf ears? Skip ahead to a tutorial on using Photoshop's textured brush. Need some color? This guide's got you covered in pencils, markers, watercolors and digital tools. Pining for the good ol' days of paper and X-acto knives? Check out the section on using comic-tone sheets.

The online nexus of *Art of Otaku's* contributing artists is central to the book's character. Online communities foster collaboration among fan artists, who post their work and receive instant feedback from a diverse group of people. Artists develop their styles through a combination

of imitation, advice and ingenuity passed between community members as quickly as images can be posted. The artists featured in this book have developed their skills in a cooperative environment and that spirit is readily found in the commentary they provide. Tips are offered on developing one's own style using the book's exercises as a starting point, not trace-and-imitate goals.

If you're looking for a polished, professional art instruction book featuring the works of technically proficient artists, *Art of Otaku* will not be a satisfying read. For less-than-expert artists in search of useful tips and easy-to-follow instruction, the charm of this book will be found in its rough spots. This is an art instruction guide with a sense of humility. While the book's art is attractive, and the techniques taught are described in confident, definitive tones, no effort is made to mask the fact that the artists are young and they're still in training. These artists have things to teach, but they also clearly have things to learn. That's why the casual artist can use this book with confidence. The book's authors are one of you. Its artists are inspired by the style of anime and they

want to show you why. Their eagerness to share their enthusiasm is infectious. ■  
Brett Rogers

### Music to Our Ears

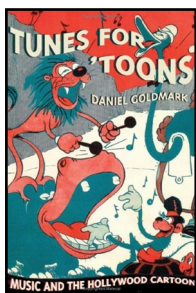
#### Tunes for 'Toons

By Daniel Goldmark

University of California Press, 2005

ISBN 0520236173

263 pages



Daniel Goldmark's book *Tunes for 'Toons* is a watershed look at the use of music in animation. More precisely, Goldmark uses the book to take a measured and scholarly look at the

music (scores *and* songs) found in animated films from the first half of the twentieth century. The book is neither an over-arching history nor a rote catalogue of songs; rather, it is a well-researched and insightful look at some of the key players, musical genres and overall musicality of the early animated cartoon.

The overall addition of sound certainly pushed animation into a new level of artistry, so it is surprising that up until now there really hasn't been a definitive volume on the subject. *Tunes for 'Toons* more than makes up for any lost time.

Right from the start, the book leans heavily on the work of composer Carl

Stalling. I know I've gotten so used to seeing his name that I'd kind of forgotten how influential and prolific he was.

The man worked at nearly every major animation studio and with his work on the early Disney shorts, one could argue he practically invented the soundtrack in animation. For many he was the underscore to hours of happiness and laughter, to others he was a gateway into music. It is inarguable that he was a giant and it's fascinating to see how he became that way.

Stalling's story is balanced with that of Scott Bradley, the MGM in-house composer. Bradley comes off as a hard worker, an innovator often at odds with his directors (particularly Tex Avery). Bradley perhaps had the tougher composing job because his music didn't just support the story, it often propelled it. (One of his primary responsibilities was scoring the generally wordless Tom and Jerry shorts.)

What was particularly interesting about the work of both of these men was the fact that they were, essentially, cogs in a large studio machine. For a composer this brought with it the benefit (or curse) of a studio music library. Being able to use any song from that library was a blessing (even though Stalling apparently pulled songs based on a perceived comedic value—that often never materialized—rather than musical need) as well as a curse (as many times the fabled “studio brass” would dictate a new song to be used, no matter what the storyline or overall cartoon subject).

While Stalling and Bradley may be the stars, the real fascination for me came from the supporting players—studio musicians, recording stars like Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong, animators and directors. The dichotomy between director and composer was a particularly insightful one with each fighting for what they felt was best for the picture. It's an age-old argument but one that had its own unique quirks and turns in this business.

The book covers all genres of music and music use in animation in those early years of the business. One of the highlights of this discussion is the chapter on perennial critical favourite, *What's Opera Doc?* The chapter uses this cartoon as a jumping-off point into a much broader discussion on the use of opera in animation. Ranging from opera's obvious to understated uses, Goldmark makes a strong case for opera's mass-appeal comic potential and animation's elevation to “high art” by taking advantage of that use.

This is just one of the many points that really forces you to re-examine some of your favourite cartoons or cartoon sequences. As a whole, the book works just because of this: it uses our collective knowledge and memory so well. It dissects and analyzes things we didn't even remember we knew.

The only negative of the work was that it was too short. I would have loved to see Goldmark cast his ear (and eye) to the music that played under some of the later '50s and '60s cartoons. (One has to believe that he would have a field day with some of the things wrought by the

early years of television.) Granted, some of this ground was covered in *The Cartoon Music Book*, of which Goldmark was one of the editors. It's a solid book in itself, but it doesn't hold the gravitas of *Tunes for 'Toons*.

When I first heard the premise of this book, I confess to being interested, though not excited. After just a few pages not only did my attitude change but I realized that I was already watching cartoons in a different way. An effect like that is the mark of a good book. This is more than that, though: it's a wonderful piece of work and an energetic capsule of history that is highly recommended for animation and music fans. ■  
Noell Wolfgram Evans

### Anime Under the Lens

#### Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation

By Susan J. Napier

Palgrave Macmillan

ISBN 1403970521

355 pages



People who like anime like it a lot. One of those people is Susan Napier, and, like many Westerners, she discovered anime when *Akira* was released and