Hello, and welcome back to Happy Synthesizers. This is part two of a series listing out my favourite song for every single Vocaloid character. I outlined my criteria in the first part, so if you haven't listened to that one yet, go check it out, but as a brief recap: I'm listing solo original songs. There might be another voicebank singing some harmonies or getting a brief feature, but to qualify for the character slot, the Vocaloid that I'm talking about has to clearly be the lead singer, andnot just one participant in a duet or ensemble piece.

I've got a mix of songs that I already knew and loved, and which I had to go looking for to fill out each character's slot, and I'm excited to share them all with you today. Let's get started!

[intro music]

Between the release of part 1 and now, the company GEMVOX released a new Vocaloid called Otobe Sapphire. Because she's so new, she's only got one song so far, which is her demo song "Lapis Lazuli Concerto" by U-SKE—no idea if I pronounced that one right. It's pretty good, though it's only a minute and a half long like an anime opening. It's definitely pulling its weight as a demo song, though, since it's got me intrigued to see what other people will do with this voicebank. Welcome to the Vocaloid family, Sapphire!

With the new kid out of the way, my original plan for this episode was to start off at the very beginning of Vocaloid history with the OGs, Leon and Lola.

My pick for Leon is "Some Other Time" by Ant. By their own description, Ant was always more involved with UTAU than they ever were with Vocaloid, which to me, just makes their skill with Vocaloid 1 that much more impressive. "Some Other Time" is just a really nice, chill pop song, and another artist might have instinctively passed Leon over in favour of a more human-sounding voicebank, but Ant tunes him well enough that he sounds like the only logical pick. The chill vibes are only heightened by the video; Ant took the footage themself at a park, then colour-graded everything in murky, nostalgic green tones that make it feel like a muggy summer day.

For Lola, on the other hand, I've picked a song with pretty much the opposite vibe. "The Thorn Princess" by Purpled is a melancholy waltz-timed piece inspired by Sleeping Beauty. The arrangement is full of layers and layers of orchestral synths, and though there are several different voicebanks making up the chorus, they're mixed in a way that makes it tricky to identify anyone besides Lola herself. I also really love the video for this one; the artwork looks like it was done traditionally in ink, and then edited digitally. And there's even some very simple silhouetted cut-out style animation, reminiscent of of *The Adventures of of Prince Achmed*—the earliest surviving feature-length animated film. However, most of Purpled's other videos on their channel are fanvids based on *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, and you can also see the influence of that series on their retelling of Sleeping Beauty.

Leon and Lola were marketed as a pair, but there are plenty of examples of each of them being used solo. The same can't be said for all of the voicebanks released as part of a duo or group,

especially the less popular ones. I probably had the trickiest time with twin sisters Anon and Kanon; they don't have a lot of songs period, and relatively few of them are solos.

For Kanon, I've picked "Love is Full Throttle!" by Ayalis. It's Kanon's most-viewed song on YouTube, though that's a reprint, and it's still not very well-known. It's actually gotten a boost since I first discovered it courtesy of the ever-amazing VocaStats. They did a video back in April listing every Vocaloid's most-viewed song, plus some additional voicebanks from other engines, and this was Kanon's entry. At the time, it had a little over 700 views, but it's nearly doubled that since then, which I think is well deserved. It's a fun song, very high energy Eurobeat kind of stuff. I can imagine it in the soundtrack of some arcade racing game, or maybe just a really hard level on *Dance Dance Revolution.*

Ayalis and VocaStats also brought me my pick for Anon, "Dear Chaos." This one actually has been translated, albeit by Hazuki no Yume, which I know is a whole thing. The lyrics are all about feeling like some sort of chaotic force of destruction but still wanting to be love. Very edgy middle-schooler-core, but I mean that in a nice way, I promise. I still listen to most of the stuff I liked as a 14-year-old who desperately wished for the confidence to be edgy and chaotic instead of a straight-laced dweeb. We could probably all do with a dose of that in our lives now and then.

Anon and Kanon weren't the only dynamic duos I had trouble finding solos for. Spanish Vocaloids Bruno and Clara have a bit more content to their names than Anon and Kanon do, but it still took a bit of searching to settle on my decision.

For Clara, I've got "Clara Clara Fever Roaring Super Night," by VNaneP. As the title no doubt makes clear, this song was inspired by Samfree and his "night" series, the most famous of which is, of course "Luka Luka Night Fever." Beyond that, there's honestly not much else to say. It's another super fun Eurobeat track, and more importantly, a lovely tribute to a Vocaloid great. What more could you ask for?

And for Bruno, I've got "The Principles and Art of Ignorance and Suffering" by Xue, because apparently long titles are a plus for me with Spanish Vocaloids. It's a song in English, though, and Xue wrangles Bruno's Spanish phonetics for the rapid-fire English lyrics really well. The instrumental is based around these really moody synth strings—structurally, it's a lot like a rock song, but the central riffs are violins and cellos instead of an electric guitar, it's really cool.

Another pair of Vocaloids you can buy bundled together are Kobayashi Matcha and Masaoka Azuki. For the former, I've got "Skydrop" by ShimaRisu. The rhythm's really interesting on this one; it's written in 3/4 time, but something about the way the drumbeat contrasts with where Matcha's voice gets the most emphasis makes it feel like it wants to be in 4/4. This kind of tension can make a song feel really chaotic—Ghost and Pals has used it to great effect—but with "Skydrop" the effect is more… elegant. I'm also a big fan of the piano sound here; it's a very bright melody, but the edges are softened by the mix. It sounds like an old baby grand kept in a room with big windows where you can see the snowfall from the music video.

That same softness cannot be found in my choice for Azuki, a punchy garage rock number called "Cycle Anchor" by TRIWAVES. Azuki's voice is a little nasal as a baseline, and the tuning here

has pushed it to sound almost a little whiny. It's a fine balance to strike, and it could've been kind of annoying if it were too heavy-handed, but it works brilliantly for this genre. It reminds me a lot of that pop-punk sneer you hear more often with male vocalists, but then cute.

And one more rarely-separated set that I'll talk about today are Wil, Yuu, and Kyo of the Zola Project. These guys have gotten a bit of a renaissance lately courtesy of a V6 upgrade with some smart marketing from Yamaha, but all of the songs I picked use their original V3 voicebanks.

For Wil, I've found "In the Autumn Wind" by akahori. This is a really mellow piece that's mostly full of traditional Japanese instruments. I think the chorused pizzicato strings you hear rounding things out in a few places might be sampled from modern Western-style orchestral strings, but I'm not 100% sure. Overall, this song wouldn't feel out of place in the soundtrack of a Japanese period piece. Wil's voice is well-matched for the as well. I think his voice is the gentlest out of the Zola boys, but this song doesn't try to push him to be more powerful than he needs to be. At the same time, it does take advantage of the full stretch of his vocal range in terms of pitch.

For Yuu, I've selected "LETTER" by Hinayukki. This is a song that really makes me wish that I knew music theory a bit better, because, while it sounds fairly simple on a first listen, the more I hear it, the more sure I am that there's quite a lot going on under the surface that I don't entirely understand. What I can tell you is that Hinayukki is doing something with the key changes that is fascinating to listen to, and even though it's a much more modern pop-rock song than Wil's in terms of instrument choices, something about the melody writing and Yuu's tuning also evokes that traditional Japanese sound for me. I mean, I could be totally barking up the wrong tree, so I'd be curious what any of you thought, but there's a sort of enka-ish warble to Yuu's voice sometimes that makes me think of some of the other traditional fusion songs I've heard.

And then, there's Kyo. Unlike the other two, I already had a song in mind for Kyo going in, and that's because he has made several appearances in the discography of one of my all-time favourite Vocaloid producers, Ferry. "Occam's Razor" is Kyo's most viewed song on YouTube, and it's part of Ferry's *Parties Are For Losers* series, a story about troubled teens living in a setting inspired by the 1979 Soviet sci-fi film *Stalker*, which was itself loosely based off of the novel *Roadside Picnic*. All three of these feature as their main plot device an anomalous "Zone," an area in which the laws of physics and nature have been permanently warped some sort of extraterrestrial or extra-dimensional force. Their distortions manifest in the form of supernaturally active objects and, crucially, genetic mutations.

"Occam's Razor" is one of the songs that assumes the viewpoint of the titular "loser" Yura Beletsky, a 17-year-old screw-up with a Talent for sensing anomalies related to the Zone. I won't get too into the plot details, since "Occam's Razor" takes place a good halfway through the story as it currently exists, but essentially, it follows Yura as he doubles down on a deeply self-destructive series of choices.

It's a bit of an odd song, rhythm-wise, starting off with a swing on the verses that kicks into a straight beat at the prechorus. Combined with the accompanying boost in volume, it gives the illusion of the tempo increasing, even though it's actually still the same speed. The vocals are a

little odd too, in a good way. I'm usually super picky about when lyrics put the emphasis on the wrong syllable, but every odd inflection that you get in this song only lends to the send of Yura's instability. This boy is spiralling, and we can feel it with every weird jolt of the melody.

Parties Are For Losers also includes my favourite Fukase song, "COMFORT ZONE." It's sung from the point of view of the character Dmitry, or Dima, a telekinetic mutant. Ferry layered both Fukase's English and Japanese voicebanks to sing this English track, which lends his performance a unique character without impeding the clarity of the lyrics too much. That's always a good thing, but particularly so here since I think "COMFORT ZONE"'s lyrics are some of Ferry's best. Again, I'm not looking to get too into the weeds, but "COMFORT ZONE" details Dima's backstory growing up in a research facility for kids mutated by the effects of the Zone. His telekinesis is very clearly a better deal than most of the frankly painful-looking mutations that the other kids have to deal with, and Dima starts out very sure of his place at the top of the pecking order. However, his perspective changes pretty drastically by the end of the song for… reasons.

Parties Are For Losers as a whole excels at reusing phrases and motifs in new contexts to explore different perspectives, but there's a lot of this kind of semi-repetition within "COMFORT ZONE" especially, and it works brilliantly with the harsh sounds of the instrumental to bring the listener into Dima's headspace as his world gets turned upside down.

Ferry gets one more entry for this list for Big Al with a non-*Parties* song called "Dopamine Machine," written for *The Big Alliance* anniversary album, which has since become Big Al's most-viewed song. Though created for a celebration project, "Dopamine Machine" is still classic Ferry, and Big Al sounds downright menacing. Like, the lyrics could've undermined the overall tone of the song since, by Ferry's own admission, they were more a rhyming exercise than anything else, and Big Al keeps going on about lemons and stuff, but the nonsense only adds to the unsettling atmosphere. It sounds like Big Al is a malfunctioning robot demon, and you're losing the boss fight against him.

Another song that sounds like a boss fight is my pick for the V6 voicebank Fuiro: "Sweet JOKER" by zensen. It's a really bass-heavy EDM kind of track, much more intense than I usually like, but I've got a lot of respect for the work that went into it. Fuiro's version of "Sweet JOKER" was a double release along with a version featuring a VTuber named Propolis Sachiko for an event called vocaduo2024. Propolis Sachiko has a gorgeous alto voice, and Fuiro's version likewise takes advantage of the strength of her lower range, so it's an excellent match.

And speaking of VTubers, the V6 era brought us the Vocaloid Beta Studio, an additional suite of vocals free for those who've purchased Vocaloid 6. Four of the Beta vocalists who have made the jump to a full commercial release are based off of the voices of some fairly well-known VTubers.

There's Kusakabe Tsumugi, who is based off the VTuber Kusakabe Tsukushi and marketed as Tsukushi's digital cousin. Though she qualifies for my list because she's gotten that full V6 release, my favourite song with her came out before that with her beta bank, and that is "KAWAII!" by OSTER project. As the name would suggest, it's a pretty cute song, and also

classically OSTER. It's upbeat and jazzy, and besides Tsumugi's vocals, the most interesting element to me is definitely the saxophone. It weaves in and out of the mix through the whole song, but about two minutes in it takes centre stage with a short, but snazzy little solo.

Another of the V6 VTuber-loids is And Uge, whose name I'm not really sure how to pronounce. The official romanization of her name is just that, A-N-D U-G-E, but the original Japanese characters look like they should be pronounced "Ando Yuge" so… I'm not sure. Regardless of how I should say her name, the name of her best song is "Retroid" by Junky. It's a spooky electro-swing number that wouldn't be out of place on a Caravan Palace album, and it served as one of her beta demos. Also, with the caveat that it's completely the wrong vibe, I would love to see this covered in *Project Sekai* by Nightcord at 25:00, since Uge's whispery vocals remind me quite a lot of Yoisaki Kanade.

And speaking of characters named Kanade, there's Kanade Kanon, based off of the VTuber of the same name. My pick for her is "Error Message" by Atonality, who shockingly only has 18 subscribers on YouTube as of recording, including me. "Error Message" is another one that feels very boss fight-coded, with a lot of layers of sampled guitar and saxophone, and, true to the channel name, some interesting dissonant tones.

Also, as a side note, Atonality's description on YouTube calls the channel a "hobby account for pepper lovers" with a bell pepper emoji and frankly I just think that's adorable.

Atonality also wrote my pick for the last of the Vtuber-loids I'll be talking about: Vocalo no Ci-chan, based off Ci-chan the Jiangshi. "Small Differences" has a lot of interesting stuff going on, but the vocals are what I've been turning over in my head the most. The tuning has a lot of vibrato and cool enka-ish flourishes, which is awesome enough on its own, but the mixing is also quite strange. It fuzzes out and noise clips in a lot of different spots, like this was somebody mixing their first cover with the vocals way too loud. But the mix overal is balanced enough with all the other elements that I don't think this is an inexperience thing. It seems to be a deliberate choice to have the vocals overdriven and distorted like that, which is honestly fascinating. Combined with the densely arranged instrumental, the overall impression is that Ci-chan is fighting to be heard, and I'm into it.

Both Ci-chan the Vocaloid and the original VTuber have a gimmick based off the *jiangshi*, a Chinese "hopping" vampire whose characteristic movements come from rigor mortis leaving it too stiff to walk properly. She's the most recent Vocaloid to have a sort of "cute monster" motif, but not the first. I've already talked in part 1 about my favourite songs for Sweet Ann and Big Al, who both have a Frankenstein theme, and their original company Power FX also collaborated with VocaTone studios to give us our beloved bandage boy Oliver. I think he's also supposed to have a bit Frankenstein-adjacent theme, but between that haunting choir voice and his outfit, I've always thought of him as maybe a little bit of a ghost, maybe undead, maybe zombie, but generally overall spooky Victorian boy.

Anyway, my song for him is "TVVS" or "Toxic Venom Vent Song" by cora. This one pushes my own parameters of a solo song since Fukase features pretty prominently in the bridge, but they're my parameters, so I can ignore them as I please. I love the whistled riff in the

instrumental, and Oliver's tuning might be some of the best I've ever heard for him. He's so clear throughout, and though Oliver could not, under any circumstances, be described as powerful, he's got some real bite to him here—appropriate for a song about spitting the venom that you've been choking down and hiding for far too long.

Oliver is one of the few "young boy" voicebanks whose voice was actually sampled from a young boy—specifically, a thirteen-year-old choir singer from England who, for obvious reasons, hasn't been identified to the public. Most of the others with this concept have been voiced by women, like Kagamine Len or Kazehiki, or by adult men with youthful-sounding voices.

One of the latter is Zhiyu Moke, who was sampled from professional voice actor Su Shangqing—and apologies as always if I've mispronounced that name, I'm still not any more confident with Chinese. My pick for Moke is "5:30 AM" by Moving Point-P. It's an easy, chill pop song, with some rich harmonies and layered vocals to show off Moving Point's fantastic tuning. Though Moving Point is from China, he's currently based in Australia and speaks excellent English, so I was able to read the bit of backstory that he put in the video description. Apparently, this song was meant for human vocalist who Moving Point is friends with, and he originally just used Moke for the demo track. It sounded good enough, though, that he kept it on the back-burner to eventually do this Vocaloid release. By Moving Point's own description, it's a song about trying to find people in your life who understand you and can support you through "every 5:30 a.m. of your life."

Moke came out on the same day as another Vsinger Mandarin voicebank, Mo Qingxian. She's another of the Chinese Vocaloids whose content isn't super widely distributed on YouTube, so I wasn't going in with a broad knowledge base, but did actually know and like one song with her ahead of time. And, though I discovered plenty of great songs, I didn't find any that I liked more than my first pick. "I Am Here" by CircusP, with Chinese lyrics by UG, is pretty quintessentially Circus; bright synths, a steady build up to the big chorus, even some "whoa-oh-oh"s in the lyrics. I'm damning with faint praise a little bit since I know I sound the most enthusiastic when I can pick out something specific that I really like, but "I Am Here" is just overall a great song, and there's not much more to it than that.

Circus P uses such a wide variety of voicebanks I could've filled up half my list with songs from him if I'd wanted, but I've restrained myself to four. The second of these is another example with a Chinese Vocaloid, but "Wrong + Right," which Circus co-wrote with Marvin Valentin, features Yuezheng Ling singing in English. Now, I called Marvin Valentin a "guitar hero" in my last episode because he does rock music and I was trying to be clever with my transitions, but drums are his real talent, and that's on full display in this song. In fact, every performer is giving just 110%, David Guthrie providing guitars, Tikaal for the bass, and an incredible vocal performance from Ling courtesy of tuner Creuzer. Not only does Ling sing the English lyrics with impressive clarity, Creuzer also draws out as much power and passion from the voicebank as possible to match the intensity of the music.

My third Circus pick is "Boku no Mono" or "My Own" with Utatane Piko. There's a lot that I could say about how amazing Piko sounds here, but it's all already been said by Western

producer Jade Kaiba, who has the top comment on the video. “It feels like Piko's voice goes through multiple different tones here, from deep and soulful to high and pained to a dark, whispery tone. It's really interesting hearing so many dynamics in one song and the visuals compl[e]ment that well.”

The visuals in question mostly consist of Piko in a forest, holding a blank mask in front of his face that cycles through various kaomoji expressions, only once showing his real eyes very briefly. Besides the awesome vocals, the instrumental is also one of my favourites from Circus. There’s a really hollow, pinging sort of xylophone synth that plays this simple descending eighth note riff in the choruses. It contrasts with the quarter-note kick drum-driven synth hits underneath, and together, they lend the song this very intense sense of driving momentum; a determined forward slog, because the only way out is through.

And the last of my Circus songs is “Right as Rain” with Po-uta. I see this song as a sequel of sorts to “Better Off Worse,” which was a strong contender for my V Flower pick. Both songs seem to have come from Circus grappling with the relationship between his art and his mental health struggles, though “Right As Rain” definitely has a much more positive outlook overall. Circus is also as ridiculously good at tuning as ever. In the verses, Po-uta sounds just as exhausted you’d expect from somebody who’s clawed their way out of a really bad place, but not to the point that he’d sound flat. Then, in the chorus, he’s bursting with energy at the top of his range. This song also has one of my favourite videos out of this whole list, even including Ferry’s stuff. I adore the cameos of the other characters from both Circus’ songs and others, and the contrast between the sort of *1942*-esque arcade fighter plane imagery and the more detailed and expressive animation of Po-uta falling to the ground is just so cool.

Now, I know the whole gimmick of Po-uta is that they made a Vocaloid out of Porter Robinson, but with the way they pitched up Robinson’s voice, Po-uta also oddly reminds me a lot of the V5 default voicebank Chris, just… better. Well, debatably better, I’ll be the first to admit that Chris just isn’t my favourite voice. Searching for his entry for this episode was the first time I’d ever like, deliberately sought out music with him, but some people have figured out how to use him really well. Among them is Nishin, who wrote my pick “Errorist.”

The rhythm on this one is interesting. The vocal melody is kinda meandering and halting, but the drumbeat is resolutely steady throughout. This mismatch is great for the tumultuous lyrics, in which Chris laments a betrayal and wonders where to go when he can’t even figure out how things went wrong or how to define friend or foe in the first place. He sounds gentle, even fragile at first, but as the song goes on, Nishin pulls out all the stops for the tuning, drawing every ounce of power from Chris’ voice and pairing it with heavy growl effects. It wouldn’t have sounded good with a less skilled tuner, but with Nishin, it sounds incredible.

Chris was, of course, one of four default voicebanks that came with Vocaloid 5, two English, two Japanese. Chris’ feminine counterpart is Amy, and my favourite Amy song is “the light we cannot see” by hagayui. I love pizzicato strings, and this song opens with a lovely pizzicato riff under Amy’s vocals, plus some twinkly little glockenspiel notes, almost a little bit Toa-ish. The arrangement then swells up from there, shifting to more elaborate bowed synth strings, but never

losing that glittery feeling of those first few bars. Listening to this song gives the same effect as looking at one of those deep space photographs of a nebula.

And my favourite songs for the Japanese defaults, Ken and Kaori, are both by Kasamura Tota, who is another producer who uses such a wide variety of voicebanks that she could've been half my list on her own.

For Ken, I've got "Thread of Glass." This is a happy-sad song if I ever heard one, with a peppy mid-tempo swing beat and some deeply melancholy lyrics about how easily you can get hurt in pursuit of connection with others. Ken is tuned with a very prominent and fast vibrato, which lends to the impression that he feels unsteady, wavering and warbling and worried about whether he'll find a love that can last. Kasamura Tota later released another version of the song with V Flower and Luo Tianyi, but I think that the song works better as a solo than a duet, so Ken's definitely had more impact for me.

And for Kaori, my pick is "The 22-Year-Old's Rebellion." This song is the third in a series, following "The 15-Year-Old's Argument" and "The 18-Year-Old's Responsibility." They're all fairly similar, piano ballads with soulful vocals, so I can't quite put my finger on why this is the one that I like best. I just do. But I think If I had to isolate one particular element that really appeals to me, it might be how even though the song is just piano and vocals, it still manages to ramp up in intensity as it goes. The beginning is very mellow, but by the last chorus, Tota is absolutely slamming on the piano keys, just wrenching emotion out of every note. I don't listen to a lot of piano ballads, but this song is a prime example of why Tota's piano ballads are among them.

V5 was kind of a weird time for vocalsynth. The other engines that have now become pretty ubiquitous like Synthesizer V weren't really much of a thing yet, but responses to the Vocaloid 5 update were pretty tepid. Accordingly, there were only a handful of new Vocaloids for V5—not many updated voices either, for that matter, but that's by the bye. In fact, besides the default four, there were only three voicebanks that debuted on V5.

First, in July of 2018, there was Haruno Sora. These days, I know her better for work using her Synthesizer V bank, but for Vocaloid specifically, I've picked "Seventeen's Dream" by Kininaru Omocha. In a word, this song is eclectic. The composition is very Eurobeat—which is becoming a bit of an odd theme in this episode, I don't listen to that much Eurobeat— but there's also a slap bass on top of that that a commenter—not unreasonably—compares to the one in the Seinfeld theme. As well, there's this sort of chimey, echo-y synth that gives the song the overall impression of like… I guess a magical girl anime theme from the 90s or early aughts. All that's missing is a cute mascot friend for Sora in the video.

And, circling back to paired characters, the other V5 newcomers were twins Meika Mikoto and Meika Hime. Mikoto gets "Shite" by YurryCanon. This song takes full advantage of of the boyish power to Mikoto's voice, and the words she's singing are just as cool. Per the translation notes on the Lyrics Wiki, "Shite" is the term for the protagonist figure in traditional Nōgaku theatre, which includes the dramatic *Noh* and the comedic *Kyougen*. The singer laments that she

does not seem to be the protagonist in her lifee—the beloved main character. She performs and cries out for someone to pay attention, but she is “still not loved enough.”

This is also another song that’s doing something interesting with the composition that I’m not quite educated enough to really break down. There’s some subtle change in the energy of the song when it hits each chorus—it almost feels like a key change, but I found sheet music, and that only happens in the final chorus, not all of them. It’s just… a vibe shift. Nothing jarring, but simply a sense of something ramping up, the desperation in the song becoming more acute.

A very different flavour of desperation permeates my favourite song for Hime, “Paradise” by QueenPb—whose name, admittedly, I’m not 100% sure I’m pronouncing correctly, because the way it’s written makes me wonder if the “Pb” shouldn’t be pronounced “lead” like on the periodic table. Appropriately, the song makes Hime’s gentle, babyish voice hit with all the weight of a lead pipe to the head. She sounds haunted, scared and sorrowful and full of remorse—not for what she’s done, but who she is at her core. There’s also an almost swashbuckling sense of danger to the song, lent by the choice of instruments and a melody full of triplets like an old Irish jig. It truly feels like Hime is singing with the voice of someone beset by an ancient pirate curse, and I love it.

Hime’s voice sounds childish, but she and Mikoto were both sampled from one adult singer. There is, however, a very popular voicebank sampled from an actual female child, and that is Kaai Yuki. I’m making a real basic bitch choice here, but my favourite Kaai Yuki song by far is “Lagtrain” by Inabakumori. Nothing else was even in consideration, because I love that song and have loved it from my very first listen. There’s very little I could say about this song that others haven’t already said, so I’ll take my cues from them. A while back, I found a fantastic breakdown of “Lagtrain” by a fellow on YouTube who goes by the handle Melty Solid. I’ll link to that in the transcript doc, but it’s over 9 minutes long, so to very briefly sum up his point: Lagtrain stands out as a brilliant song even among all of Inabakumori’s other brilliant songs because of how well it plays around with tension. The arrangement constantly shifts, stripped back at times, but just as often an overwhelming rush of sound—and it is always very smart about when the dynamic shifts.

And though there are some songs on this list I would’ve liked just as well if they’d used a different voicebank, I absolutely think that Yuki was the best possible choice of singer here. Beyond the fact that she just always suits Inabakumori’s style, there’s something that just sounds so lonely about this kid’s voice that ties everything together. She doesn’t have much power to her, so when Inabakumori pushes her in the most intense parts of the song, rather than getting a belt, you get something quavering and anxious. There are so many Lagtrain covers out there, by human and synthetic vocalists alike, and I love so many of them, but Yuki owns this song.

Funny enough, though, Lagtrain is not the only song on this list to feature somebody glumly spacing out on a darkened train in the video. The other one is my pick for Chika: “ad nauseam” by jelly. There are a lot of songs out there that grapple with mental illnesses like depression, but I have rarely seen any that so effectively capture how humdrum and routine the misery can become. Fear of the unknown and avoidance of one’s problems can turn sadness into something terribly normal. There’s a glimmer of hope, as the singer notes in the last chorus that she can

“almost see the sun on the other side,” but this song understands that reaching out for it can be really scary.

Aside from being almost painfully relatable, fantastically tuned, and generally catchy as hell, this is also the only song on the list whose creator I’ve actually spoken to, at least over text. I commissioned Jelly for some video art a while back, and they were exceptionally helpful and polite through the whole process. I don’t really know what’s going on with them these days since they’ve largely stepped back from both Vocaloid and social media more generally, but I wish them the best. Great song, great person.

Chika was released by Internet Co. Limited for their final new voicebank for Vocaloid 3. Their first V3 debut was CUL, a collaborative project done with TV program *VOCALO Revolution*. CUL is another voicebank who, for whatever reason, has had most of her success only on Nicovideo and not as much with official YouTube uploads. That said, I found a great rock song called “Dirty Ruby” by TaKa Nome. The guitar solo alone would’ve made this song a solid contender for lots of voicebanks, let alone one as under appreciated as CUL, and the rest of the song is just as exciting to listen to. Rock on, CUL.

Now, a song that’s not exciting to listen to, but absolutely lovely, is my pick for fellow Internet Co. V3 singer kokone. Returning once more to Kasamura Tota, we’ve got “I Won’t Let You Fight Alone Anymore.” This song originally featured Gumi, and though their voices are ultimately very similar, kokone’s version is the better one to me. I’m not sure if it’s tuning or mixing or some odd combination of both, but kokone just sounds way clearer, which is incredibly important when a song is as simple as this one, just a voice and piano. The vocal melody also nicely showcases kokone’s falsettos. Her voicebank switches from chest voice to head voice automatically at D4, but you’d never know listening to Tota’s smooth-tuned transitions there was a hard cut-off like that,. Besides kokone’s vocals, I also particularly love the piano sound here. There’s a little more reverb than you hear in a lot of Tota’s work, and it suits the rather grand themes of the song.

Chika, CUL, and kokone are all kind of the hidden gems in Internet Co.’s lineup, but they’ve also released some much bigger names. I spoke last episode about some of them—namely Gachapoid, Lily, and their superstar Gumi—but none of them would’ve really gotten a chance for success if it hadn’t been for their very first voicebank—Gackpoid, also known as Camui Gakupo. My favourite Gakupo song is “Entwined Hands” by otetsu. otetsu is one of the OGs on the Vocaloid scene, and the official YouTube upload of this song came much later than its album release. If you look in the comments, there are a lot of people excited to see the song get its own video, noting how much they loved the track when they heard it back in like middle school. I can agree that it’s exactly the kind of music that first drew me to Vocaloid when I was a teenager; loud, densely arranged, and almost a little frantic, but unmistakably gorgeous at the same time.

And to close out the episode, we return to the matter of paired Vocaloids—the most iconic of Vocaloid pairs, Kagamine Len and Kagamine Rin. These were some of the hardest picks in the whole list. I *love* the Kagamines, and a lot of the producers that I love use them a lot.

For Len, I finally settled on “FPS” by Neru. Neru is my all-time favourite Vocaloid producer, and it wasn’t really a question of whether he’d get one of my Kagamine slots as much as which one. His composition is alwayys ridiculously impressive, his tuning incredible, and his lyrics a perfect mix of strong emotion and biting social commentary. All of this is true for FPS and then some. Just the chorus’ key change from A flat to D flat would make this song a contender—that’s an insane thing to do and bonkers cool. But the song is just more than the sum of its parts. As much as I love each individual component of the song, it’s just the overall emotional impression that wins it for me. I could watch the music video and feel as wrung out by the end of it as if I’d sat for a screening of a two hour World War II film. Neru is a mad genius, and he knew exactly what he was doing here.

He also nearly got my pick for Rin as well; since I’ve made up my own rules, I don’t mind bending them to give an honourable mention to “Terror.”

But my actual pick for Rin is probably my favourite Vocaloid song period—“Q” by Siinamota. This song is a riptide. I’ve spent a good part of this episode lamenting my lack of music theory knowledge, but I know enough to recognize Siinamota did something special here. The key goes down in the chorus, from D to D flat, but the overall pitch jumps so much that it’s more like he went up eleven keys, which is nuts.

At the same time, the song is pretty simple in a lot of ways. The vocals have some cool effects on them in some places, but there’s not a whole lot going on with the harmonies. And it’s a really relentless, driving song thanks to the tempo and the guitar sound, but overall, the arrangement isn’t as busy as a lot of other Vocaloid songs of its era were. And even then, Siinamota knew it wasn’t right to keep that up for the whole song. In the bridge, he strips it down to just Rin and a drumbeat. The noise filters back in, and hits even louder than ever in the last chorus, but not before you’ve had time to feel just terribly lonely.

In some ways, this song is a lot like the one that closed out part one of my list, Kemu’s “The Defeated Boy” with Gumi. Both deal with themes of loss and regret and grief, but also how to move forward afterwards. I think that the most common reading of “Q” is that someone close to Siinamota died—and there is evidence to back that up, in the comments that he made before his own death and in some of the translations of the song, since there’s always that element as an English listener to a Japanese song. But without any awareness of that I came to my own, slightly different conclusion about the song’s meaning a while ago, and I’ve never seen reason to leave it behind.

I talked about it a bit before in one of the interview episodes, but to me, “Q” feels like a reluctant parting of the ways—a choice. Two people, be they friends or lovers or a secret third thing, have been together for a long time and come to know each other like they know themselves. To separate would be an avulsion of a fundamental part of who they are, but the singer comes to realize that, for whatever reason, they need to do so—maybe forever. It’s a very difficult conclusion to come to, but a decision that the singer nonetheless finds the strength to make anyway, with hope that by embracing this truth, and all the feelings that come with it, will leave them the stronger.

It's a lot. It's even heavier knowing that Siinamota is gone, and that he was really just a kid when he wrote this song. 17 years old, and he took a swing at something that lots of adults are never brave enough to face.

I don't have anything more cheerful to add, to cap off the episode, but I hope that you, like me, find something uplifting in "Q." Grief, after all, comes only after there's been love.

I know this segment was a long time coming. Since part one, I've been hideously busy and sick besides, but I hope it was worth the wait. If all goes well, I'll see you soon for the finale. Until then, enjoy the music, take care of yourself, and thank you so much for listening.

Bye.

1. Lapis Lazuli Concerto - U-SKE ft Otobe Sapphire
2. Some Other Time - Ant ft LEON
3. The Thorn Princess - Purpled ft LOLA
4. Love is Full Throttle! - Ayalis ft Kanon (reprint)
5. Dear Chaos - Ayalis ft Anon (reprint)
6. Clara Clara Fever Roaring Super Night - VNaneP ft Clara
7. The Principle and Art of Ignorance and Suffering - Xue ft Bruno
8. Skydrop - Shimarisu ft Kobayashi Matcha
9. Cycle Anchor - TRIWAVES ft Azuki (and Yuzuki Yukari)
10. In the Autumn Wind - akahori ft Wil (reprint)
11. LETTER - Hinayukki ft Yuu (reprint)
12. Occam's Razor - Ferry ft Kyo
13. COMFORT ZONE - Ferry ft Fukase
14. DOPAMINE MACHINE - Ferry ft Big Al
15. Sweet Joker - zensen ft Fuiro
16. KAWAII!! - OSTER project ft Kusakabe Tsumugi
17. Retroid - Junky ft And Uge
18. Error Message - Atonality ft Kanade (and Ci-chan)
19. Small Differences - Atonality ft Vocalo no Ci-chan
20. TVVS - cora ft Oliver (and Fukase)
21. 5:30 A.M. - Moving Point ft Zhiyu Moke
22. I Am Here - CircusP ft Mo Qingxian
23. Wrong + Right - CircusP and Marvin Valentin ft Yuezheng Ling
24. My Own - CircusP ft Utatane Piko
25. Right as Rain - CircusP ft Po-uta
26. Errorist - Nishin ft Chris
27. the light we cannot see - hagayui ft Amy
28. Thread of Glass - Kasamura Tota ft Ken
29. The 22-Year-Old's Rebellion - Kasamura Tota ft Kaori
30. Seventeen's Dream - Kininaru Omocha ft. Haruno Sora
31. Shite - YurryCanon ft Meika Mikoto
32. Paradise - QueenPb ft Meika Hime

33. Lagtrain - Inabakumori ft Kaai Yuki
    - Melty Solid's breakdown
34. ad nauseum - Jelly ft Chika
35. Dirty Ruby - TaKa NoMe ft. Cul
36. I Won't Let You Fight Alone Anymore - Kasamura Tota ft. Kokone
37. Entwined Hands - otetsu ft Gakupo
38. FPS - Neru ft Kagamine Len
39. Q - Siinamota ft Kagamine Rin