EUROBEAT: A MUSIC GENRE PRODUCED BY ITALIANS, FOR THE JAPANESE MARKET

by

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ABSTRACT

ERJAN SYRGAK. Eurobeat: A Music Genre Produced by Italians, for The Japanese Market. (Under the direction of DR. EHLERS)

Until the end of Japan's bubble economy in 1991, many Japanese people enjoyed living in an affluent economy. One of the popular pastimes many people, especially young urbanites, partook in was dancing at discotheques that frequently played foreign Disco music. In the meantime, Italian dance producers of the 1980s developed and distributed their own type of localized version of electronic Disco music known as Italo-Disco. By the mid-1980s, some Italian producers began exporting their Italo-Disco, often infused with a similar genre known as Hi-NRG, specifically towards the Japanese music market. Overtime, the Eurobeat sound emerged as a result of the transnational music trade between Italian and Japanese companies. However, in this thesis I argue that Eurobeat finally evolved into a proper music genre only after 1990 when the Japanese company Avex, a newcomer to the Eurobeat business, managed to gain exclusivity rights with multiple Eurobeat labels to distribute their music in Japan directly from them. The result of Avex's collaboration with the Italian labels allowed for Eurobeat to reliably sustain itself in the Japanese market through Avex's connection, and along the way distinguish itself as a proper genre accepted locally by Japanese consumers.

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Introduction

What kind of music genre originates from Italy, is sung in English, and is obscure almost everywhere except in Japan? That's Eurobeat, a type of fast-paced disco music historically significant to Japanese electronic dance music culture. Part of a 1980s global pop fad, Eurobeat emerged when Italian disco-dance producers created music aimed specifically for the Japanese market. Not only did Japanese partygoers love dancing to the music, but Eurobeat's sound appealed to Japanese tastes so much that the genre managed to sustain itself even after the Japanese bubble economy popped and the disco trend faded from the international mainstream.

The Eurobeat sound spawned in the late 1980s at a time when many European disco records found their way into Japan. Previously in the 1970s, disco originated from America and from there the disco culture swept across the world throughout the late 1970s.[1] However, by the early 1980s many Americans stopped listening to disco due to its over commercialization while production of it continued in Europe. This is partially why the Japanese music industry eventually adopted the term 'Eurobeat' as a way to conveniently describe imported dance records that usually came from Europe.

The music industry also played an important role in expanding the notion of 'Eurobeat' in Japan. Musicologist Yusuke Wajima, in his article "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," argues that Eurobeat is a music genre that the Japanese music industry "almost fabricated."[2] Wajima regards Eurobeat as a 'pseudo-international' genre because it got accepted by Japanese consumers as an international music when, in reality, Eurobeat's "status as

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[1] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 166.

[2] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 117-118

'international' music was actually only valid in Japan."[3] I utilize Wajima's concept of Eurobeat as a pseudo-international genre as a starting point for my research. The pseudo-international concept aptly applies to the history of Eurobeat's emergence and the realities of its early popularity. The Eurobeat sound developed during a time when Japanese consumers simply referred to a broad range of foreign disco-dance imports as 'Eurobeat.' As such, there is an important distinction to be made between 'proper' Eurobeat and 'fake' 'Eurobeat' in the transnational flow of a globalized genre like disco in Japan.

Like Wajima, I explore the developments of Eurobeat's relationship to the Japanese music industry in this thesis. But I also attempt to elaborate upon Wajima's concept of Eurobeat as a pseudo-international genre by exploring the Italian side of the Eurobeat movement and analyzing the statements made by Italian producers about their memories of the late 1980s and 1990s, the time of Eurobeat's rise. The Italian perspective does not necessarily challenge the interpretation of Eurobeat as pseudo-international music, since Japanese record companies were largely responsible for influencing the development of foreign disco within Japan. But it does offer a more nuanced and balanced account of Eurobeat's industrial evolution as a genre, since the Italian sources showcase both the autonomy and relationship of Eurobeat producers to the Japanese music market. Additionally, my research centers more on the Japanese record company Avex than on Alfa Records, which is the main focus in Wajima's chapter. As such, my thesis places greater importance on the 1990s, when Avex partnered up with various Eurobeat labels to directly commission Eurobeat tracks from them and distribute those tracks in Japan. However, I still do explore disco music in 1980s Japan to a significant extent since it crucially influenced the emergence of Eurobeat.

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[3] Ibid., 102.

In this thesis, I argue that Eurobeat evolved into a proper music genre when Italian disco producers secured a foothold in the Japanese music market in 1990 thanks to an unprecedented close relationship with a Japanese record company, Avex. Due to Avex's desire to directly import Eurobeat from the Eurobeat labels themselves, the Italian producers adapted in response to new interests as a way to sustain and expand their business in the Japanese music market. Prior to Avex, other Japanese record companies like Alfa Records already did business with Italian disco producers, but Avex was the first to establish a close institutional relationship that closely linked a record company (itself) to the Eurobeat labels. Business shaped Eurobeat, but other aspects like the Japanese perception of foreign music and the appearance of new subcultures also heavily influenced the evolution of Eurobeat. It is ultimately due to the viability of Eurobeat as an appealing sound for producers, record companies, and consumers that a foreign genre such as this one was able to thrive and keep a foothold in the second largest music market in the world.

In July 2023, I conducted interviews with four Eurobeat producers from three separate labels to learn more about the emergence and popularity of Eurobeat and gain an insiders' perspective on the process behind its creation. I conducted these interviews in northern Italy with an audio recording device as I spoke to and heard from the interviewees about their memories of producing Eurobeat in the 1980s and 1990s. First, I interviewed Time Record's CEO, Giacomo Maiolini alongside his son who helped interpret. During the interview I learned about the early beginnings of Time Records, their work in pioneering the Eurobeat movement, and their relationship with Avex. Afterwards, I interviewed Clara Moroni, co-founder of Delta Music Industries. During the interview I learned about her career as a Eurobeat vocalist, her experience as a manager of Delta, and Delta's relationship with Avex. Finally, I interviewed Stefano Castagna and his wife Evelina Somenzi, founders of SCP Music. During the interview I learned

about Castagna's experience as a producer in the early days of Eurobeat, how he and his wife founded their label, and SCP Music's position in the industry. The information gathered from each interview was extremely helpful in comprehending the complex developments in early Eurobeat, learning the interviewee's thoughts on Eurobeat's emergence, and other realities about the genre including the role of Avex.

Aside from the interviews, my primary sources also include *Billboard* magazine articles which provide contemporary music industry perspectives on the Japanese music market in the late twentieth century. Otherwise, I rely largely on secondary sources for background on Japanese popular music, disco music, cultural context, and the music industry in general. Most of the online news articles I cite relate to either Japanese pop music or to Eurobeat, including some articles posted by Avex themselves. The website "Discogs," a site that collects data on music records from around the world, helped me explore certain songs that are mentioned in my thesis. Both official and unofficial websites contribute a great deal in learning and understanding Eurobeat for both informal and academic research purposes, despite their occasional unreliability. It is also worth mentioning that Eurobeat's peak popularity in Japanese society mostly occurred during a time when the internet was still in its infancy. So even though the internet contains a lot of information about Eurobeat, a significant amount of other information has been lost as well.

As previously mentioned, I use Yusuke Wajima's chapter about pseudo-international music as a starting point to understand the emergence of Eurobeat and the developments within the Japanese music industry that enabled that emergence. However, Wajima's chapter also deals with larger trends of disco music in the Japanese context and developments within the Japanese

music industry that paved the way for the establishment of modern J-pop.[4] In English scholarship, there does not seem to exist any other scholarly source that deals as much with Eurobeat as Wajima's article. Nevertheless, Eurobeat is briefly mentioned in a variety of other scholarly sources, often those dealing with Japanese popular music. In fact, the field of "Japanese popular music" has been quite rich since at least the 1980s in English scholarly discourse.

In an article from 1983 "Japan in Japan: Notes on an Aspect of the Popular Music Record Industry in Japan," Toru Mitsui discussed the situation of the Japanese music industry in the 1970s and early 1980s. Mitsui noted various interesting contemporary developments in the market, such as foreign companies seeking to establish joint ventures with Japanese record companies because they noticed that a high percentage of records released by Japanese companies were foreign songs. Foreign companies also noticed an overall increase in sales in the Japanese music market, which made establishing joint ventures more desirable for them.[5] Another interesting point made by Mitsui is that international divisions inside Japanese record companies seemed increasingly likely to "concentrate more of their efforts on looking for inexpensive, potential stars from abroad," which "is bound to affect significantly the nature of the music they [Japanese record companies] produce."[6] Meanwhile, as part of a larger picture, Mitsui analyzed the music industry in the context of the liberalization of foreign trade in the Japanese economy.[7] In April 1963, Japan joined the intergovernmental organization OECD, and by 1967 the Japanese government decided to loosen restrictions on foreign investment for

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[4] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 122.
[5] Toru Mitsui, "Japan in Japan: Notes on an Aspect of the Popular Music Record Industry in Japan," *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 108.
[6] Ibid., 119.
[7] Ibid., 107.

industries that could not significantly disrupt the nation's economy, such as the record industry.[8] The information presented in Mitsui's article serves as an important source as it details trends in the Japanese music market that impacted the entire music industry in the early 1980s and later on throughout the rest of the remaining century.

Similarly, Kitagawa Junko's 1991 article "Some Aspects of Japanese Popular Music" analyzes the Japanese music market, but rather than focusing on record companies, it explores the historic evolution of Japanese popular music in its relation to the demographics of consumption and the influence of American music from around 1960 to 1990.[9] Like Mitsui, Kitagawa's research related past patterns to the ever-evolving situation in the then contemporary music market. For example, Kitagawa notes that "the notion that a copy [of a song] is inferior to an original has become less accepted in recent Japan," especially because audio machines, music schools, keyboards, and guitars spread and became common for young listeners to re-compose the music themselves in the early 1990s.[10] The increasing acceptance of copied songs contrasted with the 1960s, when bands who copied other bands faced less acceptance than at the time when Kitagawa published their article. As a result, later Japanese rock bands who copied prominent artists like Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix attracted fans of those artists, young girls who viewed the copy bands as idols, and people who enjoyed the copied song without knowing the originals.[11] In the conclusion of their article, Kitagawa also mentioned that in recent times "those who have advanced musical literacy express their literacy at *karaoke*" and "that people have [developed] their own idiosyncratic taste in popular music."[12] As a side note, singing along to

[8] Ibid., 108.
[9] Kitagawa Junko, "Some Aspects of Japanese Popular Music," *Popular Music* 10, no. 3 (October 1991): 305.
[10] Ibid., 314.
[11] Ibid., 311.
[12] Ibid., 315.

karaoke became a national phenomenon in Japan by the end of the century,[13] so much so that one of the most successful J-pop producers in history, Tetsuya Komuro, greatly utilized karaoke as a way to popularize his dance music. Similarly, Japanese covers of Eurobeat tracks gained wider popularity thanks to their availability at 1990s karaoke places.

Both Mitsui and Kitagawa in their respective articles acknowledged the relevance of Western music in Japan by discussing its presence either as a market force or as a cultural influence. Similarly, Guy de Launey in their 1995 article "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market" takes it a step further by homing in on the status of the declining presence of Western music in the Japanese music market.[14] In it, de Launey argues that domestic Japanese popular music "has as much right to be viewed as 'authentic' as that of any other country" against notions of a local music's inferiority to Western trends. Furthermore, de Launey affirmed that Western pop music is nowhere near as prevalent in Japan, the second largest music market in the world, as some Western observers believed at the time due to the global prevalence Western artists tended to enjoy in the late twentieth century.[15] Like Kitagawa, de Launey also explores the historic evolution of Japanese idols and Japanese rock music, but more extensively in the context of their relationship with Western music. For example, de Launey wrote that the sound of mainstream (mid-1990s) Japanese pop music shares more commonality with 1980s 'Eurobeat' records, such as those by [Italo-Disco artist] Spagna, than with the traditional band line-up of the late 1980s 'band boom.' Additionally, de Launey mentioned that mainstream pop artists such as B'z and Dreams Come True share a pastiche with Earth Wind and Fire (a renowned American Disco group.) Yet there was still a foundational difference in the

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[13] Bonnie C. Wade, *Music in Japan: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 156.
[14] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 209.
[15] Ibid., 223.

construction of how Japanese pop differed from Western pop. Japanese songs placed greater emphasis on the chorus, which "regularly comes at the start" and "is then repeated at frequent intervals." And unlike in Western pop, verses "often appear to be no more than afterthoughts" as they are not "as melodic or memorable as the chorus."[16] In the case of Eurobeat, the term 'Western pop' does not aptly describe the genre because it never gained widespread notoriety in North America, Europe, or Oceania in the 1990s. Instead, Eurobeat became 'big in Japan,' a phrase which refers to whenever a foreign artist [or genre] achieves great commercial success in Japan while not necessarily gaining it anywhere else in the world.[17] Perhaps Eurobeat made it 'big in Japan' because it managed to appeal to Japanese consumer tastes in ways that Western pop could not.

Other English-language authors who have written about Japanese popular music explore it in specific contexts both inside and outside of Japan, and this thesis similarly does the same but with Disco music. In a 2002 article, Kyoko Koizumi conducted an ethnographic study of how male and female Japanese high schoolers behaved regarding popular music both at a school setting and at leisure sites.[18] James E. Roberson in his 2001 article explored the complex relationship between mainland Japan's perception of Okinawan music and the intricacies of popular Okinawan music as a force of local Okinawan identity.[19] In a 2023 article, Maxwell Ramage demonstrated the prevalence of a Western musical chord progression, named the "royal road progression" as a unique characteristic in modern Japanese popular music.[20] Other scholars

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[16] Ibid., 210.
[17] Ibid., 203.
[18] Kyoko Koizumi, "Popular Music, Gender and High School Pupils in Japan: Personal Music in School and Leisure Sites," *Popular Music* 21, no. 1 (2002): 107, https://www.jstor.org/stable/853589.
[19] James E. Roberson, "Uchinaa Pop: Place and Identity in Contemporary Okinawan Popular Music," *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2001): 213, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710122617.
[20] Maxwell Ramage, "The Royal Road Progression in Japanese Popular Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 45, no. 2 (2023): 238.

such as Benjamin Wai-ming Ng and Dal Yong Jin have explored the influence of Japanese popular music in separate East Asian localities outside of Japan. In a 2003 article, Ng explored the then explosive popularity of Japanese pop culture in Southeast Asia, particularly Singapore, and the sociocultural effects of it in Japanizing and hybridizing local media.[21] And Jin, in a 2020 article, examined not only the historical prevalence of J-pop in Korea, but also compared the structures and characteristics of it to the rise of the K-pop industry.[22] In relation to their own respective subject matters, these articles mention the prevalence and/or influence of 1990s J-pop in cultures either abroad or in Japan. Furthermore, whether explicitly mentioned or not in scholarly articles, Eurobeat participated as part of the mid-1990s to the early 2000s J-pop movement via artists such as Namie Amuro, MAX, and V6,[23] who have all previously covered Eurobeat tracks. Koizumi briefly mentioned in their article that Japanese youngsters, such as middle schoolers, enjoyed listening to the pop group V6 in the early 2000s.[24] Roberson noted that famous Okinawan-born J-pop artists such as MAX and Namie Amuro are linked to the Okinawan identity in popular culture,.[25] And Ng stated that that Avex manufactured their copies of J-pop tracks [which also included J-Euro] in Hong Kong for international distribution.[2627]

Indeed, scholarship on Japanese popular music is as extensive as the music itself. Some scholars have dealt with popular music from the perspective of the music industry, as seen with

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[21] Benjamin Wai-ming Ng, "Japanese Popular Music in Singapore and the Hybridization of Asian Music," *Asian Music* 34, no. 1 (2002): 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/834419.

[22] Dal Yong Jin, "Comparative Discourse on J-pop and K-pop: *Hybridity in Contemporary Local Music*," *Korea Journal* 60, no. 1 (2020): 41, DOI: 10.25024/kj.2020.60.1.40.

[23] "V6 – Music For The People," Discogs, accessed June 5, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/6682412-V6-Music-For-The-People.

[24] Kyoko Koizumi, "Popular Music, Gender and High School Pupils in Japan: Personal Music in School and Leisure Sites," *Popular Music* 21, no. 1 (2002): 114, https://www.jstor.org/stable/853589.

[25] James E. Roberson, "Uchinaa Pop: Place and Identity in Contemporary Okinawan Popular Music," *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2001): 215, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710122617.

[26] Benjamin Wai-ming Ng, "Japanese Popular Music in Singapore and the Hybridization of Asian Music," *Asian Music* 34, no. 1 (2002): 4, https://www.jstor.org/stable/834419.

[27] "Various – J-Euro Best," Discogs, accessed, June 5, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/11468525-Various-J-Euro-Best.

Mitsui, while other scholars have observed Japanese popular music through a comparative lens, such as de Launey, who has compared the status of Western pop to domestic pop in Japan. In general, late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century scholars have primarily studied the Japanese popular music scene because it represents a significant portion of the Japanese entertainment industry and therefore played a relevant role in the lives of millions of people. Additionally, popular music in the world's second largest music market also plays a major role in international media consumption for people outside of Japan, however insulated the Japanese market may be.

As such, placing a foreign genre like Eurobeat within the context of Japanese popular music sets it in direct relation to the significance of the Japanese music market, and to the history and culture of music in Japan. By doing this, I do not mean to suggest that Eurobeat is literally a Japanese music genre, even though it did emerge thanks to the receptivity of the Japanese market. Italian producers did indeed develop Eurobeat in the social and cultural context of northern Italy when they exported their tracks to Japan. However, by also situating Eurobeat in the Japanese context, we can distinguish Eurobeat as a unique case where a Western dance genre was integrated into the Japanese music market. I share Wajima's concept of Eurobeat as a pseudo-international genre, a genre almost 'fabricated' by the Japanese record industry, because it does logically situate Eurobeat as a music reflecting the market it originated from. However, I argue that Eurobeat evolved into a proper music genre around 1990 because my examination of the growth of the Eurobeat industry showed that the involvement of Avex helped legitimize an 'artificial' genre into a proper one. Historians of Japanese music and culture may recognize Eurobeat as an important, and underrepresented, subject within Japanese music culture. As a foreign genre produced specifically for the Japanese market, it managed to not only leave a mark

in Japanese electronic music history, but also helped establish modern J-pop in the 1990s. Additionally, scholars of popular music in general may consider Eurobeat a useful case to show how, even in a rapidly globalizing world, transnational exchange between Italian producers and Japanese record companies allowed for an entire music genre to spawn inside a single foreign market.

This thesis attempts to demonstrate that thanks to the cooperation between Italian producers and Avex, Eurobeat emerged as a proper genre and grew into a local part of electronic dance music culture in Japan. A focus on the Italian producers is fundamentally important because not only did they create the genre, but they also expanded it by continuously producing new tracks and new styles of Eurobeat for over a decade. Additionally, this thesis shows that Eurobeat's diversification and tremendous growth in popularity happened only after new Italian Eurobeat labels began to distribute their music in Japan via Avex. As a result, Avex de facto dominated the Eurobeat market in Japan by the late 1990s. To be sure, there are also important points that could be raised to challenge this thesis. First, the sound of Eurobeat, and thus Eurobeat itself, arguably already existed prior to 1990 before Avex entered the scene. Additionally, Alfa Records, the Japanese record company that popularized the term 'Eurobeat' in Japan, continued to distribute Eurobeat music produced by Asia Records (a prominent Eurobeat label) all the way into the mid-1990s. Therefore, a significant amount of Eurobeat continued to be distributed outside of Avex's grasp in spite of Avex's quick growth as a powerful force in the dance music market in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, Avex's role in continuously pushing Eurobeat in Japan led it to eventually becoming the major distributor and advertiser of Eurobeat. Additionally, the Eurobeat labels who were involved with Avex's distribution became the main source for what has now become known as "Eurobeat" around the world.

It is noteworthy to mention that I do not provide a musicological analysis of Eurobeat, but rather a study on the emergence of an industry and the popularity of the music it produced. And because my focus is on the Eurobeat labels who were involved with Avex, this thesis does not discuss other Japanese record companies such as Alfa Records or Italian labels such as Asia Records in great detail. This is not to deny the major role these companies have played in helping define and create the Eurobeat world since the early days. But compared to subject matters like Avex, sources about Alfa Records (regarding Eurobeat) are relatively scarce, while Avex has left footprints on Eurobeat's history that continue to this day. With regard to Italy, both the primary and secondary sources I acquired during my research leaned towards emphasizing the role of a label like ABeatC rather than Asia Records in expanding the genre's popularity. Thus, among other factors, this thesis does not attempt to paint a complete picture of Eurobeat's history, but merely a portion of it.

The structure for the thesis is as follows. Chapter 1 surveys the history of Eurobeat in Japan, first by introducing what Eurobeat is and then exploring the extent of Eurobeat's presence in twentieth-century Japan. It also shows that Eurobeat was appealing enough to Japanese listeners that it remained relevant as an electronic music genre even outside of Discotheque dance floors. Chapter 2 explores the Italian side of the Eurobeat story and the early transnational connection between the Japanese music market and Italy. The chapter is about the process of Eurobeat's emergence, and as such, I primarily focus on the 1980s when Eurobeat was in its infancy. It concludes by arguing that the Italian producers' search for new music and aiming for success in the international market fortuitously coincided with the musical preferences of the affluent Japanese music market in the 1980s. Chapter 3 examines Avex's rise as a major record company and its relationships with various Eurobeat labels. The interviews I conducted with the

Italian producers further indicate a close connection and/or dependency between the producers and the Japanese market. I argue that Avex's interests, Avex's growth, and the appearance of new Eurobeat labels all contributed to both Eurobeat's popularity and prevalence as a distinct genre in Japan.

To sum up, chapter 1 showcases the extent of Eurobeat's popularity in Japan, chapter 2 explores the transnational foundations of Eurobeat's emergence, and chapter 3 examines the importance of the Eurobeat labels' connections to Avex. Together, these three chapters consolidate the central argument of this thesis. Eurobeat evolved into a distinct music genre through the sustained import and receptivity for it in 1990s Japan after Avex began to cooperate closely with Eurobeat producers. In terms of the broader history, Eurobeat's emergence as a distinct genre and its appeal among Japanese consumers proves how a foreign music can become a locally accepted sound ingrained into Japanese electronic music history.

Chapter 1: An Overview of Eurobeat

Compared to popular music in Europe, North America, and elsewhere, it is odd to consider that in Japan, 1980s electronic Disco music continued all the way into the early 2000s almost uninterrupted as a relevant music genre. Although the sound of Eurobeat did audibly evolve throughout the 1990s to fit newer preferences, the purpose and essence of Eurobeat remained relatively consistent from the mid-to-late 1980s. Eurobeat producers (predominantly Italians) wrote the lyrics, composed the arrangements, and fine-tuned the mixing of a track before handing it to a Japanese distributor to sell in Japan. And as it turned out, Japanese consumers kept buying, listening, and dancing to Eurobeat even after the affluent bubble economy collapsed and a 'new form' of Japanese popular music known as J-pop took hold of mainstream society.

This chapter surveys what Eurobeat is, what its place was in late twentieth century Japanese society, and why it appealed to so many people over the years. Of course, Eurobeat did not supersede established, highly popular, domestic artists such as the Japanese rock duo B'z. Instead, since its emergence, Eurobeat first found its core audience in the discotheque scene before expanding to include other segments of society such as fans of J-pop groups like MAX, motorsport enthusiasts, and young women that danced the 'Para Para.' So, rather than competing with domestic pop, Eurobeat carved out its own niche within the Japanese market and was even embraced by some local pop artists.

Throughout the paper I argue that Eurobeat evolved into a proper music genre when Eurobeat producers began collaborating closely with the Japanese record company Avex. This chapter demonstrates the results of that collaboration through an examination of Eurobeat's popularity in 1990s Japan. New Eurobeat labels, founded after 1990, particularly helped

facilitate that popularity. In the 1980s, Eurobeat still belonged to a broader international Disco trend in Japan, but then, factors such as Avex helped 'officialize' Eurobeat as its own distinct genre. Yet in both decades, the appeal of Eurobeat's sound to Japanese consumers was the key reason why Eurobeat landed a foothold in the Japanese market, and why it managed to *secure* that foothold over time.

I begin the chapter by introducing the concept of Eurobeat and a few intricacies of its industry in section 1. I then follow by establishing the historical context of Disco music in Japan and the urban places where 'Eurobeat' was listened to in section 2. Then, in section 3 I explore the usage of English and the 'exoticism' of Eurobeat in relation to its appeal to Japanese consumers while simultaneously gradually transitioning from the 1980s to the 1990s. And finally in section 4, I showcase the cultural reach of Eurobeat's popularity in Japanese society beyond the discotheques of the 1980s. The chapter attempts to not only give an overview of the history of Eurobeat, but to also establish the crucial point that Eurobeat prevailed as a relevant music in Japan beyond just being a fad of the times.

Section 1: What is Eurobeat?

Eurobeat is an 'electronic dance music' genre (EDM), a massive umbrella term used to describe various electronic musical styles including Electro, House, Techno, Trance and so on. But unlike many of those genres, which initially gained their prominence in Europe and North America, Eurobeat historically links to Japan because it got produced specifically for Japanese listeners. As such, Eurobeat developed in close association with the music market in Japan ever since its sound began to emerge in the mid-to-late 1980s.

Eurobeat's sound traditionally derives from two other EDM genres, Hi-NRG and Italo-Disco. Hi-NRG first appeared in the late 1970s as a faster paced, more electronic, and more

upbeat style of Disco music. Hi-NRG differed from standard 1970s Disco by valuing melodies over basslines and velocity over funkiness in its sound.[28] Similarly, Italo-Disco, which also emerged in the late 1970s, departed from standard Disco's funkiness to a more hard-core electronic atmosphere supported by pumped-up bassy sounds.[29] And by the late 1980s, early Eurobeat came about as a merger between these two genres since both of them appealed to Japanese listeners and dancers at discotheques.

Although not always exclusively produced by Italians, Eurobeat originated in northern Italy in the latter half of the 1980s when Italian record companies such as Time Records, Asia Records, and Flea Records began to export their Italo-Disco/Hi-NRG/Eurobeat tracks to Japan. As these tracks streamed into Japan, their sound continuously evolved entering the 1990s. During that decade, Eurobeat diversified with the appearance of new labels and individuals who significantly contributed to the creation of new styles and sounds. For example, the composer Bratt Sinclaire utilized their background in rock music to compose melodic yet unusually aggressive Eurobeat tracks, such as "King & Queen," which differed from the late 1980s Hi-NRG approach that Japanese DJs grew familiar with.[30] Nevertheless, a commonality that many Eurobeat tracks share is the presence of synthesizers, an A melody, a B melody, chorus, riffs, kicking rhythmic sounds, festive percussions, and a tempo of often over 140 beats-per-minute.[31] Additionally, most Eurobeat tracks are typically sung in English, but a fair number of them are also in Japanese.

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[28] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 196.

[29] Andrea A. Bufalini and Giovanni Savastano, *La Storia Della Disco Music* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Milano, 2019), 330.

[30] "My Eurobeat," Bratt Sinclaire, accessed May 11, 2024, https://brattsinclaire.com/about-me/my-biography/.

[31] Saika Shinnosuke サイカ シンノスケ, "[Eibekkusu no genten!] Sūpāyūrobīto no rekishi ni semaru!" [エイベックスの原点!] SUPER EUROBEATの歴史にせまる！ [[The origin of Avex!] Closer to the history of SUPER EUROBEAT!], *Avexnet*, December 28, 2016, https://avexnet.jp/column/detail.php?id=1000132.

Aside from the abovementioned pioneers, other staple Eurobeat labels include ABeatC, Hi-NRG Attack, Delta Music Industry, SCP Music, and more. It is worth mentioning that some significant Eurobeat labels like Flea Records and Vibration are either defunct or have been inactive since the 1990s. Additionally, Eurobeat tracks did not always get produced solely for exportation to Japan, or they simply did not initially (or officially) make it into the Japanese market for whatever reason. In the case of the label Vibration, founded in 1995, the Japanese record company Avex initially did not cooperate with them for Japanese distribution because it was already dealing with enough other partners[32] like Time Records, ABeatC, Hi-NRG Attack, and eventually Delta Music Industry.

By the mid-1990s, it appears that many Eurobeat producers seemed to gravitate towards wanting to distribute their music in Japan via Avex since Avex played a dominant role in the Japanese dance music market at the time. Reliable access into the Japanese market for Eurobeat producers served as a crucial source of the Eurobeat industry's growth. But even before Avex's involvement, success within the Japanese market was sought after since it was/is the second largest music market in the world. This meant that consumer engagement and spending for music was a lot higher in Japan than elsewhere in the world, aside from the even bigger market of the United States of America. However domestic music sold a lot better in Japan than most foreign songs that entered it in the 1990s[33] since many consumers preferred music they could relate to and understand. Meanwhile, as a music genre traditionally 'made by Italians for the Japanese,' Eurobeat managed to set a foothold within Japan as early as in the late 1980s. Yet Eurobeat producers *secured* this foothold only once they established a direct link with Avex since that allowed them to sustain a continuous export of Eurobeat to the Japanese music market via Avex's

[32] Castagna, Stefano, and Evelina Somenzi, audio interview by author, Milan, Italy, July 18th, 2023.
[33] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 204.

distribution. By the end of the twentieth century, Eurobeat as an international genre became not so foreign anymore in Japan, but rather institutionalized as a part of modern Japanese dance music culture.

The substance behind Eurobeat's success in securing a foothold in Japan lays in its appealing sound and the popularity of that sound amongst Japanese consumers. Like a lot of EDM, Eurobeat descends from disco music. But Eurobeat as a cultural product may be seen originating as part of a broader global EDM trend known as Euro-Disco. An umbrella term, Euro-Disco refers to a variety of 1980s disco music produced in multiple European countries including France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Western Germany. Depending on the definition or viewpoint, Italo-Disco also falls under Euro-Disco or, at the very least, they both share the strong similarity of mixing electronic sounds with disco rhythms and a strong usage of synthesizers.[34] In the 1980s when digital equipment became relatively inexpensive to obtain,[35] Euro-Disco appealed to record producers and DJs because it was cheap to produce, and it brought in quick revenue after release. For consumers, Euro-Disco offered immediate transnational appeal thanks to its bouncy beats, chorus hooks, simple lyrics, and sometimes even a sleazy nostalgic charm.[36] Of course, Euro-Disco initially appealed to popular tastes in numerous European countries including the United Kingdom, which possessed a very large music market comparable to Japan's.[37] Yet ever since disco became a global phenomenon in the late 1970s,[38] people in countries outside of North America and Europe, like in Japan, naturally also began to listen to Euro-Disco and genres like it around the same time.

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[34] "Euro-Disco," Discogs, accessed May 20th, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/style/euro-disco.
[35] Richard James Burgess, *The History of Music Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 116.
[36] Simon Frith, "Euro Pop," *Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (1989): 168, DOI:10.1080/09502388900490111.
[37] Ibid., 169.
[38] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 166.

Section 2: Disco Dancing in Japan

Because music and dancing are seemingly inseparably intertwined for humans as a species,[39] it should come to no surprise that people in Japan, too, like to dance. Historically, one of the earliest appearances of Western dancing in Japan occurred in the mid-nineteenth century during the Meiji era. In an effort to Westernize their nation, the Japanese elite adopted ballroom 'social dancing' to show Westerners that the Japanese people "can also dance in a 'civilized' way." However, many citizens initially disliked social dances because they considered them vulgar and overtly sexual since intimately dancing in public while also entwined with another individual seemed unusual.[40] But after World War II ended, people became interested in dancing again because both Japanese citizens and the American occupation forces needed a form of leisure, and so, new dance halls appeared in the postwar years. In accordance with Japanese law, these dance halls quickly became businesses because they served alcohol. And before long, dancing became a commercialized part of the entertainment industry where men and women intermingled openly.[41] Aside from other music genres like Rock'n'Roll, Tango, Swing, and later Salsa, disco dancing was one of the earliest forms of Western dancing imported to Japan.[42]

But before disco music became popular in Japan, various stylistic origins of disco music already enjoyed a growing presence since the late 1960s. Between 1967 to 1968, some people began listening to popular Rhythm and Blues artists such as the Four Tops and the Supremes. In the early 1970s, Soul artists Stevie Wonder and Diana Ross gained a large following when record companies began promoting their Soul records. Not long afterwards, local press media picked up

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[39] Richard James Burgess, *The History of Music Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112.
[40] Nana Okura Gagné, "Romance and sexuality in Japanese Latin dance clubs," *Ethnography* 15, no. 4 (December 2014): 450.
[41] Ibid., 451.
[42] Ibid., 452.

the term “black funk” and used it to introduce artists like the Crusaders and Kool & Gang to the public. In 1974, both the American ‘Bump’ dance and the song “Bump” by the Commodores grew popular among the youth who began dancing to it at newly appearing discotheques. The Commodores visited Japan in 1975 when the ‘All Japan Soul Disco Organization’ hosted the nationwide event “All Japan Bump Contest.” In March of the same year, the song “Hustle” by Van McCoy ranked first place for 20 weeks straight on the Japanese international music charts, selling over 500,000 copies. And later in November, the ‘All Japan Hustle Contest’ took place. In 1977, around 600 discotheques existed in various cities across Japan, including about 100 just in Tokyo.[43]

By the late 1970s, dancing to disco music and going to discotheques became a very popular pastime among the Japanese youth.[44] The rise of disco’s popularity coincided with the rise of new popular Japanese rock and electronic music artists like Southern All Stars and Yellow Magic Orchestra. Idol, Folk, and Rock music constituted a large portion of popular music in 1970s and 1980s Japan. And although many young people continued to listen to Japanese idols and rock bands, many also frequented discotheques. There, often urged on by DJs, the urban youth danced away to ‘Eurobeat’ at high volume.[45] Historically, Japanese DJs in the 1970s differed from their American counterparts by talking a lot more directly to their audiences. And since Japanese crowds did not easily go wild on dance floors due to shyness, the DJ was expected to set the entire mood inside a discotheque to help ease people into dancing to new unfamiliar songs. Japanese discotheques even contained inhouse dancers that sometimes instructed a crowd on how to dance to a song. Additionally, record companies in the 1970s

[43] Ben Okano, “Japan: Discovering Its Own Musical Diversity,” *Billboard*, April 30th, 1977.
[44] Kazu Fukatsu, “Disco makes itself at home,” *Billboard,* May 26th, 1979.
[45] Yoshio Sugimoto, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 270.

utilized discotheques to promote their records by attempting to tie a new dance to a song.[46] Perhaps these characteristics of Japanese discotheques partially influenced the later rise of 'Para Para,' a dance based on arm movements which is closely associated with Eurobeat.

Due to disco's great popularity in the 1970s and 1980s Japanese urban entertainment scene, it even became trendy to attach the phrase "Disco Hit" to singles and albums in the Japanese music industry. Following this trend, in 1982 many record companies including Alfa Records, CBS/Sony, Canyon, Toshiba-EMI, Nippon, Warner-Pioneer and more, participated in a national push to promote "Dance Contemporary" music. The term referred to the following music types: New Wave, Black music, Fusion, Rock, and of course, Disco. The record companies promoted their respective artists such as Shakatak, Donna Summer, Men at Work, the Village People, Kool & Gang, and so on.[47] It certainly seems that by the early 1980s, dance, as a music style, took a hold in Japan.

Financially, life in 1980s Japan was good, with a growing economy, modest inflation, and unemployment remaining under 2%, many people enjoyed monetary freedom which contributed to the rising popularity of Disco.[48] One of the few financial issues people did face was the expensive Yen causing export costs to soar. Nevertheless, at the time people in Japan viewed the world with confidence as reflected by their country's average gross-national-product growth rates higher throughout the decade in comparison to other wealthy countries like UK, France, West Germany, and even the U.S.A.[49] Back in the immediate postwar decades, Japanese people understood themselves as part of a nation building effort to improve the economy for themselves

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[46] Ben Okano, "Japan: Discovering Its Own Musical Diversity," *Billboard*, April 30th, 1977.
[47] Shig Fujita, "Japanese Labels Unite in 'Dance Contemporary' Push," *Billboard*, November 20, 1982, 74.
[48] Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 309.
[49] Ibid., 310.

and their families. However, by the 1980s, many urban young people behaved with a different, more playful, mentality. Single young women, who often worked modest jobs as "office ladies" while living rent-free at home, became a noticeable consumerist force in the economy. The media portrayed this new group of women with mixed receptions, sometimes perceiving them akin to the 1920s "modern girl." But unlike previous generations, the 1980s 'office ladies' enjoyed spending their money to obtain the newest electronic devices like Walkman music players and fax machines. Meanwhile, the middle-aged crowd often referred to the new youth as *shinjinrui*, meaning a "new species" or "aliens" for their frivolous attitudes to life and overt materialism. While some middle-aged men were workaholics, some young men on the other hand became known as *furiita*, "free arbiters," who oddly rejected secure corporate jobs for the opportunity to freelance instead.[50] In general, the affluent economic conditions of the 1980s very likely contributed to the greater prevalence of discotheques in Japan, since a substantial number of people could afford to enjoy themselves on the dance floors.

Shinjuku and Roppongi, two city districts within Tokyo, served as significant spots for the evolution of Japanese disco culture since the early 1970s. Regarded as a popular youth entertainment district even today, Shinjuku contained many discotheques close to nearby universities and colleges in the area, such as the prominent private institute of Waseda University. After the mid-1970s, discotheques began attracting teenage customers by offering inexpensive admission fees and free low-quality food. It is also in Shinjuku where discotheque staff at various venues invented choreographed dances that later influenced typical characteristics of Japanese disco dancing, likely including Para Para. Meanwhile, Roppongi discotheques offered a more sophisticated, affluent, and adult atmosphere due to its reputation for celebrity

[50] Ibid., 317.

status and as a westernized locale.[51] African American customers, from a nearby U.S. embassy and Army facilities, attended discotheques that played Funk, Soul, and Rhythm and Blues music. These customers played an important role in diffusing and popularizing new musical trends in Japan. However, in contrast to these venues that devoted themselves to authentic African American music, newer consumerist Eurobeat-playing discotheques opened in Roppongi by the mid-1980s.[52]

In 1984 the discotheque 'Maharaja Tokyo' opened, and by the late 1980s 'Maharaja' became a very popular discotheque chain that epitomized Japan's bubble economy's hedonistic culture.[53] The bubble economy is characterized by a rapid rise in asset prices, overheating of economic activity, and a sizable increase in money supply and credit.[54] In relation to discotheques, the bubble economy (roughly 1987-1991) meant that partygoers carried a greater degree of financial prowess to go enjoy themselves at discotheques. And it so happened that during this period, Japanese consumers liked Hi-NRG and Italo-Disco so much that the Maharaja at Tokyo released its own Japanese covers of popular 'Eurobeat' tunes associated with the venue, such as Michael Fortunati's "Give Me Up" and Dead or Alive's "Turn Around and Count 2 Ten."[55] Some Eurobeat experts or fans consider that the 'first Eurobeat boom' happened in the 1980s when franchises like Maharaja readily appealed to the urban youth and dominated the

[51] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," in *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, ed. Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zuba (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 105.
[52] Ibid., 106.
[53] Ibid., 118.
[54] Kunio Okina, Masaaki Shirakawa, and Shigenori Shiratsuka, "The Asset Price Bubble and Monetary Policy: Japan's Experience in the Late 1980s and the Lessons," *Monetary and Economic Studies* 19, no. S-1 (February 2001): 397.
[55] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," in *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, ed. Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zuba (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 118.

Japanese nightlife entertainment scene.[56] By the end of the bubble period, the term ‘Eurobeat’ became closely intertwined with discotheques.

Section 3: The Appeal of Eurobeat

The earliest usage of the term ‘Eurobeat’ appeared in the UK *Record Magazine* as a substitute marketing term for Hi-NRG music from November 1985 to May 1987 before reverting to ‘Hi-NRG’ again.[57] Alfa Records, one of the first Japanese record companies to import Eurobeat from Italy, adopted the term ‘Eurobeat’ and used it as a marketing term for various imported disco-dance tracks from abroad. Thus, by the time the early Eurobeat sound emerged, it spawned from and coincided with a trend in the mid-1980s when Japanese record companies and consumers began to collectively refer to songs from ‘genres' like Euro-Disco, Italo-Disco, Hi-NRG, and so on, as simply ‘Eurobeat.’ A French musician of Italian descent, Michael Fortunati found himself referred to as a ‘Eurobeat’ artist in Japan after his Euro-Disco single “Give Me Up” became a hit there despite not having referred to himself as one prior to this. Fortunati’s song was found on the first ‘Eurobeat’ album released in November 1986 by Alfa International, a then sublabel of Alfa Records, titled “That’s Eurobeat Vol. 1.” Alongside “Give Me Up” is a remix of an Italo-Disco vocalist Ken Laszlo’s track “Tonight,” French Euro-Disco band Magazine 60’s “Don Quichotte,” British Hi-NRG vocalist Angie Gold’s “Timebomb,” American Hi-NRG pioneer Bobby Orlando and Canadian Disco vocalist Claudja Barry’s “Whisper To A

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[56] Saika Shinnosuke サイカ シンノスケ, “[Eibekkusu no genten!] Sūpāyūrobīto no rekishi ni semaru!” [エイベックスの原点!] SUPER EUROBEATの歴史にせまる！ [[The origin of Avex!] Closer to the history of SUPER EUROBEAT!], *Avexnet*, December 28, 2016, https://avexnet.jp/column/detail.php?id=1000132.

[57] Yusuke Wajima, “Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music,” In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 117.

Scream," and more.[58] Although That's Eurobeat Vol. 1 included artists unaffiliated with each other, every track included nevertheless shared a key similarity, a danceable sound.

Eurobeat as a 'proper' genre arguably started with 'Super Eurobeat,' a CD album compilation series similar to That's Eurobeat. On January 21st, 1990, "Super Eurobeat Vol. 1 – Time Compilation" was released under the Italian "Beat Freaks" label. Time Records mixed every track in SEB Vol 1. and the Italian EDM publisher Disco Magic S.r.l. distributed it. Later, perhaps part of a prearranged agreement, Avex officially took over the SEB series by releasing volume 9 on November 25th, 1990. As of 2021, a great number of Eurobeat tracks are found within the 250 volumes of SEB and its spin-off compilations related to it such as 'Eurobeat Flash.'[59] Japanese consumers listened to SEB because it generally contained a lot of musical elements that tended to appeal to Japanese dance-music consumers, such as sparkling synth riffs, easy-to-follow 4/4 rhythms, and melancholy melodies."[60]

Despite being a largely English language-based genre, Eurobeat continued to find success in Japan even as the global Euro-Disco trend ended and while the domestic market continued to eclipse Western music in sales. SEB Vol. 100, the best-selling Eurobeat album of all time, managed to reach 9th place in the *Billboard's* Japanese album charts from late August to early September 1999.[61] Additionally, it also ranked 50th place as the bestselling album of 1999

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[58] "That's Eurobeat Vol. 1," Discogs, accessed May 20, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/571646-Various-Thats-Eurobeat-Vol-1.

[59] "About HI-BPM Studio," Avex, accessed April 6, 2024, https://avex.jp/eurobeat/about/english.php.

[60] Tomoyuki Mori, "Yūrobīto-kai no jūchin DJ bosu ga kataru dapanpu `U. S. A.' Hitto no hiketsu" ユーロビート界の重鎮・DJ BOSSが語る　DA PUMP「U.S.A.」ヒットの秘訣 [DJ BOSS, a heavyweight in the Eurobeat world, talks about the secret behind DA PUMP's "U.S.A." hit], *Oricon,* September 15, 2018, https://www.oricon.co.jp/confidence/special/51785/.

[61] Linda Nash and Menno Visser, "Hits of the World," *Billboard,* September 4, 1999, https://books.google.com/books?id=nwgEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA56&dq=billboard+1999+september&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwib4rih7aSGAxVpMlkFHfgrANQQ6AF6BAgWEAI#v=onepage&q=japan&f=false.

according to the Japanese music chart, Oricon.[62] Meanwhile, in the context of the 1990s, the average Japanese consumer greatly preferred music produced by home-grown artists over foreign ones. Even global superstars like Michael Jackson, who sang in English, sold only in average amounts in Japan while local artists usually sold significantly more. Previously, further in the past, American music once dominated the Japanese music market immediately following the end of World War II in the first couple of decades.[63] Yet in more recent times, the success of local artists signified an erosion of the dominance of Anglo-American music, not just in Japan but around the world as well. As a side note, in my interview with the veteran Eurobeat producer Clara Moroni, she interestingly mentioned that she stuck to her 'Anglo-Saxon' and Italian roots of Eurobeat production by rarely including things like Japanese words into their tracks,[64] while other non-Japanese Eurobeat creators have more frequently indulged in adding non-English cultural flares into their tracks. An actual musicology of Eurobeat's sound, the purpose of that sound, and its effects may reveal the degree to which the musical structure of Eurobeat helped it distinguish itself from other Western music and complement itself in the Japanese market. Either way, the prevalence of domestic Japanese music over foreign music in Japan becomes clear when, in May 1994, the only foreign single listed in Oricon's top fifty all-time singles belonged to English singer Daniel Boone's "Beautiful Sunday," which aired as a theme song for a 1976 TV show broadcasted by TBS.[65]

On the other hand, Western pop and the English language have left an influential mark on modern Japanese popular music in all aspects. In J-pop, English song titles and English phrases

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[62] "1999 Oricon Top 100 Albums," Generasia, accessed May 20, 2024, https://www.generasia.com/wiki/1999_Oricon_Top_100_Albums.

[63] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 204.

[64] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.

[65] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 222.

in lyrics are still often utilized, and sometimes even slightly preferred.[66] Back in the 1970s, non-rock Japanese Folk artists who strove for broader appeal distinguished themselves under the English moniker 'New Music.'[67] And City Pop, a term originally used to describe a Western-influenced offshoot of New Music containing styles like Jazz and Rhythm & Blues,[68] was sometimes produced within the Disco context of the late 1970s and early 1980s. There, songs like the 1979 "Bomber" by Tatsuro Yamashita became an unexpected hit song in Osaka's discotheques,[69] while Mariya Takeuchi's 1985 "Plastic Love" referred to a casual love affair occurring in relation to attending a discotheque. However, for a variety of reasons, City Pop did not remain very relevant at discotheques. One of the reasons behind it, is that many DJs at the time apparently believed that songs played at discotheques needed to be sung in English.[70] Perhaps this insistence on English-language tracks by Japanese DJs helped partially set a precedent, or acceptance, for consumers to continue listening to English sung Eurobeat even after the 1980s.

Nevertheless, broader trends influenced by the globalization of the English language likely contributed the most to listeners' passive familiarity with English vocals in Disco-like music. In Europe, simultaneous to the rise of Eurobeat, various artists from different national backgrounds achieved transnational pop status while performing new EDM genres like Eurodance in the English language. 2 Unlimited, Culture Beat, and Ace of Base, respectively from the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden, are some of the major artists who managed to

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[66] Arthur Bernstein, Naoki Sekine, and Dick Weissman, *The Global Music Industry: Three Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 251.
[67] Philip Brasor and Tsubuku Masako, "Idol Chatter: The Evolution of J-pop," *Japan Quarterly*, April-June, 1997, 57.
[68] Ryotaro Aoki, "City pop revival is literally a trend in name only," *The Japan Times*, July 5, 2015, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/07/05/music/city-pop-revival-literally-trend-name/.
[69] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 114.
[70] Ibid., 115.

score international hits in the 1990s.[71] Of course, the situation in the European and the Japanese music markets should not be directly compared; however, the continued usage of English among pop artists outside of the U.S.A. and the UK indicate that English remained the most relevant language for EDM. Beforehand, in the late 1970s, individuals like Patrick Hernandez helped set a precedent for European Disco artists to achieve transnational success by singing in English, the global language. Influenced by Hernandez, the success of Michael Fortunati's "Give Me Up" likely benefited a great deal from Fortunati's and his team's decision for him to sing the song in English, rather than in his native French, because it allowed the Euro-Disco song to also reach all way to the Asian markets.[72]

Another relevant factor behind Eurobeat's longevity inside the Japanese music market may reside not only in its audible appeal, but also in its presentation. As its name suggests, Eurobeat (in reference to Europe) was immediately understood as an inherently international music style, a status that likely helped rather than hindered its popularity. Historically, Japan has often maintained a clear awareness of differences in music styles between native and foreign cultural origins.[73] In recent times, some Japanese musicians still prefer to maintain a musicological boundary between "ours" and "theirs" in their concern with upholding the authenticity of foreign genres like jazz or classical. The mentality of maintaining boundaries may extend even beyond just music and into wider cultural Japanese thought. This can be seen in the common usage of 'katakana,' a separate script in Japanese used to write foreign words.[74] The

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[71] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 222.
[72] "Interview – Michael Fortunati: Give Me Up," Pop Music Deluxe, accessed September 27, 2023. https://popmusicdeluxe.fr/2020/06/23/interview-michael-fortunati-give-me-up/.
[73] Luciana Galliano, *Yogaku: Japanese Music in the 20th Century* (Blue Ridge Summit: Scarecrow Press, Incorporated, 2002), 5.
[74] Bonnie C. Wade, *Music in Japan: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 138.

broad cultural context of maintaining boundaries perhaps even contributed to the popular willingness to accept the term 'Eurobeat' by Japanese consumers as a way to distinguish the arrival of foreign EDM in the 1980s. Furthermore, perhaps questioning the aspects of authenticity and the exoticism of Eurobeat may yield relevance as to why Eurobeat, a foreign genre, persisted and thrived inside the Japanese market.

In the case of authenticity, the audience for disco music, and to an extent also Eurobeat, generally seemed to lack the same degree of interest in pursuing an intellectual understanding of their genre when compared to other audiences for genres like jazz, rock, or hip-hop. Indeed, it seems that Disco audiences accepted, or simply enjoyed, the 'superficiality' of Disco music.[75] In contrast, numerous twentieth-century Japanese jazz artists who displayed brilliant technical skills as jazz players still doubted their own authenticity as artists of a musical style that originated from abroad. To both artists and the consumers, jazz music sometimes did not seem 'authentic' to them unless played by Americans, even though Japan already possessed one of the richest jazz markets in the world.[76] Japanese consumers of classical music also seemed to harbor concerns over the authenticity of a music that they perceived as objectively European in origin. However, consumers of jazz and classical music likely also maintained their boundaries to experience the opportunity to interact with 'exotic' content and participate in international life via foreign musical styles.[77] Similarly, the desire to simply enjoy a foreign product like Western Disco, a product formerly separate from 'standard' domestic Japanese media content like Rock, Folk, and Idol music, may partially explain why discotheque goers enjoyed dancing to foreign records rather than just domestically produced ones. In the case of 'Eurobeat,' since it was obvious that

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[75] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 103.
[76] Bonnie C. Wade, *Music in Japan: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 139.
[77] Ibid., 140.

foreigners produced the majority of 'Eurobeat,' the issue of musicianship and the origins of an artist did not seem like a prevalent topic among consumers. Indeed, it is safe to assume that consumers easily understood that Eurobeat was an international genre, almost deceivingly so, and so it was not worth worrying about it in terms of authenticity.

Section 4: How Eurobeat Grew Popular

In the 1990s, Eurobeat continued to make big impact on the Japanese EDM scene despite the global decline of old EDM like Euro-Disco and the rise of new EDM genres in Japan like Techno. But before it did so, after the end of the bubble era, Eurobeat temporarily left the spotlight as a popular music in urban society. From 1991 to 1994, Techno music, like that played at a discotheque called "Juliana's," overshadowed Eurobeat as a new relevant sound.[78] During that period, slightly similar to Maharaja, Juliana's was nationally known as a symbol of late-bubble-era decadence, music fashion, and sexual display. Located in Tokyo's Shibaura district, the high-tech and high-class discotheque's design contrasted its mundane neighborhood which consisted of drab office buildings that attracted some of the office employees that worked there to party after work.[79] At its peak, Juliana's attracted 5,000 attendants per night. However, the conservative neighborhood surrounding Juliana's did not appreciate the rowdiness of the crowds and the immodesty of their clothing. Tokyo Metropolitan Police stepped in and began pressuring Juliana's management to adopt new policies, which the management did but at the expense of most of their customers. Eventually, the discotheque closed in 1994 due to a lack of profit.[80] After Juliana's ended, Eurobeat soon rose into the spotlight again in the mid-1990s, but unlike in

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[78] Tomoyuki Mori, "Yūrobīto-kai no jūchin DJ bosu ga kataru dapanpu `U. S. A.' Hitto no hiketsu" ユーロビート界の重鎮・DJ BOSSが語る　DA PUMP「U.S.A.」ヒットの秘訣 [DJ BOSS, a heavyweight in the Eurobeat world, talks about the secret behind DA PUMP's "U.S.A." hit], *Oricon*, September 15, 2018, https://www.oricon.co.jp/confidence/special/51785/.

[79] Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1997), 77.

[80] Ibid., 78.

the 1980s, Eurobeat was no longer danced only at discotheques. Instead, Eurobeat now began to truly expand into mainstream society as a more diverse sound enjoyed by newer audiences.

Two major developments in the mid-1990s kicked off what may be described as the 'second Eurobeat boom,' the rise of the Para Para dance and the appearance of very successful J-pop covers of Eurobeat tracks. It is also during the mid-1990s that new Eurobeat labels began to appear. Previously, Time Records, Asia Records, ABeatC, and Flea Records produced the majority of Eurobeat found in Japan. However, the emergence of Delta, Hi-NRG Attack, and later SCP Music not only diversified the Eurobeat sound, but also directly contributed to Eurobeat's accelerating newfound popularity throughout the rest of the decade.[81] And certainly from this point on, the Eurobeat sound evolved from a remnant trend of 1980s electronic Disco to a quintessential part of 1990s Japanese EDM characterized by its fast 'beats-per-minute.'

Japanese covers of preexisting foreign songs were nothing new in Japan. As early as the late 1950s and mid-1960s, Japanese covers of foreign pop songs served as important methods for the promotion of foreign and domestic records. However, covers temporarily became irrelevant due to the rising growth and prominence of Japanese Folk and Rock music in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet with the release of one of the earliest domestically produced Disco songs "Sexy Bus Stop" in March 1976 by Dr. Dragon & The Oriental Express, which also happened to disguise itself as an international record for better sales, a cover of it by a teenage idol called Yuko Asano subsequently influenced the rise of more Japanese covers of foreign pop and Disco records.[82] As a sidenote, it is noteworthy to mention that around this time the Japanese duo Pink Lady enjoyed

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[81] Saika Shinnosuke サイカ シンノスケ, "[Eibekkusu no genten!] Sūpāyūrobīto no rekishi ni semaru!" [エイベックスの原点!] SUPER EUROBEATの歴史にせまる！ [[The origin of Avex!] Closer to the history of SUPER EUROBEAT!], *Avexnet*, December 28, 2016, https://avexnet.jp/column/detail.php?id=1000132.

[82] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 111-112.

tremendous mainstream success as disco-pop singers and dancers who peaked from 1976 to 1978. Not only did they appear like refined disco-dancing clones, but their clean and charming image was used as a reliable promotional tool for various companies.[83] Simultaneously, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the German girl group Arabesque became 'big in Japan' after the release of their 1978 hit Disco song "Hello Mister Monkey."[84] Both Pink Lady and Arabesque are not famous for covering songs, but they do indicate that there existed a precedent for female artists, both foreign and local, to find widespread success as Disco artists in the Japanese market for years to come.

In the 1980s, numerous idols from various companies covered imported Hi-NRG, Euro-Disco, and other foreign EDM songs. For context, a fair number of popular female Japanese singers are idols, a type of celebrity that grew extremely popular among the youth thanks to the fact that most households in the 1970s possessed a television set to watch them from.[85] The former deputy president of Sony Music Entertainment Japan, Shigeo Maruyama, attributed the rise of idol music to the rise of color televisions and the broadcast programs that promoted idol singers. In addition, the appearance of teenage girls as celebrities helped shorten the psychological distance between the idols and their young audience.[86] Idols grew especially successful in mainstream Japan, with Seiko Matsuda leading as an example of a prominent idol who remained a best-selling album artist from 1970 to 1989.[87] In 1985, the idol Eri covered the

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[83] Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1997), 187-188.
[84] Toru Mitsui, "Japan in Japan: Notes on an Aspect of the Popular Music Record Industry in Japan," *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 111.
[85] Philip Brasor and Tsubuku Masako, "Idol Chatter: The Evolution of J-pop," *Japan Quarterly*, April-June, 1997, 58.
[86] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 208.
[87] Ibid., 209.

song “Unexpected Lovers” by the French-Canadian group called Lime,[88] in 1986 the idol Yoko Nagayama covered the song “Venus” by the British girl group called Bananarama,[89] and in 1987 the pop duo Babe covered “Give Me Up” by Michael Fortunati.[90] Yet, one of the most famous Japanese covers of a ‘Eurobeat’ song is Yoko Oginome’s 1985 “Dancing Hero,” which covered the Hi-NRG song “Eat You Up” by Angie Gold. The prevalence of “Dancing Hero” as a 1980s song in Japan is so strong that it was used in a 2017 choreographed dance by members of the Osaka Tomioka High School Dance club who mimicked the extravagant fashion, expressions, and the collective memory of the bubble-era’s unique Disco vibes. Thanks to a music video uploaded on the internet by the club, garnering over 117,000,000 views on YouTube as of April 2024, “Dancing Hero” received a brief yet dazzling resurgence in 2017-2018 mainstream Japan. Oginome’s song became so relevant again that it reached second place in the “Billboard Japan Hot 100 Top 20” on September 18, 2017.[91]

Similarly, the long-standing J-pop group, DA PUMP, caught the attention of modern audiences with “U.S.A.,” an ‘unhip but cool’ music video released on Avex’s YouTube channel in May 2018.[92] Currently with over 265,000,000 views,[93] the music video originally gained 2 million views in merely 10 days. Initially perceived as lame by some viewers, many people nevertheless grew to enjoy DA PUMP’s viral hit and became fond of its cheesy lyrics. A cover of

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[88] “Eri – Unexpected Lovers,” Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/22570259-Eri-%E3%81%8A%E3%82%82%E3%81%84%E3%81%8C%E3%81%91%E3%81%AA%E3%81%84%E6%81%8B.

[89] “Yoko Nagayama – Venus,” Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/master/2649362-Yoko-Nagayama-Venus.

[90] “Babe (4) – Give Me Up,” Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/7132397-Babe-Give-Me-Up.

[91] Billboard Japan, “DAOKO x Kenshi Yonezu Return to Top of Japan Hot 100; Namie Amuro Lands 12 Songs in Top 100,” *Billboard*, September 28, 2017, https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/daoko-kenshi-yonezu-japan-hot-100-namie-amuro-7981708/.

[92] “[Interview] Current as the Origin. SUPER EUROBEAT Challenges 250th Album in its 30th year,” Avex, accessed March 27th, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/contents/super-euro-beat-250/.

[93] Avex, “DA PUMP / U.S.A.,” YouTube, May 16, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sr--GVIoluU.

a 1992 song by the same name, U.S.A. operates with a simple yet catchy melody like many other Eurobeat tracks. DA PUMP took advantage of the easy melody and choreographed a silly yet equally memorable dance on top of it. As a result, DA PUMP managed to produce something fun and eye-catching despite the unhipness of the dance and the mainstream irrelevance of an old Eurobeat song.[94] It is worth mentioning that, unlike many J-pop covers of Eurobeat tracks distributed by Avex Trax in the 1990s, Severo Lombardoni produced U.S.A. under a short-lived sublabel of his Disco Magic S.r.l publishing company called 'Eurobeat Records.' Additionally, Gino Caria, a prominent Eurobeat producer, sung the original U.S.A. under the alias 'Joe Yellow,' an alias which was used by multiple other individuals since the early Italo-Disco days.[95] Also, JASRAC, the largest music copyright administrative society in Japan, gave writing credits to the following Eurobeat producers: S. Lombardoni, Donatella Cirelli, Anna Maria Gioco, and Claudio Accatino (one of the founders of Hi-NRG Attack) as composers for U.S.A.. JASRAC recognized and awarded these individuals because of DA PUMP's 2018 cover, which got played more than 100 million times on video sharing services and "was also used in karaoke by a wide range of generations."[96]

Both "Dancing Hero" and "U.S.A." show that the Eurobeat-sound still appeals to modern Japanese audiences, a subtle reminder to those who lived through the 1990s and early 2000s of a time when Eurobeat helped define an era. However, Eurobeat specialist and Avex employee DJ Boss (Satoshi Yokota) stated in an interview with Oricon that U.S.A. and the 'bubbly' dance

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[94] Shinichi Kinuwa 衣輪晋一, "Dapanpu issa "dasa kakkoī" `U. S. A.' No daiichiinshō wa `maji ka yo'" DA PUMP - ISSA "ダサかっこいい"「U.S.A.」の第一印象は「まじかよ」[DA PUMP - ISSA "Uncool" My first impression of "U.S.A." was "Are you serious?"], *Oricon*, June 4, 2018, https://www.oricon.co.jp/news/2112725/full/.

[95] "Joe Yellow – U.S.A.," Discogs, accessed May 20, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/621983-Joe-Yellow-USA.

[96] "38th JASRAC Awards," Jasrac, accessed May 23, 2024, https://www.jasrac.or.jp/ejhp/about/award38.html#primo.

spread virally because they updated Eurobeat for modern tastes by incorporating already-trending EDM elements into the mix. Furthermore, it was the dances displayed in the modern covers which attracted so many young people across social media platforms like Tik-Tok. Thus, Eurobeat's base appeal did not garner new attention purely on its own, but due to more recent technological and sociocultural factors of the late 2010s which helped propel those viral videos into the mainstream. Nevertheless, Oricon noted that producing 'J-Euro' like in the 1990s, when J-pop artists such as Namie Amuro covered Eurobeat tracks, is still seemingly effective even today as a popular music, as proven with "U.S.A." by DA PUMP.[97]

J-pop covers of Eurobeat are the clearest examples of how the Eurobeat sound did not fade into obscurity in the 1990s, but instead it evolved and transformed into popular music. One of the J-pop groups that frequently covered Eurobeat tracks in the mid-to-late 1990s was MAX, a four-member female dance group. In recent times, like Yoko Oginome with her "Dancing Hero," MAX rode on the momentum of Eurobeat's brief resurgence by performing their own repertoire of famous J-Euro tracks such as "Tora Tora Tora" at a live concert on October 2018.[98] Their cover calls back when they, and their fellow Okinawan-born Namie Amuro, broke into the J-pop scene with Eurobeat tracks produced by ABeatC. The artist Domino (Alessandra Gatti) sang the original "Tora Tora Tora," composed by Bratt Sinclaire (Andrea Leonardi.) Dave Rodgers

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[97] Tomoyuki Mori, "Yūrobīto-kai no jūchin DJ bosu ga kataru dapanpu `U. S. A.' Hitto no hiketsu" ユーロビート界の重鎮・DJ BOSSが語る　DA PUMP「U.S.A.」ヒットの秘訣 [DJ BOSS, a heavyweight in the Eurobeat world, talks about the secret behind DA PUMP's "U.S.A." hit], *Oricon*, September 15, 2018, https://www.oricon.co.jp/confidence/special/51785/.

[98] "Makkusu, zen'in 40-dai mukae-hatsu no tandoku kōen "Heisei saigo no raibu" yūrobīto de miryō" MAX、全員40代迎え初の単独公演 "平成最後のライブ"ユーロビートで魅了 [MAX, all members in their 40s, hold their first solo performance "last live of the Heisei era" captivating with Eurobeat], *Oricon*, October 14, 2018, https://www.oricon.co.jp/news/2121481/full/.

(Giancarlo Pasquini) sang the original “Music for the People,” covered by J-pop group V6. And Lolita (Annerley Gordon) sang the original “Try Me,” a song covered by Namie Amuro.[99]

As a teenager, Amuro spent some time trying to break into the Tokyo Disco scene before growing into one of the most prominent Japanese idols of the 1990s.[100] She quickly became famous with the release of “Try Me” in 1995.[101] And soon after, Amuro began to perform under the dance label Avex Trax with the tutelage of Tetsuya Komuro, a renowned producer and successful artist in his own right. Amuro appealed to a consumer-savvy female fanbase and represented an image of a ‘perfect modern girl.’ Aside from her ‘natural’ appeal to fans as a pop star, a portion of Amuro’s early successes derived from the influence of Komuro. At that time, Komuro dealt with various other popular artists such as Globe and TRF (also affiliated with Avex Trax) as part of the ‘Komuro family.’[102] Generally, a lot of music that came out of Avex Trax in the 1990s significantly impacted the evolution of both J-pop and Eurobeat by adding dance elements into the mainstream wave.

Eurobeat’s rise as a popular music in mainstream Japan likely developed from three directions. First, the consistent production of Eurobeat tracks by Italian labels and their distribution by Avex Trax sustained and grew the genre over time. Second, J-Euro, Japanese covers of Eurobeat tracks and original Japanese Eurobeat, greatly helped expand the genre into the ears of general audiences. And third, , Avex’s sway in the Japanese dance music market and

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[99] Saika Shinnosuke サイカ シンノスケ, “[Eibekkusu no genten!] Sūpāyūrobīto no rekishi ni semaru!” [エイベックスの原点!] SUPER EUROBEATの歴史にせまる！ [[The origin of Avex!] Closer to the history of SUPER EUROBEAT!], *Avexnet*, December 28, 2016, https://avexnet.jp/column/detail.php?id=1000132.

[100] Philip Brasor and Tsubuku Masako, “Idol Chatter: The Evolution of J-pop,” *Japan Quarterly*, April-June, 1997, 63.

[101] “[Interview] Current as the Origin. SUPER EUROBEAT Challenges 250th Album in its 30th year,” Avex, accessed March 27th, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/contents/super-euro-beat-250/.

[102] Philip Brasor and Tsubuku Masako, “Idol Chatter: The Evolution of J-pop,” *Japan Quarterly*, April-June, 1997, 63.

the popularity of dance music like that produced by Tetsuya Komuro helped increase Eurobeat's acceptance and legitimacy as a local dance sound within Japan.

The Japanese music market in the 1990s experienced massive changes, such as the appearance of the modern notion of J-pop and the rise of dance music in mainstream society. Older categories of popular music became largely meaningless due to the appearance of a wider variety of specific musical styles for consumers to choose from, such as singing Folk-Rock music in an Okinawan accent or rapping Hip-Hop tracks with an Osaka dialect. Due to this diversification of the market, stores began to classify all contemporary Japanese popular music as "J-pop" and any older pop song as *kayōkyoku* (pop tune) to simplify things for consumers. At the same time, many artists began to cater to tiny cliques of fans at clubs or concert halls, while only a few pop artists active in the mainstream market sold incredibly well.[103] The commonality of compact discs (CDs) allowed for tracks to achieve a greater number of sales since teenagers could now better access and afford new music.[104] To put it into perspective, the value of music recording media more than doubled in 1988 and kept increasing till 1996 after consumers transitioned from analog discs to CDs.[105] The usage of CDs not only involved J-pop, but also the entire SEB series and other Eurobeat distributions. Easy-to-sing songs available at karaoke places also effectively helped boost the sale of pops songs (such as Namie Amuro's "Try Me.") Meanwhile, popular music easily diffused to broader audiences when played as theme songs for TV programs or as snippets in TV commercials. For example, a tiny bit of Eurobeat infiltrated youth entertainment with V6's "Take Me Higher" scoring first place for seventeen weeks in 1996

[103] Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1997), 98.
[104] Ibid., 99.
[105] Furuya Maho, "Japan's Foreign Trade of Media and Cultural Products In The Age of Globalization: Factors, Characteristics, and Implications" (PhD diss., The State University of New York at Buffalo, 2005), 139.

as the opening theme song for the show Ultraman Tiga.[106] Of course, the music industry understood that all of these factors influenced sales. However, the savvy music producer Tetsuya Komuro expertly managed to incorporate every element of these new trends to his advantage. And by the mid-1990s, simultaneous to the 'second Eurobeat boom,' he managed to become the most successful record producer in Japanese music history.[107]

In the 1980s, Komuro formed a technopop group called TM Network. After the release of TM Network's first album, "Rainbow Rainbow,"[108] Komuro also began producing records for other popular artists. In 1986 Komuro produced "My Revolution" for Misato Watanabe, which sold 700,000 copies and became the first hit song he produced. For the rest of the 1980s, Komuro proceeded to work with other popular talents such as Seiko Matsuda, Miho Nakayama, Kyoko Koizumi, Rie Miyakawa, Akina Nakamori, and Yoko Oginome. Of course, Komuro also produced top hits for his TM Network, such as "Get Wild." Yet in 1988, Komuro paused his career in Japan and went to London to study the Western way of producing pop music. There, he studied how the British enjoyed themselves at wild all-night dance parties known as raves, which he later brought with him back to Japan. By then, Komuro already knew that he wanted to develop his own artists with his own style of music. This is why he created TRF ("Tetsuya Komuro Dance Factory") after he searched for talents such as Yuki, who he found at a Disco dance contest in 1992. After TRF joined the freshest new dance music label in the industry, Avex Trax, they released a major 1993 hit song "Ez Do Dance." As TRF quickly exploded in popularity, Avex Trax subsequently became a powerhouse in the Japanese pop market by selling a total of 21 million albums and singles at the end 1996. The core concept behind TRF's successful tunes derived from Komuro's simple yet effective idea: combine two popular forms of

[106] "Take Me Higher," Oricon, accessed June 5, 2024, https://www.oricon.co.jp/prof/25517/products/46028/1/.
[107] Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1997), 98.
[108] Ibid., 100.

mass entertainment together, karaoke singing and disco-dancing.[109] Komuro's production of TRF's style of 'Eurobeat-rave'[110] songs sounded more reminiscent of British Hi-NRG than Avex's SEB-style of Eurobeat. Nevertheless, TRFs' songs featured busy-but-insistent rhythms and simple-but-catchy hooks that made dancing and singing to their songs easy for many people, similar to what made Eurobeat popular at discotheques in the first place.

In collaboration with Avex, Komuro continued to produce other artists including Namie Amuro after he noticed her 1995 hit "Try Me." Seeing her potential, he negotiated Amuro's transfer from Toshiba-EMI to Avex Trax. Amuro's first release under Avex Trax "Body Feels Exit" sold 800,000 copies before her second Komuro-produced-single "Chase the Chance" sold 1.3 million copies. By Amuro's first year with Avex Trax, her CDs sales amounted to eight billion yen or nearly eighty million American dollars. Part of Amuro's charm was her reputation as a diva and her fashion style which caught the attention of a lot of schoolgirls who began to imitate her dyed copper-shaded hair and beach-girl complexion.[111] This style subsequently influenced the *Gyaru*, a fashion subculture that frequently danced to Para Para.

Komuro helped grow the Japanese domestic market by producing hit dance music infused with an international flair, which brought new worldly dance sounds to Japan. In the mid-1990s Komuro also produced a three-member group, which included himself, named "Globe." It joined TRF, Namie Amuro, and many other dance artists at Avex Trax. Globe's debut album, named after themselves, released on March 31st, 1996, hit the 4 million sales mark for the first time in Japanese music industry history. Thus, by that point, Komuro certainly existed as one of the

[109] Ibid., 102.
[110] Ibid., 99.
[111] Ibid., 100.

highest (if not the highest) paid individuals within the entire Japanese entertainment industry.[112] Similarly, a year earlier, TRF sold more than any other music artist in Japanese history at that point in time.[113] In the *Billboard* magazine's August 2nd, 1997, release, the Japan music reporter Steve McClure wrote that Kamuro's "forte is setting the vocals" of female-idols such as Miho Nakayama and Yuki Uchida "to Eurobeat-style dance rhythms in a glossy mix that's instantly recognizable as a Komuro production."[114] Although Komura produced dance hits of his own style, it is not farfetched to claim that Komuro's productions obliquely helped familiarize the entire mainstream market to EDM and perhaps even ease audiences to the more intense sounds of the Super Eurobeat series.

As mentioned earlier, the 'second Eurobeat boom' was spurred on not only by J-pop covers of Eurobeat songs, but also by the rise of the Para Para dance in the mid-1990s. One of the sites where Para Para arose was in a discotheque owned by Avex at Roppongi called Velfarre, which lasted from 1994 till the end of 2006. Although not as nationally popular as Juliana's, Velfarre's popularity played an important role in expanding the EDM market in Japan. The club could house 2,000 patrons a night on an enormous dance floor accompanied by several bars and private member lounges nearby. It was at clubs like Velfarre that Japanese tabloid television caught on and began featuring scantily clad women dancing choreographically primarily with their arms.[115]

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[112] Steve McClure, "Japan: Not So Predictable Anymore," *Billboard*, August 31, 1996, 67.
[113] Geoff Burpee and Steve McClure, "Japan's Komuro, Murdoch Link: Their TK News Venture to Develop Talent," *Billboard*, January 25, 1997, 109.
[114] Steve McClure, "TK's Singles Soar in Japan: Producer Sets Record with 3 Hits," *Billboard*, August 2, 1997, 59.
[115] "Death of a Disco," *South China Morning Post*, December 30th, 2006. https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/death-disco/docview/266516232/se-2.

Para Para likely originated in 1980s Maharaja discotheques when the audience started imitating the presentational movements made by the discotheque's staff.[116] The term itself, 'Para Para,' may derive from a chant yelled alongside the synth riffs heard in Trans-X's "Living on Video," a track that became popular at Shinjuku venues in 1984.[117] Often danced to Eurobeat, Para Para involves fast and angular arm movements and back-and-forth foot movements. Many Eurobeat songs, especially the famous ones, have a specific choreographic routine to dance to. In the mid-1990s, Avex produced CDs and DVDs featuring Para Para routines dancing to SEB tracks.[118] By then, Para Para became especially popular among teens and women in their 20s.[119]

The connection between Eurobeat and Para Para undoubtedly aided the expansion and the general public's familiarity with Eurobeat. It was during the third Eurobeat boom, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, that both Eurobeat and Para Para peaked in popularity. Takuya Kimura, a member of a very famous J-pop group, SMAP, further boosted the popularity of Para Para by dancing to it on TV. After him, many more high school girls began dancing to Para Para, particularly on the streets of Shibuya. And soon enough, around 1999-2001, the awareness of Para Para spread through the general population. Kindergarteners danced to it at school, elderly

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[116] Tomoyuki Mori, "Yūrobīto-kai no jūchin DJ bosu ga kataru dapanpu `U. S. A.' Hitto no hiketsu" ユーロビート界の重鎮・DJ BOSSが語る　DA PUMP「U.S.A.」ヒットの秘訣 [DJ BOSS, a heavyweight in the Eurobeat world, talks about the secret behind DA PUMP's "U.S.A." hit], *Oricon*, September 15, 2018, https://www.oricon.co.jp/confidence/special/51785/.

[117] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 119.

[118] Nathaly Yumi da Silva, **"**Eurobeat and Para Para Dance: An Italian-Japanese Relationship," *Diggit Magazine*, July 5, 2021, https://www.diggitmagazine.com/papers/eurobeat-and-para-para-dance.

[119] Tomoyuki Mori, "Yūrobīto-kai no jūchin DJ bosu ga kataru dapanpu `U. S. A.' Hitto no hiketsu" ユーロビート界の重鎮・DJ BOSSが語る　DA PUMP「U.S.A.」ヒットの秘訣 [DJ BOSS, a heavyweight in the Eurobeat world, talks about the secret behind DA PUMP's "U.S.A." hit], *Oricon*, September 15, 2018, https://www.oricon.co.jp/confidence/special/51785/.

people knew about it from watching it on the TV, and even Micky Mouse danced to it at Tokyo's Disneyland.[120]

In relation to Eurobeat, the "Gyaru" subculture ('gals') served as a major demographic group of young women that danced to and diffused Para Para since around the mid-1990s. Often wearing exaggerated makeup and possessing artificially tanned faces, the youth-based movement utilized Eurobeat and Trance music to socialize with fellow gals at large circles.[121] Unlike disco-goers, gals networked not only at discotheques but at simple public spots like at a McDonalds in Shibuya. The Gyaru subculture offered gals an opportunity to symbolically go against normative expectations of Japanese femininity and adulthood,[122] and Para Para was one of the tools used by them to characterize themselves. And since their rise coincided with the appearance of Eurobeat in the mainstream, gals likely used Eurobeat as another uniting factor to help identify and express themselves alongside other gals.[123] However, around 2003-2004, the image of gals dancing Para Para in Shibuya began to transform into a more negative one when Eurobeat simultaneously began to fade from mainstream popularity. Nevertheless, some gals still perform Para Para to Eurobeat today, such as depicted in the modern online version of the legendary gal magazine "Egg."[124]

Para Para even made it into video games. Konami Holding Corporation's arcade game "Para Para Paradise" is a good example where Avex distributed SEB beyond just CD compilations and into other mediums such as video games. Released in 2000, the arcade game

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[120] "[Interview] Current as the Origin. SUPER EUROBEAT Challenges 250th Album in its 30th year," Avex, accessed March 27th, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/contents/super-euro-beat-250/.
[121] Brian Morris, "Un/Wrapping Shibuya: Place, Media, and Punctualization," *Space and Culture* 13, no. 3 (2010): 269.
[122] Ibid., 297.
[123] Yoshio Sugimoto, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 279.
[124] "[Interview] Current as the Origin. SUPER EUROBEAT Challenges 250th Album in its 30th year," Avex, accessed March 27th, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/contents/super-euro-beat-250/.

tracks a player's choreographed hand movements as they dance Para Para to Eurobeat music.[125] But beyond just Para Para Paradise, Konami's franchise of simulation games known as "Dance Dance Revolution" (DDR), allude back to popular disco and post-disco dances. DDR's revolutionary technology, which simulated a dance environment like at a discotheque, offered both adults and the youth a way to socialize while playing games together at an arcade (despite the inherent solitary nature of a simulated activity.)[126] In 2001, a PlayStation (a home game console) version of DDR was released in America containing various genres including Hip-Hop, Techno, and Disco. With the release of DDR in America, songs within the game naturally diffused abroad.[127] Including a few Eurobeat tracks such as "Boom Boom Dollars" by King Kong & D. Jungle Girls (Mauro Farina).[128] Naturally, whenever Eurobeat merged with other forms of global entertainment mediums like DDR, many more people outside of Japan became aware of the existence of Eurobeat as a genre.[129]

Alongside the rise of Para Para and the growing popularity of original Japanese Eurobeat artists like M.O.V.E, the fusion between SEB and Japanese animation ushered in the third Eurobeat boom of the late 1990s.[130] The collaboration between Eurobeat and the anime show "Initial D" became a major catalyst for Eurobeat's notoriety and legacy, not just in Japan but

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[125] Nathaly Yumi da Silva, **"**Eurobeat and Para Para Dance: An Italian-Japanese Relationship," *Diggit Magazine*, July 5, 2021, https://www.diggitmagazine.com/papers/eurobeat-and-para-para-dance.

[126] Joanna Demers, "Dancing Machines: 'Dance Dance Revolution', Cybernetic Dance, and Musical Taste," *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (2006): 407.

[127] Ibid., 409.

[128] "Various – Dance Dance Revolution 3rd Mix Original Soundtrack," Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/559584-Various-Dance-Dance-Revolution-3rd-MIX-Original-Soundtrack.

[129] Tomoyuki Mori, "Yūrobīto-kai no jūchin DJ bosu ga kataru dapanpu `U. S. A.' Hitto no hiketsu" ユーロビート界の重鎮・DJ BOSSが語る　DA PUMP「U.S.A.」ヒットの秘訣 [DJ BOSS, a heavyweight in the Eurobeat world, talks about the secret behind DA PUMP's "U.S.A." hit], *Oricon*, September 15, 2018,

[130] Saika Shinnosuke サイカ シンノスケ, "[Eibekkusu no genten!] Sūpāyūrobīto no rekishi ni semaru!" [エイベックスの原点!] SUPER EUROBEATの歴史にせまる！[[The origin of Avex!] Closer to the history of SUPER EUROBEAT!], *Avexnet*, December 28, 2016, https://avexnet.jp/column/detail.php?id=1000132.

around the world as well. In Chris Stuckmann's 2018 *Anime Impact: The Movies and Shows that Changed the World of Japanese Animation*, Initial D certainly earned a spot in that list. Vincent R. Siciliano, an American software developer and enjoyer of vintage electronics, wrote the entry about Initial D describing it as "a classic underdog story about defeating those with significant technical, experiential, and financial advantages." The main character, Takumi, dominates *togue* street races on mountain roads by aggressively drifting across hairpin turns with disregard for the incredible riskiness off a cliff. However, the star of Initial D, the cheap yet reliable AE86 Toyota Trueno, epitomized the association between Japanese drifting culture with Eurobeat. In high school, Siciliano hung out with an "elusive group of street races" who drove cars such as Toyota's turbo MR2, Toyota's Supra, and Honda's s2000. According to Siciliano, the high school seniors only let him hang out with them "because I was a pretty good Dance Revolution-er." Siciliano goes on to state that "Eurobeat is the genre of music that perfectly complements and characterizes Initial D's spirit, "personal confidence, a destiny through laser focus and a little bit of luck.""[131] Further, he added, "I continue to listen to the latest Super Eurobeat Series, helping me to perform my daily duties with a fiery intensity like no other."[132] Thus, Eurobeat and Initial D often go hand and hand, symbolically diffusing Eurobeat with the images of an AE86 Trueno or motor sports in general.

Since the mid-1990s, Eurobeat's unique tempo and speedy sensation made it popular among drivers and motor sports fans. In 1997, Avex experimented by fusing Eurobeat with racing culture when they entered the car "avex Dome MUGEN NSX" into the Japan Grand Touring Car Championship. Later, Avex entered into an official collaboration with the Japan GT Car Championship (among other motor-related organizations), which likely influenced the

[131] Chris Stuckmann, *Anime Impact: The Movies and Shows that Changed the World of Japanese Animation* (Coral Gables: Mango Publishing Group, 2018), 95.
[132] Ibid., 196.

eventual adoption of Eurobeat music in Initial D. Broadcasts of Initial D aired in 1998, and throughout the show's entire lifespan Eurobeat tracks were always used during its racing scenes, leaving a deep impression on the audience.[133] And after appearing in the show, songs like "Night of Fire," originally released in 1997, quickly grew immensely popular. During my interview with Clara Moroni, she mentioned that she did not even know about the existence of Initial D until "Night of Fire," one of the songs used in the show, boomed with massive popular success, selling over 3 million copies.[134] Since then, Eurobeat's legacy has become tied to the show. Even beyond Japan, the cult status of both Eurobeat and Initial D are found abroad as well. For example, an Initial D themed café that plays Eurobeat in the background named "Fujiwara Tofu Concept Shop" opened in Singapore in 2023.[135] Internationally on the internet, the most famous Eurobeat songs are "Déjà vu" sung by Dave Rodgers, "Running in the 90s" by Max Coveri (Maurizio de Jorio), "Gas Gas Gas" by Manuel (Manuel Caramori), and "Night of Fire" by Niko (also Maurizio de Jorio).[136] There are many more top-quality Eurobeat tracks out there, but the best-known are strongly associated with Initial D both in Japan and around the world.

Aside from supplementary factors such as dancing and video games, Eurobeat suited popular preferences for music in Japan due to its sound structure. Many Eurobeat and J-pop songs share a chord progression called the 'royal road progression.' Commonly found within J-pop, 23% of top-selling J-pop songs between 1989-2019 contained RRP. A four-chord progression, there exists the IV-V-iii-vi Ionian progression (in major,) and the VI-VII-v-I Aeolian progression (in natural minor.) Additionally, there is a specific style of RRP called the 'root-

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[133] "About HI-BPM Studio," Avex, accessed April 6, 2024, https://avex.jp/eurobeat/about/english.php.
[134] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.
[135] Enze Kay. "Initial D Café Opens Near Aljunied MRT with Japanese Snacks and Beer," *Eatbook*, February 17, 2023, https://eatbook.sg/initial-d-cafe/.
[136] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.

position,' which tends to appear in rock and electronic songs.[137] Previously in the 1960s and early 1970s, Japanese popular music often contained pentatonic melodies and relied on harmonic minor scales, as heard in emotional songs like in *Enka*. However, with the rise of New Music in the 1970s, which received influences from Jazz, Rock, Fusion, Disco, and sentimental ballads new arrangements like RRP became common.[138] Moreover, the influences of 1980s Hi-NRG songs like Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up" and Kylie Minogue's "I Should Be So Lucky," produced by the renowned British production trio Stock-Aitken-Waterman, further increased RRP's popularity in Japan.

The Aeolian-establishing progression (VI-VII-I), formerly found in 1960s-1980s British and American rock songs, became a prevailing feature in the Eurobeat genre. Similarly, the root-position of RRP also commonly appears within Eurobeat.[139] Previously in Japan, it appeared in older songs like Yumi Arai's 1974 "Yasashisa ni Tsutsumareta Nara [If I've Been Enveloped in Tenderness,]"[140] Akiko Yano's 1980 "Hitotsu Dake [Only One Thing,]" and Yoshiyuki Ohsawa's 1984 "Soshite Boku wa Tohou ni Kureru [And I'm at a Loss.]" It so happens that the first SEB track in Vol. 1 "Just a Game" by Vanessa (Clara Moroni) utilized the root-position, as did "Bad Love" by Annalise (Annerley Gordon) in volume 16 and "The Way You Love Me" by Nathalie (Nathalie Aarts) in volume 72. Eurobeat's usage of the Aeolian-establishing progression (VI-VII-i) and RRP diffused into J-pop and is found in modern J-pop songs like Miyu Tomita and Mariya Ise's 2021 "Deep in Abyss," and Mayu Maeshima's 2021 "Long Shot."[141] The Aeolian-establishing method is not an RRP, but due to Eurobeat's and J-pop's common usage of both,

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[137] Maxwell Ramage, "The Royal Road Progression in Japanese Popular Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 45, no. 2 (2023): 239.
[138] Ibid., 238.
[139] Ibid., 253.
[140] Ibid., 252.
[141] Ibid., 253.

they have become closely associated with each other today.[142] The evolution of J-pop is important to Eurobeat, and vice versa, because not only does J-pop belong to the second largest music market in the world, but in recent times it also enjoys a worldwide following alongside other Japanese pop products like anime and manga.[143] By securing and sustaining a foothold within the Japan's market, Eurobeat remains ingrained in Japanese EDM history.

Conclusion

Eurobeat did not merely exist as a fad in Japan, but instead became a prevalent music in Japan through the sustained efforts of the producers, businesspeople, and consumers. While J-pop covers of Eurobeat helped bring the genre into the mainstream, the Para Para dance and the Gyaru subculture also brought new avenues of accessibility for new core audiences. Similarly, the power of Japanese animation via Initial D further broadened Eurobeat's reach to include motor sport fans and TV watchers. And although expanded audiences naturally boosted the sale of Eurobeat, Eurobeat's popularity more importantly cemented it as a popular part of Japanese EDM culture alongside other dance hits produced by the then highly influential Tetsuya Komuro. Fundamentally, Eurobeat's success derived from its uniqueness as a genre made specifically for Japanese listeners by offering simple, melodic, and catchy Disco-like tunes that appealed to 'intrinsic' Japanese tastes.

Before the fledgling company Avex took the opportunity to collaborate directly with Italian producers to expand and refine the notion of Eurobeat, long-term changes in the Japanese music industry created a welcome climate for Eurobeat's sound to appear in the mid-to-late 1980s when Italian producers began aiming at the Japanese market. The next chapter will move on from the subject of Eurobeat's musical appeal to the conditions of 1980s Japan and Italy.

[142] Ibid., 254.
[143] Ibid., 238.

Chapter 2 will focus on the *process* behind Eurobeat's emergence by analyzing the transnational developments of Japanese foreign trade and the developments of Disco in Italy.

Chapter 2: The Process Behind Eurobeat's Emergence

Eurobeat's story begins in the 1980s, during a time when Western Europe faced trade tensions with Japan and Disco music thrived as a globalized sound. Italian producers sought to create new types of music while Japanese people prospered in economic affluence. And although half the world separated them, both peoples shared the strong desire to dance and have fun, causing Eurobeat to emerge as a result.

This chapter deals with the process behind Eurobeat's emergence. As previously mentioned in chapter 1, Eurobeat's sound spawned when Italian dance producers aimed to export their Italo-Disco and Hi-NRG songs to the Japanese music market, the second largest in the world. But what was Italo-Disco like in Italy? And why did their music get continuously distributed throughout mid-to-late 1980s Japan? To answer these questions, I begin with a general look at the Japanese economy, especially foreign trade, to establish the context of the broader transnational relationship between Japan and Europe. Then, I briefly examine the globalized nature of Disco production before focusing on the characteristics and charms of Italo-Disco, which arguably was the foundation of Eurobeat. Finally, I transition back to analyzing foreign trade in Japan, but this time centering on the Japanese record industry's connection to it and how certain types of foreign music became a desired import by record companies.

As my thesis intends to prove, Eurobeat became a proper music genre when Italian producers began to closely cooperate with Avex, which helped them continue the distribution of their music in Japan. But prior to Avex, the process that led the sustenance of Italian disco-dance music was a 'coincidental' scenario where the aim of Italian producers to sell their music in Japan fortuitously aligned with the Japanese record companies' preferences to import their type of music to Japan. Not only did 'Eurobeat' appeal to Japanese consumers in multiple ways, as

explored in chapter 1, but 'Eurobeat' appealed to record companies as a convenient product to sell. By arguing this, I provide a valid explanation for how and why a precursor of Eurobeat managed to gain a foothold in Japa, as a predominantly Italian-produced music, before Eurobeat producers later *secured* that foothold with Avex's cooperation.

Section 1: International Economic Trends

When Eurobeat began to emerge in the 1980s, the Japanese economy was growing at about twice the rate of its Western European counterparts. With one of the highest industrial productivity rates in the world, Japan transformed into a very affluent nation both internally and externally by the late 1980s.[144] As Japan became an increasingly corporate society, even the Japanese Socialist Party, a former large opposition force to the established right-leaning LDP-led government of Japan, became more conservative, defending the status quo of the nation's postwar democratic constitution during talks of possible revision. Nevertheless, under LDP prime minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, the government managed to privatize several large public corporations such as the Japan National Railway much to the dismay of the socialist party and railway unionists. From a broader viewpoint, Japan's deregulation and the privatization of major industries aligned with the policies of governments led by American president Ronald Reagan and UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher.[145] However, for the average Japanese, higher politics were of little concern, especially since their quality of life continued to generally improve exponentially since the start of the postwar years. By the end of the 1980s, the Japanese took ten million annual trips abroad, mostly as leisure travelers who spent generously at foreign hotels. Compared to previous years, when only three million traveled abroad annually in 1980 or only

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[144] Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 309.
[145] Ibid., 314.

300,000 (mostly businessmen) in 1965, the degree of prosperity certainly increased dramatically in 1980s Japanese society.[146] Meanwhile, high inflation, high unemployment, labor protests, and somewhat weakly growing economies made the 1970s and 1980s a less smooth ride for people in Western Europe.[147]

Japan's postwar relationship with European countries between 1969 and 1990 was marked by rising trade tensions. In 1986, Japanese exports made up 10% of imports among countries part of the European (Economic) Community, making it the Community's second largest supplier. Japanese imports consisted mainly of sound and telecommunication equipment, electrical machinery, road vehicles, photographic equipment, and office machinery. Simultaneously, Japan imported a more diversified supply of products and resources from European countries such as organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, non-ferrous metals, road vehicles, and clothing. Yet, since Japanese exports not only influenced European markets but also dominated global market shares, Japan's headway in Europe disgruntled many European firms. European countries reacted to the surplus of Japanese trade by adopting protectionist measures on Japanese import products such as stereo cassette tape heads, numerically controlled machine tools, color televisions, light commercial vehicles, video tape records, and more.[148]

The quick rise of Japanese car exports, initially in global markets and then also in Europe, especially worried European car producers. The most concerned member states of the European Community included Italy and France, countries with renowned automobile manufacturers, who imposed firm quotas on Japanese car imports. These protectionist actions influenced Japanese car companies to set up local manufacturing plants in Europe, such as with

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[146] Ibid., 317.
[147] Ibid., 309.
[148] Massimiliano Porto, "The rules of origin in the EU-Japan relations from the 1980s to the EPA and BREXIT," *Asia Europe Journal* 18, (2020): 39, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-019-00539-1.

Nissan's establishment of a plant in the UK in the late 1970s due to the UK's large market and traditionally weak status as a car producer.[149] Among other factors, the second 1970s oil crisis that occurred in 1979 damaged European industries and caused unemployment to worsen. The first half of the 1980s in Europe are referred to as the age of 'Euro-Pessimism.' The European Community's trade issues with Japan became even more serious in the 1980s than in the 1970s. The European Community's trade deficit surpassed ten billion dollars with Japan as Japanese exports continued to create a trade surplus problem for the European Community until 1987.

In October 1980 the Japanese government and the European Community discussed decreasing the Community's deficit with Japan. However, on November 17th, Japan's Foreign Affairs Minister, Masayoshi Ito, stated that due to European protectionist measures the Japanese government hesitated to slow down the flow of Japanese products. Furthermore, Ito stated that the member countries of the European Community should make greater effort to increase their own exports.[150] Then, on October 1981, Yoshihiro Inayama, the then leader of the economic delegation of the Japanese government, demanded the European Community to open its markets and expand its exports to Japan. Meanwhile, in December, the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Community also requested Japan to further open its markets. They requested a reduction in tariffs, improved inspection standards and import procedures, import expansion, and the improvement of access to finance, service, and investments to increase the import volume of products from Europe. Yet although European Community member states like Western Germany, the Benelux nations, and the UK, led by Margaret Thatcher's cabinet at the time, operated on a

[149] Ibid., 43.

[150] Takeshi Abe, "THE "JAPAN PROBLEM": THE TRADE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND JAPAN IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE 20TH CENTURY," *Entreprises Et Histoire*, no. 80 (2015): 17, https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/japan-problem-trade-conflict-between-european/docview/1767700118/se-2.

relatively friendly stance to Japanese trade, both France and Italy continued to place greater restrictions on Japanese imports in the early 1980s.[151]

At the end of 1981, West Germany, among most other Western European nations, placed a few import restrictions on Japan in farm, mineral, and industrial products. Compared to West Germany's and Norway's three import restrictions on Japan, France placed twenty-two and Italy placed thirty-five.[152] In the case of Italy's relation with Japanese trade, the government announced import quotas against Japan for a year starting in October 1980, and in January 1982 the European Community Commission approved the prohibition of Japanese car sales in Italy until June of that same year.[153] Although the trade issue continued throughout the 1980s, Italy did announce in October 1984, at the second Italo-Japan Economy Consultative Committee, the reduction of discriminatory import restrictions on Japan.[154] In September 1988, Japan held the first official EC-Japan conference about the subject of the quantitative-restrictions placed on it. And eventually, after multiple conferences held in 1989, countries including West Germany and Denmark abolished quantitative restrictions, while countries including France and Italy agreed to reduce residual import restrictions by around sixty.[155]

Although these macro-economic developments do not directly reflect the reality of the global diffusion of music culture and product, they do indicate a climate of trade tension between Japan and Europe happening simultaneously when Disco music rose to international relevance. The height of Disco's global popularity coincided more or less with the continuous growth of the Japanese economy until the burst of its bubble economy in 1991. Similarly, the increase of

[151] Ibid., 18.
[152] Ibid., 21.
[153] Ibid., 19.
[154] Ibid., 20.
[155] Ibid., 27.

Japanese trade in foreign media and cultural products also paralleled the growth of the national economy and the progress of globalization in Japan. Both factors, a booming economy and globalization, elevated the possibility of increased exchange activities of foreign products due to the flows in the international marketplace.[156]

During Japan's bubble economy (roughly 1987-1991) the import volume of foreign films, broadcast number of foreign TV programs, and the import volume and value of foreign music media increased in Japan, as did the foreign sales value of exported Japanese films and music.[157] When the bubble period ended, the import volume (but not necessarily value) of foreign music continued to experience an increasing trend.[158] Even before the bubble economy, the number and value of foreign music imports grew in the 1970s despite the fact that the Japanese economy temporarily suffered from the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979. Such trends imply a continuous increase in demand for foreign music, and/or the possibility of foreign music becoming popular in Japan.[159] However, it appears that the trade of foreign media and cultural products does not always correlate with a nation's general economic activity in foreign trade.[160] This may mean that the trade tensions between the European Community and Japan are not relevant to the history of Euro-Disco's flow to Japan. However, a closer study on the logistics behind the transnational trade of music between Europe and Japan could potentially reveal that Japan experienced an influx of EDM from European countries like Italy starting in the mid-1980s because national markets loosened thanks to international negotiations or other international

[156] Furuya Maho, "Japan's Foreign Trade of Media and Cultural Products In The Age of Globalization: Factors, Characteristics, and Implications" (PhD diss., The State University of New York at Buffalo, 2005), 260.
[157] Ibid., 261.
[158] Ibid., 261-262.
[159] Ibid., 260.
[160] Ibid., 261-262.

changes. Recognizing these developments is important because Eurobeat spawned and evolved as a transnational genre seemingly solely due to private trade activity.

Section 2: Disco as a Globalized Sound in Italy

A crucial component of Eurobeat's emergence is its lineage to Disco music. Back in the late 1970s, the Disco phenomenon swept across the world.[161] The music industry in the U.S.A. infamously over-commercialized Disco music to the point that many Americans grew tired of hearing it and later began perceiving it as a passing fad. However, prior to that, when profits from rock music declined, music magnates in the mid-1970s started to target Disco music because its groovy sound could easily appeal to broad audiences. It also helped that almost anyone could dance to Disco music without needing to know about the spiritual or social significance of what Disco meant to the communities it originated from. Thus, in a short span of time, record companies created sublabels and departments dedicated to harnessing Disco's tunes and selling them. Disco music played frequently in many radio stations, clubs, bars, and restaurants throughout America, quickly becoming a big and very profitable business. Additionally, other forms of media like Hollywood's 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever* captured the attention of the American mainstream and spread Disco's symbolic influences abroad.[162] Even Non-Western countries like India experienced the Disco phenomenon, for example, through a 1982 Hindi-language film released by Bombay cinema called *Disco Dancer* that localized the global impact of Disco found in popular international media like *Saturday Night Fever*.[163] Disco music also reached communist East Germany, when various Western artists like

[161] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 166.
[162] Ibid., 167.
[163] Neepa Majumdar, "*Disco Dancer* and the Idioms of the Global-Popular," *Cultural Critique*, no. 114 (2022): 82.

European Disco pioneers ABBA sold there (with the exception that some of their songs like "Money, Money, Money" were not distributed due to ideological censorship).[164]

While Disco consumption continued smoothly in Europe into the 1980s, in America there existed a growing distaste for the genre by the end of the 1970s. The infamous Disco Demolition Night, on July 12th, 1979, popularized the supposed downfall of Disco. The event took place at a Chicago baseball stadium where a large group of people, who shared a distaste for Disco music, disrupted a baseball game with a riot to demonstrate their hatred for the genre's prevalence in America. It is worth noting that a variety of factors contributed to the event and the growing disapproval of Disco music, such as the fact that in 1979 economic opportunities began to shrink for people without college degrees, which likely added fuel to the fire for those who held contempt for Disco's commercialized presence in American media.[165] And somewhat similar to Western Europe, America in the late 1970s suffered from 'stagflation,' where the economy stagnated, and inflation hovered in the double digits. The traditional industrial heartland of America, the Rust Belt, in particular experienced a deep recession where unemployment in midwestern states reached 10-13 percent.[166] Nevertheless, whether or not Disco Demolition Night effectively contributed to the fall of Disco music in America is debatable, especially since the original Disco movement, a music traditionally consumed by Black, Latino, and gay communities at underground clubs, was already diluted due to the genre's commercialization by the mainstream.[167] Furthermore, by 1981, things clearly began to change. Too many producers in

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[164] Sven Kube, "Music Trade in the Slipstream of Cultural Diplomacy," in *Popular Music and Public Diplomacy: Transnational and Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Mario Dunkel and Sina A. Nitzsche, 205.

[165] Kirstin Butler, ""We rock 'n' rollers will resist—and we will triumph!"" *PBS*, October 26th, 2023, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/war-disco-we-rock-n-rollers-will-resistand-we-will-triumph/.

[166] Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 309.

[167] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 166.

the late 1970s and early 1980s produced too many not-so-great songs with poor vocals that contributed to people's exhaustion with bad quality Disco.[168]

When Disco did depart mainstream America, it did so merely in name. Derived from Disco's sound, new styles of dance music emerged from local urban club scenes from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, such as Hi-NRG, House, Garage, Techno, Jungle, and more.[169] While some Black and Latin facets of Disco music evolved into genres like House music, a Whiter style of Disco arrived in the form of Hi-NRG. The Hi-NRG genre valued melodies and velocity over basslines and the funkiness of standard 1970s Disco music. It became an internationally important genre for White gay dancefloors, and it even reached worldwide pop status in the 1980s as a bubblegum-type music often made by the UK production trio Stock-Aitken-Waterman (SAW) who produced hit artists like Kylie Minogue, Dead or Alive, Mel & Kim, and many more.[170] Pete Waterman helped adapt the gay club sound to fit teenage mainstream tastes by utilizing expensive production equipment to make the music sound more expensive for pop-quality, and by creating a strong brand image with the enlistment of artists who possessed 'clean' recognizable faces like Kylie Minogue and Samantha Fox.[171] It was during SAW's heyday that the United Kingdom magazine *Record Mirror* temporarily used 'Eurobeat' as a marketing term for Hi-NRG music, like that produced by SAW.[172] As evidenced with musicologist Simon Frith's 1989 usage of the term,[173] 'Eurobeat' stuck around in the mid-1980s European music scene

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[168] Giorgio Moroder, "This interview with Giorgio Moroder, writer/producer of "I Feel love., was conducted by the Library of Congress on October 14th, 2015," interview by Cary O'Dell, *The Library of Congress*, October 14th, 2015. https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/MoroderInterview.pdf.

[169] Richard James Burgess, *The History of Music Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 115.

[170] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 16.

[171] Simon Frith, "Euro Pop," *Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (1989): 169, DOI:10.1080/09502388900490111.

[172] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 117.

[173] Simon Frith, "Euro Pop," *Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (1989): 169, DOI:10.1080/09502388900490111.

before dissipating from relevance as a term in Europe. Yet, as already explored in chapter 1, 'Eurobeat' remained a relevant term in Japan since its inception in the mid-1980s.

Disco music in Europe was often a truly international affair. Legendary figures in EDM history, the northeastern Italian Giorgio Moroder and his English partner Pete Bellotte pioneered both Hi-NRG and Euro-Disco from their homebase in Munich, southern Germany. In the 1970s, they scored their first hit together with the production of "Son of My Father" covered by English pop group Chicory Tip.[174] Although Italian by birth, Moroder created Euro-Disco music as a Germanic dance producer from his 'adoptive homeland' of Bavaria. There, 'thanks' to the Cold War and the Iron Curtain alongside West Germany's border, a massive presence of Black Americans from the military diffused soul-funk Disco music in Germany. Donna Summer, part of that German American context, soon became a jeweled member of Moroder's productions.[175] While working with Summer, Moroder and Bellotte produced one of the first worldwide Disco hits in 1975 "Love to Love You Baby," inspired by Iron Butterfly's progressive rock epic "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida." But then, a few years later, with an electronic pulsating beat, sequenced sounds, and Summer's autoerotic vocals, the futuristic-sounding song "I Feel Love" became a major international hit that made Disco history. Moroder and Bellotte subsequently also became one of Europe's most sought-after music producers.[176] Utilizing the Moog Modular 3P synthesizer, "I Feel Love" not only revolutionized the use of the formerly intellectualized synthesizer machine for pure pleasure, but its basslines became hardcoded into the DNA of a lot

[174] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 194.
[175] Francesco Cataldo Verrina, *The History of Italo Disco: Italian Dominance on the Dance Culture of 80's* (Lulu International Press, 2015), 56.
[176] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 194.

of EDM. American pioneer of Hi-NRG Patrick Cowley was influenced by it,[177] and even Post-Punk and New Wave groups liked the song's electronic sounds so much that they appropriated the relentless groove of a sequenced synth pulsation for their own music. If a song could mark the start of 1980s Euro-Disco, it would be the 1977 "I Feel Love."[178]

The genre of Italo-Disco was created and played mostly by Italian musicians, inspired by Moroder's Euro-Disco, seasoned with melodies, simple refrains, electric basslines, and very pumped-up drum machines.[179] Bernhard Mikulski, Polish-born record producer and founder of the historically influential German record company ZYX Music, coined the term 'Italo-Disco' after attributing the adjective 'Italo' to any Italian Disco record that arrived into his warehouse from Italy. Despite the seeming superficiality of a term that can refer to any Euro-Disco song produced by someone inside or outside of Italy, Mikulski nevertheless fiercely supported and popularized the Italo-Disco term.[180] The first generation of Italian Disco produced on Italian soil followed 'standard' 1970s American style of Disco, while the second generation followed the Anglo-Saxon and Central European styles (like those made by SAW and Moroder.) This meant that into the 1980s, the part of the Italian Disco movement that transitioned into Italo-Disco began to align closer with the intercontinental Euro-Disco trend.[181]

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[177] Bill Brewster, "I feel Love: Donna Summer And Giorgio Moroder Created The Template For Dance Music As We Know It," *Mixmag*, June 22nd, 2017, https://mixmag.net/feature/i-feel-love-donna-summer-and-giorgio-moroder-created-the-template-for-dance-music-as-we-know-it.

[178] Simon Reynolds, *Futuromania: Sogni Elettronici Da Moroder Al Migos*, Rome: Minimum Fax, 2020, 16.

[179] Andrea A. Bufalini and Giovanni Savastano, *La Storia Della Disco Music* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Milano, 2019), 331.

[180] Francesco Cataldo Verrina, *The History of Italo Disco: Italian Dominance on the Dance Culture of 80's* (Lulu International Press, 2015), 20.

[181] Ibid., 22.

Italo-Disco got pioneered by progressive rock musicians, members of the Italian rock band 'Goblin,' Claudio Simonetti[182] Fabio Pignatelli, and Walter Martino. Simonetti, the producer Giancarlo Meo, and the brothers Paulo and Peter Micioni founded a Disco group called 'Easy Going.' In 1978 they released their first record titled "Baby I Love You," which depicted a mosaic of two muscular Roman men sensually entwined with each other while wrestling on its logo. The song not only borrowed from Moroder's influences, but it departed from the funky-dance style of standard Disco for a more hard-core electronic atmosphere with an emphasis on pumped-up bass. "Baby I Love You" may mark the beginning of Italo-Disco, as one of the earliest songs produced of its kind. The spread of this style of electronic Disco music was aided when the DJ/singer Paolo Micioni gradually left Easy Going and began to dedicate himself to independent productions and collaborations with other producers like the singer Gary Low (Luis Romano Peris Belmonte.) Together with songwriter/producer Pierluigi Giombini, Paolo Micioni wrote Gary Low's Italo-Disco song "You Are a Danger" which reached and remained in the *Billboard* disco charts for ten weeks in 1983. Back in 1979, English ghost singer Douglas Meakin did the uncredited vocals for Easy Going's second song, "Fear," as well as other Italo-Disco projects like for the band 'Traks.' Additionally, the disco-dance star Viven Vee (Viviana Andreattini) sang the vocals for Simonetti's 1980 hit song "Give me a Break."[183]

In an interview after the 1980s, Simonetti recalled that after the [temporary] dissolution of the progressive rock band Goblin, his encounter with producer Giancarlo Meo led him to dedicate himself to Disco music. Simonetti stated that at the beginning of the 1980s "people now wanted to have fun and shake off the difficult moment of the seventies." To him and others, the 1980s in the realm of music meant seeking entertainment and dancing at discotheques.

[182] Andrea A. Bufalini and Giovanni Savastano, *La Storia Della Disco Music* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Milano, 2019), 333.
[183] Ibid., 330.

Additionally, the 1980s brought new genres that "set aside" 1970s rock,[184] new groups like Duran Duran and Depeche Mode, new pop stars like Michael Jackson and Madonna who changed the connotation of a 'rock star,' and the advent of new sounds via experimentations and electronic instruments.[185]

An interesting thing to note, is the decision by Italo-Disco producers for native Italian singers to go under an alias, such as with the case of Gary Low and Viven Vee. Furthermore, the sometimes-uncredited vocals by an English singer like Douglas Meakin display the desire and prominence of the English language in Italo-Disco productions. Even right before the dawn of electronic Italo-Disco, in 1977 popular Italian singer-songwriter Adriano Celentano noticed ahead of time the trend to sing in English. Celentano proceeded to create an entire album in English containing six songs that mimicked American Disco music. In construction and intent, the album did well. But Celentano's non-fluent pronunciation and vaguely parodistic attitude to the Disco genre did not sway foreign listeners, and so the album did not make it big abroad. Some of his songs are "You Can Be Happy," "Somebody Save Me," and "Kiss Me Goodbye."[186]

Although not all Italo-Disco songs were sung in English, there nonetheless appeared to be a clear objective by Italo-Disco producers to reach the international market via English vocals. Thus, it is safe to assume that, at the very least, some qualities of Eurobeat likely derived from things that Italo-Disco helped set as a precedent. Yet aside from just the English vocals, many aliases of Eurobeat artists relate to the Anglo-American language for the sake of international appeal. On the other hand, a fair number of Eurobeat singers and composers, both in the past and today, are not from Italy. For example, British singer and songwriter Annerley Gordon ran into

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[184] Francesco Cataldo Verrina, *The History of Italo Disco: Italian Dominance on the Dance Culture of 80's* (Lulu International Press, 2015), 80.
[185] Ibid., 81.
[186] Ibid., 58.

talent scouts from ABeatC in the early 1990s while on holiday in Italy. Among others, she worked with Giancarlo Pasquini, Gino Caria, and Andrea Leonardi to produce tracks like "Try Me" as Lolita and "On My Own" under her own actual name.[187] The internationality of Italo-Disco (and later also Eurobeat) displayed a 'sense of confidence' by Italian producers to not only develop their own style of electronic Disco music, but also to aim it at foreign audiences. In addition, Italo-Disco offered immediate transitional appeal from Italy to consumers in other countries in Europe and around the world thanks to its shared/similar characteristics to Euro-Disco, such as simple lyrics, bouncy beats, and a sleazy nostalgic charm.[188]

Compared to Eurobeat's broadly international presentation, a fair number of Italo-Disco (not only counting songs sung literally in Italian) tended to offer a more overtly Italian flair in their sound. Additionally, the green-white-red (Italian) colors found on the covers of vinyl records added to the 'Italo' appeal. On the other hand, most of the album covers for the Super Eurobeat series frequently employed ornamental high-definition female models that did not indicate the specific origins of the music. Additionally, some Eurobeat, in its sound and physical presentation, aligned with broadly Western-international aesthetics, for example when producers Clara Moroni and Laurent 'Newfield' (Gelmetti) tended to stick closer to their Anglo-Saxon and Italian musical roots in Eurobeat production.[189] On the other hand, other English-language Eurobeat tracks are named and contain non-English cultural aspects, most often in Japanese, like the originally named "Tora Tora Tora" (meaning "Tiger Tiger Tiger") produced by Bratt Sinclaire (Andrea Leonardi.) However, while Eurobeat often presented itself as either 'international' or leaned towards another style, quite a few Italo-Disco records aimed explicitly for Asian-themed sounds and presentations in their songs. Those records displayed a clear interest and/or mimicry

[187] "About Annerley," Annerley Music, accessed May 20, 2024. https://www.annerleymusic.com/about.php.
[188] Simon Frith, "Euro Pop," *Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (1989): 168, DOI:10.1080/09502388900490111.
[189] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.

of East Asian symbolism, sometimes relating specifically to China, Japan, or elsewhere. Perhaps some of those records even constituted an orientalist design since many of them were released primarily for consumption by domestic audiences in European markets rather than for international audiences elsewhere.[190] Although the presentation of Eurobeat was largely unrelated to Asian-themed Italo-Disco, the existence of Asian-themed Italo-Disco nevertheless indicates an awareness and interest in the East Asia region among Italian producers as early as 1980.[191]

The founder of the once largest dance music record company in Italy, Severo Lombardoni was a tremendously influential individual within the Italo-Disco industry. Founded in 1981, Disco Magic distributed inter-continental hit Italo-Disco artists such as Paul Pelandi, Roberto Zanetti, Domenico Ricchini, Stefano Zandri, Luis Romano Peris Belmonte, Fabio Roscioli, and more.[192] Pelandi as P. Lion sang the 1983 "Happy Children," Zanetti as Savage sang the 1983 "Don't Cry Tonight," Ricchini as Joe Yellow sang the 1986 "I'm Your Lover," Zandri as Den Harrow sang the 1983 "A Taste of Love," Belmonte as Gary Low sang the 1982 "You are a Danger," and Roscioli as Ryan Paris sang the 1983 "Dolce Vita." Songs like Roscioli's "Dolce Vita" did extremely well internationally, selling more than five million copies. In merely four years since its inception, Disco Magic became synonymous with the highest quality Italo-Disco production. Lombardoni even launched a lucrative Italian model for dance compilations that became a popular format in Europe. By the early 1990s, Disco Magic became a dance music empire that managed to penetrate even the tough-to-crack British charts, expand commerce in

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[190] "Asian themed Italo-disco," Discogs, accessed May 24, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/lists/Asian-themed-Italo-disco/235048.

[191] "China Express – The Ghost Of The Samurai / In Orient," Discogs, accessed May 24, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/3887490-China-Express-The-Ghost-Of-The-Samurai-In-Orient.

[192] Francesco Cataldo Verrina, *The History of Italo Disco: Italian Dominance on the Dance Culture of 80's* (Lulu International Press, 2015), 305.

new overseas markets like in Eastern Europe and South America, and even establish its own German subsidiary named 'Lombardoni Muzic.' By that point, the Disco Magic group earned twenty billion lire a year. However, due to internal family disputes and a liquidity crisis,[193] Disco Magic eventually closed in 1997 due to a 'strategic bankruptcy' influenced by those internal disputes in business management.[194] But before it closed, Bernhard Mikulski of the German record company ZYX bought the entire catalog for around eight billion lire.[195] In the case of Eurobeat, Disco Magic played an influential role in contributing to the emergence of Eurobeat's sound because it distributed the initial Italo-Disco and Hi-NRG music produced by Eurobeat pioneer companies, Time Records and S.A.I.F.A.M, in Europe.

Just as Euro-Disco and other EDM styles influenced Italo-Disco, Italo-Disco also influenced other Euro-Disco/Hi-NRG productions by the Pet Shop Boys, Madonna, SAW, and others as those producers borrowed some of that Italian Disco flare.[196] Although not exactly an Italo-Disco production, Michael Fortunati's 1986 Euro-Disco hit "Give Me Up" presents an interesting case where the sounds of 1980s European EDM meshed with each other. Released in 1987, a year after Fortunati's song, SAW's production of Bananarama's Hi-NRG "I Heard a Rumor" arguably sounds remarkably akin to "Give Me Up." In recent times, while recollecting the 1980s, Mike Stock claimed that "I Heard a Rumor" happened to coincide with other new Europop sounds that developed in the 1980s. As such, the two songs simply derive from a similar flavor of 1980s pop, but otherwise there exists no direct connection between both songs.[197] Such

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[193] Ibid., 306.
[194] Ibid., 300.
[195] Ibid., 307.
[196] Andrea A. Bufalini and Giovanni Savastano, *La Storia Della Disco Music* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli Milano, 2019), 337.
[197] "Apple Podcasts: A Journey Through Stock Aitken Waterman: Episode 24: Nothing's Gonna Stop Me Now to F.L.M," Apple, accessed October 31st, 2023, https://podcasts.apple.com/se/podcast/ep-24-nothings-gonna-stop-me-now-to-f-l-m/id1565879477?i=1000551681202.

case helps signify the blurriness of 1980s EDM productions in Europe, or the basic autonomous usage of popular, appealing, sounds. Moreover, in something as fluid as music, the concept of a static music genre does not reconcile well with the reality of music production or the evolution of sound. Thus, little prevented Italian producers and others from conjuring up innovative and appealing sounds with the inspiration of other songs and genres.

In 1981, Mauro Farina and Giuliano Crivellente established their company S.A.I.F.A.M srl. and the Factory Sound Studio. In 1982 they both began collaborating with numerous Italian distribution companies like Gong Music, Discotto, and Disco Magic. As shared enthusiasts of Hi-NRG music produced by American artists Bobby Orlando and Patrick Cowley, they decided to create music together. Their first production was Caravan's 1983 "You and Me Tonight," and afterwards they continued to produce songs like Brand Image's 1983 "Are You Loving" and The Family Number One's 1984 "Lara De Bahia." Over time Farina and Crivellente became prominent dance music producers[198] who created the renowned European Disco group Radiorama whose tracks, such as "Desire," "Vampires," and "Aliens," reached the top charts in countries such as Austria, Germany, Switzerland, the Benelux, the Scandinavian ones, Mexico, Singapore, Canada, Australia, Japan, and so on. In 1986 they met and founded a new record company with Florian Fadinger named Flea Records. Going into the late 1980s, Farina, Crivellente, and Fadinger aimed at producing for the Japanese market via Flea Records. Meanwhile, Farina and Crivellente simultaneously also produced for Time Records and later for Asia Records. It was during these same mid-to-late 1980s that the Eurobeat sound was beginning to emerge as it continuously kept arriving inside the Japanese market as an Italo-Disco/Hi-NRG/Eurobeat export. The popularity of this sound proved so great that the 1989 Eurobeat track

[198] Ibid., 320.

"Boom Boom Dollars" by King Kong & D'Jungle Girls won the 1989 Dance Music Awards as the best song in Asia for that year.[199]

In an interview after the 1980s, Farina recalled that "at the beginning of the 80's a big "movement" was born in Italy, especially in the North, where many people attended discotheques to listen and dance to new kinds of music including him, Crivellente, and others. Farina also stated that the dance music scene in 1980s Italy was like "the golden age" that consisted of many "unforgettable people with artists like Den Harrow, Radiorama, Albert One, Aleph, Fred Venturo, Joe Yellow" and so on. Farina loved to write many songs alongside Crivellente, "spending many hours composing new refrains, verses, etc."[200]

A lot of Italo-Disco, and subsequently Eurobeat, production occurred in northern Italy. In the case of Eurobeat, there does not seem to be a clear explanation for that. For example, many people asked the CEO of Time Records, Giacomo Maiolini, "why Brescia?" The northern city simply happened to be Maiolini's hometown and that of Media Records', a big record company at the time that was also located in Brescia. One could hypothesize that northern Italy's historically industrial, and seemingly more international, status in Italy influenced the existence and development of the disco-dance scene in that part of Italy. [201] Every staple Eurobeat label of the 1980s and 1990s produced most of their music from studios located in northern Italian cities such as Verona and Alessandria. Nevertheless, the specific geographic locations of Eurobeat do not appear to have influenced the sound or distribution of Eurobeat in any major way, especially when compared to the influence of the individual producer themself.

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[199] Ibid., 321.
[200] Ibid., 90.
[201] Maiolini, Giacomo, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.

Another interesting, yet unclear, facet of the process of Eurobeat's emergence is the degree of influence that traditional Italian songs played in the sound and structure of Eurobeat music. For instance, Time Records took inspiration from domestic 1960s-1970s domestic songs with a bit of modification.[202] And when interviewed, Evelina Somenzi from SCP Music was doubtful that domestic Japanese Eurobeat managed (or attempted) to imitate a type of 'Italian essence' within Eurobeat.[203] Yet whether or not 'original' Eurobeat contains a uniquely Italian essence to it, it is at least possible that future research on native Italian musical (or sociocultural) influences on Italo-Disco/Eurobeat production may infer a new 'hidden' reason behind Eurobeat's appeal to consumers.

Section 3: The Japanese Music Industry

The flow of Italo-Disco and Hi-NRG music into the Japanese market is an important subject matter because it showcases how, even in a globalized world, a distinct music genre can form inside a single market belonging to a foreign nation. Historically, as with the case of Eurobeat, discotheque-goers sustained an interest in European dance music throughout the late twentieth century. And because discotheques symbolized the financial prowess and consumerism of Japan's bubble economy, Eurobeat naturally belonged as part of that Japanese bubble-era culture. This is a revealing factor because popular music, whether foreign or native, can help shed light upon the qualities of global and national cultures. Eurobeat's existence is not only a significant part of Japanese EDM history, but also of the history of lifestyle and leisure in Japan. Additionally, as a popular music in urban areas, Eurobeat's presence in Japan correlated with the

[202] Maiolini, Giacomo, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.
[203] Stefano Castagna, and Evelina Somenzi, audio interview by author, Milan, Italy, July 18th, 2023.

conditions, interests, and experiences of the general public.[204] Simply put, Eurobeat helped define a substantial portion of Japanese people's lives in the late twentieth century by partially reflecting the conditions of their lives.

Meanwhile, the music industry, that is the artists, record companies, and publishers, are normally the initiators and maintainers of popular music. These three groups are often interconnected via a series of contractual relationships, which in recent times are frequently formed transnationally and have resulted in a complex, heterogenous, international music market.[205] In the case of Eurobeat, international retail stores in Japan like Tower Records and HMV became the standard 'publishers' (on-site distributors) of music only beginning in the 1990s. Back in the 1980s, domestic record companies still fulfilled their dual roles as record companies and 'publishers.' This gave the domestic record companies the ability to 'gatekeep' the international music sections of stores. The record companies performed gatekeeping by selling a selection of certain imported international records as a foreign product for consumers interested in foreign music. Because they presented a curated number and type of foreign product, 'international' music in Japan did not always correspond to the actual international music trends occurring overseas.[206] It is because of this sway that Japanese record companies possessed, that Eurobeat was created in a pseudo-international context where, as a foreign disco-dance music, it did not always reflect popular music trends from the broader international market. This is likely a major factor why Italian productions managed to land a foothold in Japan without exporting the same type of pop music consumed in other national or regional markets.

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[204] Stephen Chen, Shane Homan, Tracy Redhead, and Richard Vella, *The Music Export Business: Born Global* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 27.
[205] Ibid., 27.
[206] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," In *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, edited by Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zubak, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 103.

The history of the Japanese music industry in the early 1980s indicates that Japanese record companies sought a particular type of foreign music to import so that they may effectively commercialize it in their own way. The phrase "big in Japan" usually refers to an artist achieving extensive commercial success in Japan while not necessarily gaining it elsewhere in the world. Indeed, in Eurobeat's case, 'big in Japan' can refer to not just an artist, but to an entire genre as well. Record companies took advantage of Eurobeat's appealing, broadly international sound, to distribute it at equal footing with other imported dance music and eventually get it into the dance floors of discotheques.

'Big in Japan' could also imply that in Japan, there existed an 'easy' market with a high demand for a foreign supply.[207] However, while Eurobeat and other foreign dance music certainly enjoyed a high demand, the same did not apply to all Western pop. Some Westerners in the late twentieth century believed in the widespread misconception that artists connected to Western popular music possessed an inherent advantage to sell better in whichever foreign market they chose to enter thanks to the global hegemony of the West. However, in the second largest music market in the world, domestic Japanese music naturally sold more than most Western pop songs that entered it.[208] Even a global superstar like Michael Jackson did not always perform nearly as well as an established domestic pop/rock duo like Chage and Aska. For example, in 1991, Michael Jackson's album *Dangerous* sold only around 350,000 copies in Japan, while Chage and Aska's album *Tree* sold around 2.2 million copies.[209] However, it is also worth mentioning that the yearly sales for best-selling international albums fluctuated from the 1970s to the mid-2000s. After Michael Jackson's *Dangerous*, Whitney Houston's 1993

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[207] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 203.
[208] Ibid., 204.
[209] Ibid., 206.

soundtrack album *The Bodyguard* sold around 1.6 million copies, yet the bestselling album of 1988, Madonna's *You Can Dance*, sold only around 185,000 copies.[210] The fluctuation of best-selling international album sales indicates the high selectivity of Japanese consumer tastes to Western music during that period.

Part of the misconception that Western pop automatically 'deserved' success in Japan stemmed from the fact that Western music did once dominate the Japanese music market. Immediately after the end of World War II, Western music held a market share of around 80 percent in Japan, partially due to the presence of American occupation forces at the time.[211] However, ever since 1967, record sales by domestic artists have consistently outnumbered foreign artists. Domestic popular music particularly played a leading role in the growth of the overall music market.[212] In about a decade between 1981 to 1992, the overall size of the market expanded from being worth 288.7 billion to 478.2 billion yen. But despite the market's incredible overall growth, the general share of Western music still steadily decreased during that period because Western sales did not keep up with domestic sales.[213]

Although on a gradual decline, in 1975, Western music still constituted about 36 percent of the overall market. Kazuo Harai, a former employee at Sony Music Entertainment Japan's international business affairs section (and recent ex-CEO), believed that despite the mainstream popularity of Japanese idols during that period, not everyone liked their music or their image. As a result, a significant portion of young people sought alternative domestic music to listen to but could not find it; thus, these people found an alternative in Western music. This allowed Western

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[210] "Best Selling Albums in Japan," BestSellingAlbums, accessed April 6th, 2024, https://bestsellingalbums.org/list-of-best-selling-albums-in-japan#by-year-int.
[211] Ibid., 204.
[212] Bonnie C. Wade, *Music in Japan: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 355.
[213] Guy de Launey, "Not-so-Big in Japan: Western Pop Music in the Japanese Market," *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (May 1995): 204.

music to continue holding onto a sizable chunk of the market for a while longer. However, in 1978, new major domestic alternatives appeared in the pop market with the debut of Yellow Magic Orchestra and Southern All Stars. By 1980, the market share of Western music quickly dropped to 26 percent, and into the late 1980s during the 'band boom,' Japanese rock further cemented the dominance of the domestic market for the foreseeable future.[214]

Nevertheless, despite the waning prominence of Western music in the overall market, Disco's arrival to Japan in the mid-1970s brought with it new sounds that continued to flourish in Japan throughout the 1980s and even into the 1990s via Eurobeat's connection to Disco. Although Eurobeat does not technically constitute 'Western popular music of the 1990s,' Disco certainly did constitute Western popular music of the late 1970s. Almost every top 10 international hit in 1978 consisted of a Disco single by artists such as Arabesque, Baccara, the Bee Gees, D. D. Sound (also known as La Bionda), Santa Esmeralda, and Earth, Wind & Fire. The following year in 1979, Disco music led the revitalization of the ailing Western singles market with Disco records, frequently selling over 100,000 copies and sometimes even over 500,000 copies.[215]

The producer of the earliest Disco records in Japan, Satoshi "Hustle" Honda, of Victor Musical Industries in 1977 believed that Japanese "disco owners and DJs should be more open minded and willing to take in different types of music." Honda said this in relation to the then-ongoing evolution of the Japanese Disco movement and its previously heavy reliance on soul music.[216] In general, Honda's 'prediction' proved true, as new Disco records (with new sounds) continued arriving to Japan in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. The German group

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[214] Ibid., 209.
[215] Kazu Fukatsu, "Disco makes itself at home," *Billboard,* May 26th, 1979.
[216] Ben Okano, "Japan: Discovering Its Own Musical Diversity," *Billboard*, April 30th, 1977.

Arabesque contributed to Disco's evolution in Japan by kickstarting a trend, termed 'candy pop,' where many other European Disco artists also found their success in Japan with the help of the Japanese record companies promoting them.[217] Although Arabesque first gained their success at home in West Germany, they became especially 'big in Japan' with their hit song "Hello Mister Monkey," which reached the top ten charts in 1978. In the following few years, the girl-trio continuously ranked successfully in the charts, even competing with domestic artists.

Arabesque succeeded in Japan not only because they appealed to a Disco market previously influenced by ABBA[218] but also due to underlying changes within the entire Japanese music industry, as caused by the broad internationalization of the capitalist world. Throughout the 1960s, Japan's economy gradually liberalized, allowing for more foreign activity inside its music market. In 1968, the Japanese company Sony launched the first ever joint venture in Japan with the American company CBS, forming CBS/Sony (now SMEJ).[219] Joint ventures between Japanese companies and foreign companies continued in the 1970s and into the 1980s. Some of the remaining purely domestic record companies in 1983 included King, Victor, Crown, Teichiku, Tokuma, Trio, and Pony (later turning into Pony Canyon). These purely domestic record companies struggled in competition against joint venture companies in acquiring favorable contracts with foreign labels operating within the Japanese market.

The record companies competed because they sought licensing agreements with foreign labels (or directly with the artists themselves) to gain the rights to distribute their music in Japan at an agreed-upon royalty rate.[220] Noticing the intense competition among the Japanese record

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[217] Yusuke Wajima, "Japanese Disco as Pseudo-International Music," in *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, ed. Flora Pitrolo, and Marko Zuba (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 116.
[218] Toru Mitsui, "Japan in Japan: Notes on an Aspect of the Popular Music Record Industry in Japan," *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 111.
[219] Ibid., 108.
[220] Ibid., 109.

companies to gain hold of profitable contracts, foreign labels began to massively increase their royalty rates as early as 1972. The companies who kept dealing with foreign labels (like joint ventures) did so for the benefit of associating with the label's prestigious value and the popular foreign artists active under it. However, as foreign royalty rates increased, they caused record companies like Nippon Columbia, one of the oldest in Japan, to focus their efforts primarily on the domestic market rather than concerning themselves with foreign records. In 1981, as much as 95 percent of Nippon Columbia's sales came from domestic records. A year earlier in 1980, Toshihiko Hirahara, Nippon Columbia's head of the international section, advised companies with domestic capital to avoid dealing with foreign labels because the rise in royalty costs (among other factors) made business generally unprofitable.[221] At around the same time, the Japanese music industry began demanding more advantageous clauses in their contracts with Western companies. Japanese record manufacturers also became less likely to sign contracts with Western companies just for the sake of their label's name value.[222]

The decision made by some record companies to concentrate their efforts on the domestic side contributed to the expansion of the overall domestic market, which went from being worth 288.7 billion yen in 1981 to 478.2 billion yen in 1992. However, at the same time, increased royalty rates also motivated domestic record companies to search for new alternative foreign labels to deal with. These companies sought lesser-known artists who cost relatively less in royalties, but who could produce good results and suit the tastes of the Japanese market.[223] When it came to conducting long-term promotional campaigns for those foreign artists, these companies possessed an advantage over joint ventures. Domestic companies could freely choose

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[221] Ibid., 110.
[222] Haruhiko Fukuhara, "Western music: disco sets the pace," *Billboard*, May 26th, 1979.
[223] Toru Mitsui, "Japan in Japan: Notes on an Aspect of the Popular Music Record Industry in Japan," *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 110.

to concentrate their efforts on an artist or a record of their choice, without needing to consider other artists or records that a parent organization of a joint venture may have placed greater importance on. Domestic companies also preferred foreign records and artists unaffected by the British or American pop charts. The lack of preexisting popularity of a foreign artist or song allowed the record companies to carefully construct long-term sales campaigns in their own way in Japan. Additionally, in the early 1980s, record companies additionally began judging independent foreign labels more by how likely their artists could appeal to Japanese consumers rather than caring too much about artists' popularity within their home markets.[224]

I hypothesize that the context of a rising affluent Japan, an increase in foreign trade activity, and the Japanese record companies' search for a particular type of foreign act to promote, motivated companies like Alfa Records to start distributing the internationally aimed Italo-Disco/Hi-NRG tracks made by Italian producers. Arabesque is an early example of a desirable non-Anglo foreign group that landed big in Japan. Later, artists like the Frenchman Michael Fortunati also managed to hit it big in Japan with his 1986 "Give Me Up," which got so popular that the local pop duo Babe covered it. Similarly, Aleph's 1985 "Fly to Me" became an unexpected big hit in Japan. Produced by Time Records, "Fly to Me," an Italo-Disco song, became the springboard that kickstarted the Eurobeat movement.[225] In an initially small movement, Italian producers blended Italo-Disco and Hi-NRG together when they exported their dance music directly to Japan, and over time, this spawned the unique Eurobeat sound.

Conclusion

[224] Ibid., 111.
[225] Giacomo Maiolini, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.

Chapter 2 broadly examined foreign trade activity in 1970s and 1980s Japan to establish the transnational context between Europe and Japan. The gradual loosening of trade restrictions in both the Japanese market and the European markets may have brought the markets closer to one another, possibly making it easier for music to transfer internationally. Moreover, considering the affluence of the Japanese economy at that time, symbolized by its strong Yen, it is no wonder that European producers wanted to distribute their music in a large and vibrant market. After section 1, section 2 explored the globalized nature of Disco music and the way Italian producers localized Disco into their own electronic style known as Italo-Disco. The foundations of Eurobeat are arguably derived from the developments within the Italo-Disco industry that Eurobeat pioneers came from. This is important because the characteristics of Italo-Disco not only influenced the later Eurobeat sound, but very likely also the structural components behind the business the Italian producers ran when they began creating Eurobeat. Finally, in section 3, 1980s Japan is revisited in a closer inspection on the then ongoing developments of the music industry and the way record companies preferred to distribute certain types of foreign music, not just Western pop in general.

I conclude by arguing that the search for new music by Italian producers and their aim for success in the international market fortuitously coincided with the musical preferences of the affluent Japanese music market in the 1980s. The appearance of new types of electronic Disco music like Italo-Disco and Hi-NRG listened to and danced to in Europe, was also of keen interest to ever-exuberant Japanese bubble-era consumers. And that is why, Italian Eurobeat not only spawned as a sound appealing to the tastes of Japanese consumers, but, also in the material and social context of the times, benefited both the Italian producers and the Japanese record companies to engage with each other in the first place. As such, this chapter explored the process

behind Eurobeat's emergence, while the next chapter will explore the formation of Eurobeat as a proper genre and the interactions of the Italian producers with Avex, a once fledgling record company that *really* desired Eurobeat.

Chapter 3: Italian Producers and Avex

Italian producers began to aim their productions towards the Japanese music market in the mid-1980s. Then, at the beginning of 1990, a hatchling record company Avex, which had started out primarily as a Eurobeat distributor, became a formidable force in the Japanese music market. In turn, their rise to the top helped them also dominate as distributor of Eurobeat in Japan. By the end of the 1990s, Avex practically had a monopoly on Eurobeat in Japan.

These developments were made possible by Avex's achievement in gaining the cooperation of multiple Eurobeat labels, many of which appeared in the mid-1990s specifically because Eurobeat became a clearly viable music to distribute in Japan. Many of the Eurobeat producers who got involved in this process were either veterans of the Italo-Disco days, or newcomers with backgrounds in non-disco matters. A key difference to the 1980s was Avex's more intimate approach to continuously collaborate with the Italian producers throughout the 1990s. This relationship spurred a sustained effort of producing, distributing, and expanding Eurobeat in Japan, creating a quasi-institutionalized relationship between Avex and the producers that ultimately officialized Eurobeat as a distinct genre.

This chapter aims to showcase the rise of Avex, and the individuals who pioneered, diversified, and evolved the transnational genre. In section 1, I begin by exploring the early rise of Avex's cooperation with Eurobeat labels. My examination of Time Records and ABeatC around 1990 reveals the confident insistence of Avex executives in their desire to gain exclusive contracts with Eurobeat producers. I then explore the emergence of the renowned Eurobeat label Delta and its relationship with Avex. Section 2 briefly describes the history of Avex's expansion as a company and its success after acquiring the cooperation of Time Records and ABeatC in 1990, and what that meant for Eurobeat in Japan. Finally, section 3 focuses on the story behind

the Eurobeat label SCP Music and the significance of the diversification of Eurobeat music. At the end, I argue that Avex's interests, Avex's expansion, and the appearance of new Eurobeat labels all contributed both to Eurobeat's popularity and to its prevalence as a distinct genre in Japan. Moreover, the evidence presented in this chapter directly relates to the main points of this paper by demonstrating that Eurobeat fundamentally transformed into a distinct genre after 1990 when Avex became involved in the production of Eurobeat.

Section 1: Avex-Eurobeat Cooperation

Nobody in Italy anticipated that the arrival of two Japanese businessmen in 1990, from a small record store in Tokyo, would in 10 years result in them leading the third largest record company in Japan. In my interview with Time Record's CEO, Giacomo Maiolini said in reflection that "at the end of 1989, two Japanese came here, and they asked me to work with them. But at that time, I had a contract with Pony Canyon [another Japanese record company] until the end of the year, 1989." This meant that Time Records could not initially consider collaborating with the two businessmen. However, due to their persistence, at the beginning of 1990 they returned to the northern Italian city of Brescia, staying there for three days to meet with Maiolini again.[226] Max Matsuura and Tom Yoda represented Avex, a fledgling company that operated as a wholesale distributor of foreign music tracks from inside an apartment in Machida city, part of Tokyo prefecture.[227] In Brescia, they intended to sign an exclusive contract with Maiolini to import music directly from Time Records. But since Avex was a new and unknown company, Maiolini asked them to give him a certain amount of money [presumably a large sum]

[226] Giacomo Maiolini, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023
[227] "Company: History of the Avex," Avex, accessed November 18, 2023, https://avex.com/jp/en/corp/history/.

for the deal. And surprisingly for Mailoini, they immediately accepted his request. From then on, Avex grew to become "very huge," one of the largest independent companies in the world.[228]

Avex sought to work with Time Records because it was the pioneer of Eurobeat, a foreign dance music greatly enjoyed by Japanese consumers during their nation's exuberant bubble era. The story of Time Record's begins in the early 1980s when Giacomo Maiolini frequented discotheques to hear and see what kind of songs did well among consumers. Around that time, in the summer of 1984, Maiolini started a record company with the aspiration of producing his own music and to have his company's logo on the center of a vinyl record. However, not yet knowing what to name his company, he one day stared up at a clock thinking about a simple, easy-to-remember, name understood in both English and Italian. And so happened, that the clock gave Maiolini the inspiration to call his record company 'Time Records.'[229]

The first official track produced by Time Records was Atrium's 1984 "Funny Dancer," while the first track produced and licensed to Japan was Aleph's 1985 "Fly to Me." Aleph's song, sung by Giancarlo Pasquini, was the springboard for the Eurobeat movement by starting everything in Japan for Time Records. Not only did "Fly to Me" find great success in the Japanese market, but even as an Italo-Disco song it contained hints of a direction towards a Hi-NRG style that Eurobeat developed from. Maiolini produced tracks aiming for the Hi-NRG style because "I took inspiration from American producers [like Hi-NRG pioneer Bobby Orlando] and because I love that kind of music, but I never imagined that the people in Japan will become crazy about that sound."[230] It seems that the shared passion for Hi-NRG between Time Records

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[229] Giacomo Maiolini, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.
[230] Giacomo Maiolini, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.

and the Japanese consumers led to an increased production of Hi-NRG infused Italo-Disco tracks by Time Records, which ultimately blended and created the Eurobeat sound.

From 1985 to 1989, Maiolini worked with three different Japanese record companies: Alfa Records, King Records, and Pony Canyon. Prior to Avex, Maiolini never received special requests from the record companies he cooperated with to produce a certain type of track because there was a different type of workflow in the 1980s. That workflow consisted of Time Records sending a track to a record company, and if that record company liked what they heard, they took the track and began distributing it in Japan. Meanwhile, with the arrival of Avex and the start of their collaboration with Time Records, Time Records experienced a closer relationship with Avex than the other Japanese record companies before. Avex particularly treasured Time Records as a business partner since they respected them as a veteran label already producing Eurobeat since the start. The relative closeness of Time Records' relationship to Avex, compared to previous Japanese record companies it dealt with, was showcased when their relationship allowed for Avex to request specific melodies or tracks it thought could do better on the Japanese market.

Before 1989, Time Records possessed a small number of employees. Yet when Maiolini started working with Avex, the productions of Time Records grew in scale, with the label producing around at least 100 tracks for Avex each year. The way Time Records produced their music went roughly as follows. The original writers of a song composed their demos before sending it to Maiolini, and then if Maiolini accepted a demo, the song went into preproduction. Afterwards, other individuals began to mix the song. For instance, Sergio Dall'Ora produced the song's demo, Laurent Gelmetti arranged the preproduction, Clara Moroni or another singer sang the song, and Dallo'ora or another person finally mixed the song. Since the demos Maiolini

received were not definitive versions of the songs, multiple other people worked on them to further change the lyrics, basslines, kicks, and so on, before a full definitive song was produced.[231]

In 1990, Avex received a steady supply of Eurobeat from a brand-new label named ABeatC. Before then, Avex D. D. Inc. emerged in 1988 as a wholesale distributor of imported records with only five executives in the beginning.[232] Co-founders Masato Matsuura and Tom Yoda played key roles in growing the company. Yoda used his connections as a former director of Sansui Electric., and his personal ability as a 'tough negotiator,' to help Avex start importing records from abroad and establish itself as a wholesale distributor.[233] Meanwhile, Matsuura possessed the foresight to anticipate future trends during a time when both Eurobeat and Techno continuously arrived into Japan as part of the ongoing bubble-era Disco boom.[234] Matsuura's taste in music allowed him to believe in the viability of as a good business opportunity in the sale of Eurobeat in the Japanese market.[235] That is why Yoda and Matsuura travelled to Italy in 1989-1990 to meet with Eurobeat producers. Aside from Time Records, Avex actively approached Giancarlo Pasquini (Dave Rodgers) and Alberto Contini multiple time before managing to sign a contract with them.[236]

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[231] Giacomo Maiolini, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.
[232] "History of the Avex," Avex, accessed April 6, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/corp/history/.
[233] Toshiki Watanabe 渡邉登志喜, "Dejitaruka no shinten ni yoru entateimento kigyo no senryaku henyo: baryu chen bunseki ni yoru henka no bunseki to yosoku"
デジタル化の進展によるエンタテイメント企業の戦略変容:
バリューチェーン分析による変化の分析と予測 [Strategic transformation of entertainment companies due to the progress of digitalization: Analysis and prediction of changes through value chain analysis], (Masters diss., Keio University Graduate School of Business Administration, 2015), 30.
[234] Ibid., 31.
[235] "[Interview] Current as the Origin. SUPER EUROBEAT Challenges 250th Album in its 30th year," Avex, accessed March 27th, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/contents/super-euro-beat-250/.
[236] "About HI-BPM Studio," Avex, accessed April 6, 2024, https://avex.jp/eurobeat/about/english.php.

Matsuura and Yoda met with Contini, Pasquini, and Alessandra Gatti (Domino) at Contini's house to plan the future of Avex and a new wave of Eurobeat. The meeting resulted in the creation of a new Eurobeat label, "ABeatC," and the subsequent establishment of their sublablel 'Avex Trax' which went on to release new volumes of the Super Eurobeat series of CD album compilations.[237] On January 21st, 1990, Super Eurobeat volume 1 was initially released under the label "Beat Freaks" containing a Time Record's compilation. Yet with Avex Trax, Avex officially began releasing the Super Eurobeat albums themselves, starting with volume 9 released on November 25th, 1990.[238]

Both Time Records and ABeatC were the main contributors to SEB in the early 1990s. One of the earliest tracks released by ABeatC, "Wild Reputation" by Big Brother (Giancarlo Pasquini), got featured on SEB volume 9. In a YouTube video posted on his own channel, Pasquini remembers producing "Wild Reputation" very well. He mentions that when ABeatC finished the song, they felt very excited at the time because "the song was very strong."[239] It is during this time when Eurobeat began to coalesce into a clearly distinct genre with the local company Avex representing it in Japan. Prior to 1990, Eurobeat broadly derived from a pool of similar disco-dance sounds that got collectively referred to as 'Eurobeat' by Japanese consumers despite originating from various countries including the UK, West Germany, Netherlands, France, and of course Italy. Yet with Avex at the helm, supported by two Eurobeat labels, Super Eurobeat targeted specifically (and often exclusively) the Japanese market. It naturally meant that, whether intentionally or not, many new Eurobeat songs grew closer aligned to the tastes of

[237] "Info," ABeatC, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.abeatc.com/.
[238] "About HI-BPM Studio," Avex, accessed April 6, 2024, https://avex.jp/eurobeat/about/english.php.
[239] Dave Rodgers, "Dave's Room #2 – Q&A 1," Youtube, March 6, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zv7UUKRyCis.

Japanese consumers, rather than as part of an international Disco movement that 'naturally' appealed to Japanese consumers like in the years prior.

With the advent of ABeatC, new styles of Eurobeat also began to emerge. A prominent Eurobeat producer who made a major contribution to the evolution of Eurobeat's sound is Andrea Leonardi (Bratt Sinclaire). With a background in rock and heavy metal, Sinclaire met a fellow AC-DC fan Alberto Contini in 1984. Leonardi cooperated with Contini in the production of rock band music throughout the mid to late 1980s. Yet in 1991, Contini offered Leonardi a new gig in dance music. Thus, Leonardi joined ABeatC and became known as "Bratt Sinclaire" because Avex wanted an artist to possess an alias. Leonardi ran the "B studio" in ABeatC and worked with Contini to produce early SEB hits like "King & Queen" in 1991. From the beginning, Leonardi produced Eurobeat in a style different from earlier (more Hi-NRG) Eurobeat because of his rock background. This influence led to his tunes to sound more aggressive and American.

However, after continuously working from 1991 to 1995, Leonardi grew tired after composing and mixing more than 200 tracks at ABeatC. By late 1994, he gradually distanced himself from ABeatC and moved back to Milan from the studio at Mantova to work as a freelancer. A year later, Leonardi officially left ABeatC and formed a new label called "Delta" with Clara Moroni and Laurent Gelmetti in 1995.[240] Around that time, Moroni and Gelmetti also felt the desire to branch out and left Time Records to create Delta feeling, confident in their skills as high-level Eurobeat producers.[241] Before Delta even released their first track, Eurobeat fans in

[240] "My Biography," Bratt Sinclaire, accessed April 6, 2024, https://brattsinclaire.com/about-me/my-biography/.
[241] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.

Japan already considered the new label as a 'Eurobeat dream-team' because it consisted of known prolific artists from Time Records and ABeatC.[242]

Delta offered a variety of Eurobeat styles that appealed to fans despite leaning away from the early sound of Eurobeat. In my interview with Clara Moroni, she mentioned that the formation of Delta, like ABeatC before, brought new sounds into the industry. Interestingly, when I asked her if she considered the tastes of Japanese consumers in Delta productions, she responded "No, at least me and Laurent Newfield, we kept our Anglo-Saxon and Italian roots. We never did stuff with Japanese words." At the same time, Moroni did remember and mention that a few tracks such as[243] "Tsunami Comes"[244] and "Go Shinkansen!"[245] that she produced used Japanese words and related to Japanese culture.

Before Moroni entered the Eurobeat world, she had already pursued singing as a career since the age of 3, travelling to London in her early years and singing as a Punk Rock artist with gigs in northern Italy. But in 1986, while performing at a gig near Brescia, one night she got contacted by Giacomo Maiolini and Joe Yellow [an alias presumably utilized by Mauro Farina at the time]. In 1986, Clara Moroni performed at a gig near Brescia. One night, she got contacted by Giacomo Maiolini and Joe Yellow [an alias presumably utilized by Mauro Farina at that time.] Maiolini mentioned that he directed a record label, and after listening to her voice he offered her the opportunity to become an artist. When Moroni asked, "what kind of artist," he replied, "we do Eurobeat." Moroni did not know about Eurobeat at that time but still decided to take the opportunity to travel and sing at Time Records' studio in Verona. There, "I did my first

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[242] "My Biography," Bratt Sinclaire, accessed April 6, 2024, https://brattsinclaire.com/about-me/my-biography/.
[243] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.
[244] "Various – Super Eurobeat Vol. 174," Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/master/440552-Various-Super-Eurobeat-Vol-174.
[245] "Various – Super Eurobeat Vol. 202," Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/10179856-Various-Super-Eurobeat-Vol-202.

Eurobeat song as a background vocalist for ‘Love at First Sight’ by Joe Yellow.” Afterwards, the producers liked her performance and kept calling her to sing more background and foreground vocals. Sometimes, they also asked her if she wanted to put her face and real name on the covers, but she declined. “I had this sensation that I couldn’t work in this genre for a lot of time.” Because the Eurobeat movement was still in its infancy, making a career out of it did not seem like a wise decision in case it did not do so well. Instead, Moroni preferred to work from behind the scenes, with multiple aliases attached to her voice. When I asked her if she felt any difference between singing Italo-Disco and Eurobeat, she responded by simply saying “it’s the same, it’s like walking and running.” Furthermore, the “melodies are the same, but they are just faster [in Eurobeat.]”

When Moroni sang and helped produce Eurobeat tracks, she already knew that the tracks were being shipped to Japan. “But the thing that I didn’t know, was that in Japan, Eurobeat was getting bigger and bigger.” When she was a freelancer and/or employee at Time Records, “all the things that I did before, I was not conscious about how big I was there. I was like a superstar. I got management, escorts, big cars, people guided my path. Like a real celebrity.” Throughout the 1990s, since the start of either 1992 or 1993, Clara Moroni frequented Japan for business trips. After Moroni co-founded Delta with Gelmetti and Leonardi, “we used to go to Japan at least 3-4 times a year. Especially after we got ‘Night of Fire,’ the hit. We had to bring Niko [alias for Maurizio de Jorio] every couple of months to do some gigs, or festivals, or TV shows.” At some point, Moroni became too tired of travelling so frequently to Japan that Laurent Gelmetti started to go in her place. Moroni had often gone to Japan because “I was also the label manager. So, Bratt Sinclaire and Laurent Newfield were staying at the studio [producing tracks] while I was

maintaining relations with Avex. It was also my duty as label manager to escort artists there [to Japan] to perform. I also went there to perform."[246]

Regarding Avex, Delta's business with them did not immediately begin after Delta was founded, meaning that Avex likely did not anticipate or seek the collaboration of more Eurobeat labels. In 1995 "we first sent an email, telling Avex that Laurent, Sinclair, and me were creating this label. And of course, Time Records and S.A.I.F.A.M were not happy about that because we might have taken a slice of their profits." But since the three talented musicians "were too strong" and "were too good," Avex "couldn't let us go." In 1995 Delta met with Avex's co-leader, Tom Yoda, in London at his major suite with a big living room after he arrived from other business matters. "After a few words, he said 'okay.' And we signed the contract in London." From then on, Delta developed a closer relationship with Avex. Tom Yoda once specified that he wanted the producers to produce and Moroni in charge of relations with Avex to "keep the ego away from a professional relationship between Delta and Avex," likely so that Avex could be assured that Delta would operate efficiently and a reliable connection would persist between the Italian label and the Japanese company. When I asked if Tom Yoda suggested or commanded this request, Moroni responded that "from Tom Yoda, it was a command."[247] Yoda likely 'commanded' it because not only was he a tough negotiator, but as the then chairman of Avex he probably understood how the company and its relationship with its licensees should be run. As such, due to its close relationship with the Italian label, Avex did somewhat influence the production of Delta's music. Moroni said that "in a sense, they were interfering with our production." Sometimes, Avex asked Delta to change a few things in the demos Delta sent them, such as the way the singer sang. However, gradually over time Avex "just let go because the

[246] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.
[247] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.

demos were perfect."[248] So, at least in the case of Delta, the Eurobeat label did cooperate closely with Avex, however, it was not necessarily tied to Avex.

Section 2: The Expansion of Avex

Avex grew remarkably quickly and exponentially throughout the early 1990s as Avex Trax continued to frequently release new SEB albums while also bringing in new genres and dance artists under Avex Trax. Already by 1993, Avex managed to host the "Avex Rave'93" event at the Tokyo Dome, a landmark baseball stadium, where various EDM got performed by international artists visiting Japan. At the end of the same year, Avex established its second sublabel Cutting Edge Inc. to expand its overall market.[249] Cutting Edge targeted "core music fans" by concentrating on licensed overseas artists, and not just within the Eurobeat labels they already worked with. When Avex established Cutting Edge, Yoda said "with the new labels, we're trying to push the artists' image or their cutting-edge sound." Avex's decision to establish Cutting Edge was related to the fact that Avex Trax handled too many products to keep up with at the time, including their successful techno compilations aimed at Juliana's Disco market in the early-mid 1990s. Later in 1994 Avex held another rave event at the Tokyo Dome with the appearance of 30 different artists and an attendance space for at least 50,000 people.[250]

Even before establishing Avex Trax to release their own music, Avex as a wholesaler already seemed to plan big. In 1989, Tom Yoda booked the company's first exhibition space at the yearly international music conference at Canne, France, called MIDEM.[251] By 1996, Avex D.

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[248] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.
[249] "History of the Avex," Avex, accessed April 6, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/corp/history/.
[250] Steve McClure, "Tokyo Indie Makes Trax for New Sounds: Cutting Edge Brings Overseas Music to Core Fans," *Billboard*, June 11, 1994, 39.
[251] Steve McClure, "Under Yoda, Multi-faceted Avex is Japan's Powerhouse Indie: Female Idol Ayumi Hamasaki's New Chart-Topping Album is Latest Proof That Label is Now 'One of the Boys,'" *Billboard*, January 19, 2002, 63.

D. Inc. could send 65 people to represent Avex, showcase a concert, and double the size of their booth from previous years to accommodate a space for their international sublabels such as Avex Hong Kong. Meanwhile, other Japanese record companies like Fujipacific kept their eyes open for good melodies and something to learn from Avex's success in the field of dance music.[252] At MIDEM, Avex executives could also conveniently meet with Time Records's CEO, Giacomo Maiolini. Additionally, Maiolini himself traveled Japan several times a year to meet with the inner people at Avex, and Avex sometimes sent their people to Italy to sign deals and discuss new productions with Time.[253]

Throughout the 1990s, Avex continuously expanded as a major Asian music company on the international stage. On October 1st, 1996, Tom Yoda signed a licensing deal with Zomba group's CEO, Clive Calder, for the rights to distribute their music from the Jive and Silvertone labels in Japan. Immediately afterwards, that November, Avex Trax released songs by the Western pop group Backstreet Boys in Japan.[254] At another transaction, Avex also gained the rights to distribute some of Earth, Wind & Fire's music in Japan because, as Yoda said, ""Earth, Wind & Fire" is one of the few old-name artists that [still] get dance freaks excited." The disco group's album "Avatar" released in Japan in 1996, while the Hong Kong-based Avex Asia Ltd. (a wholly owned subsidiary) released "Avatar" in the rest of East Asia.[255] Avex continued to expand its international repertoire by deciding to import trance music to Japan after conceiving a plan with the Belgian label Antler-Subway, an Avex licensee, during the 1998 MIDEM. As Haji Taniguchi, the then director of international A&R at Avex, said, "dance music has always been

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[252] Steve McClure, "Japan: Labels Dance into Other Genres and Territories," *Billboard*, January 27, 1996, 62
[253] Maiolini, Giacomo, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.
[254] Steve McClure, "Avex D. D. Signs Licensing Deal with Zomba Labels for Japan," *Billboard*, October 5, 1996. 44.
[255] Ibid., 70.

our backbone." And so, for Avex's 10-year anniversary in 1998, trance music joined the dance floor at Avex's Roppongi discotheque, Velfarre.[256]

The same year, Avex reorganized itself to "prevent 'big-company disease," as Tom Yoda said at the end of 1997 when the conglomerate employed around 500 people.[257] Reorganization benefited Avex because it not only made the conglomerate more efficient, but it also allowed Avex to prepare for their stock market debut on October 1998,[258] where they eventually got listed alongside the nation's other large companies in the first section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange.[259] By July 1999, Steve McClure of *Billboard* magazine described Avex as the "most successful Japanese indie." He stated that "the "indie" tag hardly seems appropriate" anymore in describing a company that consistently performed financially well in comparison to its mediocre-performing competitors, including the giant Sony Music Entertainment Japan (SMEJ).[260] A few years later, in 2002, Avex was one of the top three record companies in Japan with an impressive share of about 14% in the overall music market, in the second largest music market in the world.

Aside from Masato Matsuura and Tom Yoda, another key individual who contributed to the Avex's dominion over the dance market in Japan was Ryuhei Chiba. While Matsuura possessed the foresight and intuition in picking out viable songs, Chiba alternatively analyzed a song's practicality from a business management standpoint. In a fundamental way, Chiba played the reliable role of a liaison, or an 'interpreter,' when it came to connecting the passion of the music to the business. Thus, Chiba was a key asset in operating the company on the ground

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[256] Steve McClure, "Avex Launches Dance Music Project: Japanese Label Hopes Trance Releases Will Revive Scene," *Billboard*, May 2, 1998, 58.
[257] Steve McClure, "Japanese Label Avex Undergoes Reorganization," *Billboard*, December 20, 1997, 1.
[258] "History of the Avex," Avex, accessed April 6, 2024, https://avex.com/jp/en/corp/history/.
[259] Maiolini, Giacomo, audio interview by author, Brescia, Italy, July 10th, 2023.
[260] Steve McClure, "Uncovering the Future," *Billboard*, July 31, 1999, 66.

level.[261] During the transformative 1996-2004 period, when Tom Yoda served as the representative of the company while Masato Matsuura served as the senior managing director, Chiba not only continued to help manage the company but also factor in the future development of it. Chiba realized that Avex needed to rely less on the distribution and sales of CDs, and should instead develop peripheral businesses for additional sources of income in case CD sales plummeted. Thus, he initiated Avex's creation of a department dedicated to advertising products aside from CDs, such as artists merchandise.

In addition, Chiba influenced the innovative decision to advertise the entire company "Avex" as its own brand, an uncommon concept at the time. Due to that decision, the logo for their dance label "Avex Trax" was displayed at the end of every Avex commercial on TV.[262] These developments meant that whenever a viewer turned on the TV and saw an advertisement by Avex, they could see a product like the Super Eurobeat series being advertised. Not only do advertisements tend to correlate with an increase in sales, the appearance of Avex's logo in direct connection to Eurobeat very likely helped 'legitimize' the foreign-sounding genre as a part of a local brand. More importantly, Avex's rise as a high-level record company meant that it possessed the resources, and thus the ability, to engage in large-scale advertisement and merchandise campaigns for their products like Eurobeat. So, thanks to Avex's reliable grip on the music market, Eurobeat was able to easily sustain itself in Japan and further advance the notion that it was a distinct genre.

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[261] Toshiki Watanabe 渡邉登志喜, "Dejitaruka no shinten ni yoru entateimento kigyo no senryaku henyo: baryu chen bunseki ni yoru henka no bunseki to yosoku"
デジタル化の進展によるエンタテイメント企業の戦略変容:
バリューチェーン分析による変化の分析と予測 [Strategic transformation of entertainment companies due to the progress of digitalization: Analysis and prediction of changes through value chain analysis], (Masters diss., Keio University Graduate School of Business Administration, 2015), 31.

[262] Ibid., 32.

Section 3: The Diversification of the Eurobeat Industry

Eurobeat peaked in Japan during the 'third Eurobeat boom' that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s. No Eurobeat song better encapsulates the 1990s Eurobeat frenzy for the public than the song "Night of Fire." Although released in 1997, its appearance in Initial D in 1999 made it incredibly popular in mainstream Japanese society. The appeal of the song spread beyond SEB and Initial D when girl groups like Dream[263] and Hinoi Team[264] covered it in 2000 and 2005 respectively. Sung by Niko (Maurizio de Jorio) and produced by Bratt Sinclaire (Andrea Leonardi), "Night of Fire" won Delta three prestigious Japanese music awards in 2000.[265] The song's popularity in Japan speaks for itself when in 2018 Universal Music Japan released an international music compilation named "Best 1 Hits" and it included "Night of Fire" alongside Psy's 2012 "Gangnam Style" and A-ha's 1984 "Take on Me."[266]

During Eurobeat's heyday, the genre did not exist as an out of place niche music unknown to society. A passerby in Tokyo's 1990s 'electronic quarter,' Akihabara, may have heard Eurobeat commonly played outside of street shops through loudspeakers. The second and third Eurobeat booms, from the mid-1990s till the early 2000s, were marked by the appearance of new labels and a new array of Eurobeat styles propelled by those new labels and their producers. Audibly, "Night of Fire" is quite different from its predecessor Eurobeat tracks like

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[263] "Dream (2) – Super Eurobeat Presents Night Of Fire," Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/2987763-Dream-Super-Eurobeat-Presents-Night-Of-Fire.

[264] "Hinoi Team with Korikki – Night Of Fire / Play With The Numbers," Discogs, accessed April 6, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/master/874781-Hinoi-%E3%83%81%E3%83%BC%E3%83%A0-With-%E3%82%B3%E3%83%AA%E3%83%83%E3%82%AD%E3%83%BC-Night-Of-Fire-Play-With-The-Numbers.

[265] "My Biography," Bratt Sinclaire, accessed April 6, 2024, https://brattsinclaire.com/about-me/my-biography/.

[266] Universal Music Japan, "Yōgaku o kikanai hito mo zettai ni shitte iru konpi "besuto 1 HITS" 洋楽を聴かない人も絶対に知っているコンピ[BEST 1 HITS] ["BEST 1 HITS" is a Compilation that even People who don't Listen to Western Music Definitely Know], Youtube, September 12, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_jua8AoOMY.

Vanessa's 1989 "Just a Game" released by Time Records, and perhaps even "King and Queen" by the artist of the same name (also produced by Bratt Sinclaire while at ABeatC.)

It may seem counterintuitive, but Eurobeat truly did grow more diverse, creative, and popular during a time when most prominent Eurobeat labels cooperated with Avex in one way or another. Even Asia Records, sublabel of S.A.I.F.A.M which traditionally released under Alfa International in Japan (until Alfa Records changed due to financial troubles in the mid-1990s,) eventually distributed their music via Avex's SEB. This is not to say that Eurobeat labels and their producers always experienced positive trends or results with Avex at 'the helm,' but the continued expansion of the Eurobeat industry into the 1990s demonstrates a willingness to produce music aimed at Japanese audiences. It proves that Eurobeat, a genre formerly almost exclusively reserved to the Japanese market, still experienced demand in Japan even after the affluent bubble-era economy disappeared and genres like Italo-Disco, Hi-NRG, and so on, lost global relevance as a mainstream music.

Stefano Castagna Productions (SCP) is a good example of a new Eurobeat label that sought the cooperation of Avex, despite Avex's resistance to an increased supply of Eurobeat. Castagna and his wife, Evelina Somenzi, already participated in the Eurobeat movement prior to founding SCP Music. Interestingly, in my interview, Castagna said "my origin is not disco music, but more rock or indie music." Nonetheless, Castagna began producing Eurobeat in 1988 as a freelancer in collaboration with Sergio Dall'Ora, a lead producer at Time Records, and his studio associate, Alberto Benati. Castagna emphasized that his relationship "was with Sergio Dall'Ora, not with Time Records." In that relationship, according to Somenzi, "Stefano was the one in charge of the music making. Alberto Benati oversaw writing the lyrics, and Dall'Ora was the boss." Castagna also freelanced with Flea Records and later with ABeatC, such as

collaborating with Giancarlo Pasquini in the early 1990s. “Stefano and Giancarlo knew each other as teenagers and would do things that teenagers do, like sharing and listening to each other’s records.” However, “Stefano refreshed his acquaintance with Giancarlo to begin working with him. But the only thing Stefano did was give Giancarlo demos.”

In Castagna’s early career, he helped produce the 1991 “I’m a Macho Man” released by Flea Records, which got made with a ‘freewheeling’ methodology. Whenever Castagna, Benati, or Dall’Ora “had a musical idea, they just tried to develop it. All the reasoning, like ‘that was successful so let’s just try to do something better,’” did not happen. Instead, the “more industrial” methodology of production came later. The 1992 track “Kamikaze” already sounded different from previous Eurobeat due to a different style of production at ABeatC. Another song Castagna helped produce was the 1996 “Be my Lover” released by the label Vibration, a different collaboration group that consisted of Alberto Ferraris, Gino Caria, and Luigi Stanga. From Castagna’s experiences between 1991-1996, and perhaps generally reflective of the entire Eurobeat industry overall, the production methods of Eurobeat tracks evolved and the conducts with Avex became even more direct than before.

In the mid-1990s Castagna met Somenzi, who had been a student of English literature in the late 1980s before later writing lyrics for Eurobeat tracks and eventually co-founding SCP Music with Castagna. Around that time, Gino Caria and Castagna decided to create an independent Eurobeat label in 1994 called Vibration. Although Vibration sought to legitimize itself vis-à-vis Avex, Avex did not want to cooperate because it already dealt with enough other Eurobeat labels and Eurobeat products. Nevertheless, “Gino and Stefano worked very closely to try to find a new identity.” Yet unfortunately, Caria’s health declined rapidly, and he passed away in 1997 and Castagna remained alone in his recording studio, Ritmo & Blue. Initially, Alberto

Benati also participated but he soon split for personal reasons relating to major changes in his life. During roughly the 1995-1997 period, SCP searched for a "different voice, a different identity." Again, Castagna attempted to cooperate with Avex as a new label separate from Vibration, but Avex declined once more. To remedy their disconnect from the Japanese market, SCP Music asked for the assistance of Alberto Contini, co-founder of ABeatC. Contini listened to the new label's music and recognized its sound as its own distinct type of Eurobeat. Thus, while founded in 1996, it took SCP until 1997 to become a fully functioning Eurobeat label with its own unique identity that distributed in Japan via Avex.[267]

The cartoon Initial D accelerated both Eurobeat's popularity and the growth of SCP Music. In later seasons of the show, a substantial number of the background car racing scene songs were produced by SCP Music artists. The method behind who sang what alias in SCP releases demonstrates how a Eurobeat label helped diversify the sound and industry. From the start, SCP possessed "two peculiar characteristics" that set it apart from other labels. First, SCP produced a wide array of Eurobeat styles, such as melodic, rock, pop, sentimental, slow, fast, more aggressive, less aggressive, and so on. Then, in SCP, "we began to use real people attached to characters," which differed substantially from the common method of one singer possessing many separate aliases. Although Ennio Zanini, also known as Fastway, now possesses two separate aliases, individuals like Christian Codenotti are just Ace. Interestingly, Ace and Fastway are probably the first male-male Eurobeat duo, a little unusual because previous Eurobeat duos were composed either of only female-male or female-female vocalists.

The emergence of SCP Music offered the Japanese market a new type of Eurobeat influenced by its style of producing Eurobeat. Initially, SCP's relationship with Avex "wasn't

[267] Stefano Castagna, and Evelina Somenzi, audio interview by author, Milan, Italy, July 18th, 2023.

direct, we did not have direct access to Avex." Instead, they passed information through Contini in 1996, who served as an authoritative voice on behalf of SCP. Gaining Avex's attention was crucial for the development of SCP because, as Castagna said, the "Japanese market was a unique possibility for us Eurobeat producers." However, even in the early days of SCP, when Castagna and Somenzi produced music, they still possessed a freewheeling mentality when it came to strategizing the appeal of their music for consumer tastes. Although over time they did gradually start planning more strategically, their diverse array of musical styles benefited them along the way. For instance, the vocalist Christine (Cristina Tosi), who had a background in a pop band, sang pop-style Eurobeat. Somenzi said: "She had the kind of voice that was very popular at the time, because it was very similar to Madonna's voice, a bit nasal." Furthermore, "because so many of our friends sounded pop" they happened to suit the tastes of the Japanese market.[268]

The experiences of each Eurobeat label with Avex and the Japanese market differed. Yet there is no denying that Eurobeat producers continued to strive for success in the Japanese market even if Avex de-facto controlled the distribution of Eurobeat in late 1990s Japan. Initially, Avex sought to acquire contracts with Eurobeat labels because individuals like Matsuura foresaw an opportunity in directly acquiring and distributing the music in Japan. However, as the company grew bigger over time, and the amount of dance music they released piled up, its eagerness to acquire more Eurobeat labels lessened over time. Yet simultaneously, the appearance and efforts of new labels in Italy diversified the Eurobeat industry because new labels helped increase the popularity and reach of Eurobeat in Japan with their sound-styles. And although Eurobeat labels, both new and old, may have competed, each nevertheless found its

[268] Stefano Castagna, and Evelina Somenzi, audio interview by author, Milan, Italy, July 18th, 2023.

own niche in the Japanese Eurobeat market. This diversification ultimately also highlights the fact that Eurobeat did indeed exist as a distinct genre.

Thesis Conclusion

In this thesis, I explored the history of Eurobeat's emergence and its popularity from the perspective of its growing industry and prevalence as a sound in Japan. I examined Eurobeat from the lens of it embodying the phrase 'big in Japan,' and the historical reality of it existing as a pseudo-international genre. The sources I used throughout the thesis reflect the memories of prominent Eurobeat producers, developments of the Japanese music industry in the late twentieth century, the qualities of Eurobeat and Disco music, and the context of transnational developments between Italy/Europe and Japan.

Eurobeat gained a foothold and became popular in Japan as part of a wave of other foreign dance music imports in the 1980s. The appeal of Eurobeat's sound captured and sustained the attraction of various Japanese consumers to the music. The continued relevance and ever-growing popularity of the genre in the 1990s demonstrates that Eurobeat persisted as not merely a passing fad, but as a genre increasingly ingrained into Japanese electronic dance music culture. Furthermore, Eurobeat's origins belong as part of a broader historical context of when Italian producers developed a localized electronic version of Disco music, Italo-Disco, before exporting their music to Japan. Meanwhile, the 1980s Japanese market correlated with the exponentially growing Japanese economy of the 1970s and 1980s. The effects of an affluent Japan, with a growing domestic music market, indirectly influenced some Japanese record companies to search for non-Anglo foreign music to import and promote domestically. Eurobeat's sound emerged as a byproduct of that transnational trade between Italian Dfooisco producers and the preferences of the Japanese record companies. Additionally, the pseudo-international aspect of Eurobeat is also apparent in the 1980s context because the Japanese record companies inflated the 'internationality' of an Italian-made music aimed at the Japanese

market. By 1990, Eurobeat's status as a 'big in Japan' genre became more refined after the newcomer Japanese record company Avex achieved obtaining exclusive contracts with multiple Eurobeat labels. Relative to other Japanese Eurobeat distributors, Avex innovated by cooperating directly with labels like Time Records and ABeatC. By doing so, Avex institutionalized a sturdy link between the Italian producers and the Japanese music market. And as Avex grew ever more prominent in the music market, that link between Japan and Eurobeat further strengthened.

I argue that Eurobeat evolved into a proper music genre once Avex initiated close relationships with Eurobeat labels, allowing for Eurobeat producers to sell their tracks inside the wealthy (yet domestically dominated) Japanese music market. Furthermore, this 'institutional' connection Avex established helped Eurobeat labels to sustain themselves by having their Eurobeat tracks, like those found in the SEB series, to consistently make their way into the hands of Japanese consumers. These developments not only secured Eurobeat's foothold in Japan as an accepted EDM, but through Avex's distribution, Eurobeat also became a distinct genre disconnected from the Euro-Disco fad of the 1980s. Chapter 1 proves this when describing how Eurobeat gained popularity beyond the dance floors of discotheques by reaching mainstream status thanks to factors such as whenever J-pop artists sang covers of Eurobeat tracks. While chapter 2 demonstrates that the process of creating Eurobeat's sound was launched by the congruent interests of Italian producers and Japanese record companies. It reveals that the social and economic contexts of the 1980s helped influence both Italians and Japanese people to want to dance to a fun music, which contributed to the eventual appearance of Italian-made Eurobeat music landing in Japan. Thus, chapter 2 supported my argument on why Eurobeat managed to gain a foothold in Japan, while chapter 1 explored the extent of this foothold by detailing the many reasons as to why Japanese consumers found Eurobeat appealing. Chapter 3, on the other

hand, explores how Avex helped secure that Eurobeat foothold. Chapter 3 demonstrates that the cooperation between the Eurobeat labels and Avex, which eventually resulted in Eurobeat's establishment as a proper genre, was led by Avex's strong desire to acquire the rights to distribute Eurobeat tracks themselves. This cooperation contributed to Avex's rise as a major record company and their ability to fulfill Eurobeat's potential as a popular genre in Japan, while simultaneously also resulting in the appearance of new Eurobeat labels that diversified the Eurobeat sound and ultimately refined the genre's characteristics further.

I believe that this thesis expands upon Yusuke Wajima's 2022 article by detailing the process by which Japanese record companies "almost fabricated" the Eurobeat genre by selling it as a popular 'international' music, when, in fact they were dealing with an internationally obscure Italian genre. Additionally, the thesis may also inform scholars of popular music of how foreign music can be transformed into a popular genre inside a single market during a time when the world was becoming increasingly more interconnected through globalization. Finally, this thesis might also help make historians of Japanese music and culture more aware of the significance of Eurobeat as an influential foreign and local force in late twentieth-century Japanese music history. It might even intrigue them to learn that the co-founder of Avex, Tom Yoda, used to say that "Eurobeat is *enka*," as in tradition, likely referring to how ingrained Eurobeat is as a localized music in Japan.[269]

Eurobeat's history reflects the spirit and conditions of 1990s and late 1980s Italian studios, Japanese discotheques, mid-1990s J-pop concerts, and the Shibuya streets where people did Para Para. However, Eurobeat's popularity has persisted until today thanks to the power of the internet in spreading the genre globally. Thus, the significance of Eurobeat's emergence

[269] Moroni, Clara, audio interview by author, Monza, Italy, July 13th, 2023.

around 1990 is undeniable, as after that point, Eurobeat began to grow as its own distinct genre. And its creation can be credited to the many individuals who partook in the Eurobeat movement: from the listeners of Eurobeat and the staff at discotheques to the Japanese record importers and the Italian producers who made it all possible.

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