



## INTERVIEW: How Ranking of Kings Composer MAYUKO Found The Heart Of Bojji's Fantasy

*The Cells at Work! composer talks influences, composition methods and more*

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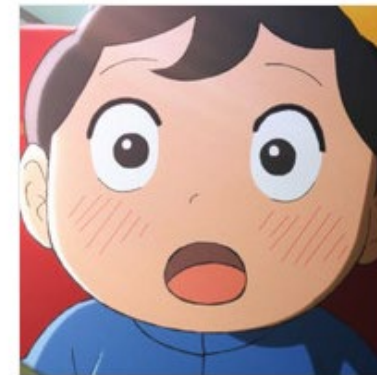
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Bojji may be at the heart of *Ranking of Kings*, but that heart just wouldn't beat as loudly without an appropriately moving score. Thankfully, the anime adaptation of Sosuke Toka's manga knocks that particular ingredient out of the park thanks to the work of **MAYUKO**. We had the opportunity to speak with the composer about transitioning from the educational Innerspace of *Cells at Work!*, the influences and composition methods that fuel *Ranking of Kings*, and more. So **crank up the volume on the soundtrack** and read on for some insight!

**What was your initial impression of *Ranking of Kings* when you joined the project as composer? Can you tell us a little about how you got involved in the first place?**

**MAYUKO:** Although our first meeting was face-to-face through a mask, I got the impression that the Director, Yosuke Hatta, was a very serious person and very careful with his storyboard drawings. The Sound Director, Yasunori Ebina, seemed to have strong beliefs and gave us instructions quickly and clearly. I was also impressed that there were women producers. I think my work on *Cells at Work!* led to *Ranking of Kings*. I am deeply grateful to those who recommended me and thought, "Maybe MAYUKO can write music for Bojji," and for those that chose me for this project.



***Ranking of Kings* is very different from your other anime work so far. How did you approach creating music for the series after handling the soundtrack for something like *Cells at Work!*?**

**MAYUKO:** *Cells at Work!* takes place in a world of good and evil, whereas *Ranking of Kings* is a more emotionally moving, sensitive, and deep story. There were many battle scenes, but I made sure to remember that the most important thing was that the music was true to the themes of emotional turmoil, friendship, and love.

**The orchestral arrangements fit perfectly with the material. Did you experiment with any other musical styles before moving forward with this one or was it something the other staff members requested from the beginning?**

**MAYUKO:** There was an initial request to use orchestral music to express the medieval atmosphere of *Ranking of Kings*. I also thought that this type of music was perfect, so I was able to proceed without hesitation.



**Is there any particular aspect of a series you focus on first when composing? Do you think of the setting, characters, or a combination of everything to guide the direction of the soundtrack?**

**MAYUKO:** For any project, I start by reading the original work. I become a fan of the work by reading the lines aloud until I can draw different portraits of the characters. In this case, I played piano pieces by Beethoven and Chopin for several days before I started to compose. After completing my classical music study, I created "Theme of Bojji" first. The birth of the main phrase, "Bojji and Kage," is really where this anime starts.

**Were there any specific fantasy titles that inspired your work or that you see as hallmarks of the genre worth studying?**

**MAYUKO:** There are so many, but one of the best soundtracks is to *West Side Story*. I had just seen the new movie adaptation at the theater the day after it was released and have seen the stage production many times. I even danced as a member of the Jets at my school's production of the musical (laughs). I can't really make songs like Bernstein for this show — my favorite music and the music I make don't necessarily go together.



**It could be the visuals playing into this but some of the way the music is incorporated reminds me of classic RPG series like Dragon Quest. Have any composers in the video game industry influenced the development of your style?**

**MAYUKO:** Great question. The only RPG game I ever got into was *Dragon Quest* and it was the *Dragon Quest* orchestral concert that I first begged my parents to let me attend. The song "Ouhi no Ketsudan" is a bit like "Rondo (Castle Theme)." I aim for background music that is melodic enough to be sung, so there may be some overlap with Koichi Sugiyama and I, who wrote a lot of the popular songs. I know it sounds presumptuous, but ...

**Ranking of Kings has a delicate balance of a light adventuring aesthetic and darker and more violent narrative elements. How do you go about matching that tone with your compositions?**

**MAYUKO:** Since there are no visuals when I start writing a song, I try to get into the world of the character instead. As for Bojji, when I decided to use the soprano recorder as the main instrument for his theme, I was able to create it rather smoothly. Also, the voice actors' vocal samples were very helpful. While listening to the lines, I checked various things, such as the tension of the chorus, the tempo, and so on.



**The stakes get higher and higher as the story progresses. How does this affect the way you compose overarching themes and motifs for the series?**

**MAYUKO:** The music of Ouken, the powerful enemy in the latter half of the show, is probably the key. The music of Ouken uses the sound of cathedral bells — the metallic sound of the bells gave me the same impression as the metallic sound of his armor-clad body. In an instant, he's a bad guy! My favorite song is "Senritsu," which was created by bumping the notes by semitones to make the audience think, "I'm not sure what is happening."

**You have a keen grasp on conveying a foreboding atmosphere, especially with songs that play during key Ouken scenes. Do you find yourself drawn to certain moods more than others, whether they be themes of horror, hope, or something else entirely?**

**MAYUKO:** There was a request to make Ouken's music "not human" and a bit wacky and crazy, so I think I was able to create it with a lot of energy. I have always personally been good at creating warm and emotional songs, songs like "Bojji to Kage no Yujyo" "Dakishimetekureru Sonzai," etc.



**This might be a tough one, but do you have a favorite *Ranking of Kings* character? You can totally say Bojji if that's the case, he's amazing!**

**MAYUKO:** It's Hiling! A loving mother. There are a lot of characters who would be long dead if it weren't for her. She is a super important character. I also love Despa, who has many wise words — I wish he would train me!

***The 91-track *Ranking of Kings* soundtrack is now available everywhere from Milan Records.***