



Cowboy Bebop: A Genre of Its Own

By Kaitlin Meaney

It's a new year and its time for a fresh start (boy do we need it). With this in mind, I'm going to take this opportunity to go back to basics with a classic retro anime. This month I am going to tell you about my thoughts revisiting Cowboy Bebop!

Cowboy Bebop, is undeniably a classic. This show is going to have such an impact on you that you're not going to forget whether you like it or not.

I saw it about two years ago and it's still resonated. I watched the dub and this cast is very stellar for an English dub of an anime. I used to be really into dubs but have recently converted to the original Japanese with subtitles, and this dub is one of my faves. As research for this article I took the liberty to watch the subbed version and the original voice actors are stellar as well. No one can replace Steve Blum (*Final Fantasy: Advent Children* and many more) as Spike for me, his voice is too perfect.

The series was directed by Shinichirō Watanabe, a very well known name in Japanese animation, who intended to produce a new genre of anime with this show and damn did he do that. *Cowboy Bebop* puts together a space western with 40's noire and jazz music as the main score. This might sound like a weird concept but in this show it works. The reason this work sis that Watanabe would get inspired from music composer Yoko Konno's music when writing scenes for the anime and in turn she would become inspired by his writing to write music for that particular scene. There's so much love put into this show and it shows.

I will get back to the music in a little bit but now onto plot and characters. The plot mainly centers around bounty hunters Spike and Jet who are pretty broke. They go from job to job looking to earn enough money to eat. Along the way they pick up a hustler with a debt called Faye Valentine, a hacker named Edward who talks about herself in the third person and an intelligent Welsh corgi they name Ein. They all have respective episodes to introduce them and how they end up together.



(From left: Spike Spiegel, Jet Black, Faye Valentine, Ed and Ein)

The first episode establishes the relationship between Spike and Jet as it has been up until this point giving us a glimpse into what their daily lives have been. This sets the scene for life on the *Bebop* spacecraft. It begins with Jet and Spike on the ship. Spike is working out and Jet is preparing their meal or bell peppers and beef. When Jet calls him in to eat Spike finds that there is in fact no beef in the bell peppers and beef because they can't afford beef. The overall plot of the episode is a pretty typical tragic sob story. It's not something we haven't seen before but the interesting thing is that opening scene with Spike and Jet. It then ends with them doing the same thing but having had the tragic story happen. They go through their routine and however impactful the events were for them (especially Spike), they must go about their lives as they usually would. I love this because it reminds us of how when life is bad it's a lot easier to move on instead of dwelling on it

The character development for each of these characters is unfinished, you never get to see the full backstory of any character even, in Jet's case where multiple episodes are dedicated to little tidbits of his past. With Spike on the other hand, his backstory is masked in mystery and we never get the whole story. That, I think is what makes his character the most interesting; that you know next to nothing about him. What you do find out is little tidbits that are scattered around the episodes. Even those meant to center around his back story are just vague enough for there not to be a full explanation. Spike spends most of the show betting on which particular job might be his last; whether he make it out alive. In one episode in particular, *Pierrot le Fou*, he goes after Le Fou without even needing to. The bounty was on someone Le Fou killed and there is nothing on his head, but Spike confronts him anyway gambling with his life. But then he's so nonchalant about it which makes it kind of depressing as well.

I always found Spike as a nod or tribute to Bruce Lee. Not in the way his character is written but in his fight scenes. I've never seen any Bruce Lee films but just something about him gave me that vibe. When/ if you watch it you might see it too but it might just be my weird interpretation.

Going back to music; all the music in this show is incredible. Mostly due to what I mentioned earlier about Watanabe and Konno. Most of the episodes have either upbeat jazz for action scenes or smooth jazz for mellow moments. Every episode is called a "session" which

shows how much each episode is centered around its music. For example episodes like *Heavy Metal Queen*, *Ballad of Fallen Angels* and *Cowboy Funk* all have distinctive music to their respective episodes. *Heavy Metal Queen* uses heavy metal in the soundtrack, *Ballad of Fallen Angels* has music that plays like a ballad and *Cowboy Funk* has old style western music. I really love how they've done that, especially in *Heavy Metal Queen* because heavy metal wouldn't fit into the series anywhere else and it is a great way to change it up. Though I would have been okay if Jazz was the only music used but it was something else that kept me interested.

As I said, this show will stay with you. I know it's stayed with me for about two years and I would watch it again and again just to see that awesome animation and interesting characters go about their lives. Along with *HunterxHunter* in my first article, I highly recommend this series to anyone looking for a dramatic good time.