



Swan, Volume 1

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One of the most famous shoujo manga books ever published, SWAN is Ariyoshi Kyoko's best-selling classic about a girl who strives to become a great ballerina. Masumi Hijiri is a 16-year-old girl about to enter her first ballet contest. The competition is fierce, and there's no telling whether she'll win, or how far her training can take her. After seeing her performance, the great director Sergeiev Alexej invites Masumi to join his company, and it is thus that she launches her career -- only to spend years dancing in the shadow of prima ballerina Kyogoku Sayoko. SWAN Vol. 1 begins the tale of Masumi's incredible journey through the great baller companies of Europe and America and through both triumph and despair as she struggles toward her goal of becoming the greatest dancer of her generation!

Swan, Volume 1 Details

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Author : Kyoko Ariyoshi , Maya Perry (Translator)

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From Reader Review Swan, Volume 1 for online ebook

Skjam! says

Masumi Hijiri is the daughter of a widowed sculptor, who has enjoyed her ballet lessons since she was a little girl. She loves to dance, and watch others perform in ballet. But stuck in a small city in rural Hokkaido, there just isn't the chance for truly expert training. So when Masumi suddenly gets an invitation to compete in a national ballet scouting event, with instruction at the top Otori School as a prize, she decides to give it her all!

This famous shoujo (girls') manga started in 1976 and ran for 21 volumes, of which 15 were published in English by the ill-fated CMX label. There was a surge of interest in ballet dancing in Japan at the time, and the creator did a lot of research to make the movements and poses look right.

The handicap of Masumi's inferior training is offset by her enormous potential as a prima ballerina, or so we are led to believe by every experienced instructor's reactions to her dancing. She's still very much prone to moments of comical klutziness. Masumi is chosen to attend Otori, and it's at this point she learns her mother was in fact a locally famous ballerina herself. Somehow this has never come up in conversation with her father or teachers before. (But it will be a recurring plot point later in the series.)

At school, Masumi becomes good friends with Sayoko Kyogoku (who is also her rival), the handsome Hisho Kusakabe who is Sayoko's long-time partner, and Aoi Yanagisawa, who is Hisho's friendly rival. They all train rigorously. Masumi is soon struggling to keep up, and is signed up for extra training with famous Russian dancer Alexei Sergeiev, along with the impulsive Yuka Asagi.

It turns out that all this was preparation for a contest to see which Otori students get to go to Moscow to train with that internationally acclaimed ballet troupe. The ballet is "Sleeping Beauty" and Sayoko, Masumi and Yuka are all dancing for the role of Aurora—only one of them will succeed!

This manga is made in the flowery, elaborately detailed style popular in shoujo in the 1970s, which works very well for the world of ballet. It's also expressive of the melodramatic emotions the characters undergo. Modern readers may find the art style somewhat antiquated and over the top.

While the creator did her research, there are some moments that are not particularly realistic in order to ratchet up the dramatic tension—those well-trained in the ballet field will easily spot them.

I am uncertain if it is the paper quality or I simply got unlucky with storage, but my copy's pages have discolored much more than other manga volumes printed at the same time. Collectors may have a hard time finding a copy in mint condition.

Recommended to fans of ballet or the Princess Tutu anime, especially girls.

Julia says

Wow, classic shoujo is definitely an adjustment to read. The artwork is more flowery and the emotions are more dramatic. This one is an old CMX title publishing a 1970s ballet epic. The initial setup brings together

dancers for a ballet competition where they'd win private lessons with top dancers and choreographers. The contrast is between Hijiri Masumi - a young girl that loves to dance but has flawed technique - and the other brilliant young dancers like Sayoko Kyogoku. I'll be honest -- some of the plot points stretch credulity -- not many top companies can afford to lose their best dancers/etc for six months unless it's in the middle of summer maybe. And maybe I've watched too many ballet documentaries but I can't believe any dancer would complain about having to train "the basics". The professionals still take class every day. But it was nice to see familiar ballets and even real dancers like Margot Fonteyn and Gelsey Kirkland mentioned in the volume.

Nga Linh says

It is a fine enough manga, the plot was not the best; however, the mangaka actually researched about ballet. There was a part I find peculiar is that the characters ate right before a big test or a full work-out. They sometimes do some dancing without even a quick barre work.

Life is certainly stranger than fiction. The main protagonist lacked personality in comparison the real dancers in their autobiography.

It certainly is great in the fact it does not have any romance subplot yet and the characters worked hard to have something so there are suspense. However, the continuous competitions made ballet seem like a sport. The art is beautiful, and this manga has so many beautiful drawings of dance.

Alison (AlisonCanRead) says

I picked up Swan without knowing much about it. According to the blurb at least, it's a classic. The story was first published in 1976 but it has a timeless feel to it. No matter the decade, the story of a girl driving to make something of herself never gets old.

Masumi is an underdog. She is from rural Hokkaido, an island at the northern end of Japan (very cold, but very beautiful - I really want to visit). She loves to dance, but lacks the rigorous training opportunities that are open to girls from more urban areas of Japan. The volume starts out with Masumi at her first ballet competition. She does well, but ultimately fails because she doesn't have the right training.

Luckily, a Russian ballet instructor sees her potential and invites her to be part of a new training program in Tokyo. Masumi is at a disadvantage not only because of her training, but also because she is the only one who didn't earn her way there through the competition. Some of her classmates see her as a usurper. Plus, she also has to adjust to her strict Russian instructor and the relentless and seemingly pointless repetition of the basics. But by the end we all see Masumi's potential begin to blossom.

As I said earlier, this series is nearly 40 years old. I loved the references to the Soviet Union and the seventies style fashions. It was so quaint. This is the first older manga series that I've read. I can't see a big difference in the art or writing. It does seem a bit denser than other series. There are more drawing boxes (the proper term escapes me right now) per page than in other series.

Swan is definitely a series I want to continue. It was satisfying to see Masumi change through hard work while maintaining her cheerfulness and humility. There's no romance in this volume, but it's a charming tale nonetheless.

Tiffany Johnson says

I like how the author illustrates through words and pictures how in ballet, passion is just as important as technique, if not more.

The illustrations were so good. The characters all so expressive. The plot moved right along too- sweet book!

Zoe Tribley says

Reading just the first book was a pretty challenging task.

In a more positive tone, I had no complaints about the drawing. The art was beautiful and very bishi/shoujo everyone had huge eyes, regardless of gender, and everyone's body was impeccably perfect. Lol like dem mangas.

But in the harsh realities of this series, not only was it hard to follow as the characters all looked the same- wide eyed, tall, and beautiful (men and women), the story was just as hard to follow as scenes jumped from here to there. The congruity was a little off and things were not cohesive enough for me to actually enjoy myself.

As I was just to busy trying to understand what exactly was happening at the moment.

Another thing that I didn't like was the slow moving plot. I have no problem with the topic of ballet, it's beautiful and graceful. It takes endurance and motivation. But always reminding your readers that yes, this story is about the hardships and strifes of ballet life- it gets a tad overexposed after the first few chapters.

Well that was my brief review, all I can say with full happiness- is to read this at your own discretion. And maybe, hopefully, you will enjoy it more than I did. ^^

PS. The people's expressions in this manga? They literally went from beautifully stunning, enduring the battles of ballet!!! to comedically and immaturely cartoon like. Like bulging eyes that you'd find in the Sunday paper's Garfield comic strip. And bodies like small squiggles.

Inex Palit says

The best ballet manga that I ever read! I read volume 1-21 in Indonesia but always hope that CMX will republish and finish translating volume 16-21 into English version.

Rachel Swords says

Things I liked about "Swan":

- 1)the idea of a ballet-centric story in manga format is highly original and creative.
- 2)the drawings of the steps were accurate and very well done.
- 3)the male dancers/students were the most interesting characters.
- 4)the famous ballets that are referred to in the story get quick explanations, and with some of the stories, that's not always easy to do!
- 5)the ballet terms in the dialogue weren't dumbed down; instead, there was a glossary at the bottom of each page to help the reader out.

Things I did not like:

- 1)the heroine, Masumi. She has got to be, out of all the manga I've read so far, the most wishy-washy character ever. Insecurity is certainly normal in the world of ballet, but Masumi takes it to a whole new level. Half the book is spent with her whining about how she's not good enough to dance, then she decides she wants to work harder, then something happens or she gets called out/gets into trouble and bawls her head off and decides she can't do it...it got to the point where I was counting the number of times she cried. And trust me, this girl cried way too many times for such a short book.
- 2)there's some sort of mysterious challenge as to why Masumi gets as far as she does. It's only referred to once, and I guess this gets explored a bit more in future volumes, but otherwise I found myself wondering, "yeah, she might have some potential, but otherwise, why is Masumi lucky enough to keep getting all these second chances?"
- 3)I know the whole silly face thing is a staple of manga, but it comes off as ridiculous and jarring to the plot when it's used in this story.
- 4)for a story somewhat grounded in reality, there's an awful lot that's unrealistic. The partnering idea was interesting and fun to read about, but would never happen at a real ballet competition. Also, Masumi would never get as far as she does, nor would she magically turn into a prima overnight like the end of the volume implies (she would improve, but they kind of go overboard in emphasizing how much she improves in such a short period). Also, if Masumi had such poor training, how did she make it to the competition?

I know I sound like a total ballet snob. But I did like this book, and I'd like to read the rest of the series.

Starbubbles says

oh, it's so good! the shocked look still freaks me out though. i keep thinking that the blank eye look means they are going to faint, not that they are so shocked, they can't speak. while reading the series, you get lovely

explanations and history of ballet. yay! you know, i have some knowledge of ballet, and still have some trouble visualizing what they were describing. but what ariyoshi does well is actually shows the movement of the steps instead of just snapshots. it reminded me a lot of an expanded version of *forbidden dance*, or more like *forbidden dance* is the condensed version of *swan*.

Dana Al-Basha ???? ?????? says

I began reading the series again and I enjoyed it as much as I did when I was 17! Masumi is very passionate about ballet but she has no confidence in her ability to win. Alexei Sergeiev is her teacher and the judge in the Japanese Ballet Competition; he sees something special in Masumi and her potential to become a great prima ballerina. But sometimes I feel he likes her deeply and personally.

Now that Masumi has the chance to live out her dream, does she have the strength?

Masumi is a 16-year-old attending a small ballet school in a remote part of Japan. When she gains admission to a school, she finally has the chance to realize her dreams. There, due to a lack of proper training, she is the weakest student in the group. Can she endure the hardship, the struggles and the fierce competition in the world of ballet?

Selena says

It was okay.

It was super technical, so if you haven't taken at least a year of non-kiddy-level ballet, don't even try. I was in ballet class for 14 years and I still had trouble understanding half of what they were talking about when it came to the dancing, which bugged me.

The characters didn't do much for me either.

Kira says

I've missed reading manga, but I could never get into any series when I tried to pick it back up. Clearly I needed to go to my staple - old school melodramatic shojo manga. And this series is fabulous and beautiful and so much fun! Matsumi's struggles with her self-confidence feels so real, and I love her friendship/rivalry with Sayoko. The manga really shows how difficult and demanding ballet is behind the beauty. It's also filled with fun facts about different ballets. Although hard to find, this is definitely something fans of shojo shouldn't miss!

Veronica Widyanti says

My first manga and the best story manga i ever read.. It's been 16 years, and still never get enough to read on and on..

Ursula Dewi says

saya dulu pernah baca serial komik ini lewat sewa.. sekarang ingi baca ulang lagi.. tapi sayang.. ditangerang susah banget yang nyewain komik swan ini. sedangkan kalau beli budgetnya ga cukup.. karena komik ini luar biasa bagus.. dan memang saya salah satu pecinta ballet dan komik

Zahra says

Best depiction of dance I've ever seen in fiction! You'd think it being a static comic, drawing dance sequences would be really hard, but the author really knows how to show bodies in action. I guess the only complaint is how does Masumi, the heroine, manage to pick up so many languages?! I get in a dance company you have to travel around a lot, but wow! Russian, English, German etc. Expect through the roof melodrama. It gets a bit ridiculous, but all in good fun. And Leonhart does improve, kinda.

Some readers don't really enjoy the New York arch, but jeez does that scene where Lucian dances Bolero send a skitter up my spine. If only I could post pictures in reviews.
