



Directing Dubs: David Wald talks To Love Ru anime and the value of controversial teen TV



by Victoria Davis 1 month ago

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Dub director David Wald talks directing anime comedy To Love Ru and the show's important dive into uncomfortable teen topics.

Adapted into four seasons of more than 60 episodes from a 36 volume manga series that spanned nearly 12 years, *To Love Ru* has earned its place among **famous Harem anime**. But despite its extensive amount of show and reading material, *To Love Ru* has also experienced backlash for its more explicit content.

Licensed by **Sentai Filmworks**, the show's now set for an English dub release March 31 and director David Wald isn't afraid to tackle the project. In fact, he believes the show harbors more substance than it been credited with in the past.

The anime, which first aired in 2008, follows the absurd misadventures of a good-hearted, albeit hormonal and clumsy, high-schooler named Rito Yuki (Ry McKeand) who gets a surprise, and literal crash-landing, visit from an Outerspace princess named Lala Satalin Deviluke (Alexis Tipton). While Rito spends most of his days trying desperately to confess to his long-time crush, Haruna Sairenji (Bryn Aprill), he becomes unwillingly engaged to Lala when Devilukean commander Zastin (Scott Gibbs) arrives to bring Lala home and the impulsive princess abruptly decides she will marry the now bewildered Rito in order to stay on Earth.

The show then spirals into a wild series mixed with typical high school drama and adventures sparked by more alien encounters. Utilizing the age-old cinematic **comedy of threes rule**, dating back to Vaudevillian theatre and Charlie Chapman, *To Love Ru* specializes in the ridiculous and relatable. But *To Love Ru's* unfiltered approach to typical teen challenges like first love, unrequited love, and the hormones every high schooler knows and dreads, **sparked controversy** among Japanese parents who believed the show to be in violation of Tokyo's revised **Youth Healthy Development Ordinance**.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Youth Healthy Development Council concluded the show was not in violation of the new ordinance standards, but its left quite a package for Wald to unpack. The dub director and voice actor has never shied away from hot-button shows before, leading the charge in **LGBTQ anime dubbing**. Hidden Remote talked with Wald about what made him fall for *To Love Ru*, his appreciation for controversial teen TV and the value in shows that promote open discussion.



Hidden Remote: Had you gotten a chance to watch this anime, *To Love Ru*, before hearing about it being picked up by Sentai Filmworks?

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David Wald: I had not. As I've become fond of explaining, I was not a consumer of anime before becoming involved in acting in it. I knew *Speed Racer* and *Battle of the Planets* from my childhood and with few other classics on the list, like *To Love Ru*. I'd heard plenty, it being sort of a paradigm in the Harem genre. I didn't watch *To Love Ru* until Sentai talked to me about directing it and I fell absolutely in love with Rito's sense of humor and was laughing like an idiot.

Hidden Remote: **It's an anime that really doesn't hold back with its comedy. What were some of your first reactions to watching the show?**

Wald: This show took me quite by surprise. I'd worked on a couple of Harem shows as an actor, so I get the vibe of the modern Harem show, and I have to say, for a lot of reasons, I don't find that genre personally very engaging. So I was a little skeptical of this title when I decided to take a look at it, but very quickly I saw that this show succeeds in being funny that anime just often doesn't succeed at anymore. Now I'm an enthusiastic participant.

Hidden Remote: **It seems like every five seconds, while you're watching this show, you have to either be laughing or rolling your eyes. Do you think one of the reasons it's so appealing is because we've all been in these unfortunate teenage situations before? Maybe minus the space invasions.**

Wald: I liken it to *Porky's*, which is an old 80s film I grew up with, or *American Pie*. It also has a lot of abstract, Zucker Bothers humor like in *The Naked Gun*. Part of the success of a script like that is that you can almost always rely on the fact that the character in question is going to make the dumbest and worst possible decision they could make at any crossroads. *To Love Ru*, on that front, never disappoints.



Hidden Remote: We've talked before about your directing LGBT anime and your desire to take on very sensitive, hot-button-topic anime like *Super Lovers*, where a lot of people have a lot of things to say about it. Even in Japan, people had a lot of negative things to say about *To Love Ru*. How did you go about approaching this show as its dub director?

Wald: The ideal purpose of entertainment that has a moral to share, however obscured, is that it sparks conversation. Something close to that spirit is the show *Big Mouth*. I know a parent who watches *Big Mouth* with his 12-year-old son and then they discuss the show together. As sublimely crass as that show is, it's such an insightful and comedic view. Both *To Love Ru* and *Big Mouth* illuminate things about the teen experience that we all remember and are all terrified to talk about.

I myself went through the teen coming-of-age experience and I remember a lot and boy did I see a lot of it in this show. I mean, these poor, idiotic, beautiful children.

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Hidden Remote: Speaking to that concept of obscurity, anime has always been very comfortable expressing sexuality in a number of levels and mediums and *To Love Ru* really pushes boundaries in that category. I'm curious how you approached the dub script to make it more digestible to an American audience.

Wald: In the world of anime I would classify myself as a "Liberal Adaptor." My main principle is that I want to elicit an emotional response from the audience that's similar to the emotional response that a Japanese audience might have had to the original iteration. Sometimes, in order to get the laugh or the tear or the gasp, adjustments have to be made.

Rito, the male lead or “Harem King” if you will, is sort of the oblivious angel. He’s a well-meaning kid, who really doesn’t get anything. I repainted him a little bit into someone with a sharper edge, who’s a little more self-aware and self-deprecating, so that innocent nature doesn’t seem as ridiculous for American audiences. Likewise, we let Lala—the visitor from a strange planet—have a harder edge to her as well. Haruna’s character, though, is still the sweetest creature to have ever lived, which is why we hired Bryn Aprill.



Hidden Remote: The voice actor for Rito, Ry McKeand, is most prominently known for his role in the Kuma Holdings anime, *This Boy Suffers from Crystallization*. But *To Love Ru* is still one of the actors’ first anime gigs, correct?

Wald: Right, exactly. My dear friend Marissa Lenti, who directed *This Boy Suffers from Crystallization*, played some of that anime for me very early and I was completely floored by the authenticity of this kid. I put a bookmark on that and have been waiting for the right role to come along because I knew Ry had unfathomable depth and his voice is authentically boyish. When I got a look at Rito, I was like, “Finally!” I’m really excited to see what happens when people hear this performance of his. Frankly, it’s astounding.

Hidden Remote: I can imagine it must have been an often amusing, time in the recording studio giving new voices to these *To Love Ru* characters. Were there moments that really stood out to you or were particularly fun?

Wald: I’ll tell you, Scott Gibbs as Zastin is sublimely, ridiculously wonderful. That character has so much and Scott found it all. He killed me virtually every time. I describe Zastin as an Errol Flynn who misses. He’s got a lot of bravado and is genuinely well-intended and devoted to his duty of protecting Lala. He thinks he’s Captain America all the time, but he’s also a little clueless and overwhelmed and Scott always finds that beautiful balance.

Another one of my favorite performances in the show is Maggie Flecknoe as Saki Tenjōin, the self-appointed queen of Sainan High. I never stopped laughing at her recording.



Hidden Remote: While *To Love Ru* is mostly a comedy intermixed with teen awkwardness and romance, there's also a lot of hidden gems and life lessons within these episodes. What are some of the scenes that were more fulfilling to create and that make it a show of substance?

Wald: Through a comical series of accidents and misadventures, Rito has become engaged to Lala, a princess from outer space. He was not prepared for this, he did not ask for this and he does not want it. So there's a scene early on, where Rito has learned there's a way to dissolve the engagement and he spends the whole episode trying to accomplish this and failing at it. Then, toward the end, he decides, "You know what? I'm trying to be all sly and slick about this, but I'm just going to put on my big-boy pants and I'm going to have a real talk with Lala.

So, Rito sits down with Lala on this hillside and, in this case, both Lala and Rito abandon their usual character practices. Rito is calm here and he's forward here and he's collected here. And Lala is also very calm and introspective, and they have a very grown-up conversation. It's a scene I actually used as an audition scene because I wanted to make sure that the actors could handle a moment where they had to turn off all the usual sparkly things and have a real moment. And Ry and Alexis Tipton are just fantastic in it.

Hidden Remote: Despite the show not being entirely well-received in Japan, the original creators still found a way to bring four seasons of *To Love Ru* to life. Is there any promise of Sentai Filmworks doing more than the first season?

Wald: Over many years, people have requested a dub for this show. But right now, Sentai is taking the wise and cautious corporate response and waiting to see how this season does with audiences before they commit to dubbing the rest of them. We all as creators want to give the fans what they really want. We'd love to do more, but we want to make sure people really dig it first. Though I have no doubt this show will be beloved.

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To Love Ru's English dub will premiere March 31. Will you be watching? What other Harem anime do you recommend? Drop a line in the comments below!

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