**VGM Analysis / Visual Literacy Site**

**Landing Page**

* Header
  + Hero Images
  + Nav
    - Home
    - Terminology
    - About Us
    - Endeavors
    - Our Words
* Opening Section
  + Welcome!
  + This site is the ground for information about the VGM Analysis community, an online and asynchronous body of people who create, research, and of course, analyze music from video games. Here, you will find a trove of information about who they are, how they do what they do, what their goals are, and how the community operates as a collective whole.
  + Click any of the navigation tabs at the top or bottom of this page to start your journey, or press START below for a quick speedrun!
* START/Main
  + Who Are We?
    - As previously stated, the VGM Analysis community is a collection of people from a wide variety of musical backgrounds who study music from video games. Some do it for the sake of practicing sound design techniques, some search these songs for sounds and digital instruments they can use for their own production, and some simply use their findings to add to their musical palette. Overall, we all connect ourselves through a mutual interest or love of video game music, and a vast majority of us have done research of our own or even collaborated to create comprehensive and resource-packed repositories for others to use and share.
    - If you would like to know more about us, check out the About Us section!
  + Why Do We Do This?
    - There are a variety of reasons we do what we obsess over video game music, though it might not be entirely obvious at first. The short answer is that we want to provide and share both resources and understandings gathered from researching and archiving video game music and their original sources. Essentially, you can think of us as a source; we archive tools, resources, information, and other goodies that those wanting to compose digital music can use and learn from.
    - For the full scoop, check out the Endeavors page!
  + Where Can We Be Found?
    - Frankly, if you search for VGM Analysis communities on any social media platform or even Google, you’ll find many different groups that do what we do. Even though this community technically encompasses all of those who research and make video game music, we’re not all connected; there are so many VGM Analysis groups out there, whether you’re looking on Google, Discord, or any other platform. If you’re interested, just dive in using your search engine of choice and pick a place to begin!
    - Some of the notable online community servers and pages are in the Resources page, so go take a look if you’re interested!

**About Us**

Opening Section

Well, who are we? In short, the VGM Analysis community is a vast collection of different people with a mutual love for music and video games, and especially the two together. Those within the community will research and source the sounds and samples used in video game music and publicize knowledge of the tools or information they found so that it may help other digital musicians in the future. That’s all pretty self-explanatory, but what are the more intricate details of the community? What’s their history? Why video games? That will all be answered right here!

Main

Video Games

Well, of course we’re starting here! Video game music wouldn’t be anything without video games, after all. You’ve played them, you probably enjoy them, and you’ve likely seen all kinds of them. Each game has its own unique style in all its artistic aspects, but the music is where a lot can be deciphered not only about a given game’s development, but also how its music was made. Countless games, even those of today, use digital sounds and samples to make up the instruments within their songs, and because of this fact, it becomes possible to research and source these sounds, be them sampled or synthesized. In doing this, the VGM Analysis community can not only trace back the sources of certain sounds and digital instruments, but they can also provide them as tools to other aspiring musicians.

Methods of Sharing

So, if information about a game and its music are collected, where are they shared? The most common way of sharing this kind of information is through online digital records. These can be Google or Microsoft spreadsheet or word documents, full webpages or websites, Community forums and servers, or really any sharable online medium. The most common digital records to find are called sample lists, and they typically contain some or all sources for the samples and sounds used in a single video game or game series. There even exist some that compile other sample lists together, and others that go on to list hundreds of games and the sources to their audio.

Operation

The process to operating in the VGM Analysis community varies from person to person, but the surefire thing to note about it first and foremost is that the community thrives on teamwork. Everyone comes from different backgrounds, different experiences, but most significantly, everyone has worked with and heard different things. Sourcing something could take a long time, especially if all you have to work with is a sound file, but with a full community of sleuths who all search for sources for countless sounds and samples, there’s a good chance someone among you might know something that could help, and they’re merely a message away. This is why sharing and teamwork is so important, because with games and the internet as a whole being so broad and vast, the best and most reliable search engines might just be your peers.

**Ventures**

Opening Section

What have they accomplished?

The community has found many games that exemplify how they want to help others, as there are many games nowadays that result from single developers and contain music that’s well worth the analysis. Even somewhat obscure things can catch the attention of a VGM analyst, as the broad spectrum of video game music offers a lot of opportunities to learn and grow even without immediately analyzing it. Here’s just a few that have garnered a high reputation in the community.

Main

Endeavors

The Sound Sources List

As a group dedicated to sourcing sounds, samples, tools, and information about video game music, the VGM Analysis community, there have to be places in which to output this information for others to easily view and reference. These are often done by creating online spreadsheets and word documents, and although these often focus on singular games, there are a select few that contain more. One of the largest of these is the VGM Sound Source List, a compendium of countless different documents compiled by the people of the community. This spreadsheet contains several links to all kinds of helpful resources, such as sample lists for certain games or consoles, breakdowns of sound libraries made by big names in the music and sound design industry, guides for using certain music programs, and so much more.

William Kage’s SNES Soundfont Library

William Kage’s SNES Soundfont Library is a resource filled to the brim with soundfonts, or collections of playable virtual instruments, that contain all the instrument samples from different Super Nintendo games. The SNES era is an time of interest in the VGM Analysis community, as the console’s new sample-utilizing capabilities made it one of the first that predominantly used samples instead of chiptune tones. Thus, samples and music from the SNES became a staple in VGM compositions and as functional examples of how well these samples work under even the limitations of the consoles of the 90’s.

Games

Undertale & Deltarune

Since its release in 2015, Toby Fox’s Undertale has become a staple in popular culture for its compelling concept, personality, and charm, and its successor, Deltarune, is shaping up to have a similar effect. One of the most notable things about these games for many, however, are their soundtracks. Nearly all the songs in the entirety of both games are made by one person, that being Fox himself. Additionally, most of the songs are made with entirely free tools, such as the soundfonts found on William Kage’s site above. There also exist a variety of sample lists for Undertale, Deltarune, and other works by Toby Fox. The first ever made by the community was for Undertale back in 2016, and as new information was found and as Fox released more games, the community created a much more accurate and comprehensive sample list. Others exist as well, and the abundance of them shows how important this game was to this community and speaks to how helpful it is viewed as for most.

The Touhou Project

The Touhou Project is a series of shoot-em-up games that was first started back in 1996 and is still receiving sequels even to this day. Jun’ya Ota, better known by his moniker ZUN, is the sole developer, artist, and composer of his games, much like Toby Fox. The music of the Touhou series has changed with time, beginning as chiptune and later evolving to use mixtures of Roland samples and other virtual instruments. Attention from the VGM Analysis community arose around these games and their soundtracks because of what they were composed with, which as previously mentioned were predominantly Roland digital instruments. This as well as the popularization of the Romantic Trumpet samples is what cemented this series into the community’s interest and made it an inspiration for some VGM composers.

Doki Doki Literature Club

Just by the title, the game doesn’t sound too terribly interesting or unique, and this is the impression one would continue to have if they began playing it themselves. Surprisingly however, this game is a psychological horror experience disguised as a safe and harmless visual novel. The game was also developed by one person, Dan Salvato, who also wrote the story and composed the music. Because of the subversion of expectations and the mostly solo development, the game garnered a lot of attention from multitudes of gaming communities, a small contingency of which being those from the VGM Analysis community. It was found that mostly a single instrument pack for a rather popular software plugin called Nexus was used to make all the music in the game. While interest in the music of this game wasn’t as high as Undertale or the Touhou Project, it caught people’s attention and even spawned a dedicated sample list.

**Methods**

How do we analyze video game music?

The process of examining and evaluating audio has deep roots in sound design, and the same principles come into play when analyzing video game music. Some may think it all comes down to having pitch-perfect hearing, a cavalcade of expensive tools, or composition skills, however this isn’t necessarily the case; there exist many free tools that a lot of people in the community use and promote, and the tactics themselves are easy to perform for beginners. Here, we will explore a few that are commonplace within the community and only require free programs to perform.

Main

Frequency Cancellation

When a song is loaded to the brim with instruments and other sounds, it can be hard to decipher what exactly is going on in the more intricate levels. Using frequency cancellation, we can extract layers of some songs to remove vocals, instruments, noise, and other audio information from songs that have a wide range of frequencies present throughout.

For a quick demonstration of how this works and how you can do it yourself, here’s a quick video that explains frequency cancellation in more detail and describes how you can do it yourself.

VIDEO

Spectrogram Analysis

A spectrogram is a visual representation of the frequencies of any given audio, and they are often very helpful in deciphering some of the notes of a song. This is most effective when the song is soft or has few instruments. The way a spectrogram communicates the pitches and frequencies of a sound to an analyst is by providing somewhat of a visual reference for where the notes would appear in a horizontal piano roll.

Take a look at this example using Toby Fox’s “Fallen Down” as the base audio.

AUDIO / Fox, Toby. “Fallen Down.” *Undertale Soundtrack*. 2015.

IMG 01 / Spectrogram of the above audio

IMG 02 / Actual piano roll arrangement

Using a Keyboard

This one might be a bit on the nose and also not as easy for people who aren’t good at differentiating notes by pitch alone, but this is a super important thing to practice in any aspiring musician’s cycle of learning. When it comes to piecing together how a song works, it’s important to understand the flow and composition of the melody and its supporting factors. Using a piano or MIDI keyboard to attempt to somewhat transcribe the music into your own muscle memory will not only build skill towards actual piano playing, but it will also help you find patterns within the music that can train you to look for patterns elsewhere and even in your own works. While this is more of learning tip than a method of analysis, it still warrants some focus since it’s both important and typically not too difficult for someone to be able to begin playing piano and learning about the mechanics of music that way.

Resources

Where do the spoils live?

It’s pretty obvious now that the goal of the VGM Analysis community is to provide musicians with tools, resources, and knowledge for composing music using video game music as the reservoir. There are heaps of content that the community has produced, some being troves of juicy information and others being actual utilities that can be used and applied to one’s works. Here’s a few that will give you a good taste of what comes out of the VGM Analysis community.