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Music and Game

Perspectives on a Popular Alliance

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Foreword

Although battling virtual worlds in high fidelity started to spread from youth into mainstream culture decades ago, the study of music in games is still a research desideratum of media studies and musicology. In German-speaking countries only very little attention has been paid to this issue. This limited recognition is contradictory to a global game market worth 30 billion dollars and as important for the production and distribution of music as other media sectors. The number of computer users has multiplied significantly in recent years – particularly in the formative teenage group where games are just as important as movies and television for musical socialization, i.e. developing musical preferences and semantic assignments. Games of different genres use sophisticated musical concepts which in turn rely on a variety of sound idioms. It is worth noting that this aesthetic approach is especially related to compositional techniques in the field of film and popular music which specialize in creating specific moods, atmospheres and characters for virtual worlds that can be connected to the real world via unconscious musical means. It must, however, be taken into account that music in games depends very much on user interactivity.

Depending on the video game genre, composing for video games can differ drastically from other forms of composition. Loop-techniques and other means are part of a compositional system which unfolds in ever new combinations according to user behaviour. For example, music for role-playing games is often not a fixed composition, but a series of modules. From the very beginning of video games, there was a desire to increase the degree of interactivity. Video game music contributes considerably to this interactivity, and has done so since the introduction of iMuse in the early 1990s. Subsequent developments have led to the current complex system of modules. Although the modules themselves are relatively fixed, their combination depends on the player's specific actions. Therefore the length and sequence of the modules has to be flexible so that the music of any one module is able to flow smoothly into that of any of the others as well as allowing two or more modules to be played harmoniously at the same time. This harmonious flexibility is also an essential element for the interactivity between music and sound design. Consequently, composer and sound designer work closely together. The auditive environment they thus produce can, in addition, be described as democratic since the flexibility of the game allows the player to become 'co-author'. This notion of equality within the close relationship of creator and consumer as collaborators stands in strong contrast to the autocratic idea of being 'true to the work' or the

'genius-aesthetic' which became particularly strong in the 19th century and, mostly, still exists today. Video game music can thus have an influence on current debates regarding what a work actually is – is it, for example, the score or its performance? The interactivity of game, music, sound, the actions of the player, etc. fully immerse the player into the game, not only as co-author, but also as performer.

In order to unfold in depth this strong alliance between music and game, the contributors to this book examine its various perspectives. Melanie Fritsch gives an historical overview of both the technical and compositional development of video game music from the time when such games were born until the present day. Her text ranges from video games for arcade halls to those for contemporary handhelds as well as outlining the progress made in the composition of the music, originally created by the video game programmers themselves and currently created by highly-specialised composers. Interactivity is the main focus of Michael Liebe's contribution. He provides a thorough description of numerous music games as well as introducing a new system of categorisation showing how music and gameplay are interlinked: the relationship of the two being based on (a) player or computer performance, (b) objective or symbolic interfaces and (c) linear, reactive or proactive tracks. Changing the perspective from a theoretical viewpoint to that of practice, video game composer and remixer Leonard Paul describes in detail various interactive techniques such as branching, layering and creating transitions and cites examples from specific video games in order to illustrate how these techniques function. Willem Strank's text focuses, in particular, on the aspect of reactive music by discussing the 1990s' era, during which various attempts were made to increase the player's freedom of interactivity in role-playing games. As he shows in his analysis of *Monkey Island 2*, the main purpose of LucasArts' *iMuse* was to create a flexible and dynamic soundtrack by means of horizontal re-sequencing as well as variations in sound, tempo, dynamics, etc. by means of vertical re-orchestration. He also examines the semiotic and semantic aspects of video game music. In the following text, Andreas Rauscher concentrates on theoretical observations concerning the relationship between video game and film music. Among other facets, he transposes Jean Mitry's theories about rhythm in film to that of video games: the rhythmic movements of the avatar, for example, being similar to the notes and tempos of a music score. He also explains how differences in genre can create different expectations regarding game play and settings. Florian Mundhenke's comparative evaluation explores the functionality of music and sound in the original *Silent Hill* video game series as well as in the film adaptation. He furnishes an overview of various theoretical approaches to both the sound and the video games, including classifications of the music and their specific roles. Following this discussion regarding the relationship of music and sound, Marcus Erbe's text presents the results of a collaborative analysis of the levels of the latter in video games. This analysis is the result of a seminar experiment in which the students

observed and monitored the various dimensions of game audio in the related genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Gregor Herzfeld's contribution addresses the issue of musical atmosphere in video games and their aesthetic implications. In the course of this, he relates Kant's, Huizinga's and Schiller's theoretical observations regarding play (man as player) to Böhme's theory of atmosphere by analysing the environment of involvement in first-person-shooter and role-playing games. Michael Custodis' text provides an historical overview of music in play. He shows, within this, that video game music cannot be seen as a specific musical genre, but rather as a performative functional assignment in order to make the player feel like a pop star as, for example, in *Guitar Hero.* He additionally deals with endeavours to connect the 'unreality' of game music with the reality of live concerts. Continuing this theme, Matthias Pasdzierny is also concerned with the performative aspect, particularly in regard to live chip music concerts. He gives a detailed history of the development of the chip music scene from the late 1980s onwards, highlighting both the technological and sociological aspects and argues that through such live performances the cultural value of video game music is enhanced. The focus of the final contribution, Stefan Strötgen's, concerns the business aspect of such music including an extensive overview of both production and composing conditions. In the course of so doing, he highlights the affiliations between composer and client, composers' rights, marketing strategies and cross-industrial relations.

To conclude this foreword, I wish to extend my deep and heartfelt gratitude to each of the above contributors for the amount of time and effort expended in producing an invaluable and comprehensive insight into the world of music for video games. In addition, I wish to thank Jim Sullivan for his editorial assistance in correcting the English where necessary, providing advice when needed, and (occasionally) finding the perfect synonym.

Peter Moormann Berlin, May 2012