

Kaitlyn Tran

kst4052@g.rit.edu

(518)416-2849

Change of major: BS

"Music is the shorthand of emotion," are words spoken by the author Leo Tolstoy that describe music's ability to create very real feeling with nothing but sound. This applies to all music, and music in games is no exception. For me, one such piece is "To Zanarkand" from *Final Fantasy X*. That piece is the single most memorable part of *Final Fantasy X*, because it is the embodiment of everything that the game is to me. For context, I first played the game seven or eight years ago, and it was the first game I had played that had a strong story with good character development. The very first sound I heard when I booted up the game for the very first time was that song, "To Zanarkand." Then from there, the relationship between the two main characters, Tidus and Yuna, is developed throughout the entire game. And at the climax of the story, after I defeated the final boss that song played again, followed by the words "I'm sorry I couldn't show you Zanarkand." That moment, where Tidus sacrifices himself to save the world, but also removing himself from Yuna's life, sacrificing any sort of future they could have had together. Because "To Zanarkand" on its own is a melancholy piece, but underpinning this moment the sadness in both was amplified. That song became entwined with that emotion and every time I hear that song it recalls the memory of Tidus' end. In fact, one of the reasons I wanted to learn and improve my skill with my viola was to be able to play "To Zanarkand" and many other pieces from video games. And that skill I honed made all the difference by setting me on this path to of becoming a game designer.

After gaining years of experience with both games and the viola an opportunity to put both to use arose; a new club was started at RIT. RIT's Game Symphony Orchestra, a club whose sole purpose is to celebrate and perform the music of games, and this past year was its very first. When we first started, we were just 25 or so people who liked video game music and happened to know how to play an instrument. I jumped at the fact that no one wanted to take the responsibility of treasurer onto their shoulders, since I had years of experience of being treasurer in high school. I'm not afraid to take charge, to take a step into the unknown by joining the eboard of a new and unproven club, nor do I fear the challenges that come with it. This wasn't the first time I've taken the lead either, previously in high school I had also been treasurer for my graduating class and my high school's chapter of the National Honors Society, roles I volunteered for happily. I didn't falter, not even when our eboard had dwindled to just the president, conductor, string section lead, and myself. Our little club could have died before it even got off the ground, but instead we persevered and the four of us lead our club to our second semester, where we recruited additional eboard members, and our team then took us from 25 members to 65. Of course, I was afraid it would fail, but it didn't stop me then nor will it stop me now from pursuing my passions. Failure is, after all, the greatest teacher. But even the greatest teacher in the world can teach a student without the will to learn.

The will that drives me to be a creator of games instead of just a player was sparked by a class I took in high school titled "Computer Science and Software Engineering." The course may have been a broad and general view on the creation of software, one topic shone well above the rest to me: video game development. For that chapter, we were tasked with making any game we wanted as long as we could get it done by the due date. My classmates weren't very invested in the project, because their minimal effort shown through in their half-baked games. They ran just fine, but they were at their core boring to play and completely silent to boot. In the limited time we had, I taught myself objected oriented programming, and recreated a version of *Pong*. I coded the game, made and implemented my own art and sound assets, and even implemented a score board to keep track of high scores. Every free moment I had from the minute the project was assigned to the moment it left my hands for grading was devoted to this little game of mine. To my classmates, video games were just silly little things, but they aren't to me. Not then, and not now.

So, more recently, I participated in RIT's Game Development Club's first annual Game Jam, where my team and I won the "Best Game Design" award with our entry, *Alt + Tab*. The whole event was stressful and hectic, but I wouldn't trade it for the world because I loved every second of it. These were glimpses of the core of what goes into game design, what it's like to be the creator of these game experiences. From simple games such as my version of *Pong*, and *Alt+Tab* to masterpieces such as *Final Fantasy X*, I want to create these experiences for other players, both in IGM, and beyond school. As a professional game designer, I wish for nothing more than to be able to bring moments like Tidus' sacrifice to life with a perfect blend of narrative, gameplay, and of course, music. Alone, with the skills and knowledge I have now, I am but a single viola, strong in its own right, but with so much more potential. IGM will give me the experience to grow into an orchestra, by teaching me about the art of creating a game. And finally, from there, I can be the one who creates the magic shorthand to players' emotions.