

# Tim Follin

**Timothy John Follin** (born 19 December 1970)<sup>[1]</sup> is an English former video game music composer who has written tracks for a variety of titles and home gaming systems, including the ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amiga, Atari ST, Nintendo Entertainment System, Mega Drive, Super NES, Game Boy, Dreamcast, and PlayStation.

Among Follin's works are the soundtracks to *Solstice*, *Silver Surfer*, *Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge*, *Plok*, and *Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future*.

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## Video game career

### Insight Studios

As a child, Follin had no significant music training.<sup>[2]</sup> Leaving Liverpool's Sandown Music College after one year of studies,<sup>[2][3]</sup> Follin's career began at the age of 15 working at Insight Studios,<sup>[4]</sup> eventually scoring titles such as *Agent X*, *Chronos*, and *Bubble Bobble* for 8-bit computers such as the Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum. Follin ended up in video games due to his older brother Mike Follin learning how to program for the ZX Spectrum and obtaining professional work at Insight,<sup>[2][3]</sup> with one of Tim's first Insight

Tim Follin	
Birth name	Timothy John Follin
Born	19 December 1970
Origin	St Helens, Lancashire, England
Genres	Electronic, new age, orchestral, rock, chiptune, video game music
Occupation(s)	Composer <div>arranger</div> <div>programmer</div>
Instruments	Piano/keyboard, guitar, violin
Years active	1985–2006, 2015
Labels	C64Audio.com (formerly High Technology Publishing)
Associated acts	Geoff Follin
Website	Dr. Follin's Home Surgery ( <span>http://timfollin.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk</span> ) <div>Baggy Cat LTD (<span>http://baggycat.com/</span>)</div>

works being the soundtrack to *The Sentinel*.<sup>[3]</sup> Mike gave Tim a brief tutorial on creating music on the Spectrum via machine code, and Tim later wrote the music driver and soundtrack for their first professional game, *Subterranean Stryker*.<sup>[5]</sup> After discovering how to create phasing sounds,<sup>[6]</sup> Follin was able to use a two-channel music driver<sup>[5]</sup> to further experiment and come up with an arrangement of Stravinsky's "The Firebird", used for the game *Star Firebirds*.<sup>[7]</sup> Follin graduated to three-channel music with his third soundtrack, *Vectron*.<sup>[5]</sup> In his early career, Follin's music was praised in magazine game reviews.<sup>[3]</sup>

Follin's sole game programming credit (not counting music drivers) came with his fourth title, *Future Games*, where he created one minigame of the several featured.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Software Creations

Hired by Richard Kay, Tim followed brother Mike in moving to Software Creations<sup>[2]</sup> in 1987, his first full-time job, where he spent a significant portion of his career. Follin's arranged soundtrack to *Bubble Bobble* was his first written for a soundchip, the AY-3-8910.<sup>[5]</sup>

Follin wrote the music for *Black Lamp* in one night after a bout of writer's block.<sup>[3]</sup>

Within the level 1 music of *Ghouls'n Ghosts* for the Amiga is a voice sample played backwards saying "secret authority," considered nothing more than a joke by Follin.<sup>[8]</sup> Alongside *Ghouls'n Ghosts*, two other Amiga soundtracks, *Sly Spy* and *Puzznic*, were presented in the Amiga music format "Follin Player II."<sup>[9]</sup> To arcade soundtrack arrangements like *Bionic Commando* and *Ghouls'n Ghosts*, Follin added richer sound palette and occasionally composed some new songs (the title music of *Ghouls'n Ghosts*).

Follin described the NES title *Solstice* as "a very inspiring game to do music for," demanding atmospheric music within the game's dark castle environment, as well as powerful music choreographed with the title sequence.<sup>[10]</sup> Follin did not use a keyboard or any instruments for the *Solstice* soundtrack, composing while "thinking along the lines of the computer and not [...] a keyboard."<sup>[10]</sup> Follin felt the programming-only approach allowed him to work with "a more open mind."<sup>[10]</sup>

In a 1990 interview, Follin expressed "a bit of desolation" over the prospect of no longer composing for the Commodore 64, stating "I don't see myself staying with this machine," perhaps sensing the transition occurring in the European gaming marketplace as the third generation of video and computer game platforms reached its end.<sup>[1]</sup> Follin's final Commodore 64 release came with 1991's *Gauntlet III*.

Beside contributing the soundtrack with brother Geoff, Follin recorded live sound effects for 1993 SNES title *Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends*.<sup>[5]</sup>

Citing a declining work environment,<sup>[4]</sup> Follin departed Software Creations in 1993 (with his final title there being *Rock N' Roll Racing*).<sup>[7]</sup>

## Malibu Interactive and freelancing

After leaving Software Creations, Follin joined Malibu Interactive for 18 months. While working for Malibu, Follin provided the soundtrack for *Time Trax* on the Sega Mega Drive and (along with brother Geoff) *Prime* for the Sega CD, doing "virtually nothing and getting paid"<sup>[8]</sup> for the following year before winding up out of work. Another title composed alongside brother Geoff, *Firearm*, went unpublished. Follin would spend the remainder of his video game career as a freelancer. Following Malibu Interactive's collapse, Follin then worked with groups that made unsuccessful game pitches to Psygnosis and the BBC.<sup>[8]</sup> Follin provided part of the soundtrack for *Batman & Robin*, developed by Probe.

Follin joined the development team of *Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future* as the title's lead composer around mid-1998,<sup>[2]</sup> leaving Attila Heger no longer responsible for providing the entirety of the soundtrack. (Heger was made primarily responsible for scoring the game's cutscenes.)<sup>[11]</sup> Follin had been offered the composer position by Sega UK producer David Nulty, who was a fan of Follin's Commodore 64 work.<sup>[2]</sup> The soundtrack received very favourable reviews from *Edge*, *DC-UK*, and *Official Dreamcast Magazine*.<sup>[12]</sup>

The 2003 multiplatform release *Starsky & Hutch* was given a funk-style score by Follin, who said at the time, "This is the project I had hoped I would get one day. I've always loved Starsky & Hutch and it's [sic] original title music."<sup>[13]</sup> While with Software Creations, Follin had previously arranged the *Starsky & Hutch* television series' theme as the title music to the 1991 NES release *Treasure Master*.

## End of video game career and return

Around August 2005, Follin announced on his website "with much delight" that he had chosen to stop composing music for video games, citing its irregular work not providing a substantial income, light-heartedly adding that the situation caused him "distress and illness." The tenuous nature of game development caused several instances of Follin being hired and subsequently having the project shelved. Follin noted that *Starsky & Hutch* had been in development for around three years before eventually being released.<sup>[7]</sup>

However, throughout 2012 to 2014, Follin worked on the video-based adventure game *Contradiction* as programmer, video editor and composer.<sup>[14]</sup>

His brothers Geoff Follin and Mike Follin also worked in the video game industry as musician and programmer respectively, with both having moved on to other careers. Much like his brothers, Follin has changed careers, choosing to pursue films, television advertising and graphic design. Follin never considered himself a gamer as much as a musician or developer.<sup>[7]</sup> Follin's website offers a brief overview of his video game music career.

## Game credits

Game	Release Date	Platform(s)	Notes
<i><u>Contradiction: Spot the Liar!</u></i>	2015	iOS, Windows, OS X	
<i><u>Lemmings</u></i>	2006	PlayStation Portable, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3	
<i><u>Ford Racing 3</u></i>	2005	PlayStation 2, Xbox, Windows, Nintendo DS	co-composers: Muddy Funkers, Paul Stroud
<i><u>Future Tactics: The Uprising</u></i>	2004	PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox, Windows	
<i><u>Ford Racing 2</u></i>	2003	PlayStation 2, Xbox, Macintosh, Windows	co-composer: Bjørn Lynne
<i><u>Starsky &amp; Hutch</u></i>	2003	PlayStation 2, Xbox, Windows, GameCube	sound, additional storyline; co-composers: Dave Sullivan, Matthew Costello
<i><u>Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future</u></i>	2000 (2002: PS2)	Dreamcast, PlayStation 2	co-composer: Attila Heger (cutscenes)
<i><u>Bust-A-Move 4</u></i>	1999	Game Boy Color	arranger, co-arranger: Andy Brock
<i><u>South Park</u></i> (cancelled)	1998	Game Boy Color	
<i><u>Batman &amp; Robin</u></i>	1998	PlayStation	film score arrangements (no compositions)
<i><u>WWF War Zone</u></i>	1998	Game Boy	
<i><u>Firearm</u></i> (cancelled)	1995	PC	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Prime</u></i>	1995	Sega CD	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Batman Forever</u></i>	1995	Mega Drive/Genesis, Super NES	co-composer: Geoff Follin (Super NES)
<i><u>Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball</u></i>	1994	SNES	arranger; co-composers/co-arrangers: Geoff Follin, Chris Jojo, Paul Tonge, Matthew Cannon
<i><u>Moto-X</u></i> (completed, unreleased) <sup>[15]</sup>	1994	SNES	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Time Trax</u></i>	1993	Sega Mega Drive	music driver designer, game never released
<i><u>Thomas the Tank Engine &amp; Friends</u></i>	1993	SNES	arranger; co-composer/co-arranger: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Rock N' Roll Racing</u></i>	1993	SNES	music driver designer, arranger; co-composer/co-arranger: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Equinox</u></i>	1993	SNES	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Plok</u></i>	1993	SNES	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Super Off Road</u></i>	1992	SNES	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<i><u>Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge</u></i>	1992	Super NES, Genesis	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<i><u>The Incredible Crash Dummies</u></i>	1992	Game Boy, Game Gear, Master System	co-composer: Geoff Follin, music conversion: Matt Furniss (GG, SMS)
<i><u>Gauntlet III</u></i>	1991	Commodore 64, Amiga, ZX Spectrum	co-composer: Geoff Follin (C64, Spectrum)
<i><u>Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade</u></i> (Taito version)	1991	NES	

<u>Treasure Master</u>	1991	NES	
<u>The New Zealand Story</u> (known in America as <i>Kiwi Kraze</i> )	1991	NES	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<u>Tom &amp; Jerry (and Tuffy)</u>	1991	NES	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<u>Pictionary</u>	1990	NES	
<u>Silver Surfer</u>	1990	NES	co-composer: Geoff Follin
<u>Solstice</u>	1990	NES	
<u>Sky Shark</u>	1989	NES	
<u>Ghouls'n Ghosts</u>	Dec. 1989	Amiga, Commodore 64, <u>Atari ST</u>	arranger
<u>Qix</u>	1989	Commodore 64, Amiga	
<u>Magic Johnson's Fast Break</u>	1989	Commodore 64, NES	
<u>Chester Field</u>	1989	Commodore 64	
<u>Missile Ground Zero</u>	1989	ZX Spectrum	
<u>Solar Invasion</u>	1989	ZX Spectrum	
<u>L.E.D. Storm</u>	Feb. 1989 <sup>[5]</sup>	Amiga, Commodore 64, Atari ST, ZX Spectrum	arranger
<u>Bionic Commando</u>	June 1988 <sup>[5]</sup>	Amiga, Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum, Atari ST	arranger
<u>Target: Renegade</u>	1988	NES	arranger
<u>Sky Shark</u>	1988	Commodore 64, NES	arranger
<u>Peter Pack Rat</u>	1988	Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum	arranger
<u>Bodyslam</u>	1988	Commodore 64	
<u>Psycho Pigs UXB</u>	1988	Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum	co-composer: Geoff Follin (C64)
<u>Aigina's Prophecy</u>	1988	Commodore 64	
<u>Star Paws</u>	1988	ZX Spectrum	
<u>Raw Recruit</u>	1988	Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum	
<u>Black Lamp</u>	Apr. 1988 <sup>[5]</sup>	Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum	
<u>Bubble Bobble</u>	Oct. 1987 <sup>[5]</sup>	Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum, Atari ST	arranger
<u>Renegade</u>	1987	Amiga, Atari ST	arranger
<u>Scumball</u>	1987	Commodore 64	
<u>Agent X II: The Mad Prof's Back</u>	1987	Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum	
<u>Chronos</u>	1987	ZX Spectrum	
<u>The Sentinel</u>	Mar. 1987 <sup>[5]</sup>	ZX Spectrum	

<u>Agent X</u>	1986	ZX Spectrum	
<u>Future Games</u>	June 1986 <sup>[5]</sup>	ZX Spectrum	
<u>Vectron</u>	Oct.-Dec. 1985 <sup>[5]</sup>	ZX Spectrum	
<u>Star Firebirds</u>	Oct. 1985 <sup>[5]</sup>	ZX Spectrum	arranger
<u>Subterranean Stryker</u>	Mar. 1985 <sup>[5]</sup>	ZX Spectrum	

## Thoughts on video game music

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Follin's methodology of music was that music is "basically an unconscious experience" that does not and should not "engage your intellect."<sup>[8]</sup> Rather, Follin believed game music was "more of a sort of atmospheric thing"<sup>[10]</sup> and had "always written music to be part of something else," intending for the video game (or other media the music is composed for) to provide the image or scene of context.<sup>[8]</sup>

Within his personal experience, Follin always found the hardest part of creating music to be the concept phase, saying "I probably tear my hair out more over arrangement than over anything else." The easiest part was the execution of the solidified concepts.<sup>[2]</sup>

Follin felt the idea of computer music was "a silly one to begin with," as soundchips from the earliest platforms (e.g. ZX Spectrum) were only meant to produce sound effects.<sup>[16]</sup> As early as 1994, Follin expressed his desire to move away from scoring video games and transition to films, stating that he preferred never to work with chip-generated music again along with his hopes that the games industry would not move backwards from the emerging standard of CD audio.<sup>[16]</sup> Whether dealing with the audio limitations of older consoles or a game's narrow style guidelines when composing for modern soundtracks, Follin regarded the challenge of creating music within constraints to be an interesting part of working in video game music.<sup>[6]</sup>

As a video game composer, Follin believed the necessities of being proficient in many genres and creating music on demand often confused the general public, who are used to acts that produce one style of music. He observed that "musicians generally aren't rewarded for being heterogeneous."<sup>[17]</sup>

During his game music career, Follin never had the mood or interest to join any demoscene groups.<sup>[1]</sup> Though Follin knew few fellow video game composers, he highly respected Richard Jacques for the amount of work put into his music.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Influences

Follin cited progressive rock<sup>[2][7]</sup> as well as many musicians (including Quincy Jones, Jethro Tull,<sup>[8]</sup> Led Zeppelin, and John Martyn<sup>[3]</sup>) as having had some casual or subconscious influence on his music, and has also enjoyed music by Deep Purple and Guns 'n Roses.<sup>[1]</sup> However, he did not feel that any specific artist or style had been a primary inspiration during his career.<sup>[3]</sup> Follin acknowledged that in one instance he went for a more contemporary style when scoring the award-winning soundtrack<sup>[2]</sup> to *Bionic Commando*, actively choosing to mimic other people's music for fear of potentially losing his job.<sup>[3]</sup>

The soundtrack to *Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future* may have been influenced by the works of American minimalist composer John Adams, whom Follin explicitly acknowledged as a current influence during the time he was completing the soundtrack, citing Adams' work as "the only minimalist stuff I've heard which struck a chord with me."<sup>[2]</sup>

Follin did not have much time to listen to the work of his musical contemporaries while in the video games industry, a situation he implied as having been a benefit to his career. Follin speculated that in actively listening to those works, he likely ran the risk of encountering ideas he had not thought of and subsequently becoming discouraged and/or prone to copycatting.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Personal view of work

Particularly in the earlier days of his career, Follin often composed game soundtracks while the games themselves were still in the writing stages, meaning that there was usually no frame of reference or genre objective in mind. Follin himself humorously felt these situations created many instances where the soundtrack was unsuited to the game, though at the time neither he nor any game developers had any issues. Given another chance, Follin said he would have given more effort toward making his earlier soundtracks better suited to the games, feeling that his failure to do so (despite the compositional quality) likely cost him future work. Back then, Follin instead focused on exploring the various consoles' audio limitations.<sup>[6][7]</sup> The technical limitations of the most primitive video game system soundchips made Follin's primary goals to create original sounds as well as not allow the resulting music to sound poor.<sup>[16]</sup>

Follin also never had the interest to join a demoscene group, though, near the end of his time working with Commodore platforms, he claimed he enjoyed himself when he made music.<sup>[1]</sup> Outside of *Ghouls'n Ghosts* however, Follin later described his Commodore 64 work as nonsense that he wasn't particularly happy with.<sup>[3]</sup>

Follin noted *Ghouls'n Ghosts* on the Commodore 64 as his favourite work,<sup>[2][7]</sup> though the game was a known entity, unlike many of Follin's early projects. Software Creations programmer Steve Ruddy, who created the music driver for the game (with design input from Follin)<sup>[18][19]</sup> recalled Follin describing a wide array of imagery for the title theme.<sup>[18]</sup> For the *Ghouls'n Ghosts* soundtrack, Follin retained parts of Tamayo Kawamoto's original arcade soundtrack within most tracks, only to transition into his own ideas for other portions of those tracks.<sup>[7]</sup> Similar circumstances resulted in Follin's soundtrack for *Bionic Commando*.<sup>[1]</sup>

Follin has found it difficult to listen to works he created, feeling them outdated by the time they were completed.<sup>[19]</sup> Follin disliked working with the Atari ST<sup>[3]</sup> and the ZX Spectrum's AY chip, feeling the NES had more character. While not feeling very successful composing music for the Amiga, Follin enjoyed working on soundtracks for the SNES and Commodore 64. He described writing for the C64's SID chip as "playing an instrument in its own right,"<sup>[8]</sup> appreciating the analogue sound it produced, despite having only three channels to work with.<sup>[2][3]</sup> Follin also recalled the SNES's *Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge* being fun due to the inclusion of cheesy '70s guitar synths and brass synths.<sup>[7]</sup>

Despite not considering himself adept at any live instruments, and composing several soundtracks beyond the fifth generation of video game consoles using samples, Follin disliked sampled music. Instead, Follin strove to make his music sound as close to live instrumentation as possible.<sup>[8]</sup> His most notable work using sampled instruments was the soundtrack to *Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future*, an experience he enjoyed, but also felt frustrated with on account of "a lack of equipment and resources – such as a string orchestra and choir!"<sup>[4]</sup> Follin finds orchestral music inherently more human-sounding and listenable.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Fandom

Several contemporaries of Follin's have cited him as an inspiration or top composer including Richard Jacques,<sup>[20]</sup> Jesper Kyd,<sup>[21]</sup> David Wise,<sup>[22]</sup> Frédéric Motte,<sup>[23]</sup> Markus Schneider,<sup>[24]</sup> Matt "Gasman" Westcott,<sup>[6]</sup> Ramiro "Extremer" Vaca,<sup>[25]</sup> graphic artist Haydn Dalton,<sup>[26]</sup> and programmer Dean Belfield.<sup>[27]</sup> Frequent Software Creations collaborator Steve Ruddy, who programmed music drivers used by Follin with Follin's design input, marvelled "I had no idea how he made it do what it did," and described his music as "astonishing."<sup>[28]</sup>

Regarding fan communities dedicated to arranging video game music, including his own, Follin remarked, "It's really good. A lot of the stuff, you just think 'Well, that's much better than what I would have done...could do now.'"<sup>[7]</sup> Follin is consistently mentioned as a favourite composer among European musicians within the Commodore arrangement scene.

Alongside the music of fellow video game music composer Rob Hubbard, Follin's musical work in games was spotlighted in listening stations of the worldwide *Game On* exhibition, organised by the Barbican Art Gallery.<sup>[29]</sup>

## Media production career

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Follin has written, directed, produced, and composed for two short films: *Body Counting* and *The Sun Circle*. *Body Counting* won the Best Short Film under £5,000 award at the Salford Film Festival in November 2004.<sup>[30]</sup>

Since semi-retiring from video game music composition, Follin has gone on to work in the television industry, working as director of photography for TV ads and dramas, as well as creating graphics, CGI, and music for commercials. In April 2010, Follin joined Matt Barraclough and Paul Ambler to form ABF Pictures Ltd., a company making TV commercials, web videos, and music promos. In 2013, he started a company to embrace his various interests and skills, called Baggy Cat Ltd.

## Personal life

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Follin once expressed interest in the works of Carl Jung regarding the meaning of dreams. More recently he has become interested in behavioural psychology and neuropsychology, particularly in the civilising effect of mirror-neurons and their implications, suggesting that the self, in the common sense, is a social construct, consisting of foundational, unconscious copied behaviours.<sup>[8]</sup> He has expressed that he does not use recreational drugs, perhaps counter to inferences made by fans of his music.<sup>[8]</sup>

Follin has little interest in television, but is a fan of documentary maker Adam Curtis as well as comedy such as the Channel 4 series *Father Ted*, *The Office*, *Alan Partridge*, and *The League of Gentlemen*.<sup>[3]</sup> He also enjoyed filmmaker John Boorman's short film *I Dreamt I Woke Up*.<sup>[31]</sup>

Follin considers writing therapeutic.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Family

Tim is married and has two school-age children. Tim, son of Marjorie Follin, was the youngest of three brothers, all of whom had careers in the video game industry. Oldest brother Michael Stuart (Mike) moved on after 16 years as a programmer to become an ordained minister in the Church of England. Middle brother Geoffrey Mark (Geoff), a fellow game composer who was proficient in several instruments, MIDI software,



and reading sheet music, later went on to become a primary school teacher and later a part-time math tutor while occasionally composing music. Other family includes Auntie Janice Perkins, Uncle David Eaton, and his cousins Catherine and Rachel Perkins, of Liverpool.<sup>[32]</sup>

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## External links

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- "Dr. Follin's Home Surgery" – Tim Follin's homepage (<https://web.archive.org/web/20000902184357/http://www.timfollin.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>)
- Tim Follin (<https://twitter.com/TimFollin>) on Twitter
- Tim Follin's profile (<http://ocremix.org/artist/70/tim-follin>) on OverClocked ReMix
- Tim Follin's profile ([http://www.remix64.com/arrangerinfo\\_5750.html](http://www.remix64.com/arrangerinfo_5750.html)) on Remix64
- Tim Follin (<http://vgmdb.net/artist/1301>) on VGMdb
- Tim Follin (<http://www.mobygames.com/developer/sheet/view/developerId,56818/>) on MobyGames
- Tim Follin (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0284345/>) on IMDb
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