



9TH ANNUAL

**NORTH AMERICAN
CONFERENCE ON
VIDEO GAME MUSIC**

APRIL 2-3, 2022
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY®
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON VIDEO GAME MUSIC

Ninth Annual Conference, April 2-3, 2022

Louisiana Tech University School of Music, Ruston, Louisiana

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Louisiana Tech School of Music acknowledges that the territory on which the school is established and currently operates is the ancestral homelands of the Caddo, Osage, and Quapaw (O-ga-xpa) nations. This acknowledgement reminds and encourages us to recognize, include, and respect the many peoples and traditions that make up our music community.

WIFI NETWORK (for guest access to the Internet for in-person participants):

Network: NACVGM **Password:** PlayIt@Tech






To facilitate virtual conversations about the topics raised at this year's conference, we encourage you to tweet or post on other social media using the hashtag **#NACVGM**.

North American Conference on Video Game Music
April 2-3, 2022 | Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, LA

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 2022

 Indicates shorter “lightning” presentations

CST	GMT	
8:30 AM	1:30 PM	Introduction/Welcome/Kickoff
8:45 AM	1:45 PM	Session 1: Soundscapes and Interactivity University Hall
8:45 AM	1:45 PM	Fowl Play and Listening Across Wingspan(s) (Kate Galloway)
9:15 AM	2:15 PM	 Music in/as the Time-Space Continuum in <i>The Outer Wilds</i> (Elizabeth Hambleton)
9:30 AM	2:30 PM	Perilous Platforms and Musical Metaphors: Mapping Music and Meaning Through Play (Julianne Grasso)
10:00 AM	3:00 PM	Break <i>University Hall Foyer</i>
10:15 AM	3:15 PM	Session 2: Rhythm... University Hall
10:15 AM	3:15 PM	 Classic Tetris for the Nintendo Entertainment System: Additive Rhythms from 1989 to Today (Thomas Wilson)
10:30 AM	3:30 PM	Whose Notes?: Rhythm Game Charters as Music-Makers (Alex Habeen Chang)
11:00 AM	4:00 PM	Break <i>University Hall Foyer</i>

CST	GMT	
11:15 AM	4:15 PM	Session 3: In the Beginning... University Hall
11:15 AM	4:15 PM	Let the Games Begin! Music and sound in the Earliest Audiovisual Advertising for Home Consoles and Video Games (James Deaville)
11:45 AM	4:45 PM	Pinball's Sounds and the Transition from Electromechanical to Solid State Games: Video Game Music's Little-known Ancestor (Neil Lerner)
12:15 PM	5:15 PM	Special Session: Publishing Your Work in the <i>Journal of Sound and Music in Games</i> (Elizabeth Medina-Gray)
12:30 PM	5:30 PM	Lunch (included with registrations completed by March 30) University Hall Foyer
1:30 PM	6:30 PM	Keynote: Mega Ran University Hall
2:45 PM	7:45 PM	Break University Hall Foyer
3:00 PM	8:00 PM	Session 4: Leitmotif University Hall
3:00 PM	8:00 PM	Playing with Musical Meaning: Toward a Theory of Ludic Leitmotifs in Role-Playing Games (Richard Anatone)
3:30 PM	8:30 PM	 Where is Link's Home?: Contrasting the Relationships of Leitmotif and Topic to Narrative Across <i>The Legend of Zelda</i> Series (Lukas Perry)

CST	GMT	
3:45 PM	8:45 PM	Break <i>University Hall Foyer</i>
4:00 PM	9:00 PM	Session 5: Game Music Outside Games University Hall
4:00 PM	9:00 PM	Examining Agency in the Music of <i>The Protomen</i> (William Ayers)
4:30 PM	9:30 PM	Video Games Alive: (Re)playful Listenings in Video Game Music Concerts (Stefan Greenfield-Casas)
5:00 PM	10:00 PM	Virtuosic VGM: Adapting Game Music for Performance in a Concert Music Setting (Marco Schirripa)
5:30 PM	10:30 PM	Dinner
7:00 PM	12:00 AM	<i>The Louisiana Tech Concert Association presents:</i> Mega Ran Howard Auditorium (Howard Center for the Performing Arts) <i>Free concert - conference registration not required</i>

CST	GMT	
8:30 AM	1:30 PM	Session 6: Gender, Identity, & Mediation University Hall
8:30 AM	1:30 PM	Musically Mediated Masculinities: A Semiotic Examination of Gender in <i>God of War</i> (2018) (Christopher Greene)
9:00 AM	2:00 PM	Gamified Gender Dysphoria in the Music of <i>Metroid</i> (John Michael Walker)
9:30 AM	2:30 PM	Gaming the Lonely Road of Americana: Authenticity and Identity in Country, Western, and Folk Music (Pete Smucker)
10:00 AM	3:00 PM	Break <i>University Hall Foyer</i>
10:15 AM	3:15 PM	Session 7: Inter/National Contact University Hall
10:15 AM	3:15 PM	⚡ “Befriending Spirits”: Jason Gallaty and Gamelan Çudamani’s Score for <i>Kena: Bridge of Spirits</i> (2021) (James Denis McGlynn)
10:30 AM	3:30 PM	Playing Japan: The Transnational Circulation of Japan in Contemporary Video Games (Drew Borecky)
11:00 AM	4:00 PM	⚡ Mandatory Metal Moments: The Ubiquity of Heavy Metal Culture in Video Games (Gregg Rossetti)
11:15 AM	4:15 PM	Break <i>University Hall Foyer</i>

CST	GMT	
11:30 AM	4:30 PM	Session 8: Film, Game, Narrative University Hall
11:30 AM	4:30 PM	The Ludonarrative Ideal: Diegetic Commentary in the Pop Music of <i>Steamworld Heist</i> (Jenny Citarelli)
12:00 PM	5:00 PM	Between the Nostromo, Sevastopol, and Your Living Room: Boundary-Crossing Sound Design in <i>Alien: Isolation</i> (2014) (Jacy Pedersen & Hannah Blanchette)
12:30 PM	5:30 PM	Music, Uncanniness and the Cinematic (Dis)comfort in <i>Little Nightmares 2</i> (Joana Freitas)
1:00 PM	6:00 PM	Lunch (included with registrations completed by March 30) University Hall Foyer
1:45 PM	6:45 PM	Session 9: Tropes, Topics, & Time University Hall
1:45 PM	6:45 PM	⚡ Performance: “Endwalker” from <i>Final Fantasy XIV: Endwalker</i> , composed by Masayoshi Soken (b. 1975); arr. Sarah (Seoin) Chang [Sarah (Seoin) Chang]
2:00 PM	7:00 PM	⚡ Dan of the Dead: Music and Temporal (Dis)Placement in the <i>MediEvil</i> Series (Karen M. Cook & Andrew Powell)
2:15 PM	7:15 PM	Troping the Age of Fire and the Age of Dark: Sonic and Multimedia Storytelling in <i>Dark Souls I</i> (Joseph R Jakubowski)
2:45 PM	7:45 PM	⚡ An Intimidating Approach: The Narrative Use of the Dark March Topic in the <i>Super Mario Bros.</i> Series (Eric Saroian)
3:00 PM	8:00 PM	Break University Hall Foyer

CST	GMT	
3:15 PM	8:15 PM	Session 10: Remix, Remake, Recover University Hall
3:15 PM	8:15 PM	<i>Link's Awakening</i> for the Nintendo Switch: A Taxonomy of Musical Palimpsests (Jordan Stokes)
3:45 PM	8:45 PM	From Square Wave to Strings: The Evolution of the Music in <i>Fire Emblem Gaiden</i> to its Remake, <i>Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows of Valentia</i> (Kerry Cobuccio)
4:15 PM	9:15 PM	Remix and Nostalgia in <i>The World Ends with You</i> (Marcos Acevedo-Arús)
4:45 PM	9:45 PM	Concluding Remarks University Hall

KEYNOTE SPEAKER BIO

Raheem “**Mega Ran**” Jarbo is a teacher, rapper, hero, and Guinness World Record Holder.

When LA Weekly said that Ran’s “fanbase and niche audiences are growing at a rate not seen since Tech N9ne,” they meant it. A former middle school teacher, Mega Ran (formerly Random) blends education, hip-hop and gaming in amazing new ways, penetrating the farthest reaches of the galaxy with his unique rhyme style and electric performances.

A Penn State graduate, Ran cut his teeth in the city of Philadelphia as a moonlighting emcee and producer, performing, freestyle rapping, producing and later engineering at a studio. After relocating to Phoenix, competing in the Scribble Jam emcee battle championships and taking an early exit, Ran almost quit before he was even started, when a creative lightning bolt struck, and a fire was lit. Video games, comic books and pop culture, all such huge factors in Ran’s upbringing, would begin to seep their way into his musical output, and the results were stunning.

Ran’s music and story have been shared on stages across the world, on television (ABC/NBC News, ESPN, Portlandia, Tosh.O, WWE Wrestling) and on Billboard, where four of his albums have placed on the Top 200 list. His musical resume boasts collaborations with legends like Del The Funky Homosapien, MURS, Kool Keith, and Young RJ of the group Slum Village. The first rapper to be officially licensed by a major gaming developer (Capcom), his music is featured on the soundtracks of games such as *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*, *Mortal Kombat 11*, *Monaco: What’s Yours Is Mine*, *Mighty No. 9*, among others. He is a 6-time Billboard-charting artist with over 10 commercial releases and holds the Guinness World Record for the most songs to reference a video game.

Today, Mega Ran is no longer a teacher by title, but maintains a rigorous touring and recording schedule, traveling the world to entertain and educate through the gift of rhyme. His autobiography, *Dream Master: A Memoir - From the Stoop to the Stage to the Stars*, was published in late 2020.

www.megar.com

PAPER ABSTRACTS and PRESENTER BIOS

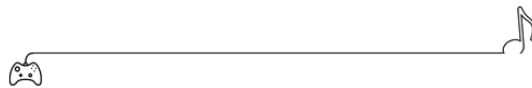
Remix and Nostalgia in *The World Ends with You*

Marcos Acevedo-Arús (Temple University)

Video game franchises often use music as a way of tapping into their own history. Whether it be *Kingdom Hearts* rearranging its title theme for each installment of the series or *Final Fantasy VII Remake* reimagining classic tracks to update the game’s soundtrack, familiar tunes are frequently reused, remixed, and repackaged to appeal to player nostalgia and create connections with past experiences. In this paper, I explore the music of Square Enix’s 2007 Action Role-Playing Game *The World Ends with You* and analyze the trajectory of its pop, hip-hop, and rock soundtrack across the franchise which includes several re-releases of the original game, an anime adaptation, a crossover appearance in *Kingdom Hearts 3D* (2012), standalone remix albums, and its 2021 sequel, *NEO: The World Ends with You*. Drawing on

previous work in genre conventions and RPG music (Gibbons, Grasso, Reale, Summers) I first demonstrate how series composer Ishimoto Takeharu defies Japanese RPG soundtrack conventions in the original game through the unique treatment of exploration and combat themes. By applying frameworks of remix studies (Borschke, Knobel and Lankshear, Lessig) and research on video game nostalgia (Wulf et al., Ivanescu), I then analyze how the prevalent use of remixes throughout the history of *The World Ends with You's* soundtracks, especially in the 2021 sequel, provides opportunities for listening players and fans of the franchise to engage with their own histories with the series. This case study demonstrates how remixed music can mediate players' memories of play to create new experiences.

Marcos Acevedo-Arús (he/him/his) is a music theorist from San Juan, Puerto Rico, currently in his last year of study in the Master's program in Music Theory at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. Marcos' primary research interest concerns the relationships between music, play, affect, and meaning in video games. He is also interested in pop music analysis, music in Japanese media, protest music, and the music of Puerto Rico. Marcos' previous presentations include "Dynamic Music and Player Achievement in Video Games" in the 8th North American Conference on Video Game Music and "Music in Puerto Rico's #RickyRenuncia Protests" in the 2021 MACSEM Annual Conference.



Playing with Musical Meaning: Toward a Theory of Ludic Leitmotifs in Role-Playing Games

Richard Anatone (Prince George's Community College)

The leitmotif exists as one of the most powerful associative themes in narrative media today: in addition to interacting with the audience's emotional memories, it contributes to the entire musico-dramatic structure through its complex developmental nature (Bribitzer-Stull 2015). Yet, video games enjoy a unique attribute compared to other media; their inherent dynamic audio allows players to contribute to the music-making process—and thus the game's diegesis—thereby creating a potential for leitmotifs to act ludically (Kamp 2010, van Elferen 2011). And while many have addressed the leitmotif's ludic potential within different RPGs, the lack of significant musical development over the course of the game often results in more modern filmic approaches to leitmotivic analysis (Whalen 2004; Lind 2016; Walsch 2017; Summers 2021). The question thus arises: does there exist a truly ludic—and truly genuine—leitmotif?

I address this question by proposing a multi-tiered continuum by which we may consider ludic leitmotifs, with consideration to diegesis, degree of player agency, types of dynamic interaction, motivic growth, and contribution to the game's musico-dramatic structure. Addressing earcons and different types of associative music that inhabit both realms of this continuum from a variety of distinct RPG sub-genres, I suggest that ludic leitmotifs interact with the game's "musico-dramatic-ludic" structure and—due to the leitmotif's rich and complicated history—function differently according to their attributes. Ultimately, these leitmotifs have the power to bridge the gap between diegesis and non-diegesis, player and character agency, and moreover, may reward players in ways previously unconsidered through semiotic interpretations of their own musical actions and their relationship to the (non)fictional game-world.

Richard Anatone currently serves as a professor of music theory and coordinator of applied music at Prince George's Community College in Largo, MD. He earned his masters and doctoral degree in piano performance with cognates in theory/composition from Ball State University. His research interests center around leitmotivic and semiotic analysis of video game soundtracks, and has presented research at the North American Conference on Video Game Music, Music and the Moving Image, the American Musicological Society, and a variety of other conferences. His upcoming edited collection, *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the Final Fantasy Series*, will be released this summer by Intellect Publishing. He is currently co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* on music in the expanded universe of *Final Fantasy VII* – submissions are still open until August 15 of this year; information can be found on his website.

 **AnatoneRich**



Examining Agency in the Music of *The Protomen*

William R. Ayers (University of Central Florida)

The occasional convergence of opera and video games has prompted numerous academic discussions on the topic of character/player agency. In a 2014 consideration of the game *Hitman: Blood Money*, William Cheng examines the virtual depiction of Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* (being rehearsed by NPCs), noting that such representations “bring our own agencies into sharp relief, pointing up just how much choice and improvisatory potential we, as players, possess by comparison,” but (alternatively) recognizing that “the actions of NPCs hold up a mirror to our habituated and rule-based means of living in worlds both virtual and real” (170–171). In a similar treatment of virtual operas, Tim Summers (2018) writes that the represented operatic actions and his own agency “sometimes seem to blur together and conflate” (253).

While operatic scenes *in* video games have received a great deal of analytical attention, real-world musical productions *inspired by* video games have a similar ability to emphasize the concept of agency. For instance, the rock-opera concept albums recorded by the Nashville-based band The Protomen go beyond simple representations of their *Mega Man* source material to explore the choices that “heroes” make in the process of narrative struggles.

This presentation will utilize Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum's concept of “values- rich” design to demonstrate that the music of the Protomen album *Act II: The Father of Death* mimics, amplifies, and reinterprets choices presented in the *Mega Man* franchise by inviting listeners to participate in the decision-making of the depicted characters.

Will Ayers (he/him/his) is Assistant Professor of Music Theory at the University of Central Florida, where he began teaching in 2017. He has presented research on the topics of microtonality, transformational theory, and video game music at numerous regional, national, and international conferences. His recent article in the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* examined the concept of subjective experience through video game echolocation mechanics. Will is also an active singer and composer and is currently working on a choral work to be premiered by the Orlando Contemporary Chamber Orchestra this summer.

@williamrayers

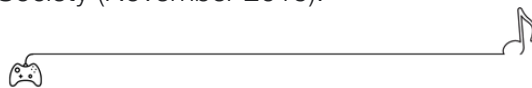
Playing Japan: The Transnational Circulation of Japan in Contemporary Video Games

Drew Borecky (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Since the rise of “Cool Japan” during the 2010s, Japan has become a force of cultural globalization through the transnational exportation of popular Japanese media including popular music, anime, and video games, among others. As Japanese popular media became popularized in the West, scholars have marked a “shifting identity” in Japanese transnational media from a global aesthetic to one that is now “distinctly Japanese.” Scholars often examine popular music and media exported from Japan to the rest of the world in relation to how it represents Japan transnationally.

Drawing on scholarship in ludomusicology and sound studies, my research examines how these representations of Japan are now being reworked and returned through popular media, particularly video games, created in the United States. The exchange of media between the U.S. and Japan has grown rapidly during the last decade, particularly in the realm of animated television shows and video games that portray a “distinctly Japanese” culture (*Persona*, Atlus Studios; *Yakuza*; Ryu Ga Gotoku Studios). My research focuses on *Ghost of Tsushima* (2020), a U.S.-made video game portraying the island of Tsushima in the wake of the first Mongol invasion of Japan, in terms of sonic markers of an imagined Japan soundscape as well as its popular reception outside of the U.S. By examining the exchange of transnational media products and their methods of representation, I assert that the exchange of media can create a loop of representation.

Originally from Winston-Salem, NC, **Drew Borecky (he/him/his)** is a graduate of the Masters of Musicology Program at the University of Tennessee Knoxville and holds Bachelor’s degrees in music and education from Western Carolina University. His research interests concern the interplay of music and various forms of media, including film, television, and video games. He has conducted research on the interplay of music and representations of mental illness in the television crime drama, the role of music and participatory performance in *Dungeons & Dragons*, and music and transnational exchange in contemporary video games. His other research interests include music and representation, ludomusicology, as well as music in “nerd” culture. Drew has presented work at Music and the Moving Image Conference (May 2018-2019) and the National Meeting of the American Musicological Society (November 2019).



Performance: “Endwalker” from *Final Fantasy XIV: Endwalker*, composed by Masayoshi Soken (b. 1975); arr. Sarah (Seoin) Chang
Sarah (Seoin) Chang

A native of Korea, **Sarah Chang (she/her/hers)** is an active soloist, collaborative musician, and game music artist. Sarah enjoyed listening to soundtracks and making transcriptions ever since her childhood and was especially fascinated by piano albums of the *Final Fantasy* series. This interest eventually led her to begin her study in game music. She has a passion for this most contemporary art form and strives to have concert-level performance of game audio. Sarah received her DMA degree in piano performance and literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, on a thesis entitled “Hear, Feel, Think”: Musical Narrativity in *Final Fantasy XIV*. At the 2020 and 2021 NACVGM concert, she performed the main-theme arrangement of *Final Fantasy XIV: Stormblood and Shadowbringers*. Her latest project is making piano arrangements of the music of *Final Fantasy XIV: Endwalker*.

Whose Notes?: Rhythm Game Charters as Music-Makers

Alex Habeen Chang (Boston University)

In rhythm games, there exists an often invisible middle actor. I argue that the charter/mapper, or the person who creates the chart of inputs to be executed by the player, is at minimum enacting music analysis, if not also acting as a composer. In some rhythm games, such as *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero*, the charters seldom receive authorship credit. Yet in other rhythm games (e.g., *Clone Hero* and *Sound Voltex*), the charters not only visually appear almost as prominently as the composers of the songs, but are also just as recognizable as the primary composers. In *Sound Voltex*, the composer of a song is sometimes also the charter, further imbuing their role in curating gaming experience with the power of the auteur. *Sound Voltex* moreover blurs the line between composer and charter, since the charters can bind audio effects (e.g., high/low pass filters) and visual effects (e.g., lane tilts and camera shifts) to player inputs.

This presentation focuses on charters of *Sound Voltex* and its unofficial clone *K-Shoot MANIA* because the games foster a robust online community of charters. Through interviews with charters and mappers interspersed with my own experiences with charting and playing charts, I discuss the many roles of rhythm game charters in the rhythm gaming experience including analysts, composers, and auteurs (Ivănescu 2020).

Alex Habeen Chang (he/him/his) is a graduate student working towards a Master of Arts in Music Theory at Boston University. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics at Rice University in 2020 and is hence currently interested in engaging with music research utilizing mathematical or computational techniques. In addition, he wishes to be involved with the ludomusicology field and community, in particular with research on rhythm gaming and its music.

 **Beanie4185**



The Ludonarrative Ideal: Diegetic Commentary in the Pop Music of Steamworld Heist

Jenny Citarelli (University of Hartford)

Analysis of the use of extant music in video games has, as much of the music in the field, been limited by its marriage to film music and the corresponding associations, frameworks, and value systems that emerge from the forced union. Applying filmic standards can only be a disservice to game, music, composer, and designer alike.

Steamworld Heist, a spinoff sequel of Steamworld Dig, is set in the space traveling far future. Despite notable differences in design and game mechanics, Heist retains a crucial element to the ludonarrative experience of the series: Peaceful hub locations, wherein the player/protagonist can sell loot, buy items/upgrades, and interact with NPCs and companions.

Augmented by the use of multiple unique and detailed hub locations, these enable a unique and striking character in the music of Heist, wherein diegetic music (and their performers) plays a consistent and necessarily active role as commentary and narrative development. This unique adaptive and narrative use of pop music hearkens to similar uses in games such as Bioshock, a game in which William Gibbons claimed the music approached as near to the “cinematic ideal” as a game could.

Steamworld Heist, as I will argue, transcends William Gibbons' so-called "cinematic ideal" to approach a more fitting "ludonarrative ideal," where music and ludic elements achieve perfect symbiosis. This provides a space for profound player/character immersion, allowing the music to provide live experiential diegetic commentary and creating a musiconarrative experience achievable only in player-driven, ludic, interactive media.

Jenny Citarelli (she/her/hers) is a composer and scholar specializing in musical theatre and stage music, gender and sexuality studies, music cognition, and video game music. She is a dedicated collaborator with a passion for queer representation in composition and music leadership. Jenny is a doctoral candidate in Composition at the Hartt School, where she serves as teaching assistant for the course "Composing for the Theatre." Her most notable major work to date is "Trebles in Paradise," an original musical highlighting struggles of queer college students with inclusion, self-discovery, and self-acceptance. Her dissertation entitled "The 5th: an original song cycle of identity and mental health" is set to premiere this May.

@ItalianFalchion



From Square Wave to Strings: The Evolution of the Music in *Fire Emblem Gaiden* to its Remake, *Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows of Valentia*

Kerry Cobuccio

Video game remakes strike a balance between capturing the spirit of the original, while adding new elements to entice newer players. No other genre like the Japanese RPG relies on the spirit of the music to capture the player experience (Rossetti 2019), and remakes are no exception. The comparison of the remake's music to the original warrants critical study, especially with orchestral game music whose originals were created within limitations of the NES sound chip. Its sound channels create their own timbre like any acoustic instrument. What is that aesthetic and how does a composer decide to rewrite that music for orchestra?

Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows of Valentia (2017) is the remake of *Fire Emblem Gaiden* (1991). Composer Takeru Kawasaki took the original compositions of *Gaiden* composer Yuka Tsujiyoko and reimagined them for orchestra. In this presentation I examine the music of both. I establish what the 8 bit aesthetic means in the context of orchestration (Braguinski 2018), and look at specific pieces from *Gaiden* with that lens. I compare those with their *Shadows of Valentia* counterparts and observe where the "spirit" of the original is reflected in those choices, and when the orchestrator moves in a different direction. Finally, I compare the aesthetic choices with the music from other game remakes in similar franchises of *Fire Emblem's* pedigree, such as *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*.

Kerry Cobuccio (she/her/hers) (b.1980) is a freelance composer, sound designer, and educator. She received a bachelors degree in music theory from the University of New Hampshire and a masters degree in Music Composition from the University of Minnesota. Kerry has written music for wind and chamber ensembles as well as film and games. Her film scores have appeared in the International Children's Film Festival in San Diego, Las Vegas and San Francisco. She has worked for a number of independent video games, most recently working for Seismic Games (Niantic Los Angeles), HyperKinectic Studios, and Player1Games. Kerry has taught clarinet, music theory, composition, and general music/rock music at the University of Minnesota, Schoolcraft College and Rio Hondo College. She has volunteered with PIECES and the Girl Scouts of Greater

Los Angeles (partnering with Women in Games International to teach girls about game development).



Dan of the Dead: Music and Temporal (Dis)Placement in the *MediEvil* Series

Karen M. Cook (University of Hartford) & Andrew Powell (Independent Scholar)

Known for its macabre humor and Gothic aesthetic, Sony Computer Entertainment's *MediEvil* series has received critical praise and a cult following for its genre- and time-bending antics.

Skeletal protagonist Sir Daniel Fortesque ironically embodies the story's central premise of temporal displacement. Accidentally risen from the dead, the gallant yet gaunt "Hero of Gallowmere" must defend his kingdom and, later, Victorian-era London, to earn his rightful resting place in the Hall of Heroes.

Adding depth to the tales are the scores from Andrew Barnabas and Bob Arnold, which draw on historical and filmic tropes to create an intricate web of cross-temporal references. Fortesque's fantastical 14th-century setting is filled with musical medievalisms: plainchant, wordless voices, lutes, Gothic organ, and harp play prominent roles in the Danny Elfman-esque Goth-fantasy score (see Binns, CookJ, CookK, Powell). Beyond this parallelism, the score generates humor through anachronistic conflict: Fortesque romps through Victorian London to the sounds of a big band, while strains reminiscent of *Rocky* (1979) float through a steampunk robot boxing match.

In this presentation, we build on scholarship by James Deaville, Isabella van Elferen, Janet Halfyard, and others to explore how this intersection of medievalist, Gothic, and cinematic musical tropes creates an audiovisual narrative befitting the series title and its time-leaping legend. The score thus joins Fortesque as an unseen secondary character, guiding the player through time and meaning as they proceed on their postmortem quests.

Karen M. Cook (she/her/hers) is Associate Professor of Music History at the Hartt School, University of Hartford. She specializes in theory and notation of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and also in medievalism in contemporary music & media, especially video games. Recent works were published or are forthcoming in the *Medieval Disability Sourcebook*, *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, *Teaching the Game*, *The Museum of Renaissance Music*, and the new *Journal of Sound & Music in Games*, for which she is on the editorial board. Her book *Music Theory in Late Medieval Avignon: Magister Johannes Pipardi* was published in 2021 as part of Routledge's RMA Monographs Series.

@CooksterKC

Andrew S. Powell (he/him/his) received his Ph. D. in Music Theory from the University of Kansas. His present work focuses on the transformational relationship between music and narrative in films and video games. His research has appeared at NACVGM, the Film and Media Interest Group of the Society for Music Theory, Music and the Moving Image, and The Ludomusicology Society of Australia, amongst other venues. He has several forthcoming book chapters discussing such topics as rhythmic and metric filmic fantasy, *Final Fantasy X*, and *Epic Mickey* currently in preparation. Andrew's primary area of specialization is the interactive drama, exploring the boundaries between game and film music and their connection to narratives which are not predetermined.

@ASPMusicTheory

Let the Games Begin! Music and Sound in the Earliest Audiovisual Advertising for Home Consoles and Video Games

James Deaville (Carleton University)

Audiovisual advertising for home consoles and video games of the early 1970s bears little surface resemblance to the game trailers that emerged in the 1990s (Vpplans 2017). However, key marketing elements for the trailers were already in place from the beginning, especially in the soundtracks to the spots. In fact, music and sound comprised integral components of the promotional message through the game industry's collapse in 1983 (Newman 2017). They first served as surrogates for the sounds of play in the early soundless games, and then evolved into increasingly complex branding soundtracks in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Nevertheless, Gibbons' insightful discussion of Atari's campaign "Have You Played Atari Today?" remains the only detailed treatment of music and sound in the important pre-Crash advertising of consoles and games (Gibbons 2021).

This paper extends our consideration back to the first audiovisual advertising for the Magnavox "Odyssey" (1972), which includes a remarkable five-minute demo video that immerses the audience in the family game experience through the sights and musically simulated sounds of play (Willaert 2020). Ads for Atari's VCS/2600 consoles and games and for its home-computer 400 and 800 models (1981-1983) took the product promotion to the next level. Sound and music were then fully integrated into the advertised experience, through the transscansion of the jingle hook for Atari games (Gibbons 2021) and the sophisticated sound design and musical strategies for the home-computer campaign. Their soundtracks would prove crucial for selling play, well before the advent of the game trailer.

Dr. James Deaville (he/him/his) teaches Music in the School for Studies in Art and Culture at Carleton University. One of his primary areas of interest is music and sound in various aspects of television, ranging from news music to TV spots for feature film. He edited *Music in Television* (Routledge, 2010) and with Christina Baade co-edited *Music and the Broadcast Experience* (Oxford, 2016). He co-edited with Ron Rodman and Siu-Lan Tan the Oxford Handbook of Music and Advertising (2021), and with Ron Rodman and Jessica Getman is currently co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Television Music*. In 2019 he received a four-year Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for research on sonic representations of disability in screen media and also just received a two-year Insight Development Grant from the same agency to study latent bias in soundscapes of news coverage from the initial pandemic epicentres.



Music, uncanniness and the *cinematic* (dis)comfort in *Little Nightmares 2*

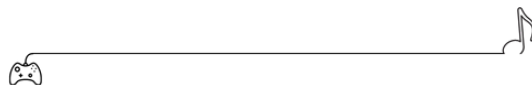
Joana Freitas (CESEM - NOVA FCSH)

The influence of the *cinematic* on video games has been, since the first debates between narratology and ludology, studied from its relationship with cinema and its remediation of codes and techniques (Bolter and Grusin 1999; King and Krzywinska 2007; Wolf 1997). If some argue that video games are not interactive cinema, discourses on the growing exchanges between art cinema and Hollywood in the multiplicity of video game genres are increasingly numerous. From an adjective to a technique, a marketing tool to a design choice, the term *cinematic* can be deemed as inseparable from this universe in the last decade, raising several questions among which we can highlight new forms of gameplay, the emotional relationship between player and virtuality, innovative audiovisual strategies for editing and, especially, the

conception and role of music between the narrative, the camera and the player as interpreter and spectator.

In this context, *Little Nightmares 2* (Tarsier Studios 2021) presents itself “as fun to watch as it is to play” (Devore 2021). With less adventure and more horror than its predecessor, its mechanics and ergodic process of interpretation are intertwined with the camera and its relationship with the player and their character. This paper aims to examine this symbiosis considering the connection between music and the uncanny: the strangeness and discomfort in *LN2*. Beyond the stereotypes of horror in the audiovisual, the uncanny determines the way music and its *transdiegesis* lie on both sides of the bridge between the player's affective agency and the *cinematic* not only on the passive screen but also as an active and significant gaze.

Joana Freitas (she/her/hers) is a PhD student in Musicology at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the NOVA University of Lisbon with a FCT PhD Scholarship (SFRH/BD/139120/2018). She completed her master's degree with a dissertation titled «The music is the only thing you don't have to mod': the musical composition in modification files for videogames» and is an integrated researcher of the Centre for the Study of Sociology and Aesthetics of Music (CESEM). She's a member of the Research Clusters in Music and Cyberculture (CysMus), Gender and Music (NEGEM) and Sociology of Music (SociMus), all three integrated in the Group of Critical Theory and Communication (GTCC). Her main areas of interest are video game music, film music, audiovisual media, interactivity, digital culture and cybercommunities, gender, and sexuality.



Fowl Play and Listening Across *Wingspan*(s)

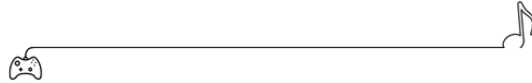
Kate Galloway (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute)

I'm an ornithologist and conservationist developing the forest, grassland, and wetland habitats of my aviary, attracting birds to my network of nature preserves in *Wingspan*. I listen across the tabletop and digital versions of *Wingspan*, attuning my ear to the ways in which the game is part of this multisensory and interactive tradition of knowing the nonhuman animal through the visual and sonic realism of “field marks” and representational habitat detail that guide species identification in the field. I argue that versionings of *Wingspan* afford players different kinds of opportunities to look *and listen* more carefully to species-specific sonic behavior. Fans of the tabletop version expressed online that they wanted to *hear*, as well as see the birds they collected and played in their personal aviaries. With each expansion pack release, the percentage of sound-oriented fieldnotes increased, but they describe how their calls related to their habitat or make comparisons using anthropocentric musical terms (e.g., “flute-like” song). When players listen to the descriptions on each card they are rarely listening to the birds. While the tabletop game arguably remains the fan favorite, the digital edition takes the concept of building bird sanctuaries by adding the call of each bird played to aviary's acoustic environment. In contrast to the tabletop version, the *Wingspan* digital game adaptation provides players with the opportunities to listen to the birds as not just a collection of visual specimens in the ecosystem of their board, but also as a soundscape of avian chaos.

Kate Galloway (she/her/hers) is on faculty at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute where she teaches and researches in the Music and Games and Simulation Arts and Sciences programs. Her research and teaching address sonic responses to environmentalism, sound studies, digital culture and interactive media, and Indigenous musical modernities and ecological knowledge.

Her monograph *Remix, Reuse, Recycle: Music, Media Technologies, and Remediating the Environment* examines how and why contemporary artists remix and recycle sounds, music, and texts encoded with environmental knowledge. Her work is published in *American Music*, *The Soundtrack*, *Ethnomusicology*, *MUSICultures*, *Tourist Studies*, *Sound Studies*, *Feminist Media Histories*, and *Popular Music*.

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Perilous Platforms and Musical Metaphors: Mapping Music and Meaning through Play Julianne Grasso (The University of Texas at Austin)

In an interview for WIRED magazine in 2007, Koji Kondo was asked about his goals in composing for *Super Mario Bros.* (1985). In his answer, he stated that the music should be heard as “actually a part of the game” rather than the background. In other words, Kondo aimed for music that would emulate playing *Super Mario Bros.* — the leaps and bounds, pitfalls and perils of its platformer mechanics. Such a musical concept differs somewhat from another typical goal of evoking a narrative affect or mood—closer to Kondo’s ideal for *The Legend of Zelda* (1986), an action-adventure game with plenty of pitfalls and perils, but more reliant on a sense of adventure and exploration than fraught movement through space.

Narrative possibilities of music are well-trodden ground for music theory, but Kondo’s *Mario* music presents a new horizon for analysis: how can we understand music that emulates a particular genre of interactive mechanics? In this presentation, I offer a means of answering these questions, focusing on Kondo’s music as integrated into a player’s experience of gameplay. Drawing from work in musical environments (Kamp, 2014), perception (Huron, 2007), and cognition (Zbikowski, 2002), I demonstrate how music offers special conceptual resources for blended, multimodal meanings in game spaces. The formation of these novel concepts is not merely a result of associations between music and game, but rather facilitated by play itself as an act of meaning construction. Gameplay, as an interactive experience of challenges and goals, enacts the processes by which meanings are formed, thus uncovering new paths for understanding video game music.

Julianne Grasso (she/her/hers) is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Music Theory at the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas at Austin. Previously, she taught at the University of Chicago where she earned her PhD in 2020 in Music History and Theory with a dissertation entitled “Video Game Music, Meaning, and the Possibilities of Play.”

 [juliannegrasso](#)



Musically Mediated Masculinities: A Semiotic Examination of Gender in *God of War* (2018) Christopher Greene (University of Cincinnati)

How does one redefine masculinity in the digital era following #gamergate? Cory Barlog addresses this question in the 2018 series reboot to *God of War*, which released to acclaim.¹ Simultaneously, scholars have begun to address how video games act as a media apparatus that redefines and reinforces hegemonic patriarchy.² This paper builds upon Iain Hart’s framework for ludomusicological semiotics³ by showcasing how *God of War*’s soundtrack communicates ideas about masculinity. From interviews and writings by director Cory Barlog

and composer Bear McCreary, a set of musical experience potentials are created that aim to redeem Kratos and establish “often conflicting character traits: strength and masculinity, wisdom and vulnerability.”⁴ While the gameplay of *God of War* often reinforces masculine performances common to video games, other game elements complicate these performances. Two key scenes are examined to show how these experience potentials are realized in gameplay. Despite not fully redeeming Kratos, *God of War*’s soundtrack interrogates the damage that toxic masculinity causes men to do to others and themselves, challenging us to, in Kratos’s own words, “be better.”

¹ Chris Plante, “God of War’s Director on Toxic Masculinity and Why Kratos Had to Change,” *Polygon* (blog), April 27, 2018, <https://www.polygon.com/interviews/2018/4/27/17287292/god-of-war-ps4-sony-toxic-masculinity>.

² Nicholas Taylor and Gerald Voorhees, eds., *Masculinities in Play*, Palgrave Games in Context (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

³ Iain James Timothy Hart, “Ludomusicological Semiotics: Theory, Implications, and Case Studies” (Ph.D., Sydney, Australia, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney, 2018).

⁴ Bear McCreary, “God of War,” *Bear McCreary Blog* (blog), May 8, 2018, <https://bearmccreary.com/god-of-war/>.

Christopher Greene (they/them/theirs) is a PhD student in Music Theory at University of Cincinnati. A saxophonist on the side, Christopher’s research interests include examining how video game music serves to communicate narrative and mediate representations of gender. In particular, they are interested in how video games can subvert and reinforce performances of masculinity, and how non-binary readings of these texts can result from play. Beyond the world of video game music, they are interested in examining the binary between musicology and music theory and how it might be broken down and rebuilt under a unified banner.



Video Games Alive: (Re)playful Listeners in Video Game Music Concerts

Stefan Greenfield-Casas (Northwestern University)

Though video game music concerts have existed in Japan since the late 1980s (e.g., *Family Classic Concert*), their popularity has exponentially increased in recent years, with concerts now spanning the globe and running the gamut from special, limited shows (e.g., *Undertale Live*) to touring, ongoing concert series (e.g., *Video Games Live*, *Distant Worlds*). Rather than focusing on ontological questions of the “authenticity” of these concert arrangements (e.g., Gibbons 2015), this paper instead considers video game music concerts from a phenomenological perspective rooted in fandom. That is, what does the experience of attending these concerts entail for these fans?

In examining fans’ relations to these performances, their emotional and material investment in the (live) music, and their personal memories of the multimedia they bring to these concerts, I ultimately argue that especially the live attendance of these concerts leads to an experience of “replaying” the games that these concerts highlight. Drawing from existing theoretical work, I offer a theory of “replayful listening.” I will merge two theoretical stances together to support this argument: the first takes theories of *liveness* (Auslander 2008, Sanden 2019, Gagen and Cook 2016) and examines how the event (Abbate 2004, Van Elferen 2020) of the concert informs audience members’ respective memories; the second considers theoretical models of *listening*, weaving together existing models of listening (Szendy 2008, Kamp 2014, Summer

2021) to revisit and add a new dimension to what Tim Summers (2021) has recently deemed “playful listening.”

Stefan Greenfield-Casas (he/him/his) is a PhD candidate in music theory & cognition and affiliate of the Interdisciplinary Program in Critical Theory at Northwestern University. His research focuses on the intersection(s) of music, myth, memory, and media, currently by way of the classical arrangement and concertization of video game and film scores. He has presented his research at various national and international conferences, including meetings of the International Musicological Society's Music and Media Study Group, the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, the Royal Musical Association's Music and Philosophy Study Group, Music and the Moving Image, Ludomusicology, and the North American Conference on Video Game Music. Stefan's forthcoming publications include invited chapters in *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the Final Fantasy Series*, *The Oxford Handbook of Arrangement Studies*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Video Game Music and Sound*.

@stefanxg



Music ⁱⁿ _{as} the Time-Space Continuum in *The Outer Wilds*

Elizabeth Hambleton (Texas State University)

Note: This abstract contains spoilers for the “true” ending of *Outer Wilds* (not including the DLC)

The Outer Wilds (Annapurna Interactive, 2019) is an adventure game featuring free exploration of a solar system to solve an eons-old mystery. The game music presents unique sonic and narrative functions. For instance, astronauts rest at campsites throughout the solar system, idly playing music that the player can pinpoint with their handy signalscope. As planets align, so do instrumental layers, and the player hears patchwork portions of the astronauts’ song. As the player learns to navigate through white dwarf wormholes and via quantum teleportation, the signalscope also becomes an essential lifeline. In this presentation, I draw on current literature in soundscapes and world building through sound and music and theories on virtual musical performance. Through these lenses, I explore how *The Outer Wilds* weaves the very space-time continuum of its virtual world with the soundscape and the act of performance. **[spoilers]** The player does not make their own music, but rather conducts the galactic orchestra, both literally and metaphorically. Only in the game’s epilogue, accessed by the “true” ending, can the player unite the musicians and hear the game’s theme in its entirety. The song ends as the universe implodes, and then both the music and universe explode again in a...well, a big bang. **[/spoilers]** Not only does music need a universe to exist, but the *Outer Wilds* universe needs music, too.

Dr. Elizabeth Hambleton (she/they) finished her Ph.D. in music theory on electroacoustic notation from UC Santa Barbara. Her work in the realm of ludomusicology focuses on soundscapes, both the composer creation and the player reception, in the video game genre commonly known as walking simulators, and how these genres uniquely intersect with soundwalks and interactive stories. Her lightning talk today is an early draft of an anthology chapter on how video game sound quite literally creates the video game universe, especially in story-driven and exploration-driven games, and uses *Outer Wilds* (Annapurna Interactive, 2019) as the focal case study.

 brohannes_jahms

Troping the Age of Fire and the Age of Dark: Sonic and Multimedia Storytelling in *Dark Souls I*

Joseph R. Jakubowski (Harvard University)

The story of *Dark Souls* (2011) is frustratingly and intentionally opaque. Aside from a brief introductory video glossing ancient events, players are given little in the way of context or motivation. Much of the narrative is told through allusions to high fantasy tropes and narrative devices, such as the chosen one plot (the player character is addressed as “Chosen Undead”). Nowhere is this more evident than the setting of Anor Londo, a glimmering golden kingdom bathed in eternal sunset and consisting of gothic architecture with impossibly huge flying buttresses. Players are literally dropped into this setting, left to admire the visual spectacle without commentary. They must use their cultural competence with genre and tropes to fill in the significance of this place.

This paper argues that this storytelling approach extends to the game’s sound design and score. For example, the player’s first meeting with Gwynevere, Princess of Sunlight is accompanied by *stile antico* sacred music, church bells, Renaissance-like vocal counterpoint, and awe-inspiring organ. Building on Hatten’s notion of topics and tropes (2004, 2018) and Atkinson’s extensions to video game scoring (2018), I analyze the interaction of visual, sonic, and narrative topics and tropes in several key moments of the game. For example, Gwynevere’s meeting appears to be a straightforward instance of awe but is revealed to be an illusion of a past golden age—much like Anor Londo itself. I conclude by considering some key debates in the fan community around the larger narrative from a tropological perspective.

Joseph R Jakubowski (he/him/his) is a Lecturer in the Harvard Music Department, where he teaches music theory courses. He received his PhD from Washington University in St. Louis with a dissertation on cognition, phenomenology, and the experience of form in spectral music. His current research interests include meter, analytical applications of cognition research, embodiment and groove, and cross-modal experiences in media, especially video games. In addition to an interest in the entire *Soulsborne* catalog, Joseph is fascinated by the modern Roguelike renaissance more broadly, from *Slay the Spire to Hades*. He is also an avid fan of *Pokemon* and *The Legend of Zelda*.



Pinball’s Sounds and the Transition from Electromechanical to Solid State Games: Video Game Music’s Little-known Ancestor

Neil Lerner (Davidson College)

Karen Collins (*Game Sound*, 2008) has traced the emergence of video game sounds in the 1970s to a history of mechanical and electromechanical amusements such as bagatelle, slot machines, and pinball. While coin-operated video games were a novelty in the U.S. in the 1970s, coin-operated amusements were not, and many of the companies associated with early arcade video games (such as Bally/Midway, Williams, and Gottlieb) had been making pinball machines for several decades. Besides the sounds of balls rolling, the free game knocker, and other electromechanical mechanisms in operation, pinball machines usually contained bells and chimes. Relatively little innovation occurred in pinball sound until the introduction of the three-note chime box by Gottlieb in 1969, which still only offered a maximum of three pitches. Comparing sounds from early pinball machines, in particular *Vagabond* (Williams, 1962) and *Fireball* (Bally, 1972) demonstrates pinball’s dominant influence on the soundscapes of early video games, in particular the use of indeterminate rhythms and melodic patterns

based on the contingencies of actions in each game. Recordings of gameplay from Gottlieb's *Neptune*, 1978, will provide examples of the apex of electromechanical pinball sound. As pinball machines began to incorporate more solid state (instead of electromechanical) mechanisms in the second half of the 1970s, more innovation began to occur, such as attempts to include less abstract sounds (such as horses galloping in 1979's *Sharpshooter*) and the first instance of dynamic audio: continuously rising pitches as gameplay continues in Williams' *Flash* (1979).

Neil Lerner (he/him/his) co-founded NACVGM with Will Gibbons and Steve Reale. He has written or edited numerous works about music and screen media, including co-editing *Music in Video Games: Studying Play*. His current project is the history of sound and music in pinball, and some of the research for this project was supported by a research fellowship at the Strong Museum of Play.



“Befriending Spirits”: Jason Gallaty and Gamelan Çudamani’s score for *Kena: Bridge of Spirits* (2021)

James Denis McGlynn (University College Cork)

In June 2020, when Sony first unveiled the design and launch titles of its much-anticipated PS5, *Kena: Bridge of Spirits* was announced as one of the first new properties that would be launched for the console. Commentators were quick to note the apparent Southeast Asian influence on *Kena*’s fictional woodland setting, especially shades of Bali and Indonesia. Quite remarkably, the origins of this Balinese influence can be directly traced to the game’s musical score: Ember Lab co-founder Josh Grier has implied that many of the game’s debts to Balinese culture were in direct response to *Kena*’s soundtrack, a collaboration between composer Jason Gallaty and Balinese gamelan ensemble Gamelan Çudamani (Wright 2021).

This paper is an exploration of Jason Gallaty and Gamelan Çudamani’s original score for *Kena* and its carefully considered, respectful incorporation of Balinese gamelan music: a joyous opportunity to revisit Hyeonjin Park’s ardent call for representation of new voices and stories in music, gaming, and academic spaces (2020, 90). I will especially focus on the interaction of traditional Indonesian tuning systems with those of Gallaty’s symphonic arrangements, which appear to be compositionally anchored in Çudamani’s gamelan contributions. Ultimately, through my close analysis of *Kena*’s score and a new interview with Jason Gallaty, Pak Dewa Berata and Emiko Saraswati Susilo (Çudamani’s directors), this paper aims to highlight the role of these individuals in making *Kena* such a unique case study in contemporary videogame music, illustrative of the “invitational approach” to cultural representation in game scoring theorized by Thomas Yee (2021).

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James Denis Mc Glynn (he/him/his) is a screen music scholar, conductor, and Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Music, University College Cork. His research interests include rearrangement, adaptations, and videographic criticism's role in scholarship. James is an alumnus of the Quercus Talented Students Programme, having been awarded a Quercus Creative & Performing Arts Scholarship in 2015. His receipt of a PhD Excellence Scholarship in 2017 enabled him to pursue his doctoral research at UCC, which he completed in 2020. James serves on the inaugural editorial board for *Sonic Scope: New Approaches to Audiovisual Media*. His research has been published in the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, *Sonic Scope*, and will soon appear in the collections *After Midnight: Watchmen After Watchmen*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Music in Television*. He is currently co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* with Richard Anatone and Andrew S. Powell.

 **JDMcGlynn**



Between the Nostromo, Sevastopol, and Your Living Room: Boundary-Crossing Sound Design in *Alien: Isolation* (2014)

Jacy Pedersen (University of Cincinnati) & Hannah Blanchette (University of Cincinnati)

Like a sonic sequel, the familiar beeps and squeaks that echoed through the hallways of the starship Nostromo in the sci-fi film *Alien* (1979) reappear on the space station Sevastopol, the main setting of the survival horror video game *Alien: Isolation* (2014). In a nostalgic effort to recreate *Alien*'s uneasy atmosphere, the game's sound design samples extensively from the original film, including computer system boot-up beeps, 1970s technological sounds, and the ship's white noise. The perceptual connection between the film and game expands beyond diegetic boundaries in some versions of the game, which add microphone reactivity, motion controls, and/or virtual reality.

In this paper, we analyze examples of how *Alien: Isolation* creates a sense of the uncanny by crossing boundaries between game and player, emphasizing liminal places, and blurring notions of past and present. We draw upon Robynn J. Stillwell's fantastical gap (2007); liminal place internet phenomena; and previous scholarship on aesthetics, silence, and noise by David Bessel (2002), Mark Sweeney (2016), and Stan Link (2017). Although horror film and television can invoke terror in viewers through audiovisual means, *Alien: Isolation*'s interconnected system of musical score, sound design, visual design, and gameplay expands the dimensions through which horror can unsettle a player. Beyond providing a case study, *Alien: Isolation*'s implementation of cutting-edge audio technology to create an immersive game experience through multi-dimensional sound design suggests the importance of new approaches to the study of horror and interactive media.

Jacy Pedersen (she/her/hers) is a PhD candidate in Music Theory at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Her dissertation, "Musical Rebellion by Women in the Soviet Union," focuses on an interdisciplinary approach to analysis, incorporating analytical tools from music theory, drama, literature, and gender studies. She has presented her work at the Society for Music Theory, the British Audio-Visual Research Network Colloquia Series, "Press Start": A Video Game Music Symposium, and other regional conferences. Jacy holds an undergraduate degree in

composition from the University of Texas-Arlington and a masters of music theory from Texas Christian University.

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Hannah Blanchette (she/her/hers) is a PhD candidate in musicology from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music. Her research focuses on rock and alternative music, media music, recorded sound, and gender studies. She has previously presented at conferences for Press Start: A Video Game Music Symposium, Music and the Moving Image, the International Association for the Study of Popular Music's US Chapter, and the Society for American Music. Hannah also writes a weekly blog for Torn Light Records in Cincinnati, which explores musicians, record labels, and organizations in modern composition, experimental, jazz, rock, and folk. She holds a Master of Music in music history from CCM and a Bachelor of Music in clarinet performance with a minor in writing from Ithaca College.

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Where is Link's Home?: Contrasting the Relationships of Leitmotive and Topic to Narrative Across *The Legend of Zelda* Series **Lukas Perry (Eastman School of Music)**

Given the natural fit for musical topics to aid video-game story-telling, Atkinson (2019) and Bradford (2020) have recently explored their usage in the *Legend of Zelda* franchise. This study contrasts musical topic theory with Bribitzer-Stull's (2015) concept of leitmotivic prototypes to show that two *Zelda* location cues, "Kokiri Forest" (*Ocarina of Time*) and "Outset Island" (*The Wind Waker*), embody Link's "home" more deeply than another cue, "Kakariko Village" (*A Link to the Past* and *Ocarina of Time*) which does not utilize leitmotive. The "Kokiri Forest" melody's first-inversion arpeggiated triad gesture forms the basis of a leitmotive taken up in "Outset Island." The gesture is quoted in the introduction, transformed into instrumental fills, and then developed into a new theme. This subtle yet clear leitmotivic process musically highlights what the two locations hold in common as Link's home despite being found in two different installments. For comparison, "Kakariko Village," while incorporating pastoral topics to demonstrate safety (Rossetti 2020), reflects how Link is ever an outsider to this location. The cue's minor harmonies (ii⁷ and vi) imbue its arpeggiated major-triad melody with both a sense of searching and twinge of melancholy. These musical and narrative realities diminish the possibility of "Kakariko Village" as home, especially when understood in light of the leitmotivic connections between "Kokiri Forest" and "Outset Island." Leitmotivic development, considered in tandem with its narrative and musical-topical contexts, elucidates nuances of *Zelda*'s rich story and engenders a deep cohesion across the series that permeates its visual, sonic, and semiotic dimensions.

Lukas Perry (he/him/his) is a second-year Ph.D. student in Music Theory at the Eastman School of Music. His research focuses on analytical approaches to Maurice Duruflé's harmonic language, video game music theory, and the history of theory.

He has presented on harmonic sequences as indicators of polystylism in Anton Bruckner's choral music as well as the compositional process of the fifteenth-century Cypriot Mass. Currently, he serves on the editorial board for *Intégral: The Journal of Applied Musical Thought*. He earned an M.A. in Music Theory and M.M. in Choral Conducting from the University of Minnesota and a B.A. in Music and B.S. in Mathematics from the University of Puget Sound.

Mandatory Metal Moments: The Ubiquity of Heavy Metal Culture in Video Games Gregg Rossetti (Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey & Montclair State University)

Through a series of case-studies, this article presents a framework of common musical tropes originally only found in rock music—specifically heavy metal. The use of aggressive “double-kicking,” galloping bass lines, harmonized melodies, and overall fast tempi are all common elements of many styles of metal first developed in the 1980s. Video games developed alongside this musical genre; action, platforming, and role-playing games did not only embrace these distinguishing characteristics of metal music, but these tropes are now expected in games of various genres. In addition, other extra-musical topics associated with heavy metal’s lyrical themes —such as references to the occult and fantasy—are common archetypes used to build the worlds of these video games.

Studies have been conducted that examine the cultural similarities between these two cultures (Arsenault & Guay 2012), the relationship of rock music with game genre and function (Phillips 2014), and the use of rock paired with sacred music specifically in battle themes (Yee 2020). By analyzing the orchestration, melodic contours, rhythm, and harmony of these games, this article discusses and demonstrates how rock music has disseminated into video game culture. There are strong connections between the fast-paced obstacles in *Mega Man* with the speed of Iron Maiden, the gothic horror stages of *Castlevania* and Baroque elegance of Yngwie Malmsteen, and the thought-provoking gameplay of *Final Fantasy* and the esoteric music of *King Crimson*. The worlds of these games are built on their music, but their music is built on a fusion of tropes used in heavy metal culture.

Gregg Rossetti (he/him/his) holds a Ph.D. in music composition from Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, with a dissertation on how specific musical tropes build worlds in early console role-playing video games. He is an active composer, currently writing for several video games.

His concert music has been commissioned or performed by new music ensembles and touring artists including Englewinds, Dave Wozniak, Nouveau Classical Project, and Newband. He is a founding member of the progressive metal band, Suspyre, with whom he has produced four commercially-released albums.

His current multimedia projects include working as the sole composer and sound designer for Aether Story, an online role-playing video game that is currently in development by Phanxgames.

In addition to running a recording studio and teaching private students, he teaches courses in the history of rock and rap music, music theory, music technology, and composition at both Rutgers and Montclair State University.

 **greggrossetti**

An Intimidating Approach: The Narrative use of the Dark March Topic in the *Super Mario Bros. Series* Eric Saroian (Michigan State University)

From funeral marches that accompany game-over screens to pastoral themes accompanying village scenes, the musical cues heard in video games often have roots in film music. Just as the soundtrack from the original *Super Mario Bros.* borrowed from early cinema topics to

evoke certain moods (Lerner 2014), later installments in the series such as *Super Mario 64* (1996), *Super Mario Galaxy* (2007), and even *Super Mario 3D World* (2013) continue to utilize musical topics from the film industry to further immerse the player in the environment.

This essay identifies and explores how the *Super Mario Bros.* series uses what I call the *dark march* topic as a narrative device. First, I define how the dark march has become its own distinct topic in film through repeated dysphoric variations of the classic march topic (Bourne forthcoming; Monelle 2006). Specifically, in films like *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*, marches that feature low brass and large drums are paired with imagery of enemy forces. From there, I highlight the use of the dark march topic in multiple entries in the *Super Mario Bros.* series. Specifically, I show how dark marches consistently accompany levels that are precursors to boss fights, namely fights with Bowser and his children. In connection with film uses of the topic, these scenes usually also feature a militaristic backdrop. Finally, I explain how the topic is used in a video game-specific context, namely, to build the player's anticipation of Mario's climactic approach to a boss fight.

Eric Saroian (he/him/his) - Originally from Indiana, composer and percussionist Eric Saroian's interest in video game music started with the *Pokémon Black & White* soundtrack. Ever since, the music of Nintendo games and indie games has solidified itself as a big musical influence. Saroian's compositions draw inspiration from many sources, ranging from personal experiences to fantastical settings, but always with the intent of creating an emotional impression on the audience. A three-time winner of the Indiana University South Bend's Ensemble Concept/21 call for scores, he has had performances of his music in South Bend, Chicago, and Lansing. As a percussionist, Saroian is a strong advocate for the creation of new solo and chamber works. Saroian currently performs with the MSU Percussion Ensemble and MSU Wind Symphony. He is an undergraduate student at Michigan State University working toward a bachelor's degree in Composition and Performance.

 [ericsaroianmusic](#)



Virtuosic VGM: Adapting Game Music for Performance in a Concert Music Setting

Marco Schirripa (The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley)

While the practice of arranging and performing music from one's favorite video game is nothing new, the community of musicians who create game music "covers" has grown significantly since the advent of video and streaming platforms like YouTube and Twitch. Many musicians within this niche demonstrate an extraordinary level of artistry and musicianship. Most works, however, tend to fall into rock or electronic music paradigms, while "classical" arrangements are less common, especially those which would truly be appropriate for performance in a concert setting.

This presentation will discuss several challenges involved with video game music arrangement, such as identifying pieces which translate well to the concert stage, simplifying "unplayable" musical lines, formal considerations, and suggestions for more idiomatic instrumental adaptations. These discussions will cite examples from the presenter's own arrangement of music from *Shovel Knight* (2014) for solo marimba, and the steps taken to make the work more appropriate for traditional "classical" performance.

The arrangement spans four movements, each based on a single level's background music. Since the pieces are originally composed as "loops," each one has been edited to fit a

standard classical form, with modest, stylistically appropriate transitional material added by the arranger. There have been notable changes in tempo, texture, and expressive elements to help create a playable, concert-appropriate piece, while staying true to each tune's original mood and energy.

The session will conclude with a performance of the arrangement, followed by questions and audience discourse.

Marco Schirripa (he/him/his) holds Bachelor's degrees in Percussion Performance and Music Theory from Ithaca College, as well as a Master's degree and doctorate in Percussion from Indiana University, where he was awarded the prestigious Performer's Certificate. He serves as Assistant Professor of Percussion at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Marco has performed on international stages, including Zeltsman Marimba Festival and several Percussive Arts Society International Conventions, along with the 2013 Great Plains and 2014 Southern California International Marimba Competitions, taking first place in both. He is currently a member of the Heartland Marimba Quartet, a group specializing in new, diverse chamber music for keyboard percussion.

Dr. Schirripa has been active in the commissioning and premiering of works by a variety of composers, and his playing can be heard on albums featuring the music of Gordon Stout, Leroy Osmon, Amaury Leon Sosa, and Dominick DiOrio. His compositions are regularly programmed around the world and his work is available through C. Alan Publications and KPP. Marco Schirripa proudly endorses Pearl/Adams percussion instruments and Sabian cymbals.



Gaming the Lonely Road of Americana: Authenticity and Identity in Country, Western, and Folk Music

Pete Smucker (Stetson University)

Game audio designers increasingly turn to folk musicians as a source of authority, both as professional recording artists and as consultants on compositional styles. These practitioners offer a way to ground video games in cultural traditions and provide a sense of musical authenticity. Yet any attempt at depicting authentic “American” music brings with it a crisis of identity. This paper demonstrates the challenges of designing authentically American music in games through two primary areas of inquiry: 1) how the multifaceted nature of American music contradicts an often narrowly focused representation in games; and 2) how romanticized depictions of the American past may reinforce a pastoral ludic escapism in games while simultaneously weakening lived traditions and realities.

For example, in the narrative-driven adventure game *Where the Water Tastes Like Wine* (2018), composer Ryan Ike uses musicians from across the United States to help depict a depression-era country, noting that “they added a lot of their own flavour to the stuff I was sending them—I think it all came out sounding very authentic” (Quillfeldt 2018). Similarly, for *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018), Rockstar Games consulted old-time musician Eli Smith, who “recruited traditional musicians with a deep knowledge of the music’s historical roots to bring authentic styles of music to the game” (Leger 2019). Although I look specifically at Country, Western, and

folk music in the United States, I also generally consider the broader nature of what is considered American musics through additional games, including *Assassin's Creed III* (2012) and *The Flame in the Flood* (2016).

Peter Smucker (he/him/his) is Associate Professor of Music Theory at the Stetson University School of Music. His research interests include ludomusicology (specifically video game music and sounds), post-tonal music in the United States, American composer Elliott Carter, transformational theory, music theory pedagogy, and intersections of society, music, and multimedia. His current research includes examining semiotic values of game audio, representations of Appalachian folk music and the supernatural in games, and today's presentation, which looks at issues of identity and authenticity of American music in video games.

 **PeteCWS**



***Link's Awakening* for the Nintendo Switch: a taxonomy of musical palimpsests** Jordan Carmalt Stokes (West Chester University)

In manuscript studies, a palimpsest is a parchment that has been erased and re-used, resulting in a document with two layers of text: a surface layer, and a hidden layer that can be recovered through special paleographic techniques. Metaphorically, a palimpsest refers to any such trace of an overwritten original. The palimpsest has been theorized in literature by Gerard Genette, in music by Lori Burns and Serge Lacasse, in games by Hanns Christian Schmidt, and in game music by Stephen Baysted.

Drawing on these studies, I explore the virtual palimpsests that appear in the 2019 re-release of *Link's Awakening*, a game that seems to dwell on (or even wallow in) the strange pleasures and pleasurable strangeness of the remake. The music team adopts a variety of palimpsestic/palimpsestuous strategies, ranging from *consummations*, cues that profess to merely translate the Gameboy bleeps and bloops into their instrumental analogues; to *faithful covers*, cues that diverge in form and texture from the original, but preserve the mood and melody; to *faithless remixes*, cues that preserve some aspects of the original but differ markedly in mood or style; to *rejections*, cues where the original soundtrack is essentially discarded; to -- my favorite -- *true (false) palimpsests*, in which elements from the original soundtrack (in all their 8-bit crudity!), are included as samples within the vastly expanded sonic palette of an 8th-generation console score. All of these interact in fascinating ways with the playmobil aesthetics of the remake's visual language and the unabashed gnosticism of the game's plot.

Jordan Carmalt Stokes (he/him/his) is an assistant professor of music at West Chester University's Wells School of Music, where he teaches mainly early music and film music. He has published essays and reviews in *Music and the Moving Image*, the *Journal of Musicology*, *Music in Epic Film*, and the *Journal of Film Music*. His research on film music spans a number of topics, including genre, semiotics, and Neo-Riemannian Theory. His research on game music, so far, is mainly about the weird feelings engendered by coming back to the *Legend of Zelda* franchise as an adult after having played the games obsessively as a kid.

 **floreustebius**

Gamified Gender Dysphoria in the Music of *Metroid*

John Michael Walker (University of Hartford)

Metroid (1986) is the genesis of one of Nintendo's most recognizable and longest running franchises, offering a rich text for ludomusicological analysis as a sci-fi action-adventure horror platformer starring a female protagonist. Recontextualizing musical analysis from William Gibbons's "The Sounds in the Machine" (2016), this paper contends that rather than the score eliciting fear for worldly terrors awaiting the player on Zebes, the distant source of horror seeping into the score is proximate, lurking within the Power Suit itself. *Metroid*'s obfuscation of Samus's identity—in both the game manual's use of male pronouns and the game's duplicitous endings (which might or might not reveal her womanhood)—supports the claim that her gender unmasking was meant to shock to the predominantly male gamers of its time.

An analysis of the game's soundtrack in tandem with feminist narrative reconstruction repositions the "twist ending" that Samus is a woman as a dysphoria-inducing sequence, presenting an alternative reading of the disorienting "burbling" motif in Gibbons's (2016) as referencing the imminent off-screen horror that Samus Aran evokes. The paper applies critical feminist analysis (à la Biscop, Malliet and Dhoest, "Subversive Ludic Performance," 2019) to the "Tourian," "Zebetite," "Silence," and "Escape" cues in a narrative reconstruction that implicates the "Staff Roll" music accompanied by Samus's revealed female body as a coming-out fanfare. This project ultimately situates *Metroid* (1986) among other horror video games that deliberately sabotage the player-protagonist association for emotional affect.

John Michael Walker (he/him) is a first-year Music History graduate student at the University of Hartford. Born and raised in Olive Branch, Mississippi, John Michael received his Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Mississippi in May 2021. Since pivoting to music research, his primary research focuses have been feminist musicology, queer musicology, ludomusicology, and the intersections therein. Next year, John Michael will serve as a Graduate Teaching Fellow at the Hartt School.

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Classic *Tetris* for the Nintendo Entertainment System: Additive Rhythms from 1989 to Today

Thomas L. Wilson (Louisiana Tech University)

In late 1989, Nintendo licensed, produced, and released a version of *Tetris* for the Nintendo Entertainment System. Beginning in 2010, the annual Classic Tetris World Championship revitalized competitive *Tetris* play. Different controller schemes emerged as the largest Esport scene of the third generation of consoles continues to grow to this day.

Within the game, auditory icons trigger each time a tetramino is shifted left or right one space. As competitors play without the default music, they use these sounds as a guide while moving the pieces at speeds of up to thirty inputs a second. Likewise, a certain additive rhythmic flow of the piece movements confirms each shift while a growing stack collapses the time between pieces. Hardware limitations require players to perform frame perfect inputs where the additive rhythm of the piece movements as well as visual cues confirm through audio whether an attempted piece placement was successful.

In my presentation, I will discuss these skills within *Tetris* and connect the additive rhythm of piece movement to the state of play associated with high-level NES *Tetris*. I will demonstrate that although competitors compete without the game's music, additional earcons prepare competitors for precise frame perfect movement from one spawned piece to the next. As these sounds are the only audio present within a modern competitive setting, the presentation serves as a case study demonstrating how audio within games can shift the state of play over time.

Thomas Wilson (he/him/his) is the Adjunct Instructor of Music Theory at Louisiana Tech University. He completed his Ph.D. in Music Composition at LSU with a minor in Experimental Music and Digital Media. His dissertation work, "The Rougarou Concerto and Initial Observations of the Flex Ensemble", includes a cello concerto for flex ensemble commissioned by Eduard Teregulov. Thomas is also a video game composer, crafting music for projects with Headless Chicken Games, and recently led an audio team for "Lucidscape", available on Steam. Outside of work, you can find Thomas organizing Classic Tetris Monthly, a series of online Classic Tetris tournaments.

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