NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON VIDEO GAME MUSIC
Tenth Annual Conference, February 4–5, 2023
Presentation Abstracts

Session 1: *Celeste*

Madeline, Music, and the Mountain: Music, Narrative, and Anxiety in *Celeste* (Adam Rizzo)

20-minute paper

Celeste, by Matt Makes Games (2018), is a game about journeys—one journey sees the protagonist Madeline climbing Celeste Mountain, while the other sees Madeline engaging with her anxiety, manifested as an alter-ego, named "Badeline." In analyzing Celeste's music, composed by Lena Raine, I draw upon both narrative and disability studies to explore this rarely analyzed piece through a ludomusicological lens. Focusing on the dynamic between Madeline and Badeline, I demonstrate how the musical relationships between the motives and ideas found in *Celeste* illustrate Madeline's progress throughout her journey, arguing that the final chapter musically demonstrates how Madeline accepts her anxiety as part of herself. In reference to Simi Linton's (1998) work on "claiming disability" as an identity, I see the end of chapter six, where Madeline accepts Badeline instead of letting her go, as Madeline "claiming" her anxiety as part of her personal identity, which results in Badeline giving Madeline the ability to double jump in the game.

Drawing on Julianne Grasso's (2020) concept of "ludomusical narrativity," I show how the track "Reach for the Summit" directly incorporates elements from the previous six chapters alongside a repeated melody to demonstrate character development. While most of the previous chapters are in minor keys, Raine transposes material to E major. Each sequential section represents a previous chapter and demonstrates Madeline's ultimate success in climbing the mountain and finding personal acceptance. *Celeste* provides a point of departure for analyzing musical relationships in a video game in the context of narrative and disability studies.

Abbreviated Bibliography

Grasso, Julianne M. "Video Game Music, Meaning, and the Possibilities of Play." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. University of Chicago, 2020.

Plank, Dana M. "Bodies in Play: Representations of Disability in 8- and 16-Bit Video Game Soundscapes." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Ohio State University, 2018.

Linton, Simi. *Claiming Disability : Knowledge and Identity*. Cultural Front. New York: NYU Press, 1998.

Straus, Joseph N. *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Musical Representations of Journey in *Celeste* (Stephanie Lind)

10-minute paper

POSSIBLE TRIGGER WARNING: DISCUSSIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Indie platformer *Celeste* (2018) achieved popularity due to its unique retro style and successful depictions of mental health struggles (https://www.vice.com/en/article/pa5937/my-biggest-revelations-of-2018-came-from-an-indie-video-game). The game depicted many of these narrative elements via musical motives, not surprising given that its composer, Lena Raine, identifies herself as a composer who is "always a fan of using convenient metaphors in music" (https://www.originalsoundversion.com/interview-composer-lena-raine-talks-celeste-soundtrack-working-in-game-audio/).

How exactly are these musical metaphors achieved? Ostinato is a major component, sonically depicting the protagonist Madeline's journey ascending the game's titular

mountain, but representations of journey (in both the geographical and personal sense) also occur via other means. A rising-fifth piano melody in the introduction, with significant amounts of reverb, suggests the instability created by the wind as well as the initiation of Madeline's journey (a depiction of ascent reminiscent of Atkinson 2019's soaring topic). Chapter 2's "Old Site" music slows and distorts when Madeline meets an alternate-reality version of herself, suggesting the uncanny, but this is followed by a rhythmic acceleration when a chase sequence initiates. Late in the game after a final reconciliation of Madeline and her alternate self, a piano melody in a minor key mirrors the rising action of the game but also combines the two thematic associations of Madeline (piano) and her alternate self (minor mode). Pulling from scholarship by Medina-Gray (2016 and 2019) on musical modularity and Reale (2016) on the representation of narrative via developmental processes in music, this presentation will analyze how motivic features depict narrative through repeated melodic cells, motivic combination, and timbral change.

References

Atkinson, Sean. "Soaring Through the Sky: Topics and Tropes in Video Game Music." *Music Theory Online* 25, no. 2 (2019). https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.2/mto.19.25.2.atkinson.html.

Medina-Gray, Elizabeth. "Analyzing Modular Smoothness in Video Game Music." *Music Theory Online* 25, no. 3 (2019). https://doi.org/10.30535/MTO.25.3.2.

——. "Modularity in Video Game Music." In *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*, edited by Michiel Kamp, Tim Summers, and Mark Sweeney, 53-72. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, Ltd., 2016.

Reale, Steven. "Variations on a Theme by a Rogue A.I.: Music, Gameplay, and Storytelling in *Portal 2*," parts 1 and 2. *SMT-V* 2, no. 2 (July 2016). http://www.smt-v.org/archives/volume2.html#variations-on-a-theme-by-a-rogue-ai-music-gameplay-and-storytelling-in-portal-2-part-1-of-2.

Session 2: Being Ludic

Radiohead's Impossible Museum: Representing Abstract Musical Phenomena and Ephemeral Listening Experiences in *KID A MNESIA EXHIBITION* (2021)

(James McGlynn)

10-minute paper

Content Warning: Although excerpts are not violent or explicit in any way, some viewers may find Yorke and Donwood's surreal imagery for KID A MNESIA EXHIBIT unsettling. Flashing images may affect individuals with photosensitive epilepsy.

In recent years, an increasingly popular mode of media cross-promotion has been the so-called "virtual experience." Typically, these are free-to-play games released for home consoles and are often closer to simulations than games, placing less emphasis on ludic elements and comprising exploratory gameplay often confined to one area, e.g. *Spider-Man: Far From Home - VR Experience* (2019) and *The Matrix Awakens: An Unreal Engine 5 Experience* (2021). What happens then when a virtual experience seeks to achieve something other than simulating memorable locations/characters, and instead attempts to represent more abstract phenomena, such as processes of musical composition? This was the ambition of Radiohead - KID A MNESIA EXHIBITION (2021): a virtual experience designed by Thom Yorke, Nigel Godrich and Stanley Donwood to coincide with the 20th anniversary re-release of the band's albums *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*.

Given the band's famously anti-corporate rhetoric (see Rose 2016), the idea of a Radiohead "PS5 game"/commercial tie-in may seem surprisingly incongruous. However, it quickly becomes apparent that KID A MNESIA EXHIBITION has artistic aspirations beyond simple cross-promotion: the experience comprises a surreal, reflexive reinterpretation of what commercial tie-ins and retrospective exhibits entail, sculpting an intimate audiovisual abstraction of the compositional processes that informed the band's fourth and fifth albums. With reference to recent research on music in walking simulators (Hambleton 2020) and accounts on other

musical experiences in VR during COVID-19 (Durand et al. 2021; Mortizen 2021; 2022), this paper analyzes how, through surreal generative visuals and creative re-implementations of Radiohead's *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* master stems, the band's "exhibition" strives to audiovisualize the most ephemeral and deeply personal aspects of creating/consuming music, in a manner impossible in (non-virtual) reality.

Works Cited

Durand, Júlia, Joana Freitas, and João Francisco Porfírio. "Listen, Watch, Play and Relax: YouTube, Video Games and Library Music in Everyday Life During the Pandemic." *Sonic Scope: New Approaches to Audiovisual Culture* 1, no. 3 (2021).

Hambleton, Elizabeth. "Gray Areas: Analyzing Navigable Narratives in the Not-So-Uncanny Valley Between Soundwalks, Video Games, and Literary Computer Games." *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1, no. 1 (2020): 20–43.

Mortizen, Karina. "Opening up Virtual Mosh Pits: Music Scenes and In-game Concerts in Fortnite and Minecraft." Presentation delivered at Ludo2021 Tenth European Conference on Video Game Music and Sound, online, 24th April 2021.

——. "Music Scenes and In-Game Concerts in Fortnite and Minecraft." *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 3, no. 2-3 (2022): 115–140.

Rose, Phil. Radiohead and the Global Movement for Change: "Pragmatism Not Idealism." Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016.

Media Cited

The Matrix Awakens: An Unreal Engine 5 Experience. Epic Games. 2021. English, PlayStation 5.

The Matrix Resurrections. Directed by Lana Wachowski. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2021.

Radiohead - KID A MNESIA EXHIBITION. Epic Games. 2021. English, PlayStation 5.

Spider-Man: Far From Home. Directed by Jon Watts. Columbia Pictures/Marvel Studios, 2019.

Spider-Man: Far From Home - Virtual Reality Experience. CreateVR/Sony Pictures Virtual Reality. 2019. English, PlayStation 4

A Magical Moment Made Just for You: Playful Design and Sensations of Wonderment in the Looping Music of Walt Disney World Attractions (Will Ayers)

20-minute paper

In a 1980 study in Anthropological Quarterly, Alexander Moore applied contemporary theories of play to the amusements and spaces of Walt Disney World. By promoting an "organized, routinized" sense of discovery through the use of stylized ritual thresholds and spatial design, Disney parks serve as both playgrounds and pilgrimage centers, akin to Mecca and Lourdes (Moore 1980). The interactive ride interfaces and augmented reality experiences of Disney's modern amusements encourage further consideration through the lens of game studies. Notably, the sound designs of rides, attractions, and spaces in Disney World often align with modern discussions of continuous musical loops in video games. This presentation will combine two concepts (one from the field of ludomusicology and another from film music studies) to analyze the continuous music of two Omnimover rides, The Seas with Nemo & Friends and the Haunted Mansion. The concept of macroloops (Collins 2006, 2007, 2008; Schartmann 2018) has been used to examine larger stretches of repeated music in early video games. The looping pieces of music in these attractions use modulation to bring about heightened "magical" moments that are unique for each rider. These moments are closely related to the sensations of wonderment that Frank Lehman discusses with regard to chromatically modulating cadential resolutions in Hollywood film music (Lehman 2013, 2018). By considering

the looping structure and affective potentials of these attractions, this presentation will demonstrate that the music of theme park rides can serve to integrate the capabilities of video game and film musics in real-world experiences.

Bonus Level 1

"Emotion and Narrative in Sport Games?" An analysis of Kris Bowers score for *Madden 21* (Calvin Evans Jr.)

20-minute paper

Topic theory has aided ludomusicologists in describing and understanding the sweeping, sweet melodies heard when flying over the kingdom of Hyrule, or the militaristic percussion accompanying a mission in *Call of Duty*. However, what topics support a head coach meeting or a training camp practice? The Madden franchise has been popular since the 1980s, yet virtually no ludomusicology scholarship discusses it, perhaps because historically, the franchise relied heavily on licensed music. However, in 2019, African American film composer Kris Bowers was brought on to compose original music for Madden 20 and 21. This paper will use topic theory relate this score to those composed for open-world video games, discussing the "Face of the Franchise" mode of Madden 21. Madden's recent games distinguish themselves from earlier editions by making the offfield experience more realistic, especially in the career modes. In Madden 21, the player is a high school quarterback encountering struggles and triumphs as they advance to college and finally the NFL. Cutscenes illustrate not only career-related events like the player choosing their college team or the experience of draft night, but also personal struggles: whether to speak up about a sick player, tension with a rival teammate, and transferring schools. In the original music used in these scenes, I define and show how musical topics like the hero, the villain, personal growth are used in Bowers' score. It's time to break the huddle and discover the meaning of music in Madden.

Session 3: Gender and Sexuality Looking at the Past

Chiptune Nostalgia through a Queer Perspective: Counter Memory, Chrononormativity, and Liminality (George Reid)

20-minute paper

Through decades of (sub)cultural appropriation, chiptune has come a long way from vitalising the pixelated geometries of in-game worlds. Yet the hypermediacies of its micro-audio technologies remain the consistent distinctiveness of its ludomusicality (cf. Bolter and Grusin 2000, pp. 31-44; Hodkinson 2002, pp. 30-31). Chip-musicians unabashedly foreground anachronistic digital aesthetics, timbres are unmistakably gritty, and obsolescence is celebrated beyond commercial abandonment. Consequently, questions regarding nostalgia's role in chiptune's longevity are common, often dramatically dividing opinion: phenomenologically, nostalgia is either relegated to gamers and demoscene veterans of a certain age or dismissed entirely as bearing no influence on chiptune's progression as a scene (see Yabsley 2007, pp. 13, 27; Scheraga 2007; Carlsson 2010, p. 11, 42-50; McAlpine 2018, pp. 256-7).

Entirely overlooked in this discourse are younger participants who didn't live through late 20th century video game and demoscene culture, yet nostalgia is cited as integral to their love of chiptune. Far from nostalgia's typically ascribed bittersweet pessimism, some have paradoxically highlighted the liminality and uncanniness of nostalgia itself as a means of identification and belonging – playing within the hazy interstices of cultural memory, time, and place. Why is this phenomenon occurring for these demographics? How do such experiences of nostalgia become an affirmative form of identification, and how does chiptuune engender these responses? Through interdisciplinary critical theory and autoethnographic reflections on chiptune and queer (listening) subjectivity, my paper sheds light on these questions by exploring the non/human encounters of chip-musicking (cf. Small 1998, pp. 1-8). In doing so, it will not only illuminate the much overlooked 'drastic' of chip-musical performativity (cf. Abbate 2004, pp. 505-36; cf. Van Elferen 2020,

pp. 103-5), but also show how nostalgia for fictional times and places can produce an affirmative source of ludomusical self-expression.

Provisional Bibliography

Abbate, C. (2004). "Music – Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry*. 30 (3). Pp. 505-536.

Blake, C., & Van Elferen, I. (2015). "Spectral Media and Sonic Loops." in Edwards, D. J. (Ed.), *Technologies of the Gothic in Literature and Culture: Technogothics*. London: Routledge.

Bolter, D. J. and Grusin, R. (2000). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. London: The MIT Press.

Boym, S. (2001). *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

_____. (2007). "Nostalgia and its Discontents." *The Hedgehog Review*. 9 (2).

Carlsson, A. (2010). *Power Users and Retro Puppets: A Critical Study of the Methods and Motivations in Chipmusic*. MA thesis. Lund University.

Cassin, B. (2016). *Nostalgia: When are We Ever at Home?* New York: Fordham University Press.

D'Errico, M. (2012). "How to Reformat the Planet: Technostalgia and the 'Live' Performance of Chipmusic" in Burgess, J. R. and Isakoff, K. (Eds.), *Journal on the Art of Record Production Conference 2011*. California: San Francisco State University.

Derrida, J. (2006). *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. London: Routledge.

Fisher, M. (2014). *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Hodkinson, P. (2002). *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture*. Oxford: Berg.

McAlpine, K. (2018). *Bits and Pieces: A History of Chiptunes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Niemeyer, K. (2014). "Introduction: Media and Nostalgia" in Niemeyer, K. (Ed.), *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Tonelli, C. (2014). "The Chiptuning of the World: Game Boys, Imagined Travel, and Musical Meaning" in Gopinath, S. and Stanyek, J. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies,* Volume 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Elferen, I. (2007). 'Introduction: Nostalgia and Perversion in Gothic Rewriting' in Van Elferen, I. (Ed.) *Nostalgia or Perversion? Gothic Rewriting from the Eighteenth Century until the Present Day*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

_____. (2012). *-Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

_____. (2020). "Ludomusicology and the New Drastic." *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*. 1 (1). Pp. 103-112.

_____. (2021). *Timbre: Paradox, Materialism, Vibrational Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Yabsley, A. (2007). *The Sound of Playing: A Study into the Music and Culture of Chiptunes.* BA thesis. Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University.

Retro Games, Retro Values: Gendered Musical Stereotypes in *Octopath Traveler* (Jasmin Limqueco)

20-minute paper

In recent years, the video game industry has seen a rise in games that draw upon ideas, themes, and styles to evoke nostalgia in players (Wulf et al. 2018). This call to a "retro" style ranges from older game mechanics to 16-bit graphics and chiptune music. *Octopath Traveler*, released in July 2018, impressed gamers with its classic pixel-style visuals and distinct characters as a nod to older Japanese role-playing games (JRPGs), such as the *Final Fantasy* franchise. But alongside these references to the past, *Octopath Traveler* also follows another trend in these nostalgic games—traditional gender constructs.

Drawing on scholarship in feminist music theory and musical exoticism (McClary 1991; Locke 2009), this paper will contemplate the pitfalls of nostalgia by examining how the musical themes in *Octopath Traveler* support these traditional gendered stereotypes. I will focus on juxtaposing the character themes of Primrose and Ophilia to reveal the oppositional representation of sexuality and morality present between them. The theme of Primrose—a dancer who resembles Bizet's Carmen—is marked by musical attributes associated with promiscuity and exoticism, such as modal harmonies and the use of tabla and finger cymbals. This theme contrasts with Ophilia's, the pure-hearted cleric, with the simple string accompaniment and a lyrical, tonal flute melody. Through this analysis, this paper will demonstrate how the comfort of musical nostalgia in video games and other media needs to be thoroughly examined in order to create new and more equitable characters in the media we consume.

Into the Dragon's Lair: A Sonic Tapestry of Medievalism, Gender, and Sexuality (Dana Plank)

20-minute paper

Dragon's Lair was a 1983 laserdisc arcade game featuring full cel animation by ex-Disney animator Don Bluth. The game was like an interactive movie, comprising playable cutscenes where the player had to respond to punishingly difficult quick-time events (QTEs) to navigate a treacherous medieval dungeon with a knight named Dirk the Daring in the hope of rescuing the heavily sexualized Princess Daphne, whose suggestive poses were based on Playboy magazine centerfolds. In this paper I examine the music and sounds of Dragon's Lair through the lens of medievalism, gender, and sexuality in four of its incarnations: the sound effects, fanfares, and voice acting of the original game scored by Chris Stone; the 2002 remake Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair (with a new original song "He's My Guy" by Stone for the closing credits from Daphne's perspective); the medievalist looped chiptune tracks for the platformer adaptation for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES; 1990) scored by Mark Cooksey; and Dirk and Daphne's musical leitmotifs and voice acting in the short-lived thirteen-episode cartoon that aired on ABC from September 1984-April 1985 scored by John Debney. Throughout its long history of sequels and remasters, Dragon's Lair consistently demonstrates visual and aural connections to the sword-and-sorcery fantasy genre revival of the 1970s-1980s as well as to Disney's animated feature films, a stable emphasis on medievalist signifiers that allowed it to present familiar elements from players' childhoods as more exciting and grown up to appeal to a teenage, heterosexual male target demographic.

Session 4: Gender and Sexuality Present and Future

Karaoke Nights: Performing Masculinity in *Yakuza 0* (Rayna Bell)

20-minute paper

The Yakuza franchise has experienced a surge in Western popularity since the song "Bakamitai" from *Yakuza* 0 went viral in a series of memes, remixes, and deepfakes. This power ballad is one of several selections available in the karaoke minigame that is presented as part of the game's nightlife simulator experience. My paper explores how karaoke inside *Yakuza* 0 is a gendered experience, characterized by modes of Japanese masculinity that took shape in the postwar period as Japan became a mass consumer society. As Japanese men were forced to embrace "salaryman" masculinity, the Yakuza film genre served as an important medium for representing men's struggles against changing cultural norms (Igarashi 2021). The Yakuza franchise serves as a modern space where masculine codes are explored, reinforced, and most uniquely, embodied by players when they participate in cultural activities and gendered actions in-game. I explore the karaoke minigame as a site where players participate in a gendered cultural activity curated by the developers with varying degrees of understanding of the Japanese language and Japanese karaoke practices. Karaoke songs are presented without English subtitles during the minigame. I draw on karaoke ethnographies, Yakuza film studies, and English player reviews to examine the ways that English-speaking players engage with the music in the karaoke portions of the game to understand character and context. Although these players may be unaware of lyric content, convention, and Japanese karaoke practices, they are able to participate successfully by drawing on previous knowledge of karaoke and rhythm minigames

Pink Empowerment: Music and Meaning in *Super Princess Peach* (Brooke McCorkle Okazaki)

20-minute paper

"Almost from their inception, video games have reiterated the objectification and violation of female figures while, at the same time, policing women's desire—in part through the simulation of emotional labor and in part by configuring them as voiceless, passive figures at the margins of a game's narrative," declares Sabine Frühstuck, a respected scholar of Japanese cultural studies (Frühstuck 2022:186). Throughout her discussion on video games, Frühstuck cites female video game characters as being defined by their relationship to males and gender stereotypes. While she doesn't name Princess Peach as a paragon of this trope, it's clear that the damsel in distress from Nintendo's platform-defining *Super Mario* franchise exemplifies Frühstuck's claims.

But what happens when we examine a game centered on Peach? This project considers how the 2005 game *Super Princess Peach* challenges the stereotypes Frühstuck outlines. First, I examine the establishment of Peach in the *Super Mario* series in the context of narrative, visual, and audio elements. Then I introduce *Super Princess Peach* and its critical reception. Citing three main components of the game's soundtrack—the opening title music, the musical rendering of her "Vibe" powers, and the role of her voice in the "Music Room" (a sidequest where Peach is the leader of a rock group)—I argue that the game's music and narrative lean into the Japanese aesthetic of *kawaii* (cuteness) in a way that empowers the character and speaks to broader trends of "pink feminism" both in Japan and abroad.

Bonus Level 2

Abstract and Realistic Representations of Voices in Video Games (Elizabeth Medina-Gray)

20-minute paper

Beginning from early game technology and continuing through today, video games have creatively used a wide variety of sounds to represent the voices of characters in game worlds. Such sounds range from relatively realistic (for instance, voice-acted dialogue with comprehensible linguistic meaning) to very abstract (for instance, beep speech (Stoeber 2020), as well as a variety of sounds that fall somewhere between those two extremes. Realistic representations of voices may convey specific textual messages that serve ludic and narrative functions, and these realistic vocal sounds may promote meaning related to emotion and affect, cultural or social identity, and so on (see Stingel-Voigt 2020; Smith 2021; Stockburger 2010). Abstract representations of voices, however, can also open space for imaginative meaning, and these more abstract sounds have received comparatively little scholarly attention thus far (for example, see Cheng 2014 on the *Final Fantasy VI* opera, and Medina-Gray 2021 on the dialogue sound in *Dragon Quest*).

In this paper, I lay some groundwork for considering representations of voices in video games, with a broad purview that includes both abstract and realistic sounds. I first identify elements that can mark these sounds as relatively realistic or relatively abstract, and I illustrate this framework with select examples from games. I then turn close attention to the game *Pyre* (2017) as a case study, to highlight some potential effects of these sounds. I suggest that abstract and realistic qualities may help shape players' expectations about what types of meaning they can obtain from these representational sounds.

Cheng, William. 2014. *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Medina-Gray, Elizabeth. 2021. "Interacting with Soundscapes: Music, Sound Effects and Dialogue in Video Games." In *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game*

Music, edited by Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers, 176-92. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Jennifer. 2021. "Voices, Combat, and Music: Identity, Camaraderie, and Relationships in *Final Fantasy XV*." *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 2 (2): 42-62. https://doi.org/10.1525/jsmg.2021.2.2.42.

Stingel-Voigt, Yvonne. 2020. "Functions and Meanings of Vocal Sound in Video Games." *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1 (2): 25–43. https://doi.org/10.1525/jsmg.2020.1.2.25.

Stockburger, Axel. 2010. "The Play of the Voice: The Role of the Voice in Contemporary Video and Computer Games." In *Voice: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, edited by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, and Theo Van Leeuwen, 281–99. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Stoeber, Jenna. 2020. "Animal Crossing's Fake Language Is Different in Japan, and Here's Why." *Polygon*. March 22, 2020. https://youtu.be/xYZMWkmXX3k.

Session 5: Game Music Outside of Games

Notes from the Gaming Prom: Video game music concerts as professionalised fan practice (Morgan Hale)

20-minute paper

On the 1st of August 2022, the BBC Proms presented its first ever Prom dedicated entirely to music from video games. Aimed at a younger audience than the Proms' usual and featuring an "electronically expanded" Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the concert took listeners through a potted history of video game music, from the 1980s to the modern day, featuring both popular favourites and lesser-known works. The presenters situated the Prom both as a stage in the widening of access to the Proms, alongside previous concerts of jazz and film music, and as a historic moment in which video game music made it to the "big stage."

This paper examines the concert as a work of productive fandom (Fiske 1992) brought to the professional stage, comprising both enunciative fandom and textual

productivity. I will also consider the concert in the context of affirmational and transformative fandom (obsession_inc 2009), paying particular attention to the intersection between that and nostalgia in the curation and arrangement of video game music for a live concert. In this way, and by examining the invocation of an assumed universal childhood and the construction of a narrative of technological and artistic progress exemplified by the repertoire chosen, I hope to illustrate some of the tensions inherent in this intersection of fan work and the industry of the Proms.

Video Game Concerts and the Affect of Liveness (Nic Vigilante)

20-minute paper

Live concerts within video games have become hugely popular in the last three years, with performances by artists such as Lil Nas X, Ariana Grande, and Travis Scott each drawing tens of millions of attendees. These virtual concerts are characterized by their fundamental interactivity; they take place in semi-persistent virtual worlds already inhabited by attendees and draw upon the communicative, visual, and embodied grammars of these worlds to create immerse and communal experiences. In this paper, I focus on concerts within the games Fortnite and Roblox, where what it means to be "live" is a question not only of temporality and agency but also one of collective affect. Central to these concerts is what I refer to – following scholars such as Philip Auslander and Paul Sanden – as *liveness*, a social affective state that emerges through the commodification and manipulation of the sense of the live's absence. Liveness is the affective terrain upon which the live is understood as such, an affective terrain that becomes perceptible only in moments of its (actual or feared) absence. What is live about these video game concerts, I argue, is not the music but rather the sense of liveness arising from the audiences' collaborative and collective actions – from dancing together to recursively watching others watch. An ethnographic methodology based on being-with-in-feeling highlights the contexts in which liveness takes shape, as well as what these ideas can tell us about the possible futures of concertgoing and sociality within Web3.

The (sound)World of the Musical *Sekaikan* or, Square Enix and the Media Mix
(Stefan Greenfield-Casas)

20-minute paper

The music of Square Enix's (SQEX) JRPG's—particularly the music composed by Nobuo Uematsu—has long been considered canonic within the world of video games (Gibbons, Grasso, Park, and Collins 2020; Gibbons 2021; Anatone 2022). So much so that the first video game music concerts were produced by Enix (1987) and Square (1989) when they were still separate entities (Lehtonen 2021). But how did this canonical status come to be? Rather than answering this question by way of musical aesthetics, I instead consider this question from a media theoretical and marketing perspective.

In this paper, I argue that SQEX has intentionally and consistently used their games' soundtracks as a way of expanding the "world" of their source games. In particular, I draw upon the Japanese media theory of the sekaikan (trans. "worldview") and the media mix (Otsuka 1989; Steinberg 2012) to refine Stefan Greenfield-Casas' (2021) claim that video game music concerts work as "worldbuilding" and "worldbridging" devices. I use the sekaikan to (1) contextualize this as a primarily (though not exclusively) Japanese phenomenon and to (2) explain how and why SQEX markets its music as heavily as it does, moving beyond classical concerts to consider SQEX Music SNS accounts, game console themes, and even representation at the 2021 Olympics. I conclude this paper by comparing SQEX to another titan in the (Japanese) video game industry, Nintendo, as a way of exploring how fan covers further build the sekaikan when a company (infamously) does not actively employ a musical media mix.

Bonus Level 3

"The Manor in the Corner of the Southern Plains Is a Right Creepy Place": Music, Landscape, and *Katabasis* in Emil's Manor from *NieR Replicant ver. 1.22474487139...* (Marina Gallagher)

20-minute paper

Whenever you speak with one of the guards at the Southern Gate of the protagonist's village in *NieR Replicant ver. 1.22474487139...* (Square Enix, 2021), he warns that Emil's Manor in the plains beyond is "a right creepy place." And yet, the player must venture into the manor twice to finish the game. Both of these journeys take the form of a *katabasis*: a descent to the Underworld in order to locate an important person or object, a narrative structure originating in Classical epic that also characterizes what I term anti-pastoral landscapes in role-playing video games. Like other "emblematic hells" (Holtsmark, 2001), the manor seeks to unsettle players through conventions derived from horror games, including darkened, labyrinthine surroundings and fixed camera angles (Niedenthal, 2009; Roberts, 2014). But while players of *Replicant* have noted a striking resemblance between Emil's Manor and Spencer Manor from *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996), the non-diegetic music for this location is atypical, combining anti-pastoral and lament elements.

Drawing on topic theory and my own research study on music and landscapes in RPGs, this paper analyses the visual and musical features of Emil's Manor in light of the area's katabatic narrative function. It argues that, while the manor itself fosters apprehension, its dynamic music elicits a more complex emotional response from players by reflecting the narrative contingencies of each *katabasis,* initially affirming the guard's evaluation of the manor as "a right creepy place" and later encouraging the player to empathize with Emil as he recalls his tragic past.

Session 6: Sound Design

Coffee Talk and the Architectonics of Game Worlds of the Everyday: Playful Ubiquity and the Sounds of "Coffitivity" (Kate Galloway)

20-minute paper

In the visual novel *Coffee Talk* (2020), set in an alternative reality Seattle in 2020, you play as the owner-barista of a small late-night coffee shop that offers its eclectic patrons good conversation and artisanal caffeinated beverages. Coffee shop simulators (e.g., *Beans* and *Cat Café Manager*), in-game coffee shops (e.g., *Animal Crossing*'s The Roost, *Detective Pikachu*'s Hi Hat Café, *Assassin's Creed Unity*'s Café Theatre), and coffee shop lo-fi remixes of video game soundtracks (e.g., "Undertale [Rainy Day at the Coffee Shop Mix]) are just a few examples of the sonic convergence of playing and working along to the clattering ceramic cups, gurgling frothed milk, burring coffee grinders, and ambient instrumental tracks. Although some critics dismissed *Coffee Talk*'s audio as "minimal," its combination of coffee shop ambiences and a lo-fi soundtrack of soft synths and piano melodies—similar to those used by the app *Coffitivity* to "boost your creativity and help you work better"—shape the quotidian "atmospheres" (Kamp, forthcoming) and architectonics of its game space. As players interact with the lives of patrons, like Freya, a journalist who spends her evenings in the cafe struggling to write a novel, I argue that they participate in "playing along" (Miller, 2011) with the acoustic environments of this space of creative productivity (Droumeva, 2017). *Coffee Talk* and its interactive ubiquitous sonic environment provides a useful space for developing an acoustic ecology of video games, building on Grimshaw (2008), that listens for audiovisual ecologies and how they function in ludic and narrative situations.

Ear Candy – A Theory of Sonic Addiction in Gacha Sound Design Content
(Thomas Yee)

10-minute paper

Sensitivity Warnings: gambling, spending large sums of money on video games

The ESA's 2022 report documented that 70% of American gamers play on mobile platforms (compare: 52% consoles, 43% PC); similarly, Newzoo's 2022 report values the mobile games industry at $103.5 billion ($52.9 billion consoles, $40.4 billion PC). Despite this, NACVGM and other ludomusicology conferences tends to focus on console rather than mobile games. 'Ear Candy – A Theory of Sonic Addiction in Gacha Sound Design' addresses this lack by proposing a theory of addictive sound design in one prominent mobile game genre – gacha games.

Derived from Japanese gachapon (ガチャポン) chance-based vending machines, gacha games dominate Japan's mobile gaming industry. Frequently compared to gambling, gacha have come under government regulation in Japan or been banned outright in some countries; one user even spent over $70,000 on Fate/Grand Order. 'Pulling' – purchasing characters or resources with in-game fictional currency – is as integral to gacha as gameplay. Every aspect of the pulling experience is fine-tuned to reinforce cycles of anticipation and frustration or reward – especially sound design. Spectrographical analysis of pull sequences' sound design from five gacha games (Graph 1.1–1.5) reveals a significantly higher presence of frequencies above 10 kHz than music for standard listening (compare: Graph 2.1– 2.3). These high-frequency sounds – like the 'attract mode' of arcades, pinball machines, and slot machines – deliver a neurochemical payoff of dopamine and endorphins, inflating players' excitement and anticipation. Other sounds create a hierarchy of sonic value; Smucker's 'ludic coin-audio' and Hatten's 'markedness' concepts elucidate the differentiation of sounds denoting rare pulls from common ones (Graph 3.1–3.2). Finally, the musical parameter of rhythm is of crucial importance, as all five gacha games analyzed feature interruptions (banners, effects, sounds, voices) in the steady finger-tapping rhythm of typical pulls, signifying a rare pull (Video 1–5). Knowledge of these strategies is key to avoiding – or perhaps willingly embracing – the sonic addiction of mobile gacha games.

Session 7: Rhythm Games and Pedagogy

"I Know That One!": Teaching Meter and Hypermeter Using Video Game Music (Chandler Blount and Jordan Lenchitz)

10-minute paper

One of the biggest challenges in teaching students how to listen for musical structure is the choice of teaching repertoire. In addition to issues of equity and inclusion in the music theory curriculum raised by Palfy and Gilson (2018) and Ewell (2020), scholars such as Karpinski (2000) and Marvin (2021) have long advocated for the importance of applying cognitive realities of musical memory to the aural skills classroom. In this paper, we build on work by Auerbach (2010) and Thompson (2014)—who taught aural skills and music appreciation, respectively, through video game music—to argue in favor of teaching meter and hypermeter through video game music to harness its memorability for the sake of building lasting understanding. Teaching using video game music allows for topics like tactus, phrase expansion, and more to be approached through music many students already know without offering the "safety blanket" of a printed score for them to rely on; instead, students must work aurally. One additional benefit to this approach is that it works equally well in courses for non-music majors, many of whom may not be comfortable with reading staff notation, but are perfectly capable of working by ear. After presenting our rationale and framework for teaching meter and hypermeter using this repertoire, we present a series of examples from a forthcoming publicly-available database, including *Kirby's Dream Land* (1992), the Mii Channel Theme (2006), and *Pikuniku* (2019–2021), all of which demonstrate this music's rich pedagogical potential.

Rhythm Games and the Theory Classroom (Clair Nguyen)

10-minute paper

Japanese rhythm games like *Colorful Stage!* establish player-drivenness (Kellman, 2020) through tactile responses to a rhythmic "beatmap." Depending on difficulty level, players negotiate various audio streams (McAdams & Bregman, 1979), evoking concepts such as metric projection (Hasty, 1997) or metric entrainment (London, 2012), the isolation of a periodicity from competing metric levels. I posit that rhythm games have pedagogical value and understanding how they work eases them into a classroom setting that provides collaborative platforms for learning through play. This presentation combines video game, animation, and music theories to analyze beatmaps as a hypertext (Kaae, 2008 and Donnelly, 2021) that conditions rhythm and meter based on difficulty levels.

Figure 1 snapshots the game's interface and its form of protonotation. Players synchronize finger taps of tap/flick (short) and hold (long) durations. Interactive patterns are tapped into an input interface (tap zone). Illustrated in Figure 2, each difficulty has its own rhythmic structure, with normal-level taps outlining downbeats, hard-level taps following the melody line, and master-level taps combining voice, accompaniment, and rhythmic additions into one track split between two hands. The conflation of audio streams at the master-level forces players to constantly reorient their entertainment and expectations. Therefore, using rhythm games to enhance students' awareness of synchronicities and audio streams can lead to further discussion about aurally recognizing complex durations, dictation exercises, experiencing entrainment, and categorizing synch points. Students' understanding can even be furthered through custom beatmap assignments that emulate official maps from the game.

Short Bibliography

Collins, Karen. *Playing with Sound: A Theory of Interacting with Sound and Music in Video Games*. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013.

Curtis, Scott. “The Sound of the Early Warner Bros. Cartoons.” In *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*. Edited by Rick Altman. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Donnelly, K. J. “The Triple Lock of Synchronization.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*. Edited by Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers, 94–109. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Thomas, Frank, and Ollie Johnston. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.

Hasty, Christopher. *Meter as Rhythm*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

London, Justin. *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

McAdams, Stephen, and Albert Bregman. “Hearing Musical Streams.” *Computer Music Journal* 3, no. 4 (1979): 26–60. Url: jstor.org/stable/4617866.

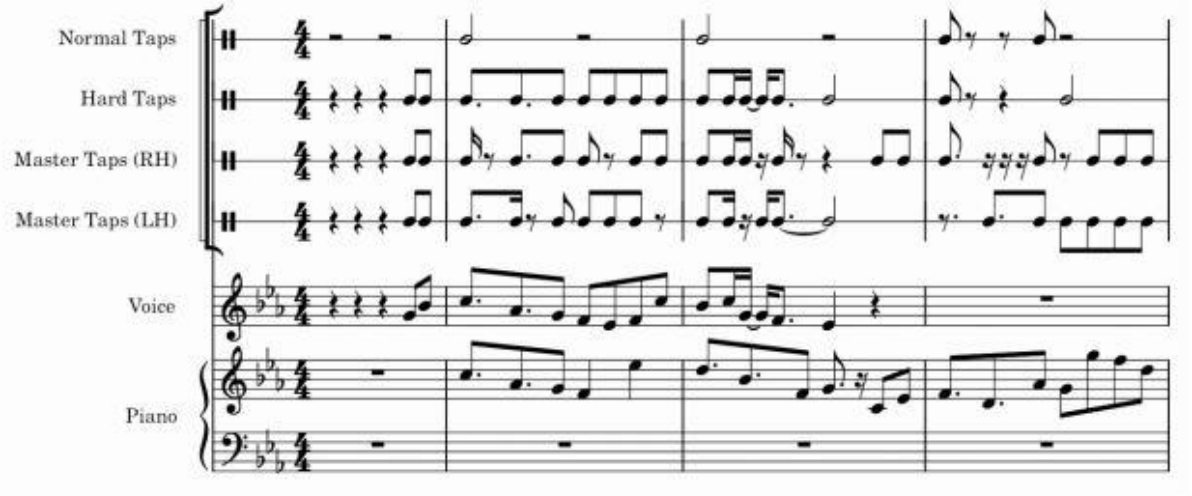
Mirka, Danuta. *Metric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Figure 1. Annotated screenshot of game interface from *Project Sekai*. Screenshot of author's gameplay.

Official gameplay excerpt: https://youtu.be/W1eU9152DSA

Figure 2. Transcription of different synch streams by difficulty in the "Yoru ni Kakeru (Into the Night)" version from *Project Sekai*.

Song URL: https://youtu.be/BkCJ-yAw0NM



What Makes *Trombone Champ* So Funny? Ironic Juxtaposition of the Continuous with the Discrete (Jeremy W. Smith)

10-minute paper

Upon release in September 2022, *Trombone Champ* became an internet meme. In this indie game players use a mouse to control pitch played by an avatar trombonist, aiming to match the pitch and rhythm with the scrolling score. Creator Dan Vecchito purposely designed the game with humor, saying "My ethos for this game was: if it's a funny idea, do it." (Dinsdale 2022, IGN.com). Many aspects of the game contribute to its humor, such as its story that parodies *Dark Souls* (Dinsdale 2022), but this presentation argues that a primary factor is the juxtaposition of continuous glissandi with mostly discrete "classical" repertoire. One could also argue that humor arises from beginner players not playing well, but if the trombone was replaced with a piano the effect of the mistakes would be significantly different.

Emily Dolan has argued that "what we think of as music is bound up with the interface of the keyboard" (Dolan 2012, 11). The analog sliding pitch in *Trombone Champ* contrasts ironically with that epistemology of control represented by the keyboard and digital, discrete staff notation (Dolan 2012, 9–12; Moseley 2016, 78). The combination of trombone glissandi with an animated avatar also recalls the same techniques used in children's cartoons (Goldmark 2005, 64–67). Not all music games featuring glissandi are humorous, though; in *Sound Voltex* the sliding pitches fit seamlessly into the soundscape of electronic music. The hilarity of Trombone Champ is caused by the continuousness of the trombone amidst the discreteness of the score.

Session 8: Your Composer is in Another Castle!

An examination of the role of music in the articulation of dramatic ludonarratives: Navigating existential vertigo and despair through *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (Nintendo, 1993), *Majora's Mask* (Nintendo, 2000), and *Twilight Princess* (Nintendo, 2006). (Cristina Guzmán Anaya)

20-minute paper

Keywords: Videogames, Musical Semiotics, Synchretic Network, The Legend of Zelda.

Video games present players with an escape route from the natural world, allowing them to engage in compelling narratives where they can push the limits of reality by defying empirical truths and evading existential axioms in an endless loop. Replayability lies at the core of the video game medium: no matter the situation the player is set to go through, there is always the given certainty of having another chance —of death never being final in virtual spaces. However, across the history of video games many ludic instances exist in which players have been forced to make transcendental decisions within narratives that mimic feelings of hopelessness and grief arising from the inevitability of death, primarily conveyed through musical means.

Drawing from this notion, this paper aims to examine the role of music in the articulation of dramatic scenes in three Legend of Zelda games from a Musical Semiotics perspective — singularizing the musical and configurative signs employed in the composition of what could be termed as 'melodies of despair' in order to discern the aesthetic patterns that contribute to create a coherent musical discourse throughout the series. By setting musical choices against the wider framework of the synchretic network taking place in the games selected, the ultimate goal is to comprehend how musical cues become the primary textual force driving both narrative and emotion during these ludic settings, helping the player face the unsettling occurrence of in-game mortality, and emphasizing existential vertigo by making it parallel the user's own finite existence.

Selected bibliography

Berger, Ross. *Dramatic Storytelling & Narrative Design: A Writer's Guide to Video Games and Transmedia*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2019.

Hanson, Christopher. *Game Time: Understanding Temporality in Video Games*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018.

Hart, Iain. "Semiotics in Game Music." In *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*, edited by Melanie Fritsch, and Tim Summers, 220–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Hawreliak, Jason. *Multimodal Semiotics and Rhetoric in Videogames*. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Mouraviev, Ivan. "The Synchretic Network: Linking Music, Narrative, and Emotion in the Video Game Journey." *Nota Bene*, no. 1 (2017). Accessed September 16, 2022.

Summers, Tim. *Understanding Video Game Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Ludography

The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening DX. Nintendo. 1993. PAL/English, Game Boy Color version on Virtual Console, Nintendo 3DS.

The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening. Nintendo. 2019. EU/Spanish, Nintendo Switch.

The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask. Nintendo. 2000. PAL/English, SNES version on SNES Virtual Console, Nintendo Switch.

The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. Nintendo. 2006. PAL/Spanish, Wii.

One or Several Dungeon Themes? The Music of *A Link Between Worlds* (Jordan Stokes)

10-minute paper

In fantasy games, we usually classify musical themes by location: town themes, dungeon themes, etc. These labels are covertly neoplatonic. Many scholars note the influence of Koichi Sugiyama's eight themes for the original *Dragon Warrior* — but if we say that *Final Fantasy VI's* Zozo theme doesn't sound like a town theme, we aren't comparing it to Sugiyama's town theme. We are comparing it to our Idea of a town theme (which presumably dwells in the realm of the Forms). It's surprising that this ordinary language requires such a robust set of metaphysical commitments. But who would deny that a town theme sounds like a town theme?

Well, I for one will deny it. Or at least, I want to argue for the value of thinking of game music as a continuous musical flow rather than a set of discrete compositions, and to argue that some musical meaning comes from comparing a theme, not to its ideal prototype, but rather to the music that precedes and follows it within that same flow. The music becomes a town theme, it bends away to become a dungeon theme; later, it bends still further to become an ice dungeon theme, etc. My central case study is *A Link Between Worlds* (2013), which underlines this sort of listening by presenting us with a single dungeon theme that contorts itself into a whole series of archetypes, by turns becoming icy, becoming spooky, and becoming aquatic.

A Koji Kondo Corpus: Comparing Macroharmony in Nintendo's *Super Mario Brothers* and *The Legend of Zelda* Franchises (Lukas Perry & Matt Chiu)

10-minute paper

In this project, we build a corpus of cues composed by Koji Kondo and drawn from Nintendo's *Super Mario Brothers* and *The Legend of Zelda* franchises in order to explore the relationship between macroharmony and gameplay function and affect. Using an online repository of transcriptions (ninsheetmusic.org), we include five representative games from each franchise, comprising 250 cues total, and use Quinn's (2006, 2007) application of the discrete Fourier transform (DFT) on pitch-class collections to capture their diatonicity, octatonicity, hexatonicity, whole-tone quality, dyadicity, or chromatic-clustered quality. We adopt Chiu's (2021) windowing DFT method to account for music's real-time, perceptual experience, and cluster the DFT outputs to determine the degree of macroharmonic similarity or difference between cues.

As the first music-theoretic corpus study of video game music, this project affords the exploration of rich questions that span the medium's musical and nonmusical domains, including: how do the pitch collections' macroharmonies characterize the Mario and Zelda franchises similarly or differently? Do particular macroharmonic qualities identify with a cue's gameplay function, affect, or interactive affordances (Phillips, 2014; Van Elferen 2016; Grasso 2020)? For example, is "dungeon" music quantitively more chromatic than "village" music, and how pronounced is this difference between Zelda and Mario? The construction and analysis of the corpus is ongoing, but preliminary results portend significance: for example, "boss" music in one game often groups with "boss" music in other games, even across franchises. Additionally, cues from the same game often group together, suggesting stylistic unity within a game.

Bonus Level 4

Providing Historically-Informed Music for a 16th-Century Murder Mystery Narrative RPG: A Case Study (Tracy Cowart & Sian Ricketts)

20-minute paper

In November 2019, Alkemie Ensemble was asked to provide a historically-informed piece for a prototype of a niche narrative RPG game. 3 years, 3 acts, and 63 minutes of music later, this game is scheduled for international release. This case study will discuss our navigation of 1) reconciling modern expectations with the musico-historical past and 2) curating, composing, and arranging a cohesive historical and historically-inspired score.

Reconciling Expectations: The current sound worlds of mainstream fantasy and history tend to invoke the "epic" as interpreted via a 19th-century lens (filtered more recently through John Williams, Howard Shore, and others) of mostly symphonic forces. These expectations do not necessarily align with the ranges, timbres, or compositional practices of Medieval and Renaissance music, which was typically played one-on-a-part. We will talk about the challenges of navigating these incongruities, especially as they relate to scoring moments of "doom" and/ "danger."

Creating Cohesion: We will examine our methods for creating musical and dramatic cohesion beyond simply utilizing period instruments. For example, the "Fortuna desperata" and "Ich stund an einem morgen" melodies proved useful due to their metatextual implications of Fortune's wheel and a narrator swept up in the drama of watching individuals drawn apart by choice and circumstances, as well as their compositional reworking in a variety of contemporaneous polyphonic settings. Hildegard's "Quia ergo femina," the "L'homme arme" theme, and the limited use of digital effects also wove together overarching plot and mood elements. We propose a 20-minute paper including recorded musical examples.

Session 9: Tourism

Track maintenance: ekimelo, authenticity, and participatory fan culture in *Densha de Go!* (Morgan Sleeper)

10-minute paper

Densha de Go! (電車でGO!) is a Japanese arcade train simulation series in which players drive real-world train routes. From its initial 1996 release, a hallmark of the series has been the inclusion of real-life ekimelo (駅メロ), or 'departure melodies': musical pieces played from station speakers before trains depart from the platform. Straddling the line between soundtrack and soundscape (Hambleton 2020) in-game, these melodies serve as both important markers of authenticity for domestic fans, and salient resources for virtual tourism (Krug 2006; Gunn 2022) for overseas players.

Notably, these departure melodies are absent in the latest two releases – *Densha de Go! Plug & Play* (2018) and *Densha de Go!! Hashirou Yamanote-sen* (2020). This omission became a focus of critical fan reception following release, as well as the impetus for efforts within an English-language *Densha de Go!* fan community to bring ekimelo back into the experience of these games.

This study takes an ethnographic approach to explore the place of ekimelo in *Densha de Go!*, focusing on the links between music, authenticity, and the "networked interactions between fans, content, technology, and producers" of participatory fan culture (Condry 2010: 196). Drawing on both the ekimelo themselves and multimodal discourse from Twitch and Discord, the analysis shows how players construct a community of cultural literacy around ekimelo, and design creative ways to re-integrate them. This work also demonstrates how collaborative musicking can build community around the otherwise solitary act of playing games like *Densha de Go!*, turning a single-player series into a co-op cultural experience.

References:

Condry, Ian. 2010. "Dark Energy: What Fansubs Reveal about the Copyright Wars." *Mechademia* 5. 193–208.

Gunn, Milly. 2022. "The Soundscape of Alola: Exploring the Use of Hawaiian Musical Tropes and Motifs in the World of Pokémon Sun and Moon." *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 3 (2–3). 59–76.

Hambleton, Elizabeth. 2020. "Gray Areas: Analyzing Navigable Narratives in the Not-So-Uncanny Valley Between Soundwalks, Video Games, and Literary Computer Games." *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1 (1). 20–43.

Krug, Christian. 2006. "Virtual tourism: The consumption of natural and digital environments." In Catrin Gersdorf & Sylvia Mayer (eds.), *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism (Nature, Culture and Literature 3),* 249–273. Brill.

The Edge of Emptiness: Sound, Space, and Disembodiment in VR Tourism (Stephen Armstrong)

20-minute paper

Virtual reality tourism has exploded since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. VR tourist apps such as *National Geographic Explore VR* (2019), *Wander* (2019), and *BRINK Traveler* (2021) offer experiences of mobility disconnected from the fears of infection, cultural exploitation, and environmental degradation inherent in global tourism. Yet VR tourism also reduces the sensory impact of travel: it shows the world without the sun on one's skin, no glare on the water, no smells of foreign soil.

In this paper, I investigate the tension between sound, space, and disembodiment that underpins VR tourism. Scholars such as William Cheng, Karen Collins, Tim

Summers, and Isabella van Elferen have discussed how sound helps immerse players within virtual environments, but VR tourism tests the boundaries of this dynamic. I examine how the immersive possibilities of VR tourism are disrupted by the sonic limitations of VR headsets as well as the absence of a player avatar. Unlike the home audio systems that reverberate through a player's entire body, VR sound is localized about the head; similarly, when looking around a VR environment, an irreconcilable dissonance emerges between the player's on-screen disembodiment and their own kinesthetic presence. I characterize this break as "the edge of emptiness," a suggestion of physical nonbeing that makes most VR experiences categorically different from traditional gaming. I close by considering how the edge of emptiness can be both calming and therapeutic in travel and meditation apps.

Session 10: Genres

Why Jazz Musicians Prefer Nintendo: Ludic Systems, Playful Standards, and The Great Video Game Songbook (James Heazlewood-Dale)

20-minute paper

On March 1, 2020, the Grammy Award-winning 8-Bit Big Band performed a sold-out concert at Boston's Berklee Performance Center. The evening's program, however, did not include the music of Duke Ellington, Stan Kenton, or Maria Schnider. It was a performance of a different repertoire altogether: video game music. In a 2020 *JazzTimes* interview, the band leader, Charlie Rosen, proclaimed his belief in the importance of the "Great Video Game Songbook." His sentiment is the crux of this inquiry. Artists, including the 8-Bit Big Band, insaneintherainmusic, and The Consouls, are introducing video game music to the creative arena of jazz performance as a means for extemporization, reinterpretation, and expression. The junction of game sound and jazz performance invites new questions: What games do these artists source to contribute to the growing canon for jazz performance? What new perspectives on sound and music from video game music manifest from an ontological examination of jazz standards? I argue that the aforementioned artists' output illuminates a rich exchange between jazz performance and video game music

to inform ludomusical frameworks that shape play and afford a sonic experience of improvisation, real-time interaction, and dynamic expression. This cross-disciplinary research draws from various perspectives in jazz studies and ludomusicology: Roger Moseley, Ted Gioia, Ingrid Monson, Neil Lerner, Isabella van Elferen, and Andrew Kania. The growing number of contemporary jazz musicians who amalgamate improvisation with video game music beckons the need for an inquiry into the cultural, historical, and musical significance of the emerging Great Video Game Songbook.

(Chip)songs without words: Hearing Four-Part Rock Form in 8-bit NES Chiptunes (Richard Anatone & Gregg Rossetti)

20-minute paper

Rock music's influence on NES chiptunes is well-documented. The NES's sound chip allowed composers to imitate instrumental ensembles by simulating characteristics and styles associated with a traditional four-piece rock bands. Indeed, many NES tracks incorporate chord progressions, cadential functions, and diatonic modes commonly used in hard rock and heavy metal music (Mitchell 2022, Rossetti 2022, O'Hara 2018, Schartmann 2018). Formally, however, these chiptunes pose analytic problems: the absence of lyrics has thus far prevented widespread adoption of rock form terminology like intro, verse, pre-chorus, chorus (IVPC), causing many to favor simple sectional labels (ABC etc.). Moreover, with the abundance of fan arrangements of—some with added lyrics—it is evident that some chiptunes lend themselves to IVPC form better than others. The question thus arises: what causes us to hear traditionally rock-based forms within chiptunes?

We attempt to answer this question by identifying instances of four-part IVPC rock form in NES music. We scrutinize over fifty different tracks from different NES games, demonstrating that although many chiptunes contain four sections, only some clearly exhibit the IVPC form through their various harmonic, melodic, registral, and textural characteristics. Applying various scholars' theories of rock syntax (Doll 2021, Nobile 2020, de Clerq 2017, Covach 2005), we categorize

chiptunes according to their resemblance to different types of IVPC form, and provide our own definitions of "chip-rock terminology" rooted in theories surrounding both VGM and rock music. As we demonstrate, the lack of lyrical text forces us to consider rock form from a purely sonic perspective, which may further inform a performer/arranger's decisions when setting text to pre-existing chiptunes.

Demons, Distortion, and the Double Tresillo: Evoking Heavy Metal in the music of *DOOM* (1993) (Holly Bergeron-Dumaine)

20-minute paper

Robert Prince's music for *DOOM* (Id Software, 1993) evokes the soundscapes of Heavy Metal as an aural backdrop to occult imagery, grotesque demonic creatures, and a profusion of on-screen violence. The full impact of these soundscapes is not guaranteed, however: rather than the recorded audio expected of modern releases, *DOOM* used synthesized music whose timbral qualities depended on the individual sound components installed in the player's computer. Meanwhile, scholarship has acknowledged the unique importance of exaggerated distortion to Metal's guitar timbre, which sharply sets it off from Rock writ large (Moore 2012). I argue that the inability to mimic sufficiently heavy distortion represents a key limitation of contemporary sound cards in evoking Heavy Metal, using spectrogram visualizations of "At Doom's Gate" as rendered by three devices available at release: the AdLib SoundBlaster 16 (using Yamaha's OPL3 chip), the Gravis UltraSound, and the Roland SC-55. These are compared against visualizations of typical late-80s Metal guitar timbres. The resulting timbral/compositional problem contextualizes Prince's insistent deployment of an archetypal riff built atop the "double tresillo"—an unevenly-grouped rhythmic accent pattern particularly pervasive in late-80s Metal and popular music (Traut 2005). I first survey some pitch contour variants of this riff in Metal alongside its appearances across *DOOM's* soundtrack. Then, uniting two modalities of analysis, I argue that its prominent use in "At Doom's Gate" provides essential aid in the process of genre recognition, "filling in" stylistic gaps otherwise left open by timbral limitations—specifying to a fault the tone of content to come.