

AMS/SMT 2014 Annual Meeting

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Film and Multimedia Interest Group Video Games Session

Saturday 5:30–8:30 - Wisconsin Center First Floor: 103 DE

Leaders: Marios Aristopoulos, Michael Austin, Andy Brick, Jesse Kinne, Bill O’Hara.

Organizers: Juan Chattah, Jesse Kinne, Frank Lehman, Bill O’Hara.

This session will provide the scholarly community a ‘hands-on’ experience with select video games that illustrate innovative applications of music and sound design, yet are accessible (in terms of difficulty) to non-aficionados. Five stations will operate simultaneously, each with a distinct gaming experience preplanned and supervised by a station leader. Participants will spend roughly fifteen minutes per station. Station leaders will guide attendees through the game dynamics (how to play the game) and significance of the soundtrack (from a perceptual, interactive, aesthetic, contextual, narrative, or multi-modal perspective).

Because a canon of games is yet in its formative stages, the following six games, characterized by their unique (yet representative) nature, have been pre-selected:

Aquaria

Station Leader: Jesse Kinne

Platform: Computer

In *Aquaria*, the player controls the main character (a mermaid) who interacts with the diegetic world primarily by singing. This interaction functions ludo-mechanically, as certain musical incipits produce alterations in the game dynamics. Non-functional pitch combinations, however, still cause aesthetic changes in the game environment. Additionally, the singing blends seamlessly with the background score: the counterpoint produced by an incipit will depend on the region of the game the player is exploring. The aggregate musical experience then is based upon the player’s preference for particular incipits rather than others as puzzle-solving tools.

Jesse Kinne is a PhD student in music theory at UC-CCM (University of Cincinnati - College Conservatory of Music). His primary research interests are rock music (especially the music of Dave Matthews Band) and groove, with secondary interests in philosophy and in video game music. Kinne has been featured at numerous national conferences; most recently, he presented “Playing with Music: Building Soundcastles in the Sandbox” at the North American Conference on Video Game Music, in Youngstown, OH.

Apotheon

Station Leader: Marios Aristopoulos

Platform: Computer

In *Apotheon*, the player (as humanity's last champion) must pass through the land of the dead, infiltrate Mount Olympus, and end the wrath of the Gods. Marios Aristopoulos composed the soundtrack by drawing on recombinant cells and specific transformational algorithms; this provides an efficient alternative solution to the problems of repetition and adaptability that are so prominent in video game music. The algorithm utilizes pre-composed material that is placed into individual cells by using pre-recorded audio files such as WAV or AIFF, and recombines them in real time in both horizontal and vertical directions, responding to different gameplay parameters such as the player's location or the intensity of a particular battle. The idea is very similar to the aleatoric 'dice games' of Mozart and Haydn, with the difference that the development of the structure is determined by gameplay input and realized by the computer.

Marios Aristopoulos is a PhD music student at City University London researching generative music in video games and holds two Masters degrees in ethnomusicology (SOAS) and composition (Goldsmiths College). He teaches film music and film sound at the Institute of Audio Research (IAR) in New York. He has created soundtracks for films, plays, and video games in Europe and the USA and has collaborated with many American directors and playwrights such as Neil LaBute, Fred Berner, Tina Howe, Wendy Kesselman, and Matthew Paul Olmos. Selected credits include the upcoming PS 4 videogame *Apotheon*, the 2012 Venice Biennale, Summer Shorts Festival, *Will Work For*, *X-Stream*. He participated in the 10th Berlinale Talent Campus and a fellowship from the prestigious Sundance Theatre lab in 2014.

Chiptune Runner and My Singing Monsters

Station Leader: Michael Austin

Platform: Mobile

Chiptune Runner is an indie music video game where an endless runner meets step sequencer. *My Singing Monsters* is a world-building game where the player collects and breeds adorable monsters who sing, play, and dance. Both games function as music sequencers. Michael Austin will discuss the relationships between musical sequencing, composition, space, and gameplay in these games.

Michael Austin is Assistant Professor of Media, Journalism, and Film and Coordinator of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program in Communications at Howard University in Washington, D.C. His research focuses on sound and music in emerging media. Dr. Austin is a member of the *Laboratoire Musique et Informatique de Marseille* [MIM] (Music and Informatics Laboratory of Marseille, France). His presentations and published articles include research on music analysis, sonic culture, music and emerging media, and encyclopedia entries on computer music, digital audio, brand image, and computer models of music (psychology). He also serves on the editorial boards of the College Music Society's journal *College Music Symposium* and the online journal *Evental Aesthetics*. His work as a sound engineer and producer has been released on the Albany Records label; he is currently producing a forthcoming radio program for HBCU, Channel 142 - SiriusXM Satellite Radio. He is also co-chair of the Sound Studies Special Interest Group for the Society for Ethnomusicology.

Proteus

Station Leader: Bill O'Hara

Platform: Mobile

The exploration-based game *Proteus* presents the player with a randomly-generated island and few discernable goals. The player's movement through the environment generates music, as encounters with landmarks cause musical textures and events to weave in and out of the soundtrack. Despite its random nature, *Proteus* does have a loose structure: certain environmental elements (such as a graveyard, a grotto of statues, and a pair of gothic towers) recur in each iteration, and each play-through of the game enacts a sequential journey through four distinct seasons. Overall, however, the game's randomly-generated and open-ended structure captures an experimental and improvisatory spirit, by which both the loose narrative and the soundtrack unfold according to the player's actions.

Bill O'Hara holds degrees in choral music from Miami University (Oxford, OH), and in music theory from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently, he is in the Ph.D. program in Music Theory at Harvard University. His research interests include the history of music theory, the history of notation, video game music, and the interaction of rules, creativity and aesthetic values in 19th-century accounts of music. He has presented papers at meetings of the Society for Music Theory, Music Theory Midwest, the Music Theory Society of New York State, the New England Conference of Music Theorists, and the Music Theory Society of the Mid-Atlantic. He is the editorial assistant for the Journal of the American Musicological Society.

Sim City

Station Leader: Andy Brick

Platform: Computer – Mobile

In *Sim City*, an open-ended city-building game, the player must define zones, each having limits on the kind of development that take place. Development of the zones is not performed directly by the player, but happens when certain conditions are met, such as power supply, adequate transport links or acceptable tax level. The music by drawing on advanced theoretical constructs.

Andy Brick is a prolific composer, conductor and symphonist of music for such blockbuster video games as *Sim City*, *Stranglehold*, *Sims 2*, *Warhammer*, *Civilization*, *Mafia 2*, *Arc The Lad*, *KidPix*, *TesselMania*, and others. Andy has written scores for a number of animated feature and short films including *Little Mermaid II*, *Lady and The Tramp II*, *Dilla*, *Sinbad's Storybook Adventure*, *Schoolhouse Rock* and the 2014 Academy Award nominated *Runaway*. He was awarded best original score for *The Story of The Red Rose* which debuted at the Sundance Film Festival. In 2011 he scored the film *SHIFT* now on permanent exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami. In 2003 Brick conducted the Czech National Symphony Orchestra in the world's first symphonic game music concert at the Gewandhaus, Leipzig Germany to a sold out audience. Andy wrote the fanfare to this historic concert event and has since conducted The Seattle Symphony, The National Symphony of the United States, The North Carolina Symphony, The Vancouver Symphony, The Calgary Philharmonic, Omaha Symphony and others. In 2009 Andy was appointed Principal Conductor and Music Director of the celebrated "Play! A Video Game Symphony" In print, Brick has been the featured composer in the *New York Times* and *Billboard Magazine* and was selected as a featured conductor in *SYMPHONY Magazine*. Andy Brick is a graduate of the University of Michigan with continued studies at Mannes College of Music. He studied Composition with Pulitzer Prize winning composer Leslie Bassett, conducting with Paul Dunkel of the American Composers Orchestra and orchestration with Walt Disney lead orchestrator Danny Troob. He currently serves as Distinguished Associate Professor and Director of the Music and Technology program at Stevens Institute of Technology. More information about Andy Brick and his music, including his recently completed symphony, is available online at www.andybrick.com