



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #5 — June 7, 2025

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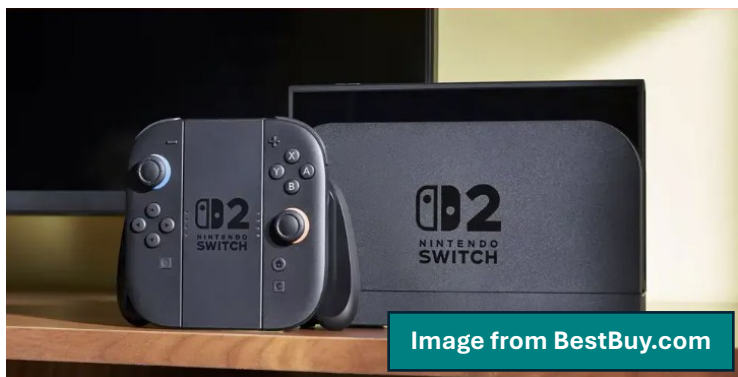
Loading Screen

This week's theme is video game music! If you're inclined to visit any of the dozens of links I've included (mostly to songs on YouTube), you may want to right-click and "open in a new tab". Despite formatting the links to do that automatically, it's not something the PDF format knows about. Microsoft Edge is at least good about returning you to the spot in the PDF where you left off when you click "back", but other browsers, not so much.

The three mini-reviews I've included from my back catalog have one thing in common: they're games where I used a few words of the limited space I had (these originally fit in just three "tweets" on Twitter) to mention something about the game's music.



Recent Events



Console Launch

Nintendo Switch 2 launched this week, and the launch day stories have been wild.

Somebody at a GameStop in Staten Island stapled customer receipts to the box, but it's boxed in a way that puts the screen very near the top, so unfortunate owners had a rude awakening when unboxing theirs: broken screens with a staple puncture.

In happier news, Wal-Mart apparently gave out Coke and Pringles with Switch 2 pick-ups.

It's also reported that the "Switch 2 Edition" of games come with the original Switch 1 version and an update patch, but they play on the original Switch by apparently ignoring the patch. It's a small consolation for this whole "game key card" thing, but it's something.

I'm guessing that wouldn't apply to those game key cards anyway. I do have a small amount of FOMO, I guess. I even considered popping into Best Buy to see if they have any in stock (reportedly, various outlets had plenty on shelves on launch day); but then I remember my concerns. I'm not a Mario Kart fan, I think the price hike on games shouldn't just get a pass, and too many games releasing for it are just "key cards".

For my complete thoughts on the Switch 2, and why I remain entirely un-hyped for it, check out my rant in VGGN Issue #1. I'll get one at some point; just not today.

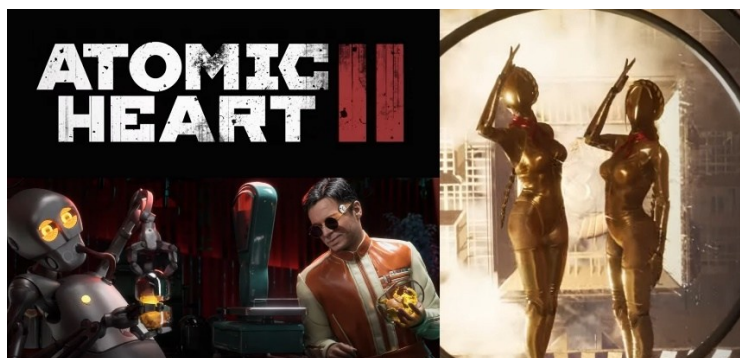
Summer Game Fest

As I write this, the two-hour SGF 2025 presentation just wrapped up. I'm not ready to tally up my score for last week's predictions (I want to wait for various other showcases and events to happen first), but I can say I've at least scored a couple points.

The Resident Evil 9 (aka RE: Requiem) fake-out was clever. After a brief tease where it seemed we wouldn't get anything more (not even a confirmation it was a mainline entry), the show ended with that big reveal. That's probably my second most anticipated game now. I thought it would be the James Bond 007 game from IO Interactive (that was one of my predictions), and while I'm looking forward to that, RE9 has surpassed it for me.



Surpassing that, though, was a much earlier announcement for Atomic Heart 2. The first game is mentioned several times in this issue, including my original mini-review for the game from 2023. If this had been teased, rumored, or previously announced, I missed it. This was the biggest surprise of the show for me. It's now my most anticipated upcoming game.



I'll leave the rest of my SGF and showcase thoughts for next week's predictions wrap-up.

Game Overtones

For as long as I've been gaming, there are plenty of "firsts" I've forgotten. Was the first game I ever played [Combat](#) on Atari 2600? No, it might have been something in an arcade, or something on the Commodore VIC-20. I think the first text adventure I ever played was [The Arconia Assignment](#), published by Rainbow Magazine for the TRS-80 CoCo with the gimmick of a scratch-and-sniff insert that tied into the gameplay, but it might have been something else. First RPG? Final Fantasy II on SNES, possibly. First platformer? Maybe NES Super Mario Bros. First open world game? Possibly Fallout 3; I was late to the open world party. First point-and-click adventure? Could have been Leisure Suit Larry or Space Quest. Who can keep track at my age?

What I do remember, though, is the first time I realized music was an important and often vital part of video games. The game was called Journey Escape for the Atari 2600.

I only had the cartridge; no manual, no promotional material. I must have borrowed it from somebody. I had no idea it was a tie-in for Journey the rock band. Heck, I doubt I even knew who they were back then, as a kid in a small town in Oklahoma. It was only later that I put the clues together and realized that little bleepy-bloopy song loop from the game that I'd become so enamored with was an out-of-tune rendition of Don't Stop Believin'.

There's a great video about this game track on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2k9EY29PSPY>

ARE YOU HOT ENOUGH TO PLAY WITH JOURNEY?

Introducing "JOURNEY ESCAPE," the challenging new DATA AGE Video Game.

You're on the road with America's hottest rock group, Journey. And they're counting on you. You're the only player who can help Journey make it to their scarab escape vehicle. Only you can outsmart the promoters, avoid the photographers and fight off the love-crazed groupies. If you can handle it!

It's a tough game. As Journey says, "Some will win, some will lose..."

Are you hot enough to play with Journey? Don't stop believin'.

Get your **JOURNEY ESCAPE** video game today!

DATA AGE

UP TO NOW, YOU'VE HAD IT EASY.

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I found this particular scan of the ad for Journey Escape at gamingafter40.blogspot.com.

Oh, The Nostalgia

Many of the tunes from my favorite NES games are instantly recognizable to me. I might not be able to easily remember which boss level in Mega Man a certain song is from (or even which numbered Mega Man it came from, in some cases), but I'll likely know that it's *from* Mega Man. I have a fondness for music from the SNES era too (Super Metroid, Super Mario World, ActRaiser and others), but there's something even more magical to me about that 8-bit original NES chiptune sound.

Some of my favorites include:

Faxanadu (title song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJ9xAfuUf9I>

Rygar (stage 2 song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTGxk8rGI-Q>

Ninja Gaiden (second part of the intro song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4C0GdBKPyy>

Castlevania II – Simon's Quest (town theme)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H58lhgcc-nk>

Uncle Fester's Quest (overworld theme)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNgv8DPFYaM>

Metroid (Brinstar theme)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVTzg2kvNaQ>

Mega Man (Elec Man theme)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJdFxTOysjo>

Mega Man II (Metal Man theme)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQXA9RkC_-c

Mega Man III (title theme)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2kTeh7FNlQ>

DuckTales (moon theme)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KF32DRg9opA>

Kid Icarus (the first level)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUBsXUt5RQE>

These is by no means all my favorites. There are so many good tunes throughout the Mega Man series, the various levels in the Super Mario Bros. series, Ninja Gaiden, Castlevania, the various other tunes in Rygar, and more.

I stumbled across a pretty good Top 50 NES songs list at <https://optovania.com/top50> which includes embedded media players for each of the tunes on that list.

Back before music streaming was a thing and most people had instant access to everything via services like Spotify on our smart phones (unless you were doing the Napster thing, which I was very much against at the time), I was a frequent visitor of <https://ocremix.org/>.

OverClocked ReMix was (and still is) a site all about showcasing and celebrating video game music, usually in the form of remixes and re-imaginings by highly talented folks who turn chiptunes into rock anthems and fast themes into ballads. The site had a lot to offer nearly twenty years ago when I was a frequent visitor, and it looks to have grown way more since.

How did a person take music on the go back then? Well, way less easily. I would download MP3's from OCREmix and then burn them to a CD. I even found a set of slow, soothing songs I enjoyed (often based on game music that wasn't originally quite so relaxing and hypnotic) and made a night-time lullabies CD to play every night for Addie (my oldest daughter, if you missed last week's issue) when she was still a baby.

Maybe I'm delusional, but I credit that not only for her early interest in video games, but for the career path she's on now. She's an outstanding trumpet player majoring in music, and she's commented before that she felt drawn to instrumental music at an early age.



Licensed to Listen

While Journey Escape is my earliest memory of licensed music in a video game (such as it was, given the limited hardware), it wasn't the first. Vanguard, a side-scrolling space shooter popular in arcades, used a song from Star Trek: The Motion Picture (later made popular as the theme of Star Trek: The Next Generation). Whether this (and the music from Flash Gordon) was *actually* licensed by the makers of Vanguard is unclear. What I've found seems to indicate it wasn't.

My game collection has two copies of Revolution X (PlayStation 1 version), which, like Journey Escape, was about a rock band (in this case, Aerosmith). I never actually played it, so I can't speak to its quality, but it's apparently an on-rails light gun shooter. It would probably be tough to get working at all, given that old light gun hardware doesn't seem to play nice with modern televisions.



Licensed music is the very foundation of some games, most notably those with a focus on dance or rhythm (Rock Band, Guitar Hero, and Dance Dance Revolution to name a few). I went through a Dance Central Spotlight phase quite a few years ago, getting some exercise in with the Xbox One Kinect game a few years after recovering from heart surgery.

Some of the games most known for their licensed soundtracks never made it onto my personal play list, for whatever reason. I never got around to Crazy Taxi, for instance. I never owned a Sega Dreamcast, but it did come to other platforms (including PS2, which I have in my collection). The Tony Hawk's Pro Skater games are well-loved, and I bet I'd enjoy them, especially given the 1+2 remake from a few years ago, and the upcoming 3+4 remake, but skateboarding was just never my thing.

Licensed music is tricky, though, because licensing deals often don't extend to remakes and future re-releases. That's why you often see tracks missing or replaced (as with the GTA trilogy Definitive Edition from a few years ago), or games simply lost to time over music licensing. Games are even delisted from digital storefronts when those deals expire.

Speaking of GTA, Grand Theft Auto III set the standard for having copious amounts of licensed music in an open world game, via various radio stations. They even managed it with Liberty City Stories on PSP (which later came to PS2), which was (somehow) the first GTA that I ever played. I think most people would attribute the trend starting with those original Tony Hawk Pro Skater games, but for me, it was Grand Theft Auto.

My favorite use of licensed music in a game (or game series) has to be the 1940s and 50's tracks that make Fallout 3 and New Vegas so special. It isn't my kind of music at all, yet it's a perfect fit for the retro-futuristic look and vibe of the series. Whenever I hear "[I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire](#)" (The Ink Spots) in any other form of media, it brings me back to Fallout. My many hours roaming those post-apocalyptic wastelands wouldn't be what they are without tracks like "[Easy Living](#)" and "[A Wonderful Guy](#)" and "[Way Back Home](#)". To me, those games *are* the music.

Licensed - Continued

After Grand Theft Auto III set the expectation that if you're driving around in a game, you need a big roster of period-appropriate and theme-appropriate licensed music, the trend continues. It probably depends on budget and other factors, but this often leads to a lot of obscure stuff and plenty of D-tier tracks. Still, it's a staple of the genre. If you've played any of the Saints Row games, any of the Mafia games, any of the Watch Dogs games, and of course any GTA from III and beyond, you were treated to an eclectic licensed soundtrack. Even games that don't feature an adventure or on-foot element, like Forza Horizon 5, go big on licensed music for the in-game radio.

Sometimes, the use of a licensed song comes as a complete surprise, because the game in question was more about original tracks up to that point. Choosing from just the games I've played and discovered in-game myself, here are a few of my favorites.

Gears of War / Mad World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wy8LRIS1SCc>

This is a bit of a cheat, because the song was used in the first game's iconic trailer, not the game itself. This was the Gary Jules version (not the Tears for Fears original), which also appeared in the cult classic movie Donnie Darko and by now may be more well-known than the original. Even more recently, a different cover of the same song was used in the MindsEye trailer at Summer Game Fest.



Mafia III / Bad Moon Rising

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2msgc4_78g

Here's another cheat, but I couldn't *not* include it. It's a cheat not only because Mafia III features plenty of licensed music, but it also includes the original version of Bad Moon Rising by Creedence Clearwater Revival. What sets the Mourning Ritual cover apart (that's the one I'm pointing out) is the shift in tone and anachronistic inclusion during a late-game mission that left an impact on me and fit the moment perfectly.

Dragon Age: Origins / This Is War

<https://youtu.be/3E4-2mwV97E>

Before "[This is War](#)" played at the end of Dragon Age: Origins, I had no idea that the pretty boy side character from Fight Club (Jared Leto) had a popular band (30 Seconds to Mars). Even though the song is tucked away for when you finally reach the credits after however many dozens of hours of gameplay, it's a perfect send-off for all of it.

Atomic Heart / Something Called Karma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1lb-dXIElw>

My unconventional pick for 2023 Game of the Year featured an absolutely perfect moment where "La donna è mobile" (a classical song you'd know if you heard) had been playing as you explore a theater. Leading into that area's boss fight, it morphs into "[Something Called Karma](#)" (not a song I'd ever heard before), and it blew me away. There I am trying not to die, and this plays during the fight. It's perfect.

On a side note, the whole game is fantastic. I consider it one of my top 10 favorites of all time. The developers caught flack for possible ties to Russia, but I never felt the game itself was glorifying Russia as much as it was just pointing out the dangers of unrestrained authoritarianism. Many would disagree with me, but I consider this game a masterpiece.

Licensed - Concluded

Phantom Dust / Arsenal

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i26A4EhO4DY>

Speaking of classical music, Phantom Dust leaned heavily into it. I tend to forget about this game, which was an exclusive on the original Xbox at the time, but I shouldn't. It's a great game that mixed a wild post-apocalyptic story with third person action gameplay that set up your skills and actions as card-based loadouts. It kind of defies explanation.

This might be another cheat as well, since classical music doesn't fall under copyright protection, but the *performance* of it might. It's not all classical, though, and some of it is heavily remixed to fit the game's vibe.



Another track remixed in Phantom Dust as [Plastic People](#) was Beethoven's [Piano Sonata No. 14](#), which was also used effectively in a level of Shadow Man, which I mini-reviewed in last week's issue.

Saints Row the Third / Power

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGuQswEWFVk>

I'm just cheating away here. The Saints Row series has plenty of licensed music, but the stand-out moment for me was a mission that begins with skydiving while Kanye West's "Power" starts to play. I was hesitant to even include this, given his problematic nature over the past few years, but that moment still exists in a time and place for me that makes it a noteworthy, memorable experience.

Borderlands / Ain't No Rest for the Wicked

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnSp9rgfel8>

No opening song for a later entry in the series ever surpassed the first one, for me.

Alan Wake 2 / Wide Awake

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLZ7peL-j_U

Yet another cheat, because the chapter songs in Alan Wake 2 were made for the game. I suppose I could have saved this for my [Other Recent Favorites](#) section later in this issue, but these feel like licensed tracks even if they aren't. My pick is "[Wide Awake](#)", although "[Follow You into the Dark](#)" is pretty good too.

This is a masterpiece of a game. If it hadn't released the same year as Atomic Heart, it would have been my 2023 Game of the Year. In some ways, I wonder if it should be anyway.

Red Dead Redemption / Far Away

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7aTu_j0dmU

I'm not going to dwell on this one too much, because I'm not actually that fond of the song and to be honest, I forgot about this entirely, but it deserves a mention for its impact.

Bayonetta / Fly Me to the Moon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EV6E13xODyA>

This is another instance where I wouldn't normally be a fan of this particular song (as with the selection in the Fallout 3), but it fits perfectly in Bayonetta and goes through various mixes and iterations in the process.

Bioshock / Beyond the Sea

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GO6FAPSkO0Y>

Here's another song I would never have in any personal playlist, but its inclusion in Bioshock was an inspired choice.

I'm sure I've missed some obvious examples, but these picks come from my own gaming experiences. Their contributions helped in a big way to make those games memorable.

One obvious omission is Hi-Fi Rush, which had a mix of original and licensed music, but it lacked what I'd consider a stand-out track. Nothing bad; just not memorable, for me.

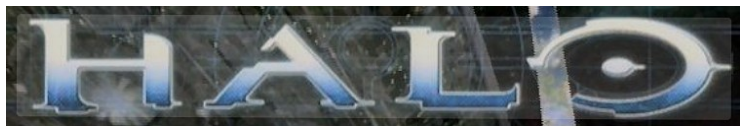
Ode to Composers

Music doesn't just make itself. Well, in today's world of generative AI maybe it does, but let's ignore that for the purpose of recognizing some of the best and most prolific composers of video game music.

Marty O'Donnell

<https://music.youtube.com/channel/UCr3--4pVFK2etDsx7OSHGMw>

Although he had a falling out with Bungie several years ago (or vice-versa, maybe), the incredible, sometimes haunting music of the Halo series is O'Donnell's creation.



Koji Kondo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDS6kGaE6hY>

Nintendo franchises Super Mario Bros. and The Legend of Zelda owe their memorable soundtracks to Koji Kondo.

Jesper Kyd

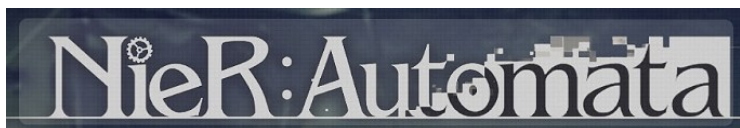
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtYeArsu5geO3RKc1S5tFViaC16i_E-n8

Although associated with music from the Hitman series, Borderlands, and Warhammer, it was the Assassin's Creed franchise that made me a fan of Jesper Kyd's music.

Keiichi Okabe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMw-DUnR10s>

I absolutely love the music of Nier and NieR: Automata. Sure, some of that comes from the ethereal vocals (in a made-up language, no less) of Emi Evans, but it's still Okabe-san's music. About 40% of the music in Stellar Blade, my pick for 2024 Game of the Year, was composed by Keiichi Okabe, and that went a long way towards my love for the game.



Yoko Shimomura

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLIXtjKWeGunMuKW6JFmWF9Y3IsXkt2Y>

Her credits include music for Super Mario RPG, Kingdom Hearts, Parasite Eve, Legend of Mana, Live A Live, Mario & Luigi, and others.

Andrew Prahlow

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPyaFR7poL4>

All I know him from is Outer Wilds, but a big part of what made that game my 2019 Game of the Year pick is his wonderful soundtrack to the game, where themes iterate and build over the course of it, leading to what – for me – was a highly emotional culmination in the game's final moments.

Austin Wintory

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=M3hFN8UrBPw>

In addition to composing the Journey soundtrack (no, not Journey Escape; I mean the PlayStation masterpiece where surprise co-op plays a big part), he composed for Assassin's Creed: Syndicate, Abzu, and quite a few other games you may have heard of.

Akira Yamaoka

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_wblVo-y9A&list=PL4LB2P23KLYjgsnQzAkSsT5Mr0-lYkFxf

Best known for the Silent Hill series (starting with the very first one and still contributing his moody masterpieces to the series today), Yamaoka-san also composed for Contra: Hard Corps and Shadows of the Damned.



Nobuo Uematsu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fqPB3rn7e8>

If you enjoyed music from the first 9 mainline Final Fantasy games, you have Uematsu-san to thank for that. He also played a part with composing the music for certain other games in the Final Fantasy series. Source: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobuo_Uematsu).

Other Recent Favorites

For some of these, “recent” is subjective. These are just a few of my other favorites after music in games moved beyond the limits of the hardware and became orchestral epics.

I sometimes feel desensitized to the music in games these days. That’s not to say it’s bland or bad; just, not every game’s soundtrack feels like an integral part of the experience anymore. It’s often good in the moment, but I couldn’t pick it from a lineup if asked to do it a month later. For instance, I remember the music in Atomfall being good (it’s a game I really enjoyed earlier this year), but I don’t remember any of it. I didn’t feel an urge to find out if it’s on Spotify. I’m not picking on that game’s music; just giving an example. I could easily swap it for Blue Prince or Split Fiction.

When the music *does* stand out, it almost always becomes a key part of what makes that game special to me. I mentioned some of that in my Ode to Composers earlier.

Clair Obscur: Expedition 33

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAQZfeETFbg>

My most recent example is my frontrunner so far for 2025 Game of the Year. The music (by Lorian Testard, who hadn’t composed for a video game before this) is varied and amazing.

Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZ-t8ASFuvj2F-CJIWa_FYTQrkMbYnNVe

Although that final level nearly broke me, I find no fault in the game’s soundtrack. Each level has two versions, and with dozens of levels, not every song is a banger, but plenty of them are worth a listen even outside the game. My two favorites are easily [Hazard Hangar](#) (normal version) in second place, and [Factory Fright](#) (flooded version) in first. All in all, the game offers a great soundtrack.

Danganronpa (Series)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeitvjG-dgl&list=PL8s8MXTddgZogP7UGrEHXDA9TZ_J2TsIJ

I’ve been playing The Hundred Line: Last Defense Academy, which is from the makers of Danganronpa, and Masafumi Takada composed for both. It’s reminding me of how much I enjoy this music. It varies in style from weird and unsettling to jazz pop, and like most of my favorites, it’s additive to the experience to the point where they wouldn’t be the same games with anything else.



Xenoblade Chronicles (Series)

[Playlist on YouTube](#)

Every soundtrack in this series is amazing. I’m less a fan of Xenoblade X than I am the numbered entries, but that takes nothing away from the music. I could probably listen to the [Gormott Theme](#) from Xenoblade 2 on repeat all day and not get tired of it. When choir vocals kick in briefly at around the 3:40 mark, I’m all in. It’s top-tier video game music.



Remember, all the teal underlined text throughout this newsletter *should* be clickable if you’re viewing this in an online PDF reader that supports hyperlinks (which most probably do). Maybe right-click and “open in a new tab”.

Favorites - Continued

El Paso, Elsewhere

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DethmTCImvw>

Although the 50 levels you play through in this Max Payne-influenced shooter feel a little repetitive after a while, the standout soundtrack is full of weird and cool stuff, including some spoken word vocals that I mistook for the protagonist's inner monologue the first time it happened ([Blood Pressure](#), then others that are even more NSFW).

What I love about this game (besides the music) is how it role-reverses the typical abusive relationship in a way that puts players in the role of the victim, not only to subvert the usual power fantasy but also to shine a light on the types of behaviors and attitudes that are common among victimizers.



Persona 5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdtlRTKlxKE>

From the title screen to the menus to the gameplay to the awesome soundtrack, Persona 5 is all about style. The title track is good, but my favorite track might be the battle music, [Last Surprise](#). It's just so good.

For that matter, I've enjoyed the music in all the Persona, Shin Megami Tensei mainline games, and spin-offs. The music in SMT tends to go for a darker tone that's sometimes melancholic and sometimes hard-hitting electronic rock, but it's equally good.

Musical Wrap-Up

If this iconic Clair Obscure – Expedition 33 song isn't performed live at this year's Game Awards, I'll be shocked. Check out the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpNVf8sczqU>

One of the most iconic classic video game songs that I haven't already mentioned is the unmistakable Tetris theme:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmCCQxVBfyM>

Don't be surprised if at some point I write an article (or opinionated rant) about underrated games; games that have either fallen out of favor when people reflect on them now or were never held in high regard to begin with; games like Forspoken, Metal Gear Solid 2, and of course Super Mario Sunshine. Love it or hate it, this music remains iconic:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYdRWC6MCgM>



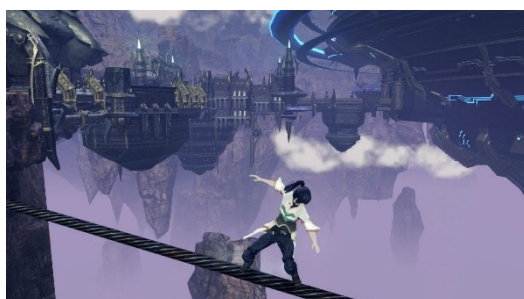
No discussion on the topic can be complete without mentioning "Still Alive", which was the perfect ending song for Portal, or to only a slightly lesser extent, the ending song "Want You Gone" from Portal 2:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6ljFaKRTrI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVVZaZ8yO6o>

Of all the memorable tracks from Nobuo Uematsu in the original Final Fantasy VII, I've never quite understood why "One Winged Angel" became the most famous. Mine is an unpopular opinion, maybe, but I find this track slightly annoying. Take a listen:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYdf0yqK_Fc

Mini-Review: Xenoblade Chronicles 3



Where do I even begin?

I guess if you mainline it on easy mode, you could finish way faster than the 165 hours I put into this epic action RPG on hard (a good mode, by the way, if you intend to do lots of side quests, since you'll easily over-level for the main story).

I didn't do everything (ex: maxing out all roles for every character, finding all weapon upgrade materials) but I did almost all side quests and hero character unlocks for all the main cast.

I loved every minute of it, too. From the epic orchestral soundtrack to the story and expansive world, it's a wonderful game. What the graphics lack in detail (a Switch exclusive) is made up by unique, inspired world design. Is it better than Xenoblade 2? That's a tough call. It's certainly a top 3 game of 2022 for me so far. I loved it.

Played on console: Switch.

Posted on: 09/04/2022.

Mini-Review: Stellar Blade

It's a fantastic action adventure game in the vein of Nier Automata, although I can see inspiration in the music, story, and art design from other games like Final Fantasy 7, Nier (the original), Drakengard 3, Bayonetta, and more.

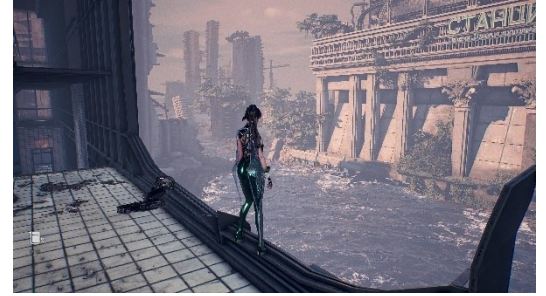
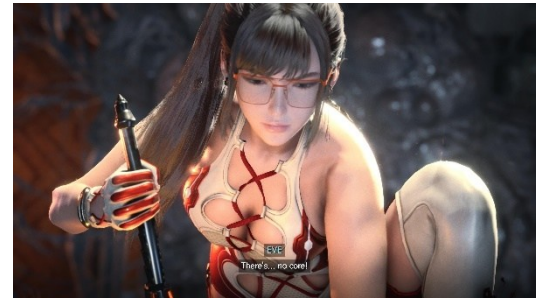
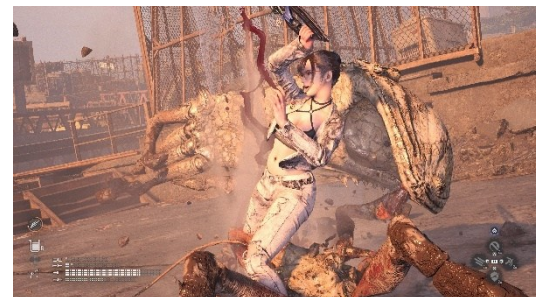
The music in particular, with its moody vocals for many tracks, carries the same melancholic vibe as Nier; hints of Danganronpa (but not as weird) and Persona (not as upbeat) too.

There's a lot more to Stellar Blade than is evident at first: open world sections, RPG-like progression, a wild post-apocalyptic sci-fi story, side quests and tons of collectibles, all additive to the core hack-and-slash combat (and later, though not as core, guns).

I've not enjoyed and excelled in this style of combat probably since Bayonetta or the much-maligned DmC. It's a great game.

Played on console: PS5.

Posted on: 05/05/2024.



Mini-Review: Atomic Heart



Wow, what a game. Even with a few remaining bugs/glitches (I got stuck in the geometry a few times and achievements are hit-or-miss busted) it's very much worth playing.

I want to say I've never played anything like it, but I have. The most immediate comparison would be the Bioshock series, but it has bits of Half-Life, Portal, Far Cry, and even Doom in whatever soup came together to create Atomic Heart.

There are moments in this alternate history 1955 Soviet Union first-person action adventure that wowed and surprised me. The whole game wows and surprises, really, from memorable missions to the music (including a classical piece that morphs into Something Called Karma), the animation, the bonkers story, the vibe; all of it.

This may need a spot on my all-time top 10.

Played on: Xbox Series X with GamePass. Review originally posted on: 03/23/2023.

Final Stage

If you've kept up with prior issues, you may have noticed a few changes in this one. I'm probably trying to be too clever, but the table of contents is now the "Start Menu" and my opening editor's note is now the "Loading Screen". I'm also using section sub-headers now, although I started doing that last week. This section is now the "Final Stage". Credits are now "End Credits" and I've shrunk the font and added background shading to them. I don't really know why I'm mentioning all this.

With so many directions to explore with this week's main topic, I never found the ideal spot to mention game song collections. While you can surely find any number of playlists on Spotify (or elsewhere) that mix and match songs from various soundtracks, two albums I highly recommend are from the London Philharmonic Orchestra. These albums are "[The Greatest Video Game Music](#)" and its sequel, "[The Greatest Video Game Music 2](#)".

It's not only a pair of wonderful collections, but they're performed by one of the greatest orchestras in the world. The second volume is even one I sometimes listen to, turned down low, if I need a little nudge falling asleep (after hiding "One Winged Angel" from it, of course).

What's the main feature for next week? To be honest, I don't know yet. Mid-week, the heat pump for my central air conditioning busted, and I've been dealing with indoor temps upwards of 82 degrees Fahrenheit. The earliest it can be looked at (because I'm at the mercy of the company contracted by my home warranty) is the Saturday this issue releases. Based on the fan coming loose entirely and doing a bit of damage to the inside of the unit, there's no guarantee it even *can* be fixed. If it *can't*, I'm told it'll be weeks of waiting as the home warranty company may require a second opinion, go through a replacement approval process, and finally ship the unit directly to the contractor. The whole thing has put me on edge. It's only going to get hotter as we march towards the blistering 100+ degree weeks by late June.

Maybe I'll write about heat in video games: lava levels, fire spells, sweltering deserts and so forth. That sounds a bit boring though.



End Credits

Some info about video game composers was found in an article written by Ben Maloney, which I recommend checking out at <https://www.nkoda.com/blog/video-games-composers>.

Links to the various soundtracks and songs mentioned in this issue point mostly to videos on YouTube. I don't know the ownership or copyright of all that, but presumably it's all owned and copy-righted by somebody.

Some of the artwork and the VGGN controller logo were made using generative AI: <https://openart.ai>

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