

Music, Sound, and Video Games Reflection Questions

Overview:

- These were a graded assignment completed in class in the last week of the semester.
 - The questions were as follows:
 1. Reflect on how you thought about music, sound, and video games before you took this course and how you think about it now that the course is (almost!) over. What's **ONE** thing that changed for you?
 2. If you had to pick one of class topics to research for a longer project, what would you pick and why? [SEE HANDOUT to review these]
 3. If you could pick one example to add to this curriculum, what would you pick and why?
 4. What is one thing that you learned in this class (or at least thought about in relation to this class) that connects with other work that you do? (this might include performing, teaching, scholarship in other disciplines, etc)
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Anonymized student responses:

Student 1:

1. Before taking this class, I took video game music seriously, but I never really thought about it as a serious discipline that could be studied in an academic setting. Taking this class made me realize that video game music can be just as significant and detailed as "serious" classical music that is a standard in the world. I hope that in the future, video game music as a genre can be taken more seriously!
2. I would want to look more into sound effects in video games (which I'm already doing for the final project). I just think it's so interesting how sound engineers and foley artists bring the objects and environment in a game to life!
3. If I had to pick one example to add to the curriculum, I would want to look at nostalgia and the use of techniques like 8-bit to evoke the sound of a "simpler time." This is a phenomenon that is discussed a lot as you get older and nostalgia becomes more of a factor in your life, and it would be interesting to look at the psychology behind this and why it happens.
4. Crane always teaches us to diversify the topics and genres we teach and connect with the interests of students. Many students, no matter the age, are passionate about video games. This topic can be used to connect with a student who might struggle to find relevance to their life in music!

Student #2:

1. Before this course, I did not realize how complex the composition process is for video game music. Whenever I listened to music in games, I thought it was relatively simple since much of it is so repetitive. However, after taking this course, I realize now how much thought must go into composing music for video games, especially given storage and technical constraints from gaming consoles.
2. I would be interested in doing more research on the topic of "are rhythm games real musical experiences?" This intrigued me because a lot of the gameplay in these music and rhythm games involve things we encourage students to explore as music educators, so I feel like they are legitimate musical experiences, but I know not everyone agrees with this, so I would love to do more research on this controversy.
3. This is not a specific example, but I think it would be interesting to explore more of the psychological connections to video game music. I think we touched on this briefly, but video games elicit so many different emotional responses, so I feel like it would be cool to do a little more exploration of these responses in this course.
4. I did not realize how many video games include operatic style music performed by classically trained singers. As a vocalist, I never thought I had a place in performing video game music because I thought it was a purely instrumental genre, but after taking this course I have realized that there are in fact ways to be involved in game sound production as a vocalist. Also, from my final project I am really excited to discover the connections between psychology and video game music, specifically in trauma responses. The effects of music on the brain, as well as music and trauma, really interest me and are research topics I would like to pursue someday, so being able to start on some exploration of these topics is very exciting.

Student #3:

1. Part of me was only used to looking at video games from a sound perspective, and I hadn't really delved deep into the music behind certain games and why composers may include certain genres of music (original or popular) within a game)
2. I would like to learn more about the idea of concerts/award nominations specifically dedicated to video games. I think normalizing the idea of arranging video music and performing it is something special.
3. I would love to cover more franchise pairs between video games and movies!
4. It was beneficial for me to arrange music for instruments I never thought would be paired together in a trio (clarinet, viola, double bass) and it gave me a new perspective on how to arrange/rearrange for certain instruments.

Student #4:

1. Before taking this course, I was interested in how composers create the soundtracks for games and film, but I never really did a deep dive into it. After taking this course, I learned about the process it takes for a composer to create the soundtracks. Also, how

the music impacts the way the player or the viewer reacts to what they played or watched.

2. One of the class topics I would want to research for a longer project would be the analysis of video game music from early video games compared to “nowadays” video games.

3. An example to add to the curriculum would be the silent movie era of video games because it shows the use of early special effects, and it’s where “people begin to understand that video games could tell larger stories with greater characters and thematic information.”

4. One thing I learned in this class that connects with other work I’ve done is the performance and presenting aspect. It was nice to be able to perform video game music because I’ve never performed it in front of an audience, and to be able to learn about a new game I’ve never played before.

Student #5:

1. The way that I play games has changed. I don’t think I ever thought about the music or sound effects that were playing in the background unless it was spooky in which case I usually just turned it off. After taking this class I’m just more aware of what’s going on around me when I play games. I notice music coming and going and I often notice changes in sound effects now that I’ve done two different play day assignments.

2. I would love to do some more research into medieval music in video games. I think the idea of having to “fake” and era is super interesting and has a ton of connections to musical theater that I would love to explore.

3. I think incorporating something like Dadish in combination with games like Mario would be an interesting discussion. I like the idea of trying to find games that the class is unlikely to know because I think it creates a really interesting discussion all around. I also was expecting to cover platformers in our discussion about genre and we didn’t really touch on it very much, but they are so prevalent that I think they warrant a bit more discussion.

4. I loved the conversation about the definition of a game and the idea of gamifying life. I think it’s super applicable to education as we are constantly trying to find the balance of making learning fun and enjoyable for young people while simultaneously not insulting their intelligence by assuming that don’t know that we are trying to trick them into learning with wacky games.

Student #6:

1. I never realized that the technology available to composers and video game designers limited the ability for what they could compose. Before this class, I knew nothing about 8-bit music and just assumed it was the preferred style of the 80’s and 90’s, not that it was quite literally all they could do.

2. I would love to further research video game adaptations of movies or other media. I feel like video games are an amazing way that people are able to immerse themselves into their favorite stories/universes, so it would be fun to explore how that is accomplished, where it may have fallen short of expectations in the past due to technological limitations, and how games may have been reimagined with the use of better technology later on to better immerse players into the world of the story.
3. I think the new *Fallout* television show on Amazon Prime Video that only just came out on April 12th of this year is a great example of an intermedial video game adaptation into television. It also has a really good soundtrack that perfectly demonstrates the sarcastic, almost mocking idea that we discussed in class where the music almost seems too happy for what is going on in the plot of the show. It also does this through a lot of 50s music, further immersing the player/audience into a world shrouded in the fear of atomic annihilation and also how those living in the bunker would've been stuck in an almost time capsule-like state.
4. Studying video game music goes along perfectly with what we talk about in the music ed curriculum as this is music that is interesting to future students. Video game composition is definitely going to be something I will tinker around with with future students.

Student #7:

1. Before taking this course, I had experienced music & sound with videogames, and had quite a few soundtracks that I already enjoyed. Yet, I hadn't thought about how much that music truly impacts the game play, the impact it can have on people's lives, and how hard it can be to find/make 'the right,' music for a game depending on factors such as the game play style. Now, I find myself re-listening to soundtracks I enjoy and thinking about what is happening in the game at the time- why were these musical decisions made, and what do they add to the gameplay experience? I really enjoy the new window I have into how game design and music can work together, and I'm looking forward to continuing to experience games/music in a new way, together.
2. I think it would be cool to do a project specifically about the 8-bit genre sound. This was really interesting to me, but if we could find some way to do an arrangement or composition with the limitations of the earlier software, I think that would be very helpful. We talked about it a good bit in class and I logically understand it, but I would like to get more familiar with it and understand it a bit more.
3. Any arrangement from the 8-Bit Big Band could be a good addition to this course. Here is a link to their website: <https://www.the8bitbigband.com/>. They also have a YouTube channel, and they post a lot of their arrangements there- it's a very cool sound, and it would be a good example to look at when talking about 'Videogames Live,' and other videogame concert experiences.

4. I realized, through this class, how critically connected my memories of games are to the music. Some of the music that is the most emotional and meaningful to me is music that went along with games I've played. It has really helped open my eyes, and it has helped me enjoy that music even more. However, for many of my favorite games, I can't remember the music- because of this class, I now want to go back and re-experience those games, so that I can experience and learn the music. This class also provided me with one of my favorite performance opportunities that I have had- the concert project was so wonderful, and helped me practice my transcription and quick-reading skills!

Thank you so much for that.

I really enjoyed this course, and it has helped lift my musical spirits back up. Thank you so much for teaching it! I would love to have some more videogame-music conversations with you over the summer, if possible, and I hope the videogame-music concert can continue next year.

Student #8:

1. The one thing that has stuck in my mind has been the idea of canon in general, but specifically video game canon, and how we are actively creating one in real time, and that we should take steps to avoid it.
2. Even though my project is genre related, I think a larger continuation on genre is what I am naturally most attracted to. There are so many different genres, undefinable genres, and general variety that makes the topic seem like it can go so deep.
3. Probably Undertale. I think more indie game rep would be a great thing, even if its just a one week topic. I think taking a moment to look into indie games gives another layer of nuance to the topic of this class (and I say Undertale because it is still popular, but has a lot of indie game tendencies and tropes).
4. Genre and composing. I already do a lot of composing, and having a composition project was a fantastic excuse to cross worlds, and I really got a lot out of it, and it gave me extra insight to genre, how it can be crossed and mixed, and what message you can convey with it.

Student #9:

1. Before I took this class I knew much less about how game composing connected to topics outside of video games. There are a wide variety of similarities to film and classical music, such as tropes and canons, as well as interesting discussion on how this kind of music is performed live. I'm now more interested in how this music can be performed live, especially after our performance at the end of this semester.
- 2) I thought that our discussion on early video game audio was really interesting. Something I'd like to look into further is why this sound is so nostalgic and why sounds, such as the 8-bit style, used today in modern video games. The reason I'd pick this is

that I play a lot of games like “Celeste” that utilize these kinds of sounds and I’m wondering why it is so satisfying to play games in this style.

3) I think it would be interesting to learn about how video game music changes depending on the output source of audio. This could be phones, TV’s, VR, Headphones, Consoles (such as the Switch), etc. I’m wondering how the music composed for these systems changes and how much of an impact it has on the soundtrack of a video game.

4) I learned a lot about performing this music, as well as how to compose it. This going to be great in my teaching as well, especially since I am looking to compose music for my ensembles.

Student #10:

1. Before this class, I loved to listen to VGM as I played and even outside of my play throughs. After this class, I learned to think a little bit more deeply about how the music makes me feel and how it may be enhancing the scene or environment.
2. I would still want to look at genre in music and what are things in them that engages listeners, how they feel as they listen, and how does it fit in the context of the game.
3. Nothing specific but some suggestions... *Sonic* (Rock music), *Dragon Quest* (Adventure, Heroic music), *Metal Gear Solid 5* (Popular Music).
4. I learned that a curriculum on VGM is possible and very much doable in any level classroom. Not only through personal experiences you shared, but through readings, videos, and posts that you have collected and has inspired me to create lessons with VGM s scaffolding for my class.

Student #11:

1. I thought this class would focus on the compositions and composers of video games before I took this course. I didn’t realize the scope of video game history and how its evolution paralleled with classical music. Another perspective change was the differences between classical music and video game sound and music. Sound effects are important, maybe even more important than the soundtrack, to the progression or enjoyment of a game, which is something that I noticed but never understood why. The soundtrack might contribute to the ambiance but the sound effects help the player move around in the digital world.

2) I would like to explore the impact of sounds and the decisions being made. In other words, horror games rely so much on sounds and keen awareness to the smallest of details. Composers and sound designers are aware of this fact and have to combine realistic sounds with computer generated ones to immerse the players and create a spooky environment.

3) I would include *Animal Crossing* into this curriculum because it is a very nostalgic life-sim game that uses simple music to calm players. The musical experience is laid-back and the player has a lot of freedom to choose what they get from the game. This

example could explore the significance of ambient sound that affects the emotions of players.

4. I developed my transcribing and arranging skills with the video game concert. I listened to video game music and noticed loops and found ways to put music that I played games into sheet music that I played for the public.

Student #12:

1. I guess I never thought about the psychological effects and how the audio end of videogames is so important for that experience. I tune into those subtleties way more than I ever did in the past.

2. Horror music genre hands down. More playdays and investigation over the composition for horror games and how they compare and contrast to horror movies/TV shows

3. Licensing for music and videogames. Super interesting topic that a lot of students may find more interesting than they thought. At least that's how I felt after researching licensing during my music law class

4. I learned how to have fun making music. All this time I've been kicking my butt to be perfect and a great musician which is absolutely valuable, but I didn't realize how fun it is to arrange and perform at such low stakes. Sure maybe I wouldn't have been able to pick up things as quick had I not studied so hard during my time here, but still. My only true regret in Crane is that I didn't take more advantage of opportunities to have low-stakes fun like the concert we held.

Student #13:

1. Personally, I always enjoyed video games before this class BUT I will say that this course allowed me to grow a new found enjoyment and love for the creation of video games as well as all of the thought that goes into the decision making process.

2. If I had to pick a class topic to research longer and have a project for I would probably pick the creation and enjoyment of the Game Cabinets and how they went on to influence video game culture as a whole. I would choose this because I believe it would help me connect more to my family members who enjoyed game cabinets as their central gaming experience.

3. I would love to see a class lecture on the game Resident Evil and how it has transcended gameplay and film, especially because now the game is receiving remasters, and remakes that are just as, if not more, popular as the original games.

4. I learned in this class that video games can be included in the pantheon of pop culture and performative arts which I feel very connected to as someone who enjoys performing. I didn't realize how programable video game music is for concerts and beyond. Thank you for showing us this side of video games, Dr. Brooks!

Student #14:

1. Before I thought about video game music as either just basic and electronic music or I thought it was basically just like movie music but after going through this class I realized while it relates a bit to movie music it is very different and very complex.
2. I really liked the recent article about comparing a movie's music to a game of the same franchise's music. I think this would be something fun to look into more.
3. For something to add maybe just having a little more talk about a wider variety of different genres of music in different video games.
4. In the future I want to be a Horn soloist and chamber musician but before that I want to be a principal Horn of a big orchestra or possibly premier military band and I think just knowing more about video game music is a good thing and makes me look forward to playing more video game concerts and not just the classical works like I prefer. I think this class has opened my eyes a little and I have realized that we should try to push other types of music.

Student #15:

- 1) Going into this class, I already knew a good deal about how music for video games is made as well as some of the conventional characteristics specific to video game music, but there were definitely gaps in my knowledge regarding things like video game music's many parallels to film music that have now been filled.
- 2) I would pick the discussing canons and franchises topic for a longer project since I think it's always nice to be exposed to new music and I think it's good to foster a less Mario-centric video game music canon.
- 3) I think more discussion about how to actually make video game music (production in a DAW using samples and synthesizers) would be a really useful topic to cover since I think music production in general is an extremely useful skill for any musician to have.
- 4) I've been learning a lot about sampling techniques that video game composers use very often in their works during my research for my final project. Music production/audio engineering is my field of expertise, so all of the information that I am currently researching for the project is very directly applicable to the work I do.

Student #16:

- 1.- one thing that changed for me was my view on how much actually goes into making, arranging, and the technological aspects of video game music. I always thought it was just composing, recording, then adding it to the game. Whereas looking back there are a lot more decisions that go into it.
2. One thing I enjoyed was Dr. Hernacki's presentation of how he goes about recording and arranging the music for video games.
3. I think touching on the social media aspect of these games could be something really cool to add to the class.

4. One thing that I learn from this class is that it is ok to program video game music for concerts. I feel like those kinds of programs aren't played as often.

Student #17:

1. Before this class, I thought about music, sound, and video games as music artists just doing their thing and making awesome soundtracks. Now, I know it's a lot more than just music artists, it's artists period, and extremely talented ones. Whether it's a dedicated composer or the same person making the rest of the game, making music for video games is an art form all on its own.

2. Honestly, I would still pick the connection between video game music and other media that is inspired by its respective game and vice versa. Video games and film have very different goals in terms of immersing the consumer, so I would love to take a look at the various approaches composers take when tackling this problem because I've yet to figure out why sometimes it works and sometimes it fails spectacularly.

3. If I had to add something to the curriculum, it would be a dive into some current practices of the gaming industry and its composers. For example, Marty O'Donnell and his role in the making of HALO's and Destiny's soundtracks and how his successors took up that mantle. I'm grappling with a similar concept myself, just the other end of it where I'm trying to leave something for my Makerspace Manager successor that will be, well, manageable. It's just a concept on my mind at the moment, but an addition of the current on top of all the old may help ground students in the familiar a little more while still giving them a "foot in the door" in something they've probably never explored.

4. My appreciation for older technology, specifically sound chips, and how much finagling people had to do to get what they want out of it has grown. It helps me appreciate the leaps and strides the 3D printing community has taken in even just the time I've been part of it. Hopefully, that appreciation will promote new ideas in the future on how I can improve the printing experience for me and the people around me.

Student #18:

1. I thought pretty simply about video game music before this class. I didn't really understand truly how many layers and aspects go into the creation of video game sound and music. I also didn't realize how much research there was about this topic.

2. I think I would research the contributions of women to video game music and why they are often left out of conversations about video game music. I wanted to write about this for my final projects, but it was too broad of a topic. I know we only talked briefly about it in class and there really isn't that much scholarly research about it.

3. Minecraft! I think it's a game a lot of people of different gaming experience levels has played and it has a pretty iconic and unique soundtrack. But maybe I'm bias because I've been playing Minecraft too much lately.

4. I think I learned a bit about the value of incorporating video game music into repertoire as a performer or educator. In classical spaces this may be looked down on, but as a teacher I know students would love to play music from video games and as a performer I know typically audiences would love to hear it.

Student #19:

1. I definitely have learned a lot more about video games, as someone with minimal video game experience! I really liked how I got to experience these games through learning about the music and the affect it really has on the game experience.
2. Probably the use of diegetic vs non diegetic music in games and more deep into the affect it has on the player and their experience
3. Not entirely sure, because like I said, not a ton of video game experience but Minecraft is always cool
4. Showing there's so much to introduce into a classroom setting that students can relate to and build off of through video games!

Student #20:

Through taking this class I believe I have gained a greater understanding of the amount of research and effort that goes into composing for video games as well as the vast amount of scholarship that has been quietly built up in the video game music space. If there was one thing I could add to the curriculum of this class it would definitely be the Minecraft soundtrack by C418 and how influential it is in pop culture and video game culture but also the inspirations behind that soundtrack like Aphex Twin and Brian Eno. Before taking this class I didn't really think about the relationships present between music and video game environments but now I feel like whenever I play a game I notice more of the sound present in the game environment that I wouldn't otherwise notice.