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On the Classical Arrangement and Concertization of Video Game Music

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Stefan Xavier Greenfield-Casas

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the remediation of video game music from their source games to the concert hall. I argue that while not unique in their repositioning from popular to classical registers, the classicalization of video game music offers a contemporary challenge to the current norms of classical music institutions. I argue that there are three, interrelated parts needed to fully understand this phenomenon: (1) the history of these concerts and their producers, (2) the arrangers and their arrangements, and (3) the fans who invest in these recordings and how they listen to and experience these (live) performances.

In this dissertation I explore this phenomenon across four chapters variously focusing on these different perspectives. In the first chapter, I examine the history of video game music concerts, from the first Family Classic Concert in 1987 to the present day. In Chapter 2, I examine a corpus of video game arrangements produced by Square Enix to create a multidimensional categorical model for analyzing how video game music is arranged, as well as consider who the arrangers are and why these arrangements are produced. Chapter 3 continues the work from Chapter 2, considering how the formal and generic associations of an arrangement can support its adaptation and meaning. Finally, Chapter 4 theorizes the listening experience of fans through a mode of what I call "replayful listening."

By exploring this phenomenon through historical, cultural, theoretical, and analytical lenses, I reveal the creative and economic dimensions at play in this new form of arrangement. I do this by highlighting the collaborative nature of these concerts and arrangements, drawing special attention to the creative agency of arrangers, but also by examining the (commodified) modes of musical dissemination, e.g., sheet music, live concerts, and audio/audiovisual recordings.

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Over the past few years especially, I have grown increasingly aware of how lucky I have been regarding the number of mentors, friends, and colleagues I've had in my lifetime who have supported me up until this point. It takes a village, truly. I am a mosaic of their being, mediated and curated through my personal ponderings, problems, and peculiarities, and I cannot imagine a more sublime constellation of brilliant stars—as they are in my eyes—to admire and aspire to in my own endeavors.

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and the live. I cannot adequately express my thanks for their chill and relaxing streams, those spaces of emotional refuge, especially as someone who did not especially watch streams prior to the pandemic.

Finally, my thanks to my family, most of whom still do not entirely understand what I do, but who have put up with my antics, supported my passions, and are proud of me regardless, now for almost three decades.

For those whose stories go untold

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Introduction

In 2010, famed Japanese artist Takashi Murakami held a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Château de Versailles in France.[1] Here, monumental statues of Murakami's whimsical and colorful anime-inspired characters were staged around the grounds and the estate of the château in direct juxtaposition to the traditional French décor and art of the palace. With this exhibition, classical met contemporary, the austere met the *kawaii*, and—to use that tired, tired cliché—the West met the East.[2] Though the juxtapositions were both obvious and intended, Murakami has long been viewed as an accredited (if controversial) member of the "high" art world.[3] In the years since, other contemporary Japanese artists have started to break into the world(s) of high art and culture.[4] This includes Yoshitaka Amano, an artist best known for his work as a concept artist for the Final Fantasy video game series.[5] In 2018 and 2019, Amano had his two-part "Interwoven Fantasy: China First Grand Tour Exhibition";[6] two years later during the COVID-19 pandemic

[1] Laurent Le Bon, cur., *Murakami Versailles* (Paris: Éditions Xavier Barral, 2010).
[2] Kawaii (可愛い) is Japanese for "cute." On the cute as an aesthetic category and how Murakami realizes it in his works, see Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), Ch. 1 (53-109).
[3] Murakami's works are housed in the permanent collections of such prestigious institutions as the New York Museum of Modern Art and Art Institute of Chicago, and he has had solo shows in similarly premiere galleries, such as Perrotin and Gagosian. But it is in no small part these institutions hosting Murakami's work that lends to its cultural credibility. Murakami's sometimes controversial art is best represented by his *My Lonesome Cowboy* statue (one edition of which is owned by billionaire art collector François Pinault).
[4] Whether or not this is a causative relationship—that is, if Murakami (and others of the Superflat movement) set the world stage to be more receptive to Japanese art and culture—is beyond the scope of this project. For a history and incisive critique of contemporary Japanese art at the turn of the millennium, see Adrian Favell, *Before and After Superflat: A Short History of Japanese Contemporary Art 1990-2011* (Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher Limited, 2011).
[5] Across this dissertation I will italicize specific games but not series to help differentiate the two. On Amano, see Florent Gorges, *Yoshitaka Amano: The Illustrated Biography | Beyond the Fantasy*, trans. Laure Dupont (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Books, 2018).
[6] https://www.yoshitakaamano.com/news/2018/12/21/interwoven-fantasy-in-china (accessed June 15, 2022).

lockdown, Amano worked as a cover artist for *Vogue Italia*'s January issue to illustrate model Lindsey Wixson when Vogue was unable to travel for photoshoots.[7]

The above examples play on the trope of the juxtapositions of "high" and "low" arts and "high" and popular culture. This dissertation explores a similar phenomenon, by way of music: the classicalization and remediation of popular video game music for the "high" art concert hall. I begin with the example of *Japanese* visual artists as these video game music concerts and arrangements originated in Japan in the late 1980s, where they continue to be performed to this day. But since 2003, video game music has been presented in Western concert halls as well. Does this mean video game music has culturally "made it" at the world stage and/or is acknowledged as part of "high" culture? Considering that, since 2013, video game music has been canonized in Classic FM's annual "Hall of Fame," perhaps this is the case.[8] Regardless, how did we get to this point? Is this assertion a footnote-free worthy statement that requires no qualifications, no problematizations, and no further study?[9]

Here I turn to the central, motivating question for this dissertation: what does it mean for popular video game music to be remediated from their source games to enter the "sacred" space

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[7] Amano was one of seven cover artists commissioned for this issue. See Laird Borrelli-Persson, "Why Fashion Illustration Matters in the Digital Age," *Vogue*, January 3, 2020, https://www.vogue.com/slideshow/why-fashion-illustration-matters-in-the-digital-age. This is not the first time Final Fantasy has met with high fashion. *Final Fantasy XIII*'s (2009) protagonist, Lightning, famously modeled Luis Vuitton's 2016 Spring-Summer collection; See "Series 4: Lightning – A Virtual Heroine," *Louis Vuitton*, https://au.louisvuitton.com/eng-au/articles/series-4-lightning-a-virtual-heroine- (accessed June 15, 2022). See also my "Beyond Worlds: Musical Allegory in *Final Fantasy X*" (Master's Report, The University of Texas at Austin, 2017), 37.

[8] Elizabeth Hunt, "From the Console to the Concert Hall" (Master's diss., University of Liverpool, 2017), 19, 77-80; William Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays: Video Games and Classical Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 162-65; Julianne Grasso, "Video Game Music, Meaning, and the Possibilities of Play" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago), 1-4. Notably, while still included as of the 2021 rankings, video game composers such as Uematsu (120) and Yoko Shimomura (86 and 217) have significantly fallen in the ranks compared to when the previous analyses were conducted. https://halloffame.classicfm.com/2021/ (accessed June 14, 2022). We should also consider that this music is still generally only performed on pops concerts or as part of video game music-only concerts, suggesting that it has not yet truly broken into the classical repertoire.

[9] No.

of orchestral music, what William Gibbons has called the "bastion of high art"?[10] Or is this even a fair assessment of the phenomenon? While it may be tempting to view the adaptation of "low" art video game music for the "high" art concert hall as a symptom of post- or metamodernism, the adaption of popular or secular music for elite or sacred spaces has a long history. Consider, for instance, the parody mass's adaption of secular motets, theme and variations on popular tunes, and—perhaps most apparently relevant to video games—the movement of film music into the concert hall, whether by way of recycled themes in symphonic works, filmic concert suites for pop orchestras, or silver-screen play-alongs (what Brooke McCorkle Okazaki has called "cine-concerts").[11]

Before we continue further, this "high/low" distinction deserves a bit more attention, and some further context may shine some light on the above examples. First, we must note that these divisions are culturally and historically situated. Culture is constructed; history is too often viewed ahisorically through a presentist lens. Lawrence Levine writes as much in his monograph on "highbrow" and "lowbrow" culture, showing that even the plays of that immortal poet, William Shakespeare, were considered popular entertainment in mid-19th century America. Indeed, Levine specifically considers Italian opera and symphonic music as other examples of that which was once popular in America.[12] As he argues, it was not until concert halls (among other "private

[10] Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 157.
[11] Brooke McCorkle Okazaki, "Liveness, Music, Media: The Case of the Cine-Concert," *Music & the Moving Image* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 3–24; for a transhistorical analysis of this phenomenon, see Sean Russell Hallowell, "Towards a Phenomenology of Musical Borrowing," *Organised Sound* 24, no. 2 (2019): 174-183; see also J. Peter Burkholder, "The Uses of Existing Music: Musical Borrowing as a Field" *Notes* 50, no. 3 (March 1994): Appendix B (869-70).
[12] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), passim. esp., Ch. 2 (85-168). John Spitzer offers a slight critique of Levine's timeline, though acknowledges the importance of Levine's larger argument, in his review of Levine's book. See Spitzer, Review of "*Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural History in America* by Lawrence W. Levine," *American Music* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 233-36.

spaces") were created as exclusionary institutions in America that classical music gained its prestigious high cultural status.[13] *Space*, then, is important in framing its contents, as is the *timing* of the framing. The (exclusionary) frame gives rise to the art within.[14]

Secondly, we might push back on this "high/low" dichotomy and hierarchy in other ways. Michael Long, for instance, suggests that rather than viewing classical music as "high" art and popular music as "low" art, we might instead consider them as specific perceptual registers that can be evoked in expressive practices. That is, these registers—sometimes called "expressive registers"—have associated stylizations and gestures that can be strategically employed as a way of evoking certain meanings.[15] The classical register, then, *does* exist, but it is not one that is inherently "high" or culturally superior; rather, that meaning-making is produced by the listener or performer who recognizes it as such and brings these valuations with it. Long gives examples of, for instance, rock music which occasionally plays with the classical register, even if it itself is not classical music. But, again, these meanings are culturally situated, and gestures or registers that might have at one point carried specific meanings might lose these meanings over time—or, rather, listeners (or creators) might eventually forget these meanings or lose track of their origins.

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[13] "But these worlds of strangers did not remain contained; they spilled over into the public spaces that characterized nineteenth-century America and that included theaters, music halls, opera houses, museums, parks, fairs, and the rich public cultural life that took place daily on the streets of American cities. This is precisely where the threat lay and the response of the elites was a tripartite one: to retreat into their own private spaces whenever possible; to transform public spaces by rules, systems of taste, and canons of behavior of their own choosing and, finally, to convert the strangers so that their modes of behavior and cultural predilections emulated those of the elites…" Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 177.

[14] Jacques Derrida and Craig Owens (trans.), "The Parergon," *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 3-41; For a musical analytical approach to this notion, see Richard C. Littlefield, "The Silence of the Frames," *Music Theory Online* 2, no. 1 (January 1996). https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.96.2.1/mto.96.2.1.littlefield.html.

[15] Robert Hatten makes similar use of these expressive registers in the development of his theory of musical meaning making vis-à-vis topics and markedness. See Robert Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

So where does video game music come into this mix? I argue that while not *unique* in their repositioning from popular to classical registers, video game arrangements for the concert hall still offer a contemporary challenge to the current norms of classical music institutions by way of their remediation from virtual gameworld to real concert hall.[16] Video game music and, in particular, video game *arrangements* challenge notions of a singular, genius composer and the work-concept; the Eurocentric and predominantly male canon; and the art for art's sake "Romantic prejudice" by way of their commercial and narrative ties.[17] However, as I will show, these challenges are often downplayed in the presentation of this music as a way of gaining cultural standing.

Video game music affords an interesting case study for arrangement studies for a few reasons: firstly, the music within them is often unfixed and dynamic in nature—it is frequently looped *ad infinitum* until players change the game state such that the music reacts in kind.[18] Thus, many (though not all!) pieces within a game have no definite ending and afford malleable material for arrangement. Secondly, this music, especially in older games, is often also quite short, so the arrangement of multiple pieces affords arrangers the opportunity to extend and embellish singular pieces, or to combine pieces together, whether in the form of a medley or in free counterpoint. Thirdly, music in video games has a long history of using electronic waveforms rather than recordings of acoustic instruments, so arrangers are able to exercise their creativity in choosing what "classical" instruments best represent the synthesized sounds from the games. All of these

[16] Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss two types of remediation. The first, "transparent immediacy," attempts to hide the process of remediation. The second, "hypermediacy," draws attention to the process of remediation. See Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).
[17] Emilio Audissino, "Overruling a Romantic Prejudice. Forms and Formats of Film Music in Concert Programs," in *Film in Concert, Film Scores and their Relation to Classical Concert Music*, ed. Sebastian Stoppe (Glückstadt: VWH Verlag, 2014), 25-43.
[18] See, for instance, Jennifer Smith, "Worldbuilding Voices in the Soundscapes of Role Playing Video Games" (PhD diss., University of Huddersfield, 2020), 100-110. See also Hunt, "From the Concert to the Concert Hall," 13-14.

points, to some degree or another, speak to what Tim Summers has recently deemed "playful listening" wherein players recognize in video game music a "potential to be otherwise."[19] One other point, however, is that video game music is *already* understood as existing in the classical register for many gamers, even if they were not originally scored for traditional classical instruments.[20] Indeed, the concert arrangements of this music is, for many fans, how the music was *supposed* to sound.[21] This makes the transition into the concert hall smoother than might otherwise be the case. Finally, there is the question of how video game music translates the narrative content of source games into instrumental form.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will specifically examine arrangements licensed, produced, and/or sanctioned by either parent companies or original composers. I do this in-part to limit my corpus, as well as to critique the power structures of how this music is (re)produced, staged, and sold. More explicitly: this is not intended as an aesthetic judgement against fan arrangements; indeed, when examining the trail of who is considered a professional or what is considered official, clear boundaries become nebulous. For instance, Ben Emberley was brought on to help arrange the *Legend of Zelda Symphony of the Goddesses* after he sent the concert producers his symphonic poem *The Creation of Hyrule*, an epic, hour-long arrangement of the music from the Legend of Zelda. Thus, the fan arrangement became acknowledged and legitimized by the parent company.[22] In the reverse, Eric Roth, the conductor of the (official) *A New Worlds*

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[19] Tim Summers, "Fantasias on a Theme by Walt Disney," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*, ed. Carlo Cenciarelli (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 690–711.
[20] Grasso, "Video Game Music," 3-4.
[21] William Gibbons, "How It's Meant to be Heard: Authenticity and Game Music," *The Avid Listener*, September 21, 2015. https://theavidlistenerblogcom.wordpress.com/2020/07/24/how-its-meant-to-be-heard-authenticity-and-game-music/.
[22] Ben Emberley, "The Creation of Hyrule // INTRODUCTION VIDEO," *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf9HIVsL4do; and idem., "The Creation Of Hyrule: A Symphonic Poem // THE LEGEND OF ZELDA // Orchestral Arrangement," *YouTube*, https://youtu.be/MGWKiB3haDA.

concert series as well as a professional arranger for AWR Music Studios, is the composer of *The RPG National Anthem Variations*. The piece is a theme and variations based on Nobuo Uematsu's "Main Theme" from the Final Fantasy series that Roth composed for the guitar virtuoso Sam Griffin of the Super Guitar Bros., a guitar duo that performs arrangements (or "covers") of video game music on YouTube. Thus, a professional arranger created an unofficial or fan arrangement. And finally, we might—and I will, later—also consider Wayô Records' recent *Across the Worlds* (2021) album, a Kickstarter-backed project which brought on numerous professional video game musicians to create an album honoring the 20th anniversary of Mitsuda Yasunori's score for *Chrono Cross* (1999).

One final note for now. Much of the music I examine in this dissertation will be Japanese in origin—as stated above, these concert arrangements of video game music originated in Japan and are still largely performed in Japan. My investigation in this dissertation *does* consider and contextualize the Japanese origins of these games and musics (particularly in Chapters 1 and 2), but it is not the primary focus of this dissertation. Instead, I am predominantly interested in the ways video game music oscillates between conforming to and challenging existing cultural power structures at the global stage (akin to Murakami's exhibition at Versailles). I will *not* argue for video game music as a means of "saving" the concert hall (though video game music *is* more and more frequently one reason why young musicians are becoming interested in classical music).[23] Instead, I will suggest that video game arrangements offer one way of challenging longstanding institutional structures. I argue that there are three, interrelated parts needed to fully understand

[23] Consider, for instance, the recent essay written by A.Z. Madonna, the music critic for the Boston Globe: "I Fell in Love with Classical Music Thanks to Video Games," *Boston Globe*, last updated April 28, 2022, https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/04/28/arts/i-fell-love-with-classical-music-thanks-video-games/.

this phenomenon: (1) the history of these concerts and their producers, (2) the arrangers and their arrangements, and (3) the fans who invest in these recordings and how they listen to and experience these (live) performances.

Engagement with Existing Literature

This dissertation lies at the intersection of two subdisciplines within music studies: media studies and arrangement studies. For the former, this includes both film music studies and ludomusicology, the study of video game music. Here I am primarily concerned with how these fields have examined multimedia scores for/in the concert hall. For the latter, considerations of arrangements can be broken into two broad areas of study: Liszt (the "inventor" of arrangements) studies, and philosophical or theoretical reflections on arrangements. I will also briefly discuss musical borrowing as it pertains to musical arrangement.

Video Game (and Film) Music in the Concert Hall

To start, when I say I will examine video game music for "the concert hall," I intend this in a relatively broad sense. Here, the concert hall is more metaphorical or synecdochical than ontological. To borrow the words of the films music scholar James Wierzbicki: "By 'concert hall' I mean not just the venue that in many cities goes officially by that name but the entire culture for which the physical concert hall is just a symbol, a culture that embraces and promotes what until not so long ago (before persistent critics challenged the labelling) might have been called 'serious music' or 'art music.'"[24] To this end, while there exist a plethora of rock covers, EDM remixes,

[24] James Wierzbicki, ed., *Double Lives: Film Composers in the Concert Hall* (New York: Routledge, 2019), ii.

and café acoustic adaptations of video game music (among others), I will not be focusing my attention on these genres in the present work.

Thus far in ludomusicological scholarship, when video game arrangements have been examined it has almost exclusively been from the viewpoint of cultural or fandom studies. Indeed, while there are a handful of chapters and articles that consider the arrangement and/or concertization of licensed video game music in the concert hall, many of them are specifically concerned with fan arrangements and remixes. Karen Collins, for instance, considers how fans cover and remix pieces from games as "part of a larger participatory, interactive network."[25] Melanie Fritsch furthers this claim, suggesting a framework of "game musical literacy" that informs how fans meaningfully contribute to the fandom's array of various musical practices.[26] Jeremy Smith reiterates Fritsch's claim, yet hones-in on what he calls the "semiotic meaning of the game's original music" and provides three case studies of fan arrangements he argues maintain the semiotic meaning in their adaptations.[27] Finally, Ryan Thompson has recently provided an in-depth history of OverClocked ReMix, the largest online community of fan remixers.[28] While fan arrangements are certainly worthy of consideration, in this dissertation I will focus on licensed and officially sanctioned arrangements, concerts, and especially *arrangers*, who far too often receive little to no credit. With this, I hope to show how these games respective soundtracks have had an

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[25] Karen Collins, *Playing with Sound: A Theory of Interacting with Sound and Music in Video Games* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013), 106.

[26] Melanie Fritsch, "'It's a-Me, Mario!' Playing with Video Game Music," in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Game Music*, eds. Michiel Kamp, Tim Summers, and Mark Sweeney (Sheffield, UK; Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2016), 92-115.

[27] Jeremy W. Smith "'Wear People's Faces': Semiotic Awareness in Fan Adaptations of the Music from *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask,*" *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1, no. 4 (2020): 45–75.

[28] Ryan Thompson, "Game Music Beyond the Games," in *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*, eds. Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 409–23. An especially interesting point in Thompson's chapter is the semi-official recognition OC ReMix has received from video game companies, especially Capcom. Here, the lines between fandom and corporation begin to blur (as I briefly mentioned above).

enormous influence in the branding of these games and their IPs, furthering the capital and time players and fans invest in the experience of the game.

The earliest academic study directly examining video game music in the concert hall comes from William Cheng's analysis of the opera from *Final Fantasy VI*.[29] The chapter from which this emerges is primarily concerned with the representation of *voice* and vocality in *FFVI*, jointly structured around a discussion of the main villain Kefka's synthesized 16-bit laugh as well as the synthesized singing that occurs in the mini opera which players play-through in the game. Though the concert arrangement of the opera only takes up a small portion of his chapter—he is focused more of representations of voice here—Cheng makes special note in his discussion to point out that the *synthesized* version of the opera is the original, and that many fans still prefer the 16-bit version to the orchestral and operatic arrangement.

To date, there exists only one full-length and concentrated study on video games in the concert hall, though it focuses more on the concerts themselves rather than the arrangements that they feature. Elizabeth Hunt's master's dissertation provided the first in-depth study on the phenomenon, considering how video game canons are formed through these concerts, how nostalgia plays into concertgoers enjoyment of the concerts, and how these concerts themselves have become gamified objects.[30] Following Hunt's attention and critique of this model, a large part of my dissertation (and my second chapter in particular) will focus on the licensed arrangement CDs and scores that the video game company Square Enix produces. Moreso than

[29] William Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press), Ch. 2 (57-91).
[30] Hunt, "From the Console to the Concert Hall."

any other company, Square Enix has done a remarkable job branding and monetizing their music, easily outshining comparable game companies such as Nintendo and Sega.[31]

William Gibbons has discussed video game music concerts in a few of his publications. The penultimate chapter of his book that examines the relationship between video games and classical music considers how video game music has become "classified."[32] For Gibbons, there are at least two elements at play here. The first element is the perception of video game scores as "being classical." He discusses how, in 2016, the Classic FM Hall of Fame included 11 video game composers. Of special note for Gibbons was the face that fans of these games/composers had coordinated together to make certain these composers and their scores were included in the list of the great "master" canonical composers. The second element of this classifying, for Gibbons, is the arrangement of video game music into specifically classical forms or genres. He cites the *Final Fantasy VII Symphony in Three Movements* (arr. Jonne Valtonen) and the Final Symphony concert program writ large as one example of this (of which the symphony is one featured piece). More recently, Gibbons penned a contribution to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* on canons in video games.[33] In this article, he argues that the *Video Games Live* concert series, perhaps the most famous long-running video game concert series, is creating a canon based on the tracks that Tommy Tallarico, the series' producer, selects. Gibbons' research largely focuses on canons and canon formation, and he has been critical of the formation of a video game music

[31] This was reflected in the 2021 opening ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, to be discussed further in Chapter 1. The ceremony featured a medley of video game music from Japanese game producers, with over half the pieces from Square Enix properties. Notably absent was any music from Nintendo, even with their recent release of the *Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020* game (Nintendo and Sega, 2019).
[32] Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, Ch. 11 (157-171).
[33] William Gibbons, "Rewritable Memory: Concerts, Canons, and Game Music History," *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1, no. 1 (2020): 75–81.

canon, both generally speaking, as well as in ludomusicological discourse, with an recent conference paper examining the parallels between the cult of Beethoven and the cult of Uematsu.[34]

Julianne Grasso has taken up this issue of canons vis-à-vis video game arrangements with her own contribution to the same colloquy.[35] Grasso writes about two elements here: (1) how the formal design of a medley arrangement can project a constructed history based on what themes it highlights and (2) how canons are constructed in different communities, both officially and through fandoms. Grasso's essay, short that it is, informs many of my thoughts in how large-scale video game arrangements can tell the story of a game or series. Furthermore, arrangement itself is a canon-forming activity, what Alexander Rehding discusses in terms of "monumentalizing" works.[36] I explore this issue of canon formation across the dissertation, both in terms of *who* is canonized and *how* arrangements contribute to this process.

Though my dissertation will focus on video game arrangements, the related phenomenon of adapting film music for the concert hall is an important parallel and, in many ways, predecessor to video game concert arrangements. Both mediums have struggled to be taken seriously as art forms, and the quotation and use of pre-existing classical music in both was one way of tapping into the cultural capital associated with classical music. Though film (and film music) has since become accepted as an art form, video games are still often considered less-than and nothing more than unserious playthings for children.[37] Bringing the music from these mediums—or it returning

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[34] William Gibbons, "Ode to Joysticks: Canonic Fantasies and the 'Beethoven of Game Music,'" paper presented at the *North American Conference on Video Game Music* (held online), June 12-13, 2021.
[35] Julianne Grasso, "On Canons as Music and Muse," *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1, no. 1 (2020): 82–86.
[36] Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[37] One of the most damning critiques comes from none other than the eminent film critic Roger Ebert. "Video Games Can Never Be Art," *Roger Ebert*, April 16, 2010, https://www.rogerebert.com/roger-ebert/video-games-can-never-be-art.

to live performance in the case of film—to the concert hall was one way of having this music taken seriously.

And yet, even with its longer history, very little has been written on film score arrangements. Generally, the closest examples focus on the works of film music composers that were not written for film.[38] Brooke McCorkle Okazaki has recently written on the cine-concert, the concert phenomenon wherein a live orchestra plays the score to a film playing on a screen behind them. She focuses especially on the emphasis of the *liveness* of the music in these concerts, one which disrupts the vococentric nature of cinema.[39] There are some additional parallels here with the practice of so-called "silent films" from the early twentieth century, wherein a film might be accompanied by a solo keyboard player or ensemble, the difference being, in the case of the cine-concerts, that there is a definite score to accompany the film, whereas with silent films, this was oftentimes not the case. Similarly, many video game music concerts feature a screen that includes gameplay, though this accompanying video is usually a pre-recorded assemblage of various cuts rather than in-time gameplay; the visual component here, then, is as malleable as the musical elements which are arranged.

Regardless, the literature on the *arrangement* of film scores is extremely sparse. Robbert van der Lek and Mick Swithinbank provides an early example of scholarship examining Korngold's arrangements and self-borrowing from his film scores into his concert works.[40] They suggest two categories for Korngold's processes: those which *adapt* his film scores (arrangement

[38] For instance, the afore-cited Wierzbicki, ed., *Double Lives*.
[39] McCorkle Okazaki, "Liveness, Music, Media"; on vococentric cinema, see David Neumeyer, *Meaning and Interpretation of Music in Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).
[40] Robbert Van der Lek and Mick Swithinbank, "Concert Music as Reused Film Music: E.-W. Korngold's Self-Arrangements." *Acta Musicologica* 66, no. 2 (1994): 78–112.

proper), and those which *incorporate* them (borrowing or quoting only portions of a cue). Emilio Audissino has similarly considered concert arrangements of film music, noting the most common types of concert hall adaptions, but primarily analyzing the "Romantic prejudice" film music must confront in its adaptation—that is, that film music is inherently *not* absolute music, that which Romantic sensibilities valorize above all others.[41] Frank Lehman further refines both of these typologies, providing a taxonomy of *ten* different ways film music can be adapted into concert music.[42] Though Lehman provides at least one example of each of these categories in his Table 1, across the article he focuses his attention on categories 5 and 6, "non-diegetic cue/set piece (adapted)" and "non-diegetic cue/set piece (unadapted)" respectively. Both of these categories are used in film as a non-diegetic underscore—the main difference is if in the process of arranging (or not) them for the concert hall involves substantial reworking or not. While these models may work for film music, they do not always work for video game music. This dissertation draws on and expands these existing models to create a multidimensional method of categorization.

Furthermore, Lehman draws on Michael Long's theorization of "cinematic listening," a theory which is based on music that "compels the listener to engage in acts of 'envisioning' some accompanying diegesis or as [sic] a series of images."[43] Lehman, like McCorkle Okazaki, is interested in the play of moving a film's score—which, in the famous words of Claudia Gorbman, should remain largely "unheard"—front and center in a concert setting.[44] In contrast to McCorkle Okazaki's cine-concerts, however, the concert pieces Lehman examines (concert scherzi derived

[41] Audissino, "Overruling a Romantic Prejudice."
[42] Frank Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music and the Formal Implications of 'Cinematic Listening,'" *Music Analysis* 37, no. 1 (2018): 7–46.
[43] Long, *Beautiful Monsters*, 246n36.
[44] Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

from action cues) are not accompanied by a multimedia image. Lehman concludes his article, however, by suggesting that in hearing these standalone works, a new mode of cinematic listening emerges, informed as we are by the concert hall experience.

Arrangement and Borrowing

The formation of TAROT Musicology, development of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Arrangement Studies*, and the growing interest in the works of French philosophers concerned with notions of "listening" (especially the work of Peter Szendy), all concentrated within the last five or so years marks a turn towards a new preoccupation with arrangement.[45] This newly codified interest should perhaps come as no surprise with the proliferation of remakes, remasters, and reboots that occurred within the last decade of the century, a point that I think also in-part supports arrangements of video game music.[46]

The use of the term "arrangement" can be somewhat contentious as it can indicate both a specific way of more freely adapting a piece of music, as well as a general catch-all for all types of musical adaptations (e.g., transcriptions, medleys, paraphrases, etc.). The use of borrowing, at least in the general sense, allows arrangement its own definition. That is, we can consider musical borrowing the general catch-all, and use a spectrum from transcription to free arrangement. Of course, borrowing itself has many facets. A brief musical quotation, for instance, is also a type of musical borrowing—is it the same as a transcription or an arrangement? Here we might also

[45] TAROT Musicology is the Royal Musicological Society's arrangement studies interest group. It is an acronym derived from Transcription, Arrangement, Recomposition, Orchestration, and Translation.
[46] This is overt with some video game remakes which include newly arranged soundtracks for their remakes or remasters, e.g., *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) and *Final Fantasy VII: Remake* (2020); and *Final Fantasy X* (2001) and *Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster* (2013).

reconsider arrangements and transcriptions, not only in terms of genres, but also as musical processes. In other words, what is the scope of the musical borrowing? Does it span the whole piece? Or only a section, or even a measure? If the former, we might consider the borrowing at the level of genre; if one of the latter, we might consider the borrowing as a compositional element or process, rather than (necessarily) a governing genre.

Peter Burkholder has addressed similar questions and considerations at length. Burkholder defines musical borrowing as the practice of "taking something from an existing piece of music and using it in a new piece. This 'something' may be anything, from a melody to a structural plan. But it must be sufficiently individual to be identifiable as coming from this particular work, rather than from repertoire in general."[47] Burkholder's useful Appendix A to his essay provides a typology of borrowings scholars should take into account when engaging with borrowed music. Though Burkholder's typology is a useful way of thinking through *how* material is borrowed and informs my own categorization model in Chapter 2, my focus remains on pieces explicitly branded as arrangements., i.e., I will not consider pieces that quote or borrow video game music, but are not labeled specifically as an arrangement.

The piano in the 19th into the 20th century proved to be instrumental in creating a market for transcriptions and arrangements. As Thomas Christensen argues of the four-hand piano transcription: "No other medium was arguably so important to nineteenth-century musicians for the dissemination and iterability of concert repertory."[48] Christensen compares the function of these transcriptions as akin to those of the radio and phonograph in the twentieth century; while

[47] J. Peter. Burkholder, "The Uses of Existing Music: Musical Borrowing as a Field." *Notes* 50, no. 3 (March 1994): 863.
[48] Thomas Christensen, "Four-Hand Piano Transcription and Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Musical Reception," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 256.

the radio allowed listeners to listen to performances of, say, a symphony by a full symphony orchestra from the comfort of their homes (though this has atomistic mode of listening has not gone without critique), four-hand piano transcriptions afforded as close an experience to this as otherwise possible in the nineteenth century, and accessibility was the driving force behind these transcriptions. While virtuosos such as Clara Wieck, Sigismond Thalberg, and especially Franz Liszt transcribed their own versions of symphonic works, their transcriptions were oftentimes outside the playing capabilities of amateur musicians. The four-handed transcriptions, however, were easier to perform for amateurs and also required fewer hands (bodies) than transcriptions for the intimate string quartet. Indeed, Christensen notes that even critics such as Hanslick and Adorno held dear these transcriptions.[49] Ultimately, however, publishers' main goal in releasing these transcriptions was tapping into the market of a newly established amateur and middle class with the material dissemination of music of which they would not otherwise have easy access. The appeal to the material dimensions of the arrangement is critical. As Christensen summarizes, though music was previously separated by genre into the church, *Kammer*, or theater, "Towards the end of the eighteenth century… the geographic boundaries separating these musical macro-genres were dissolving rapidly. Performing locations could no longer offer firm guidelines to listeners as to the genres they were to hear, and hence what the expected code of response might be."[50] As he more eloquently puts it, just a few pages later: "Willy-nilly, then, the piano was becoming two instruments—one for the home and one for the concert hall… Through the rise of

[49] I will discuss Adorno's general view on arrangement below.
[50] Christensen, "Four-Hand Piano Transcriptions," 288.

both the piano transcription and the concert recital in the nineteenth century, musical genres became irrevocably untethered from their traditional geographies of performance."[51]

Perhaps the most important composer-arranger in terms of how we conceive of arrangement today is Franz Liszt. Indeed, as the "inventor" of the "art of transcription," Liszt's enormous catalogue of transcriptions, arrangements, fantasies, and paraphrases has set him apart from his contemporaries as a composer-transcriber. As Alan Walker opines: "Comparison between Liszt's arrangements and those of his contemporaries demonstrates why Liszt's remain of lasting interest. For him there were no stock devices or standard piano textures. Liszt's inventiveness enabled him to create individual pianistic solutions to the variety of problems encountered in translating music from one medium to another."[52] Similarly, James Penrose suggests that with Liszt's transcriptions: "Transcriber and pianist must each persuade the listener of the tonal [timbral] qualities of the underlying music—be it song, string, brass, or otherwise."[53]

Foremost amongst scholarship examining Liszt's relationship to arrangement and transcription is Jonathan Kregor's monograph on the subject. Across the volume, Kregor examines how the pieces Liszt chose to transcribe played into how he constructed his own musico-artistic persona: from his collaboration with Berlioz on the *Symphonie fantastique*, to "monumentalizing" Beethoven (and himself) with the piano score arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies;[54] from taking almost free reign in reconceiving and restructuring the architectonic design of Schubert's

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[51] Ibid., 289.
[52] Alan Walker, "Liszt, Franz: 10. Arrangements," *Grove Music Online*, 2001. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000048265.
[53] James F. Penrose, "The Piano Transcriptions of Franz Liszt," *The American Scholar* 64, No. 2 (1995): 273.
[54] Jonathan Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chs. 2 and 4, respectively.

Winterresise, to the "often tumultuous relationship" he had with Wagner and how this manifest as a "sense of drama" within his transcriptions of Wagner's operas.[55]

The tethering of Liszt to arrangement is tied to at least two points: the first is based on his prolific output of transcriptions—hundreds of transcriptions for the piano, ranging in genre from song cycles to symphonies, and across national borders to include Austro-German, Italian, Hungarian, French, English, and Russian composers.[56] The second point is Liszt's approach to transcription: as an artform unto itself. For Liszt, a transcription was not necessarily a one-to-one inscription or reduction from source to his piece. For instance, while some authors such as Penrose suggests that Liszt's *Partitions* are "almost note-for-note renderings of the orchestral text into a piano score," citing, for instance, the transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies, Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*, and Wagner's *Liebestod*, Penrose does not offer any textual analysis to support this claim.[57] Kregor's book, on the other hand, challenges this note-for-note claim of the transcriptions, offering close analyses comparing and contrasting Liszt's transcriptions to their sources. Kregor's approach here informs one such example I will undertake in Chapter 2, highlighting the differences in pieces, even when they can all be understood as transcriptions.

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[55] Ibid., Chs. 3 and 5, respectively. Quoted phrases on p. 184. Similarly, Penrose suggests that Liszt's transcriptions served one of three purposes: as pieces to display his virtuosity, as homages to composers he revered, and as a means of performing the source music at a high enough performance level: "Liszt transcribed the Beethoven symphonies simply because he could play them better than many orchestras." Penrose, "The Piano Transcriptions," 274.

[56] See Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber*, 201-02 (Table 6.1).

[57] Penrose, "The Piano Transcriptions," 274. Alan Walker makes a similar claim in the subsection on "Arrangements" in *Grove*'s entry on Liszt, suggesting that "Apart from his many original studies and character-pieces, Liszt made many keyboard arrangements. They fall broadly into two categories: paraphrases and transcriptions. These terms were coined by Liszt himself (he lay claim to them, together with the term 'Réminiscence', in his annotated copy of Ramann's biography) and their meanings are distinct. In a paraphrase the arranger is free to vary the original and weave his own fantasy around it. A transcription, on the other hand, must be a faithful recreation of the original."

Though not always explicitly centered on Liszt's notions of transcription and arrangement, discussions of Liszt's virtuosity frequently mention his transcriptions vis-à-vis his theme and variations, fantasies, and paraphrases.[58] Indeed, Dana Gooley argues that, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, Liszt's use of transcriptions as homage to other composers helped mute his own artistic persona to some extent, diverting the focus (at least in part) from Liszt as virtuosic performer to the respective composers of his transcriptions' source material.[59] In the same edited collection, James Deaville examines Liszt's publishing ledgers to contend that Liszt's paraphrases sold as well as they did in part because they were based on recently premiered operas. In contrast to at least some of Christensen's claims, Deaville argues that even though the pieces were playable by only a handful of pianists, this did not affect the sales of these transcriptions. He suggests that these scores were bought as a kind of material trace, a memento, to remember the spectacle of having experienced Liszt perform the piece live.[60] A similar argument can be made now of arrangement albums of video game music, as I will show.

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[58] On Liszt's virtuosity, see Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). One genre which I have chosen to forego extended discussion of in this essay is the theme and variation, especially in consideration of the sub-genre of variations based on preexisting themes. Representative scholarship on the topic includes: Janet Bourne, "A Theory of Analogy for Musical Sense-Making and Categorization: Understanding Musical Jabberwocky" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2015), Ch. 5; Roman Ivanovitch, "What's in a Theme? On the Nature of Variation," *Gamut: Online Journal of the Music Theory Society of the Mid-Atlantic* 3, No. 1 (2010): Article 3. https://trace.tennessee.edu/gamut/vol3/iss1/3; and Elaine Sisman, *Haydn and the Classical Variation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[59] Dana. Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Franz Liszt and His World*, eds. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75-111.

[60] James Deaville, "Publishing Paraphrases and Creating Collectors: Friedrich Hofmesister, Franz Liszt, and the Technology of Popularity," in *Franz Liszt and His World*, eds. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 255-88. As Christensen argues: "To be sure, the purchasing of reproductions-whether lithographs or piano transcriptions can still be seen as a kind of consumer fetishism so excoriated by Adorno. Reproductions, that is, may be mere cultural commodities that are collected and displayed by a bourgeoisie vainly seeking aesthetic distraction or social valorization. What may absolve performances of piano transcriptions from such a fetishism, however, is precisely the fact that it is the individual consumers who control the reproduction. While Adorno might still condemn the element of musical commodification in the reproduction trade, performances of transcriptions are indisputably participatory acts, ones that hold out the possibility of rescuing the auratic experience from the regressive listening induced by the culture industry." Christensen, "Four-Hand Piano Transcriptions," 281-82.

Peter Szendy's treatise, *Listen: A History of our Ears*, is perhaps the most influential text on musical arrangement in contemporary arrangement studies. Szendy is concerned, above all, with "listener's rights." He asks, "*Who has a right to music?* Who can hear it as if it belonged to him, who can appropriate it? Who has the right to make it *his own*?"[61] In this sense, Szendy is concerned with specific and individual "listenings" of music: how does my (or your) listening of a piece differ from another's? While he considers this topic across both history and genre—from French rulings on copyright and Harley Davidson, to DJ sampling and Don Juan (and Don Juan as DJ), to deafness and the merits of distracted listening—arrangement is always at least in the background, and the centerpiece of his book is his oft-cited chapter on arrangers, those listeners he loves "more than all the others."[62]

In this chapter, Szendy claims that arrangers are "the only listeners in the history of music to *write down* their listenings."[63] Because of this, listening to arrangements grants us the unique opportunity to share in a listening with such an arranger. With this experience, Szendy further claims we are "hearing double," listening to the arrangement—the arranger's listening—while also (presumably) juxtaposing it against the original, the source material as we have listened to it before. Further still, drawing on the practice of transcription as conceived of by Liszt, he contends that "*the original and the arrangement are complementary, contiguous in their incompleteness and their distance from the essence of the work*…" That is, the Work for Szendy (as for Benjamin and translation) is never complete upon composition. Rather, arrangements provide an afterlife for these works, a malleable and plastic essence of being and, for Szendy, listening. This leads to a

[61] Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 5, italics in original
[62] Ibid., 35.
[63] Ibid., 36.

fragmentation, a desire to understand the works through the purview of the other: an "oscillation," a listening "torn between two parallel lines, one present and the other ghostly or spectral."[64] This listening of arrangement, then, is ultimately a triangulation: between source composer, the listening arranger, and the listening listener. While this triangulation informs my writings on video game arrangements, one important added element for video game arrangements is the listener's own experience playing the game and how this mediates their own hearing of another's listening.

Brian Kane has offered his own philosophical ruminations on arrangements, yet he focuses on both a different repertoire (the jazz standard) and a different vein of research within arrangement studies (ontology).[65] Kane offers a model based on Actor Network Theory to account for the ontology of jazz standards as they undergo various changes from performer to performer, performance to performance. This model has two components: nomination and replication. Kane approaches the first element of his model, replication, through musical analysis; that is, what features are maintained across different arrangements? The second element, nomination, might simply be understood as whether or not the piece shares the same name as that which it was based on. If it does, no matter how drastically altered an arrangement is compared to its predecessor(s), it is still tethered to the network of the piece.[66] This nomination, then, is in itself an "assertion"—a claim—to this ontological network.

More recently still, William Drummond's dissertation on the arrangements of French composer Gérard Pesson draws heavily from the writings of Szendy. Across his dissertation, he primarily argues against a fidelity-centered ethics of arrangement (what he deems "fidelity

[64] Ibid., 37, 58.
[65] Brian Kane, "Jazz, Mediation, Ontology," *Contemporary Music Review* 37, no. 5–6 (2018): 507–28.
[66] Crucially, for Kane, the network *is* the Work.

essentialism" and is dependent on notions such as "temporal fidelity"), and suggests instead that "arrangement names a way of listening as much as it does a type of musical object."[67] With this thesis, he sidesteps the question of ontology to instead focus on a kind of phenomenology inherent to arrangement. Drummond's repositioning of arrangement away from ontology towards phenomenology is an important one, as the perceptual transformation from one piece to its arrangement(s) is entirely contextual.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Adorno's discussion of "structural listening" is frequently cited (and critiqued) in these *Listen*-oriented texts. And yet, it is elsewhere that Adorno most explicitly summarizes his views on arrangement. In his essay "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," Adorno offers his own critique of arrangements. While the potential loss of the architectonic element of the source material is certainly a source of discomfort for Adorno, it is ultimately his concern with music as fetish object which causes Adorno the most distress. There is, of course, a negative dialectics at play here for Adorno. On the one hand, "arranging seeks to make the great distant sound, which always has aspects of the public and unprivate [we might think of the concert hall], assimilable"—that is, arrangement seeks to bring music into the intimate sphere;[68] on the other hand, arrangements are an unfortunate symptom of the regression of listening. In other words, rather than arrangements *causing* listeners' musical tastes to regress, it is only one facet of the larger plague of musical fetishism that haunts Adorno. Interesting for me is the reversal of Adorno's critique with this dissertation's case study—or perhaps the realization of his fear. Video games—an activity that necessitates player action and reflection—and their

[67] William J. Drummond, "Arrangement, Listening, and the Music of Gérard Pesson" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 2019), 1.
[68] Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 282.

music begin in the intimate sphere: in the home on the TV or computer screen. Yet this music also becomes a fetish object in its "need" to be valorized in its performance in the concert hall.

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is broken into four main chapters. Chapter 1 sets the stage for this dissertation, providing a historical survey of video game music concerts from their inception until present. I will argue that this history can be divided into four parts, based on various factors including who was producing these shows, how these shows were framed, and how world events (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) affected how these shows were adapted.

Chapter 2 turns its attentions to the arrangements and arrangers themselves, analyzing a set of arrangements produced by the Japanese video game company Square Enix to identify the most popular methods of arranging these scores. Here, I compare and contrast how video game and film score adaptations for the concert hall differ, and offer a new model of categorization for these arrangements. The central portion of this chapter is an analysis of three transcriptions of Nobuo Uematsu's "Dancing Mad" based on this model. I conclude the chapter by considering why Square Enix produces these albums, concerts, and arrangements to the level that they do. With this chapter in particular, I also hope to also direct attention to the arrangers themselves, as academic studies on these concerts have invariably focused on the original composer's music, rather than the arrangers and their creative labor and craft.

Chapter 3 will focus specifically on a subgenre of arrangements wherein arrangers arrange these scores into traditional classical forms/genres. I will argue that these genres are *not only* a matter of accruing cultural capital, but are also oftentimes based in the musico-semiotic meanings attributed to the forms: concerto form (individual against society); theme and variation (repetition

and difference); and the symphony (monumentality). My primary case studies will be the *Final Fantasy X Piano Concerto*, the Concert Paraphrase on "Dearly Beloved", and the *Legend of Zelda*: *Symphony of the Goddesses*, though I conclude the chapter by considering how Austin Wintory's score for *Journey* has been adapted in ways each of the previous analyses highlighted. My analysis will expand Jeremy W. Smith's recent observation that fan adaptations of The Legend of Zelda's music oftentimes "pick up on semiotic meaning in the game's original music and maintain this meaning while changing some structural features of the music to place the original pieces into new stylistic and generic contexts."[69]

Chapter 4 will conclude the dissertation by theorizing why these concerts have become as popular as they have. Drawing on personal experience attending these concerts, as well as theories of liveness and listening, I will draw on Tim Summers' recent theory of "playful listening" to theorize a kind of "*re*playful" listening based on a particular kind of hearing unique to video games and the repetition that is inherent to them. Directly following the writings of Carolyn Abbate and Elizabeth van Elferen, I will suggest that the drastic event of playing a game creates a marked *event* in which concertgoers who have played the game experience a virtual replay of their playthrough. Music here, then, functions as a temporal bridge between the virtual and real world. Finally, the dissertation's Conclusion will suggest further related avenues and questions ripe for scholarly consideration.

My goals with this project include the following: (1) to turn attention away from canonical video game music composers and towards those working "behind the scenes" to realize these concerts, including concert producers and, especially, arrangers; (2) to provide new categorical

[69] Smith, "Wear People's Faces,'" 45.

and theoretical methodologies for analyzing video game arrangements; and (3) to provide preliminary reference material for those wishing to further explore these concerts and arrangements in greater detail in the future.

Chapter 1

A History from Dragons to Olympians

It's 2021, a year after the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games were supposed to have taken place.[70] It's about an hour into the Opening Ceremony of the delayed Olympics and, finally, one of the most anticipated events is about to begin: the Parade of Nations. A pre-recorded introduction flashes on-screen, showing the performing orchestra's concertmaster walking on stage, taking a seat, and playing a tuning concert A. The other members of the orchestra soon join her, accompanied by footage of past Olympians. While the other members of the orchestra continue their tuning, a lone trumpet emerges from the texture, ascending to a concert E a fifth above its tuning note. Other instruments follow suit: marcato triplets from the timpanist, a slow glissando from a trombone. The images on the screen respond to their audio counterparts: as the trumpet ascends, a gymnast leaps upward; as the timpani mallets bounce, tennis balls do as well; as the trombone slide slides up, an archer pulls back their bowstring. The conductor walks on stage and a set of acousmatic voiceovers in three languages—French, English, Japanese—asks the audience to welcome the athletes of the 32nd Olympiad. As the orchestra continues to "warm up," carefully timed thematic gestures fade in and out—was that what I think it was?—and the image continues to cut between past footage and the musicians. The conductor calls for silence. A beat. She raises her arms… and then the orchestra plays the introduction proper, a brief ten-second fanfare. As the fanfare and introductory recording end, we cut to live footage of the parade. The first nation, Greece, marches forward, proudly bearing their country's flag. But the processional music that accompanies the

[70] Aside from the global COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony was plagued with last minute staff changes.

athletes is, much to my surprise, something I've heard before… but not from anywhere I was expecting. Not music from previous Olympic Games, not a classical Elgarian Pomp and Circumstance, no, but, rather, music from a *video game*: the main theme from Square Enix's *Dragon Quest* series.

As Table 1.1 shows, 19 pieces of Japanese video game music were performed and cycled through across the entire two-hour Parade of Nations. How did video games make it to the Olympics? To start, we might consider the ludic nature of games, sports, and music; that is, we *play* all three. We might also consider the *cultural* notoriety that Japan's billion-dollar video game industry offers the country—these opening ceremonies are supposed to celebrate their host countries and their cultures, after all.[71] Zooming in to consider the pieces themselves, some of the selections' titles quite obviously speak for themselves (e.g., "Olympus Coliseum" from Kingdom Hearts gesturing to Olympus and the "eFootball Walk-On Theme" as a sports fanfare), while others gesture to the heroic or triumphant nature of the Olympians (e.g., "Victory Fanfare" from Final Fantasy, "Proof of Hero" from Monster Hunter, and "Hero's Fanfare" from Kingdom Hearts). But that the first piece performed in this parade was the main theme from Dragon Quest should come as little surprise considering both the popularity of the game series in Japan, as well as its music's cultural legacy. It was the music of Dragon Quest, after all, that was performed on the first concert that featured video game music.

[71] As far back as the early 80s, the music of video games in Japan was attracting recognition. As Chris Marker suggests in his essay film *Sans Soleil* (1983), video game music in the arcade helped contribute to the "score" of Tokyo. For Marker, video games and their music offer "the inseparable philosophy of our time." I have considered Marker's thoughts on the matter elsewhere, see "Rhythms of Extreme Play," *Ludomusicology*, April 27, 2020, https://www.ludomusicology.org/2020/04/27/rhythms-of-extreme-play/.

Time (First Appearance)	Game / Game Series	Piece	Original Composer(s) and Arranger (if known)
00:49:00	N/A	Introduction to the Parade of Nations	Naoki Sato[72]
00:51:17	Dragon Quest (XI)	Overture XI (AKA Dragon Quest March)	Koichi Sugiyama
00:52:37	Final Fantasy Series	Victory Fanfare	Nobuo Uematsu
00:54:14	Tales of Zestria	Sorey's Theme ~The Shepherd~	Motoi Sakuraba, Go Shiina; Arr. Tomomichi Takeoka
00:58:02	Monster Hunter Series	Proof of a Hero	Kouda Masato; Arr. Kang Zhen-lan
01:01:14	Kingdom Hearts	Olympus Coliseum	Yoko Shimomura
01:04:46	Chrono Trigger	Frog's Theme	Mitsuda Kazunori; Arr. Mariam Abounnasr
01:07:35	Ace Combat	First Flight	Keiki Kobayashi (?)
01:09:45	Tales of Graces	Royal Capital ~Majestic Grandeur~	Motoi Sakuraba, Shinji Tamura
01:11:42	Monster Hunter 4	Wind of Departure	Marika Suzuki
01:15:25	Chrono Trigger	Robo's Theme	Mitsuda Yasunori; Arr. Daisuke Shinoda
01:17:40	Sonic the Hedgehog	Star Light Zone	Masato Nakamura
01:18:40	eFootball; Winning Eleven; Pro Evolution Soccer (PES) 21	eFootball Walk-On Theme	Unknown
01:21:03	Final Fantasy Series	Main Theme	Nobuo Uematsu
01:22:32	Phantasy Star Universe	Guardians	Hideaki Kobayashi, Fumie Kumatani, Kenichi Tokoi, Seirou Okamoto, Taihei Sato

Table 1.1. List of video game music featured during the Parade of Nations. Timestamps taken from the upload of the ceremony on the official Olympics YouTube channel, accessible at the following link: https://youtu.be/6u6uCbe6zh8 (accessed June 22, 2022).

[72] Keigo Oyamada, the composer originally appointed to write the music for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, resigned from his position after it surfaced that he had bullied and abused his classmates when he was younger. Naoki Sato replaced Oyamada as the composer.

01:24:48	Kingdom Hearts III	Hero's Fanfare	Yoko Shimomura
01:28:01	Gradius (Nemesis)	01 Act 1-1	Miki Higashino
01:30:09	NieR Series	Song of the Ancients (excerpt)	Studio Monaca; Arr. Kosuke Yamashita
01:33:00	Saga Series	The Minstrel's Refrain: SaGa Series Medley 2016 (ending excerpt)	Nobuo Uematsu, Kenji Ito, Ryuji Sasai, Masashi Hamauzu; Arr. Kosuke Yamashita
01:35:11	SoulCalibur VI	The Brave New Stage of History	Junichi Nakatsuru

Table 1.1, cont.

As with all histories, there are a variety of ways to divide the history of video game music concerts, depending on if the historian chooses to focus on a game series or composer, director or conductor, series of concerts, or other standard.[73] Victoria Gonzalez, for instance, has suggested that this history can be broken into seven overlapping "loops" or stages of development which also incorporate three generations of concerts.[74] As Gonzalez conceives, a

> "loop" is used to reflect how developments in [video game] music, both internally (original game music material) and externally (concerts, studio recordings, etc.), must overlap and incorporate older developments and characteristics in order to continue forward. This loop progression has been present since the early years of video game music, and has been so effective and well received that each loop continues to push VGM genre boundaries.[75]

Gonzalez chooses to highlight the transnational staging of these concerts to set three generations of concerts, focusing primarily on how Japanese video game music in particular is adapted to the

[73] For instance, I have written about this history focusing more specifically on Nobuo Uematsu and his role in these concerts elsewhere. See my "Uematsu's Postgame: The Music of *Final Fantasy* in the Concert Hall (and Beyond)," *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the* Final Fantasy *Series*, ed. Richard Anatone (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2022), 291-311.

[74] I am enormously thankful to Gonzalez for sharing her unpublished work with me. While Gonzalez presented this work as a poster (Gonzalez, "Japanese Video Game Music," poster presentation at *Press Start: A Video Game Music Symposium*, University of North Texas, March 26, 2022), the poster was derived from her unpublished thesis ("Japanese Video Game Music: Orchestrations that Revolutionized the International Music Industry" (Capstone Thesis, University of Arizona, 2021)), which is from what I will cite.

[75] Gonzalez, "Japanese Video Game Music," 6.

world stage. While Gonzalez' discussion of this cross-cultural pollination is well taken, for my own purposes, I will break my survey of these concerts into three phases based on a variety of factors (including locations, producers, and branding) and suggest that we are in the midst of an emergent fourth phase as well. Additionally, while these transnational relationships will account for part of my timeline divisions, they will not be the sole factor in my categorization. These timeframes are as follows: 1987-2003; 2003~2010; and from ~2010 onward. The emergent fourth time frame is a possible result of the COVID-19 pandemic currently ongoing at the time of writing.

Following Gonzalez, my first timeframe took place entirely in Japan, from the first video game music concert in 1987.[76] While several video game composers had their music arranged and performed in concert settings during this time, two composers in particular set the stage for video game music concerts to emerge as a legitimate cultural genre: Koichi Sugiyama and Nobuo Uematsu. The second era of video game music concerts begins in 2003 when video game music concerts began to take place outside of Japan. Here, concert organizers such as Thomas Böcker, Arnie Roth, and Tommy Tallarico (among others) created video game music concerts ranging a gamut of presentation styles: from spectacular "rockestra" concerts to "high" art-aspiring symphonic programs. In particular, I will highlight the rhetoric these producers use in branding their concerts as authentic representations of the source music, as well as how they write themselves into the lineage of the history of video game music concerts.[77] The third phase of video game music concerts is primarily dominated by anniversary concerts, but also features an

[76] Though by no means exhaustive, Appendix A contains a list of approximately 100 concerts and related events spanning 1987-2022.

[77] "Milestones," *Game Concerts*, https://www.gameconcerts.com/en/background/milestones/; "About," *Video Game Live*, https://www.videogameslive.com/about/; Rachel Swatman, "Video Games Live Creator Tommy Tallarico Receives Certificates at Record-Breaking Concert," *Guinness World Records*, March 22, 2016, https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2016/3/video-games-live-creator-tommy-tallarico-receives-certificates-at-record-breaking-421744 (all accessed June 22, 2022).

exponential explosion in the sheer number of concerts being produced. The emergent current era is primarily based on concerts produced virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of my work in this chapter is informed by digital archival work, as well as written correspondence with video game music concert producers.

Phase 1: 1987-2003

I define the first concert phase as the start of video game music concerts in Japan until the first video game music concert outside of Japan. During this time, two composers set the musical landscape for video game music concerts to flourish: Koichi Sugiyama and Nobuo Uematsu. Though a politically polemical figure, Sugiyama was the first video game music composer to have his work arranged for the concert hall.[78] As Lasse Lehtonen has argued, understanding Sugiyama's role in postwar Japanese music history at large is crucial for understanding the development of game music concerts in Japan.[79] Lehtonen points to three elements which supported Sugiyama's success: (1) his experience composing, producing, and arranging music; (2) his connections with cultural institutions and the mass media; and (3) his preexisting establishment as a figure with the reputation of a "pioneer" when he started writing for video games. This is all largely made apparent with Sugiyama's media (television) presence in *The Hit Parade*, with the show giving him the mass cultural capital and appeal that allowed for the (at the time) unusual idea of staging a concert that featured video game music.

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[78] For a summary of both Sugiyama's accomplishments as well as his controversial status, see Aimee Hart, "Controversial Dragon Quest Composer Koichi Sugiyama has Died," *Gayming*, October 7, 2021, https://gaymingmag.com/2021/10/controversial-dragon-quest-composer-koichi-sugiyama-has-died/.

[79] I am extremely grateful to Lehtonen for sharing his unpublished work with me. See Lasse Lehtonen, "Kōichi Sugiyama, Japanese Music History, and the Origins of Game Music Concerts," paper presented at *Ludo2021* (held online), April 23-25, 2021.

The first concert took place in 1987 with the *Family Classic Concert*, which paired Sugiyama's *Dragon Quest Suite* with Camille Saint-Saëns' *The Carnival of the Animals*. Nobuo Uematsu's music was performed two years later with the *Final Fantasy Concert Suite*. But whereas Sugiyama already had the cultural prestige to put on the show, Uematsu instead had to "beg" for his music to performed in such a venue.[80] That is, even if *Sugiyama* had the cultural cache to stage such a performance, neither video game music nor Uemtasu were yet well-regarded enough to easily produce a concert. With that last point in mind, it is especially interesting to see how these two representative composers have (or *haven't*) been written into the history of video game music concerts writ large. In many ways, Uematsu's prominence in the genre and Sugiyama's absence (at least at the global stage) parallels the story of the game series for which they're most well-known: Uematsu and Final Fantasy, and Sugiyama and Dragon Quest.

The global success of Final Fantasy and only local success of Dragon Quest is a well-known story within the gaming community and especially amongst JRPG-aficionados. That is, Final Fantasy, especially with the release of *Final Fantasy VII* for the PlayStation, became an international hit. Dragon Quest, on the other hand, received only moderate success at a global scale yet continues to outsell Final Fantasy on the Japanese domestic market.[81] Resultantly, it is Uematsu's Final Fantasy scores which became the global standard for video game music, not Dragon Quest (even if Sugiyama's Dragon Quest did much of the initial heavy lifting). As Elizabeth Hunt writes:

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[80] "Symphonic Suite Final Fantasy," https://finalfantasy.fandom.com/wiki/Symphonic_Suite_Final_Fantasy (accessed June 22, 2022); Nobuo Uematsu, liner notes from *Symphonic Suite Final Fantasy*, PSCR-5253, 1994, CD.
[81] Hayes Madsen, "Why Final Fantasy is More Popular than Dragon Quest in the West," *ScreenRant*, May 11, 2020, https://screenrant.com/final-fantasy-dragon-quest-more-popular-west/; see also Jason Dunning, "Square Enix Thinks Final Fantasy is More Popular than Dragon Quest in the West because of Historical Timing," *PlayStation Lifestyle*, January 2, 2017, https://www.playstationlifestyle.net/2017/01/02/square-enix-thinks-final-fantasy-popular-dragon-quest-west-historical-timing/.

> Although *Family Classic Concert* is an annual production, *Final Fantasy Symphonic Suite* was a standalone presentation of music which was also released on CD. This concert is significant as music from the *Final Fantasy* series has become some of the most performed music in the video game concert repertoire, featuring in concerts such as 2017's [sic] *Symphonic Odysseys*. Uematsu's work has also garnered critical acclaim in classical music circles, for example he has been included numerous times in Classic FM's annually updated Hall of Fame… Concerts dedicated to Uematsu's work are increasingly common and consistently popular.[82]

Even here, Hunt focuses on Uematsu rather than Sugiyama. And while this makes sense at, again, a global scale, it's unusual in the context of the time. For instance, while both Uematsu and Sugiyama's scores were featured in the *Orchestral Game Music Concerts* (1991-95), the *Final Fantasy* series was not performed on the third (1993) nor fifth (1995) of these concerts while music from Dragon Quest was featured across each of the concerts.[83] But it is what came next that really set the stage for Final Fantasy and Uematsu to emerge as the de facto face of video game concerts.

Following the *Orchestral Game Music Concerts*, a special, *Final Fantasy*-centric concert was produced in the early aughts. Titled *20020220: Music from Final Fantasy*, the concert took place on February 20, 2002 (following the Japanese date system of year, month, day—2002, 02, 20) and was performed by the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. Uematsu's music was the focus of this concert as well, including arrangements from the then-new *Final Fantasy X* for the PlayStation 2. A series of new concerts and concert series ensued, including the *Dear Friends: Music from Final Fantasy* concert in 2004, the first concert dedicated to Final Fantasy's music that was

[82] Hunt, "From Console to Concert Hall," 19.

[83] Indeed, these concerts offered a third variation on the video game concert format. While the *Family Classics Concert* paired video game arrangements with a traditional classical work and while the *Symphonic Suite Final Fantasy* was a program dedicated entirely to one franchise, the *Orchestral Game Music Concerts* featured a number of composers and arrangers representing various game companies and properties (including other big-name video game composers such as Yoko Kanno and Koji Kondo). As with the *Final Fantasy Symphonic Suite*, these concerts were also recorded and released on CD, further documenting these performances (as well as commodifying them as material artifacts). Many of these early recordings are quite rare and/or expensive. Fortunately, the online Video Game Music Database has chronicled an enormous amount of this material.

performed outside of Japan.[84] And yet, while Final Fantasy concerts continued to be staged both in Japan and around the world—a feature of the second phase, as I will discuss below—Sugiyama and Dragon Quest's music never quite caught on in the same way Uematsu and Final Fantasy's music did at the global scale. Again, this is likely because the Final Fantasy series was better known (or at least more commercially profitable) than the Dragon Quest series outside of Japan. For instance, while the music of Final Fantasy was featured—sometimes multiple times per program—on all but the third of the Symphonic Game Music Concerts (the first video game music concert series outside of Japan), Dragon Quest was only featured on the third program in this series.[85]

Both Sugiyama and Uematsu were important composers in setting the stage for video game music concerts to eventually become a worldwide phenomenon. If Sugiyama has a claim to "firstness" here in these initial Japanese concerts, using his established reputation to program video game music in the first place, then Uematsu's importance lies in both his very early foray into video game music concerts as well as how his music continued to be featured—oftentimes over Sugiyama's—when video game music concerts started to take place at the world stage. These two composers will both remain important in what follows at the global stage: Sugiyama in terms of his staging of the first concert to feature video game music, and Uematsu in terms of the enormous popularity of the Final Fantasy series and his scores.

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[84] Hunt notes that "From the first *Family Classic Concert* in 1987 to the final *Orchestral Game Music Concert* in 1996, the documented concerts of video game music were Japanese in origin, production, and performance. A likely reason for this is Japan's prominence in the video game industry at this time." "From Console to Concert Hall," 20. A related point that I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2 is the Japanese media theoretical *sekaikan*.

[85] I am enormously thankful to the series producer Thomas Böcker for sharing the programs to these concerts with me. Personal correspondence, April 2022.

Phase 2: 2003~2010

On August 20, 2003—the 16th anniversary of the first *Family Classic Concert*—the first video game music concert took place outside of Japan: the *Symphonic Game Music Concert*, performed by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra at the Game Convention in Leipzig.[86] The concert, produced by Thomas Böcker, was both a commercial and critical success, selling out and garnering favorable reviews from both critics and fans.[87] This concert not only marks the start of this second phase, but also encapsulates many of the defining features of this era: (1) concerts begin to take place across the world, not just in Japan; (2) concert producers often frame their concerts in terms of either some kind of authentic or official representation of the music; and/or (3) concerts lay claim to some kind of lineage, whether by connecting to other concerts, or by advertising themselves as the first to do some landmark act. With these latter points in particular, concert producers began the fight for video game music to be taken seriously.

The first Symphonic Game Music Concert met the previous points as follows: the concert took place in Germany as the first video game music concert outside of Japan; it demonstrated its "classical" legitimacy by being performed in the Gewnadhaus; it showed it was sanctioned by inviting the composers featured on its program (composers in attendance included Nobuo Uematsu, Christopher Lennertz, Olof Gustafsson, Richard Jacques, and Andrew Barnabas); and the concert connected itself to the existing history of video game music with both its premiere date (exactly 16 years after the first video game music concert, to the date), as well as with its name (referencing the Japanese *Orchestral Game Music Concert* series from the 1990s).

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[86] "History," *Game Concerts*, https://www.gameconcerts.com/en/background/history/.

[87] Böcker has written on the process of organizing this first concert. Thomas Boecker [Böcker], "The Making of the First Symphonic Game Music Concert in Europe," *Game Developer*, November 24, 2003, https://www.gamedeveloper.com/audio/the-making-of-the-first-symphonic-game-music-concert-in-europe.

This concert's director, Merregnon Studios' Thomas Böcker, is one of the key players in concerts of this time and beyond. Böcker has been involved in a number of video game music projects, both in a directorial and advisory role.[88] In particular, his site provides both a curated history of video game music concerts, as well as a "milestones" page that highlights the numerous *Firsts* of his game concerts: from the "First ever game music concert outside of Japan" to the "First live radio broadcast / first Internet audiostream of a game music concert" and even the "First European game music concert production in Japan."[89] Böcker's concerts are among the most traditionally classical in presentation.[90] The *Symphonic Game Music Concert* series as a whole featured numerous composers, as Böcker wanted to highlight not only European, but American and Japanese composers as well.[91] Other concerts in his series have more specific programs, however. Take what I call Böcker's "Symphonic Quartet":[92] *Symphonic Shades* (2008) featured the music of the German game composer Christopher Hülsbeck (best known for the *Turrican* series); *Symphonic Fantasies* (2009) and *Symphonic Legends* (2010) highlighted the music from Square Enix and Nintendo properties, respectively; and *Symphonic Odysseys* (2011) highlighted the music of Nobuo Uematsu, featuring not only his Final Fantasy compositions, but also pieces

[88] For example, Böcker was involved as a production consultant for the first two *Distant Worlds* albums, and as a director for the *Symphonic* series (*Shades*, *Fantasies*, *Legends*, *Odysseys*, *Memories*) and *Final Symphony*, perhaps the most "high" art-aspiring concert series. He has also collaborated with video game composers to create symphonic concertworks outside of their game score, for instance his recent collaboration with Yoko Shimomura to create *Merregnon: Land of Silence*, an "original symphonic fairy tale, created for School and Family Concerts" in-line with Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf and Britten's "The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra." See *Merregnon*, "Merregnon: Land of Silence," https://www.merregnon.com/en/ (accessed April 12, 2022).
[89] *Game Concerts*, "Milestones."
[90] As these are more classical in nature, the form of remediation that occurs here is *hypermediacy*, such that it is explicitly apparent that the music is remediated from the game into the concert hall. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*.
[91] Böcker, "The Making of the First Symphonic Game Music Concert in Europe."
[92] To be clear, this is my own designation, not something that Böcker call these concerts. Furthermore, it is somewhat of a misnomer, as Böcker would produce a fifth concert in a similar vein in 2018, the *Symphonic Memories* concert, which featured both new arrangements as well as well as pieces from the previous concerts. In 2019, *Symphonic Memories* had its Japanese premiere in Kawasaki, featuring additional new scores.

from *Blue Dragon* (2006), *Lost Odyssey* (2007), and even *King's Knight* (1986).[93] These programs were all produced in collaboration with the featured company and/or composer(s) and, per the Game Concerts "milestones" page, are attached to numerous Firsts.

In many ways, Böcker's approach to game music concerts can be juxtaposed against Tommy Tallarico's series, *Video Games Live*.[94] While Böcker's concerts—along with the majority of other concerts I discuss in this text—lean more towards the traditional end of the classical concerts spectrum, Tallarico's concerts are instead branded as an "immersive concert events," following a hybrid "rockestra" stylization that combines a traditional orchestra with electric guitars, synths, synchronized lighting, and the like.[95] Though a very different style of concert and presentation of video game music, *Video Games Live* stakes its claim as "the biggest, most successful and longest running game concert in the world" with its official induction into the *Guinness Book of World Records*.[96] While the company is listed as being incorporated in 2002 on the site (and thus coincidentally preceding the *Symphonic Game Music Concert*), the concert series did not debut until July 6, 2005 at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.[97] The concert also differs from Böcker's productions in that *Video Games Alive* treats the concerts as multimedia events, including not only the spectacle of synchronized lighting, but also including gameplay on a screen behind the performers.

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[93] Here it might be worth pointing out that Uematsu was thus featured in both *Symphonic Fantasies* with Jonne Valtonen's *Final Fantasy* fantasy ("Fantasy IV" on the program), as well as with this concert.
[94] On Video Games Live, Tommy Tallarico, and (re)written canons, see Gibbons, "Rewritable Memory." On Video Games Live and fandom, see Hunt, "From Console to Concert Hall."
[95] *Video Games Live*, Home Page, https://www.videogameslive.com/ (accessed June 22, 2022).
[96] *Video Games Live*, "About"; "Largest Audience for a Live Videogame Music Concert," *Guinness World Records*, https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/420959-largest-audience-for-a-live-videogame-music-concert; *Guinness World Records*, "Video Games Live Creator."
[97] More explicitly, I suspect the only reason its incorporation is listed is to lay implicit claim that *Video Games Live* "actually" came before Böcker's concert (even if just as an idea even though it did not *actually* premiere until after).

While the previous two examples highlighted multiple composers and games in their programs, concerts explicitly focusing on Final Fantasy continued to be performed during this time as well. Jason Michael Paul, for instance, helped produce both the aforementioned *Dear Friends* as well as the *More Friends: Music from Final Fantasy* concerts. Alongside Paul, Arnie Roth of AWR Music is a conductor and concert director often associated with the Final Fantasy concerts. He was involved with many of the original concerts that occurred in the aughts, serving as a conductor for the *Dear Friends*, *More Friends*, and *Voices* Final Fantasy concerts; *Symphonic Shades*, *Fantasies*, and *Odysseys* concerts; as well as *Play! A Video Game Symphony*. Due to his ties with Square Enix and these early Final Fantasy concerts, Roth came to produce one of the best-known concert series: the ongoing *Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy* series.[98]

The *Distant Worlds* concerts are full-on audiovisual productions.[99] In these concerts, scenes from the games are displayed onscreen behind the orchestra, visually accompanying the orchestra as it plays arrangements of pieces from the franchise. In terms of recorded albums, at the time of this chapter's writing there are currently five *Distant Worlds* albums available with music spanning from the original *Final Fantasy* (1987) to *Final Fantasy XV* (2016). There have also been what might best be understood as 'spin-off' versions of the *Distant Worlds* concert series, including the "Music from Final Fantasy: The Journey of 100" concert, a special program which took place on January 22, 2015 in Osaka, Japan to celebrate the 100th performance in the *Distant Worlds* concert series, as well as the *A New World: Intimate Music from Final Fantasy* series,

[98] Roth continues to work closely with Square Enix, having produced and conducted the *NieR Orchestra Concert re: 12018* (2020) and the *Final Fantasy VII Remake World Tour* (2021).

[99] Here, in contrast to Böcker's hypertraditional concerts, Roth's concerts (and any concert that uses a screen in a similar way) remediate the music by way of *transparent immediacy*, smoothing over the remediation by maintaining the screen and visual from the game. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*.

which premiered in 2014 and focuses on 'intimate' chamber music arrangements, rather than the full symphonic orchestration of its sibling concert series.[100]

Following the first phase of video game music concerts, the Square Enix-produced Final Fantasy concerts—converging into *Distant Worlds*—continued to highlight Uematsu and position him as a canonical figure in both the history of video game music as well as game music concerts.[101] Following the second phase, Roth highlights *Distant Worlds*' licensed and official status, for instance noting that its visual components are "HD video direct from the FINAL FANTASY game developers SQUARE ENIX" as well as listing Uematsu's bio on the website.[102] The Final Fantasy concerts also highlight Firsts, for instance noting that "Under Music Director Arnie Roth, the 2005 U.S. concert tour *Dear Friends: music from FINAL FANTASY* was the first concert production that featured the music of FINAL FANTASY outside Japan."[103] Following this, the Final Fantasy concerts also brand themselves as their own series, frequently reflecting back on themselves and Final Fantasy to celebrate anniversaries: the *More Friends* tour was supposed to celebrate the one year anniversary of the *Dear Friends* tour; the *Distant Worlds*

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[100] Eric Roth, Arnie Roth's son, is the music director, producer, conductor, and arranger for the *A New World* series. This series also differs from *Distant Worlds* in that no visual accompanies the chamber ensemble. Appendix B includes a joint interview between Eric Roth, Benyamin Nuss, and the author.

[101] Curiously, press on these concerts rarely mention concerts prior to *20020220* (and sometimes not even before the *Tour de Japon*). This may be because Square Enix was not founded until 2003, as a merger between the then-disparate companies Square (1986-2003) and Enix (1975-2003) and thus the previous concerts ostensibly existed outside of its formation. With that being said, Square was the producer of the Final Fantasy series, and Enix was the producer of the Dragon Quest series, so both of these IPs (and their related music/concerts) should have remained fair game for press citations.

[102] "Home Page," *FF Distant Worlds*, https://ffdistantworlds.com/ (accessed June 22, 2022); In an interview for the anime convention "Anime Central," Roth was more explicit in his assessment, stating "I think that there are two kinds [of video game music concerts] that I see in general. In terms of the big orchestra productions, I see the ones that are, as I said before, arrangers' fantasies on themes by various composers of video game music and then there are those that are *very strictly representing the composers' intents*, that there are separate songs, *separate compositions by the composers that are being more faithful to the way it was heard in the game*" (emphasis added). Roth, interview with Anime Central, May 17, 2020. It is also worth noting that while the Final Fantasy series has had other composers besides Uematsu (and whose works also appear on *Distant Worlds* program), it is only Uematsu's bio that is listed.

[103] "About," *FF Distant Worlds*, https://ffdistantworlds.com/about/.

concerts series was started to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Final Fantasy; and while "The Journey of 100" concert took place in 2015 (and is thus technically outside of this phase), it celebrated both the 100th concert in the series as well as the 10th anniversary of Square Enix Music. Indeed, these anniversary concerts will become more and more prevalent in general in the third phase and beyond.

While I have thus far highlighted three particular concert directors in this phase, other concerts and concert series took place during this time as well. In 2003 the Eminence Symphony Orchestra, an Australian group which focused on Japanese multimedia scores, debuted; in 2007 the orchestra performed its "A Night in Fantasia 2007: Symphonic Games Edition," the first concert from the symphony that focused exclusively on video game music, and which was attended by the likes of game composers Yoko Shimomura, Yasunori Mitsuda, Hitoshi Sakimoto, and others.[104] In 2006, both *Play! A Video Game Symphony* and *Press Start: Symphony of Games* premiered. *Play!* was a produced by both the aforementioned Jason Michael Paul and Böcker, and featured the music of a variety of game composers, including a fanfare written for the concert series by Nobuo Uematsu.[105] It was eventually replaced with *rePLAY: Symphony of Heroes* (also produced by Paul), which uses music from a variety of games in tandem with a narrator recounting the stages of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey.[106] *Press Start*, on the other hand, was a new

[104] "The Rise of the Eminence Symphony Orchestra," *Classic FM*, https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/periods-genres/video-game/concerts/a-night-in-fantasia-2007/ (accessed June 22, 2022).
[105] "About," *Play Symphony*, https://web.archive.org/web/20060822061456/https://www.play-symphony.com/; for a note on the fanfare, see D. Choi, "Nobuo Uematsu Behind PLAY! Opening Fanfare," *endgadget*, March 1, 2006, https://www.engadget.com/2006-02-28-nobuo-uematsu-behind-play-opening-fanfare.html. Both accessed June 22, 2022.
[106] There is little documentation of *rePLAY: Symphony of Heroes* on the internet, and it is not to be confused with the Game Music Foundation's 2017 *Symphony of Heroes* concert/symphony (also featured on the inaugural *Game Music Festival* in 2018), which features the music from the Heroes of Might and Magic series. According to producer Jason Michael Paul, *rePLAY* is variously called *Heroes: A Video Game Symphony*, *rePLAY: A Video Game Symphony of Heroes*, or the *Replay Symphony*. Personal correspondence, April 2022.

Japanese production headed by Nobuo Uematsu, Shogo Sakai, Taizo Takemoto, Masahiro Sakurai, and Kazushige Nojima.[107] The series, which ran from 2006-2010, primarily featured music from Japanese games, though included a mix of both popular games as well as lesser-known or older games.[108]

Outside of specific concert series, directors, and/or conductors I also want to draw attention to one organization in particular. The WDR Funkhausorchester (Radio Orchestra) is one of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln's (WDR; West German Broadcasting Cologne) two orchestras. While the WDR Sinfonieorchester (Symphony Orchestra) generally performs more traditional concert programs, the WDR Radio Orchestra instead functions as something akin to a Pops Orchestra, generally performing various popular musics. As the WDR states on their site, the orchestra "presents great entertainment of the highest musical quality - from operetta to film music, from popular classics to Dubstep. With well-known melodies, fascinating artists and innovative projects, it entertains a large audience from young to old."[109] As an institution, the WDR Radio Orchestra has been one of the most important orchestras in legitimizing video game music's presence in the concert hall outside of Japan, starting with their performance of Böcker's *Symphonic Shades*. After the WDR Radio Orchestra's initial collaboration with Böcker, the orchestra continued to perform video game music, in large part thanks to Winfried Fechner, the then-manager of the WDR Orchestra, and his interest in the genre.[110] Due to the high demand for

[107] "What is Press Start?" [PRESS START とは?], *Press Start*, https://web.archive.org/web/20081217152238/http://fami-web.jp/pressstart/about.html (accessed June 22, 2022).
[108] It is also worth noting that neither Sugiyama nor Dragon Quest were involved or featured in these concerts, whereas Uematsu was a member of the committee and Final Fantasy was represented on each of these programs.
[109] "About Us: WDR Funkhaus Orchestra," *WDR*, https://www1.wdr.de/orchester-und-chor/startseite/wir-ueber-uns/weaboutus-100.html (accessed June 22, 2022).
[110] An extended interview with Fechner and his oral history is available as Winfried Fechner, "Winfried Fechner Interview: Game Music Concerts at the WDR Radio Orchestra," interview by Chris Greening, *VGMOnline*, last modified March 7, 2014, http://www.vgmonline.net/winfriedfechnerinterview/.

the initial *Symphonic Shades* concert (with both its initial concert as well as the latter added evening performance selling out), Fechner saw an opportunity to expand the generic repertoire of the orchestra. In particular, he attributes the success of the concert to three reasons: 1) "it was the first time that the WDR Radio Orchestra worked on such a big concert with video game music — something that was a new genre for most of the orchestra members. They played with so much passion"; 2) "there was an audience… that was listening with such a dedication and responding to the music with so much energy that the musicians felt very encouraged"; and 3) "the exceptionally beautiful and musically high-class arrangements by Jonne Valtonen." Aside from premiering all of Böcker's Symphonic Quartet, other notable video game music concerts from the orchestra include the *Final Fantasy X* "Dreams of Zanarkand" concert (which premiered on October 8, 2016 and was produced in collaboration with the pianist Benyamin Nuss) and their recent "Gaming Sounds" concert (which took place on January 21, 2022).[111] That the symphony continues to perform these concerts dedicated to both specific games (like *Final Fantasy X*) and "best-of" programs highlighting multiple composers/games, demonstrates the orchestra's commitment to legitimizing video game music in the concert hall.[112]

While not all concert series that took place during this time continued into the new decade, the concerts that took place during this time showed that video game music could productively (and profitably) be staged in the concert hall. Part of this process was based in branding these concerts in particular ways, highlighting how they were especially classical, official, or even the

[111] As mentioned in a previous footnote, an interview between Nuss, Eric Roth, and the author can be found in Appendix B. Nuss is also an important figure in this broader history, having professionally recorded multiple albums (exclusively) featuring video game music, and frequently performing as a piano soloist for various video game music concerts.

[112] Though it does also raise the question if this music will ever be performed by the WDR *Symphony* Orchestra.

first of their kind. In charting these Firsts, highlighting the official-ness of these concerts, and in commemorating important events and celebrating anniversaries, these global concert productions legitimized this music's presence in the concert hall at a global level.

Phase 3: ~2010—(2020)

From approximately 2010 onwards, there is no one defining feature to video game music concerts besides perhaps that they become increasingly common—this is the reason I give an imprecise date rather than a definite one. And yet, a few notable events happen around this time. In 2009, *Video Games Live* was the first non-Japanese video game concert production to perform a concert in Japan. A year later, the *Distant Worlds* series held a special "Returning Home" concert to commemorate the first time the *Distant Worlds* program was performed in Japan. And in 2012, Merregnon Studios' wildly successful *Symphonic Fantasies* program premiered in Tokyo as the first video game music concert to take place in Japan produced by a European company.[113] While video game music concerts have been ongoing in Japan since the aughts, these "returning home" to Japan concerts mark one notable type of concert during this time.

Another feature of concerts during this time is the rise of symphonic concerts taking place outside the traditional concert spaces.[114] I have already given one example of this with the music performed during the Tokyo Olympics' Parade of Nations. One relatively common set of stages these concerts are featured on is that of game festivals, award shows, and conventions.[115] As

[113] These "return to Japan" concerts constitute part of Gonzalez's sixth loop.
[114] A related point is concerts that take place *in* video games, what I call Live Virtual Concerts. See Chapter 4.
[115] A reminder that I am here focusing on licensed symphonic/classical performances. MAGFest, as one example, has been in production since 2002, but focuses on a wide range of video game and video game-adjacent musical genres (not only classical) and acts (both fan-produced and officially recognized).

mentioned previously, as early as 2003, Thomas Böcker's *Symphonic Game Music Concerts* took place in association with the Leipzig Games Convention (though the concert itself was held in the Gewanhaus concert hall). But across the 2010s performances of this type became more and more frequent. For instance, the Video Game Orchestra has performed at MAGFest (the Music and Game Festival) in 2013, as well as at PAX East—a gaming culture festival—since 2010. In 2011, Nintendo started its E3—the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the premiere video game trade expo—press conference with an orchestral performance under Eímear Noone to celebrate the Legend of Zelda's 25th anniversary;[116] in 2019, the *Assassin's Creed Symphony* premiered at E3. And in 2017, The Game Awards debuted The Game Awards Orchestra, a live orchestra which has since annually performed a medley highlighting the music from the games nominated for the prestigious Game of the Year award.[117]

During this time, more and more games and game series received concerts dedicated specifically to that sole intellectual property, partly as a way of celebrating these games and series' anniversaries and partly, I would argue, because of the success with which previous concerts had been met. While this continued to include Square Enix properties—more Final Fantasy, yes, but also Kingdom Hearts, Chrono Cross/Trigger, and NieR, among others—this also included the concert series produced by Nintendo (*Pokémon Symphonic Evolutions* and, especially, *Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddess*) and even indie games (*Gris Game Live*, *Dear Esther Live*, *UNDERTALE 5th Anniversary Concert*). In-line with these concerts for specific series and games,

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[116] The press conference can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1JJPkd4Q28 (accessed June 22, 2022). Noone, who is also a video game composer, has since conducted a number of game music concerts and soundtracks. Her conducting credits include *Video Games Live*, the *Gaming in Symphony* concert, and *The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses*.

[117] "Introducing the Game Awards Orchestra," *The Game Awards*, October 10, 2017, https://thegameawards.com/news/introducing-the-game-awards-orchestra.

more and more of these concerts are billed as anniversary concerts. These concerts range from celebrating decades-old series (*Distant Worlds: Coral* to celebrate Final Fantasy's 35th anniversary, the *Sonic 30th Anniversary Symphony*, and even the *Ace Attorney 20th Anniversary Orchestra Concert*) to younger games (*Genshin Impact*'s *Melodies of an Endless Journey* concert to celebrate its one-year anniversary, or *Another Eden*'s *5th Anniversary: Special Mini Concert* performed by Hoshino Otoshimono).[118] As I will show in Chapter 3, these concerts and their arrangements offer one distinct way of commemorating and memorializing these games and game series.

Here I would like to highlight one concert series that started during this time. In 2017, Jan Sanejko and Arturo Matsumoto's *Symphony of Heroes* premiered, a symphony comprised of three suites based on Paul Anthony Romero's scores for the Heroes of Might and Magic series.[119] The concert was produced by the Game Music Foundation, an organization based in Poland dedicated to video game music and which had helped with previous concerts such as *Distant Worlds*, *Video Games Live*, and *Critical Hit*.[120] The following year, the foundation produced the first annual *Game Music Festival*, (re)programming the *Symphony of Heroes* along with *The Symphony of the Storm*, *The Symphony of the Forest* and *The Jazz of Grim Fandango*. As Table 1.2 shows, apart from 2021 due to the global pandemic, the *Game Music Festival* has been an annual event, highlighting the music from a variety of games ranging from AAA and recent titles to indie and

[118] The *Coral* concert series—titled as such as coral is the material traditionally used in 35th wedding anniversary gifts—is advertised as: "Specially curated by Nobuo Uematsu, the program is a monumental, retrospective celebration of the incredible FINAL FANTASY music catalogue." "35th Anniversary," *FF Distant Worlds*, https://ffdistantworlds.com/35th-anniversary/ (accessed June 22, 2022).
[119] "About the Concert," *Symphony of the Heroes*, http://symphonyofheroes.com/about-the-concert/.
[120] The foundation also runs Gamemusic [sic] Records, which was established in 2016 to release official vinyl recordings of video game music.

retro games.[121] The festivals also include and educational element, where the invited composers and game industry professionals give lectures and participate in workshops and discussions (and hold meet-and-greets).

Year	Program	Arranger(s)	Source Game(s) or Series
2018	The Symphony of the Storm	Arturo Matsumoto, Jan Sanjeko	Blizzard Games: *StarCraft*, *Diablo*, *World of Warcraft*
	The Symphony of the Forest	Robert Kurdybacha, Jan Sanjeko	*Ori and the Blind Forest*
	The Symphony of Heroes	Jan Sanejko, Arturo Matsumoto	*Heroes of Might and Magic*
	The Jazz of Grim Fandango	Bartosz Pernal	*Grim Fandango*
2019	The Symphony of the Desert	Brian LaGuardia, Austin Wintory	*Journey*, *The Banner Saga*, *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, *Erica*, *flOw*, *Deformers*, *Abzu*, *Tooth and Tail*, *Monaco*
	The Symphony of the Colossus	Arturo Matsumoto, Robert Kurdybacha	*ICO*, *The Last Guardian*, *Shadow of the Colossus*
	The Symphony of the Shadows	Michał Szarowicz, Ignacy Wojciechowski	*Hitman*, *Assassin's Creed II*

Table 1.2. Programs from the annual *Game Music Festivals*.

[121] I am extremely grateful to Krzysztof Bińczak of the Game Music Foundation for sharing the programs for these concerts with me. When I asked him how the foundation selected the scores from the games, he stated that "Many months before every GMF, our team (i.e., the members of Game Music Foundation's council) convenes to discuss the potential line-up of the next event. Each member proposes several titles, based on their personal preferences, artistic taste, and gaming experience. Basically, we already have a backlog of soundtracks that we would like to see played live. While the 'commercial potential' of a game is considered, it has never been a decisive factor. That is why we always aspire to have something surprising in the repertoire, like the jazz pieces in 2018 and 2022. We try to balance having a solid headliner with less obvious choices which we want to present to the fans for artistic reasons. This includes soundtracks that would not get much recognition (in terms of being played on stage nowadays) otherwise. Furthermore, the availability of the related composers is important – we invite them as special guests to be on-site and even participate in a performance." Bińczak, personal correspondence with the author, April 2022.

2020	The Symphony of Four Worlds	Robert Kurdybacha	Supergiant Games: *Bastion*, *Pyre*, *Hades*, *Transistor*
	The Symphony of Sin	Borislav Slavov, Ignacy Wojciechowski, Georgi Andreev	Larian Studios: *Divinity: Original Sin II*, *Baldur's Gate III*
2022	The Jazz of Cuphead	Bartosz Pernal	*Cuphead*
	The Symphony of the Spirits	Robert Kurdybacha	*Ori and the Blind Forest*, *Ori and the Will of the Wisps*

Table 1.2, cont.

With the advent of concert programs like the *Game Music Festival* and Böcker's *Final Symphony* (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3), it is during this time that classical orchestras—or classical *institutions*—outside of Japan start to take video game music more seriously. While this is still an ongoing process—that is, video game music concerts are for the most part still relegated to Pops orchestras/are not performed alongside canonical classical works—that the London Symphony Orchestra has now recorded both the *Final Symphony* program and Austin Wintory's *Traveler: A Journey Symphony*, that Benyamin Nuss recorded an album of arrangements of Uematsu's video game scores for Deutsche Grammophon, and that the BBC Proms has scheduled a program of all-video game music ("From 8-Bit to Infinity") in late 2022, leads me to argue that video game music—and video game music concerts—are becoming seen as legitimate: whether at a cultural, artistic, or commercial level (or somewhere in-between these three points).[122]

[122] Will Nelson, "BBC's First Gaming Prom will Include Music from 'Kingdom Hearts' and More," *NME*, April 26, 2022, https://www.nme.com/news/gaming-news/bbcs-first-gaming-prom-will-include-music-from-kingdom-hearts-and-more-3212604. We might also consider Classic FM's inclusion of composers such as Uematsu, Shimomura, and Grant Kirkhope in their annual "Hall of Fame," as mentioned in the Introduction.

A New Phase? 2020ff. and the COVID-19 Pandemic

In early 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic afflicted the world, and many nations went into lockdown to try and reduce exposure to the virus. Due to this, concerts and events the world over were cancelled or postponed. Game music concerts went on a hiatus—to a degree. While most in-person concerts were cancelled from March onwards, orchestras found creative ways of continuing to perform concerts, mostly by way of streaming, whether through prerecorded concerts or live performances.[123] This included rebroadcasting previously recorded concerts (such as the *Undertale LIVE* rebroadcast), as well as carefully coordinated live performances which were also streamed (such as the third *Game Music Festival*).

Though restrictions on concerts and such have waned since a vaccine for the virus was created, many orchestras and concert producers have continued to stream and/or upload their concerts online, oftentimes on YouTube. This includes a number of European orchestras, such as the DR Symfoniorkestret (Danish National Symphony Orchestra), the RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann; radio and television of Ireland) National Symphony Orchestra, and the aforementioned WDR Radio Orchestra, which have each uploaded full concerts to their respective YouTube channels. While game concerts have been streamed in the past—recall Böcker's list of Firsts—they are becoming more and more common in this new "post"-pandemic zeitgeist. This holds true for many anniversary concerts as well, many of which are now being uploaded to YouTube for fans to view. Whether or not this will continue in the future, or if this is simply a welcome—but temporary—symptom of the pandemic, remains to be seen.

[123] I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 4, there providing a typology of these types of "live" concerts.

In this chapter I have provided a survey of video game music concerts from their inception in 1987 to the present day. I have charted three phases across this time—defined by the concerts' locations, producers, branding, and agendas—and have suggested we are potentially in the midst of an emergent fourth phase due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the next chapter I will turn my attention to the arrangements featured on these concerts. In particular, I will examine the classical output of Square Enix.

Chapter 2

Those who "*write down* their listenings…"

In a blog post on *The Avid Listener* blog, William Gibbons details his experience as the emcee (officially, "Dungeonmaster") of a video game music concert performed by The Dallas Winds in 2015.[124] He notes that in talking with concert attendees after the concert, many of them were thrilled they were able to hear the music as it was "intended" to sound:

> Though the responses varied, one refrain caught my attention: many listeners were excited to have heard their favorite game music "how it was meant to be heard." They seemed to mean that they preferred the music performed by a large, live ensemble instead of the original, electronic version—they felt, in other words, that the orchestral rendition was somehow more "authentic."[125]

Across the rest of the blog, Gibbons problematizes what it means for video game music to be considered "real" and the paradox at play in video game soundtracks from especially the 1980s and 1990s (the era most often associated with musical "beeps and boops") not being the "real" or "authentic" versions of their own music.

To be sure, some video game music written during this time often *does* overtly index "real" (acoustic might be more accurate) instruments, classical or otherwise (Gibbons gives the example of the well-known in-game opera scene in *Final Fantasy VI* and its synthesized aria).[126] Other scores, however, revel in their electronic and synthesized textures and timbres. But in this chapter, I want to pick up on a slightly different thread Gibbons does not address in his post: namely, the

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[124] Gibbons, "How It's Meant to be Heard."
[125] Ibid.
[126] On this opera see also Cheng, *Sound Play*, Ch. 2 (57-91); Ryan Thompson, "Operatic Conventions and Expectations in *Final Fantasy VI*," in *Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes and Harmonies*, eds. William Gibbons and Steven Reale (New York: Routledge, 2019), 117-28; and Tim Summers, "Opera Scenes in Video Games: Hitmen, Divas and Wagner's Werewolves," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29, no. 3 (2018): 267-74.

role of the arranger in the concertized realizations of these works. Indeed, no one has yet studied provided an overview of video game music arrangements for the concert hall in any substantial manner.[127] While certain arrangements have been mentioned in passing, no study has yet systematically examined *how* these pieces are arranged, *who* is arranging these pieces (especially regarding official arrangements), and *why* they are arranged.[128] To accomplish this, in this chapter I examine a corpus of official and/or professional arrangements of Square Enix's video game scores.[129] I focus specifically on Square Enix because of their obvious investment in their games' soundtracks: not only were Square and Enix game soundtracks among the first to be performed in concert (as discussed in the previous chapter), but Square (Enix) has consistently produced arrangement albums and concerts of their music since the 1990s.[130] I argue that Square Enix's musical success is due in large part to the wide array of arrangements, concerts, and albums it produces, in a wide variety of styles. The arrangement of its music for the concert hall has helped legitimize and ontologically realize its musics (that is, bringing them into the real world from the virtual), ranging from straightforward transcriptions within the classical register to monumental "high" art-aspiring and transformative works. That these arrangements are then generally made

[127] The closest consideration has been Matthew Thompson's examination of video game music piano arrangements, though his consideration is specifically pedagogical in nature. See Thompson, "'There's No Doubt You'll be Popular After Performing These in Front of Your Friends!': The Pedagogy and Performance of Piano Transcriptions of Video Game Music," paper given at the *North American Conference on Video Game Music*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, January 13-14, 2018.

[128] Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, fan "covers" (as they are frequently called on sites like YouTube and Twitter) have garnered more attention than official arrangements and their arrangers in scholarship (see, for instance, the beginning of the literature review in this dissertation's Introduction). While fan covers and fandom are certainly worthy of study—critically, aesthetically, and socioculturally—this does not mean official arrangements and arrangers should be left out of scholarship.

[129] Appendix C contains a list of the albums consulted for this chapter.

[130] This started with Square's *Final Fantasy IV Celtic Moon* album (1991; arr. Máire Bhreatnach) and the jointly packaged *Piano Collections Final Fantasy IV* sheet music and CD recording (1992; arr. Shiro Sato). On the Enix side of things, while Sugiyama continued to arrange his Dragon Quest music during this time, it does not appear that Enix was heavily involved with its production.

accessible to the public by way of concert tours, piano scores, and especially recorded albums, helps further extend the life of the music and the world(s) of the franchise.[131] While this production and branding is done on Square Enix's part, and while fans (also) enjoy this music in the context of its source game, it is largely on the part of the arrangers and their creative agency that the music is enjoyed *outside* of the game. This is especially true considering how few of Square Enix's composers arrange their own music in these productions—oftentimes the arrangement is left up to professional arrangers associated with various music studios (e.g., Shangri-la Studio, Procyon Studio, Monomusik, AWR Music, etc.).

I break this chapter into four parts based on the three questions asked at this chapter's outset. The first part considers *how* these pieces are arranged, comparing video game arrangements to similar studies of film score adaptations for the concert hall and offering a revised multidimensional model for categorizing these arrangements. The second part considers *who* is writing these arrangements, highlighting the networks of relationship between composers and arrangers. The third section continues to focus on the *who* (and also the *what*), comparing three different transcriptions of "Dancing Mad" by three different arrangers and drawing attention to the creative agency these arrangers express in their adaptations. I conclude the chapter with a final section that asks *why* these arrangements are produced in the first place, offering both a critical and reparative reading of Square Enix's use of this music as material investment based in the Japanese concepts of the *sekaikan* and the media mix.

[131] See Christensen, "Piano Four-Hand Transcriptions"; Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music"; and Gibbons, "Rewritable Memory." While many of Square Enix's arrangements remain accessible in some fashion, this statement does require some qualification. For instance, the *Final Symphony II* (2015) program is famously unavailable as a recording (or in score form).

How?

As a starting point for considering video game music arrangements for the concert hall, some important precursors can be found in the literature examining the concertization of film music. Robbert van der Lek and Mick Swithinbank offered the first typology of film music adaptations, a simple bipartite typology that considered whether a composer (in their case, Erich Wolfgang Korngold) fully *adapted* a film cue as a standalone work, or whether the composer only *incorporated* them into a larger work symphonic work (e.g., through a brief quotation) that disguised its filmic origins.[132] Emilio Audissino would later create a list of the "the most common tradition-inspired formats used for film music," based on his archival work in the Boston Symphony Archives and the BBC Proms archive.[133] Table 2.1 provides an overview of these forms and formats. Audissino further notes the *multimedia* element included in some of these concerts, wherein there is a visual element, such as a screen, included in the performance of the piece(s). Audissino here considers whether a sole piece or the full concert is accompanied by such a screen, and/or whether the visual is taken directly from a film, or if it is a kind of assembled montage.

More recently, Frank Lehman created a "working taxonomy" (adapted in Table 2.2) of extra-filmic film music (or film-as-concert music) that "aim[s] for systematicity and comprehensiveness."[134] Lehman's typology appears as a branching path model with categories splitting off depending on which path they better fit. For instance, the first fork in the road considers non-programmatic vs

[132] "[T]wo views – focusing on "set pieces" and "themes" respectively - represent the two main categories which can be distinguished within the film material incorporated into non-film works; conversely therefore, they can be taken as a basis for a division of the works themselves into two categories. Some may be regarded as "adapting" and others as "incorporating" existing material (to be referred to as "arrangements" and "incorporating works" respectively.)" Van der Lek and Swithinbank, "Concert Music," 80.
[133] Audissino, "Overruling a Romantic Prejudice," 35.
[134] Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music," 8; in an endnote, Lehman also notes that the typology *excludes* works incorporating music initially planned for a film, works inspired by film in general, and works that encompass multiple films. Ibid., 39n3.

programmatic music, wherein non-programmatic music hides—or does not acknowledge—its filmic source and programmatic music is explicit in it. Lehman gives Korngold's Violin Concerto as one example of the former (which quotes from his scores of *The Prince & The Pauper*, among others) and an extended analysis of John Williams' "The Asteroid Field" from *Star Wars* as an example of the latter.

(a)

Category	Definition
Main Title From/End Credits From	Music used from either a Main Title or a combination of the Main Title *and* End Credits
Finale/End Credits	Music used from either the End Credits or a combination of the Finale (scene) *and* End Credits
Excerpts/Selections From	Multiple pieces combined together *from a single film*
Suite	A multimovement piece taking multiple cues/pieces from one film
Medley	Multiple pieces combined together *from multiple films*
Concert Piece for Soloist and Orchestra	A piece adapted from film music that highlights a solo instrument
Concert Piece for Narrator and Orchestra	A piece adapted from film music that includes a spoken word narrator

(b)

Category	Definition
Multimedia Concert Piece	A singular piece that uses assembled footage from a film
Multimedia Film Piece	A singular piece that accompanies a scene directly taken from a film
Multimedia Concert	A full concert that makes use of a multimedia screen
Multimedia Film	A concert performance of a film, i.e., cine-concert

Table 2.1. (a) Audissino's "tradition-inspired formats used for film music." (b) Audissino's "multimedia forms" used for film music. (Both adapted from Audissino, "Overruling a Romantic Prejudice.")

Category	Definition
Non-programmatic piece (partial incorporation)	When film music is partially incorporated into otherwise non-film music
Non-programmatic piece (extensive incorporation)	When film music is substantially borrowed from and incorporated into non-film music
Diegetic Piece (showcase)	Music from a film that is diegetic to the filmworld and *is* highlighted in performance or relevance to plot
Diegetic Piece (background)	Music from a film that is diegetic to the filmworld, but not prominently featured in the film
Non-diegetic cue/set piece (adapted)	Film underscore that is substantially altered for the concert hall
Non-diegetic cue/set piece (unadapted)	Film underscore that is mostly unaltered
Non-diegetic suite/medley (abstract)	Multiple cues/themes combined together that do not represent the film's narrative
Non-diegetic suite/medley (narratival)	Multiple cues/themes combined together that *do* try to represent the film's narrative
Extra-diegetic Piece (thematic)	Themes or motifs expanded into an autonomous character piece
Extra-diegetic Piece (framing)	Paratextural pieces such as Main Titles or End Credits

Table 2.2. Lehman's Typology of extra-filmic film music. (Adapted from Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music").

There are a number of important differences between the adaptation of films scores for the concert hall and the arrangement of video game music for the concert hall. First and foremost, the formal composition of the two styles differs within their source multimedia: video game music is dynamically adaptive—changing based on the players' actions—and/or frequently looped; film music is fixed in form. The dynamic and adaptive nature of video game music thus *affords* arrangement, unfixed as it is.[135] Secondly, early "retro" video game music was entirely created using synthesized timbres and thus necessitates a translation into a concert medium for traditional

[135] Tim Summers has discussed this in terms of the "queerness" of video game music. See Summers, "Queer Aesthetics and Game Music, or, Has Video Game Music Always Been Queer?," paper given at the *North American Conference on Video Game Music* (held online), June 13– 14, 2020.

classical instruments. Though there are plenty of film scores written using electronic means (e.g., *Forbidden Planet* (1956)), film scores from their inception adhered to a concert hall tradition. Finally, as mentioned above, film music composers seem much more likely to self-arrange than video game music composers.[136]

While each of these typologies have their pros, none quite work as-is for the corpus I examined. While generally an important categorization, Van der Lek and Swithinbank's typology does not apply for the pieces I consider—each of the pieces wears its video game source on its sleeve. Audissino's categories seem to be based more on *naming conventions* than formal or compositional practice. For instance, Audissino differentiates between "Excerpts/Selections From" and "Medleys," wherein the former is based specifically around a sole film, while the latter is based around different films. Based on the standard definition of the medley, however, the former could be subsumed into the latter. Furthermore, while this naming convention may hold true for film music arrangements, this is rarely the case for video game arrangements. Another puzzling example is Audissino's labelling of the *Lord of the Rings* Symphony as a suite—while it does fit the categorical description of a "set of autonomous and self-contained pieces," the naming here suggests more is at stake in dubbing this epic, multimovement work a symphony rather than just a suite. Finally, while Lehman's typology is thorough and offers some important distinctions that carry over into my corpus (for instance, abstract vs. narrative combinations of pieces), there are many places where a piece might fall into multiple categories (as is also the case with Audissino's typology), which his forked paths model does not easily account for. Lehman's interest in differentiating the arrangement of diegetic, non-diegetic, and extra-diegetic also forces

[136] A notable exception within the analyzed corpus is Masashi Hamauzu. This may be in part because of Hamauzu's classical compositional practice outside of video game music.

some unusual choices to be made depending on how a piece is categorized, and this diegetic categorization does not seem overly important to video game arrangers when adapting these pieces.[137]

To be clear, nowhere do the aforementioned authors state these categories are strict and must be adhered to without nuance when conducting analyses. With the exception of van der Lek and Swithinbank, these typologies were not the sole focus of these essays. Rather, they are typologies used to help illustrate the authors' respective points. Audissino focuses on the Romantic prejudice film music most overcomes; Lehman is interested in the modes of listening film-as-concert music can afford. Drawing from and adding to these existing typologies, in what follows I offer a multidimensional model that allows for more nuance in categorizing video game arrangements. This method will also sidestep the sometime gray area of how these arrangements are named. For instance, while suites are traditionally sets of multiple standalone pieces and medleys are understood as a singular through composed piece of music, there are examples of through composed pieces being named suites, such as Shiro Hamaguchi's *Final Fantasy VII Battle Suite*.[138] The parameters to consider are as follows: Instrumentation, Number of Pieces Adapted, Number of Games/Series Adapted, Through Composed or Multimovement, Level of Adaptation, Level of Narrative Adaptation, and Level of Classicalization.[139]

[137] This occurs because Lehman's typology conflates *where* a piece is adapted from (e.g., his diegesis assignments) and *how* it is arranged (e.g., as a standalone piece, a medley, as part of a "non-programmatic piece," etc.). Both are important considerations, but they are two different points of inspection bound within a single chart.
[138] To return to the point of Audissino's categorization of the *Lord of the Rings Symphony* as a suite, here we can simply call it a multimovement arrangement.
[139] There is some overlap with Lehman's four "analytic priorities" here. Lehman's priorities include: relationship with original, closure, narrative, and hermeneutics. Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music," 13-20.

Instrumentation

What the piece is written for. In terms of classical arrangements, solo piano and full orchestra are by and large the most popular ensembles to write for, but other examples include piano duo (e.g., Yui Morishita's arrangement of "The Girl Who Stole the Stars"), string quartet (e.g., Eric Roth's "Fight with Seymour"), wind ensemble (e.g., the entire *Kingdom Hearts: First Breath* album/concert series), orchestra and chorus (e.g., Keigo Hoashi's "A Beautiful Song"), solo instrument and ensemble (e.g., Kaoru Wada's March Caprice for Piano and Orchestra), and other nonstandard (or less common) chamber ensembles (e.g., the new arrangements on the *NieR Replicant: 10+1 Years* album).[140]

Number of Pieces Adapted

The number of pieces adapted in the arrangement. Though it's not uncommon for multiple pieces to be stitched or grouped together, by and large, singular standalone pieces remain the most common form of arrangement in video game arrangements. These range from character themes and cues (e.g., "Musique pour la Tristesse de Xion" and "Those Who Fight"), to title sequences and theme songs (e.g., "Scars of Time" and "Weight of the World"). Even here, however, there are some fuzzy boundaries. Does a brief quotation count as adapting a piece, especially if it is not named? Furthermore, while there are often prototypical versions of themes, some games—such as those from the NieR series—include multiple versions of a theme depending on the situation.[141] If an arrangement uses these multiple versions, is it adapting one theme? Or multiple? Similarly, if a

[140] These nonstandard arrangements are for saxophone quartet, double reed quartet, recorder quartet, and mandolin quartet. I will discuss these arrangements further in the conclusion of this chapter.
[141] I discuss two examples of this in this dissertation's Conclusion.

set-piece within a game itself already adapts multiple themes or pieces, does this count as one singular piece adapted (based on name) or multiple pieces (based on function). The in-game "Ending Theme" of *Final Fantasy X*, for instance, is itself already a medley of "Zanarkand," "Hymn of the Fayth," and a newly composed theme often called "Never Forget Them." Is Masashi Hamauzu's "Ending Theme" arrangement for the *Symphonic Odysseys* program considered an adaptation of a singular piece or multiple pieces, then?

Number of Games/Series Adapted

If an arrangement adapts multiple pieces, the number of games adapted (if more than one) and/or the number of series adapted. Some arrangements that adapt multiple pieces will adapt them all from within one series, but across multiple games within that series (e.g., the four fantasies from the *Symphonic Fantasies* program). Others will adapt pieces from across both multiple series and (inherently) multiple games as well (e.g., Jonne Valtonen's encore "Final Boss Suite" from the same program).[142] There are also some pieces—often specific themes—that are used across a series and are better understood as series or franchise themes rather than as iterative of multiple games within the series (the example *par excellence* here is the Final Fantasy "Prelude," also sometimes known as the "Crystal Theme"). Contra the last point, however, there are also series themes that have distinct arrangements of the theme for each new game within the series (e.g., Kingdom Hearts' "Dearly Beloved").

[142] This is actually an extremely rare example—the only one I came across in this particular corpus. This may be a branding decision on Square Enix's part, however, in that they choose to focus the attention on each specific series rather than representing multiple series in one piece. As another example outside of Square Enix, the Game Music Festival's *The Symphony of the Desert* (arr. Brian LaGuardia and Austin Wintory) took Wintory's scores from different games and combined them together into a multimovement symphony (each movement of which included multiple games). The branding here, however, is Wintory-*qua*-composer.

Through Composed or Multimovement

If an arrangement adapts multiple pieces, whether or not the arrangement is through composed (written without breaks across a single piece) or if it is comprised of multiple, disparate movements. Though relatively straightforward, it is not uncommon for a technically through composed piece to have a grand pause written in in-between pieces being arranged (e.g., Tomomichi Takeoka's arrangement "The Darkness of Time / Life -A Distant Promise- / Reminisce - Enduring Thoughts -" in between the final two pieces).

Level of Adaptation

To what degree an arrangement has been adapted (in this case for the concert hall).[143] This can range from essentially 1:1 transcriptions that change only a piece's instrumentation (e.g., Mariam Abounnasr's arrangement of "Scars of Time") to free arrangements that liberally alter, embellish, and even add newly composed music to the original (e.g., Benyamin Nuss's Improvisation over "Dust to Dust").[144] The level of adaptation one perceives in-game music can be especially subjective for a number of reasons, including the use of loops in game music, the adaptive and unfixed nature of many game scores, and the synthesized timbres of some games. Even if a piece is a 1:1 transcription of the pitches, rhythms, and harmonies from a retro, synthesized chiptune soundtrack whose timbres approximate orchestral instruments, for instance, what level one considers it adapted to is dependent on how essentially determinative those timbres are to the piece in that listener's hearing of the work.

[143] Here we might also reference Peter Burkholder's typology of musical borrowing. See Burkholder, "The Uses of Existing Music," Appendix A (pp. 867-69).
[144] Nuss discusses this improvisation in an interview with the author in Appendix B.

Level of Narrative Adaptation

To what degree an arrangement tells the narrative of its source game(s)/series.[145] This can range from a piece that makes no effort to communicate a narrative and simply uses the pre-existing material as a basis for a new composition (e.g., Katsuhisa Hattori and Takayuki Hattori's "Symphonic Suite Final Fantasy"), to more abstract connections (e.g., a "field theme" medley, such as Kaoru Wada's "The World of Kingdom Hearts"), to more concrete relations between pieces (e.g., specifically "boss battle" music, such as Sachiko Miyano's "Let Darkness Assemble: Final Boss Battle Medley"), to generally narrative (e.g., a medley of pieces related to a specific character, such as Mariam Abounnasr's Kid medley, "The Girl Who Stole the Stars / Dreams of the Ages"), to overtly narrative (e.g., stitching pieces together in order of when they were used in the narrative to "retell" the game's narrative, such as Masashi Hamauzu's *Final Fantasy X* Piano Concerto).

Level of Classicalization

To what degree an arrangement has been "classicalized" or placed within the classical register.[146] In many ways this is the most nebulous category and is the most subjective. This classicalization can range from generic classification (e.g., naming a piece a symphony, concerto, symphonic poem, etc.), to the style or formal design of the piece (regardless of title), to its instrumentation and beyond. The naming of a piece using classical genres and forms can also be viewed on a scale

[145] Lehman further acknowledges that an arrangement can include a narrative element even outside of its filmic source. Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music," 17-19.
[146] This generic category can be adapted as needed for the analyst's purposes.

based on cultural prestige.[147] Pieces entitled suite or overture, for instance, hold less prestige than those named as a sonata or symphony (e.g., Natsumi Kameoka's Sonata on Themes of *Kingdom Hearts* or Jonne Valtonen's *Final Fantasy VII*: Symphony in Three Movements). Pieces may also make extensive use of counterpoint or be written in a specific classical form, even if they do not make this apparent by way of name. For instance, the *Chocobo Medley 2014* (arr. Eric and Arnie Roth) is formally a theme and variations—even though it is not titled as such—based on the various versions of the Chocobo theme across the Final Fantasy series.[148] A different arrangement of the same piece is overtly labeled as such with Benyamin Nuss's performance of the jazzy *Chocobo Variations* (arr. Bill Dobbins) on his *Fantasy Worlds* album.[149] This parameter will be considered in greater detail in the next chapter.

These parameters range from the discrete to the dynamic. To what degree a piece is adapted, as discussed above, is dynamically subjective. And while I complicated the number of games/series adapted, more often than not, there *does* tend to be a discrete answer. Other parameters could also be included depending on the analyst's (or arranger's or listener's) motivations. Audissino's consideration of the multimedia elements is certainly pertinent for concert stagings of these

[147] The language used to title a piece can contribute to this as well. Yoko Shimomura frequently titles her pieces—even in their original video game scores—in European languages, which contributes to the cultural capital of these pieces (e.g., "Nachtflügel," "Musique pour la tristesse de Xion," "Valse di Fantastica," and "Somnus"). Shimomura will also sometimes name the *arrangements* of her works, such as her naming of "Serenade Fantastique for Piano: Noctis" (arr. Natsumi Kameoka). Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 1-2.

[148] The Chocobo theme has many different versions across the Final Fantasy series, including "Samba de Chocobo" (*Final Fantasy IV*), "Mambo de Chocobo" (*Final Fantasy V*), and "Cinco de Chocobo" (*Final Fantasy VII*). This medley/theme and variation arrangement, which Eric Roth conducts as part of the *A New World* concert series, is intended as a lighthearted piece, arranged for chamber ensemble, rubber duck, and slide whistle.

[149] This brief mention of jazz warrants further commentary. While the vast majority of pieces examined are "classical" in style in a general sense of the term, often albums or concerts will include an arrangement or two that are in a jazzier style (again, in a general sense of the term). As Benyamin Nuss himself is also a jazz pianist (his father, Ludwig Nuss, is a jazz trombonist), the adaptations he performs and arranges not infrequently oscillate between classical and jazz stylizations.

arrangements, though I forego this consideration here since with this corpus I am focusing on audio recordings. I similarly did not include the categorization of what van der Lek and Swithinbank call incorporating and adapting works (what Lehman differentiates as non-programmatic and programmatic music, respectively), nor Lehman's diegetic considerations, as they did not come into obvious play in my corpus. My larger point in moving away from a (likely unintended) essentializing categorization model to one that accounts for different parameters each on their own terms. So, rather than a necessary-and-sufficient or prototype-based model of parametrical categorization, we might instead consider a Wittgensteinian family resemblance model, wherein pieces can be compared more generally based on their similarities and differences, no matter how closely they resemble each other (or not).[150]

Who?

Arrangers and orchestrators occupy one of the most important—yet too often underappreciated—positions in the production of Square Enix's concerts and arrangements. As mentioned above, most of Square Enix composers do not self-arrange their own compositions. But it is through the arranger's creative agency that new life is breathed into existing works. These arrangers contribute to the afterlife of the original—much as Walter Benjamin notes is the task of the translator in literature.[151] But this creative labor is often overlooked or understated. Frequently it is the original composer who continues to gain credit for the music, even when an arrangement is strikingly

[150] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).
[151] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 1968 [1923]), 69-82.

transformative. Here, arrangers contribute to the canonization of composers, helping cement the legacies of the first-order creator through their labor.[152]

For the philosopher Peter Szendy, arrangers *share* their listenings with others. They write down *how* they hear a work, how they *understand* it, and *share* this collaborative hearing, between source composer and arranger, with those willing to listen. And when a listener is familiar with both first and second-order creations, the listener "hears double" as Szendy posits. Szendy highlights this collaborative process by theorizing the hyphen as a claim to partial authorship:

> I love them more than all the others, the arrangers. The ones who sign their names *inside* the work, and don't hesitate to set their name down next to the author's. Bluntly adding their surname by means of a *hyphen*: Beethoven-Liszt (for a piano version of the nine symphonies), Bach-Webern (for an orchestration of the *ricercar* in the *Musical Offering*), Brahms-Schoenberg, Schubert-Berio, who else—in short, a whole mass of double-barrel signatures.[153]

Szendy here focuses on canonical composers, but it should be stressed that all arrangements, all second-order creations (translations, remixes, audiovisual adaptations of books, etc.) go through this process in some fashion, regardless of whether or not—or to what degree—the second-order creator (arranger, translator, director, etc.) is acknowledged in presenting *their* understanding of a work.[154] Szendy's listed examples are all also split in time, wherein the original composer did not have a chance to hear these listenings of their works. This is not the case with the arrangements

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[152] To be sure, there are some examples where an arrangement is better known than the original. One of the best-known examples is Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral arrangement of Modest Mussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain," which was originally written for piano. On this arrangement as used in *Kingdom Hearts*, see my "From Screen (to Screen) to Concert Hall: Arrangement as a Worldbuilding and Worldbridging Device in the *Kingdom Hearts* Series," in *The Oxford Handbook of Arrangement Studies*, ed. Ryan Raul Bañagale (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, forth). This occurs more frequently in pop song covers, however, such as with Aretha Franklin's "Respect" (originally by Otis Redding), Jimi Hendrix' "All Along The Watchtower" (Bob Dylan), Natalie Imbruglia's "Torn" (Ednaswap), and even the Fairy Godmother's "I Need a Hero" from *Shrek 2* (2004; original, Bonnie Tyler). These original-usurping covers are sometimes called "steals." See Deena Weinstein, "Appreciating Cover Songs: Stereophony," in *Play it Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music*, ed. George Plasketes (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 243-251.

[153] Szendy, *Listen*, 35.

[154] I will take this point up further in the following chapter.

under study. Indeed, with these official arrangements, the original composer is often involved in the process and will give their stamp of approval on a listening.[155]

Especially interesting—though perhaps not surprising—is the networks of relationships fostered between composers and arrangers. That is, certain composers will frequently work with specific arrangers. Even if the general public does not understand or appreciate what arrangers do for composers and their compositions, composers recognize and value these second-order creators. To name but a few relations in Square Enix: Yoko Shimomura (Kingdom Hearts, *Final Fantasy XV*) often works with Kaoru Wada, Sachiko Miyano, and Natsumi Kameoka. Nobuo Uematsu's works have been professionally arranged by numerous arrangers, but Shiro Hamaguchi arranged many of the first pieces used in concert and which are still used to this day.[156] Eric and Arnie Roth have both also arranged many of Uematsu's pieces for both the Distant Worlds and A New World concert series. Daisuke Shinoda and Kosuke Yamashita have both worked as arrangers for both the NieR and Chrono series concerts, and thus for Studio Monaca (headed by Keiichi Okabe) and Yasunori Mitsuda, respectively.

And while composers may have their go-to arrangers, many arrangers work for a variety of composers and productions.[157] Sachiko Miyano, for example, is one of Japan's most prominent arrangers and orchestrators for TV, film, and games, and she has arranged music for each of the series under study.[158] She is credited as either an arranger or orchestrator for over 200 anime and game albums, and is one of the founding members of Shangri-la Studio, which is an outsource

[155] This was confirmed in the interviews in Appendices B and D.
[156] These early arrangements were featured on the albums *Final Fantasy VII: Reunion Tracks* (1997) and *Fithos Lusec Wecos Vinosec: Final Fantasy VIII* (1999), as well as the previously mentioned *20020220, Tour de Japon,* and *Voices: Music from Final Fantasy* concerts, among others.
[157] Many of these arrangers also work as arrangers and/or orchestrators for games, anime, film, and TV in addition to their concert hall adaptations.
[158] "Sachiko Miyano," *Video Game Music Database*, https://vgmdb.net/artist/5645 (accessed June 22, 2022).

studio for commercial arrangements.[159] As another example, Mariam Abounnasr is a member of Yasunori Mitsuda's Procyon Studios and works as an arranger and orchestrator for Mitsuda, both for games and concerts/albums.[160] Outside of her work for Mitsuda, she has also contributed arrangements for NieR and Kingdom Hearts, as well as worked as a composer for video games including *Another Eden* (2017) and *Oninaki* (2019).[161] As a final example, Jonne Valtonen and Roger Wanamo are both associated with Merregnon Studios and arrange and orchestrate the pieces for Böcker's concerts. Though both have worked as arrangers, Valtonen works as the lead arranger and Wanamo often works as an orchestrator, as he did for Masashi Hamauzu's *Final Fantasy X* Piano Concerto.[162]

Each of these arrangers brings with them their own experiences, stylizations, and listenings when arranging a piece of music. Because of this, each arranger will have their own unique take on adapting or arranging a piece, even one that is already relatively "fleshed out" so to speak. In what follows, I will provide an analysis of three different listenings of Nobuo Uematsu's "Dancing Mad," what I will call "transcriptions" as they do not fundamentally alter the form of the original. The piece affords some interesting points of analysis, as it was originally written as a synthesized 16-bit composition, but one which frequently indexes the sounds of classical instruments. The piece is also already quite developed, with the original soundtrack (OST) version of the piece

[159] "Sachiko Miyano," SHANGRI-LA, INC., http://www.shangrila-inc.jp/miyano.html; Sachiko Miyano, "I want to change the music scene by creating a studio dedicated to background music in Japan," [いつか日本に劇伴専用スタジオのスコアリングステージを作って音楽シーンを変えたい; interview with Miyano] *Highflyers* 17, no. 4, June 23, 2016, http://www.highflyers.nu/hf/sachikomiyano4/#startcontents. Both accessed June 22, 2022.
[160] "Mariam Abounnasr," *Procyon Studio*, https://www.procyon-studio.co.jp/staff/mariam/ (accessed June 22, 2022).
[161] Appendix D contains an interview between Abounnasr and the author.
[162] "Jonne Valtonen," *Game Concerts*, https://www.gameconcerts.com/en/background/team/jonne-valtonen/; "Roger Wanamo," *Game Concerts*, https://www.gameconcerts.com/en/background/team/roger-wanamo/ (accessed June 22, 2022).

clocking in at almost eighteen minutes.[163] Furthermore, while the piece is mostly written in a kind of traditional symphonic style, the last section of the piece is heavily inspired by progressive rock of the 1970s. Finally, while already relatively autonomous, the original composition does not have a definite end—here, each arranger must choose how to end the piece.

"Transcribing" Mad

Final Fantasy VI's "Dancing Mad," the music which accompanies players as they battle against the game's final boss, has remained relatively immutable in the various "transcriptions" of the piece. This, I argue, has much to do with "Dancing Mad" already existing as a kind of (neo) Romantic "Work." That is, the piece—with its multimovement form, extended duration, and clever use of quotation (both intertextual and leitmotivic)—makes for an already ambitious piece which would be difficult to adapt into an arrangement featuring other pieces as well.[164]

Here, I would like to consider the various versions of "Dancing Mad" as types of "transcriptions" of the piece.[165] As opposed to free arrangements, in which composer-arrangers

[163] I use this simply as a heuristic device—I will elaborate below that this is not The Work. This OST version also includes repeats of all sections (which players may or may not hear depending on how quickly they get through each stage of the multipart battle) that essentially doubles the amount of music the piece contains.

[164] Lydia Goehr first discussed the "work-concept" in relation to classical musics, though Tim Summers has recently discussed the notion of the work as pertaining to video game music. See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, Revised Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007 [1992]), passim.; and Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). And though I suggest it difficult to arrange this piece, it is certainly not impossible. Take, for instance, the use of "Dancing Mad" in the *Final Boss Suite*, which was performed as an encore on the *Symphonic Fantasies Tokyo* concert, as well as its inclusion in *Final Symphony*'s symphonic poem, *Final Fantasy VI – Symphonic Poem: Born with the Gift of Magic*. A related (non-classical) example is the final track of Square Enix's *Last SQ* album (2015), which combines the pieces "Chaos Shrine," "Dancing Mad," and "Prologue" from both the original *Final Fantasy* and *Final Fantasy VI*.

[165] On the politics of transcribing music as heard, see Dana Plank, "From the Concert Hall to the Console: Three 8-Bit Translations of the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor," *BACH: Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute* 50, no. 1 (2019): 32-62; and Peter Winkler, "Writing Ghost Notes: The Poetics and Politics of Transcription," in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwartz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegler (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 169-203.

take pre-existing musical materials and adapt them to their own purposes, transcriptions take what music theorist Leonard Meyer deems the primary parameters of a piece (a piece's melody, harmony, and rhythm) as generally immutable, and focus instead on changing its secondary parameters (instrumentation, timbre, dynamics).[166] In Szendy's terms,

> The body that shapes transcription is thus *plastic*. As is also… our listening to an arrangement, torn between two parallel lines, one present and the other ghostly or spectral: our listening is stretched, stretched to breaking point like a rubber band, between the transcription and the original. That is to say… between the piano score and the original score.[167]

Szendy's discussion of transcription focuses on Franz Liszt's transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies, what Liszt called "piano scores" (rather than, say, piano reductions).[168] While the versions of "Dancing Mad" that I will deem its transcriptions are perhaps not all as obvious as Szendy's Lisztian example, I argue that the technologies of the present and recent past (e.g., game systems) require new ways of adapting Szendy's theory to the current time and its music.[169]

I focus on three transcriptions of "Dancing Mad" in this section, drawn from Michael Harris's blog post on the ending of *Final Fantasy VI*.[170] These include the versions featured on: (1) the *Piano Opera: Final Fantasy IV/V/VI* (2012) album, transcribed and performed by Hiroyuki

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[166] Leonard Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 21n44. See also Christensen, "Piano Four-Hand Transcriptions"; and Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber*, esp. Ch. 2.

[167] Szendy, *Listen*, 58 (original emphasis).

[168] "Partition de piano" in French.

[169] Summers makes a similar connection between the piano scores and video game music arrangements: "Liszt's solo piano transcriptions and his fantasies of music from earlier operas might be seen as akin to the adaptions of video game music for live performance in events such as the *Video Games Live* or *Zelda* orchestral concerts." Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music*, 29. Summers' more recent claim that video game music is inherently *queer* when contrasted to other types of music (citing, for instance, the frequent use of loops in video game music) is, I think, one provocative way of engaging Szendy's theory with consideration of new technologies. See Summers, "Queer Aesthetics."

[170] See Michael W. Harris, "The Music of Final Fantasy VI – Act IV: 'Dancing Mad' and the Insanity of Kefka," *The Temp Track*, August 20, 2016, https://www.thetemptrack.com/2016/08/20/the-music-of-final-fantasy-vi-act-iv-dancing-mad-and-the-insanity-of-kefka/.

Nakayama; (2) the Black Mages' (Uematsu's first prog rock band) cover of the piece, featured on their eponymous debut album (2003); and (3) the *Distant Worlds II: More Music from Final Fantasy* (2010) recording by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Elmhurst College Concert Choir, and Earthbound Papas (Uematsu's second prog rock band).[171] One of the interesting facets of these various transcriptions is how they each choose to conclude the piece. As noted by a number of video game music scholars, video game music is often looped and left intentionally "open" to help facilitate more seamless repeats.[172] This makes writing definite endings for these pieces a political act; that is, one where conscious and very intentional decisions have to be made—where a certain stance is taken.[173] While some video game music transcriptions might lend themselves to simply tacking on a sustained chord at the piece's "end," I contend that the epic-ness of "Dancing Mad" would be lost—or at the very least marred—by such a sudden and jarring ending.[174] We might consider how these transcribers choose to conclude this piece, then, as political *hearings* (a la Szendy).

Before engaging with the respective endings of these various transcriptions, however, a cursory overview of the form of "Dancing Mad" is in order. The piece is divided into four (or five) separate sections, reflecting the stage of battle in which players are engaged with the nihilist jester-turned-god Kefka. These include, per the original soundtrack: (1) a ponderous intro, (2) an off-

[171] There is also a *Distant Worlds* version that does not include the prog band—aside from the missing guitar solo, however, the orchestration and formal design is essentially the same.
[172] See Karen Collins, *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design* (Cambridge: The MIT Press**,** 2008), 26-28; Winifred Phillips, *A Composer's Guide to Game Music* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014); Thompson, "'There's no doubt'"; and Summers, "Queer Aesthetics."
[173] My use of the term "political" here is informed by Annemarie Mol's writings on *ontological politics*, where the ontology of an object is itself multiple and that "there are *options* between the various versions of an object" based on different definitions or understandings of said object. Mol gives the medical example of *anaemia* and how it exists (is performed) differently when evaluated clinically, statistically, and pathophysiologically. Mol, "Ontological Politics. A Word and Some Questions," *The Sociology Review* 47, No. 1 (1999): 74.
[174] Lehman notes a similar phenomenon regarding the adaption of film scores. See Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music," 15-17.

kilter march, (3) an extended eighteenth century-style "organ" feature, and (4) a direct quotation of the game's opening (and probable allusion to Richard Strauss's tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra*) that leads into (5) an epic, prog rock conclusion.[175] With the exception of the fourth section (which—per Dana Plank's analysis of the piece—is more of an introduction to the final section of the work than a standalone section on its own terms), these sections will loop and repeat as needed while players battle Kefka.[176] Thus, in the context of the game, sections do not have definitive and overtly teleological endings. Perhaps counterintuitively, this is especially true of the final section as heard in the game. Rather than a grand cadence and/or heroic fanfare announcing Kefka's defeat with the final blow in the game, the music instead abruptly fades out and an extended sonic rendering of Kefka's pixelated deterioration takes over.[177] Indeed, even on the *Final Fantasy VI* original soundtrack, the final section simply loops and eventually fades out, implying that the music (as well as this epic battle) could continue on *ad infinitum*.

This musical ending, unceremonious and abrupt as it is, then, does not particularly lend itself to transcription (neither formally, nor sonically). Such a claim is especially true if "Dancing Mad" is conceived of as a kind of musical work, with all the cultural and aesthetic baggage that comes with the term. As Tim Summers notes, "popular music studies have too often uncritically

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[175] For an extended discussion of the *Also sprach Zarathustra* allusion, see Richard Anatone, "Thus Spake Uematsu: Satirical Parody in the Opening Sequence to *Final Fantasy VI*," in *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the* Final Fantasy *Series*, ed. Richard Anatone (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2022), 99-129. The concluding prog rock section of "Dancing Mad" shares many similarities to the title track of Emerson, Lake & Palmer's album *Tarkus*. I am thankful to Thomas Gaubatz for sharing this observation with me.

[176] Dana Plank, "Bodies in Play: Representations of Disability in 8- and 16-bit Video Game Soundscapes (PhD diss., Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2018), 281-88.

[177] On rendering, Michel Chion suggests that "The film spectator [or, in this case, video game player] recognizes sounds to be truthful, effective, and fitting not so much if they reproduce what would be heard in the same situation in reality, but if they render (convey, express) the feelings associated with the situation." Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, [1990] 1994), 109. See also James Buhler, *Theories of the Soundtrack* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 254-56.

dealt with recordings as ultimate incarnations of 'works.'"[178] He continues, reflecting that "A game, or a piece of music, exists as a domain of performative possibilities. Just as performances of music vary upon repetition of the same piece, so do performances of games, often with implications for the music as sounded during play."[179] Following Summers' claim, neither "Dancing Mad" as heard on the *Final Fantasy VI* OST, nor the various transcriptions of "Dancing Mad" should be understood as "ultimate incarnations" of "Dancing Mad."[180] To return to a point mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, questions of authenticity surrounding video game music can become very tricky, very quickly. And yet, this does not mean we should abandon hope in terms of considering these transcriptions in relation to the original. Rather, I believe that if questions of definitive authenticity can be placed to the side, questions of specific (political) *hearings* might prove to be worth considering. With this, I now turn to this section of the chapter's three case studies.

Hiroyuki "Chopin" Nakayama is a pianist and arranger who is best known for his *Piano Opera* trilogy, a set of piano arrangements derived from Uematsu's scores of *Final Fantasy – Final Fantasy IX*.[181] Nakayama's transcription of "Dancing Mad" is perhaps the most akin to the Beethoven-Liszt "piano scores" both Szendy and Summers discuss.[182] This is largely because many of the primary parameters of Uematsu's original "Dancing Mad" remain the same in

[178] Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music*, 25.
[179] Ibid., 29; Summer would later develop this claim into his theory of "playful listening," which I take up in Chapter 4.
[180] As discussed in the Introduction's literature review, Brian Kane has theorized a useful method of discussing such intricate musico-ontological relations via networked chains of "replication" and "nomination." Though Kane specifically focuses on jazz standards in his article, he notes that his model is applicable to a number of different genres and style of music. See Kane, "Jazz, Mediation, Ontology."
[181] Nakayama has also performed on the *Kingdom Hearts* and *Final Fantasy XV* piano collections under Yoko Shimomura. One topic that warrants further investigation (but which is outside the scope of this project) is the regular performers of this music, including pianists Nakayma, Yui "Duke of Pianeet" Morishita, and Benyamin Nuss.
[182] For further discussion of Liszt and his transcriptions, see especially Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber*.

Nakayama's transcription of the piece. That is, the piece (for the most part) is a one-to-one mapping of the original 16-bit track to a piano transcription (or piano *score* in a Lisztian sense). As Nakayama himself writes in the liner notes of his recording of his transcription: "Easily the most deserving of the title PIANO OPERA, this piece is truly a work of epic operatic scale. While arranging this multi-movement opus, I tried to capture the ambience of a full orchestra, just as if I were scoring a symphony for sole piano."[183] With this Work-aspiring claim, Nakayama was able to transcribe the piece almost verbatim.[184] Indeed, this is to the extent that Nakayama's transcription is the only version of the piece analyzed in this chapter which includes the fourth section of "Dancing Mad." Following an extended cadence at the end of the third section, the piano transcription quotes the opening of the game. As Dana Plank notes of this fourth part:

> "Dancing Mad Part 4" is simply an introduction to the final form of Kefka, bringing the game full circle by repeating the opening gesture of the game – the theme that plays over the title screen with the ominous dark purple and black clouds and lightning when the player turns the game on… Every time a player restarts the SNES, this theme recurs, and so it is one of the most-heard tracks in the game. And yet it reappears verbatim in the second to last part of the final boss fight—coming full circle with the musical material.[185]

That this portion of "Dancing Mad" is present might not seem particularly noteworthy – it is a part of the game after all, announcing Kefka's ultimate incarnation. And yet, as mentioned above, this transcription is the only one among the versions I consider in this chapter which retains this fourth section. It is perhaps because the circularity that Plank notes is generally absent from these transcriptions in isolation. That is, players have not just started up their respective Super Nintendos

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[183] Hiroyuki Nakayama, liner notes for *Piano Opera: Final Fantasy I-IX Piano Arrangement Album [Special Edition]*, SQEX-U0001-3, 2015.
[184] The piece *does* differ from the original in some interesting ways. This includes a kind of *pre-introduction* slow introduction, an unusual addition considering the original opening of the piece is itself already a kind of slow introduction. James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy discuss slow introductions in terms of formal "parageneric spaces." See Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 295-300.
[185] Plank, "Bodies in Play," 281.

(or Super Famicoms), and have not resultantly just heard the opening of the game. Thus, the circularity and *specificity* to *Final Fantasy VI* is lost in these other transcriptions.

Be that as it may, Nakayama's transcription includes this fourth section, and unproblematically proceeds to the fifth section's prog rock ending. By way of ending the piece, Nakayama includes some newly composed material which oscillates between the major and minor modes of the concluding key. Just as how Liszt scholar Jonathan Kregor suggests that "one of the most impressive aspects of Liszt's late [transcriptions] is the way in which he added material that maintained the vestigial presence of the source composer yet still managed to bring forth his own artistic profile," so too does Nakayama's composed ending support both the source material as well as his own hearing.[186] Nakayama's oscillation between modalities affords a concluding Picardy third, harkening back to the Baroque period and, more particularly, a religious ending.[187] In this way, Nakayama's transcription almost seems to accept Kefka's godhood, giving the piece a new, religious closure unheard in the game's sounding of "Dancing Mad." An alternative, redemptive hearing might pit the ending minor and major modalities against each other in a kind of "Fateful" Beethovenian struggle, with the redemptive major mode (here representative of the in-game party) ultimately overcoming the antagonistic minor mode (here associated with Kefka).

In direct contrast to Nakayama's transcription, which equalizes the parts of the original piece into a version with a singular instrument and lone performer, the Black Mages' transcription (one might also productively use the term "cover," which is perhaps more appropriate to the genre)

[186] Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber,* 218.
[187] Further still, this Baroque-style ending recalls the earlier third section (the "organ" section) of the piece. For an extended discussion of the musical meaning associated with the Picardy third, see Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 29-66.

adapts the piece for Uematsu's first prog rock band.[188] That is, rather than just the last section of "Dancing Mad" gesturing towards prog rock, in this version (and still one of *Uematsu*'s Szendian "hearings" it should be noted!) the entirety of the piece is performed by a prog rock band. And while certain sections of the piece may seem somewhat less overtly "proggy" than others (the third section, for instance, still maintains its status as a faux-eighteenth century organ solo), the genre is certainly cemented with the extended guitar solo at the end of this version.[189] Indeed, while the repeats that are inherent in the individual sections of the game are generally ignored in the various transcriptions of the piece, the final section in this cover includes not just two, but *three* vamps to allow for an extended guitar solo by the band's guitarist, Tsuyoshi Sekito**.** And yet, this is not where the piece ultimately concludes, even with the blistering sixth octave C-sharp that concludes Sekito's solo. Instead, the piece returns to the beginning—not the beginning of the game (as quoted in the piece's fourth section), but the beginning of "Dancing Mad" *itself* before concluding with a chiming bell that fades out over a pedal drone. Thus, the cover is cyclical, not in the context of the grand narrative of the game (to which the missing fourth section would allude), but rather intra-musically to itself. Indeed, as this is the first licensed version of the piece outside of *Final Fantasy VI* and its OST, this cover set the musical precedent for concluding all subsequent iterations of "Dancing Mad." This precedent is reflected in the *Distant Worlds* transcription.

The *Distant Worlds* recording (arranged by Adam Klemens and Arnie Roth) functions as a kind of amalgamation of the two transcriptions I have already discussed, yet also differs in a

[188] Here I deviate from the obviously classical register—yet progressive rock of the 1970s oftentimes included classical register gestures, as I will discuss in what follows.

[189] And yet, even if the purely *rock* aesthetic is not as overtly present in this section, prog rock bands did not shy away from incorporating classical instruments into their instrumentation. This is especially true of the organ, and the Hammond organ in particular. See Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

critical aspect: as part of the *Distant Worlds* tour, it features an orchestral transcription of Uematsu's music, thus providing the acoustic, "real" timbres the instruments of the 16-bit soundtrack index.[190] And yet, this "Dancing Mad" transcription stands out even on the *Distant Worlds* album on which it is recorded, as it features Uematsu's second prog rock band, the Earthbound Papas, in the final section of the piece.[191] Perhaps because Uematsu himself was involved with both transcriptions (or both "hearings") of the piece, the *Distant Worlds* ending is very much in-line with the Black Mages' ending—that is, it allots for an extended guitar solo which then cycles back to the beginning of the piece, recapitulating the piece's slow introduction to end the transcription. In contrast to the Black Mages' ending (with its use of bells that fade out and end the piece), however, the *Distant Worlds* recording instead makes use of a Picardy third at the end of the recapitulated introduction-*qua*-ending, akin to Nakayama's transcription. This transcription thus ends in a spectacularly epic fashion, providing listeners an additional and engaging "hearing" (or *re*-hearing) of Uematsu's work, one that aspires to a religious experience.[192]

While I have called each of these three pieces transcriptions, I hope to have problematized this term a bit, especially in relation to video games and notions of definitive "works" within them. Just by nature of the affordances of the instruments, ensembles, and number of bodies playing these pieces, each transcription chooses to highlight (and/or diminish) certain aspects or

[190] The provenance of this arrangement is rather complicated, as is not infrequently the case with arrangements. The *Distant Worlds* albums, for instance, list all arrangers involved with the album, but do not give specific credits per piece. However, in one of the Distant Worlds' earlier programs (c. 2015), arrangement credits were given for 44 of their arrangements, including "Dancing Mad." In an email, Thomas Böcker further informed me that Klemens wrote the original, base arrangement for the 2006 Symphonic Game Music Concert, and that Roth would later adapt this piece for *Distant Worlds*. I thank Böcker for sharing this anecdote with me.

[191] Indeed, this was the new band's inaugural performance. The Earthbound Papas released their own recording of "Dancing Mad" on their sophomore album, *Dancing Dad* (2013). Though similar to the Black Mages' cover of the piece, the Earthbound Papas' cover makes some notable deviations. This includes an electric guitar doubling portions of the contrapuntal organ section.

[192] Relatedly, Edward Macan notes that prog rock took on an almost religious and 'liturgical' role for many of its fans. Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 66-68.

parameters of the source piece, based on each transcriber's respective hearing of it. Nakayama's piano transcription, for instance, not only entirely removes the timbres of the original soundtrack, but also simplifies some of the textures of the original piece while ornamenting others—a necessity in order to play the piece with only two hands rather than the eight channels of the original game. The Black Mages and *Distant Worlds* transcriptions, on the other hand, add a dramatic flair to the piece with their respective ensembles and associated timbral palettes, yet leave out part of the music heard in the context of the game. To complicate questions of authenticity, however, both of these recordings can be considered as Uematsu's re-hearings of "Dancing Mad" as he was involved in both their respective productions. To reiterate: it is not my intention to say that any one of these transcriptions is inherently "better" (or, per the introduction, more "authentic") than the others. Instead, I am more interested in drawing attention to the process of transcription and arrangement itself and examining the many ways it can be enacted in respect to a singular piece of music, thus highlighting the unique merits of each transcription and each arranger's respective hearing.

Why?

By way of conclusion, I turn now to the question of *why* these arrangements are produced to the degree that they are. Just a day before drafting this conclusion, Square Enix—by voice of none other than Nobuo Uematsu himself—announced a new arrangement album in celebration of Final Fantasy's 35th anniversary, the *Modulation: Final Fantasy Arrangement Album* due out on November 9, 2022.[193] The album promises the "True Uematsu sound," as Uematsu himself will

[193] Square Enix Music (@sem_sep), "11/9日発売『Modulation - FINAL FANTASY Arrangement Album』好評予約受付中！" *Twitter*, June 5, 2022. https://twitter.com/sem_sep/status/1533382458808233984.

arrange the music from their original sound sources of the first ten Final Fantasy games.[194] As discussed in the previous chapter, one reason companies produce these arrangements is to celebrate certain milestones for franchises and series, oftentimes based on the anniversaries of when a game was released. There is a *celebratory* element here, where the importance of music from these games is recognized and acknowledged.

But these celebrations would not be possible without fans, those who enjoy the games and their soundtracks, and who are then willing to pay (sometimes a premium) to attend these concerts, purchase arrangement albums, and acquire and play the sheet music. The economic dimension of this branding and advertisement should not be glossed over. Perhaps more so than any other video game company, Square Enix has done a remarkable job branding and marketing their games' respective soundtracks as what James Buhler would call "key franchise assets" which help extend the life (and commercial reach) of these properties:

> Music has been widely acknowledged as a resource for cross-promotion and for its capacity to generate ancillary income and to establish an appropriate cinematic (and increasingly epic) tone… But less appreciated has been music's function in product branding, its way of binding the world of the franchise together across not just various films but an increasingly diverse media landscape, including especially video games, websites, and amusement park rides. Music in fact has often been deployed as though it was a *key franchise asset*, along with characters and set and prop design, which induces the appearance of, our belief in, and commitment to the fictional world. Music seems especially important to encourage us to embrace the fantasy of an alternate universe.[195]

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[194] https://www.jp.square-enix.com/music/sem/page/MODULATION/ (accessed June 6, 2022); "**真植松サウンド**" (transliterated as "shin Uematsu soundo"). Though the Kanji used for *shin* here is best translated as "true" (**真**), *shin* (neutrally written as **シン**) can also mean "new" (**新**) or "God" (**神**) depending on how it is written/read. This homonymic ambiguity may have been intentional and, relatedly, the use of *shin* may have been inspired by the recent wave of "*shin* films" directed by Hideaki Anno (which intentionally play on this ambiguity), most notably *Shin Godzilla* (2016) and *Shin Evangelion* (2021; English title: *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time*). See Mikikazu Komatsu, "Toho Opens Official Website for 2016 'Shin Godzilla' Film," *Crunchyroll*, September 23, 2015, https://www.crunchyroll.com/anime-news/2015/09/23-1/toho-opens-official-website-for-2016-shin-godzilla-film.

[195] James Buhler, "Branding the Franchise: Music, Opening Credits, and the (Corporate) Myth of Origin," in *Music in Epic Film: Listening to Spectacle*, ed. Stephen C. Meyer (New York: Routledge, 2017), 5 (emphasis added).

Square Enix is well aware of this musical power and its value. Aside from the world concert tours and frequent album releases they produce, a selling point for purchasing the collector's edition of many of their games is an included limited-edition arrangement album of the game's soundtrack.[196] They also maintain an official "Square Enix Music" Discord server, a kind of digital chatroom where fans of the company (or its music) can discuss their favorite pieces and where official moderators can update members in real-time when new music is announced and/or released. And from 2019-2020, players could download not one, but *two* Square Enix *Music* themes for the PlayStation 4 (for free) that changed the interface of the game system's main menu.[197] Fans' material investment in these products strengthens their bond with the gameworld; but it is the performance of these arrangements in the concert hall that makes this music both ontologically and phenomenologically "real." Returning to the introduction, recall William Gibbons' recurring "refrain" that fans attend these concerts and listen to these arrangements to hear how the music was "intended" to sound, real- and actualizing what was previously only indexical and virtual.[198] Whether or not that is the main or sole goal of these concerts is debatable. But that Square Enix produces arrangements as one way of extending the life-of and investment-in its properties is without question.

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[196] See also Greenfield-Casas, "Between Worlds," 31-33.
[197] These are the Square Enix Music "Shizuka" (quiet, calm) and "Akari" (bright/light) themes. While they were free upon release, they were reportedly only available until August of 2020. Chris Moyse, "You can Grab these Free Square Enix Music Themes for your PS4 Right Now," *Destructoid*, September 19, 2019, https://www.destructoid.com/you-can-grab-these-free-square-enix-music-themes-for-your-ps4-right-now/ (accessed June 15, 2022).
[198] Gibbons, "How It's Meant to be Heard."

One way of situating this phenomenon is through the Japanese notions of *sekaikan* (**世界観**) and of the "media mix."[199] *Sekaikan* is generally translated as meaning "worldview," though it might also be understood as an extended type of *worldbuilding*, one that exceeds the narrative boundaries often imposed on traditional narrative formulae, as Japanese media and cultural theorist Eiji Ōtsuka writes.[200] The media mix (which even in Japanese uses the English loanwords), are the material objects that contribute to the *sekaikan*. While these include the source narrative (assuming one exists) and anything narratively relating to the "grand narrative" of the *sekaikan*, these also include *anything* that helps further contribute to the lifespan of the constructed *sekaikan*.[201] As Matthew Richardson writes in his dissertation examining Japanese idols, "the media mix permits access to an intangible *sekaikan* mediated by the products. The question of an original in wholly irrelevant, because the media mix facilitates ongoing engagement with a set of affects experienced through time."[202] For Ōtsuka, while not an *exclusively* Japanese phenomenon, the *sekaikan* is *distinctly* Japanese, born in part from the *otaku* subcultures in Japan and their obsessions with consuming the *sekaikan* and all it has to offer (and then some).[203] In his frequently cited essay on

[199] Matthew Richardson has written about the affective dimensions of these media theoretical units at length in his dissertation examining Japanese idols; see Richardson, "Marketing Affect in Japanese Idol Music" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2016).
[200] Eiji Ōtsuka and Marc Steinberg (trans. and ed.), "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative," *Mechademia: Second Arc* 5 "Fanthropologies" (2010): 99-116.
[201] This distinguishes the view from other global media theories. American transmedia theorist Henry Jenkins, for instance, differentiates between transmedia storytelling and transmedia branding, whereas, for Ōtsuka, both would contribute to the *sekaikan*. "We might also draw a distinction between transmedia storytelling and transmedia branding, though these can also be closely intertwined. So, we can see something like [the novel] *Dark Lord: The Rise of Darth Vader* as an extension of the transmedia narrative that has grown up around *Star Wars* because it provides back story and insights into a central character in that saga. By comparison, a *Star Wars* breakfast cereal may enhance the franchise's branding but it may have a limited contribution to make to our understanding of the narrative or the world of the story." Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An annotated syllabus," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (December 2010): 944-45. On Star Wars as *sekaikan*, see Richardson, "Marketing Affect," 157-58.
[202] Richardson, "Marketing Affect," 153.
[203] While generally understood as those obsessed with manga and anime, otaku more generally characterizes a person (or group of people) with *any* intense or obsessive interest (e.g., train otaku, idol otaku, or even military

the phenomenon, Ōtsuka gives examples ranging from the Bikkuriman Chocolates and the highly prized stickers that came with them, to the *Mobile Suit Gundam* anime, to, yes, even video games. More explicitly, Ōtsuka suggests that "it is by convincing consumers that through the repetition of this very act of consumption they grow closer to the totality of the grand narrative that the sales of countless quantities of the same kind of commodity become possible." Repetition, then, is paramount. And what better form of musical repetition through time than through the diachronic variations of arrangements?

We can see this especially with some of the *compilation* albums Square Enix has released. For instance, the *Final Fantasy: The Preludes since 1987* (2019) album which—as it in no uncertain terms eponymously states—is a compilation of the various arrangements of *Final Fantasy*'s iconic musical brand. The *NieR Replicant: 10+1 Year Vinyl LP Box* (2021) is similarly a quartet of compilation albums of previous arrangements of character themes; included here, however, were newly composed arrangements only available for collectors who purchased these vinyl records, thus using new and exclusive arrangements as a way of incentivizing fans and collectors to purchase a set of music they may already own.[204] The NieR and Chrono series both also have special collector's boxes available of their orchestral recordings which include an exclusive arrangement album. While fans can purchase the orchestral albums individually, e.g., the *Chrono Trigger Orchestral Arrangement* album and the *Chrono Cross Orchestral Arrangement* album, for fans who buy the special box collection (SQEX-10727~9), a bonus CD is

otaku). See Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[204] That these were exclusively available on vinyl also perhaps was an appeal to vinyl collectors, especially with the recent surge in popularity of vinyl. See, for instance, Josh Terry, "Vinyl is More Popular than Ever. Surprisingly, That's a Problem," *Vice*, July 6, 2021, https://www.vice.com/en/article/dyv4zq/the-vinyl-boom-is-pushing-out-smaller-labels.

included, the *Chrono Special Disc: Piano Duo*, which includes four new (and otherwise unavailable) piano duo arrangements by Yui Morishita and Takuro Iga. Finally, we might also consider the recent rerelease of the original NieR game, the remastered *NieR Replicant Ver. 1.22*… As one incentive for purchasing the "White Snow" collector's edition of the game, included was not just one, but *two* special arrangement albums presented in an embossed case: the "Another Edit Version" and "Weiss Edition Arrangement" albums.

This branding also extends outside of technically official arrangements. The *Across the Worlds* album was a project crowd-funded through a Kickstarter campaign to celebrate *Chrono Cross*'s 20th anniversary and Mitsuda's score for the game. This included a star-studded lineup of professionals within the industry, including Masashi Hamauzu, Mariam Abounnasr, and Akiko Noguchi as arrangers, Benyamin Nuss as performer, and Kiyoshi Arai (who has worked for Square Enix for over ten years) as illustrator. And yet, this album was not produced by Square Enix or even Procyon Studio (Mitsuda's studio)—it was produced by Wayô Records, a European music label that works to localize and produce Japanese media soundtracks.[205] While the project was "licensed by the Japanese music right-holders Septima Ley and Procyon Studio (Yasunori Mitsuda's company)!," the fine print on the Kickstarter page notes that: (1) "*This project is not affiliated with Square Enix*" and that (2) "Although the project is entirely approved by Septima Ley and Yasunori Mitsuda through his parent company Procyon Studio, he is not involved in the creation of this album."[206]

[205] "Wayo Records," *Wayo Records*, http://www.wayorecords.net/wayorecords/ (accessed June 22, 2022).
[206] "Across The Worlds ~ Chrono Cross Piano (Digital)," *Wayo Records*, https://www.wayorecords.com/en/cd-tapes/692-across-the-worlds-chrono-cross-piano-digital.html; and "Across the Worlds ~ Chrono Cross Wayô Piano Collection," *Kickstarter*, https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/wayo/across-the-worlds-chrono-cross-wayo-piano-collection. Both accessed February 3, 2022.

And yet, while not technically official—even if licensed—Wayô advertised the album as "a gathering of some of the best Japanese video game talents!" Hamauzu would have been already well-known for his video game scores, especially with the then-recent announcement that he was one of the composers involved with the long-awaited *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020); Abounnasr was highlighted as a member of Procyon Studios and as having performed as a keyboardist for a separate (official) anniversary concert celebrating Mitsuda's work; and Noguchi was similarly advertised as having worked as an arranger for other official Chrono series albums. The unspoken branding was clear: "this is the most official unofficial album you can get." Unsurprisingly, the album sold well, more than tripling its main goal of €25,000 with 930 backers pledging €84,110 and with the campaign reaching all but the fourth and final of its stretch goals.[207] But the first and third stretch goals (€40000 and €65000, respectively) were rewarded with two new arrangements, both by Hamauzu. Arrangements, again, incentivized investment.

Returning to the *sekaikan*, we can see how these arrangements and albums contribute to the "grand narrative" of these game series, one that eclipses the confines of the narrative within the game. As Richardson writes, "we see how media commodities can function not as commodities *per se*, but as items with affective affordances. These affordances are desired more strongly than the commodities themselves."[208] In other words, the object that is desired is an object (commodity or otherwise) that can continue to act as a (re)mediating catalyst for the fan (or consumer) to continue to engage with the "grand narrative" of the *sekaikan*. It is not (necessarily) the object itself that is desired but, rather, the affect the object provides the fan.

[207] €100,000, which would have funded a live performance of the album and provided all backers with a video recording of the event, even if they could not attend the performance in person.
[208] Richardson, "Marketing Affect," 155.

While the analyses offered in this conclusion may read as operating under a hermeneutics of suspicion, I want to shine a reparative light on the matter as well.[209] Just as the economic dimension of these arrangements shouldn't be glossed over, neither should the fandom element. While, yes, Square Enix (and other companies) can be critiqued as profiting off fans' investments in this music, we must not remove the agency of the fan in this relationship. That is, the fans continue to invest in these concerts, albums, and arrangements because they *enjoy* them. The success—especially *continued success*—of such a franchise or company is dependent on its fans.[210] This does not mean we should not be critical in observing how some of this music is produced and distributed (e.g., the arrangements unique to special collector's editions of games or albums). Marketing *does* play an important role in this relationship. But we must remember that fans can choose to continue to invest in these companies, these series, and their music… or not. Furthermore, fans can pick and choose to what level they engage and consume their choice media—Richardson compares this to a buffet.[211] A superfan *otaku* may purchase every conceivable item related to a franchise that they can afford (or even beyond that); a more casual fan may buy (or engage with) nothing besides the original media text. I will return to this relationship with the fan in the final chapter of this dissertation. In the next chapter, however, I will continue my examination of video game arrangements for the concert hall. I will focus more

[209] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is about You," in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1-37.

[210] "*Sekaikans* are open-ended as long as people engage with them, so even if a comprehensive description could incorporate every single media object in a *sekaikan*, it would become outdated almost as soon as it was written down. A sekaikan would only become static if its objects have fallen entirely out of circulation and use." Richardson, "Marketing Affect," 195.

[211] "Like a buffet meal, fans can selectively decide which products they would like to use, how much and how often they like to engage. Periodic snackers and those with bottomless appetites all come to the same spread of media offerings. In this sense, it assumes neither a strictly rational nor a strictly irrational consumer. It leaves potential for consumption on almost any level of commitment." Ibid., 189.

specifically on those arrangements that wear their classical “high” art aspirations on their sleeves and how the forms and genres they employ as their transformative vessels support the extramusical meanings from their source games.

Chapter 3

Playing Between Forms

While in Chapter 2 I examined a wide corpus of arrangements produced by Square Enix following the typologies proffered by Robbert Van der Lek and Mick Swithinbank, Emilio Audissino, and Frank Lehman, in this chapter I expand their typologies to consider a new (or at least previously unaddressed) subcategory of musical adaptation: the arrangement of source multimedia into an overtly classical genre.[212] Just as the aforementioned scholars' respective typologies are applicable to video game music, so too are their examples of film music that fall into this category. Consider, for instance, Howard Shore's monumental six-movement *Lord of the Rings* Symphony, based on his scores for the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003). Consider also Tan Dun's *Martial Arts Trilogy*, three concerti based on the scores of three *wuxia* martial arts films for which he composed the scores (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000; *Hero*, 2002; *The Banquet*, 2006), or John Corigliano's *Red Violin* Chaconne, based on his score for *The Red Violin* (1998).[213]

Although concert suites are quite common (so much so that Audissino grants them their own category in his typology), there is an additional layer of cultural cache attached to these forms, raising these pieces even higher in the classical register identified by Michael Long.[214] And yet,

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[212] Lehman's eighth category, "programmatic non-diegetic suite/medleys" is perhaps the closest to this category, but I argue that the formal and hermeneutic stakes of working the soundtrack into "high art" concert genres (rather than simply stitching them together as a medley) suggests an attempt at raising video game (and also film music in this form) to the high art register. See Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music," 8-9.

[213] On Tan's concerti, see Stefan Greenfield-Casas, "Art or Action? Oneness and Duality in Tan Dun's *Martial Arts Trilogy*," paper presented at the 11th *Music and the Moving Image Conference*, New York City, New York, May 28, 2016. On Corigliano's chaconne, see A.J. Cohen, "Music Cognition and the Cognitive Psychology of Film Structure," *Canadian Psychology* 43 (2002): 215-232; and Michael Daniel Deall, "The Role of Style in the John Corigliano's Film Score to *The Red Violin* (1999) [sic]" (PhD Dissertation, University of Florida, 2008). Cohen's article in particular is interesting in that she offers almost the inversion of what I argue in this chapter, suggesting that the *movie* follows and adapts the musical form of a rondo.

[214] Michael Long, *Beautiful Monsters*.

even with cultural capital placed to the side, there is one additional element the adaptation of these soundtracks into these forms affords: the extramusical narrative and semiotic associations attached to these forms. Drawing on theories of translation, adaptation, and (musical) narrativity, in this chapter I will show how certain musical genres support and intensify the narrative meaning of their source games through a process of what linguist Roman Jakobson calls "intersemiotic translation."[215] I begin by outlining how arrangement studies can provide a new way of conceptualizing intersemiotic translation by way of musical narrative. I then use three generic (*genre*-ic) case studies to demonstrate my claim: the concerto (with Masashi Hamauzu's *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto*), the theme and variations (with Natsumi Kameoka's Concert Paraphrase on "Dearly Beloved"), and the symphony (with *The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses*). While I will show that the concerto can offer a fairly straightforward adaptation of the "individual versus society" narrative conflict archetype, with the theme and variation I abstract further to demonstrate how the theme and variation reflects the fundamental narrative element of video games: repetition (as I alluded to in Chapter 2 and which I will take up again in detail in Chapter 4). The third case study considers how the multimovement symphony, the most monumental and "prestigious" of the classical genres, is one formal vessel that can translate the epic franchise, balancing individual games against the grand overarching narrative of the series, while also commemorating it. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief consideration of Austin Wintory's score and arrangements from the indie game *Journey*, showing how the music from one game can be translated into multiple forms.

[215] Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." In *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000 [1959]), 113-18.

Intersemiotic Translation, Ekphrastic Adaptation, and Musical Arrangement

What does it mean to convert, translate, or adapt a work across media? In particular, how can this be managed when making the transformation from an overtly story-based medium (e.g., narrative video games) to an ineffable one (e.g., music)?[216] In his 1959 essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Roman Jakobson offers one fledgling approach rooted in semiotics.[217] In the essay, he suggests three ways of interpreting a verbal sign through *translation*: intralingual translation (rewording within a set language), interlingual translation ("translation proper" across languages), and intersemiotic translation (the translation of language to a nonverbal system). More specifically, intersemiotic translation is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems."[218] Regrettably, Jakobson does not fully develop the notion of this transmutation within his essay—while he lists it with the other two forms of translation early in the essay, it is not until the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph that he mentions it again, simply listing it with its sibling modes, this time as "intersemiotic transposition—from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting."[219] This semiotic mode of translation,

[216] Though not all games are narratively oriented, many are. Indeed, media theorist Torben Grodal goes so far as to suggest that "video games and some types of virtual reality are the supreme media for the full simulation of our basic first-person "story" experience because they allow "the full experiential flow" by linking perceptions, cognitions, and emotions with first-person actions." Torben Grodal, "Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles: Video Games, Media, and Embodied Experiences," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, eds. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 132. For a ludomusicological theory of narrativity, see Julianne Grasso, "Video Game Music," Ch. 3 (pp. 113-137); and idem, "Music in the Time of Video Games: Spelunking *Final Fantasy IV*," in *Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes & Harmonies*, eds. William Gibbons and Steven Reale (New York: Routledge, 2019), 97–116.

[217] For other approaches to developing this theory, see, for instance, Vasso Giannakopolou and Deborah Cartmell (eds.), Intersemiotic Translation as Adaptation (Special Issue), *Adaptation* 12, no. 3 (2019).

[218] Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 114.

[219] Ibid., 118. It is unclear and unexplained why Jakobson switches from "translation" to "transposition" in this last paragraph.

then, offers one theoretical apparatus for which to discuss the adaptation of stories into music—program music, for instance.

The transmutation across artforms allows something like a novel (or a painting, or a video game) to be transmuted—that is, *adapted*—into a purely musical work.[220] In a more traditional vein, we might here think of Richard Strauss' tone poems or Liszt's symphonic poems. And yet, due to the change from verbal to nonverbal signs, these intersemiotic translations can struggle to impart and communicate the narrative content of the source material vis-à-vis its second-order creation. For translation theorist and practitioner Lawrence Venuti, however, such a strictly *instrumental* understanding of language and translation is inherently flawed. Venuti differentiates between two concepts of language, one instrumental and the other hermeneutic:

> an instrumental concept of language as expressive of thought and representing reality leads to a theory of translation (and adaptation) as the communication of a univocal meaning inherent in the source text, whereas a hermeneutic concept of language as constitutive of thought and determining reality leads to a theory of translation (and adaptation) as an interpretation that fixes a form and meaning in the source text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations in the translating language and culture.[221]

Venuti's approach to navigating the acts of adaptation and, in a later essay, *ekphrasis* is dependent on the *interpretant*, following the logics of a Peircian semiotics (as did too Jakobson's theory).[222]

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[220] Siglund Bruhn has offered a related theory of musical ekphrasis, differentiating musical ekphrasis from program music. As she writes, "Program music narrates or paints, suggests or represents scenes or stories (and by extension events or characters) that enter the music from the composer's mind. Musical ekphrasis, by contrast, narrates or paints stories or scenes created by an artist *other than the composer of the music* and *in another artistic medium*." See Bruhn, "A Concert of Paintings: 'Musical Ekprhasis' in the Twentieth Century," *Poetics Today* 22, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 554, emphasis added. Though Bruhn's differentiation is well-taken, I draw from ekphrasis as a mode of second-order creation and practice of intersemiotic translation, not as ontological category. For a critique and expansion of Bruhn's theory, see Thomas C. Connoly, "Walking in Colour: Another Look at Musical Ekphrasis through Marc Chagall's Jerusalem Windows," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 51, no. 1 (March 2018): 161-178.

[221] Lawrence Venuti, "Adaptation, Translation, Critique." *Journal of Visual Culture* 6, no. 1 (2007): 28.

[222] See also Lawrence Venuti, "Ekphrasis, Translation, Critique," *Art in Translation* 2, no. 2 (2010): 131-52. Both of these essays by Venuti essentially rewrite the same translation theory dependent on the interpretant, though the genres on which they focus differ: adaptation studies (which, institutionally, primarily focuses on movie adaptations of literary works), and ekphrastic poems (a genre of poems based on or inspired by a visual art piece). Both genres,

In Venuti's own theoretical model—a hermeneutic model—the critic (or academic) instead positions themself within a particular cultural framework to draw attention through critical hermeneutic analysis to the process of translation from source material to second-order creation.[223] The meaning is not immutable, but, rather, flexible and malleable, largely dependent on the context in which it is interpreted (by both the translator and the critic/academic).

In considering Venuti's hermeneutic translation, then, the change in how the narrative is presented in a musical adaptation of a literary (or ludic) work is no longer an issue as it is based in *interpretation*. "Hence ekphrasis is seen, not as instrumental, communicating an invariant inherent in the artwork, but as hermeneutic, communicating *an interpretation* that is inscribed by *transformative operations* specific to the medium of language, to genres and discourses that characterize fields and disciplines."[224] We might also recall Byron Almén's framing of the "sibling"-like (rather than descendant) relationship between musical and literary narrative. Almén's theory itself is inherently hermeneutic and offers a perspective on how, though there are some commonalities between fields, it is potentially to the detriment of music to *base* its own

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then, are a kind of adaptation in the colloquial sense of the word. Indeed, one could perhaps read the latter essay as a kind of intralingual yet intergeneric translation of the former.

[223] Two notes on the interpretant. First and foremost, these are not to be singularly conflated with interpreters, those doing the interpreting, as did even the brilliant Leonard Meyer. The interpreter can be an interpretant, though it is more the cultural values they hold. See Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 34. Second, and relatedly, Venuti distinguishes between formal and thematic interpretants: "Formal interpretants may include a concept of equivalence, such as a semantic correspondence based on dictionary definitions and philological research, or a concept of style, a particular lexicon and syntax linked to a genre or discourse. Thematic interpretants are codes: they may include an interpretation of the source text that has been articulated independently in commentary; a discourse in the sense of a relatively coherent body of concepts, problems, and arguments housed in a cultural or social institution; and an ensemble of values, beliefs, and representations affiliated with specific social groups." Venuti, "ETC," 140.

[224] Venuti, "ETC," 134 (emphasis added). He continues a few pages later: "In ekphrastic studies informed by the hermeneutic model, the literary text is not compared directly to the artwork, but rather to a version of it mediated by a specific theoretical, critical, or political discourse to the exclusion of other discourses." Ibid., 136.

theories on its sibling fields.[225] In following Venuti's (and Peirce's) interpretants we escape the (now ironically entitled) instrumental understanding of meaning which assumes some kind of Ur-meaning. And, while we (as critics) can funnel our analyses through a formal interpretant (as I will do in-part below), we must remember that any second-order creation is itself a product of interpretation. As Venuti reminds us, "When translated, then, the source text undergoes not only various degrees of formal and semantic loss, but also an exorbitant gain: in attempting to fix the form and meaning of that text, the translator develops an interpretation in the translating language that ultimately proliferates cultural differences so that the translation can signify in the receiving situation."[226] This loss and gain are in part due to the de- and *re*contextualization that occurs in intersemiotic translations (whether filmic, ekphrastic, ludic, or musical).[227]

The question, then, becomes less "*what* does this mean?" (assuming one fixed meaning) but, perhaps "what does this mean *for this interpretation*?" (assuming at least one interpretation by the arranger). If the meaning to be translated is based on the game's narrative, then it is the narrative of the game which should be translated from game to musical object.[228] One avenue of approaching this, as I will show below, is not only temporally based (i.e., stitching pieces together in the order they appeared in the game), but also generically based. That is, if musical genres or forms themselves hold some kind of meaning, then they can be used as one way of potentially

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[225] "To use a genealogical metaphor, I prefer a *sibling* model rather than a *descendant* model for articulating the relationship between musical and literary narrative. The *descendant model* presupposes a conceptual priority for literary narrative, while the *sibling model* distinguishes between a set of foundational principles common to all narrative media and principles unique to each medium." Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 12.

[226] Venuti, "ATC," 30.

[227] Venuti, "ETC," 138. There are certain parallels here with remediation as well, as I discussed in Chapter 1. See Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

[228] Jeremy Smith, for instance, has suggested that fan adaptations (his words) of video game music pick up on the semiotic meaning of the music from which they are derived. His case studies focus on local scenes or areas within games, rather than the game's narrative as a whole. While his analyses do not always make explicit what the semiotic meaning he's advocating for is, the premise itself is, I believe, sound. See Smith, "'Wear People's Faces.'"

easing the process of translation, smoothing out the architectonic wrinkles between mediums. Here, form and genre become a formal interpretant.[229]

"Listen to my story"

On May 11th, 2013 the Wuppertal Symphony Orchestra premiered the *Final Symphony*—a set of orchestral arrangements based on Nobuo Uematsu's music for the Final Fantasy series—at the Historische Stadthalle; just two years later, the London Symphony Orchestra released a recording of the *Final Symphony*. Even among the ever-growing brand of game music concerts, the *Final Symphony* stands apart with its extreme "high art" aspirations as it borrows the music from three of the Final Fantasy games (*Final Fantasy VI*, *Final Fantasy VII*, and *Final Fantasy X*), and freely arranged the music from these games into "proper" classical symphonic genres (a symphonic poem, symphony, and concerto, respectively).[230] This initial concert was followed on August 29th, 2015 by *Final Symphony II*, which featured similar symphonic arrangements of the music from *Final Fantasy V* (1992), *Final Fantasy VIII* (1999), *Final Fantasy IX* (2000), and *Final Fantasy XIII* (2010).[231]

In this section I would like to focus on Masashi Hamauzu's contribution to the first *Final Symphony* program: *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto*. This piece is somewhat unique in the scope of the original *Final Symphony* program, as *Final Fantasy X* was the first main series game

[229] "These interpretants can be interrelated: a style or genre may be chosen because it somehow corresponds to a figure, scene, or period depicted in the image, establishing a relation of equivalence." Venuti, "ETC," 140.
[230] Uematsu himself states that 'What makes *Final Symphony* so different is that it's interpreted more freely, in an artistic manner. There are even aspects that are closer to contemporary classical music." "Final Symphony - Interview with Nobuo Uematsu," interview by Game Concerts, *Vimeo*, https://vimeo.com/130751534; cf. Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 170.
[231] Unlike the pieces for the original *Final Symphony*, the pieces arranged for this concert were all single movement works. Also unlike the original *Final Symphony*, only the piece associated with *Final Fantasy IX* (Roger Wanamo's *For the People of Gaia*) is in a traditional "classical" genre (a piano concerto).

in the franchise for which Uematsu was not the sole composer. Indeed, Hamauzu was one of two additional main composers on the game's soundtrack, along with Junya Nakano. With his contribution to the *Final Symphony*, Hamauzu took pieces from the soundtrack originally composed by both himself and Uematsu and arranged them into a virtuosic concerto.[232] This piece, then, aligns itself with a specific musical tradition, directly orienting itself with classical music, contributing to what William Gibbons has termed the "classifying" of game music.[233] I'd like to consider this process regarding this concerto in terms of musical *arrangement*, drawing particularly on Peter Szendy's musings on arrangement and transcription as a way of understanding how preexisting music can be revisited—or perhaps in the language of video games, re-*played*.[234]

Christopher Huynh indirectly notes this process of arrangement in his analysis of the concerto, stating that "Hamauzu's piano concerto… purposely [does] not hav[e] clear ties to the narrative and characters of its game. Although he chooses a handful of recognizable themes, Hamauzu doesn't shy away from giving them far-removed variations to craft a new experience."[235] Though he claims this towards the beginning of his analysis, much of Huynh's analysis *does* try to tie his reading of the concerto back to the game. He does this primarily by tracking the motivic fragments as Hamauzu arranges and transforms them across the concerto. Yet while Huynh

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[232] Uematsu notes in an interview that with all of the *Final Symphony* pieces the various arrangers "developed fragments of the melodies I wrote into complex, highly sophisticated music." Nobuo Uematsu, "Final Symphony - Music from Final Fantasy VI, VII and X," interview by Game Concerts, *Vimeo*, https://vimeo.com/119326867.
[233] Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 157-71. I prefer the term "classicalization."
[234] Julianne Grasso has discussed a related point in terms of phenomenologically "reliving" a game while listening to a video game music concert: "I'd like to focus on the use of the term 'reliving' – the notion that the music will allow the listener more than recalling, but rather an access to an embodied memory that perhaps *enacts* something about experiences of play, through forms of musical narrativity." Julianne Grasso, "On Canons as Music and Muse," 84. I take this point up again in earnest in Chapter 4.
[235] Christopher Huynh, "Final Fantasy X Piano Concerto Listener's Guide," *VGMOnline*, last modified April 23, 2015, http://www.vgmonline.net/ff10concerto/.

chooses to focus on the motivic development across the concerto, I am instead interested in more specifically *why* the concerto as a musical genre was chosen in the first place. I contend that the appeal of the concerto is its classical associations of the (narrative) relationship between the individual and society—that is, the soloist and their relationship to the accompanying ensemble.

Elsewhere, I have argued that *Final Fantasy X* represents a hyperreal re-telling of Japan's history, though through an imagined Western lens. Crucial to this point is the use of the diegetic "Hymn of the Fayth" as a way of framing the Yevon religion of the gameworld in the Western sacred music tradition. This ultimately culminates with a literal "death of god" at the game's narrative epoch, one marked by "drastic harmonic changes to the hymn."[236] Pertinent to my reading of the *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto* is that the game's focus is on Yuna, a summoner who undergoes a religious pilgrimage in order to defeat the evil "Sin" incarnate of the gameworld.[237] Along the way, however, she forsakes her sacred pilgrimage after finding out the dark truth behind the religion in which she once so faithfully believed. In this sense, Yuna becomes the crucial lynchpin in the masses' ultimate disillusionment with Yevon. And yet, it is not until the end of the game that players defeat Yu Yevon, the god of the gameworld, and that the people of Spira completely embrace the change Yuna represents. That is, along the way Yuna becomes persecuted for her changed beliefs—an individual against society in terms of narrative conflict.

The understanding of the concerto (or, more specifically, the concerto grosso) as representative of the relationship between the individual and society was perhaps made most

[236] Stefan Greenfield-Casas, "Between Worlds," 4.
[237] While Yuna is not the game's primary playable character, she is almost certainly the game's protagonist and hero(ine). On this distinction see Catherine Bailey Kyle, "Her Story, Too: *Final Fantasy X*, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, and the Feminist Hero's Journey," in *Heroines of Film and Television: Portrayals in Popular Culture*, eds. Norma Jones, Maja Bajac-Carter, and Bob Batchelor (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 131-46.

famous in Susan McClary's well-known analysis of J.S. Bach's Fifth Brandenburg Concerto.[238] For McClary, "The concerto grosso involves two principal performing media: a large, collective force (the concerto grosso – literally, the 'big ensemble') and one or more soloists. The two forces enact metaphorically – and as a spectacle – the interactions between individual and society."[239] Tied to her analysis is the "politics" of Bach's time: the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The larger point of her essay, that music should be understood, not in a kind of "Pythagorean," metaphysical sense, but as "artistic production as social practice," was indicative of her own time within the field of music studies: the so-called new musicology of the late 1980s and early 1990s.[240] For some, her hermeneutics pushed the interpretive envelope too far, perhaps in large part because of the grand societal (rather than local agential or biographical) narrative she mapped onto the abstract music.[241] And yet, I wish to make a similar hermeneutic analysis with the *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto* as the game's narrative *overtly* plays on this narrative underpinning.

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[238] See Susan McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, eds. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13-62. Though McClary was perhaps the first to tie the socio-historical milieu of Bach's time to her analysis, even as far back as Heinrich Koch has the notion of a dialogue between soloist and orchestra been noted: "The expression of feeling by the solo player is like a monologue in passionate tones, in which the solo player is, as it were, communing with himself; nothing external has the slightest influence on the expression of his feeling. But consider a well-worked-out concerto in which, during the solo, the accompanying voices are not merely there to sound this or that missing interval of the chords between the soprano and bass. There is a passionate dialogue between the concerto player and the accompanying orchestra. He expresses his feelings to the orchestra, and it signals him through short interspersed phrases sometimes approval, sometimes acceptance of his expression, as it were. Now in the allegro it tries to stimulate his noble feelings still more; now it commiserates, now it comforts him in the adagio. In short, by a concerto I imagine something similar to the tragedy of the ancients, where the actor expressed his feelings not towards the pit, but to the chorus." Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Introductory Essay on Composition: The Mechanical Rules of Melody, Sections 3 and 4*, trans. Nancy Kovaleff Baker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 209. See also Joseph Kerman, *Concerto Conversations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[239] McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics," 23.

[240] Ibid., 60.

[241] Charles Rosen's chapter on "The New Musicology" is one such example. See Charles Rosen, *Critical Entertainments: Music Old and New* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 255–72, esp. 264–65.

As I have previously argued, the history of Spira aligns itself in a kind of hyperreal turn to the Enlightenment. In this sense, a concerto is generically the perfect musical representation of *Final Fantasy X*. Even if Hamauzu claims that "His inspiration for the material in this concert is more a reflection of that bigger vision [seeing the *Final Fantasy* series "more as a continuum than as a series of separate scenes and stories"] and not so much connected to any certain story-arc or a set of characters," the form and genre of the concerto paints a different picture.[242] Formally, the order of the movements *does* roughly align with the game's narrative**,** as shown in Figure 3.1.

It opens with a movement titled "Zanarkand," which aligns not only with where the opening credits play before players start the game proper take place, but also where one starts in the game: the Zanarkand of the past before Tidus is dragged into the future.[243] The second movement, which I will discuss in more detail below, is entitled "Inori" (the Japanese title of the "Hymn of the Fayth"), the musical synecdoche for both Spira and a hyperreal Japan. Finally, the third and last movement, "Kessen" (Eng. "Final Battle") is based on merging both the music played when the party confronts both Sin (a piece titled "Assault") and the music played when battling the game's final boss (the aforementioned "Final Battle").[244]

In terms of the genre of the piece, the interactions between the individual and society are tied to Yuna's narrative within the gameworld—the piano, then, becomes representative of Yuna as the game's protagonist. And yet, just as McClary's keyboard player occupies a double role as both accompanist and as soloist, so too does the piano here reflect part of the society with which

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[242] "Final Symphony," *Game Concerts*, http://www.gameconcerts.com/en/concerts/final-symphony/.
[243] Huynh's analysis also convincingly focuses on the use of the piece "Besaid" in this movement, which I will not rehash here. Indeed, he provides a more thorough list of the specific pieces used across the concerto as a whole. I have adapted Huynh's analysis into Figure 3.1.
[244] All of these pieces have various titles based on how the original Japanese was translated. These include "To Zanarkand," "At Zanarkand," and "Zanarkand"; "Hymn of the Fayth," "Song of Prayer," and "Inori"; and "Decisive Battle," "Final Battle," and "Kessen."

Movement 1: Zanarkand

00:00	00:19	00:38	00:56	01:38	03:28	04:04	04:38	04:50	05:11	06:59	08:17
Newly composed material	Zanarkand fragment	Newly composed material	Besaid	Zanarkand	Interjection, newly composed material	Hymn of the Fayth	Final Battle	Newly composed material	Zanarkand	Besaid	End

Movement 2: Inori

00:00	00:49	01:14	01:47	02:25	03:48	04:10	04:36	04:55	05:25	06:36
Hymn of the Fayth (solo piano)	Hymn of the Fayth (with orchestra)	Newly composed material	Hymn of the Fayth	Thunder Plains	Yuna's Decision	Thunder Plains	Newly composed material (piano solo)	Hymn of the Fayth (The Sending)	Hymn of the Fayth (Piano cadenza with orch)	End (attacca)

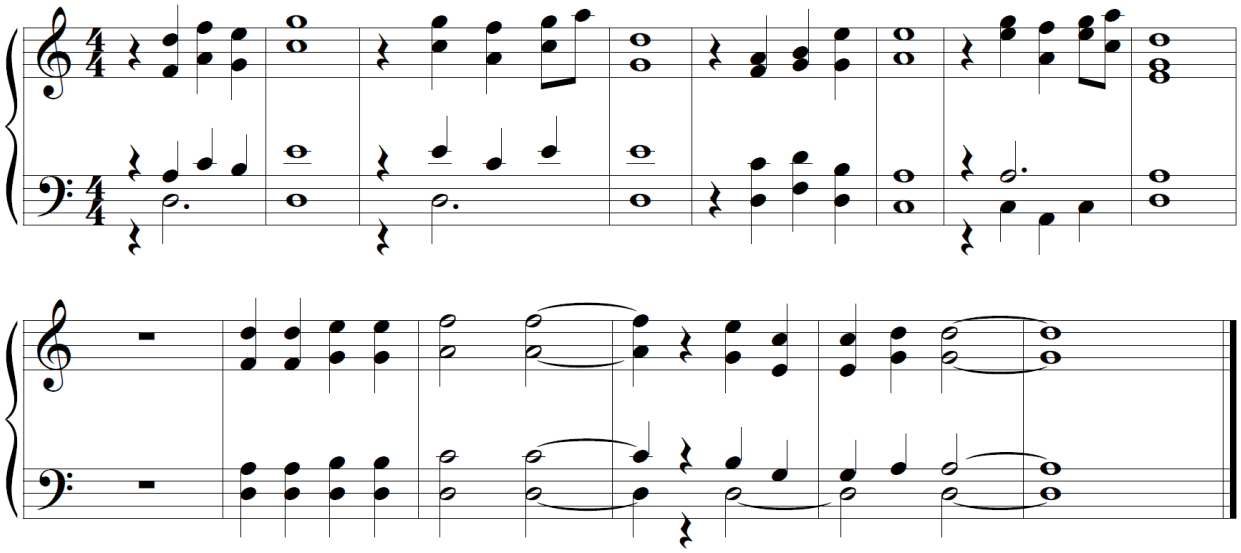
Movement 3: Kessen

00:00	01:47	01:58	02:06	02:58	03:31	03:42	04:00	04:16	04:21
Assault	Hymn of the Fayth(?)	Newly composed material, link	Final Battle	+Zanarkand countermelody	Hymn of the Fayth	Zanarkand	Coda	End	Recording ends

Figure 3.1. Thematic layout of *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto* (adapted and revised from Huynh, "Final Fantasy X Piano Concerto Listener's Guide."

it is interacting. This is most apparent in the second movement of the concerto, "Inori." As mentioned above, this movement takes as its main motivic material the "Hymn of the Fayth" (transcribed in its prototypical form in Example 3.1), a sacred song of the Yevon religion.[245] The hymn (and/or chorale) as a musical topic evokes not only religious connotations, but those of community as well.[246] The song, then, is not just Yuna's song—instead it is one that belongs to all of the people of Spira. And yet, it is largely because of Yuna's progression in her journey that Spira undergoes the changes it does in the game.[247] That the solo piano plays a highly decorated variation on the Hymn in this second movement, against a kind of cantus firmus on the Hymn played by the accompanying orchestra before moving uninterrupted into the third movement signals not only musical, but the narrative ties between the two as well. This is doubly reinforced with the ending of the concerto—just before the halfway point of the final movement, a full voiced iteration of the Hymn is played again by the solo piano. This is then reiterated in the antepenultimate phrase of the movement, just before the concerto ends. The Hymn governs not only the second movement, then, but extends forward to the "decisive battle" that concludes the narrative of the game and, ultimately, the piano concerto itself.

[245] I have written on this song and its many arrangements at length. See Greenfield-Casas, "Between Worlds," 6-18.
[246] For an extended discussion of the hymn as a musical topic, see Olga Sánchez-Kisielewska, "The Hymn as a Musical Topic in the Age of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2018).
[247] As McClary notes in her analysis: "Certainly, social order and individual freedom are possible, but apparently only so long as the individuals in question… abide by the rules and permit themselves to be appropriated. What happens when a genuine deviant (and one from the ensemble's service staff yet!) declares itself a genius, unconstrained by convention, and takes over? We readily identify with this self-appointed protagonist's adventure (its storming of the Bastille, if you will) and at the same time fear for what might happen as a result of the suspension of traditional authority." McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics," 40.



Example 3.1. "Hymn of the Fayth" (transcription by author).

With this concerto, Hamauzu provided his own take and translation, not only on the music of *Final Fantasy X*, but also on the narrative of the game. As he notes of the *Final Symphony*: "In this instance I could give more priority to my feelings and sensitivity when composing music than often is the case. Naturally I also had the storyline of the game strongly in my mind, but I also got ideas from the real world outside the creations of the FINAL FANTASY-world."[248] Hamauzu's quote aligns with Szendy's discussion of his love of arrangers, that is, those who "don't hesitate to set their name down next to the author's. Bluntly adding their surname by means of a *hyphen*…"[249] Here, Hamauzu adds a metaphorical hyphen by not only Uematsu (Uematsu-Hamauzu), but arguably also Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of the *Final Fantasy* series and executive producer of *Final Fantasy X*; thus: Sakaguchi-Hamauzu… or perhaps even Sakaguchi-Uematsu-Hamauzu. This is by no means to say Hamauzu's score is derivative—at least not in any negative sense of the word. Instead, it is a specific *hearing* of *Final Fantasy X* and its music, his

[248] *Game Concerts*, "Final Symphony."
[249] Szendy, *Listen*, 35 (emphasis in original).

intersemiotic translation from game to concerto. These Szendian hearings parallel Venuti's hermeneutic framework: a translation (arrangement) created through various formal and/or thematic interpretants (a "hearing," here mediated through the concerto genre). To reiterate Szendy's words: "what arrangers are signing is above all a listening. *Their* hearing of a work."[250] In this sense, Hamauzu's view (or hearing) of the music of *Final Fantasy X* is instructive: "There were a few things I couldn't express well enough while I was working originally on the music of FINAL FANTASY X, and I feel like I could express those things this time around."[251]

As I have shown in this section, Hamauzu's hearing and resultant intersemiotic translation is still very much in line with the narrative of *Final Fantasy X* and its story. Perhaps it is no accident, then, that the mythic first words heard spoken in the Final Fantasy franchise writ large are these: "Listen to my story."[252] This line is spoken by *Final Fantasy X*'s playable character, Tidus, in the game's introductory cinematic, directly imploring that those playing the game *listen*. *Final Fantasy X* and Hamauzu's *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto*, then, can be heard as an auspicious example of how listening directly connects to arrangement. That Tidus's plea is spoken over Uematsu's composition "Zanarkand," for instance, directly reinforces Hamauzu's adaptation of the piece into the opening of his concerto, prompting us from the outset to remember to *listen*. Indeed, with this concerto, Hamauzu simply invites us to listen to the worlds of *Final Fantasy* as he hears them.[253]

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[250] Ibid., 36.
[251] *Game Concerts*, "Final Symphony."
[252] The previous games in the series did not include spoken dialogue, though the previous three games included pieces with recorded vocal lines.
[253] To rewrite Szendy slightly: "And [we] *listen to him listening*." Szendy, *Listen*, 60 (original emphasis).

Play It Again, Sora

The now-classic PlayStation 2 game *Kingdom Hearts* (2002) was the result of a synergetic collaboration between two media powerhouses: the Walt Disney media conglomerate, and the Japanese video game company Square (as the series continued on, eventually Square Enix).[254] The game tells the story of a young boy named Sora (shown in Figure 3.2), who is whisked away from his home on an adventure to save numerous worlds from the evil Heartless, creatures of darkness which threaten to overtake these worlds. Characters from Disney's properties, Square Enix's Final Fantasy series, and some characters new and novel to *Kingdom Hearts* cohabitate these many in-

Figure 3.2. Title Screen of *Kingdom Hearts* (2002).

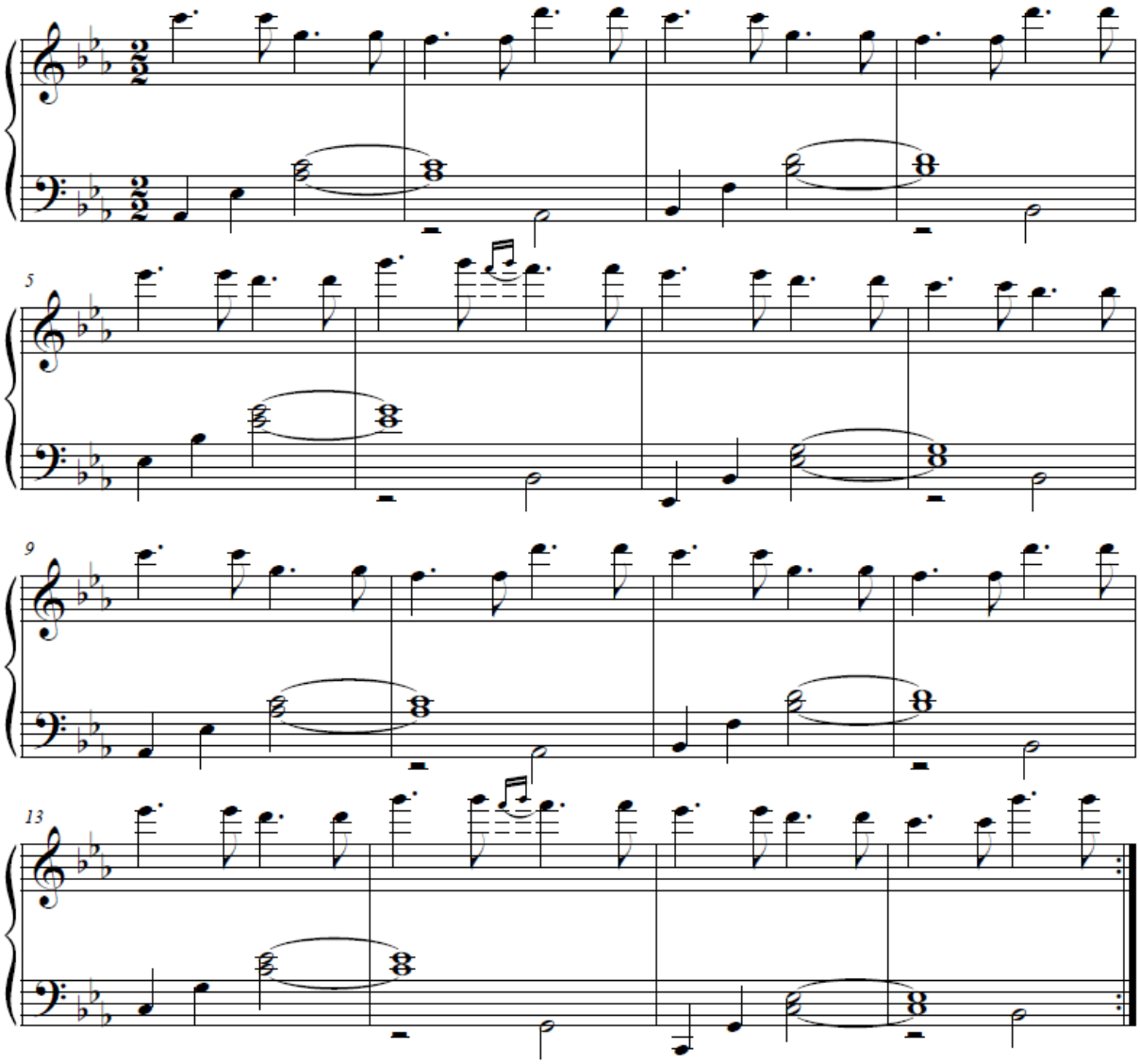
[254] As the legend goes, the then-executive director of Square, Shinji Hashimoto, bumped into a Disney executive in an elevator and took advantage of the opportunity to pitch a game that merged Disney characters with characters from Square's immensely popular *Final Fantasy* series (1987 – present). By a further stroke of luck, the pitch was accepted, and Tetsuya Nomura—then best known for his work as a character designer for the Final Fantasy games—took over as both the game's director and character designer. See Alexa Ray Corriea, *Kingdom Hearts II* (Los Angeles: Boss Fight Books, 2017), 5-6.

game "worlds." Some of these worlds are unique to *Kingdom Hearts* (e.g., Destiny Island, Traverse Town, and Hollow Bastion), though many of the worlds are built upon the settings of Disney movies (e.g., the Halloween Town world based on Disney's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), or Olympus Coliseum based on Disney's *Hercules* (1997)). And yet, in this section I am less interested in the play between worlds in the game, and more interested in what happens before gameplay even starts: composer Yoko Shimomura's "Dearly Beloved," the piece that plays during the game's start-up sequence.

As "Dearly Beloved" (transcribed in Example 3.2) and its various arrangements have played on loop at the title screen of every Kingdom Hearts game for almost two decades, the melody has become a familiar one to fans of the franchise.[255] In the context of the Kingdom Hearts games, "Dearly Beloved" musically "brands" the franchise (to borrow a phrase from James Buhler) at the game's outset. Both James Buhler and Tim Summer have written on this phenomenon, the former analyzing the mythic branding of franchises by way of the corporate logos that open epic transmedia franchises (e.g., Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, and Harry Potter), and the latter focusing more particularly on video games openings.[256] Summers writes that

> When a game is triggered by the player, the corporate logos of the developers and publishers responsible for the game are displayed, much in the way that the animated logos of film studios such as Universal or Twentieth Century Fox are familiar preludes to movies. While the producer logos are usually accompanied by a sonically striking musical cue, unlike their cinematic siblings, in games, the music and presentation of the logo is more likely to be individualized for each game, revised as sound technology develops from year to year. *Rather than a static musical identity for a company, an evolving one is often created*.[257]

[255] As with many video games, the music played at the *Kingdom Hearts* title screen is looped (or repeated) until the player makes their first interaction with the game (by pressing a button on the controller). For the first *Kingdom Hearts*, if players wait too long, the main menu cinematic will start playing.
[256] See Buhler, "Branding the Franchise"; and Tim Summers, *Understanding Video Game Music*.
[257] See ibid., 16 (emphasis added).



Example 3.2. “Dearly Beloved” (transcription by author).

Since the original *Kingdom Hearts*, “Dearly Beloved” has played with these ludo-schematic conventions. While the publishers and developers’ logos are indeed displayed as the game boots up—first Square Electronic Arts, followed by Disney Interactive—no music or sonic logos accompany these title cards. Instead, a poignant and pregnant silence leads into a melancholy piano rendition of “Dearly Beloved” playing over the sound of lapping waves when the game-proper’s

start-up menu fades into focus, shown previously in Figure 3.2. As I suggest elsewhere, music is used in the series as a way of mediating the merging of these franchises.[258] Here, the silencing of the parent franchises emphasizes Kingdom Hearts as its own series; the subsequent lapping waves, the sounds of water, symbolically give birth to the series before its own theme sounds. This opening audio-visual schema has opened every entry in the Kingdom Hearts franchise (ten games thus far, as well as various remasters and re-releases).

Following Summers' discussion of an "evolving" musical identity for a video game company (or here we might more productively think of Kingdom Hearts as a franchise), each of these iterations of "Dearly Beloved" is arranged in some new or novel way. To list a few notable examples: *Kingdom Heart II* (2005) was orchestrated for string orchestra and piano, and added an introduction of sorts as well as a new countermelody;[259] *Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days* (2009) highlighted the countermelody as played by a solo clarinet—a previously unused instrument in arrangements of "Dearly Beloved"—over the original melody; *Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance* (2012) arranged the previously duple theme into a dactylic waltz; and, most recently, *Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory* (2020) arranged the piece into a kind of "Pixar jazz" arrangement.[260] While each new arrangement is ontologically understood as (an arrangement of) "Dearly Beloved," each new iteration also marks a new game.[261]

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[258] See Stefan Greenfield-Casas, "From the Screen (to the Screen) to the Concert Hall: Arrangement as a Worldbuilding and Worldbridging Device in the *Kingdom Hearts* Series," in *The Oxford Handbook of Arrangement Studies*, ed. Ryan Raul Bañagale (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, forth).

[259] Also noteworthy, I think, is that it is the version of "Dearly Beloved" played at the end of *Kingdom Hearts 2* which I believe to be the prototypical arrangement of the piece. It was also the version featured on the *KINGDOM HEARTS Concert –World Tour–* program.

[260] I thank Fred Hosken for suggesting this apropos generic category, which might also be understood as falling under the symphonic jazz genre.

[261] Considering the ontology of arrangements, see Brian Kane, "Jazz, Mediation, Ontology," *Contemporary Music Review* 37, no. 5-6 (2018): 507-28. Each arrangement of "Dearly Beloved" also hints at the narrative within that particular game. The "Always on My Mind" countermelody added in *Kingdom Hearts II*, for instance, is representative of the new protagonist featured in the game who is essentially the counterpart of Sora. This same

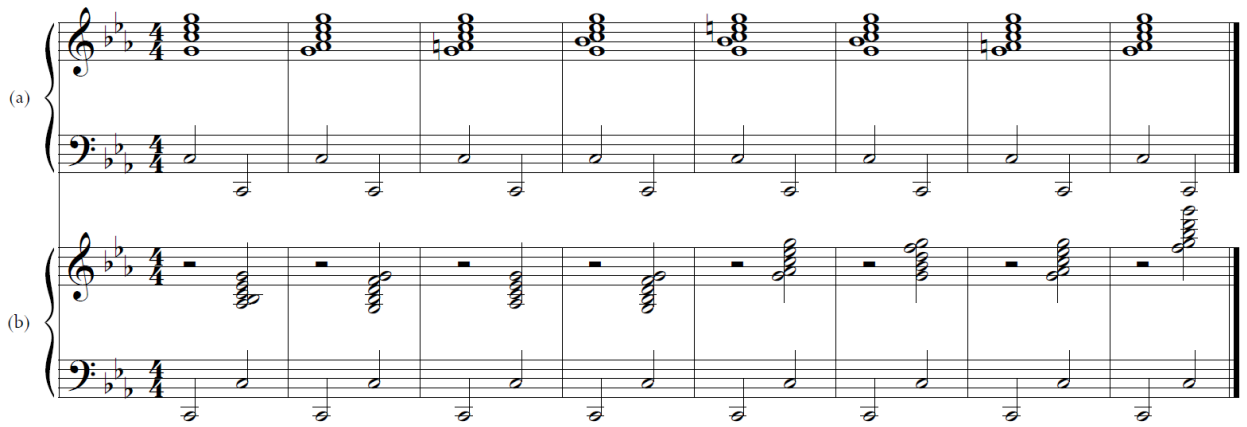
That the games in the franchise play with musical variations, then, perfectly set up Natsumi Kameoka's Concert Paraphrase on "Dearly Beloved." The Concert Paraphrase was released as a recording on the *Piano Collections Kingdom Hearts* album, produced by Square Enix and distributed by Sony in 2009.[262] The piece is a neo-Romantic tour-de-force that recalls the virtuosic opera paraphrases of Franz Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg. Over the course of multiple variations, the paraphrase reconstructs the unassuming original with a virtuosic accompaniment and full-voiced theme. The paraphrase itself further comments on this Romantic and virtuosic lineage with an intertextual allusion to what is frequently thought of as a paragon of Romantic piano writing: the opening eight measures of Sergei Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto (see Example 3.3).[263]

Here too we witness a kind of intersemiotic translation, moving from the ludosemiotic presentation of the series' opening and development across time to a musical translation of this in the form of the theme and variation. But whereas the *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto* was linearly tied to the game's narrative, here instead the Concert Paraphrase on "Dearly Beloved" abstracts away from a singular game's narrative and instead considers the parageneric space of the series opening. If meaning was explicitly bound in *narrative* content before, here instead it plays with a split pre-narrative meaning. On the one hand, it is a translation of the schematic video game

character is then the main protagonist of *358/2*, as musically suggested by the prominence of the countermelody in the *358/2* arrangement of "Dearly Beloved." I thank Ryan Thompson for this observation.

[262] In addition to the Concert Paraphrase on "Dearly Beloved," the album also includes transcriptions by Sachiko Miyano of various other pieces from the series, as well as a four-movement "Sonata on Themes of KINGDOM HEARTS" arranged by Kameoka.

[263] Though the reference is unmistakable, it is more an intertextual allusion than a straight quotation. Even when transposed, the harmonic content is different: while Rachmaninoff creates tension through a slithering chromatic line in the inner voices, Kameoka instead creates harmonic tension through a rising diatonic line (though again in the inner voices). Further still, Rachmaninoff's inverts back in on itself five chords in, returning from whence it came; Kameoka's introduction, however, instead *repeats* itself (signaling, perhaps, what is to come across the rest of the paraphrase), though this time up an octave. On musical intertextuality, see Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).



Example 3.3. Transposed and reduced comparison of the opening of (a) Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto and (b) Kameoka's Concert Paraphrase.

opening sequence and title screen, repeating over and over again as players start their save file, picking up where they left off with an apperceptual new understanding of the game. On the other hand, it is a non-specific transmutation of the Kingdom Hearts series as a whole: a paraphrase of the series. In Disney and Square's silence in the opening branding (following Buhler and Summers), "Dearly Beloved" becomes the sole musical agent that contains the meaning of Kingdom Hearts. In other words, "Dearly Beloved" comes to *mean*, to *index*, Kingdom Hearts as its main theme, its brand. The genre(s) of the paraphrase and the theme and variations, then, perfectly encapsulate the essence of Kingdom Hearts and of "Dearly Beloved": just as the games within the series each paraphrase the Disney narratives they retell, so too does Kameoka's piece paraphrase the franchise; and just as each game within the Kingdom Hearts series start with a new and looped variation of "Dearly Beloved," each developing or highlighting a new element of the original piece, so too does the paraphrase develop the original theme by "looping" back in on itself into a series of spectacular variations.

Indeed, this translation gives special credence to theme and variation scholar Roman Ivanovitch's assertion that "Listeners who become 'preoccupied' with variation allow the composer to lead them through a musical world in which relations between two musical objects are not measured according to some finely calibrated absolute scale, but are governed by strategic reassurances[…], general shapes, and a willingness to exert one's mental faculties to fill in the blanks."[264] The variation world here is based on the Kingdom Hearts series—an entire intermedial universe as I have argued elsewhere.[265] The mental faculties which fill in the blanks are based on the listeners' (presumed) personal experience with the series. And while there might be a distance between musical objects (the theme and its variations), with this particular set of variations there is also the distance traveled from the gameworld to our world, the "real" world.

Nintendo's (Lost) Monument to the Goddesses

Perhaps more so than any other symphonic genre, the symphony has come to represent the epitome of Western classical music. This might in part be due to the musicians which perform these works: the symphony is institution, genre, and form all in one. In other words, symphonies (e.g., the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) perform symphonies (e.g., Beethoven's Symphony No. 5) that are often written in the four-movement symphonic form (prototypically: sonata-allegro, slow, minuet and trio, finale).[266] But this fame also comes from the genre's long history. William Gibbons, glossing Mark Evan Bonds, highlights the "prestige" and "seriousness" this genre has garnered,

[264] Roman Ivanovitch, "What's in a Theme? On the Nature of Variation," *Gamut: Online Journal of the Music Theory Society of the Mid-Atlantic* 3 (1): Article 3. https://trace.tennessee.edu/gamut/vol3/iss1/3/.
[265] Greenfield-Casas, "From the Screen (to the Screen) to the Concert Hall."
[266] Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, ch. 15 (318-42), esp. 320-336, with a cursory summary pp. 320-321. Sometimes this supermacro schema is written as Fast, Slow, Minuet, Fast, as in Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1.

especially over time.[267] But there is an additional element imbued in the symphony, especially in the Teutonic Romantic symphonic tradition: that of the monumental.[268]

Alexander Rehding has analyzed the musical monumental at length, considering the subject vis-à-vis Romantic German works. As Rehding points out, the term monumental has two meanings. On the one hand, it gestures to the monumental in terms of its grand scale, with aspirations to the sublime.[269] On the other hand, there is a commemorative element, wherein that which is monumental often serves as a monument in remembrance of something.[270] Indeed, Rehding argues that *arrangement* is one way of commemorating music. To quote him at length:

> What is common to these arrangements is that they all are material—often tangible—manifestations of a musical work. The material component of these musical objects is foregrounded here so as to focus our attention on the function that such monuments fulfill in musical culture and to reveal the embeddedness of monumental music in a network of cultural and musical connections most clearly. The focus on arrangements here is neither to say, of course, that a monument can *only* be an arrangement nor that *any* arrangement is automatically monumental. It is to say, rather, that the machinations of monumentalization can more often be laid bare in arrangements and offer instructive insights on the workings of monumentality—more so, in many cases, than compositions that have inherent pretensions to monumentality and that have garnered a lasting place in the canonical Hall of Fame.[271]

In this sense, arrangement is one material element of canonization—a reification of cultural legacy. As I will argue in what follows, these qualities are all exemplified in *The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses*, based on the music from across the eponymous (Epona-mous?)

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[267] Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 169; cf. Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 1, 2. Importantly, Bonds notes the symphony was not always the pinnacle of instrumental composition.
[268] I explore this idea further in a forthcoming review-article. See Stefan Greenfield-Casas, "On Musical Museums, Monuments, and Memories: Review of FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE Orchestral Arrangement Album," *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, Special Issue on *Final Fantasy VII*'s Musical Legacy, eds. Richard Anatone, James Denis McGlynn, and Andrew Powell (forth).
[269] What Rehding calls the "aesthetic" monumental. Rehding, *Music and Monumentality*, 28, 39.
[270] What Rehding calls the "historical" monumental. Ibid., 27-28, 40.
[271] Ibid., 16.

franchise.[272] That is, the symphony as a genre represents the monumental; and here, in contradistinction to using a singular theme to represent a series (as with "Dearly Beloved"), the epic, decades-spanning series is instead translated to a multimovement form that specifically highlights certain games within the series.

As I outlined above, the term symphony has multiple meanings. This remains the case with *The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses*, now with an added meaning. Here, *The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses* is both the title of the full concert program (shown in Table 3.1) which toured from 2012-2017,[273] as well as the specific multi-movement symphony (arranged by Chad Seiter)[274] featured on the concert program.[275] For the rest of this chapter, I will discuss the symphony proper unless otherwise noted.

The Legend of Zelda franchise has a convoluted overarching narrative and multipart timeline (Figure 3.3 shows a curated version of this timeline based on the games featured in the symphony).[276] Each game on its own, however, is relatively straightforward. At a fundamental

[272] Epona is Link's (the protagonist of the series) horse.
[273] Other examples of video game concert programs being named "symphonies" (even if they did not always include a symphony on their programs) include *Play! A Video Game Symphony*, *rePLAY: A Symphony of Heroes*, *Final Symphony*, and *Press Start: Symphony of Games*. Square Enix will sometimes brand a recording or performing ensemble as a symphony that somehow relates to the music they are performing, e.g., the Shinra Symphony Orchestra (from Final Fantasy VII) and the YoRHa Symphony Orchestra (from the NieR series).
[274] Arranged by Chad Seiter, and orchestrated by Susie Benchasil Seiter and Chad Seiter. The Skyward Sword movement is arranged by Bill Panks, and orchestrated by Panks and Ben Emberley.
[275] Each movement within the symphony is a through-composed arrangement comprised of multiple pieces from that movement's source game.
[276] As such, fans with intimate knowledge of the series and its lore may find the following gloss of the series lacking. For the purposes of this chapter, I provide only the tip of the iceberg. For those interested in the lore of the game, see the official *The Legend of Zelda: Encyclopedia*; Ben Gelinas, *The Legend of Zelda: Encyclopedia*, Patrick Thorpe, ed., Keaton C. White, trans. (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Books, 2018). For those interested in more in-depth scholarly interpretations of the series, see Anthony G. Cirilla and Vincent E. Rome, eds., *Mythopoeic Narrative in The Legend of Zelda* (New York: Routledge, 2020). And, finally, for those interested in the music of the game, see Tim Summers, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time: A Game Music Companion* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2021). Finally, though not officially a movement within the symphony, I have included *Breath of the Wild* since (canonically) all paths within the splintered timeline converge into this game. I would further hypothesize that if/when the *Symphony of the Goddesses* is (re)produced again by Nintendo, that a sixth movement based on *Breath of the Wild* would act as a Finale for the symphony.

Act	First Season (2012-13)	Second Quest (2013)	Master Quest 2015	Master Quest 2016	Master Quest 2017
Act 1	Overture	Overture	Overture	Overture	Overture (2017)
	Dungeons of Hyrule	*Link's Awakening* *Spirit Tracks*	Gerudo Valley	Gerudo Valley	Dragon Roost Island
	Kakariko Village ~ Hope and Calm		Boss Battle Medley	Boss Battle Medley	*Majora's Mask* Medley
	Songs of the Hero		Suite from *Majora's Mask*	*Tri Force Heroes*	*Breath of the Wild*
			A Link Between Worlds	*A Link Between Worlds*	*A Link Between Worlds*
	Prelude ~ The Creation of Hyrule	Prelude ~ The Creation	Prelude ~ The Creation of Hyrule	Prelude ~ The Creation of Hyrule	Prelude ~ The Creation of Hyrule
					Movement I ~ *Skyward Sword*
	Movement I ~ *Ocarina of Time*	Movement I ~ The *Ocarina of Time*	Movement I ~ *Ocarina of Time*	Movement I ~ *Ocarina of Time*	Movement II ~ *Ocarina of Time*
	Movement II ~ *The Wind Waker*	Movement II ~ *The Wind Waker*	Movement II ~ *The Wind Waker*	Movement II ~ *The Wind Waker*	

Table 3.1. Comparison of *Legend of Zelda Symphony of the Goddesses* concert tour programs. Programs aligned when possible.[277]

[277] Some general observations regarding the program over time: Skyward Sword was upgraded from a medley to a movement of the symphony proper. Gerudo Valley was changed from an encore piece to an intermezzo piece to an opening piece (and it was only removed from the last concert due to time constraints). Similarly, Dragon Roost Island, which was a long-time encore piece, was moved to the beginning of the first act in the last concert. The intermezzo pieces were the most malleable, shifting from Great Fairy's Fountain, to Gerudo Valley, to Temple of Time. Majora's Mask switched from a suite to a medley (because of the absence of recordings, I am uncertain how similar these pieces were in actuality). Finally, the Second Quest program was the most inconsistent programming-wise—it jumped almost immediately into the symphony, used Gerudo Valley as the intermezzo (rather than Great Fairy Fountain), and flipped the Majora's Mask suite with the Skyward Sword medley. On Gerudo Valley being removed, see Chris del Castillo, "Legend Of Zelda: Symphony of the

Act 2	Intermezzo ~ Great Fairy's Fountain	Gerudo Valley	Intermezzo ~ Great Fairy's Fountain	Intermezzo ~ Temple of Time	Intermezzo ~ Temple of Time
					Movement III ~ *The Wind Waker*
	Movement III ~ *Twilight Princess*	Movement III ~ The *Twilight Princess*	Movement III ~ *Twilight Princess*	Movement III ~ *Twilight Princess*	Movement IV ~ *Twilight Princess*
	Movement IV ~ *A Link to the Past*	Movement IV ~ Time of the Falling Rain	Movement IV ~ Time of the Falling Rain	Movement IV ~ Time of the Falling Rain	Movement V ~ Time of the Falling Rain
	Final		Finale	Finale	Finale
Encore	Ballad of the Wind Fish	Suite from *Majora's Mask*	*Skyward Sword* Medley	*Majora's Mask* Medley	Ballad of the Wind Fish
	Gerudo Valley	Dragon Roost Island	Dragon Roost Island	Dragon Roost Island	Goron City (*Breath of the Wild*)
	Suite from *Majora's Mask*	*Skyward Sword* Medley	*Majora's Mask* Medley	*Skyward Sword* Medley	

Table 3.1, cont.

Goddesses – Interview with producer Jason Michael Paul," *Nerd Reactor*, October 5, 2017, https://nerdreactor.com/2017/10/05/legend-of-zelda-symphony-of-the-goddesses-interview-jason-michael-paul/.

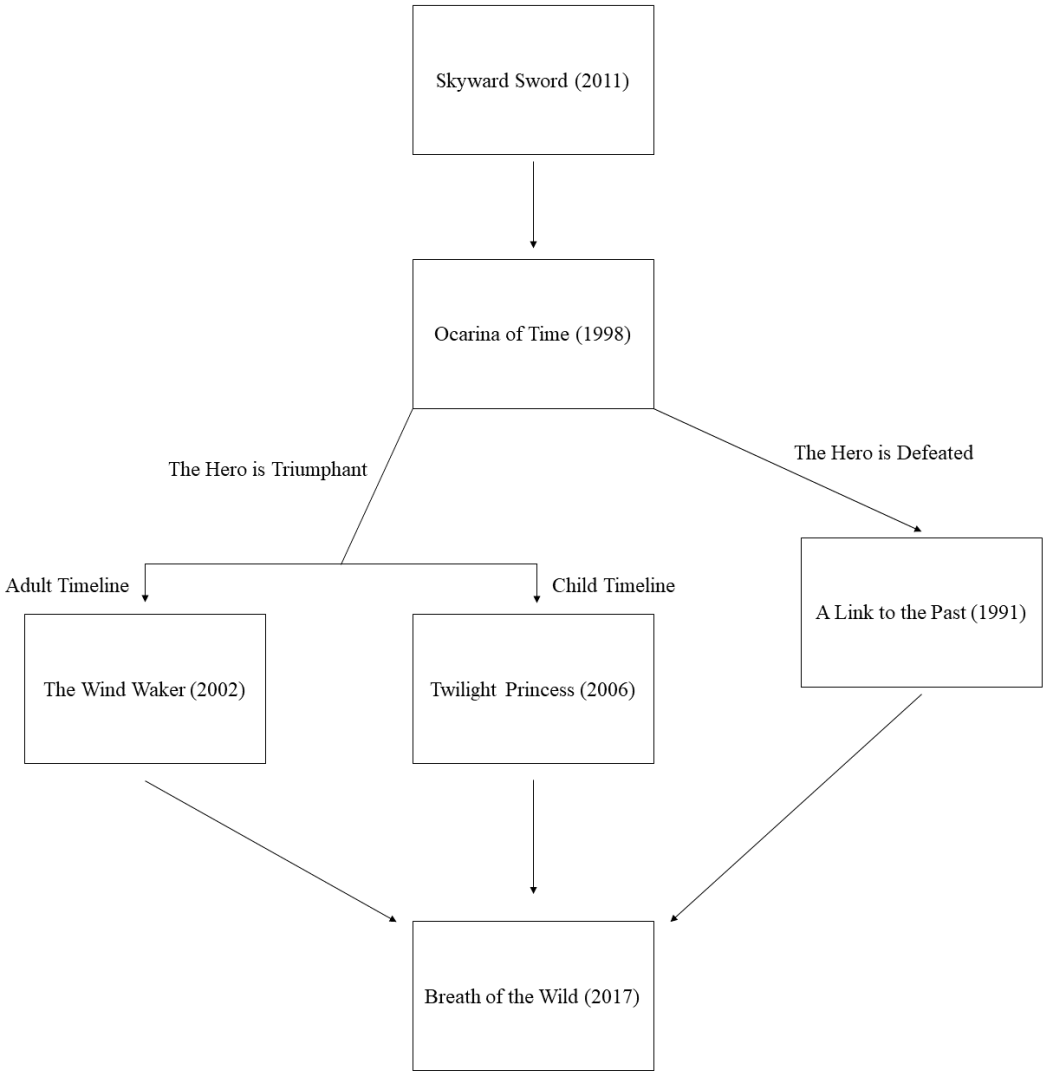

Figure 3.3. Curated timeline of games within The Legend of Zelda series mythohistory (*additional games exist across each of the arrows*).

level, most of its games center around a protagonist, Link, who must join with Princess Zelda to save the kingdom of Hyrule from the evil Ganon (or Ganondorf), oftentimes by finding the

legendary Master Sword and/or sacred Triforce.[278] While there are variations and deviations from this narrative structure per each unique game within the series, this very general overview will suffice for the time being as, for the purposes of my analysis, it is how these games relate to each other *in the grand narrative of the Zelda mythohistory* that is most important for my analysis.

Essentially, Link, Zelda, and Ganon are all stuck in a mythic cycle of reincarnation. The overarching narrative begins with a creation myth wherein three Golden Goddesses (for which the symphony is named) create the world of Hyrule and the wish-granting Triforce, and leave both under the stewardship of another goddess, Hylia. Eventually, evil (known as Demise), comes to Hyrule, and Hylia forsakes her godhood in order to join forces with a chosen hero to use the Triforce to defeat Demise. These mythic characters all have ever-reincarnating mortal forms: Hylia as Zelda, Demise as Ganon, and the chosen hero as Link. In a subsequent reincarnation story, what players will know as *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, Link travels through time (from when he was a child to an adult) in order to gain the power of the Seven Sages in order to defeat Ganon.

Depending on the outcome of this quest, however, there are three timelines which come into being (as something akin to a multiverse): the "child" timeline, to which Link is sent back upon defeating Ganon (since Link is a child when players first start *Ocarina of Time*); the "adult" timeline, which remains its own distinct timeline after Link travels back in time to the child timeline; and a fatalist "defeat" timeline where Link fails and is defeated by Ganon. The various games within the series all fall somewhere in fractured narrative.[279]

[278] Ganon and Ganondorf are the same being, but the former refers to his more primal form while the latter refers to his human form. For clarity's sake, I will default to using Ganon as the nonspecific name.
[279] For the intrepid reader, the full timeline is available to peruse in *The Legend of Zelda: Encyclopedia*, current as of 2017. See Gelinas, *The Legend of Zelda*, 10, 11, 19.

With this symphony, we see the fractured timeline of the Zelda franchise represented: these movements are split to show this temporal shattering. With the added first movement in 2017, *Skyward Sword* is (retroactively) acknowledged as the origin story of the franchise. From there, *Ocarina of Time*—the last game before (and cause of) the timeline split—is translated as the second movement. And with that movement there is a shift in temporalities to represent one game from each of the three timelines: *The Wind Waker* from the "Adult Timeline," *Twilight Princess* from the "Child Timeline," and *A Link to the Past* from the "Hero is Defeated" Timeline. It is somewhat difficult to discern the logics of the ordering of these movements. They were not ordered in terms of release date, as *A Link to the Past*, the third game released in the series back in the early 1990s, is the last movement. That it is the final movement, however, perhaps makes some sense as it is the earliest released game among the represented games, and thus holds the most potential for a climactic rush of nostalgia in the grand narrative arc of the symphony.

As for the remaining two games then, we can perhaps listen to them for their affective tones. To generalize, *Twilight Princess*'s narrative had a darker and more somber tone than *The Wind Waker*. In terms of the architectonic layout of the symphony, then, the decision might have been based on juxtaposing moods between movements, akin to the juxtaposition of tempi in traditional symphonies. Similarly, leaving off on the darker tone of *Twilight Princess* sets the stage for the "Hero is Defeated" Timeline. Indeed, placing the *A Link to the Past* ("Time of the Falling Rain") movement last, lends further credence to Grasso's analysis of "The Legend of Zelda 25th Anniversary Medley" (which, incidentally, Seiter also arranged).[280] In her analysis of the thematic makeup of the medley, Grasso notes that *A Link to the Past* is far and above prioritized over other

[280] Furthermore, as a piece arranged to celebrate a significant anniversary, this is another musical work that monumentalizes the series.

games within the series in terms of playtime. She notes that the extensive use of "The Dark World" cue across the medley builds musico-narrative tension across the arrangement. She continues:

> As a result, this arrangement of "The Dark World" is not as much a translation of 16-bit music to the symphony orchestra, but rather it maximizes the affects surrounding the memory of play—the melodic materials simply act as a signifier for A Link to the Past. (A "link to the past" indeed!) And more to Gibbons's points [suggesting that video game concerts reify particular histories within the history of video games],[281] positioning a game for the Super Nintendo as the climax of the 25th Anniversary Medley reinforces a notion of a Super Nintendo "golden age."[282]

Here, memory and, more specifically, *nostalgia* are the name of the game; many games play with notions of repetition, playing with players' memories of what has come before, and—in a case like this—tugging at the nostalgic heartstrings of players who have lived with a franchise for decades. I further expand on this notion in the following chapter, drawing on Grasso's writings on "reliving" the event, here reminiscent of Svetlana Boym's writings on restorative nostalgia, a type of nostalgia based around an individual's (or community's) desire to restore the past.[283] To be clear, while I think memory is an important topic to be discussed when dealing with these arrangements, it cannot be assumed on the listener's part; similarly, I think the knee-jerk reaction to default to nostalgia should be avoided. Here, however, this nostalgia seems to be written into the symphony, as Grasso notes of Seiter's arrangement (and here his symphony) prioritizing the "Super Nintendo 'golden age.'" There is a nostalgia in *Seiter's* "listening" of The Legend of Zelda, then, one which is potentially shared with fans who attend this concert and who have similar nostalgic sentiments for these early games.[284]

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[281] Gibbons, "Rewritable Memory."
[282] Grasso, "Canons as Music and Muse," 84.
[283] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41-48; Boym contrasts uncritical *restorative* nostalgia (a desire to return to and recreate the past) with *reflective* nostalgia (wherein the past can still be appreciated, but not through rose-tinted glasses). Ibid., 49-56.
[284] This nostalgic branding also extends to the *marketing* of the *Symphony of the Goddesses* tour (to be discussed in the following chapter).

If the symphony is already the most monumental of forms, then the symphony based on an epic franchise must eclipse the bounds of the standard four-movement symphony. Recall the six-movement *Lord of the Rings* Symphony, which shatters the formal schemata of the four-movement symphony. Here, the initially four—turned five—movement *Symphony of the Goddesses* is performed *across* the concert program *Symphony of the Goddesses*, as shown in Table 3.1. In performing its monumentality and its displaced temporality, the symphony cannot—or *should not*—be contained together as back-to-back movements. That is, because the timeline of The Legend of Zelda is in shambles and split across three disparate timelines, spacing the symphony across the program further highlights the disjunct timeline of the series.[285] Indeed, this shattering extends into formal turned generic constraints of each movement; bound no longer by the logics of, for instance, sonata form, each movement instead narratively (re)iterates the content of the flagship games of the series.[286] Each movement becomes a kind of symphonic poem or medley, a sonic montage of each game's respective narrative. If the "problem" of self-referentiality and cyclic coherence manifest within the classical symphony, then this problem is elided as a non-issue with the symphony (or any multimovement work) arranged from preexisting media.[287] That this source material exists gives these pieces a privileged sense of narrative coherence: that is, even if the pieces do not explicitly temporally trace out the musical themes in order of appearance as

[285] The symphony is split across the intermission of the program. "Better" still (for my own reading at least) would be if each movement was separated by other interlude arrangements, i.e., Mvt. 1, interlude, Mvt. 2, interlude, Mvt. 3, etc.

[286] This is not to say this could not have happened. Ultimately, it is based on the arrangers' hermeneutic hearing. A hypothetical symphonic arrangement that was concerned only with the music from these games could have taken them strictly as thematic or motivic materials, divorced from any narrative associations, and arranged them following classical formal conventions.

[287] "This sense of cohesiveness, construed as a web of interrelations, is not to be conceived exclusively as a pre-existing 'object' to be discovered through research. Instead, perceiving degrees of multimovement integration also belongs to the realm of interpretation." Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 318. Lehman discusses this with film adaptations as well. See Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music," 13-14.

might have been heard in a playthrough of the game, that the musical motifs, themes, and the like all explicitly come from the same source material gives these pieces a sense of cyclic coherence (to varying levels).

Furthermore, here, a multimovement work offers a counterpoint to the theme and variation in intersemiotically transmogrifying a series writ large. Where before the narrative of a full game was told across a multimovement piece (Hamauzu's piano concerto) and a series was represented with one piece (Kameoka's concert paraphrase), with the *Symphony of the Goddesses* we have The Legend of Zelda series monumentalized in an epic multimovement work and individual games within the series confined to singular movements. And yet… what remains of this musical monument?

In the previous chapter I argued that Square Enix has done an excellent job of using the music from its games to further the longevity of their media properties and their worlds. Nintendo, on the other hand, has been significantly less successful on this score. This is not to say that they haven't used their music as selling points before—think of the *Symphonic Legends* concert and the 25th Anniversary CD that accompanied copies of *Skyward Sword*—but Nintendo has been far less active in promoting their music. This includes material traces of its music. While, by all accounts, the *Symphonic Legends* concert was a success, it does not have an official recording available (in comparison to, say, *Symphonic Fantasies* and *Symphonic Odysseys*). While Square Enix and other companies' properties were fanfared across the stadium at the 2020 (2021) Tokyo Olympics, Nintendo's properties were silent. And, while *Symphony of the Goddesses* concert series was enormously popular and toured across the world for five years, there are (again) no official recordings of the performance. Granted, there are two piano reductions of the score available, published through Alfred Music—but they are very much piano reductions, not piano scores *a la*

Liszt.[288] This recalls Thomas Christensen's discussion of the purpose of four-hand piano transcriptions in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries: the arrangements were usually for amateurs, they were oftentimes the only way musical amateurs could hear this music (in an era before the phonograph, let alone recording technologies), and, in many instances, they were intended less as standalone autonomous pieces than as *aide-memoire* to remember the music in its full symphonic glory.[289] While Christensen offers a thorough, nuanced, and historically situated meditation on these bourgeois transcriptions, however, we are now at least a century-removed from this commercial framework. There is little reason for Nintendo not to produce an official recording of something like *Symphony of the Goddesses* if there is enough demand (which, if Square Enix's musical marketing is any indicator, there is). Indeed, Nintendo has not released official OSTs for many of its properties, much to the lament of fans, and is infamously draconian when it comes to copyright and fans trying to upload soundtracks to sites like YouTube.[290] And while it is—at least for now—still a major player in the video game industry, I wonder what the absence of official musical monuments will mean for its legacy.[291] In this day and age, recordings are invaluable forms of documentation and dissemination. Without preservation, these histories very quickly become lost to time. And, at least in this timeline, there is no ocarina which can return us to the past.

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[288] The score also contains *multiple* errors in terms of properly identifying/naming the pieces used in each movement. Whether this is on Nintendo's or Alfred's part is unclear, but does not inspire faith that these reductions were produced with care.
[289] Christensen, "Four-Hand Piano Transcriptions," 256, 259, 264, passim.
[290] This most recently occurred with the well-known "GilvaSunner" channel, the owner of which received over 2200 copyright claims from Nintendo based on the Nintendo OSTs they had uploaded. See Ana Diaz, "Nintendo Crushes Fan-Favorite Game Music YouTube Channel with Thousands of Copyright Claims," *Polygon*, February 3, 2022, https://www.polygon.com/22916040/nintendo-video-game-music-osts-youtube-gilvasunner-copyright-takedown.
[291] As mentioned previously, I am not taking into account fan arrangements or covers. Optimistically, these in some ways carry more value than official monuments. Pessimistically, however, if Nintendo does not allow for their publication, this becomes a moot point.

Narrative, Variation, Monument… Apotheosis

As a brief concluding analysis, I will consider how one game (and its various arrangements) encapsulate what I have examined with the previous case studies. Furthermore, here I move away from AAA game titles and franchises and move instead to a game developed by an indie game studio: thatgamecompany's *Journey* (2012).[292]

Austin Wintory's much-lauded score for *Journey* was the first video game score nominated for a Grammy. But its music has always existed in a liminal space between concertpiece and score. As Wintory himself writes of the time he was writing the score:

> *Journey* ended up permeating virtually my whole output during that time. In April 2011, I wrote a miniature cello concerto for Tina [Guo] (called "Woven Variations,"[…]) that we performed together in Los Angeles.[293] The piece is not really a suite of my music from *Journey*, but more of an extrapolation. It's an exploration of the material, taken to entirely different places. This ended up going even further the subsequent summer when I conducted a concert featuring the LA Master Chorale, where I created a single hour-long piece (based on the same 'Hero's Journey' archetype) by stitching together various works in the repertoire and using my *Journey* music as the glue. Because *Journey* was still being actively worked on, I would then take the lessons learned from these concerts and apply them to the actual score. A peculiar process emerged from this, where the tangents started informing the core project, as if my career were a table of people all talking back and forth to each other, instead of a normal, forward-moving single file line.[294]

[292] Admittedly, *Journey*—which is frequently referred to as an "art" game—has become a canonical game in its own right, thanks in large part to its score. Outside of the arrangements I will discuss in what follows, arrangements of its score have been performed in concert with *Video Games Live*, *rePLAY: Symphony of Heroes*, *Journey Live*, and the Game Music Festival's "The Symphony of the Desert," all of which contribute to its legacy. And while I will not specifically discuss it in detail here, Laura Intravia has also created a book of piano arrangements of Wintory's score, entitled *Journey: Transcendence* (2014). On *Journey*'s categorization as an art game, see Grasso, "Video Game Music," 135-36.

[293] Tina Guo is the cello soloist featured on the *Journey OST* and is a close collaborator of Wintory's. Indeed, this is to such a degree that in the score for *Traveler – A Journey Symphony*, the solo cello part is labeled not as "solo cello," but as "Tina." See, for instance, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8wDlqx11IY (accessed April 5, 2022).

[294] Austin Wintory, "A Musical Journey," *Medium*, January 5, 2018, https://awintory.medium.com/a-musical-journey-1eb078939569.

In this sense, Wintory *played* with the score as he developed it. Furthermore, the eight-minute "Woven Variations" (as a set of *variations*) not only presented an opportunity for play and development, but also set the stage for Wintory's recurring return to this music.

Journey itself is based around the monomythic Ur-narrative, Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey." In the game, players play as The Traveler (shown in Figure 3.4), a robed individual who gradually unravels the history of the desolate land they traverse as they journey to reach the summit of a far-off mountain.[295] The game is told in eight parts, as players undergo this mythic journey.[296] But upon completing the hero's journey, players are afforded the option to begin again, now with new knowledge: a replay. Indeed, this is an important ludic element in *Journey*. The game has a feature built-in where players who have beat the game before are able to play online with new players, wordlessly guiding them through the game's narrative.[297] Here the diachronic variations come into play, with Wintory's return again and again to this music to play with it, revise it, and further monumentalize it. That it was a symphony—or a piece titled symphony: as with many video game symphonies, it adheres less to the strict architectonic design of the prototypical

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[295] I want to turn away from the music for a moment and consider the focus of this journey: the mountain. To return to Rehding and his discussion of monumentality, one specific metaphor Rehding highlights is that of the monumental and sublime mountain: "In the absence of concrete examples, a ubiquitous image to capture monumentality in music was that of the mountain range. A stock-in-trade figure of the sublime, the use of this metaphor may still seem surprising in this function, as the image of the mountain range cannot convey either associations of musical sound or commemorative values. Regardless of their historiographic and political leanings, music historians of the nineteenth century tend to be in agreement on the usage of such mountainous metaphors." Rehding, *Music and Monumentality*, 29. To be clear, I am not suggesting that thatgamecompany or Wintory were explicitly drawing on 19th century music critics when conceiving of this game. With that being said, I believe it is a not insignificant parallel. The mountain in these writings is supposed to be representative of that which is ageless, that which will not wither, that immortal object.

[296] IGN lists these levels as the: Beginning, Bridge, Desert, Descent, Tunnels, Temple, Mountain, and Summit. https://www.ign.com/wikis/journey/Walkthrough. For a ludonarrative musical analysis of the third level, see Grasso, "Video Game Music," 127-35. For an analysis of the game's theme, especially how it is developed in the final level—here we might even say arranged—see 8-bit Music Theory, "Austin Wintory's Themes are Simple, but Sophisticated," *YouTube*, October 31, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBV1Uk5UkJ4.

[297] There is no spoken dialogue in the game, thus disrupting the vococentric paradigm many screen-based media follow by drawing attention to the game's music and sound effects.

symphony—erected as a monument on the tenth anniversary of the game's release is an important point. Anniversaries are important events; we assign importance to these events, celebrating them, reflecting on them, and paying tribute to them. That monumental genre, the symphony, then, was the ultimate tribute to this game.[298] It represents the apotheosis of classical music writing; that the final cue in the game before the ending credits is titled "Apotheosis," then, was perhaps a further indicator of what was to come.

Figure 3.4. The Traveler as shown in *Journey*'s opening cinematic.

With *Journey* and its various arrangements, we witness how the music from one game can be adapted into various forms/genres, depending on what the arranger chooses to highlight. Like

[298] The term "monumental" is not infrequently used to advertise video game music concerts/arrangements. *Game Music Festival Vol. 1*, for instance, describes its "The Symphony of the Storm" as a "monumental piece of art." In celebration of the 35th anniversary of Final Fantasy, the aforementioned *Distant Worlds* tour writes of this special program (entitled "Coral"): "Specially curated by Nobuo Uematsu, the 35th Anniversary program is a *monumental*, retrospective celebration of the incredible FINAL FANTASY music catalogue!" (emphasis added). *FF Distant Worlds*, "35th Anniversary."

the *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto*, the *Journey* OST itself is written around a specific narrative mold, here featuring the solo cellist as a musical protagonist. Like the Concert Paraphrase on *Dearly Beloved*, the *Woven Variations* act as a kind of metacommentary on returning to and playing with a singular theme that represents the game/game series. Finally, like the *Symphony of the Goddesses*, the epic *Traveler – A Journey Symphony* is monumental in both its size as well as its intent: a commemorative (anniversary) celebration of its source material. But especially interesting with the *Journey* arrangements featured here is the fact they are all (re)arrangements by Wintory himself.[299] That is, they are personal revisions, returns, and replays—"extrapolations" and "explorations" as Wintory himself puts it. Further still, Wintory has made his commentary on many of his pieces easily accessible by uploading full recordings (sometimes with the original scores) overlayed with his commentary to YouTube, leaving a lasting legacy.[300]

From Virtual to Real and Beyond

With these high classical arrangements for the concert hall, there is a new recontextualization at play: music from the virtual gameworld traverses myriad spaces—digital, analog, real, virtual, economic, ludic, and symphonic—to enter our world, the "real" world.[301] Not only this, but the

[299] To be sure, this is not unique to Wintory. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hamauzu has rearranged many of his pieces (e.g., his piano arrangements of the *Final Fantasy X* score). Other game composers have also self-arranged. For instance, while the original *NieR: Replicant* OST is attributed as a collaborative product of studio MONACA (specifically Keiichi Okabe, Kakeru Ishihama, and Keigo Hoashi) and Takafumi Nishimura, the fact that four of the subsequent arrangements of Kainé's theme are specifically by member Keigo Hoashi leads me to believe that he was likely the composer of that specific theme and to speculate that this is the reason he in particular has continued to develop it. This is worth overtly pointing out as Okabe is often the main (and only) composer associated with the NieR games. I will discuss this theme briefly in the Conclusion.

[300] Wintory's videos that include his scores are featured in his "As Noted" playlist, accessible here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLT0fv21DRJaUg1CXXf03JqKOTu_chz2Xx.

[301] On music's role in constructing the "real" in video games, see especially Isabella van Elferen, "¡Un Forastero! Issues of Virtuality and Diegesis in Videogame Music," *Music and the Moving Image* 4, no. 2 (2011): 30–39; and idem, "Virtual Worlds from Recording to Video Games," in *The Cambridge Companion to Music in Digital*

music has moved from "low art" videogames to the "high art" concert hall, as I discussed in the introduction. With this remediation, these arrangements work as a *bridge* between the virtual game world and the "real" world. Indeed, one way video game arrangements strengthen their position within the concert hall is by the intertextual allusion to or quotation of preexisting classical music, branding *themselves* as classical.[302] While in this chapter I gave the example of Kameoka's paraphrase alluding to the opening of Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto, other examples abound.[303]

In this chapter I have examined the arrangement of video game music into overtly classical genres, focusing on how these genres reinforce hermeneutic readings (or *listenings* a la Szendy) of the meanings inscribed in the intersemiotic translation from ludic to musical form by way of semiotic interpretants. With the *Final Fantasy X – Piano Concerto*, I showed that the narrative conflict represented in the game (individual versus society) is supported by the concerto genre. With the Concert Paraphrase on "Dearly Beloved," I instead showed how the double genre of the theme and variation, as well as the paraphrase, supported the translation of the opening title sequence schema, as well as a representation of returning to the franchise over and over again. With the *Symphony of the Goddesses*, I showed how monumentality is represented by the genre and scope of the symphony, and how such a multimovement work offers a counterpoint to the

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Culture, eds. Nicholas Cook, David Trippett, and Monique M. Ingalls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 209-26.

[302] More sinisterly, one could also say these pieces *use* or *consume* their references for their cultural capital.

[303] Other examples include the opening of Rachmaninoff's concerto again in Shiro Sagisu and Tsuneyoshi's arrangement of Nobuo Uematasu's "Aria di Mezzo Carattere" from the *Final Fantasy VI Grand Finale* album, the famous rhythmic ostinato of "Mars" from Gustav Holst's *The Planets* in Jonne Valtonen's "Fantasy I: Kingdom Hearts" from *Symphonic Fantasies*, and a direct quotation of "O Fortuna" from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* in Yasunori Nishiki's concert arrangement of "One-Winged Angel Rebirth" for the *Final Fantasy VII Remake Orchestral Arrangement Album*, itself an arrangement (by himself and Masashi Haumazu) of Uematsu's famed "One-Winged Angel." I discuss the "OWA Rebirth" arrangement in detail in a forthcoming review of the album. See Greenfield-Casas, "On Musical Museums, Monuments, and Memories."

theme and variation in transmogrifying a series writ large. Finally, with *Journey* and its arrangements, I have showed how the score of one game can be returned to and adapted in various ways, each way highlighting different hermeneutic interpretations. I take this point of repeated return/play and the above discussion of the ludomusical virtual and real as a segue into the next chapter. In this fourth and final chapter of this dissertation I will return, at least once more, to the notion of *replay* within video games and video game music.

Chapter 4

Replayful Listening

Prelude: Music and Memory

It is—quite literally—a dark and stormy night. The crowd waiting outside the theater huddles as best it can under the building's glass awning, and when security finally opens the doors a few hours before the concert is supposed to start, the concertgoers swarm into the warm foyer of the theater. Rather than immediately finding their seats, however, many—myself included—converge into an hour-long-wait line for the merchandise booth, eager to purchase the video game soundtrack and other limited merchandise related to the concert. I make casual conversation with the concertgoer in front of me—it turns out he has flown across the country to attend the sold-out event, and is flying out early the next day. After making my way through the line and purchasing the orchestral arrangement CD of *NieR: Automata*'s (2017) soundtrack, I take my seat in the concert hall, noticing concertgoers dressed in tuxedos and gowns, cosplay (costumes) of game characters, and everything in between. The lights dim, the conductor walks out on stage, and the concert begins. It has barely been a minute into the first piece on the program before someone in front of me starts to cry; I hear them apologize to their neighbor: "I'm sorry—I'll just never forget my experience of first playing *NieR*."

The preceding anecdote was the prelude to my experience attending the premiere of the 2020 *NieR: Orchestra Concert re: 12018*, a limited concert series of the award-winning soundtracks from the NieR video game series.[304] As I discussed in Chapter 1, such concerts based

[304] The concert tour included performances in Chicago, Los Angeles, London, and Bangkok. Per the "re: 12018" in its title, the concert was a based on a similar four-concert series that occurred in Tokyo in 2018.

around video games are gaining popularity, prompting some journalists to ask "are video games the future of live music?", while others wonder if "video games are saving the symphony orchestra"?[305] While I do not offer a definite answer to these questions in this chapter, I instead take them as a starting point in exploring how the live event of attending video game music concerts contributes to the aesthetic (re)experience of their source media.

This chapter considers video game music concerts from a phenomenological perspective rooted in fandom. That is, what does the experience of attending these concerts entail for these fans? Drawing from existing theoretical work, I build a theory of ludic liveness to consider the politics and play of attending these concerts. In examining fans' relations to these performances, their emotional and material investment in the (live) music, and their personal memories of the multimedia they bring to these concerts, I ultimately argue that especially the live attendance of these concerts leads to an experience of "replaying" the games that these concerts highlight. I will merge two theoretical stances to support this argument: the first takes theories of *liveness* and examines how the event informs the audience's memories; the second considers theoretical models of *listening*, weaving together existing models of listening to revisit and add a new dimension to what Tim Summers has recently deemed "playful listening."[306]

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[305] Mat Ombler, "Are Video Games the Future of Live Music?" *GamesIndustry*, June 10, 2020, https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2020-06-10-are-video-games-the-future-of-live-music (accessed July 18, 2021); and Sarah E. Needleman, "How Videogames Are Saving the Symphony Orchestra," *The Wall Street Journal*. October 12, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-videogames-are-saving-the-symphony-orchestra-1444696737. (accessed July 18, 2021).

[306] Summer, "Fantasias on a Theme by Walt Disney."

Ludic Liveness and the Post-Live Provocateur

While video game music concerts have existed in Japan since the late 1980s, their popularity has exponentially increased in recent years, with concerts now spanning the globe and running the gamut from special, limited shows (e.g., *Undertale Live*, *GAME THEORY: The Indie Game Symphony*) to touring, ongoing concert series (e.g., *Video Games Live*, *Distant Worlds*).[307] Indeed, some devoted fans go so far as to undertake transcontinental trips to attend these concerts as a way of celebrating their favorite video games and their respective soundtracks. The investment in attending these concerts has not gone unnoticed by video game companies, some of which are now adding metacommentary and lore to the games within these concerts as special incentives to attend these live concerts, fueling a convergent transmedia economy.[308]

The *liveness* of these concerts—what I will call ludic liveness—takes a particular dimension with respect to video game music. What does it mean for this music to be performed live, taken from the virtual realm of the games that host this music? Indeed, what does it mean for this music to be performed live on "real" instruments, rather than as synthesized waveforms or samples from a virtual library?[309] Scholars including William Cheng, as well as Justin Gagen and Nicholas Cook have examined the stakes of the performance of (live) music in (virtual) games and

[307] The *GAME THEORY: The Indie Game Symphony*, which was supposed to take place on October 5, 2019 at the Ford Amphitheatre in Hollywood, was unfortunately canceled without explanation. It is perhaps worth noting that many officially produced video game music concerts primarily (or solely) feature AAA game series, so this was an especially unfortunate occurrence.

[308] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Colide*, Revised Ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2008). The NieR concert series in particular has incorporated dramatic readings performed by the game's voice actors in order to expand the lore of the games. Square Enix has also premiered trailers of highly anticipated games at some of their concerts, including a trailer that first announced the release date for the long-awaited *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020) at the to-be-discussed *FINAL FANTASY VII – A Symphonic Reunion* concert in 2019.

[309] Though many AAA games with large budgets do indeed use orchestras to record their soundtracks.

the values these players, both ludic and musical, bring to the game.[310] Outside of the ludomusic(ologic)al sphere, Philip Auslander has problematized what it means for something to be considered "live" at all in our increasingly mediatized and hyperreal world (a point I will return to when discussing different forms of video game music concerts). For Auslander, "liveness" as a category is historically and culturally situated; indeed, as he posits, the idea of "liveness" as we conceive of it today did not exist prior to recording technologies.[311] Paul Sanden, on the other hand, is less interested in the ontological stakes of liveness with which Auslander is preoccupied, and is instead more concerned with the audience's *perception* of liveness. To this end, he offers seven categories of liveness: temporal liveness, spatial liveness, liveness of fidelity, liveness of spontaneity, corporeal liveness, interactive liveness, and virtual liveness.[312] The first six of these categories in some way reflect what Sanden identifies as the "traditional (live) performance paradigm," whereas virtual liveness (which he further theorizes in a later chapter) is instead "largely constructed by technological means and conveys a sense of performance that, although meaningful, is not grounded in actuality."[313] These manifold *perceptions* of liveness play into the

[310] Cheng, *Sound Play*; Justin Gagen and Nicholas Cook, "Performing Live in Second Life," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, eds. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 191–209.
[311] Auslander *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Revised Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 158
[312] Paul Sanden, *Liveness in Modern Music: Musicians, Technology, and the Perception of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 31-43, passim.
[313] Ibid., 32, 33; Sanden later further refines this definition to suggest that "virtual liveness is a perception of liveness—a perception of performance—that embraces a musical experience's grounding in the various incursions of electronic sound technologies. It involves an extension of the whole concept of performance to include things like the synthesis, samples and simulations that characterise the logics of digital culture, and which would seem to conflict with traditional definitions of what performance is—and, more importantly, is not—while at the same time making room (sometimes through simulation or technological enhancement) for certain elements of those traditional definitions to persist." Idem., "Rethinking Liveness in the Digital Age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Music in Digital Culture*, eds. Nicholas Cook, Monique M. Ingalls, and David Trippett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 183.

historical and cultural values Auslander identifies, and further nuance what liveness means in an increasingly digital world.

But just as Auslander claims that the "ideologically engrained sense of television as a live medium makes its historical relationship to the theatre different from that of film, and enabled television to colonize liveness, [as] the one aspect of theatrical presentation that film could not replicate," so too do I argue that the ontological liveness of video games offers a similar conduit for ("classical") musical replication and remediation in a live setting—namely, video game music concerts.[314]

There seems to be something at stake in the live performance of this music, something that drives fans to attend these concerts in droves. As William Gibbons positions it, at least part of this may have to do with a valorization of game music.[315] That is, in branding this music as "classical"—or, in Michael Long's framing as discussed in the Introduction, we might say in moving it to the classical "register"—there is an aesthetic judgement at stake in this valuation.[316] To put it simply, the music from "low art" video games is "raised" to the level of "high art" classical music. And while I think this framing is at least in part true—that is, that fans bring these cultural values with them—I think an added layer comes about in being able to re-experience, re-live, and—in some sense—re-*play* these games by way of these concerts.

Julianne Grasso has suggested a similar phenomenon. In examining "*The Legend of Zelda* 25th Anniversary Medley" (arr. Chad Seiter), she suggests that the music formally "maximizes the affects surrounding the memory of play [with] the melodic materials [acting] as a signifier for *A*

[314] Auslander, *Liveness,* 13.
[315] Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 161-65.
[316] Long, *Beautiful Monsters*.

Link to the Past."[317] Further still, as Grasso notes, the branding of The Legend of Zelda concert series, *Symphony of the Goddesses* (discussed in the previous chapter), posits a "reliving" of players' respective gaming experiences, with Grasso suggesting that "'Relive' is a term that seems to suggest that the music will allow the listener more than recall: an access to an embodied memory that perhaps enacts something about experiences of play."[318] .

An important element to the reliving and replaying of these games, I contend, is the notion of the *event*. Carolyn Abbate posits in her well-known essay "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" that for too long music studies has been concerned with clandestine "gnostic" ways of understanding the musical work, rather than a "drastic" understanding of the (live) event. As one example of this, she provides an anecdote of her experience attending two different live performances of Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.[319] In the first, the soloist, Ben Heppner, cracked a high note, very much bringing Abbate into the moment of the live event. In the second performance, just a few days later, she experienced a "momentary optical hallucination, a genuine neurological misfire" wherein the previous performance overrode the performance taking place in front of her.[320] As she further muses:

> But what triggered the neurological restaging, the necessary condition for the gnostic mentality to appear as a hallucinatory symbol, was the earlier performance, where, in someone obsessed by Heppner's courage, the drastic attitude had prevailed. The second performance would not have fractured had my experience of the first not been so radically attentive to what was taking place, so inattentive to Wagner's *Meistersinger* and what its music means or conceals.[321]

[317] Grasso, "On Canons as Music and Muse," 84.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 535-36.
[320] Ibid., 535.
[321] Ibid., 536.

The marked experience she had attending a previous (live) performance of Wagner's *Meistersinger* surfaced again, and she essentially *relived* this experience, informed as she was by the "drastic knowledge" that came with it.

Expanding on Abbate's notion of the drastic, Isabella van Elferen has argued that both game music as a genre and ludomusicology as a field can lead to what she calls the "New Drastic." Indeed, she cites Abbate's story directly when she claims that the "performative shape of game music, its presence, is unpredictable, which arguably makes it more immediate and more 'live' even than *Die Meistersinger* could ever be. Playing games is making music."[322] Van Elferen's attention to the liveness and immediacy of game music further recalls Auslander's invocation of Walter Benjamin, and the auratic distance we attempt to overcome in the age of mechanical reproduction.[323] But we are now beyond the purely mechanical; instead, we reside in the hyperreal age of the virtual and mediatized, of which games play a fundamental role.[324] But this attempt at overcoming distance to achieve a sense of immediacy remains. The distance to be traversed here is between the virtual and the real, all within a *live* context. As I have argued elsewhere, the arrangement of video game music for the concert hall inherently operates as a worldbridging device, spanning game worlds and the real world.[325] But to add a new piece to the puzzle, I suggest that the *live performance* of this music as an *event* further links the virtual and real world. This is

[322] Isabella Van Elferen, "Ludomusicology and the New Drastic," *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 1, no. 1: 106-07.
[323] Auslander, *Liveness*, 38; Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflactions*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 222-23.
[324] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994); Alfie Bown, *Playstation Dreamworld* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017); Jesper Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005).
[325] Greenfield-Casas, "From Screen (to Screen) to Concert Hall." I first made this claim, in a more directly Auslanderian and Baudrillardian-inspired fashion, when building a theory of a hyperreal mythology that video games (and their musics) afford in "Between Worlds," 22–28, esp. 22n36 and 26–27.

ludic liveness. But what are these types of liveness and different types of concerts I have hinted at?

Intermission: A Typology of Video Game Music Concerts

As outlined above, Auslander has convincingly argued that liveness is always situated both historically and culturally. He notes that the traditional or "default definition of live performance is that it is the kind of performance in which the performers and the audience are both physically and temporally co-present to one another."[326] Auslander immediately problematizes this definition, noting the spatial rupture with live broadcasts, as well as the temporal and spatial disjuncture with that which is "recorded live." Justin Gagen and Nicholas Cook similarly discuss the absence of a singular *now* in *Second Life* due to Internet lag: "the present moment is blurred, smeared over a period of several seconds."[327] And as Paul Sanden has elucidated, perhaps most important in the understanding of liveness is the *perception* of just how live a performance is and how there are various types of liveness which can temper an audience's thoughts on the matter—from the temporal and spatial, to the interactive and virtual. Contemporary understandings of liveness are thus frequently mediated through technology. Following Auslander and Sanden's lead, I add a few additional categories of liveness and proffer a typology of five different forms this liveness takes with video game music concerts (Table 4.1 also summarizes these forms of live concerts).[328] This list is *not* intended to be comprehensive—there are, I am sure, many examples that fall in liminal spaces between or outside these five examples.

[326] Auslander, *Liveness,* 60.
[327] Gagen and Cook, "Performing Live," 196.
[328] Cf. Auslander, *Liveness*, 61.

Traditional Live Concerts

A concert which follows Auslander's "default definition" of liveness. There remains the possibility of a ritualistic ceremony here, perhaps more so than with virtual concerts. The liveness frequently includes a ceremonial dressing for the concert, whether in cosplay or in formalwear. It also likely includes standing in line at the merch booth to purchase memorabilia with which to remember the concert. Because of the already presumed remembering of the game with the concert, this merchandise acts as a redolent anchor point to a second-order memory: a re-remembering.

Live Recorded Concerts

The pre-E3 *FINAL FANTASY VII – A Symphonic Reunion* concert held in 2019 infamously had a split liveness to it. It was presented live—fans came in person to listen to this music, together—yet much of the concert was *not* performed by a live orchestra. Rather, MIDI recordings of the music were played for a live audience. Fans were unhappy with the concert, commenting that *when* the orchestra was performing, it was an enjoyable experience, but that the MIDI in isolation left something to be desired.[329] Per Sanden's categories, the liveness of spontaneity here was lost with the recordings. The music was the same—that is, both the MIDI and the orchestral performance came from the *Final Fantasy VII* universe. In fact, the MIDI recordings were in many ways more

[329] Darryn Bonthuys, "Fans Aren't Happy with a Final Fantasy VII Tribute Concert That Used Mostly MIDI Songs Instead of Live Performances," *Critical Hit*, June 10, 2019, https://www.criticalhit.net/gaming/fans-arent-happy-with-a-final-fantasy-vii-tribute-concert-that-used-mostly-midi-songs-instead-of-live-performances/ (accessed July 18, 2021).

"authentic" to the original game. Yet attendees felt slighted by this live playing of pre-recorded music. I will return to this case study below.

Recorded Live Concerts

Recorded live concerts are concerts that initially occurred under the parameters of the "default definition" of liveness, but which are recorded for documentary (and/or commercial) purposes. The audience reactions are often captured and exhibited as part of these recordings, providing a kind of meta-commentary on the concert: everything from elated smiles to misty eyes are caught live and edited to highlight the (deemed) appropriate feeling the music should convey. These recorded concerts can also become selling points for concert producers.[330] For Abbate, these recorded live concerts do not constitute what she calls "an actual live performance," as she values the "material, present event";[331] for Auslander, however, this is one form of liveness that has become "another concept [of liveness] we now accept without question."[332]

Virtual Live Concerts

Virtual concerts take place, well, virtually, and are one example of Sanden's elusive virtual liveness. Here, I especially consider the virtual live concert as a concert that was pre-recorded, but which is then *premiered live* virtually, oftentimes as a stream on Twitch or YouTube. These concerts are not always pre-recorded, however. With the global pandemic that began in 2020, at

[330] Perhaps the best example of this is the tetralogy of NieR concerts: *NieR Music Concert & Talk Live* (2010), *NieR Music Concert: "The Memories of Puppets"* (2018), *NieR: Orchestra Concert 12018* (2019), and *NieR: Theatrical Orchestra 12020* (2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, the final of these recordings was recorded live, though without an audience.
[331] Abbate, "Drastic of Gnostic?," 506.
[332] Auslander, *Liveness*, 60.

the time of writing this type of concert has become one of the default modes of having live video game music concerts (as discussed earlier in Chapter 1). Consider the *Sonic 30th Anniversary Symphony*, which premiered on YouTube on June 23, 2021. Early in the program, approximately four minutes into the premiere, no fewer than a "paltry" 35,000 people were watching the program live. By the end of the concert, over 50,000 people were watching the concert live. These streamed concerts not only open the doors for stadium-sized crowds (rather than the comparatively smaller sphere of the concert hall or the even more intimate recital hall), but they also allow for increased access for persons who might otherwise not be able to travel to attend a concert.[333]

Live Virtual Concerts

The live virtual concert is a concert that takes place within the game. As mentioned above, Gagen and Cook have discussed the smearing of "the now" with these concerts, though there is still an emphasis on a shared temporality and virtuality with these concerts. Furthermore, while the above concerts focused on video game music, the most famous examples of virtual concerts often focus on music that was *not* strictly composed for games (e.g., Lang Lang's 2007 classical recital in *Second Life* and, more recently, Lil Nas X's 2020 performance in *Roblox*).[334] As with the virtual live concerts, there was a proliferation of this type of concert in 2020–2021 due to the pandemic.

[333] Many concert halls can comfortably seat a few thousand spectators (Carnegie Hall, for instance, is just shy of 3000 seats in its main auditorium), yet this pales in comparison to the theoretically limitless virtual "seats" that a virtual concert can offer (provided the concert takes place on a site that can handle the bandwidth of a large congregation of virtual bodies).

[334] On Lang Lang's recital, see Anne Midgette, "Watching a Cyber Audience Watch a Real Orchestra Perform in a Virtual World, *The New York Times*, September 18, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/18/arts/music/18seco.html. On Lil Nas X's performance, see Jacob Kastrenakes, "Lil Nas X's Roblox Concert was Attended 33 Million Times," *The Verge*, November 16, 2020, https://www.theverge.com/2020/11/16/21570454/lil-nas-x-roblox-concert-33-million-views.

Concert Type	Definition	Examples
Live Concert	A (traditional) concert attended in person with the music being played live in real time	*Undertale Live*; *Journey Live*; *Symphony of the Goddesses*; *Pokémon: Symphonic Evolutions*; *Video Games Live*
Recorded Live Concert	A recording of a Live Concert that fans can purchase and view on their own time	*NieR: Orchestra Concert 12018*; *The Journey of 100: Distant Worlds, Music from Final Fantasy*
Live Recorded Concert	A concert attended in person that plays recordings of music	*FINAL FANTASY VII – A Symphonic Reunion*
Virtual Live Concert	A concert premiered virtually (e.g., over the internet) in real time with an audience watching together	*Sonic 30th Anniversary Symphony* (premiered on YouTube); *Undertale 5th Anniversary Concert* (premiered on Twitch)
Live Virtual Concert	A concert attended virtually (in-game) with the music being played live	Lang Lang's concert in *Second Life*; Travis Scott's shows in *Fortnite*; Open Pit's festivals in *Minecraft*; Lil Nas X's concert in *Roblox*

Table 4.1. A typology of video game concerts.

To immediately reiterate, I am sure there will be (if there are not already) concerts that fall outside of easy categorization, and we might take these categories more as guidelines rather than as strict rules. If a video on demand (VOD) of a Virtual Live Concert is preserved, for instance, it becomes something akin to a Recorded Live Concert. And while both the Virtual Live Concert and its VOD have elements of liveness to them, the experience of this liveness is different for each *event*. A further dimension to consider with these concerts is the inclusion or absence of accompanying moving images. Many of these concert productions include (usually pre-recorded) gameplay displayed on a screen behind the performing orchestra (e.g., *Distant Worlds* and *Pokémon:*

Symphonic Evolutions).[335] Other concerts intentionally omit this footage so that the audience's sensorial attention is fixed on the music itself (e.g., *A New World* and *Final Symphony*). Concert producer Thomas Böcker, for instance, has been critical of the former model, stating that:

> What I am not convinced about is the way it [video projection] is typically implemented in video game music concerts. It is often similar to a simple clip show. There is no creative approach that would be comparable to what we do with the arrangements, and hence it takes away from the overall experience, at least for me. A concert with equally sophisticated audio and video parts complementing each other would, however, be definitely to my liking; though there would undoubtedly be practical challenges, including gaining the additional support of licensors and investment from promoters.[336]

As discussed in earlier chapters, Böcker's concerts lean heavily into the classical music tradition and the traditional model of the live concert (e.g., the piano concerto from the *Final Symphony* program discussed in Chapter 3). Because of this traditional take on musical form and symphonic structure, it follows that his productions would take a conservative stance towards liveness.[337]

Two notable examples of concerts outside of this traditional mold come by way of Chicago's Fifth House Ensemble, wherein the video projection itself was live as well—that is, not pre-recorded. In the *Journey Live* concert, premiered at MAGFest in 2016, not only was the music performed live, but so too was the gameplay. In performances of *Journey Live*, a special sound effect-only version of the game is played by an audience member live in front of the audience. They are accompanied by Fifth House Ensemble, who respond to the players actions by playing Patrick O'Malley's arrangement of Austin Wintory's much-lauded score for the game *Journey* (discussed briefly at the end of Chapter 3). In the *Undertale LIVE* concert, following the mechanics

[335] See McCorkle Okazaki, "Liveness, Music, Media"; and Audissino, "Overruling a Romantic Prejudice," 39-42.
[336] Thomas Böcker, "Producing Game Music Concerts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*, eds. Melanie Fritsch and Tim Summers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 428–429.
[337] Eric Roth also discusses the use and effects of including (or not) a screen in concerts in Appendix B. There, Benyamin Nuss also notes the potential issue of copyright in using footage from games.

of Toby Fox's original game (*Undertale*, 2015), the audience determines what route the production (a condensed version of the game) takes by voting in real time. Depending on what the audience votes for, the ensemble responds in kind following conductor Eric Roth's cues.[338]

In many ways, my discussion of ludic liveness is intended to be provocative, offering not definite answers but new ways of considering the relationship between video games, concerts, and liveness. Following van Elferen, we can see that video games and their musics afford a novel type of liveness; following Auslander and Sanden, we can see that liveness is not a static concept—it is one that changes with the times, its cultures, and its technologies. Liveness, more than anything, comes to present a specific type of temporality: an experience, in one way or another, that occurs—at least at one point—in "real time" as Abbate would frame it.[339] Yet the mediatization of these concerts, whether through recording technologies or streaming latency, often challenges this time's discrete realness; instead, there is a split between real time and virtual time. The audience exists in between these times, within the confines of the event as Abbate and van Elferen suggest. But in addition to this split virtual and real event, there is also the virtual re-playing of each respective audience member's experience playing the game from whence the sounding music came. As van Elferen notes: "Quantitative research into listening practices shows that the flow of listening to or making music can take us away from the here and now and relocate us into other times and spaces by way of its strong connotations. . . . This musical *mémoire involontaire* destabilizes the fixedness of temporal and spatial referentiality and makes past, present, and future meanings virtually

[338] When I was interviewing Roth about his experience conducting and arranging for this concert, he said with a laugh that it was "a little nerve-wracking." See Appendix B.
[339] Abbate, "Drastic or Gnostic?," 511.

overlap."[340] Abbate's *Meistersinger* anecdote provides one example of this. Listening to this music, especially in the ritualistic setting of a concert space, thus creates a *listening experience* that is a marked event, one linked to the audience's experience of previously hearing this music if they have played the game from which it is taken.[341] For something to be post-live, then, the live must have already occurred. The event is already past. In the context of video game music concerts, the mnemonic *re*playing of the game through its music is what comes after: the playing of the game is the first live event; listening to its music live as another event allows for a post-live replay of what has already come before. The music marks a Barthesian "that has been"-ness, a dead past now re-lived.[342] But whereas the material photograph that is the object of Barthes's elegy is an ontological object, a perverse signifier of the flatness of Death (and thus the absence of life—the live), the post-live is *at the same time—real* time—also still live. One, after all, can only listen live, as music is notoriously ephemeral.[343] That is, listening cannot happen *in* the past, even if we can listen *to* the past vis-à-vis recording technologies. It is a mode of being through feeling (literally, considering the physiology of listening). This is perhaps what Jean-Luc Nancy means when he writes of the "sonorous body" in his foreword to Szendy's treatise.[344]

To summarize what I have suggested so far: with video game music concerts, the supposition is often that attendees have already played the featured game(s). There is a reliving,

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[340] Isabella Van Elferen, "¡Un Forastero! Issues of Virtuality and Diegesis in Videogame Music," *Music and the Moving Image* 4, no. 2 (2011): 31; van Elferen is here referencing Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[341] Oftentimes the supposition is that concertgoers will have played the source game before. Julianne Grasso, for instance, point to the language used in the advertisement for the *The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses* concert, suggesting that the concert is for fans of the series. In direct contrast to this stance, however, concert producers like the aforementioned Böcker instead hope to elevate the music to such a degree that it can stand on its own for even those unfamiliar with its source materials. See Grasso, "On Canons as Music and Muse," 84.

[342] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 76–89.

[343] Abbate, "Drastic or Gnostic?"

[344] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Ascoltando," in Peter Szendy, *Listen,* x.

yes, but there is also a *replaying* inherent to this particular brand of reliving. Certainly, not all concertgoers have played all the games featured. Perhaps a family member or a friend is dragged along to accompany an eager attendee. (I must confess that I myself have not played all the games featured in the concerts I have attended—I will return to this point below.) But in the performance of this music, the *playing* of the instruments, there is a bridge between the virtual and real worlds. Following Auslander's Benjaminian line of reasoning here, attending these concerts provides one way of overcoming the auratic distance of mass media. In the context of video games, this bridge comes by way of the music, now performed live to bridge the experience and entangle the event(s) within each other. Following van Elferen's hyperrealistic reading of *Guitar Hero*, in which "the rock songs are part of the game but also of the player's cultural memory, evoking in his or her mind emotions, memories, and identifications that are rooted firmly outside the game diegesis," we might further this line of reasoning to consider what kind of hyperreality comes into being with the live performance of video game music.[345] In particular, I will suggest that there is an emergent kind of (re-)playful listening.

Re:Playful Listening and the (non-)Ideal Listener

Though the previous section focused explicitly on *liveness*, a perhaps implicit element of the live experience of a concert is the act of *listening* to the music (a point that began to emerge by the previous section's penultimate paragraph). Philosophies and theories of listening abound—oftentimes differentiating active listening against passive hearing—and in recent years a particular vein of scholarship has developed that focuses on modes of listening inherent to music and

[345] Van Elferen, "¡Un Forastero!," 31.

media.[346] In this section, I would like to further develop a ludic mode of listening based around video game music concerts, expanding Tim Summer's account of what he calls "playful listening."

> For Summers, a playful listening is one which shows how:
>
> > music in its concert, cinematic, and game presentations, can be understood to be implicitly playful, primarily through our awareness of its "potential to be otherwise." That is, we understand that the particular sounding of music that we experience is only one outcome among a range of possibilities within a broader field of potential incarnations of that music. Playful listening is a mode of listening where we consider the alternative possible forms of the musical material.[347]

Summers includes concerts within this mode of listening, though does not fully expand on how they might differ, at least in part, from the source of his study (video games proper). As I argue, this "potential to be otherwise" has two elements in the context of video game music concerts. On the one hand, concertgoers experience the remediation of this music outside of the game—it is a *realization* of this potential, an actualization of play which they listen to. On the other hand, there is generally another agent involved in this process of remediation: that of the arranger. As official scores for video games tend not to exist—at least not as traditionally conceived—arrangers and transcribers are paramount in bringing these concerts to life (as I have detailed in previous

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[346] See, for instance, Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Milena Droumeva "An Acoustic Communication Framework for Game Sound: Fidelity, Verisimilitude, Ecology," in *Game Sound Technology and Player Interaction: Concepts and Developments*, ed. Mark Grimshaw (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference), 131-152; and Michel Kamp, "Four Ways of Hearing Video Game Music" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2014). As mentioned previously, Michael Long's notion of "cinematic listening" has become especially influential, spawning a series of related essays, e.g. Lehman, "Film-as-Concert Music"; and Cenciarelli, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). Pertinent to my focus on video game concerts, Milena Droumeva has suggested one mode that she calls "inter-textual listening," a mode of listening that is the "result of cross-pollination of different media genres, [wherein] this listening position addresses situations where game soundscapes contain radio, telephone, or TV sounds (most famously featured in *Grand Theft Auto*)." She continues, "Conversely, the popular events of *Video Game Concerts* are settings where game sounds live on outside gameworlds and are performed, listened to, and used for other purposes outside of games." I find her writings on nostalgic listening equally fruitful in (re)playful listening: "An analytical, culturally-critical type of listening that has emerged over time in experienced players who look for iconic game music themes through platforms and generations of a particular game (some notable examples here being the *Final Fantasy, Super Mario, Zelda* and *Mega Man* series)" Droumeva, "An Acoustic Communication Framework," 145.

[347] Summers, "Fantasias on a Theme by Walt Disney," 702.

chapters).[348] As I have shown in the previous chapters, they, along with concert producers, must make decisions on how they will rearrange this music: from pieces that are closer to 1:1 transcriptions of what is heard in the game, to medleys, to free arrangements and paraphrases. Though this mediating element of the concert is not necessarily "live," it is still very much a playful listening, the arranger's own "projecti[on of] the possible soundings of the music."[349]

Indeed, if the concert attendees of the aforementioned *FINAL FANTASY VII – A Symphonic Reunion* concert are any indication, listeners adamantly *do not* want to hear *exactly* what they would hear in the game. This is not to say that they might not have enjoyed a MIDI arrangement of the music, but the "potential to be otherwise" was not met in this instance. There must be some form of (re)mediation to breathe new life into the work, whether through a particular mode of liveness or an arranger's listening (or a combination of the two). To return briefly to Auslander—and, even earlier still, Levine—we must remember to situate the experience of the concertgoer not only historically, but also culturally as well.

One cultural element inherent to video games is the notion of *replay*. William Gibbons begins his monograph on the relationship between classical music and video games with a discussion of *replay value*, which he suggests is "at the core of the video game experience."[350] He continues, stating that, in replaying a game: "The result is an experience at once familiar and new. Players relive the game, but with their frame of reference and mode of understanding it irrevocably altered—and hopefully enriched—by what they had already accomplished."[351] Such is the

[348] See also van Elferen, "Ludomusicology and the New Drastic," 106. Indeed, in my interviews with two professional video game concert arrangers, Eric Roth of AWR Music and Mariam Abounnasr of Procyon Studio, both noted that it was not uncommon for them to have to transcribe the music from the game by ear before they could arrange it for a concert setting. See Appendices B and D, respectively.
[349] Summers, "Fantasias on a Theme by Walt Disney," 705.
[350] Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 1.
[351] Ibid.

presumed experience of the concertgoer and the arranger, who both now have an experience "at once familiar and new" with the music in these concerts. As quoted previously, Hamauzu said of his arrangement of the *Final Fantasy X* Piano Concerto from the *Final Symphony* program that: "There were a few things I couldn't express well enough while I was working originally on the music of FINAL FANTASY X, and I feel like I could express those things this time around."[352] Even as one of the composers on the original soundtrack, Hamauzu still found new ways of (re)playing with the game's score in order to create his new arrangement. Similarly, concertgoers who attend these concerts also will have the chance to (re)playfully listen to these arrangements, understanding them as one realization of the "alternative possible forms of the musical material."

Playful listening, then, becomes re-playful listening. This is partly simply my own returning and responding to Summers's notion of playful listening and my remediating it from the game world to the real world. It is also, however, one particular way of experiencing playful listening—a specific type of playful listening. Just as replaying a game is still, at base, a way of playing a game, so too is re-playful listening simultaneously still also playful listening. But this mode of listening is dependent on a kind of ideal listener, one who has already played through the game, who is culturally situated, and who has personal memories to mediate their experience. At an extreme, they may be a superfan who knows the ins and out of the game, its lore, its music, and how they are all interconnected together. In listening to this music, whether in isolation (e.g., an orchestra performing without a screen) or in some kind of audiovisual combination, they are able to make sense of this music and what it means. Perhaps they might even encounter a moment of ludomusical dissonance if a scene from the game is displayed that does not actually include the

[352] "FINAL FANTASY X Piano Concerto," *Game Concerts*, http://www.gameconcerts.com/en/concerts/final-symphony/ (accessed July 18, 2021).

music the orchestra is performing. The non-ideal listener, on the other hand, has no relation to the game or its music. Perhaps they are a friend or family member who was dragged along to the concert (perhaps even a season ticket holder), and perhaps they have some disinterested Kantian aesthetic appreciation of the music, but it is (likely) based outside of any preexisting notions of what the music "should" be.[353]

I invite the reader now to engage in a (brief) playful reading with me. If you choose to accept, simply return to the first page of this chapter and reread the opening first paragraph. In this "replay" of sorts, what information is newly brought to your attention that was not before? Perhaps, having read my musings on ludic liveness, you are more attentive to my personal *lived* experience of a specific *event*. Perhaps you picked up on the (re)playful listening the concertgoer (an ideal listener) in front of me had, immediately moved to tears that they were. Indeed, with this opening memory, I hope to illustrate one example of re-playful listening mediated through ludic liveness. I remember being distinctly struck by their words, to the point I quickly wrote them down. It was not just a matter of "I'll never forget *NieR*," nor even "I'll never forget my experience with *NieR*," but specifically "I'll just *never* forget my *experience* of *first playing NieR*." Never is a long time, and to cherish memories for a lifetime shows how dear the game was to them. And not only was it their personal experience with *NieR* that came to mind, but their *first* playthrough. This implies that they likely replayed the game multiple times. Indeed, both the original *NieR* as well as its sequel, *NieR: Automata*, have a replay system built into the game wherein the "true" ending is only reached if players replay and beat the game multiple times, each time leading to a different

[353] To be clear, no concertgoer is a totally a blank slate—we are all indoctrinated with some kind of aesthetic preference based on our upbringing at both a cultural and personal level.

ending.[354] That they explicitly mentioned their playthrough of *NieR* suggests a replaying, a re-experiencing of what they had already played, a "that has been"-ness tethering the past and present, real and virtual through the music. But what about the experience of a non-ideal listener?

On June 23, 2021—in the midst of writing the first draft of this chapter—I received a message on Discord asking if I was watching the premiere of the *Sonic 30th Anniversary Concert* on YouTube. I quickly saved my work and opened up the concert.[355] As mentioned above, this was an example of what I have called a Virtual Live Concert. It was a pre-recorded concert (complete with a clip show playing on a screen behind the orchestra) performed by the FILMharmonic Orchestra, Tomoya Ohtani Band, and Crush 40 that peaked at approximately 50,000 viewers during its premiere. The live chat was filled with fans aggressively expressing their enthusiasm, complimenting the musicians, and reminiscing on their experiences with the franchise. I sat mutely at my table in the coffeeshop I was working in, focusing more on the chat than the music. The reason for this is in no small part because I have little to no attachment to the Sonic series. While I vaguely know the premise of the series (somethingsomething blue hedgehog, somethingsomething Eggman, somethingsomething "gotta go fast"), I did not grow up playing this series. In fact, the strongest memory I have of the series is my mother *not* purchasing me *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* (2002) for my GameCube. The musical performance was stellar—honestly a stronger concert than some other programs I was more personally invested in—but without that

[354] For the highly motivated reader who perhaps re-read the entirety of my introduction, they might have caught that this concert was dubbed "re: 12018," as it was a repeat or a return to a concert program that had premiered in Japan two years prior (see n304). Furthermore, the original *NieR* game was recently remastered and re-released as *NieR Replicant ver. 1.22474487139…*, offering a further example of replayabilty in the NieR series.

[355] The concert can be watched in full (along with a replay of the live chat) on the official Sonic the Hedgehog's YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGTlBHNvjsU. At the time of writing the first draft of this chapter, just a few weeks after the premiere, the concert had already garnered over 1.6 million views on YouTube. Now it is at 4.2 million (last accessed June 20, 2022).

connection of having previously played the games within the series, my enjoyment of the concert was severely dampened. William Gibbons and Julianne Grasso have discussed the (positive) psychology of this repetition in video game music concerts, stating simply that "the themes that are likely to be most familiar to listeners [are] thus most likely to trigger positive reactions. People want to hear the hits."[356] But the opposite is true as well: if the music is unfamiliar to the listener, they are less likely to have a strong reaction to the music. And while it might be stating the obvious, listeners who are not familiar with the game or series cannot have a re-playful listening experience.

Coda—Play Again?

In this chapter I have argued that video game music concerts afford a replay experience of the games whose music they feature. A critical element of this experience, I have argued, is the *live event* that is inherent to both playing a game as well as attending a concert. This double experience, both virtual and real, is mediated by listening to the music live—replayful listening—both by the audience in real time, and the music's arranger (they who transcribe—that is, to write *across*—media). These concerts, though primarily a phenomenological experience, also ontologically validate the game's music. In the remediation of the music from the half-real game to the concert hall, the music fully steps into the real world.[357] But there is one final element in this process. To briefly return to my event which began this chapter (and which, hopefully, you have already reread): upon returning home after the *NieR: Orchestra Concert re: 12018* performance, I turned

[356] William Gibbons and Julianne Grasso, "'And So It Goes, On and On': Repetition in the Music of Final Fantasy," in *Surpassing the Limit Break: The Psychology of Final Fantasy*, ed. Anthony M Bean (Fort Worth, TX: Leyline Publishing, Inc.), 56.
[357] Juul, *Half-Real*.

on my PlayStation 4 and wandered around in *NieR: Automata* for the first time in over a year. The virtual replay of the concert inspired a real (re)play of the game: a re:replay.

Conclusion

Continuation

To begin this conclusion, let us continue with our (my) re:replay and memories of *NieR: Automata*, here focusing not on the concert, but rather the game. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the NieR series is based doubly on the concepts of memory and replayability (broadly, repetition). While the series' various arrangements, concerts, albums, and even remastered *Ver. 1.22* all speak to this at some level, this is best reflected in a secret quest players can undertake within *NieR: Automata*. In the quest, players encounter Emil, one of the main characters in the original *NieR*, who has since lost many of his memories. The multi-part quest involves players seeking out a particular type of rare flower, the Lunar Tear, which, similar to Emil, was featured in the original game. Upon finding each of the hidden Lunar Tears across the sprawling gameworld, Emil will show up and give players some insight into his character as well as begin to remember fragments of his forgotten memories. After players have tracked down all the Lunar Tears, they are then able to find the "place from [Emil's] memories, which [he] worked so hard to protect" hidden deep underground. Upon walking into this subterranean space, players are struck by a one-two audiovisual aesthetic (sucker) punch. Visually, as shown in Figure C.1, players encounter an expansive field of Lunar Tears glowing against the cave's dark mise-en-scène, a sight to behold as the Lunar Tear is supposed to be an extremely rare flower. Sonically, however, a theme as-yet-unheard in *Automata* begins: Kainé's theme.[358] And yet, Kainé herself is nowhere to be found,

[358] Kainé's theme is one of the staples of the NieR series. First introduced in the original *NieR* game in 2010, the piece has been featured in nearly every NieR-adjacent media since. This includes not only the sequel game *NieR: Automata*, but also the program for every NieR concert, as well as almost every officially licensed NieR album.

absent as she has been across the entire game, thousands of years into the future it is from the

Figure C.1. Field of Lunar Tears in *NieR: Automata* (2017).

original *NieR*. Instead, Emil suddenly appears and reveals his backstory, which he now remembers: that he was created to be a weapon that could adapt to any environment; that when the aliens attacked earth, he created copies of himself to protect this place. He continues,

> But the more of ourselves we created, the more our original memories began to fade. The original Emil liked this place a lot. He spent a lot of time here with people he loved. They were tough times… Sad times… But the memories of that journey were his greatest treasure. And I have a few traces of those memories in my own mind.

Kainé's theme, nondiegetic though it is, is the whisper of the memories Emil—*this* Emil—retains: the memory of his time with NieR's protagonist, Kainé, and himself. Kainé's theme here sounds in its most prototypical form, as "Kainé – Salvation" (Table C.1 provides a list of all official arrangements of Kainé's theme current as of the time of writing). And yet this theme itself is

loaded: not only is it Kainé's theme, but Kainé's association with the Lunar Tear in the first *NieR* is also implied. Indeed, though unnamed as such, this location is Kainé's house.

Title/arrangement	Arranger	First Featured	Year	Notes
Kainé – Salvation	Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kakeru Ishihama	NieR: Replicant	2010	Prototype version of Kaine's theme.
Kainé – Escape	Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kakeru Ishihama	NieR: Replicant	2010	Dynamic/action version of Kaine's theme.
Kainé – Duet Ver.	Keigo Hoashi	NieR Gestalt & Replicant 15 Nightmares & Arrange Tracks	2010	String quartet arrangement of Kainé's theme
Kainé – echo	Sen	NieR Tribute Album -echo-	2011	Electronic remix of Kainé's theme
Kainé	Keigo Hoashi	Piano Collections NieR Gestalt & Replicant	2012	Piano transcription of Kainé's theme
Kainé	Sachiko Miyano	NieR Gestalt & Replicant Orchestral Arrangement Album	2020	Orchestral arrangement of Kainé's theme
Kainé (Addendum version)	Sachiko Miyano	NieR Orchestral Arrangement Album – Addendum	2020	Orchestral arrangement of Kainé's theme featuring a violin and piano duet intro
Kainé / Chiptune	Taku Yoshioka	NieR Chiptune Arrangement Tracks	2021	Jazzy chiptune arrangement of Kainé's theme
Kainé – Salvation	Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kakeru Ishihama	NieR: Replicant Ver. 1.22	2021	Prototype version of Kaine's theme; Rearranged and rerecorded
Kainé – Escape	Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kakeru Ishihama	NieR: Replicant Ver. 1.22	2021	Dynamic/action version of Kaine's theme; Rearranged and rerecorded

Table C.1. List of official versions/arrangements of Kainé's theme produced by Square Enix.

Kainé – Premonition	Keigo Hoashi	NieR: Replicant Ver. 1.22	2021	Newly added to the Ver. 1.22 version of the game
Kainé – Another Edit Version	Keigo Hoashi	NieR Replicant ver.1.22 Soundtrack Weiss Edition	2021	Enclosed with the US release of NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139... White Snow Edition
Kainé – Weiss Edition Arrangement	Ryu Kawamura	NieR Replicant ver.1.22 Soundtrack Weiss Edition	2021	Jazz combo arrangement of Kainé's theme
Kainé – Oboe and Bassoon Ensemble Ver.	Sachiko Miyano	NieR Replicant - 10+1 Years- /Kainé Album	2021	Double reed quartet (2 oboe + 2 bsn.) arrangement of Kainé's theme
Kainé	Sachiko Miyano	NieR Replicant ver.1.22 Choir Arrangement Album	2022	Choral arrangement of Kainé's theme with cembalo accompaniment

Table C.1, cont.

Players familiar with NieR's lore and who have played the original game will encounter this scene with their own memories of their experience playing the game. They will know of Emil's sacrifice, Kainé's pain, and the significance of the Lunar Tear and what it stands for in NieR. It is a poignant play on the themes of the NieR series: memory and, here, repetition. And while Kainé's theme is in its prototypical form here, should players continue the quest beyond this point, they encounter an arrangement of a different kind: "Emil – Despair." For Emil is (SPOILERS to follow) the game's secret and hardest boss, and can only be battled after undergoing a long and arduous journey, of which the aforementioned quest is just the start. "Emil – Despair" is a new arrangement, ludically unique to *NieR: Automata*, which includes cinematic percussion and full chorus to evoke Emil's apocalyptic despair.[359] How have other games (re)arranged music from previous

[359] One of the 26 endings players can get in the game occurs if they allow Emil to destroy the world after this battle ("Ending Y: headY battle"). Notably, Sachiko Miyano's concert arrangement of Emil's theme featured on the *NieR*

installments or earlier versions? And what meanings are bound within these (re)arrangements? This question is especially timely considering the recent trend of remasters, remakes, and reboots, including *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (2019), *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020), and *NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139* (2021).

I take this conclusion's opening and brief analysis as a way of showing there is much more work to be done with video game arrangements. Here, we hear how arrangements between games—even between newly arranged versions of existing pieces—can themselves carry poignant, intraseries meanings. While in this dissertation I have considered official arrangements for the concert hall, there are plenty of other avenues to investigate re: video game music arrangements and concerts. These include (to name but a few and in no particular order): examining specific arrangers and their styles, considering fan covers in greater detail (both analytically and theoretically), ethnographies of concert attendance, further consideration of the producers who make these game concerts happen, critical attention to the role of copyright in these processes of creation, considering styles and registers aside from the classical (both in terms of arrangements and concerts), more specific attention to indie game composers and their arrangements, examining the overlap of vinyl collectors and video game fans, archival work on the early history of video game music concerts in Japan, microhistories of specific video game music concerts, the establishment of an archive of important video game music ephemera (including rare albums, program notes, and—if at all possible—official scores), and, as mentioned above, a thorough and critical examination and theorization of the (re)arrangement of remake and

Orchestral Arrangement Album: Addendum (2020) is partly derived from "Emil – Despair." This track perhaps had to be relegated to the *Addendum* album, as it combined music from the two disparate games while the original *NieR* and *Automata* each had their own specific orchestral albums.

remaster soundtracks. So, while this is a conclusion for this project, it is also a call for continued work that was not addressed here.

In this dissertation I have examined the remediation of video game music from games to the concert hall. I approached this through historical, analytical, and theoretical lenses, considering how networks of companies, arrangers, and fans (among others) gave rise to this phenomenon. Chapter 1 approached these concerts through a historical lens, highlighting concerts producers and offering a survey of these concerts from 1987 to present day. Chapter 2 asked who, how, and why of video game arrangements, focusing on the arrangers *who* create them, *how* these arrangements are adapted, and *why* they are produced. Continuing to focus on arrangements, Chapter 3 instead examined arrangements adapted into traditional classical forms and genres, examining how the represented genres supported the intersemiotic translation of ludonarrative meaning to music. Finally, Chapter 4 theorized a type of listening afforded by video game music and concert arrangements.

I began this dissertation with a few guiding questions: Has video game music culturally "made it"? How did we get to the point of it entering the concert hall in the first place? How does video game music challenge existing classical structures and how do its arrangements both adhere to and challenge these structures? In traversing these chapters, I have shown how this process started in Japan, largely through the efforts of Koichi Sugiyama, even if Nobuo Uematsu has perhaps become the composer most associated with these concerts. But even here, we must note the efforts of other agents and actors in legitimizing this phenomenon, including concert producers, arrangers, fans, and even video game companies. In highlighting the theory of the *sekaikan*, for instance, we can see *why* Japanese companies such as Square Enix support the official production of these concerts and arrangements in particular. This also provides an additional reason as to why

so many of these arrangements come from Japanese video games besides the fact that they originated in Japan.

Have video games or has video game music "made it"? This is a more difficult question to answer. On the one hand, classical "high" art institutions like the London Symphony Orchestra and WDR Radio Orchestra are performing this music in the concert hall. But it is *arrangements* of this music more specifically that they are playing, not the original music from the game. Arrangers, then, not the source composers, are the ones translating this music into a different cultural register. That translation is still needed. We must also consider that oftentimes these arrangements, even when performed in concert halls, are still relegated to their own video game music programs, such as with the upcoming video game music program featured on the 2022 BBC Proms. How is this music situated? Or, better yet, how *will* this music be situated ten, fifty, one hundred years from now? Perhaps the best question, however, is whether this valorization is needed at all.

To that end, it is also especially worth noting that, in (generally) limiting the scope of this project specifically to classical and official arrangements in this dissertation, I have elided one of the most important types of second-order creations: fan arrangements (often called covers). If classical video game arrangements can offer a way of challenging traditional classical structures (e.g., inherently highlighting a collaborative model of creative production over a sole genius narrative), then how do fan arrangements further disrupt or adhere to the models created by official arrangements? If official arrangements are beholden to certain economic and legal dimensions, for instance, how do fan arrangements play with(in) (or flat out ignore) these power structures and to what ends? What do fans value (generically, formally, aesthetically) in the music that they create? On what terms do they continue to engage with the gameworld outside of the game? The final stage of the *sekaikan*, after all, is the fan's *own* extension of the world.

Finally, I wonder also what arrangements can teach us about "re" in general. As I hoped to show, arrangers hold an enormous amount of creative agency in producing their second-order creations. Might this carry over into other second-order creations as well? Many people have lamented the current "re" zeitgeist of the last decade or so, with the aforementioned wave of remakes, reboots, and remasters.[360] But these arrangements existed long before then. What can these re:creations tell us about their re:creators? What can they tell us about their source materials? What can other forms of second-order creations learn from video game arrangements for the concert hall, which themselves go through a process of remediation?

Ultimately, video game music arrangements are one part of the history of musical borrowings and arrangements. This history is in many ways cyclical, a concertized *return* in order to *remake*: to rehear. If video games are inherently vessels of replayability, then these arrangements were the inevitable musical conduit for this phenomenon.

[360] See, for instance, Daniella Scott, "There's a Reason Why There are so Many Remakes Right Now," *Yahoo*, November 4, 2021, https://news.yahoo.com/theres-reason-why-many-remakes-141000996.html.

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Ludography

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Chrono Cross. Square, 1999. NES. Music by Yasunori Mitsuda.

Chrono Trigger. Square, 1995. PlayStation. Music by Yasunori Mitsuda.

Dragon Quest. Enix, 1986. NES. Music by Koichi Sugiyama.

Final Fantasy. Square, 1987. NES. Music by Nobuo Uematsu.

Final Fantasy II. Square, 1988. NES. Music by Nobuo Uematsu.

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Final Fantasy VIII. Square, 1999. PlayStation. Music by Nobuo Uematsu.

Final Fantasy IX. Square, 2000. PlayStation. Music by Nobuo Uematsu.

Final Fantasy X. Square, 2001. PlayStation 2. Music by Nobuo Uematsu, Masashi Hamauzu, and Junya Nakano.

Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster. Square Enix, 2013. PlayStation 3. Music by Nobuo Uematsu, Masashi Hamauzu, and Junya Nakano.

Final Fantasy XIII. Square Enix, 2009. PlayStation 3. Music by Masashi Hamauzu.

Final Fantasy XV. Square Enix, 2016. PlayStation 4, Xbox One. Music by Yoko Shimomura, Tetsuya Shibata, Yoshino Aoki, Yoshitaka Suzuki, and Mitsuhiro Ohta.

Genshin Impact. miHoYo, 2020. Mobile, Windows, PlayStation 4. Music by Yu-Peng Chen.

Gris. Nomada Studio, 2018. Switch and Windows. Music by Berlinists.

Journey. thatgamestudio, 2012. PlayStation 3. Music by Austin Wintory.

King's Knight. Square, 1986. NES. Music by Nobuo Uematsu.

Lost Odyssey. Mistwalker, 2007. Xbox 360. Music by Nobuo Uematsu.

Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Sega, 2019. Switch. Music by Kenichi Tokoi and Tomoya Ohtani.

Kingdom Hearts. Square, 2002. PlayStation 2. Music by Yoko Shimomura.

Kingdom Hearts II. Square Enix, 2005. PlayStation 2. Music by Yoko Shimomura.

Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days. Square Enix, 2009. Nintendo DS. Music by Yoko Shimomura.

Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance. Square Enix, 2012. Nintendo 3DS. Music by Yoko Shimomura.

Kingdom Hearts III. Square Enix, 2019. PlayStation 4 and Xbox One. Music by Yoko Shimomura, Takeharu Ishimoto and Tsuyoshi Sekito.

Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory. Square Enix, 2020. PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Switch. Music by Yoko Shimomura, Takeharu shimoto and Tsuyoshi Sekito.

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past. Nintendo, 1991. SNES. Music by Koji Kondo.

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. Nintendo, 1998. Nintendo 64. Music by Koji Kondo.

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker. Nintendo, 2002. GameCube. Music by Kenta Nagata, Hajime Wakai, Toru Minegishi, and Koji Kondo.

The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. Nintendo, 2006. GameCube and Wii. Music by Toru Minegishi, Asuka Ohta, and Koji Kondo.

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword. Nintendo, 2011. Wii. Music by Hajime Wakai, Shiho Fujii, Mahito Yokota, and Takeshi Hama.

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. Nintendo, 2017. Switch. Music by Manaka Kataoka, Yasuaki Iwata, and Hajime Wakai.

The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening. Nintendo, 2019. Switch. Music by Ryo Nagamatsu.

Nier [Replicant and Gestalt]. Square Enix, 2010. PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. Music by Keiichi Okabe, Kakeru Ishihama, Keigo Hoashi, and Takafumi Nishimura.

NieR:Automata. Square Enix, 2017. PlayStation 4. Music by Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kuniyuki Takahashi.

NieR Replicant ver. 1.22474487139... Square Enix, 2021. PlayStation 4. Music by Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kakeru Ishihama, and Takafumi Nishimura.

Roblox. Roblox Corporation, 2006. Windows.

Second Life. Linden Lab, 2003. Windows and macOS.

Sonic Adventure 2: Battle. Sega, 2001. GameCube. Music by Jun Senoue, Kenichi Tokoi, Fumi Kumatani, and Tomoya Ohtani.

Undertale. Toby Fox, 2015. Microsoft Windows and OS X. Music by Toby Fox.

Appendix A

List of Game Music Concerts and Related Events

nb: This list is by no means comprehensive and primarily focuses on official productions. For the purposes of this document, notes are given sparingly. Dates given should be assumed to be the first premiere date unless otherwise indicated.

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Year	Date	Concert Title	Notes
1987	Aug 20	Family Classic Concert	Featured two suites of the music from Dragon Quest as well as Saint-Saëns' Carnival of the Animals
1989	May 20	Symphonic Suite Final Fantasy	Exclusively featured the music from Final Fantasy and Final Fantasy II
1991	Sep 15	Orchestral Game Music Concert 1	Featured the music of multiple game series
1992	Sep 15	Orchestral Game Music Concert 2	
1993	Oct 17	Orchestral Game Music Concert 3	
1994	Sep 4	Orchestral Game Music Concert 4	
1995	Oct 29	Orchestral Game Music Concert 5	
2002			
	Feb 20	20020220: Music from Final Fantasy	
	N.D.	Video Games Live is incorporated	
2003			
	Aug 20	Symphonic Game Music Concert 1	Premiered on the same day as the first video game music concert; first game music concert outside of Japan
	Oct 31	Eminence Symphony Orchestra debut concert	
2004			
	Mar 12	Tour de Japon – Music from Final Fantasy	
	May 10	Dear Friends: Music from Final Fantasy	First time Final Fantasy Toured the US

	Aug 18	Symphonic Game Music Concert 2	
2005			
	May 16	More Friends: Music from Final Fantasy	
	Jul 6	Video Games Live	Premiered at the Hollywood Bowl with the LA Philharmonic
	Aug 17	Symphonic Game Music Concert 3	
2006			
	Feb 18	Voices – Music from Final Fantasy	
	May 27	Play! A Video Game Symphony	
	Jul 28	Beginning of Fantasy Concert	
	Aug 23	Symphonic Game Music Concert 4	
	Sep 22	Press Start 2006 -Symphony of Games-	
2007			
	Apr 20	A Night in Fantasia 2007: Symphonic Games Edition	First Eminence Symphony Orchestra program dedicated entirely to video game music.
	Aug 22	Symphonic Game Music Concert 5	
	Sep 17	Press Start 2007 -Symphony of Games-	
	Dec 4	Distant Worlds	Celebration of FF 20th anniversary
2008			
	Jul 2	A Night of Symphonic Video Game Music	Debut concert of the Video Game Orchestra (VGO)
	Aug 23	Symphonic Shades	
	Sep 14	Press Start 2008 -Symphony of Games-	
2009			
	Aug 2	Press Start 2009 -Symphony of Games-	
	Sep 12	Symphonic Fantasies	The concert was broadcast live, worldwide as an Internet video stream. The European album release was published by Decca Records (see below).
	Sep 21	Video Games Alive Japan	First concert from outside of Japan in Japan/Tokyo Game Show

2010			
	Feb 19	Castlevania: The Concert	
	Mar 26	The Video Game Orchestra debuts at PAX East	
	Sep 17	Benyamin Nuss plays Nobuo Uematsu CD	First video game music recording by Deutsche Grammophon
	Sep 17	Symphonic Fantasies CD	First game music recording by DECCA
	Sep 23	Symphonic Legends - Music from Nintendo	
	Nov 6	Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy Returning Home	
2011			
	Jun 7	Legend of Zelda 25th Anniversary Orchestra Performance at E3	
	Jul 9	Symphonic Odysseys	
2012			
	Jan 7	Symphonic Fantasies Tokyo	
	Mar 28	Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddess	
	Nov 2	25th Anniversary Distant Worlds: The Celebration	
2013			
	Jan 4	Video Game Orchestra MAGFest debut	
	Jun 6	Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddess (Second Quest)	
	May 11	Final Symphony	
	Nov 22	Symphonic Selections	
2014			
	Feb 15	A New World: Intimate Music from Final Fantasy	
	Jun 21	Final Fantasy VII orchestral concert	
	Aug 15	Pokémon Symphonic Evolutions	
2015			
	Jan 21	Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddess (Master Quest)	
	Jan 22	Music from Final Fantasy: The Journey of 100	
	Aug 29	Final Symphony II	
	Nov 7	Piano Opera: Music from Final Fantasy	

	Dec 9	20th Anniversary Tales of Orchestra Concert	
2016			
	Jan 30	Score – Videogame music with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra	
	Feb 20	Journey Live	
	Aug 11	Kingdom Hearts Concert -First Breath-	
	Sep 7	Final Fantasy XV Live at Abbey Road Studios	
	Oct 8	Dreams of Zanarkand	
	Oct 14	Dear Esther Live	
	Dec 2	Video Games Classic	
2017			
	Feb 4	Orchestral Memories	
	Mar 10	Kingdom Hearts -Orchestra World Tour-	
	Apr 23	NieR Music Concert: The Memories of Puppets	
	Jul 1	FINAL FANTASY 30th Anniversary – JIRITSU	
	Jul 22	Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddess (World Tour)	
	Sep 23	Eorzean Symphony	
	Oct 27	Symphony of Heroes	
	Dec 7	The Game Awards Orchestra debuts	Beginning in 2017 and from then on, the music of the nominees for the Game of the Year at The Game Awards were arranged into a medley and performed during the award show
2018			
	Apr 6	PAX EAST 2018 - Final Fantasy XV A Special Orchestral Performance	
	Apr 7	Xenogears 20th Anniversary Concert: -The Beginning of the End-	
	Jun 9	Symphonic Memories	
	Aug 19	Power Up Games in Concert	
	Aug	Gaming in Symphony	
	Sep 15	"Koopa is the Protagonist?" Super Mario Orchestra Concert	
	Oct 10	Metal Gear in Concert	

	Oct 26	Game Music Fest 1	
2019			
	Apr 27	Kingdom Hearts Orchestra - World of Tres-	Also included as a bonus if players bought the Re Mind downloadable content for Kingdom Hearts III
	Apr 28	Dragon Quest Symphonic Suite series	The Tokyo City Philharmonic Orchestra started a program series that performed each of the (at the time) eleven Dragon Quest symphonic suites
	Jun 9	Final Fantasy VII: A Symphonic Reunion Concert	
	Jun 11	Assassin's Creed Symphony	
	Jul 18	Gris Game Live	
	Sep 7	Chrono Orchestra: Toki o Wataru Tsubasa	
	Sep 15	UNDERTALE 5th Anniversary Concert	
	Oct 5*	Game Theory Concert (Indie Game Symphony)	Cancelled without explanation
	Oct 18	Game Music Fest 2	
	Nov 3	Chrono Cross 20th Anniversary Live Tour 2019 RADICAL DREAMERS Yasunori Mitsuda & Millennial Fair	
	Dec 14	Symphonic Memories (Japan)	
2020			
	Jan 8	Game ON!	
	Jan 11	Undertale LIVE	
	Jan 24	NieR: Orchestra Concert: re: 12018	
	Feb 28	Supergiant Games Orchestra – PAX EAST 2020	
	Jun 14*	Final Fantasy VII: Remake Orchestra World Tour	First known concert series that was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic
	Sep 5	Tales of Orchestra Concert 25th Anniversary	
	Oct 7	Undertale LIVE virtual rebroadcast	
	Oct 16	Games Music Festival Vol. 3	
	Dec 10	Super Mario Bros. Symphony Performance at The Game Awards	35th anniversary concert; medley performed by the London Philharmonic from Abbey Road Studio

2021			
	Feb 13	Final Fantasy VII: Remake Orchestra World Tour	Virtually premiered on Niconico by the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra after initial cancellations/delays
	Jun 23	Sonic 30th Anniversary Symphony	
	Jun 26	Trials of Mana 25th Anniversary Concert	
	Jul 21	Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony	
	Jul 23	Electric Arcade	
	Oct 3	Genshin Impact: “Melodies of an Endless Journey”	
	Nov 11	Skyrim 10th Anniversary Concert	
	Nov 21	25th Anniversary Persona Symphonic Concert	
2022			
	Jan 21	Gaming Sounds	
	Apr 8	Another Eden 5th Anniversary: Special Mini Concert by "Hoshino Otoshimono"	
	Mar 5	Game Music Festival Vol. 4	
	May 7	The Ace Attorney 20th Anniversary Orchestra Concert	
	Mar 14	Traveler – A Journey Symphony	
	Apr 21*	Symphony of MapleStory	Premiered prior—uploaded to YouTube on April 21st
	Jun 2	Video Games in Concert	
	Jul 8	Untitled Goose Game Live	
	Aug 1	BBC Proms, Gaming Prom: From 8-Bit to Infinity	
	Aug 6	Distant Worlds -Coral-	
	Oct 8	Persona Super Live P-Sound WISH 2022: Crossing Journey	
	Oct 29	Assassin’s Creed Symphonic Adventure	

Appendix B

Interview with Benyamin Nuss and Eric Roth

Conducted January 19, 2020 (the day after Nuss and Roth's *A New World* performance) in Chicago, IL by Stefan Greenfield-Casas.

Benyamin Nuss is a pianist, composer, and arranger who has performed for the *Symphonic Fantasies*, *Symphonic Odysseys*, *Final Symphony*, *Distant Worlds*, *A New World*, and *Kingdom Hearts Orchestra: World of Tres* concerts, among others. He also recorded the first video game music album for Deutsche Grammophon, which featured the music of Nobuo Uematsu.

Eric Roth is a conductor, arranger, and producer who primarily works through AWR Music. He has conducted and/or arranged for the *Distant Worlds*, *A New World*, and *Undertale LIVE* concerts, among others.

This interview has been edited for clarity.

***

Stefan Greenfield-Casas: So, the first question is an easy one: how did you two meet?

Eric Roth: Well, I think your story goes back before me, so…

Benyamin Nuss: Eleven years ago, I met Arnie [Roth] at a video game music concert—*Symphonic Fantasies*. It was a coincidence actually. I liked to play games and I won a scholarship with which I was able to play with the Cologne WDR Orchestra and they asked me "what production do you want to do?" And it was like [unintelligible] and film music and I was like "mmmm…" and then they said, "we also do game music," and I said "what kind of game music?" and they said "Final Fantasy." "Final Fantasy! I want to do that!" And that's how I met his [**ER's**] dad. And then we met in Chicago 2011 at the *Distant Worlds* marathon, and we talked about a lot of jazz and that's how we got [to know each other]— We had all the same interests in talking about music.

ER: We've always had a lot in common.

SGC to **BN:** And your father is a jazz trombonist if I remember correctly?

BN: Yes, actually my whole family is. My dad is a trombone player, my brother is a trombone player, and my future wife is a trombone player.

SGC: Lots of trombone players! So how did you end up on piano and not trombone then?

BN: It was just too loud. *all laugh* There was a piano standing around in our house and I just liked the fact that you could play two or three notes and not just one, and then harmony was a big thing.

SGC: So, a question for you more specifically then, in terms of jazz training—the little jazzy solo you had last night, was that improvised?

BN: Yes! Yes, he [**ER**] was actually looking for a piece that would allow me to [improvise].

ER: Yeah, that's right.

BN to **ER:** Thank you. *both laugh*

SGC: Yeah, I brought a friend with me [to the concert] last night, and he turned to me afterward and asked, "did he improvise that?" and I said "I'm pretty sure, he has a jazz background. I'll ask him tomorrow."

BN: He [**ER**] actually does too! Because he studied jazz.

SGC: You did?

ER: Yeah, that's true.

SGC: So, I know you were doing your DMA in New York, correct?

ER: Yeah, I did. Well, I did do that, I didn't complete it.

SGC: So, were you studying composition there, or was it jazz composition in particular?

ER: No, before that I came up as basically a jazz drummer. That's my main background, and so when I was doing my bachelor's degree at the University of Michigan, I was tapped in with all the Detroit jazz players so they could kick my ass around. *laughs* And so then after college I came back to Chicago and I was basically a gigging drummer and percussionist for a bunch of years, playing whatever I could, from hip-hop to jazz to improvised music to klezmer music or whatever. So that's really more my jazz background. At the Grad Center, that was more contemporary classical. Actually, I've always felt very open to the idea of improvisation in my compositions. To

me, if the players are comfortable enough to where they feel like they can do that, then that's a great opportunity.

BN: And that's something that's not that common in written down music, right?

ER: Not to have that openness about it, to control it in various ways. But I'm talking about having the musicians have the conviction to—

BN: But it's important because in classical music the players—the old players back then—they were able to improvise even the classical music.

ER: That's right they would do it on the melodies.

BN: Why are we losing that? Actually, improvisation is one factor for a musician for composition, improvisation, interpretation these three factors, but classical music has lost that.

SGC to **BN:** So, following that actually, a question for you: on your latest album, you have that Improvisation on "Dust to Dust," right?

BN: Yeah.

SGC: Was that purely improvised? Or was that worked on a little bit and then recorded?

BN: I think I did a couple of takes. I think I did five different takes and then chose that one. After I did that take, I thought "maybe this is the take."

SGC: So, nothing was written out?

BN: No—well just the melody.

SGC: Right, that's so fantastic. I've been wondering that since I saw it titled as such on the CD, "oh I have to know this."

ER: Let me—can I ask a question?

BN: Of course!

ER: But you would rehearse doing that, right? Like not what you played, but you would actually do that on your own, right? Before the recording?

BN: The thing is, how the idea actually came up when I had a concert with Hamauzu in Cologne once. I didn't have an encore, but I liked this melody… and I hadn't practiced it. And I was sitting down (it's on YouTube) and I was like "oh shit, what should I play now?" and I went like this *gestures* and "okay, I could play that piece." And I was so nervous and was just trying to find the melody and I didn't know how to end it and I thought I totally screwed up everything—like the ending like the harmonies were off—but then I listened back to it and thought "wait a minute, this isn't too bad." *all laugh* And it's a challenge, you can't practice just being in the moment. Like if you play a note off, don't think of it as being off, because it *could* make sense. Everything could make sense depending on the way you take it.

SGC: Yeah. So, actually, a little bit about me—I should have started with that, I'm sorry! [To **ER:**] I don't know how much he [Benyamin] told you about me. So, I'm a PhD student at Northwestern studying music theory and cognition, and my dissertation is on video game music and, more specifically, video game music in the concert hall.

BN to **ER:** Yeah, actually I think I forwarded you the email.

ER: Yeah, I was going to say that's about all the information that I have.

SGC: Okay good. But my background in music: my undergrad [degree] was actually in French horn performance and towards the end of it especially I was doing a lot of free improvisation stuff. I wrote a paper a few years ago on improvisation writ large (but focusing on free improvisation) and I was interviewing some old teachers about that and there was some disagreement about whether or not you can practice improvisation and especially free improvisation, because if it's supposed to be "free" how are you practicing it? And the conclusion a lot of people came to was that you can practice being in the moment, or getting that feeling—

BN: You can totally practice it! In jazz anyways, just… I think it's about your knowledge and the more you improvise, the more your horizons broaden. And being in the moment and playing around decent stuff and—sorry, I'm thinking in German—you just find new things constantly.

ER: I would add to that I that's kind of fallacious a little bit, the idea that it's not really free if you prepare it, because that's almost like saying experience doesn't matter, you know what I mean? *laughs* I mean if you can't have experience otherwise, it's not a free improvisation… I mean that's totally fallacious. You know what I mean?

SGC: So, Derrida of all people actually has this great interview where he talks about that specifically! But another question for you, Benyamin, about your relationship with Masashi

Hamauzu in particular. You two seem to be pretty close—you're doing his chamber works. Can you talk about that a bit?

BN: Also through his [Eric's] dad. I mean we met for the first time in *Distant Worlds* in Tokyo and he was there and I was a diehard fan of his music. And I had actually prepared a piece which I wrote for him, and I played it for him. And then I asked him to write a piece for my *Exotica* [album] and then he invited me for a recording session and somehow the chemistry—it just clicked. And because I had listened to his music, he was a big influence on me. Somehow the musical ideas matched.

SGC: So, a general question for the both of you. So again, my dissertation in on transcription and arrangements and both of you have a background and history with this. I'm wondering if you have any philosophies on transcription or arrangement. Are you trying to get exactly—

ER: No.

BN: Yeah okay, good.

ER: Definitely not. That's definitely not what I try and do. From my perspective it's about balance. Between maintaining—no, not maintaining that's not the right word… *retaining* the identity of the original while bringing something fresh to the table. That's really how I approach it, trying to have that balance, so I look at it like there are *opportunities* in this transformation. Like things in the orchestrational [sic] balance, it's an opportunity to rebalance these things, y'know? Or when something might not sit the best on this instrument, but it sounds like it would be great on that instrument, like changing something just a little bit to retain the identity but still bring something fresh. I don't shy away from doing these kinds of things. It's risky business, if you know what I mean *laughs* but I guess it's my musical personality.

SGC: Yeah definitely. Do you have any thoughts, Benyamin?

BN: I totally agree and I would like to add that I think if you just go with your idea and stick to it 100% and with your philosophy then it will turn out good. Because if you're not 100% behind it, you can hear it. Uematsu also listens to all the stuff, he just exes stuff if it's not 100% there.

SGC: So how is it working with him [Uematsu]? I've been reading past interviews saying that he's very involved in the process and listening and that it's very collaborative? [That] it's more like you saying, "I have this idea" and you give it to him and he says "yeah I like that" or "maybe this instead."

ER: Yeah, it's not like that's how it goes for every piece *laughs* but at my favorite times it is very much like that, where he is weighing in on how he feels about the idea. And he's not shy about things, he'll talk *tempo*, he'll talk *balance*, *dynamics*, y'know? I keep on coming to this word "opportunity," but he's a living legend. And beyond that he's a really terrific fella, so it's a really nice combination to be able to [work with him]… When he gives you some information, you hold onto it and value it. That's how I look at it.

BN: He's like an encyclopedia of music. He listens to allllll different styles of music and that's exactly what we constantly talking about, sharing the new music we're listening to. "Do you have some compositions, some contemporary stuff you can recommend to me?" And we just talk about that stuff. So, it's actually super inspiring. We share this same philosophy.

ER: Yeah, we have that in common. I think Uematsu-san shares a lot of that common ground as well.

BN: Yeah, that's what I meant!

SGC: So, one of the things a lot of video game music scholars like to talk about is when he [Uematsu] was composing, for especially for the 8-bit and the 16-bit tracks, did he, y'know, *mean* for this to be an organ in "Dancing Mad," did he *mean* for this to be a harp in the opening "Prelude"? I mean obviously the voice in the opera [in *Final Fantasy VI*]—

ER: The process of signification.

SGC: Yes! Do you have any insight on that? That's something I have not really been able to find in any conversations.

pause

ER: *slow, hesitant breath in* Well… I guess my only insight would be that he knows so much music that the idea it's not referential in some way seems a little farfetched to me. But beyond that, I don't want to make a big claim especially in the sense that it's a different palette, it's not just trying to be "the same thing" and I think it's a more nuanced kind of thing. But as far as the question of "is it really supposed to be an organ" I don't think it is really supposed to be an organ at the heart of the matter.

BN: That's what a lot of video game music scholars say as well. That we need to take this music on its own terms, and yeah, it probably is referential or gesturing toward something in particular, but it's 8-bit music, it's 16-bit music, and we need to honor that as it is.

ER: I mean we're kind of coming back to something we were talking about earlier with experience and improvisation, in the sense that does he have to throw away that experience of all that music that he knows in order to make something that's truly to the—

SGC: Nothings made in a vacuum.

ER: Yeah exactly. [To **BN:**] What do you think? I'm curious.

BN: About what?

ER: About the intension of the sounds, especially in the early music?

BN: Well… even if it's 8-bit you can already hear like it could be a clarinet or something, but knowing his background like his progressive rock that he likes, I mean it's pretty clear it could be an organ that he likes. What's the band he likes a lot? Palmer…?

ER, concurrently: Emerson, Lake and Palmer.
SGC, concurrently: ELP.

ER: Yeah, it's true. It's just as likely to be an analogue synth sound that he's thinking of as woodwind sound!

SGC: Yeah, I didn't even think about that! So, another general question: Why Nobuo Uematsu? Why *Final Fantasy*? Why do you think it's taken off as much as it has in particular?

BN: The game?

SGC: The music [for the game], like the concert series.

BN: It's definitely Uematsu. The thing he can really do is write melodies. And it's not only easy melodies, it's pretty complex stuff sometimes in terms of harmony and also how he writes melodies. But he's so good at writing catchy melodies. Even though it's harmonically—"Zanarkand" is [also pretty] unusual, I think. But he just really knows how to write good melodies. And also like… feel the mood(?) which is in the game. He's a deep personality. So, if you think in terms of music of emotions, if you just say "that's sad," that's pretty superficial. But Uematsu's like "okay, this is *this* kind of sad" and he feels it, it's not only *this* kind of sad, it's *this* kind of sadness, it's *this* kind of happiness. So, he really is a deep composer, and he feels the different lives going on in the game.

ER: Yeah, I agree, I think it's a lot about his depth and beauty as a composer. I mean, just the incredible variety. You know, delivering the goods with that kind of variety is pretty unusual. You know? It's not like you can look around the video game world and say "oh, that's just one of any other…" [composers?] *laughs* I mean, let's get real, it's like producing at a magnificent, historic level. And that's not to say that I'm ripping on other video game music or anything like that, I'm just saying that the *quantity* and *quality*—and *variety*—of the music in these games is really exceptional.

BN: And then, because every Final Fantasy is different, *IX* is more Baroque style, so he fits into every style. *VIII* is more experimental, *VII* is dark… so he is also very experimental, looking for new sounds and trying out new styles, trying out a new style of composition or of orchestration.

SGC: So, one question for you, Eric. I know you recently wrote and premiered the *RPG National Anthem Variations*, right?

ER: Yeah!

SGC: This is maybe in line with the question I just asked, but why the Final Fantasy theme as the RPG National Anthem?

ER: You mean why the title, or…?

SGC: Why the theme being representative of RPGs?

ER: Oh, well. I heard somebody call it that once, and I just thought that was awesome. *laughs* It seems like a very ambitious claim, but it's really more just a fun claim. Having said that… I think it's not such a horrible description. And it's a great theme! It's a great theme. It was *not* an accidental choice. I'll put it that way.

SGC: So why the theme and variations genre for it?

ER: For the fun of it. For the fun of it! Sam [Griffin] and I had been talking about doing something and this seemed like the way to push the boundaries of what we could and still live in our world and yeah. It hit the sweet spot for the kind of collaboration we wanted to do. But as far as "why a theme and variations in particular?," it's not important to me to say something about that form or anything like that. It's really just fun, that's really how we looked at it. It might be a way that people would have a way into listening to the creative composition aspect of it—as opposed to

something that's more abstract, I guess, and just "influenced by." So, I would say if there was a pragmatic consideration, then that was it.

SGC: Excellent. So, in terms of crowd engagement at the concert last night… I was surprised by the "Sephiroth"! For at least the *Distant Worlds* concerts, everyone is *screaming* it. But at least where I was sitting—I was in the balcony area—a few people said it the first time, but not so much after that. Is that often the case with the *A New World* concerts?

ER: Well, I'll do it two ways. One way is actually doing a formal sing along, like, y'know, bully everyone into doing it. *laughs* But I don't love doing that, I feel like it's not exactly in the spirit of the concert. When people are getting really, really fired up, then I've found myself wanting to do that spontaneously a few times, but when it's more the hyper concentration and intimate vibe, I like to invite the interaction, but I don't want to force it.

SGC: Another thing I'm curious about is your… what did you call it? Not demogr—was it demographics?

ER: Oh, "market research time?"

SGC: Yeah! But when you asked, "who's attended a non-video game chamber music concert within the last two months," it seemed like a pretty decent amount of people raised their hands? Is that common?

ER: Well, that's a pretty funny way of putting it. What did you expect versus what it was? Did you expect it to be less?

SGC: Yeah, less. Not *nothing,* but less. But it seemed like most of the same hands went up—

ER: Oh, that wasn't my experience!

SGC: Again, I only had the view of the balcony.

ER: Right, right. Actually, I remember thinking that there were more people raising their hand in the balcony…

SGC: Perspective!

ER: Yeah, that's just random. But yeah, it was less people, significantly.

BN: In Kansas it was a lot more.

ER: I mean you can see the basic pattern at all the shows, but the proportions show.

BN: It's funny because we always take the reports after every concert. *laughs*

SGC to **ER:** So, in terms of AWR Music in general… You were in charge of [the] *Undertale* [concert] last weekend?

ER: Yeah.

SGC: I wasn't able to attend unfortunately, it sold out so quick. How was conducting it? I know it was supposed to be more of a play-along?

ER: Not exactly—nobody's playing along. The entire audience has certain junctures where they can make choices.

SGC: That's what it was.

ER: Yeah! It's a condensed version of the game; it's a branching path, right? So, you can go straight, sparing everybody (straight pacifist), or there are a couple different neutral outcomes or paths, and there's what they call *laughs nervously* the genocide route—it's very hard to say every time. So, in real time I'm responding to what I'm seeing on the video, as far as what the choices were that they've made, and have to analyze it and tell the musicians where we're going with signals—

BN: Wow

ER: Like there's instructions on each part at the end, like "this is what comes next" or either "this, this, or this comes next" or that sort of thing.

SGC: Virtuosity as a conductor!

ER: Oh my god. It was really… it was a little nerve wracking. *laughs nervously*

SGC: Yeah, I believe it! So how did you get involved with 5th House Ensemble?

ER: Let's see. I would say that mostly it started through some of the musicians connecting me with Dan Visconti, the artistic director. And then we had lots of conversations about programming

and what could happen, in a bunch of different directions. And something that appeals to me about them—even before our collaboration—is their community building work. It's a very endearing and robust part of what they do. We had this idea, Dan and I, for this show. And *Undertale* is a pretty special game in a lot of ways, so we thought it was a great opportunity to engage with really a different demographic. And then [do something different from] what any other video game concert show is and bring something fresh to the table, [while] maintaining the identity of the game and that's where it started. And then talking to Sebastian Wolf and Materia collective there's been some back and forth.

SGC to **BN:** We had talked about Materia Collective in the email as well. Have you worked with them before?

BN: No, I haven't actually.

SGC: So, here's another thing I'm pretty interested in. I have a basic understanding of it, but nothing super in-depth. How does copyright works with all of this? So, I know you all are in conversation not only with the composers, but with Square Enix the company writ large. What kind of permissions have to happen?

BN: *long exhale* It depends on the video game music company. Nintendo is *very* tough. It's *almost* impossible to do anything with them officially. But with Square Enix, because we work with them a lot, they told me that if I want to do an arrangement, I just have to contact the owner because they hold the rights and if they say "yes," it's okay. Basically, Square is okay, doing arrangements anyways. And the composition rights are all with Square Enix, so not even with Uematsu-san. Which is pretty tough. But there's a movement going on in Japan where they're trying to push for the rights of the composers.

SGC: So, they would maintain rights, or partial rights at least?

BN: Yeah. Yes.

SGC: This is something I'm not super well versed in, but in academic conversations about arrangement and transcription that's one of the things that's frequently brought up.

ER: Frequently brought up like asked about?

SGC: Not necessarily asking about, more philosophizing about—

ER: Philosophizing about… copyright?

SGC: Yeah, copyright!

ER: For musicologists?

SGC: Yeah! So, like there have been all these cases of late asking whether such-and-such artist copied whoever, so those kinds of discussions in forensic musicology. And… it at least *can* be a tricky situation. This is, in my opinion at least, a pretty straightforward relationship: you're in conversation with Square Enix, with the composers, and you ask "hey, we want to do this"—

ER: It's not "Blurred Lines," is that what you're saying?

SGC: Yes. *all laugh* Yeah, so it's something I'm just starting to dip my toes into, asking "what all is there even to know about this?" But yeah—just a few more tidying up questions. I've heard that "Zanarkand" is performed at every concert, at least for *Distant Worlds*. Is that also true for *A New World*? I've also heard that that's at the request of Uematsu-san.

ER: Well, uhm, I don't know if it's officially [a request], but yeah, we haven't done one yet where we didn't play it.

BN: It's always two pieces, right? That one and "One-Winged Angel."

SGC: And yeah, that was the other one. I know "One-Winged Angel" is just such a fan favorite.

ER: I think that a lot of people just feel like they… think like something's missing if we don't [play it], y'know? And what's the upside if it's missing? *laughs*

SGC: And one final question I can think of for now, in terms of the screen—or lack thereof for *A New World*! What sort of difference do you think it brings, creates—or what-have-you—having the screen or *not* having the screen?

ER: Well, I'll just say it's obvious and *cool* to have the intermedia, y'know? And there's obviously demand and a lot of richness in that experience. *pause* The people who come to these concerts are there for a live music experience and, as such, with the rich relationship that they already have with the music and the programmatic aspects of it, it's not required to have this visual component is how I feel about it. So, yeah. I think that's one of the great things about *A New World*, is it's not that it's "better" or anything like that, it's just a really cool experience to have. There's this feeling from the audience that I think is so rare, everybody having that kind of rich experience that they're bringing to the concert hall as an audience. And that's really special, I think.

SGC: It's been a really interesting experience for me because this was the first video game music concert that I've been to that didn't have a screen of some sort. And especially with certain pieces, as soon as they started playing, it was in my mind's eye: I'm walking around, I'm playing, it's this cutscene, it's that cutscene. It's just such a different experience. And I think I subconsciously knew that might happen, but it wasn't until it was actually happening that I thought "oh wow, this is so cool." Do you know of any other video game music concerts that don't use the screen?

ER: Well, I know of smaller acts, like Sam's act, the Super Guitar Brothers, but yeah not [really]… [To **BN:**] do you?

BN: I mean there's also *Final Symphony*.

ER: Oh yeah, well there's that. But that's like a different kind of thing in the music, it's not…

BN: It's more like… contemporary.

ER: More "inspired by."

BN: Yeah. I also do it without the screen. I think you don't really need it.

ER: I mean I'm sure there are lots of projects out there.

BN: Yeah, because it's also harder to get the rights officially.

SGC: I think those are most of my questions, so thank you so much for your time, both of you!

ER: Oh, well thank you!

BN: Yes, thank you.

Appendix C

List of Albums Consulted

nb: This list includes all albums *consulted* for this dissertation. The separate Discography only includes albums directly *referenced* in the text. There is some overlap between the two lists.

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Albums Consulted for Chapter 2

A New World: intimate music from Final Fantasy. Eric Roth and The New World Players. AWR 10103, 2014, CD.
A New World: intimate music from Final Fantasy – Volume II. Eric Roth and The New World Players. AWR 10113, 2019, CD.
Across the Worlds ~ Chrono Cross Wayô Piano Collection. Benyamin Nuss, piano. WAYO-029~30, 2021, CD.
Chrono Orchestra Arrangement Box. Yasunori Mitsuda, composer. SQEX-10727~9, 2019, CD.
Distant Worlds: music from Final Fantasy. Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. AWR 10101, 2007, CD.
Distant Worlds II: more music from Final Fantasy. Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. AWR 10102, 2010, CD.
Distant Worlds III: more music from Final Fantasy. Distant Worlds Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus. AWR 10108, 2015, CD.
Distant Worlds IV: more music from Final Fantasy. Distant Worlds Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus. AWR 10109, 2017, CD.
Distant Worlds V: more music from Final Fantasy. Distant Worlds Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus. AWR 10114, 2019, CD.
Final Symphony - music from FINAL FANTASY VI, VII and X. London Symphony Orchestra. SQEX-20021, 2015, Blu-ray.
Kingdom Hearts Concert First Breath Album. Osaka Shion Wind Orchestra. SQEX-10598, 2017, CD.
Kingdom Hearts Orchestra World Tour Album. Czech National Symphony Orchestra. SQEX-10592, 2017, CD.
Kingdom Hearts Orchestra World of Tres Album. Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. SQEX-10714, 2019, CD.
NieR Orchestral Arrangement Special Box Edition. Kanagawa Philharmonic Orchestra. SQEX-10675~7, 2018, CD.
NieR Replicant 10 + 1 Years: Vinyl LP Box. Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kakeru Ishihama, composers. SQEX-10859~62, 2021, Vinyl LP.
Piano Collections Final Fantasy VII. Seiji Honda, piano. SSCX-10111, 2003, CD.
Piano Collections Final Fantasy X. Aki Kuroda, piano. SSCX-10064, 2002, CD.

Piano Collections Kingdom Hearts. Takehiko Yamada, Hiroyuki Nakayama, Miwa Sato, piano. SQEX-10144, 2009, CD.
Symphonic Fantasies: Music from Square Enix. WDR Rundfunkorchester Köln. SQEX-10202, 2010, CD.
Symphonic Odysseys: Tribute to Nobuo Uematsu. WDR Rundfunkorchester Köln. DERP-10017~8, 2011, CD.
Symphonic Suite Final Fantasy. Tokyo Symphony Orchestra. PSCR-5253, 1994, CD.

Additional Albums Consulted in Part

20020220: Music from Final Fantasy. Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. SQEX-10030~1, 2004, CD.
Benyamin Nuss Plays Uematsu. Benyamin Nuss, piano. Deutsche Grammophon 0289 476 395-6, 2010, CD.
Fantasy Worlds. Benyamin Nuss, Piano. Neue Mesiter 030116NM, 2019, CD.
Final Fantasy VI Grand Finale. Milan Symphony Orchestra. NTCP-5004, 2004, CD.
FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE Orchestral Arrangement Album. Shinra Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. SQEX-10806, 2020, CD.
The Legend of Zelda 25th Anniversary Special Orchestra CD. Orchestra Nova San Diego. RVL-ZSCD-0A-0 USA S0, 2011, CD.
NieR Gestalt & Replicant 15 Nightmares & Arrange Tracks. MONACA, composer. SQEX-10212, 2010, CD.
NieR Orchestral Arrangement Album – Addendum. Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. SQEX-10765, 2020, CD.
NieR Orchestral Arrangement Album - Addendum Special Disc. Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. SQEX-10766, 2020, CD.
NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139... Choir Arrangement Album. Sachiko Miyano, arr. SQEX-10924, 2022, CD.
NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139... Soundtrack Weiss Edition. Keiichi Okabe, Keigo Hoashi, Kakeru Ishihama, composers. SQEX-10836~7, 2021, CD.
Piano Collections Final Fantasy VI. Reiko Nomura, piano. NTCP-1003, 2001, CD.
Piano Collections Final Fantasy XV: Moonlit Melodies. Sachiko Miyano and Natsumi Kameoka, arr. SQEX-10586, 2017, CD.
Piano Collections Kingdom Hearts Field & Battle. Sachiko Miyano, Natsumi Kameoka, and Hiroyuki Nakayama, arr. SQEX-10177, 2010, CD.
Piano Opera: Final Fantasy I-IX Piano Arrangement Album [Special Edition]. Hiroyuko Nakayama, piano and arr. SQEX-U0001~3, 2015, CD.
Symphonic Fantasies Tokyo. Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. MSP-9612~3, 2012, CD.
Symphonic Memories Concert - music from SQUARE ENIX. Kanagawa Philharmonic Orchestra. SQEX-10809~10, 2020, CD.

Appendix D

Interview with Mariam Abounnasr

Conducted May 15 (Chicago) / May 16 (Tokyo), 2021 over Skype by Stefan Greenfield-Casas.

Mariam Abounnasr is a composer and arranger who primarily works for Procyon Studios. She has composed the soundtracks for *Another Eden* and *Oninaki*, among others, and has worked as an arranger for the *NieR Orchestral Arrangement*, *Chrono Orchestral Arrangement*, and *Across the Worlds* albums, as well as for various concerts for the NieR, Xeno, Chrono, and Kingdom Hearts series, among others.

This interview has been edited for clarity.

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Stefan Greenfield-Casas: Thanks for meeting with me! So, one, I'm not sure how much Tom has told you about me, but I'm a PhD student at Northwestern University in Chicago. I'm writing my dissertation on the arrangement of video game music and, more specially, arrangements in the concert hall. So, you know, the various video game music concerts that are taking over the world at this point. *both laugh* So that's a little bit about me. I guess to start, I was wondering if you could introduce yourself and give me a bit of your bio. I've read your interview with Don Kotowski and so I have some general information from there, but can you give me a little bit of your background?

Mariam Abounnasr: Well, I've moved back and forth between Japan and the UK from an early age. During that time, I learned piano in Japan for a few years and then I started composing as a hobby at the age of 14, around junior high or maybe high school. And I started uni doing music thinking that's what I wanted to do: composing or anything that involved music. At that time during uni I worked at the concert halls, ushering mostly, and then one of the acquaintances I met through that basically lead me to where I am today. One of them introduced me to Mitsuda-san and he offered me a project and I thought "yes, please." *laughs* Yeah, that's sort of the general flow I guess.

SGC: So where did you actually do your degree? What university?

MA: It was at a uni called Royal Holloway.

SGC: I actually know some scholars who are teaching there! Yeah, it's a good school; they have a really good video game music presence in the very small field that is video game music studies right now.

MA: During the time when I was there, there wasn't much game music to be honest. It was mostly very classical, maybe avant-garde. Maybe there were a few people doing video game music, but not a lot. And then, yeah, after that I went to a different school, Trinity College of Music in London.

SGC: So, Trinity was for your master's then?

MA: Yes, that was for my master's.

SGC: So, from this other interview I know some of your influences include Bartok, Stravinsky, Pärt, and Reich. Something that I'm curious about is if you see any of their influences—well I guess you cite them as influences *laughs*—but *what kind* of influence they have on your music composition and/or your music arrangement?

MA: Well, I guess for Stravinsky, there's a lot of influence especially in orchestration I think. Rite of Spring is one of my favorite pieces; it's very sort of bold and—I wish I knew how to express it. And that sort of style has really influenced me, especially in NieR. Actually, in the orchestrations for NieR, I was consciously listening to Stravinsky before actually writing the pieces, so…

SGC: Is that, and this is just a guess, but "Bipolar Nightmare" maybe?

MA: Yeah, somewhere in that line. *laughs*

SGC: Yeah! I've been listening to your arrangements for, well for a few months now I guess, but today especially and for the last like four or so hours I've just had your music playing in the background so I definitely hear that influence there. *laughs* So yes. Following influences, I guess one of my main questions is whether you have a general compositional philosophy? And, if so, how does that differ (or is it the same maybe) in terms of how you approach arrangements in particular?

MA: Hmmmm… It's very hard because I don't—well maybe not recently, but at first, I never distinguished between the process of arranging and composing; it was more or less a similar approach. But recently, now that I'm more used to arranging and orchestrating, I've sort of found my way. For arranging, for example, you're not meant to compose a tune or a phrase, so I try to find a way to make the piece sound new with different approaches—I don't know, reversing a tune in retrograde or whatever. But back when I had just started I don't think I was doing that bit well

and ended up composing some of the bits. But I think that's kind of a normal thing, looking at other people's pieces. I mean some of them are quite obvious: "obviously that tune is not part of the original, I don't know how that got in there." Yeah. I'm not sure that's a good thing or a bad thing, I don't know about that... that's just the way it is. And yes, at first I was doing the same thing but I sort of gradually moved away from it and tried to concentrate on the actual tune and see what all I can do with it technically.

SGC: Yeah, definitely. I mean, the way that I've been conceptualizing it—and this is not law or anything—but the way that I've been conceptualizing it is transcription as one end of the spectrum, where it's pretty much keeping everything for the most part the same and "just orchestrating," and then, on the other end of the spectrum, paraphrase or free arrangement, where the piece is there *somewhere* but it's morphed into maybe something that's a little bit past that. And, for instance, you can take Liszt as arranger or composer or transcriber—he did all ends of that spectrum as well. So yeah, I don't think there is a quote-on-quote "right way" to do it necessarily but just consider *how* it happens.

MA: I think it really depends on—I guess this is sort of the commercial side of the whole project—if you know it's something that people just want the actual, the original and nothing else. Then obviously you're more restricted to what you can do. But if you want something done with a new project—I don't know, maybe like a *Xenoblade 3* or *Xenoblade 4* or whatever—then that's where you can have more freedom to do what you want with the tune you are given. Because nobody knows it yet, so... *laughs*. It really depends on the context in terms of the kind of approach you take I think.

SGC: This is actually something I meant to ask a little bit earlier. So, when you were in uni, did you want to work specifically with video games, or film, or music in multimedia? Or were you just generally interested in musical composition?

MA: Back then it was just music, just composition basically, I wasn't really thinking of any sort of form. I mean, I was interested in writing for films or anime or for games. But back then I was more into avant-garde sort of things, some of the weird stuff. *laughs* I think that was kind of the vibe that I felt during my time in uni. Everyone was doing it and I had a lot of opportunities to do that sort of thing, so it was natural for me to pursue that sort of path. So what I'm doing right now is something that I wouldn't normally do, even though I was interested in video game music when I was in primary school or whenever. But, yeah... this is something really weird actually. *laughs*

SGC: So how did your interest in video game music start? I saw in the other interview you said there's this one game (I hadn't heard of it before actually!), that you played when you were 14 or something. I had to look it up. But did you just continue playing a bunch of video games? Or were

you more interested in the music? I know some people don't actually play video games—they just listen to the music. I have quite a few friends like that actually.

MA: Well, I wouldn't call myself a gamer. I played—I think it was the one in the interview that I said—this game called *Klonoa 2***,** which you probably haven't heard of. It was a game from Bandai Namco, which was one of my favorites. I played that and then I moved on to Square Enix, playing *Final Fantasy*… I think it was *X* [ten]? Yeah, my first one was *X*. And then *Kingdom Hearts*, *Dragon Quest*, etc. But I would play maybe one game from one series and that was it really. I never actually moved on and played the whole series. I definitely would listen to the music which I very much loved. But then I stopped playing games... I think that was when I moved back to the UK, simply because I didn't know where to get the games from. *laughs* But I kept listening to the music. I especially really like Hamauzu Masashi's stuff which is very nice. I continued listening and then I sort of moved away from games, and then started listening to Sakamoto Ryuichi, Joe Hisaishi, that sort of film music. So yeah, it was sort of a phase really, moving back and forth.

SGC: *Final Fantasy X* was my first *Final Fantasy*, and it was my favorite game until I played *NieR Automata* and then *that* became my favorite game, so *Final Fantasy X* has a very dear place in my heart. I actually wrote my master's thesis on *Final Fantasy X*, so it's *very* dear to me. Love that game. All right. So another question I have, again maybe circling back to our compositional philosophy /arrangement philosophy discussion, is also kind of logistical in terms of the process of how you actually arrange these pieces. In other words, what is the arrangement process like? Are you given something like a lead sheet or a score reduction, and then from there you orchestrate the piece? Or is it more the case that you dictate everything by ear yourself and then create the score? I imagined it might change from piece to piece.

MA: Yeah, definitely. It really depends on the piece. If I'm not given any data or anything, I have to use my ear… which is not rare to be honest. *laughs* I do that a lot, especially if it's something that's a work in progress. If it's for a game that has already been released, then I mostly use my ear because they tend not to have any data of that music anymore. Like especially *Chrono Trigger*, for example, which is like what—20, 22 years old? But for something that's been released recently, I use mostly MIDI. Maybe a score if there is any, but mostly MIDI. And also, for example, for *Xenoblade Chronicles 2* Mitsuda-san would sometimes just give me a piano score or a MIDI of piano, and he would ask me to orchestrate that. But sometimes he would do the orchestration himself and then let me finish it off, where I would do the brushing up rather than the actual orchestration. Sometimes I would be given just the tune—literally just the tune—and he would let me do the rest. Yeah, so it depends, but mostly either by ear or MIDI. I think those two are the most common.

SGC: Okay, that's interesting. So, another question: For the most part, I've been able to track down your credits for which pieces you've done. One exception to that is for *not* the NieR Orchestral CD or album, but for the actual NieR *concerts* that were performed live. I haven't been able to find the metadata for the pieces you arranged or orchestrated on those programs. Do you have that information available by chance? Because I assumed they were the same—that is, the orchestral album and what was played on the concert—but listening back, for instance to City Ruins, it sounded like they were two different arrangements.

MA: Uhm… it's very confusing for NieR for me even because I think they made a new orchestral album, which I wasn't involved with. But I don't think that's what you're talking about, right? It's the actual 2018 concert. Uhm… no, the arrangements should be the same. For the concert what usually happens is you do a few pieces which are on the album and then they pretty much do exactly the same arrangements on the concert. But maybe they'll add a few extra pieces as a bonus.

SGC: Okay—I'll double check on that then. Because that was something that I was looking into and was suddenly very confused by. Because I assumed that they would be exactly the same. But I'll double check on that then.

MA: Okay. They also added a narration with the voice actors from NieR, so maybe they sort of changed the way they performed it? Maybe? I'm not quite sure.

SGC: So, similar to the previous question, for this next part I want to ask some specific questions about some specific projects. And here I wanted to start with *Another Eden.* I must confess, I haven't actually played the game, but I've been listening to the soundtrack all afternoon. So you had the concert a few years ago and now you have the arrangement album coming out soon as well. What's it been like arranging—or maybe rearranging—these pieces you've composed? Are you generally keeping things the same or are you taking things in new directions?

MA: Well, I wanted to keep the live band version as much as possible because the aim was to actually have something that we can look back on to the concert. But we did add a few more arrangements because the members changed. And we added a few new instruments as well, so we essentially had to change it anyway. I think Tsuchiya did the same as well. We tried to sort of keep it as—well, not "the same" but as something close in resemblance to the concert back in 2018. So it was more like we took that concert as a base and then added a few things on top.

SGC: Okay. And then just kind of going through the list… In terms of—I've asked you a little bit about this—the *NieR* concerts and albums, in those ones in particular I actually did hear you "add

something" to the piece. So, for instance, with the "City Ruins" piece and the new viola solo added to it. So, what was it about the viola that you thought represented this piece?

MA: Well, overall, we were specifically told *not* to do something that would come out the same as the original. We were told to do something different. And there were other arrangers—I think three of them—and we were each told "okay, you're going to do this kind of style and you're going to do this kind of style" and so on. I was told to do something more cinematic. And for "City Ruins" I generally like the viola. *laughs* I think that definitely was a part in deciding to add a solo in there. But the vibe of the original piece really felt like it should either be a cello or maybe a viola solo. For me, personally, solo cello is quite difficult to include when I want it to blend with an orchestra in terms of the balance. And, for some reason, viola really suited me well in that way. So yeah, I thought the vibe worked and the orchestration worked, so I thought why not.

SGC: Are there other instruments that you're especially drawn to? I was trying to identify or see if I could figure any out. And I have a few guesses, but I'd love to hear your thoughts.

MA: Let's see… viola and… I'm not drawn into violin solo for some reason. *laughs* I don't know why. I love the horn, the French horn.

SGC: I'm a French horn player! *points off-screen to where my horn is sitting*

MA: Oh yeah! *both laugh* I love the French horn and also the bassoon as well. Not many people use bassoon solos for some reason, but I like it anyway. I think sort of more bass, maybe middle kind of tenor or alto, I think that kind of range is something that I'm really drawn to. *shrugs* I don't know why! *laughs*

SGC: I was guessing flute, but that might also be part of the folksy nature of a lot of the pieces you've arranged. Choir too, actually. I noticed—well, I don't want to say you use it a lot necessarily, but I did notice your use of choir in general. Whenever I think "orchestral," I don't default to including choir with that, so when it does occur, it's noteworthy to me.

MA: Oh, well… I think it depends. Mostly when I'm given an orchestra a choir comes with it. *laughs* I don't know why. And if I'm given an opportunity to write for choir, then yeah why not add it in rather than not add it in.

SGC: I would say choir especially in today's Hollywood soundscape is very cinematic, so that makes a lot of sense to me. And French horn as well; I would say it's become a very cinematic instrument. But back to the questions! So, in terms of your work on *Chrono Cross* and *Chrono Trigger* and arranging those pieces, what was the process like for those pieces? You've talked

about it a little bit, but one thing I was looking at and expecting was that you would have arranged some of the same pieces even on different productions—for instance, the orchestral albums and the recent *Across the Worlds* album—but they were all entirely different pieces. Can you speak about the experience of both the orchestral albums and then the *Across the Worlds* album as well?

MA: I think for the *Across the Worlds* album at first I was told to do "Scars of Time" and I refused *laughs* because, well, for the orchestral version I wasn't really happy with it to be honest. But I think that was the best I could have done. I mean I didn't see much… mmmm, maybe not "improvement" but even as an arrangement I wasn't sure how to take it because it had had such a huge impact already, so I thought I couldn't make it any better. *laughs* But I had to do the orchestral one, that was already decided so I said "okay, I'll do it." And I thought "never again." *both laugh* But I think somebody else did it [for the *Across the Worlds* album], which he did brilliantly at. I think it was Noguchi-san who did it and he did a good job on it. I wouldn't have able to do something as good as his. I think in general, arranging for piano was very different from arranging for orchestra. Simply because, at first, I couldn't picture how it would sound on the piano because the *Chrono Cross* soundtrack is very "ethnic." Sort of like a guitar and a few drums. I could see it as an orchestral arrangement for some reason, but not as a piano one, which was hard. It was quite a challenge for me. Yeah, I can't remember which piece I did, I think it was a medley? Oh yes! The "Another World Medley." That one was fairly approachable for me because I was able to set up those three pieces as one piece as sort of a storyline. So that wasn't that bad. *laughs* But yeah, I'm trying to remember which pieces I did, hold on. Let me search it up. *checks computer* I hardly remember by the way. Because they usually release it like a year after and, by that time, I'm doing something else and that piece has been gone in my head.

SGC: That makes sense!

MA: Okay. "Radical Dreamers," yes, that was a hard one because I wasn't sure if I should stick to the original structure or not. I don't know if you've heard the piano version yet, but I basically added something new to it and I wasn't sure whether that was the right thing to do. *laughs* But that was a way for me to—well, not only to give it a new approach, but to make it as a piano piece if you see what I mean. If I stuck to the original, which was a song, as you know, I thought it wouldn't work, it wouldn't function as a piano piece. And I think WAYO wanted it as a classical piano piece. Which was something that I had in mind when doing the other pieces as well. And I think that's what the other arrangers did—Hamauzu-san and Noguchi-san, I think that's what they did. Yeah. I'm sorry, did that answer your question? *laughs*

SGC: No yeah, definitely. I guess one follow up question I have is, so… You're originally a pianist, correct? I guess one, very briefly, do you have any other instruments that you play?

MA: No.

SGC: Just piano, okay. So, I guess how do you compare the processes of arranging for piano vs. for orchestra or band? Do you have a preference for any of them?

MA: Well, because for *Chrono Cross* I started writing for the orchestra, that sort of sound was always with me, even when I was doing the piano arrangement. And also because I was more familiar writing for orchestra rather than for the piano. So, it was more like transcribing an orchestral piece into a piano score? Yeah, but obviously not exactly in that sort of way. I don't have any sort of preferred approach, so to speak, because it's more something if I have an image or a sort of an idea then I will just follow it. If not, then I'll just wait for something to happen to be honest. *laughs*

SGC: Yeah! I know that in one of the interviews you talked about even being influenced by… I think it was nature documentaries?

MA: Oh yeah! I think that was for *Oninaki*. I think that was especially for the field music. The game producer wanted something that didn't have a tune to it? And that really reminded me of nature documentary kind of background music, which I like anyways. So, I got that idea for that piece.

SGC: Very cool! Let's see, next question… Okay so for the *Kingdom Hearts: World of Tres* concert, you did the *Birth by Sleep* piece. One thing that I'm wondering is how you conceived of that concert? What I mean by that is the first part of it has music from *Kingdom Hearts* one, *Kingdom Hearts II*, *Birth By Sleep, 358/2 Days*, and it almost seems like there's a movement for each game? Was it intended as that, or are they each supposed to be standalone "tone poems"?

MA: Do you mean the whole set list?

SGC: Yeah, let me pull up the set list quickly so I can refresh my own memory. *checks notes* Yeah, so the program is broken into two parts. So there's the first half of concert/CD and that, of course, starts with "Dearly Beloved" as everything does *both laugh* and from there there's "Music from *Kingdom Hearts*," "Music from *Chain of Memories*," "Music from *Kingdom Hearts II*," and it looks like Kaoru Wada, Natsumi Kameoka, Sachiko Miyano, and you each basically composed a—and again, I'm not sure if it's a "movement" per se, or if they're supposed to all be their own standalone pieces for this first half of the program. I know the second half definitely has a more overt structure—it's labeled as "Symphonic Suite: The World of Tres" [part] one, two, three, four, five. So, I guess for this first half of the program, were you given any direction regarding your piece compared to the others? Or was it just "you're arranging for this game"?

MA: Well for Kingdom Hearts I was only given one piece. And the way that they wanted the piece crafted was very specific. I was given three pieces to make into a medley and they wanted the start to be in this kind of way and they wanted the middle to be in this kind of way and it was all very specifically written. So, I was following that direction. And I think that was pretty much the same for other people as well. I think Shimomura-san really made the menu of it. I'm not sure she intended it as a movement as you said. But I think we arrangers didn't have that freedom of making it as a movement or making it something that's independent from other pieces. Yeah. So it was all specifically written down so we were just following that.

SGC: That's actually really helpful to know. So, was Shimomura-san the director of it all then? Did she oversee everything?

MA: Yeah!

SGC: That was actually going to be one of my follow up questions. I think you said you played at least one game, but it has 10+ games in the series now and I haven't even played them all. *Birth by Sleep* is actually one of the ones I have not played. So, I was curious—and this is maybe somewhat of a general question too—for these concerts or these pieces that you're arranging, how much of the time have you played the game that they come from?

MA: Okay. I only played *Kingdom Hearts II.* And I did [arranged] *Birth by Sleep,* which I haven't played yet. I was looking through one of those YouTube clips that people post. The whole story is just so complicated and there are so many characters and I was trying to follow that. I was a bit disappointed that I didn't get to do the second one, the *Kingdom Hearts II* version, but yeah. So I haven't played *Birth by Sleep* if that's what you meant.

SGC: Yeah. So, *Birth by Sleep* definitely, but other games as well. So, for instance, have you played *Chrono Trigger, Chrono Cross, NieR: Automata*, etc. etc.

MA: Oh, I see! I haven't played NieR. I tried. I have played *Chrono Trigger*, but haven't actually completed it yet because I'm just so slow in playing games. I actually haven't played most of them. Not NieR, not—well for Kingdom Hearts I played the second one. Basically, we just have such a short amount of time when we're doing arranging and I'm just trying to follow the storyline by looking it up on YouTube or something. But I think most arrangers don't really play games. We're only just given a sort of very brief idea of what the piece is about and what the whole game is about and that's pretty much it.

SGC: I see! So, you also do orchestrations. I know you've done *Final Fantasy XV: Episode Ignis*, and then *Xenogears* as well? So, for those, what kind of directions are you given? How much—and you don't have to answer if you can't or don't want to—how much insight into the games are you given? For example, let's say it's (since this doesn't exist) *Xenoblade 5* or something like that down the line—do they give you narrative information or story? Or do they just say "generally speaking we want this to be a very brassy piece" or something like that?

MA: Uhm. It depends on the project, but generally as a composer then yes, I would definitely be given the actual narration of the game. But as an arranger, not much. It depends on the composer rather than the producer of the game actually. If the composer thinks that the arranger must know the actual details, then yes, I'll be given specific things to do and what not to do because this character's doing whatsit and it's all very specific. But it depends on the composer. I remember for the *Xenogears* concert I really had to know what the story was about and the relationship between characters and so on. Mitsuda-san really wanted me to know and that really affected the arrangements I think.

SGC: So those are most of my specific questions, but I have two final things I want to ask. One is another specific question, and one is a fun question. I've noticed you've used the word "cinematic" in a few different places and interviews. You actually even mentioned it in this interview! But you seem to have an attraction to film music or cinematic music. Can you elaborate on that a little bit maybe? Or where you think that maybe came from or…?

MA: Uhm… I think I feel it's easier for me to write music when there's an image or a movie going on. Yeah. Hmmm. But I wouldn't say that I'm particularly into films or the moving image, just that I would like to write for a moving image rather than not having any image at all. That's just the way that I work maybe, musically. Yeah. Uhmmm... Not sure why though! *laughs* I like watching films generally, but I've never, for example, taken any classes in specifically writing for film music. I never had the option to do that, so it's weird, isn't it? *laughs*

SGC: And I guess that's a follow up question. So, you mentioned you did a lot of avant-garde music when you were at uni. When you started working with Procyon Studios, how much of that was learning stuff on the fly? Or did you feel that your training in uni set you up for being able to work in that environment?

MA: Oh, no. I actually didn't even know what a MIDI was when I started working with Procyon. That's how bad it was. *laughs* No, because what I was doing back in uni was completely different, so at first it was quite hard. But then I was used to doing orchestration anyways, so that sort of helped me into making myself useful in the Procyon Studios. *laughs* and I think that's what Mitsuda-san knew anyway. That's why he started giving me lots of orchestrations to do.

SGC: And now the final question, just as a fun one: do you have a favorite project that you've worked on in these last six years?

MA: My favorite… hm. Well for the *Chrono Trigger/Chrono Cross Orchestral Album*, I think I was quite fond of some of the pieces that I did. Not all of them, but some of them. *laughs* Yeah, that's one. Yeah, and *Another Eden* was another for me, because that was more composition than arranging.

SGC: There's some very beautiful music in *Another Eden* especially. I'm trying to remember there's one—I know it was choir based, but anyways… I think those are all the questions I have. Do you have any final thoughts or questions for me?

MA: What's the thesis about? Do you have a big question you're trying to answer, or are you just sort of looking at it broadly?

SGC: Ah, that's the question, isn't it? *both laugh* So I guess a few things. I don't know if I would state it as a thesis in particular, but one things that I'm trying to do… so I'm a music theorist—a music analyst—though my research has tended more musicological in the sense of drawing on critical theories and more the humanities. I am trying to develop a theory of analysis, though, in part. So, for that I'm drawing on certain music theories—like topic theory, transformational theory… I don't know if you're familiar with any of these—to create a theory of what I'm calling "transformative dissonance." The idea behind it for me—and this is where it gets a little more heady—is the idea of somebody going to a concert. And let's say they've played the video game this concert is based around and they have a particular kind of sound in their head, whether that's something from the 8-Bit generation of video game music or maybe something that's more recent. So they have that in their head and that's one object, and then they go to the concert, maybe the music is "exactly the same"—as you know, there are various ways of arranging—or maybe it's relatively different. And so there's this dissonance, right, of the two objects competing with each other. So the analytical portion of the theory is creating something like a chart which says what parameters of the music have changed. That could be anything from the melody having changed a little bit or perhaps the harmonies have changed or whatever, but also—and this is a little untraditional—the idea of mediation too. In other words, saying that just by nature of hearing the music in the concert hall vs in your home in the living room playing the game, it's a very different place, right? Place or space. And so even that, regardless of if the music is "the same" or not, there's already something different there. And so it's partly cognitive, partly philosophical… yeah. That's generally what the theory is. And the dissertation will also have a historical element, saying, for instance, that these concert started in 1987 and they're going to this day. I'm still debating whether or not I want to focus on Square Enix in particular because they are

so good about having arrangements albums and concerts, etc, etc. Part of me *doesn't* want to because there are so many other concerts happening and arrangements happening. But so many of my case studies *do* come from Square Enix. But yeah. I don't know, does that answer your question?

MA: Yeah! It's quite interesting what you said about what the consumer expects when he goes to a concert hall. I think that's something that all arrangers are quite conscious about, because you're not going to please everyone, I mean surely. *laughs* I mean you try, but it just doesn't happen. And also there's this thing, because it's something that comes from you yourself, so you don't want to just please everyone for the sake of it, you want to do something that you really enjoy. And so there's that combat between pleasing everyone and pleasing yourself. So it's very hard. *laughs* For *Chrono Trigger* I think I was doing the pleasing part rather than the self-pleasing part. And for some reason in the end that balance sort of worked out, maybe that's why it's one of my favorite albums that I did. Maybe not so much for NieR… well I was specifically told not to do it so maybe that's why. Yeah, but that's interesting. It's good that someone like you is making a thesis out of it. And I would like to read it when it's done.

SGC: Yeah, I'll definitely send you a copy! One other element of this in general too is that arrangers and orchestrators tend not to get the limelight most of the time and I think that's really unfortunate because a lot of times you all have a lot of creative agency in putting these pieces together. As you said, "are you pleasing yourself? The audience?" And there's definitely a balance, I fully understand that. But it's not just a matter of clicking a button and then the piece is transcribed; no, there's a human actually doing it, so I really want to highlight that in the dissertation as well.

MA: Well, I hope I answered all of your questions!

SGC: Oh definitely, yeah! You said plenty of helpful things. Well, I think that's it then. Again, thank you thank you thank you so much, I know you're crazy busy and it's a Sunday morning for you too, so I'm sorry to take your Sunday morning away from you, but thank you thank you so much.

MA: Hopefully that was helpful! I mean I don't usually think logically when I'm doing my stuff, so it gave me an opportunity to actually think what it is that I was doing, so it was good.