



MCCC News



Fort Worth

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Dallas

Music in Video Games

Welcome to what is more or less the end of the summer season. Our thoughts and well-wishes go out to those in coastal Texas, Florida, and elsewhere, as they work to recover from the battering taken during this year's record-setting hurricane season. It's events like this that put our own piddling petty problems in perspective.

On that terrible segue, I'll give the next installment of Vampire-Quest. There haven't been any direct updates on my ordered Vampire 600 board, but Kipper, who has been my contact since I first expressed interest in early 2016, is leaving the Apollo accelerators group, ostensibly overwhelmed by the workload and related financial issues. This leaves the exact status of my paid order unknown, with the person I have dealt with up to now turning duties over to... who exactly?, while the Apollo group themselves work to transition to the upcoming Vampire V4 board family. There's a mind-boggling level of uncertainty at work here, which hopefully will be remedied soonish, or at least before the next generation of boards make it all entirely pointless.

I'm going outside my Amiga-based articles for a bit for a topic I found interesting lately. I often find the history of video games worthy of study, and recently I turned to the subject of music in games. (beware: several video links will follow). In terms of copyrights and intellectual properties, the fledgling video game industry of the 1970s and early 1980s was pretty much the wild west, as legal precedents catch up with new media. Even the very first arcade video games, "Computer Space" and "Pong" are modified copies of the "Spacewar!" game for university computers and Ralph Baer's TV Tennis that would become the first Magnavox Odyssey. Concept copying and even direct bootlegging of arcade games was common through the seventies. I probably couldn't count the number of bootlegs, copies, and shallow variations there are of the first 'mega-hit' video game, "Space Invaders."

While I could probably go on and on, I found myself concentrating on the subject of music in the early days of Video games. At the start, most video games had little more than simple sound effects. If there was any music,

it was a simple tune to signify a game event, and usually a crude clipped digital rendition of a well known tune, like the funeral march played when an on-screen character dies in games like "Gun Fight" or "Circus." The role of music in games grew steadily, from the 'Jaws'-like two notes of "Asteroids" to the opening ditties of "Pac-Man" to the simple, repetitive background tunes of "Donkey Kong." One of the first arcade games to have a moderately elaborate musical soundtrack was "Frogger," a game about a car-sized frog crossing a road and a river, by Konami and distributed in the US by Sega. The game had multiple long (longer than one or two bars anyway) tunes, which played throughout, but few, if any, were original compositions. The tune played at the start, which most people familiar with Frogger know, comes from a 1960s Japanese children's song, "Inu no Omawarisan" (or 'The Dog Policeman')

Frogger start:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZCPEenuB4A>

Doggy Policeman:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIRpYwVpP4E>

That's far from the only musical borrowing. In addition to 'quotes' from "Camptown Races" and other sources, the primary tune that plays during the main game action comes from a 1970s Japanese animated series called "Rascal the Raccoon." (Fun fact: this cartoon prompted many Japanese to import raccoons as pets back then, which later became a destructive invasive species in the country.)

Frogger stage theme:

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

Araiguma Rascal:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YMH5ntJEZ0>

Much of the western audience probably never realized the soundtrack wasn't original, as they weren't familiar with the Japanese source material. Most home ports for consoles and computers repeated the same music as best they could. The musical copying was apparently too blatant for Konami to get away with, at least in the long term, as recent ports replace the classic 'Frogger' music with new original compositions, or drop the music completely.

Exploring the topic of appropriated music further, I continued with early arcade games by Konami, as the company seemed to pioneer in the strong musical soundtrack, and the borrowing of tunes to do so. My next example was “Amidar,” a game described as a cross between Pac-Man and Qix, by way of a Japanese puzzle. I discovered the jaunty jungle-ish tune played on the first level is shared with a 1960s Japanese cartoon called “Adventure on Gaboten Island.”

Amidar:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uy1lo0T5Rho>

Gaboten Isle:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYhDU0yR5kU>

Another Konami game, “Pooyan” (in which a mother pig conducts a siege defense against wolves), had an in-game tune I found quite catchy, which I have since found to be the curiously named “Desecration Rag” by Felix Arndt. I would discover ragtime music to be popular among game soundtracks.

Pooyan:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32q67Bap4vg>

Arndt:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV0n_f6lNNY

Konami redeems itself somewhat with shooter “Gyruss” (basically Galaga in a circle), widely lauded as having possibly the best musical soundtrack of the early ‘eighties arcade. It still borrows tunes, namely “Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor” by Bach, reworked into an up-tempo rock version, which requires some musical (re)composition talent. I’ve heard it compared to “Tocatta” by instrumental band Sky, but to me it’s mainly just because both are rock versions of the same classical song.

Gyruss:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNC7VdD-ink>

Sky:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgbgUrp1a70>
(you be the judge.)

So you won’t think I’m picking on Konami exclusively, I can cite examples from other producers. “Bagman” from Valadon Automation (all about stealing money) makes liberal use of the classic tune “Turkey in the Straw.”

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

“Domino Man” (pretty self-explanatory, really) from Bally-Midway continues the ragtime tradition with Scott Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJZQ47haWX8>

The game “Pengo” (about a penguin murdering arctic wildlife by crushing them with ice blocks) has two versions. The first used the 1969 synth-pop instrumental tune “Popcorn,” which was replaced by an original tune for the second version. Presumably the change was made to avoid legal issues in one sense or another.

Pengo 1:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hdDKxfrAbs>

Pengo 2:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX81IbYPAWE>

Perhaps one of the more blatant arcade musical appropriations comes from fledgling company Japanese game maker SNK and its multi-stage shooter “Vanguard” (possibly better known for its ports to Atari consoles than arcades). It opens with the theme from the first “Star Trek” movie, and tacks on a ‘power up’ music from Queen’s “Flash Gordon” soundtrack, though just short clips of each.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Szifekd3EAW>

Why is music theft so apparently common in the early days of video games? I can’t say for certain, but I can make a number of easy assumptions. First, many of the games of the early eighties, both home and arcade, were designed by very small teams or even one individual, usually a programmer or a hardware designer, and there probably weren’t a lot of talented music composers on staff at video game companies back then, so it was probably much simpler to transcribe a familiar tune, whether popular music or public domain, into digital notes. Second, copyright law was playing catching up to the then-new media of video games, and many games came from Japan and other countries, which held varying levels of respect for intellectual property. Perhaps it was believed a clip of a copyrighted tune in a game was not worth pursuing legally, or translating that tune into the beeps and boops of the early audio hardware made it a different enough entity in a copyright sense. Who can say exactly, but most game producers are far more careful about creating original content today, even if it is derivative original content. I concentrated on arcade video games in this article, though I’m sure home games had similar issues perhaps to a greater degree. Many home versions of arcade games will port the borrowed music along to the new platform.

I will leave you with one home computer game I’ve always loved, even though its music usage falls in the ‘so audaciously blatant it’s awesome category—“Frantic Freddie,” a simple Commodore 64 game by Commercial

Data Systems, later ported to the Amiga by Bignonia. Music appearing in this game includes "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" by Queen, "Boogie Fever" by the Sylvers, "A Fifth of Beethoven" from Walter Murphy, "Don't Bring Me Down" by ELO, Paul Simon's "Kodachrome," and no less than five ragtime tunes from Scott Joplin. Enjoy, everyone!

The Audacious Frantic Freddie (Amiga):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTDz51BONGo>

...Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech Gazette,
September 2017



Ultimate Nerdgasm

Thu Aug 17, 2017

Amiga Love has had a few articles on getting various Commodore machines back online and into the BBS world. From C64s to Amiga 500s (et al) as well as the terminal programs we use; PETSCII capable (i, ii) in case you're trying to hit an C64 BBS from your Amiga or ANSI capable, like A-Talk III, for most other boards. There are a lot of options out there, and the BBS scene is vastly smaller than back in the day, but it's not dead by any stretch. Oh no, dear reader, it is not dead. (I see four lights!) If anything, the interest in this form of socializing and connecting seems to be growing lately as hardware options become easier to build and less expensive to source.

Tonight, I finally got my Amiga 1000 online for the first time ever and connected to some of my favorite BBSs. And oh my god, have you ever seen a more beautiful sight? I doubt it. Well, at least not for about 30 years, give or take.

Here's what I used to accomplish this pièce de résistance.

- Amiga 1000 with 1MB of total chip & fast RAM. It could probably be done with less, but guaranteed no issues.
- Paul Rickards wifi modem with 1MB of total chip & fast RAM. It could probably be done with far less (maybe .5MB), but this guaranteed no issues. Also required the use of a serial port gender changer, due to the Amiga 1000's port.
- Kickstart 1.3 disk (it's an Amiga 1000 after all)
- 64Door terminal program to connect to Particles BBS and Centronian BBS (there are lots of other active C64 boards, too), both PETSCII capable board that are run off actual C64s. You can connect to them in ANSI but it's not as pretty.
- A-Talk III simply my favorite ANSI terminal program, for hitting non-C64 boards. It requires that you load Workbench (1.3 in my case) to run from there. Or a hard drive. I ain't got no hard drive on my 1000. Old school, yo!

That's it!

And since I already had everything in the list except for the gender changer, once I got it today in the mail it took me all of one minute to hook everything up and get to BBSing.

...<https://amigalove.com/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=300>

October Calendar

October 2 — MCCC Chapter Meeting
7:00 PM — Grand Prairie Airport
3116 S. Great Southwest Parkway, Grand Prairie

October 2 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:00 PM — Location TBD

October 30 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

MCCC 2507 Tamaron Cove Cedar Hill, Texas 75104
<http://www.amigamccc.org>