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Washington Metropolitan Gamer Symphony Orchestra

presents

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An evening of video game music



Sunday, July 7, 2019, 4:30 p.m.
BlackRock Center for the Arts
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\$15 at the door

wmgso.org/events

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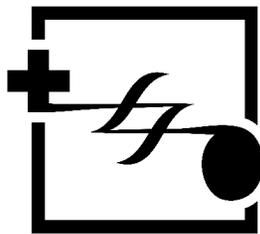
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WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN

Gamer Symphony Orchestra

The Washington Metropolitan Gamer Symphony Orchestra (WMGSO) is a community orchestra and choir whose mission is to share and celebrate video game music with a wide audience, primarily by putting on affordable, accessible concerts in the DC area.

Game music weaves a complex melodic thread through the traditions, shared memories, values, and myths of an entire international and intergenerational culture. WMGSO showcases this music that largely escapes recognition in professional circles.

The result: classical music with a 21st-century twist, drawing non-gamers to the artistic merits of video game soundtracks and attracting new audiences to orchestral concert halls.

About Our Music Director



Nigel Horne is an experienced conductor, clinician, and composer, with a degree in band studies from the University of Sheffield, England, and a Master of Philosophy in Free Composition from the University of Leeds. Nigel has also directed the Rockville Brass Band since 2009.

About Our Chorus Master



Jacob Coppage-Gross served as the conductor for the Gamer Symphony Orchestra at University of Maryland, College Park for two years and has performed in collaborations with the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center, as well as at local churches and with other small groups in the area.

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START!

Beginning

Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse (1989)

Hidenori Maezawa, Jun Funahashi,
Yukie Morimoto & Yoshinori Sasaki
Arr. Jamin Morden

Castlevania has a unique musical footprint. The soundtrack contains obvious references to classical and baroque music, with pieces that sound like they were transcribed from a Bach cantata.

“Beginning” (the music for the first level of the game, appearing first in *Castlevania III* and then in subsequent installments of the series) borrows heavily from baroque era music. Featuring intensely active melodies, wildly technical arpeggio patterns, and pages black with sixteenth notes, this tune wears its love of the baroque on its sleeve.

That said, “Beginning” also has distinctly non-baroque elements. While much of the harmony wouldn’t be out of place in the 1700s, the piece has chords and progressions that were not popularized until 20th century rock and roll music. Additionally, the rhythm of the piece emphasizes the back end of the beat (anticipating what’s coming next), another staple of more modern music. This (unholy?) marriage of baroque and modern techniques gives the *Castlevania* compositions their unique Bach-Rock flavor, and “Beginning” is no exception.

This piece features Zeynep Dilli on piano and Jamin Morden on French horn.

Daughter of the Sea

World of Warcraft Warbringers: Jaina (2018)

Neal Acree & Logan Laflotte
Arr. Ashleah Younker

The lyrics of “Daughter of the Sea” tell the story of Jaina Proudmoore and her role in the demise of her father. The original version is a folk song that reminds sailors of her great betrayal, but the version performed today is sung from Jaina’s perspective as she travels to raise a ship she once helped sink. Ghostly visions from the past haunt Jaina as an undead ferryman with the visage of her father carries her to the sunken ship. She recounts her story with guilt and sadness, but also adds a new stanza to the original song that lingers with a note of vengeance.

This arrangement is stripped down to evoke melancholy and the feeling of standing on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea. The guitar and vocals ebb and flow like ocean waves, as if a rolling fog brings with it distant warnings from the daughter of the sea.

“Daughter of the Sea” features Ashleah Younker as the lead alto voice; Elise Favia on English horn; Tracy Flanders, Olivia Smith-Elnaggar, and Soumya Yanamandra on background vocals; Michael Ohr on acoustic guitar; and Lee Stearns on the bodhran.

Tifa’s Theme

Final Fantasy VII (1997)

Nobuo Uematsu
Arr. A. C. Menes

As much credit as Uematsu receives (and deserves) for his high-octane, epic battle music, he is equally comfortable writing more sensitive material.

“Tifa’s Theme” first plays when Cloud, the protagonist of *Final Fantasy VII*, returns to Tifa’s bar/restaurant, “7th Heaven,” after the game’s opening sequence. The tune that greets the player is warm, welcoming, and safe after the barely controlled chaos of Cloud’s previous mission.

Although “Tifa’s Theme” is written in a major key, Uematsu borrows a few minor chords from the parallel minor to give the theme a more bittersweet, plaintive feel. This is a fairly common technique that composers use for themes of love or love interests. Compare “Tifa’s Theme” to John Williams’ themes, such as “Princess Leia’s Theme” from *Star Wars* or “Marion’s Theme” from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The notes of the melody may be different, but the harmonic language of all three themes bear striking similarities.

This piece features Joe Ichniowski on the cello and Julius Verzosa on the piano.

A Smile for Ms. Blue

Valis: The Fantasm Soldier (1992)

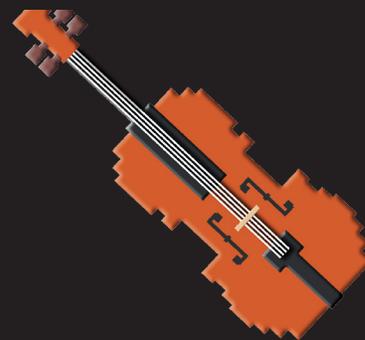
Shinobu Ogawa
Arr. Zeynep Dilli

Thanks to: Peter Pappas

Lyrics adapted by Zeynep Dilli

Valis: The Fantasm Soldier was first released in Japan for the MSX and PC-88 computers as a platformer game in which the main character, Yuko, wields a mystical sword to defend Earth and other worlds. Subsequent remakes changed the gameplay, design, and music. Whereas the MSX release had a low-resolution MIDI soundtrack, the 1992 release for the game console TurboGrafx-16 (also known as

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“PC Engine”) added voiced cutscenes and a more advanced synthesized sound. The last piece in the soundtrack, “A Smile for Ms. Blue,” was recorded with instrumentation and vocals.

Although the 1992 version of “A Smile for Ms. Blue” has cheerful instrumentation and a harmonic structure typical of 1980s anime/pop music, the tale it tells is sorrowful—the lyrics speak of Yuko’s reaction to the unavoidable loss of her friend and classmate, Reiko, who was brainwashed by their enemies.

This WMGSO arrangement amplifies the sorrowful aspect with a slower tempo, acoustic instrumentation, and classical stylistic elements, developing melodic motifs that invoke a bittersweet longing. The English lyrics are adapted from a literal translation of the original Japanese lyrics, and a touch of whimsical ornamentation in the harp and the piano recalls the clean simplicity of the 8-bit version of the piece.

“A Smile for Ms. Blue” was arranged at the request of Peter Pappas, in gratitude for his substantial backing of our crowdfunding campaign for the production of WMGSO’s debut album in 2018. It is presented by Tracy Flanders as the lead vocal, Claire Bradfuhrer on harp, Zeynep Dilli on piano, Taylor Kim on cello, Yannick Joseph on clarinet, and Joseph Wang on flute.

Turret Opera/Cara Mia Addio

Portal 2 (2011)

Following a period of suspended animation after the events of the first *Portal* game, Chell (that is, the player) awakens inside the Aperture Science testing facility to find it in extreme disrepair. As Chell attempts to escape Aperture’s dilapidated ruins, she inadvertently reactivates GLaDOS—the testing facility’s omnipresent, caretaking artificial intelligence—and the principal antagonist of Chell’s previous Aperture experience.

GLaDOS sets up automated turrets that are programmed to shoot Chell on sight. Most turrets carry out their instructions with glee, but in a hidden area, Chell discovers a quartet of turrets with other priorities. Rather than spraying Chell with bullets, the turrets offer up a musical interlude, the “Turret Wife Serenade.” Following some unexpected changes in GLaDOS and Chell’s relationship, the same four turrets return at *Portal 2*’s conclusion to sing another tribute, “Cara Mia Addio.”

Operationally trained voice actress Ellen McLain (who voices both GLaDOS and the turrets) improvised the libretto of “Cara Mia Addio” using what she described as “bad Italian.” Listen for when the soloist sings “ciel,” a word that means “sky” in Italian, but is pronounced almost exactly like Chell’s name.

Mike Morasky

Arr. Rob Garner

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Amanda Cavanagh, Meredith Chen, Erin Detty, Elise Favia, Matthew Harker, Jess Hencke, Kevin Hencke, Jeremy Hersh, Ayla Hurley, Michael Ohr, Nnamdi Okoli, Taylor Kim, Jimyo Lin, Emily Monahan, Jamin Morden, Olivia Smith-Elnaggar, Benjamin Tousley, Holly Wu, Soumya Yanamandra, Ashleah Younker, and Sheldon Zamora-Soon perform as WMGSO’s summer chorus. Zeynep Dilli sings the soprano solo for “Cara Mia Addio.”

PAUSE

Are you enjoying the show so far?

- Yes.
- Of course!

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Level 2 – START!

Heartbeat, Heartbreak/Beneath the Mask

Persona 4 (2008) & Persona 5 (2016)

“Heartbeat, Heartbreak” from *Persona 4* and “Beneath the Mask” from *Persona 5* share similar harmonic structures and approaches to rhythm. In both soundtracks, Shoji Meguro demonstrates complete mastery over several different genres, moods, and ensembles. “Heartbeat, Heartbreak” is a masterclass on rhythm: every part of its tune dances around the beat but rarely, if ever, lands squarely on a downbeat. The result is a tune that, despite its relatively slow beat (around 100 beats per minute), is constantly moving forward and encouraging the listener to get up and dance.

In contrast, “Beneath the Mask” summons the essence of relaxing with a book and a cup of coffee on a rainy day. The static back-and-forth of the primary motif stays low-key while the bassline and melody provide the rhythmic interest. The harmony remains fairly static, alternating between two chords, with the exception of a sassy little line near the end. Then the back-and-forth motif returns, and the tune fades out with the rain.

The performers are Jacob Deaven on alto sax, Zeynep Dilli on piano, Josh Haas and Iain Kierzewski on trombones, Jamin Morden on French Horn, Mira Rossberg on trumpet, Lee Stearns on drums, and Julius Verzosa on electric bass.

Wolven Storm

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015)

Since the release of the first game in the *Witcher* series in 2009, the franchise has been known for its high-quality soundtrack with strong Celtic folk influences. Composers have even produced original music explicitly labeled as “Inspired by *The Witcher*.”

Although the vast, open world of *The Witcher 3* is full of picturesque sunsets and haunted ruins, “Wolven Storm” exemplifies how the series’ soundscape can downscale from the epic level to the intimate. The song, first heard in one of the game’s taverns, imparts the love story of Geralt, the protagonist, and his old flame, Yennefer, switching back and forth between their points of view to tell of love found, love lost, and an uncertain future. The simple, stark presentation with a single mandolin and voice carries the intensity of the emotions.

Amanda Cavanagh on voice is accompanied by El Calderon on mandolin.

Shoji Meguro

Arr. Jamin Morden

Marcin Przybyłowicz & Mikołaj Stroiński

Arr. Amanda Cavanagh & El Calderon



Cyrus the Scholar
Octopath Traveler (2018)

Octopath Traveler is a love letter to the 16-bit era of RPGs that comprises eight stories centered on eight characters. The massive symphonic soundtrack bears the structural hallmarks of the RPG soundtrack genre, with battle themes, town and “overworld” themes, and character themes. The soundtrack for *Octopath Traveler* is heavily influenced by the Romantic era of Western classical music, plus shades of folk and early music—just like its spiritual predecessors: the Final Fantasy soundtracks by Nobuo Uematsu and the compositions by other masters of the genre, such as Yasunori Mitsuda and Yoko Shimomura.

Of the eight characters, Cyrus, “the Scholar,” is a brilliant and absent-minded professor who advocates for “Knowledge for All” and has no idea why his students like him. He semi-accidentally saves the world by chasing the thieves of a book of evil magic (he just wanted to read the book, but happened to retrieve it before the thieves could use it). Cyrus’ theme, befitting someone from a city styled as a “seat of learning,” is an elaborate waltz similar to those composed by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák, and, of course, Johann Strauss.

Unlike the original strings-heavy piece, our arrangement uses a modified woodwind quintet and references Smetana’s “Moldau” and Strauss’ “The Blue Danube.” Fast-moving segments in the treble lines invoke the sweeping, whirling motion of a Viennese waltz, while the lower instruments drive the beat. Short phrases from the two melodic themes meld into moving lines for the instruments to weave around each other in dense counterpoint.

Yasunori Nishiki
Arr. Zeynep Dilli

This piece is performed by Jacob Deaven on baritone sax, Elise Favia on oboe, Jenn Ganss on flute, Yannick Joseph on clarinet, and Jamin Morden on French horn.

Chemical Plant Zone
Sonic the Hedgehog 2 (1992)

Masato Nakamura
Arr. Jamin Morden

Sonic the Hedgehog 2 wastes no time in ramping up in difficulty. After Sonic completes the introductory grassy forest level, he encounters the chemical plant zone. Filled with moving platforms and poisonous chemicals, the chemical plant zone stage is remembered by many players for its trickiness and the horrifying music that plays whenever Sonic drowns. The musical theme matches the action on screen—fast, frantic, and laced with danger and suspense. The solo line in particular features several fiendish rhythms, requiring a high level of technical skill.

Our performers are Jacob Deaven and Joseph Wang on alto saxophone, Olivia Smith-Elnaggar on baritone saxophone, Benjamin Tousley on tenor saxophone, and Lee Stearns on drums.

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