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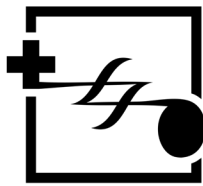
INTERSTELLAR HARMONIES



May 18, 2024

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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 D.C. area.

Game music weaves a complex melodic thread through the traditions, shared memories, values, and mythos 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.



MetroGSO



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About Our Music Director



Jamin Morden attended Northwestern University, dual majoring in French Horn Performance and Music Education. After he completed a master's degree in French Horn Performance at Yale University, he moved to Maryland to teach instrumental music in Montgomery County Public Schools. Jamin is also involved with Symphony of the Potomac and the Maryland Band Directors' Band.

About Our Choir Director



Anthony Khong is an active musician, educator, and arts administrator and is native to the D.C. area. Prior to his work in community choirs, he served as a chorus teacher in Fairfax County. Anthony holds a master's in Arts Management from George Mason University, and a bachelor's in Music Education from James Madison University, where he studied voice and clarinet.

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START!

Super Mario Kart

Super Mario Kart (1992)

Soyo Oka

Arr. Dan Serino

“Welcome to Koopa Beach!”

Super Mario Kart is the first game in one of the most successful spinoff series in gaming history, a series that revolutionized the multiplayer genre. The composer of *Super Mario Kart*, Soyo Oka (aka DJ Alice), joined Nintendo Entertainment Analysis & Development (Nintendo EAD) under Koji Kondo's supervision in 1987 after majoring in composition at Osaka College of Music. Her influences span composers from modern classical, jazz, fusion, electronic, and rock genres, all of which are present in this piece.

The original themes composed for *Super Mario Kart* went on to become dominant themes present in every successive installment in the series. This arrangement features “Title Theme,” “Mario Circuit,” “Koopa Beach,” “Rainbow Road,” “Goal!”, “New Record,” “Peach’s Ranks,” “Tournament Win,” and “Staff Roll.” Notably, “Rainbow Road” and “Peach’s Ranks” are among the composer’s favorite works. This medley of tunes brings the listener through a playthrough of the game.

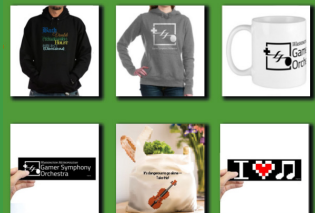
*Benvenuti alla Spiaggia Koopa
È il primo circuito del Trofeo Stella
Benvenuti alla Spiaggia Koopa
Piccolo arcipelago nell’acqua azzurro chiaro
Alla Spiaggia Koopa (azzurro chiaro)*

*Welcome to the Koopa Beach
It is the first circuit of the Star Cup
Welcome to the Koopa Beach
Small archipelago in clear blue waters
At the Koopa Beach (clear blue)*

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Quiet and Falling

Celeste (2018)

Lena Raine

Arr. Jamin Morden

Celeste follows the story of Madeline as she attempts to scale the great Mount Celeste. The plot revolves around her trials during the journey, both physical and mental, as well as her attempts to escape and later reconcile with the part of herself she dislikes. In a narrative that grapples with issues of mental health, Madeline climbs to escape her anxiety and depression. But the higher she goes, the more she must face the physical manifestation of her self-loathing: a dark doppelganger.

Lena Raine's soundtrack scores the action with exciting tunes to pump up the player for the difficult platforming challenges, as well as a couple of tunes of a different mood. "Quiet and Falling," heard during the fifth chapter of gameplay, is a melancholy piece of music that avoids sweeping melodies and complicated rhythms. Instead, our attention is drawn to the harmony and texture of the piece, with one very important exception halfway through.

This arrangement has a couple of aims: First, it uses the sparse texture of the original as a canvas to paint new melodies and ideas, mostly by various woodwind soloists; second, it seeks to create a dramatic arc reminiscent of scaling a mountain, complete with a climb up, reaching the summit, and a climb back down.

Haunted PNF-404

Pikmin 2 (2004) and *Pikmin 3* (2013)

Hajime Wakai, Asuka Hayazaki,

Atsuko Asahi & Kazumi Totaka

Arr. David Crisler

PNF-404, the main setting of the four *Pikmin* games, is many things. It is a planet brimming with beautiful natural environments, home of the adorable and loyal Pikmin. It is also a harsh, uncaring world, full of elemental danger and monsters to whom the player is nothing more than a tasty snack.

The games take this danger one step further, with *Pikmin 2*'s Waterwraith and *Pikmin 3*'s Plasm Wraith exchanging cruel indifference for outright malevolence. In their dungeons, which feel more like the setting of a survival horror game, the player must solve puzzles and fight their way out, all while being pursued by an invulnerable, unnatural creature.

This arrangement seeks to replicate the harrowing experience of these bosses, from first encounter to eventual escape. In order, it features music from the Plasm Wraith's intro, the Waterwraith's dungeon and chase sequence, and the Plasm Wraith's fight.

Though over a decade separates the composers who worked on the themes in this arrangement, they have striking similarities in approach. Many of the "melodies" in these tracks use atonal tricks such as nonstandard scales and parallel chromatic movement, and most have layered rhythmic patterns that play out of time with one another. The resulting music is violent and unsettling, a perfect fit for the memorable bosses it accompanies.

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Let's Do the Fooka-Fooka (Nimbus Land Theme)

Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars (1996, 2023)

Yoko Shimamura

Arr. Lee Stearns

Nimbus Land is a floating kingdom in the clouds visited near the end of *Super Mario RPG: The Legend of the Seven Stars*. The song's title may derive from the Japanese “fuwa,” roughly meaning “fluffy.” That would be appropriate: the Fooka-Fooka is a courtly dance performed by the cloud-like Nimbus people.

The music is fittingly light and airy, but with a percussive eighth-note pattern driving the tempo throughout. WMGSO first performed this piece with a reduced orchestra in 2016, but the arrangement has now been expanded and updated to reflect the 2023 remake, for which legendary VGM composer Yoko Shimamura worked on and helped produce renewed versions of her joyfully elegant soundtrack.

Blue Birds

Rhythm Heaven DS (2008)

Tsunku

Arr. Chris “CTL” Lee

Welcome to the Blue Bird Brigade!

Rhythm Heaven is a lesser-known Nintendo series created by the team behind *WarioWare* that combines the wacky mayhem of *WarioWare* with difficult rhythm challenges and music composed by Japanese musician Tsunku to create a universe of more than one hundred rhythm games across four Nintendo systems and one arcade machine. The *Rhythm Heaven* series innovates on classic rhythm games by providing audio, rather than visual, cues for its games. From dancing in-time with a saxophone-playing frog to operating a monkey-powered clock or hitting baseballs in outer space, the series has varied rhythm gameplay and contains remixes that combine elements from across individual rhythm games.

“Blue Birds” and “Blues Birds 2” originate from *Rhythm Heaven DS*. These games bring us to frigid climates and depict an intense training regime of the Blue Bird Brigade as Captain Blue Bird gives orders to Bird 1, Bird 2, and...YOU! Vivid flashbacks of a harsh basic training run through your head—you've parachuted, flown airplanes, camped out on mountains, gone ice fishing, and fallen off a cliff. Soon, you will receive your assignment. Can you peck your beak and stretch out your neck in time to earn a Superb, or even, a Perfect?

This arrangement features Chris “CTL” Lee and Kai Diaz on violin, Freyja Barber on viola, Diana Henry on Cello, Ben Shrager as the Blue Bird Captain, and David Werner, Tony McMannis, and YOU as the blue birds.

A Tea Party in Fire

Fire Emblem Engage (2023)

Hiroki Morishita, Yasuhisa Baba, and Takafumi Wada

Arr. Dominic Manzella

There's nothing quite like enjoying a respite between gruesome battles with a calming cup of tea. As you prepare for the next soul-crushing day in a world torn apart by war, kick back and relax with your royal friends while vibing to the chill yet upbeat rhythm from the cafe band. This arrangement features Dominic Manzella on alto sax and Dan Serino on acoustic guitar.

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“Do you remember when the little things made you happy?”

Metal Gear Solid, written and directed by the legendary Hideo Kojima, is actually the third game in the Metal Gear franchise, but remains one of the most memorable entries in the series. Like the rest of the series, the game focuses on stealth as the primary means of accomplishing objectives, instead of overwhelming force. It remains a beloved entry in the franchise in large part due its sweeping cinematic narrative, fully voice-acted cut scenes, and memorable characters.

Already a grizzled veteran by the events of the game, the player character, Solid Snake, is sent to infiltrate a military facility in Alaska taken over by terrorists, led by the rogue special forces unit FOXHOUND. Their demands are the body of the greatest soldier who ever lived, Big Boss, and a hefty ransom, or else they will use the bipedal nuclear weapons platform Metal Gear REX to wreak havoc on the globe. As he defeats them one by one, Snake slowly uncovers secrets of both history and his own past that threaten the fabric of society.

“The Best Is Yet to Come” is the ending theme of the game. It reflects Snake’s development through the game and his feelings that, even after all the things he has seen and gone through as a soldier and warrior, there is hope and love after the flames of the battlefield die out. Translated into Irish for the game by Bláthnaid Ní Chofaigh, it was originally performed by Aoife Ní Fhearraigh.

This arrangement features Tori Buckshaw, Amanda Cavanagh, Madison Chase, and Rachel Winograd as vocal soloists.

The instrumentalists are Jess Bateman on alto flute, Elias Schwartzman on the fiddle, Les Doerfler on double bass, Jadzia Metcalf-Burton on the keyboard, Julius Verzosa and JP Zavodny on guitar, and Cory Haley, Kunho Kim, Scott Luxenberg, and Johnny Olson (Percussion).

*An cuimhin leat an grá?
Crá croí an ghrá?
Níl anois ach ceol na hoíche.
Tá mé síoraí i ngrá.
Leannáin bhá, grá le smál
Leannáin bhá, grá le smál
Lig leis agus beidh leat.
Lig leis agus beidh grá.*

*Do you remember the love?
The heartache of love?
Now there is only the music of the night.
I am eternally in love.
Sympathetic lovers, love with a stain.
Sympathetic lovers, love with a stain.
Let it go and you will win.
Let it go and [there] will [be] love.*

*An cuimhneach leat an t-am
Nuair a bhí tú sásta?
An cuimhneach leat an t-am
Nuair a bhí tú ag gáire?*

*Do you recall the time
When you were satisfied?
Do you recall the time
When you were laughing?*

*Tá an saol iontach
Má chreideann tú ann.
Tug aghaidh ar an saol
Is sonas síoraí inár measc.*

*Life is great
If you believe it.
Face life
And eternal happiness among us.*

*Céard a tharla do na laethanta sin?
Céard a tharla do na hoícheanta sin?
An cuimhin leat an t-am
Nuair a bhí tú faoi bhrón?*

*What happened to those days?
What happened to those nights?
Do you remember the time
When you were sad?*

*An cuimhin leat an t-am
Go síoraí ag sileadh na ndeoir?
An ormsa nó orainne a bhí an locht?*

*Do you remember the time
Eternally shedding tears?
Is it my fault or our fault?*

*Ag mothú caillte is ar fán,
Cén fáth an t-achrann is sileadh na ndeoir?
Tá áilleacht sa saol má chuardaíonn tú é.
Tá gliondar sa saol; cuardaímis é.*

*Feeling lost and astray,
Why the arguing and shedding of tears?
There is beauty in life if you look for it.
There is joy in life; let's look for it.*



A FINAL FANTASY COVER ALBUM

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“Hold tight, don’t fight, don’t lose the power.”

In the third act of this critically acclaimed 2023 role-playing video game, the player and their companions finally reach the titular city of Baldur’s Gate and are given free rein to roam the lower part of the city, taking in all of the sights, sounds, and chaos. Upon entering the harbor area and wandering in the direction of the Water Queen’s House, the player is treated to an alluring siren’s song of a familiar melody. As they approach to investigate, they find a funeral in progress being conducted by waveservants, worshippers of the sea goddess Umberlee.

Here, “The Power,” which appears in several versions earlier throughout the game, takes on captivating form as a lush and mysterious choral arrangement. The main chorus of the tune echoes the all too-familiar “Down by the River,” which also appears infamously on the character creation screen. As our arrangement reaches its climax, it transitions into the ending credits version of the song, shifting into a contemporary a cappella cover of the rock power ballad that bookends the player’s epic journey and reflects the game’s narrative question—what is the true price of power?

This arrangement features Tracy Flanders and Jasmine Marcelo as vocal soloists and Beejul Khatri as vocal percussion.

*We’d make our way, overhear more in changing
You into me, and me, into you.
I meant to say that I love you, or maybe
Fear like a flame—what’s happening to me?*

*Firelight burning the tower...
Hold tight, don’t fight the power,
Firelight burning the tower,
Hold tight, don’t fight, don’t fight, don’t lose the power...*

*Lantern with a star,
Hard heart hamm’ring where you are.
Step slow as a fawn,
Firelight burning the tower...*

*Crowned light moon of mine,
I found you too soon...*

*Down, down, down by the river,
Down, down, down by the river,
Hold tight, don’t fight the power...*

*Moonlight burning the flower,
Hold tight, don't fight the power,
Firelight burning the tower,
Hold tight,
Don't fight,
Don't fight, don't lose the power.*

PAUSE

Are you enjoying the show so far?

- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ Of course!

Intermission is the perfect time to give your feedback (scan the QR code on the right or follow the URL) or make a donation at WMGSO's booth in the lobby!

Note: This QR Code and [bit.ly](https://bit.ly/3Ms9DTI) go to the in-person version of the audience survey. Twitch viewers, please type !survey in chat.

Audience Feedback Survey



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LEVEL 2 – START!

STAR FOX 64 SYMPHONIC SUITE

Star Fox 64 (1998)

Hajime Wakai & Koji Kondo

Arr. Chris Apple, Zeynep Dilli, Kyle G. Jamolin, Fred Morden & Jamin Morden

Lyrics by: Zeynep Dilli & Virgil

Conceived as a multi-arranger collaboration in 2019 and originally programmed for spring 2020, the *Star Fox 64 Symphonic Suite* represents a concert half a decade in the making. *Star Fox 64* is the main focus. Its main theme bookends the suite, while the center movements are themes from the various planets. While the arrangers discussed the idea of shaping movements of this suite after movements in Gustav Holst's *The Planets* suite, in the final form only one movement (Zoness) contains direct allusions to Holst's work. Interestingly, our arrangers primarily chose to work with planets in the middle and challenge paths of the game. We invite you to enjoy this tour of the Lylat System, starting with:

Lylat Wars

Arr. Kyle G. Jamolin & Jamin Morden

"The light of Lylat's sun illuminates a day of war, once more."

"Lylat Wars" is a faithful recreation of the opening of the game. We hear a mysterious, otherworldly sound echo across the void. Stars twinkle in the distance. The optimistic yet martial theme of *Star Fox* marches in, interrupting this reverie. Featuring melodies in the brass and winds, we have only a few moments to enjoy the tune before we are quickly whisked away to our first planet: Zoness.

*Lux solis Lylatis illucet
Diem belli denuo.*

Pugnabunt in Zoness.

Pugnabunt in Aquais.

Volabunt in Venomis.

Et in pulvere et pro soli et pro paci.

Volate! Et volatate!

Pugnate! Et pugnatate!

Volutate quasi dolium!

*The light of Lylat's sun illuminates
A day of war again.*

They will fight on Zoness.

They will fight on Aquas.

They will fly on Venom.

And in the dust, and for the sun and for peace.

Fly now! And fly!

Fight now! And fight!

Roll like a barrel!

(Lyricist's Note: We had to have it, but you try translating the concept of a "barrel roll" let alone find the imperative verb for it in Latin.)

“There is no mercy in the barren waters.”

Green and acidic, the oceans of Zoness are too polluted to sustain life. The evil Andross has long used this planet as his own personal dumping grounds, and its ecology has collapsed. Now, it is just an ugly battleground on Star Fox’s journey to the planet Venom. History has ended for Zoness; it will remain a vast ocean of toxic waste for the rest of time. But it was not always so. Zoness’ oceans were once blue and clear and teemed with life like Aquas.

This arrangement is an exploration of ecological themes, the runaway consequences of climate change, and a lamentation of life lost. Though the influence of Holst’s “Mars” is obvious, the most important inspiration for this arranger actually comes from Holst’s “Venus.” Harkening back to Zoness’ youth, this arrangement imagines the verdant fields of wildflowers that once covered the planet. The oceans and air were clean. It was a paradise, and the arrangement borrows lovingly from the instrumentation and chords used in pastoral classical works. The *Star Fox* theme can be found within the arrangement; perhaps Star Fox, under the command of Fox’s father James, visited the planet before its fate had been sealed.

The lyrics call out with the pain of the poisoned world:

Olim hic mundi vixit.

Nunc non vivit.

Hic tempus desiit.

Non alii dies sunt.

Miserere nobis—

Non est misericordia in aquis cassis.

Once, this world was alive.

Now it is lifeless.

Time stopped here.

There are no other days.

Have mercy on us—

There is no mercy in the barren waters.



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“Who dares say the Sun is a liar?”

This is a medley of two pieces from the *Star Fox 64* soundtrack, “Sector X” and “Solar/Sector Y.”

“Sector X” is the darkly mysterious sector in the Lylat system, where Fox and his band are not quite sure what it is they are facing. The lethargic theme of the sector, even though its dominant shape is ascending, is intertwined with descending chromatic scales, emphasizing the uncertainty and eeriness of the surroundings. The chorus opens this part with support from the piano and the electric bass. After the first complete statement of the theme, more instruments enter, first tentatively, then with rising power until they are teetering on the border of chaos and completely drowning the chorus out—up until the end of their statement, when they abruptly run out of power and the chorus bursts through, again supported by the electric bass and piano, to carry everyone to the next stage.

“Solar/Sector Y” is the stage around the sun of the Lylat system. As befits the sun of a system torn by war, this theme is martial and no-frills on the surface with its very simple two-phrase melody and apparent sparseness in its functional harmony. This starkness allows the arrangement to add the complexity that underlies every war, be it political or personal.

The main melody comprises a phrase, the same phrase repeated a third up, and a second phrase. Moreover, the game theme consists of the main melody stated first in the strings, then echoed in the brass in a different key, a modulation back to the original key, and an endless loop. Since this structure evokes the idea of a fugue, the arrangement runs with it: The game theme is first presented very closely to the original instrumentation, leaving the orchestra almost at a loss where to go next, when a single French horn intervenes and builds into a cadenza that leads to the chorus coming back in for the first exposition of a fugue based on the first melody phrase. After the exposition and middle entry, the ascending motif from “Sector X” abruptly reappears for the last exposition. The orchestra and chorus shake off the confusion it creates with a final statement of the fugue, which concludes with the second phrase of the melody making a comeback, leading into a climactic coda.

The lyrics are adapted from an excerpt of Virgil’s “Georgics,” 1st century BCE.

*Dēnique, quid Vesper sērus vehat, unde serēnās
ventus agat nūbēs, quid cōgitet ūmidus Auster,
sōl tibi signa dabit. Sōlem quis dīcere falsum audeat?
Ille etiam caecōs īnstāre tumultūs
saepe monet fraudemque et operta tumēscere bella...*

A translation, a bit more poetic than literal, is by A. Z. Foreman at poemsintranslation.com:

*What the late dusk brings hither, whence the weather
Hurls the fair clouds, how dank the southwind's schemes...
These things the sun foreshadows. Who dares say the sun is a liar?
For it foretells the tide of times,
Treasons unseen, star-chambered insurrection,
And the first groundswell of uncivil war.*

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“Did they go extinct here? Is this where we started?”

The elite mercenary team of Star Fox, on their quest to save an entire solar system, have seen many unique wonders of the galaxy: one such wonder is hidden deep under the dark waves of the ocean planet Aquas, where Fox McCloud and his team must find and destroy a bioweapon facility. In the uncharted deeps, Fox confirms a long-held myth about Aquas: in the ocean depths, there lie the ruins of an ancient civilization. Who they were is a mystery, and nothing remains of their culture except rows of pillars, once part of a great and beautiful city.

“The Pillars of Aquas” explores both the beauty of the city and the treacherousness of the ocean, often transitioning between glorious and eerie. With rich woodwind color and tiny ornamentations, the opening paints a picture of this mysterious alien ocean, full of rare and exquisite life lurking just out of sight. The second half describes the glory of discovering the ruins. As the horns and brass join in, the arrangement heralds the great and ancient civilization that once dwelt there as the chorus asks who they were and where they might have gone. The end climax of the piece reconciles both the glory and the mystery, embellishing the first theme into a lament for the civilization’s loss.

In the mythology of the game, there is speculation that the current inhabitants of the solar system may have evolved from those who left Aquas when a disaster covered everything under oceans—but it may just as well have been that the species who built those magnificent edifices, now in ruins, went extinct in that disaster. The lyrics explore these questions.

*Sub aquis, sub mari,
In tenebris est, terribilis est
Magnificus, gloria silentii, tenebris*

*Under the waters, under the sea,
It is in darkness, it is terrifying (and)
Magnificent, the glory of silence, the dark*

*Abiere in tempora cladis
Resedere? Hic extinctus?
Nos quo hic pugnamus
Sumus hospites?
Revertimur domum?
Hic incepimus?*

*Did they leave at the time of disaster
Did they stay? Did they go extinct here?
We who fight here
Are we visitors?
Are we returning home?
Is this where we started?*

*Sub aquis, sub mari
In tenebris est, terribilis est
Magnificus, gloria tenebris, gloria tenebrae
Hic incepimus? Hoc est domum?
Nunc tacent aquas tenebrosa...*

*Under the waters, under the sea
It's in darkness, it's terrifying (and)
Magnificent, dark glory, the glory of darkness
Is this where we started? Is this home?
Now silent, the dark waters...*

If the player is successful in finding the hidden or more challenging routes through the game, they will find themselves approaching Venom, the final stage, with one major obstacle between themselves and the evil Andross: the rival ace pilot Star Wolf and his team.

The music scoring this final dogfight between Fox and his rival moves between sweeping dramatic melodies and staccato, martial rhythmic stabs. Kondo used mostly traditionally acoustic sounds throughout the soundtrack, and Star Wolf's theme is particularly brass-heavy. The arranger presents us with more-or-less accurate retellings of this theme, before taking it apart piece by piece. Small motivic chunks of melody become main ideas that are tossed around the orchestra or repeated to become ostinato figures underneath entirely different melodies. The fighting is fierce, but in the end, a glorious major-mode recapitulation of the theme reveals that we've won at last!



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“Fox, you are your father’s son.”

Coming straight after the battle on and in Venom, this Finale is primarily composed of the music for the ending credits and cutscene for *Star Fox 64*. From the harrowing escape to the awards ceremony (to the staggering invoice poor General Pepper has to contend with), the music reimagines the main theme, the victory theme, and several other themes as we enjoy a cathartic ending.

There is relatively little transformation of the themes from their original forms, though the arranger expanded the restatement of the main theme with full brass and percussion. There is a brief fugue between all the sections of the orchestra, culminating in a massive discordant iteration that is swept aside by the woodwinds and eventually low strings, who guide us back to the proper ending.

Victoria!

Sumus!

Sum vulpes, sum falco

Sum rana, sum lepus

E sumus milites volantes

E sumus amici volantes

Victory!

We are!

I am the fox, I am the falcon,

I am the frog, I am the rabbit

And we are flying soldiers

And we are flying friends

In pace Lylat est.

In pace Lylat erit.

Andross victus!

Lylat is at peace.

Lylat will be at peace.

Andross is defeated!

In Zoness et in Aquais volavimus

In Venomis et in pulvere, pro Soli,

Pro paci, pugnavimus

Fox nos servavit iterum

On Zoness and on Aquas we flew

On Venom and in the dust, for the Sun,

For peace, we fought

Fox saved us again and again

Novus dies videt hodie

Lylat in pace hodie

Fox, tu es filius patris tuus

We see a new day today

Lylat at peace today

Fox, you are your father's son.

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