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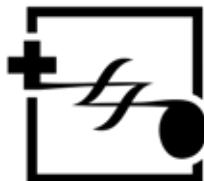
THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

PRESENTED BY



**THE WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN
GAMER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

MAY 20, 2023 - PGCC CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS



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 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



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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Concert Program Available Online

To view the concert program on your phone, use the QR code on the right or go to www.wmgso.org/program.



START!

Liberi Fatali

Final Fantasy VIII (1999)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Josh Haas

Lyrics by: Taro Yamashita & Kazushige Nojima

Final Fantasy VIII has a dramatic, iconic opening cinematic with a matching soundtrack: With flashes of out-of-context story bits, “Liberi Fatali”—“Fated Children”—grabs your attention immediately and holds you in thrall for the entire ride. The title refers to the game’s main characters—students of a renowned military academy who find themselves embroiled in complex political intrigue and...time travel? The repeating lyrics throughout the tune (“FITHOS - LUSEC - WECOS - VINOSEC”) are not real words, but an anagram of two main themes in the game: “Succession of Witches” and “Love.”

The piece is a compact, streamlined three-minute gem, as directed and impactful as a thrown spear, and has earned its place in concert repertoires many times over. A series of momentum-building ostinatos follow one another, and no thematic statement overstays its welcome. Famously, the piece does not end on a resolution, but with a chord that leaves the tonal center uncertain, as the screen first crashes into black, then dissolves into the words “Final Fantasy VIII” with the cover design—a young couple embracing, or...is he holding her up as she’s collapsing? This non-resolution is of course appropriate: This is where our story begins. Please press “Start.”

Terra's Theme

Final Fantasy VI (1994)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Jamin Morden

Final Fantasy VI also has an iconic opening cinematic, albeit with graphics a few generations older. The game opens with narration about the legendary War of the Magi, as well as the machinations of the evil empire currently attempting to conquer the world. We first hear “Terra’s Theme” accompanying an opening title crawl as two empire soldiers and a “witch” pilot their magically infused Magitek armor mechas towards the snow-covered town of Narshe. It’s a long march. The credits appear almost exactly as they would in a movie opening title sequence, and the player sees the cliffs on which Narshe is nestled come closer and closer, as snow falls and a blizzard howls. Moments like this that invite us to so completely focus on the music are somewhat rare in video games as a medium—though the arranger thinks that *Final Fantasy* in general does well on this front—and this opening (and thus, “Terra’s Theme” itself) is quite striking. Although this arrangement features material from the more complete version of the tune found later in the game, it’s this ominous trek over the tundra that was the source of inspiration. Rather than heighten and elaborate the determination and hopefulness the music naturally evokes, the arrangement seeks to recreate the opening scene as though from the perspective of a bystander watching this fateful march from the sidelines.

At first, there’s only the faintest hint of what’s to come in the whistling wind. Vague shapes and fragments of melody are passed from section to section, implying but never quite coalescing into the theme proper. This changes with a crash as the trio and their Magitek armor come fully into view. The music gains a frightening clarity at times during our observation, culminating in a somewhat disquieting reharmonization of the second motif. The ensemble rights itself for only a moment before the trio are lost in the blizzard, continuing their march. Though we, as the audience, may be in the know, any observers of this march would have no concept that they were simultaneously witnessing the Empire’s most fearsome new weapon, as well as that world’s single greatest hope for peace.

Good King Moogle Mog

Final Fantasy V (1992), Final Fantasy XIV (2010)

Nobuo Uematsu & Masayoshi Soken

Arr. Thomas Ashcom

Lyrics by: Michael-Christopher Koji Fox & Eva Kappeller

Moogles are creatures with bat wings, cat or rabbit ears, and a “pom-pom” on their head; they are a recurring motif in *Final Fantasy* games, just like chocobos. Moogles first appear in *Final Fantasy III*, but they don’t get a musical leitmotif of their own until *Final Fantasy V*: A playful, tiny bit janky, and tilted melody that keeps listeners on their toes.

In various *Final Fantasy* games, Moogles appear as a reclusive community of creatures, playable characters, or even just toys. In *Final Fantasy XIV*, they are once again a reclusive group living in a distant forest, but they have a group of protectors, who at one point feel that the forest is threatened and summon a legendary protector

of the Moogles, which the players end up battling in a boss fight: Good King Moggle Mog XII.

This boss battle theme plays liberally with the Moogles theme and has been very fairly described as an “Elfmanesque ditty.” The arrangement also makes extended use of the Moogles theme. At first, the piece sounds way too cheery to be a boss battle. But it doesn’t take long to realize that here are jaws that bite, claws that catch, swords that tear, and magic that can probably do way worse. How much trouble are we in? Listen and find out.

The spoken solo lines are performed by Amanda Cavanagh, Tracy Flanders, Thomas Ashcom, and Elias Schwartzman for the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass lines, respectively.

Dragonsong

Final Fantasy XIV: Heavensward (2015)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Doug Eber & Jasmine Marcelo

Lyrics by: Michael-Christopher Koji Fox

Final Fantasy XIV: Heavensward introduces the Dragonsong War, which raged for over a thousand years in the northernmost regions of Eorzea. The Warrior of Light finds themselves in the middle of this conflict after traveling there for refuge, on a journey through the ancestral lands of both man and dragon. Though they are able to slay Nidhogg’s physical body, the war is far from over, as the essence of his wrath and hatred manifests into a shade of himself, allowing him to possess Estinien Wyrmblood, a man driven by his own vengeance and losses during the war just as Nidhogg was.

“Dragonsong” is the main vocal theme of *Heavensward* and a lament that sings of the eternal bond between Saint Shiva, an Elezen woman, and Hraesvelgr of the first brood, before revealing the story behind the betrayal of the dragons and the subsequent events that led to a needless war, paved in the blood of both man and dragon. “Dragonsong” also begins the Warrior of Light’s final stand against Nidhogg’s shade and the final song of the war.

This piece features Nico Benner as the vocal soloist.

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www.youtube.com/wmgso



Matoya's Cave/Overworld

Final Fantasy (1987)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Jamin Morden

Lyrics by: Zeynep Dilli

Nobuo Uematsu was the sole composer for the numbered main-sequence *Final Fantasy* games from *Final Fantasy* to *Final Fantasy IX* and has contributed to several of the rest of the soundtracks since. His music is widely thought to be a significant factor in the games' lasting place in video game (and video game music) history. His score for *Final Fantasy* masterfully uses the NES soundchip. With only three possible tones and a noise channel, Uematsu relies on strong melody, implied harmonies, and bass motion to allow the listener to fill in the gaps. The original "Matoya's Cave" moves quickly from major to minor sonorities, creating an air of mystery while still embracing the game's adventurous feel, which is especially evident in the final bars, where rising inner voices form bright seventh chords before the form loops back in on itself. Meanwhile, the Overworld theme presents no illusions as to its intention: it is a full-throated adventure song—bright, upbeat, and using the top two voices to keep the motion constant.

The arrangement follows these two themes as they vie for the audience's attention. We begin in Matoya's Cave. With water dripping from stalactites and shadows filling every corner, this theme enjoys our undivided attention for the first section. In its second iteration, motes of light begin to appear in our view—first hinted at subtly in the basses, then ever more forcefully until the brass flatly declare "We're doing something else now." The Overworld theme is presented fully first by our spectacular woodwind section, then is passed to the horns, before fading into subtle memories of Matoya's Cave. Here, the two melodies compete for our attention, shards and bits appearing in different keys. The strings finally silence the discord and lead into a saxophone quartet. From here, both tunes snake around each other, each finding opportunities to insert itself into the other, before playing simultaneously in a glorious cacophony. The way is thus paved for a cameo from the "Bridge Theme" or "Opening Theme," also known as the Main Theme of the *Final Fantasy* series (known to WMGSO veterans as simply "The Anthem").

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!

Audience Feedback
Survey



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Level 2 – START!

Spring Yard Zone

Sonic the Hedgehog (1991)

Masato Nakamura

Arr. Jamin Morden

The original *Sonic the Hedgehog* boasts some amazing music, and “Spring Yard Zone” is just one example. Funky, driving, and memorable, this piece uses rhythmic and melodic tropes from more modern genres to give it a distinct feel. In this arrangement, players improvise over chord changes and partake in a quintet-wide solo that features all the members of the group at once.

Our woodwind quintet is Jess Bateman on flute, Jenn Ganss on oboe, Angela Small on clarinet, Jamin Morden on horn, and Douglas Eber on bassoon.

Shiten'ou (四天王)/Battle with the Four Fiends

Final Fantasy IV (1991)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Sheldon Zamora-Soon

Lyrics by: Sheldon Zamora-Soon

“Shiten'ou,” the title of the arrangement, comes from three Japanese words: “Shi” (四), meaning “four,” “Ten” (天) meaning “heaven,” and “Ou” meaning “kings” (王)—literally translating to “the Four Heavenly Kings.” Shiten'ou was localized as the “Archfiends” or the “Four Fiends of the Elements” in the English releases of *Final Fantasy IV*.

The Shiten'ou are powerful masters of the four elements serving under the sorcerer Golbez. In the story of the Blue Planet, these four Archfiends are the main opposition to Cecil and his party throughout the middle portion of the game. The Blighted Despot Scarmiglione is sent with his zombies to stop Cecil from completing his trial to become a Paladin. The Drowned King Cagnazzo is revealed to have replaced Cecil's king and is behind the orders to steal the Crystal of Water and destroy a village of Summoners. The Empress of the Winds, Barbaricia, and her minions guard the Tower of Zot, where Golbez holds Cecil's lover Rosa captive. And finally, the Autarch of Flame, Rubicante, guards the four stolen crystals in the Tower of Babel.

The Shiten'ou return in *Final Fantasy XIV: Endwalker*. With extended background stories, the Shiten'ou, once again serving Golbez, appear as boss battles: Scarmiglione and Cagnazzo are dungeon bosses, while Barbariccia and Rubicante are trial bosses, complete with a new arrangement of their theme from *Final Fantasy IV*.

This a cappella arrangement borrows a bit of inspiration from the comedic cover of the song “Battle with the Four Fiends” by Hyadain and a bit of barbershop quartet influence. It features Tristan Kirkman as the baritone singer and voice of Scarmiglione, Michael Ohr as the bass singer and voice of Cagnazzo, Sheldon Zamora-Soon as the tenor singer and voice of Barbariccia, and Tony McMannis as the lead singer and voice of Rubicante.

To Zanarkand

Final Fantasy X (2001)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Samantha Ballard

Final Fantasy X is a game of dreams—dreams as opposed to reality and dreams of what one plans for or hopes will come to pass. Alas, it is also a game of dreams that cannot be.

Along with “Suteki da Ne,” “Zanarkand” is considered one of the two main themes for *Final Fantasy X*. Similar to “Liberi Fatali” (*Final Fantasy VIII*), “Terra’s Theme” (*Final Fantasy VI*), and “Opening: Bombing Mission” (*Final Fantasy VII*) from our album line-up, “Zanarkand” is featured at the opening of the game and appears again in the thematically appropriate moment, as “Terra’s Theme” also does.

The original soundtrack is presented in solo piano with a melody of wide intervals, of repeated climbs and falling back down, of reaching, yearning, stretching out with your fingertips—only to miss the touch again and again. This arrangement for solo harp is just as simple and stark a statement.

As “Zanarkand” plays in the opening, the main character says, “Listen to my story. This may be our last chance,” in a voiceover, and a group of sorrowful people gather around a campfire on a seaside of ancient ruins. Near the end of the game, the player arrives at the campfire and hears the heart-breaking strains of “Zanarkand” again, when they have learned enough—learned too much—to understand what the ruins are, the reason for sorrow, and why some dreams just cannot be.

“To Zanarkand” is presented by Kara Welch on solo harp.

Hymn of the Fayth

Final Fantasy X (2001)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Amanda Cavanagh

Final Fantasy X follows a Summoner and her Guardians through their pilgrimage, in which they visit temples spread all over their world, Spira. At each temple, they eventually must reach the Chamber of the Fayth and pray to the human soul, the “fayth,” voluntarily trapped there long ago. You can hear the Hymn of the Fayth, a reverent yet lyrical chant, in every temple you visit. Almost every Fayth sings it when you reach them, each with their own different rendition of the piece.

While most renditions are monophonic, almost like a Gregorian chant, there are a few that use tense, eerie harmonies, adding to the otherworldliness of the setting and the situation. This arrangement for a cappella choir and soloists follows that lead with powerful swells, unexpected entrances, and careful use of harmony.

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The lyrics are a puzzle. They are Japanese syllables that do not form words when sung in the order they are in the hymn:

I	E	YU	I
NO	BO	ME	NO
RE	N	MI	RI
YO	JU	YO	GO

HA	SA
TE	KA
NA	E
KU	TA
	MA
	E

But if the lines are arranged on top of each other, as above, and the syllables are read top to bottom, then right to left in the Japanese manner, they form words that match the melody:

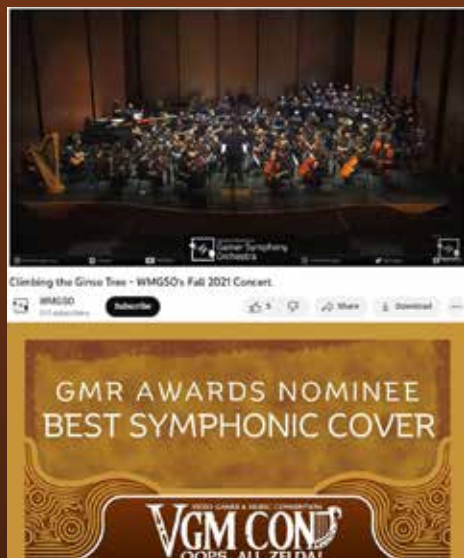
Inorigo	(Fayth)
Yume mi yo	(Dream!)
Ebonju	(Yu Yevon)
Inore yo	(Pray!)
Sakae tamae	(Please grant prosperity)
Hatenaku	(Without end)

In this presentation, the soprano solo is sung by Isabella Umberger, and the tenor solo is sung by Nikhil Pateel.

Check out our performance of
“Climbing the Ginso Tree,”
nominated this year in the
Symphonic category of the
Game Music Remix Awards!



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The Heart of the People

Final Fantasy X (2001)

Masashi Hamauzu, Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Chris Apple

“People of the North Pole,” the piece upon which this arrangement is based, is the theme of the Ronso in *Final Fantasy X*. The Ronso live in seclusion on a high, icy mountain, where they lead a simple life. Bulging with incredible physical stature, many Ronso are warriors who value strength and courage. But they also greatly revere the spiritual beliefs that tie together all the cultures of the world. The first time the player sees them kneel in prayer reveals a compassionate, contemplative side to these ferocious fighters.

This arrangement proposes that the Ronso are in fact a people of deep, complex faith. Cloistered on their sacred mountaintop, they dwell with all their ancestors, in constant commune with every Ronso who has ever walked the earth. Remembering their forebears is not just an occasional ritual. They are alive with them always, every day.

This unity is the heart of their people: not the mountain itself, not any individual Ronso or his deeds, but the communion of all Ronso who inhabit that place, living and dead, stretching back all the way to the creation of their people. It is an experience that is uniquely Ronso and cannot be truly understood by outsiders.

The piece follows the protagonists’ journey through the Ronso village. It opens with sparse instrumentation to suggest the cold, lonely landscape of the Ronso’s mountain. As the listener reaches the summit, more voices are added, filling the empty space with beauty and harmony. Suddenly the choir appears, the singers representing the voices of ancestors who are adding to the music of the village, full of life and joy. Then the arrangement ends as it began, leaving the village, fading away into the desolate wind.

This piece features Zeynep Dilli as the alto recorder soloist, Josh Haas as the soprano recorder soloist, and Christopher Tillman as the electric violin soloist.

Fourfold Battle on the Big Bridge

Final Fantasy XIV: Shadowbringers (2019)

Final Fantasy V (1992)

Masayoshi Soken & Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Jacob Coppage-Gross

“Battle on the Big Bridge” or “Battle with Gilgamesh” is the theme for the boss battle with Gilgamesh in *Final Fantasy V*. Gilgamesh is snarky, sarcastic, loves to fight, and starts his battle by cutting the heroes’ declamations short with “Enough expository banter!” The battle takes place on...wait for it...a big bridge.

The *Final Fantasy* series is known for weaving concepts and themes throughout its many games, including musical elements. When it comes to famous boss fights, “Battle on the Big Bridge” is one such theme. This musical thread continues throughout other *Final Fantasy* games that feature similar encounters with Gilgamesh, each a new rendition of this bombastic theme, which fits his personality perfectly. These cameos eventually gave the piece its secondary

name. In this arrangement, we continue this idea of bringing new musical styles to classic themes, including the addition of excerpts from another Final Fantasy game. Hard rock and Latin stylings are blended with the title screen music from the *Final Fantasy XIV: Shadowbringers* expansion, “Fourfold Knowing,” to create a new, dynamic presentation of this iconic theme.

The Prelude

Final Fantasy Series (1987-2023)

Nobuo Uematsu

Arr. Zeynep Dilli

You put in the cartridge, double-click the game icon, select the game, and press “X”—a moment of loading, maybe an opening cinematic, then up pops the splash screen: white background, the characteristic font, the number, the stylized logo, and...a series of arpeggios, in a soundfont or sample or instrument depending on which era we’re in, with the same fundamental chord progression—in the first iterations repeating just by itself, but after a few years, gaining an overlaying melody. The first piece of *Final Fantasy* music any player had ever heard. Sometimes called the “Crystal Theme,” occasionally quoted within the game or during the end credits, endlessly played around with, varied, and adapted by every composer who contributed to the series after Uematsu—36 years of video game music history, with about as iconic a stature as a piece of music can have, this is “The Prelude.”

This arrangement is built to convey a sense of self-awareness, so to speak, on the part of this piece itself. Layer by layer, we witness as the orchestra teaches each other this piece of history, or rather, as the piece discovers itself, builds itself up: The immediately identifiable major add-2 chord arpeggio first, next the full chord progression, then the arpeggios with their correct inversions, then the full arpeggio progression, then bits and pieces of the descant melody... and finally, everything put together, presented now delicately, now with a sense of humor, now in its full power and glory, and finally, sweetly, calling back to stories that were, looking ahead to stories that will be. For this is The Prelude: End of our concert and our album, beginning of what comes next for all of us, audience and musicians alike.

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