

VGM special
video game music

star wax

DJ lifestyle magazine

Star Wax n°79 / English version brought to you by Compos-it / 1982, San Diego © Ira Nowinski

DETROIT RISING

LUSH GROOVES VOL #1,2,3

JIMPSTER, KAIDI TATHAM,
SPINNA, KAI ALCE, EVM 128

MATICA, STREETON, DON SURF,
BRUK ROGERS, RALPH SESSION,
MAKEZ, CRACKAZAT

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Records

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Today, we're diving into video game culture through the lens of music. The website senscritique.com categorizes games into eighty styles, including *eroge*, a type of Japanese video game with erotic content. Naturally, there's always a YouTuber looking for a great idea to create a buzz. Search for "Eroge VGM," and the engine will find: "ベストエゲソング 2021 - BestErogeSong 2021," which are very pop-oriented songs, often with a fast tempo, a modern Japanese music, such as city pop or J-pop (terms that emerged in the 80s). Japanese record stores are known for being very well-stocked; you can sometimes even find gems never seen before, especially when it comes to video games. However, if the Land of the Rising Sun is hardly known for having invented an international music style its certainly the cradle of video game music according to most people! Contrary to the popular belief that gaming was an invention of Western engineers, the Japanese *riposte* has been so wide that the list of VGM Japanese composers is almost neverending. Their influences are varied; for example, the music of Yuzo Koshiro draws from new wave, nascent electronic music and melodies by Mozart, Bach and Beethoven due to his classical training. It's also difficult not to mention Yellow Magic Orchestra, which offers techno pop and was already sampling sounds from games like "Circus" and "Gun Fight" for their self-titled debut album in 1978. When listening to game soundtracks, there's some very good stuff, some mediocre stuff and some that are simply insignificant. Some record store owners confidently believe there's a vinyl record for every customer, no matter how weird. Of course, everyone is differently sensitive to vibrations and some people look for specific samples or particular covers. This is the case for VGM collectors, who are often also addicted to video games. Even though men dominate among composers, the profile of gamers is mixed. According to a study by the French video game publishers' association (Syndicat des éditeurs de logiciel de loisirs) conducted with Médiamétrie, the average gamer in France is 40 years old and 60% report having made online friendships through gaming. But what does VGM mean?

In 50 years, video game music or VGM, has traveled far and wide. In the age of the internet and streaming, 8-bit music related to the chiptune movement remains creative and trendy, reaching up millions of views.

You can find a retro gaming culture fan group on Facebook with over 400,000 nostalgic members... The figures are staggering. AA refers to mid-range games with production budgets ranging from 3 to 20 million euros. Developing an AAA video game represents an investment of between 100 and 200 million euros, or even 500 million for a blockbuster like "Red Dead Redemption." That is an amount worthy of the biggest film productions. When you compare this to DIY developers who create high-quality games with tiny teams, it's quite something to think about. Video game music, like the culture surrounding it, is an art form in its own right. Music serves to enhance the game's narrative and some composers have achieved star status. Nonetheless, compared to the overall game development budget, music still represents a relatively small portion of the budget.

The gaming phenomenon is amazing! Today, composers are emerging from all over the globe. Visual and audio aesthetics are constantly evolving. Its music is also being performed live in huge venues; VGM Con 2024's Warp Stage hosted the Baltimore Gamer Symphony Orchestra for their tenth anniversary. At the beginning of 2026, Conduit Winter Park in Orlando celebrated the 40th anniversary of Zelda. In France, tickets for Ankama's 25th anniversary concert at the end of 2026 are on sale... Those unfamiliar with video games may not know that there are also national video game museums in many countries and the Philharmonie de Paris is hosting an exhibition until the end of October 2026. We also observe National Video Game Day on September 12th. The magnetism of VGM is such that it is now being featured in TV series, advertising, and films. And some labels are specializing in VGM. All these are good reasons to dig through the ever-growing VGM record crates...

Given the time constraints for this special VGM edition and since none of our members speak Japanese, we have assembled a panel of Western activists without neglecting the contribution of Japanese culture. And for those who want to dig deeper, downloads.khinsider.com lists a total of 101,247 albums or more than three million tracks. Star wax magazine: 100% produced with AI - Analog intelligence - for 20 years!

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03 - Editorial	04 - Summary
06 - The history of VGM	
14 - Aleksandria Migova	
22 - LudoWic	28 - Fran Romguier
34 - Yann Van Der Cruyssen	
38 - Mobile Suits focus	
44 - Rare Wax by 2080	
48 - Menu Best Of	



IN FIFTY YEARS, THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY HAS REVOLUTIONIZED THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY TO THE POINT OF GENERATING MORE PROFITS THAN THE FILM INDUSTRY. FOR THIS SPECIAL VGM (VIDEO GAME MUSIC) ISSUE, WE REVISIT THIS HISTORY: THE TRANSITION FROM ANALOG TO DIGITAL, WHERE THE VISUAL AND SOUND AESTHETICS OF VIDEO GAMES EVOLVED ALONGSIDE TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN AUDIO CARDS, GRAPHICS CARDS AND COMPUTER PROCESSORS. COMPOSERS WHO LIKE RECLUSES IN THEIR HOME STUDIOS ARE STILL THE LAST LINK IN THE GAME CREATION CHAIN. FOCUS ON THESE GENERATIONS WHO DEVELOPED MINIMAL 8-BIT MUSIC IN ADAPTIVE MUSIC USING AUDIO MIDDLEWARE.

Beginnings

Pinball is derived from a game of Bagatelle, a French creation and Japanese billiards. Developed in Chicago in the 1930s, it is considered the ancestor of video games. Pinball machines became electronic in the 1970s. During the same period, the early stages of video games in laboratories began in 1947, but public access happened in 1972. While millions of Americans had invested in a television, engineer Ralph Baer began to study the possibility of playing video games on a television. Between 1966 and 1969, he and his colleagues Bill Harrison and Bill Rusch developed several prototypes, culminating in the Brown Box, the first multiplayer and multi-program video game system. Then, the first home console appeared on the market in September 1972. A month later, "Pong" was released. According to the National Museum of American History, Atari and other companies were sued for patent infringement. Undeniably, this kick-starts the business of home consoles, arcades and 8-bit music.

Japanese riposte

In 1977, the American company released the Atari 2600 home console, a pioneer in first-person shooter video games and the Color TV Game. Nintendo's first console was designed exclusively for the Japanese market. In 1978, "Space Invaders" is considered the first game with a continuous soundtrack. In Japan, very young musicians joined Falcom, pioneers of video role-playing games and formed a sound production team. This small-scale video game publishing and development company launched its first game for the PC-8801 in 1982, a computer not commercially available in any other country. 1982 also saw the launch of the Commodore 64 computer. This period is considered the golden age of gaming; job opportunities were plentiful, but video game soundtracks were not yet released on vinyl.

From 8 to 16 bits

The first crash occurred at the end of 1983, and until then, Western composers were largely unknown. This coincided with the arrival of the Japanese NES and Famicom consoles. They became available in Europe in 1987 and over 1200 games were developed specifically for the Famicom. The 1980s are considered the golden age of the video game OST vinyl business. Haruomi Hosono's "Game Music" was released by Yen Records in 1984. It is considered the first video game music and chiptune vinyl.

In England, another pioneer composer, Rob Hubbard, immersed himself in computer programming languages. He notably worked on "Goldrunner" released in 1987. Memory cards became more powerful. High-pitched melodies became a signature sound. Music could compensate for things that the still-simplified graphics could not show. This marked the beginning of the 16-bit era with the Japanese release of the PC Engine. In 1988, Hiroyuki Kawada composed the music for "Winning Run," the first true 3D racing arcade game. Revitalizing a market that would remain popular, especially in East and Southeast Asia. In 1989, the Game Boy from the Japanese company Nintendo revolutionized gaming with its pocket-sized format allowing players to play anywhere. Yuzo Koshiro, who had been looking for a developer job a few years earlier was hired as a composer. Thanks to his open-mindedness and classical music training. This speaks volumes about the numerous musical influences found in his compositions... After composing over 100 tracks for Nihon Falcom, he left the company, which failed to credit him. He continued as a freelancer working for various companies, notably Sega, for whom he composed part of the OST for "The Revenge of Shinobi" (1989). Unusually for the time, Koshiro's name appeared on the game's title screen.



The 1990s

This was the transition from 2D to 3D and music evolved with fewer iterations. Some spoke of a renaissance thanks to "Street Fighter II" and beat 'em up action games. The Maruyama club was already hosting Tokyo Gamers Night Groove parties, as Tadashi Daiba reported via x.com. Meanwhile, Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima shared a passion for clubbing and composed the soundtrack for "Streets of Rage 2" under the influence of early techno-gabber. The digital age and democratizing analog polyphonic synthesizers opened up a world of possibilities for electronic music. Thanks to richer sounds. Composers and sound designers worked hand in hand. Prodigy, Leftfield, and Chemical Brothers, future legends of electronic music, appeared as early as 1995 on the soundtrack of the game "Wipe Out," which was released on CD only. This year coincided with the release of the PlayStation and the Sega Saturn. While it received less media attention, remix culture was beginning to explode. Englishman Ray Keith offered a jungle-infused reinterpretation of "Jazz Step Mix," a track by Shinji Hosoe for the game "Ridge Racer," which was also released on a 12-inch single by JVC Records. The widespread adoption of 32/54-bit machines, allowing for higher sampling rates, enabled composers to establish themselves alongside their productions.

The 2000s

The early 2000s pushed the boundaries of the genre, marking a new era for video games with the release of the PS3, Wii, and Xbox 360. However, compared to the overall game development process, music still held relatively little importance. With few exceptions, the interplay between music, game design and narrative was not yet fully integrated. Ubisoft launched Ubisoft Music. Synchronization, the process of clarifying rights for music in films, commercials or video games was expensive. Industry leaders understood this well, so they developed catalogs with in-house productions. This was welcome news for beatmakers looking to supplement their income. Some even made it their primary occupation. The constellation surrounding video game music was significant and record labels also capitalized on the vinyl revival. Box sets and reissues are among the merchandise covered by fans. Some pressings are already collector's items. Meanwhile, mobile games are booming for startups. They are also released regularly, especially as more and more games transition from mobile to console markets. This enthusiasm doesn't always lead to higher quality because composers are often forced to use VSTs to create orchestral tracks.

The music production is still uneven. When it's inspired by 80s productions and sounds raw and unpolished, I struggle a bit, but nostalgic fans are delighted. On the other hand, a meticulously crafted orchestral soundtrack is powerful but it reminds me of a film score. Risk-taking is rare. Ultimately, sometimes a track that wasn't specifically designed for a game, like "The Commissioner" by XL Middleton for "Street Rage IV," is incredibly effective. Otherwise, "Make This Right" by The Toxic Avenger, heavily influenced by Daft Punk and Lom's bass music tracks for the game "Furi," demonstrate heavy production values. Interest in the game continues to grow as does that of the artists contributing to the music. Producer Danger states: "I learned everything about music by playing video games and watching reruns of cartoons..."

Part of the generation born with the internet uses these games solely for chatting, outside the reach of their parents' social media. It allows them to connect with others in their own community. A massive community that's no longer limited to the Japanese but includes millions of users across all continents. Equally amazing but still rare, are DJs who use their game consoles as computers to manipulate their DVS vinyl mixing systems. French and American rap are also part of the industry. GTA offers its own radio station with a remarkable playlist ranging from G-Funk to Tangerine Dream, Woody Jackson, The Alchemist, Oh No and DJ Shadow. It even offers extended versions that can last up to 45 minutes. The soundtracks of urban sports action games are also experiencing exponential growth. As for skateboarding, the legendary Tony Hawk series demonstrates that rap, rock and dub can coexist. The first edition in 1999 was a bestseller. Since then, other companies have tried to dethrone the legend. There are also parkour, snowboarding and BMX games. "Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2," released in 2001, was a pioneer but the current flagship title, developed by an independent studio, is "Streets of Rage 2" ... Many professions are simulated in games; for example, "House Builder 2" invites players to construct wooden buildings. GTA V also allows players to experience the life of a programmer thanks to the option of managing a nightclub by inviting real-world DJs. "Beatmania," released in 1998 by Konami, sold millions of copies of a game where players embody a DJ who must manipulate a mixing console; see the attached photo of its arcade version, which exists in 25 different models... And DropMix was launched in 2017 but was abandoned...



Ultimately, in 2026, there's still no convincing game for DJs, graffiti artists or beatmakers... So, isn't software like Complete 15 Ultimate connected to Machine as a console, the perfect game where you're the soundtrack hero?

Visually, "Flight Simulator" is stunningly realistic and augmented reality games are booming. The community loves merchandise: plush toys, figurines, clothes, books and vinyl records. There are even E-sports arenas, places of entertainment and technological innovation dedicated to video games. Live bands are frequent and VGM performs in the biggest venues... But in this Eldorado, all is not so easy. Several voices claim that independent video games are increasingly overshadowing the giants.

Indie studios made a historic breakthrough in 2025, joining the exclusive club of Game of the Year contenders. Congratulations to the French studio Sandfall and composer Laurien Testard. In an industry shaken by declining entertainment spending and the arrival of ready-made game engines, will the latter become the former? This recent social phenomenon has been the subject of study for ten years in France and for three decades across the Atlantic. And it's not just vinyl records that are becoming collector's items. In 2020, Heritage Auctions sold a prototype console for \$360,000. And the American National Video Game Museum is proud to share its acquisition of a prototype that never saw the light of day but which inspired the legendary Nintendo PlayStation.

IN JAPAN, THE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES IS INSEPARABLE FROM MUSICAL CREATION. AS EARLY AS THE 1970s, THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS SECTOR WAS NOT MERELY A TECHNOLOGY OR A FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT: IT WAS ALSO A TOTAL SPACE WHERE IMAGE, SOUND, DESIGN, AND STORYTELLING MERGE. AT THE CROSSROADS OF THESE COMPLEMENTARY WORLDS EMERGED A KEY FIGURE: RYÜICHI SAKAMOTO...

TOKYO CALLING

In the late 1970s, Japanese companies such as Nintendo, Sega, and Namco transformed arcade halls into genuine cultural laboratories. Games such as Tetris, Pac-Man, and Super Mario became global phenomena. Driven by exponential growth, Japan became the world's nerve centre for the video game industry during the 1990s, generating billions of dollars in revenue and becoming a cornerstone of the national economy. Today, the archipelago ranks as the world's third-largest video game market, behind China and the United States, generating more than \$17 billion annually (source: French Video Game Agency, Newzoo 2025 study).

Particularly dynamic, this sector—embraced by all generations in Japan, where roughly one in two people plays video games—exports not only consoles but also franchises, soundtracks, technologies, and an aesthetic promoted through the Cool Japan initiative, a soft-power strategy that also encompasses manga, anime, and music. Although its influence is now challenged by South Korea, especially in terms of international visibility, Japan continues to cultivate a distinctive emotional approach, far removed from the United States, where game music was long regarded as little more than background accompaniment. As a member of the group Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO), alongside multi-instrumentalist Haruomi Hosono and drummer-singer Yukihiko Takahashi, Ryūichi Sakamoto played an active role in this artistic revolution from the late 1970s onward. Building on the legacy of Germany's pioneering electronic scene and its disruptive ensembles, the composer combined synthesizers, digital sounds and rhythms, and a futuristic aesthetic. The connection was striking: many of YMO's timbres and melodies cleverly imitated or reinterpreted the sound effects of arcade games. Intelligent and inventive, this mirror-like relationship can be heard on albums such as *Yellow Magic Orchestra*, *Solid State Survivor*, and the remarkable *Technodelic*.

Beyond YMO's own compositions, the collective's influence can naturally be detected in the work of Koji Kondo, composer of the music for *Super Mario Bros.*, and Nobuo Uematsu, creator of the themes for the *Final Fantasy* series. Significantly, these composers no longer limited themselves to producing jingles, riffs, or incidental musical motifs: they created sophisticated works inspired by classical music, jazz, and techno. At the same time, gaming worlds became populated by cyberpunk aesthetics and occasionally contemplative atmospheres.

Minimalism

Influenced by figures as eclectic as Impressionist pianist Claude Debussy, rock icon David Bowie and his alter ego Aladdin Kane, and producer-songwriter Pierre Barouh, Ryūichi Sakamoto entered the virtual world head-on, creating a series of remarkable musical variations. Building upon a solo career that included albums such as *"Thousand Knives"*, *"Hidari Ude No Yume"*, and *"Neo Geo"*, the refined keyboardist used this discographic experience before ultimately yielding to the attractions of the flourishing image industry. Ironically, outside Japan, high-definition screens have long since eclipsed turntables. Released for the Sega Dreamcast in 2000, the unusual *"L.O.L." (Lack Of Love)* broke with many conventions of the genre through its minimalist inspiration. Published by Sony for the PlayStation 2, *"Seven Samurai 20XX"* drew heavily from *"Seven Samurai"*, the classic film by Akira Kurosawa, which later inspired the Hollywood adaptation directed by John Sturges. Notably, the game reimaged the saga through a blend of tradition and futurism, featuring artwork by the legendary comic-book creator Jean Giraud, better known as Moebius. Finally, the accomplished keyboardist and composer took a detour with *Enemy Zero*, an alternative production by Kenji Eno, whose soundtrack responsibilities were later entrusted to Michael Nyman, the composer, conductor, and critic closely associated with filmmakers Peter Greenaway and Jane Campion. Significantly, both Yellow Magic Orchestra and Ryūichi Sakamoto helped disseminate techniques borrowed from Western cinema through the medium of digital screens. This skilful adaptation of audiovisual grammar now combines with recurring heroes, dramatic narrative structures, and, more broadly, the themes and values embodied by the protagonists of contemporary video games.



Ryūichi Sakamoto



TOP 11 VGM REC ORDS

Masaya Matsuura / Parappa The Rapper
picture disque... (Vacuum Records - 1997)



Yasunori Mitsuda & Millenial Fair /
20th Anniversary Chrono Trigger/ Chrono
Cross (Square Enix Music - 2015)



Kuniaki Haishima / Kowloon's Gate
(Great Tracks - 2019)



Miho Nakayama / Mind Game Lp
(King Records - 1988)



Jun Chiki Chikuma / Bomberman Hero
(NTT Publishing - CD in 1998 and
Magic Burn Records - vinyl in 2021)



Chipzel / Super Hexagon 10-inch
shape disc (iam8bit - 2015)



Danger / Haven OST 2xLp
limited edition (G4F Record - 2022)



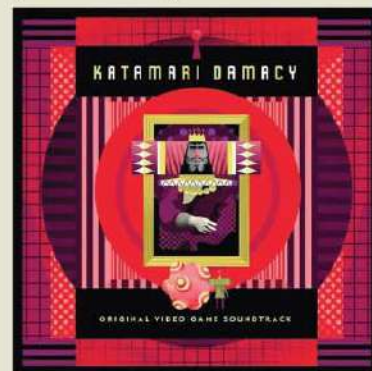
Michiru Oshima / The Weathering Continent
OST Vol.2 Cd (Victor - 1993)



Amon Tobin / Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell:
Chaos Theory 2xLp (Ninja Tune - 2005)



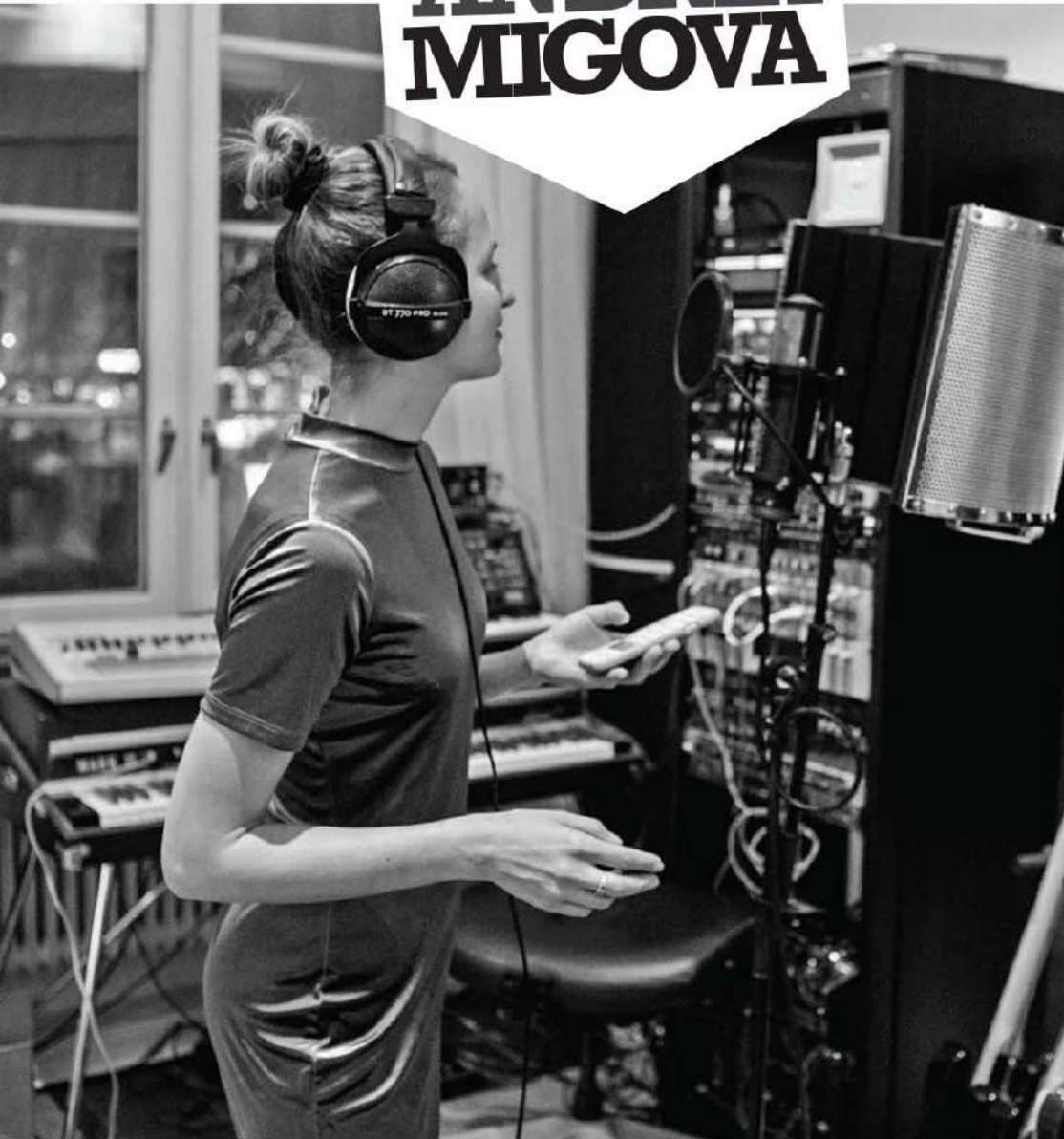
V-A / Katamari Damacy Lp
(Mondo - 2018)



Blueshift Big Band / Joystick Jazz Vol.2
(iam8bit - 2024)



ALEKS ANDRIA MIGOVA



AS A TEENAGER, ALEKSANDRIA MIGOVA DISCOVERED POST-SOVIET'S UNDERGROUND ELECTRONIC MUSIC SCENE. CAPTIVATED BY THE NIGHTLIFE AND THE FRENCH CULTURE, SHE LEFT HER NATIVE COUNTRY IN 2005 TO LIVE IN PARIS. DETERMINED TO PURSUE A CAREER IN MUSIC, SHE BECAME A DJ WHILE STUDYING AT EICAR, AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF AUDIOVISUAL CREATION. SHE BEGAN TO PRODUCE DEEP HOUSE BUT SHE GAINED RECOGNITION AS A COMPOSER FOR VGM. SHE IS NOTABLY THE COMPOSER BEHIND THE SOUNDTRACK FOR "BATTLERITE" IN 2016, AND MORE RECENTLY FOR "MADNESS" AND "V REING." AN INTERVIEW WITH A CREATIVE SELF-TAUGHT, PASSIONISTA AND FOUNDER OF THE KOHDU RECORDS LABEL.

Welcome, a glass of...

I chose kombucha. When I go out, I usually go for a champagne or a Tequila Mule.

Where and how was the environment where you grew up? Were vinyl records...

I grew up in an environment passionate about music, and I think I learned to feel and perceive it from the very beginning of my existence. My parents often listened to full concert recordings on reel-to-reel tapes. My father was a great vinyl enthusiast and played the guitar. Our room was filled with vinyls and tapes, large speakers, and all kinds of music players. My mother often said he spent more money on music than on the household. He introduced me to quality bands and artists such as Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, The Beatles, Scorpions, The Animals, Nazareth, Queen, and The Doors. I believe he was an unrealized artistic soul, trapped in a terrible place called the USSR, where the day your dreams were born, they could be destroyed the next day. My mother, with her softer and more poetic side, introduced me to legendary pop icons like Madonna, Sade, Prince, Roxette, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, ABBA, Eurythmics, and many more. My grand parents would always sing Ukrainian folk songs during family gatherings and celebrations. I've also been singing since I was very young, both at school and at home, always putting on little shows for guests. Later, when I was eight, my mother met a new partner. That's when my stepfather came into my life with his refined taste in cinema. Thanks to him, I discovered film music. He bought me cassette tapes with soundtracks by Ennio M., James Horner, Vangelis, and many others, which I loved listening to for hours. At that time, c.A.T.u. was extremely popular, and I was in a relationship with a girl. Circa 2003 I discovered the electronic scene, she was the one who took me to clubs and secret parties, where they played Deep Tech House and Electro-clash — and wow, for the first time, I felt the real groove and bass in my chest. That was the moment I told myself, "This is it. I want to create musical journeys and ignite people's hearts with hypnotic vibes." At one of those parties someone told me that a clothing and vinyl shop was hiring and since every Friday there were DJs who came to mix and promote their music. After finishing school at 17, I accepted the job and met DJ.

I came from a modest family with no means to buy turntables, so I started mixing on Cubase Pro. I wanted to earn some money to pay for recording sessions and eventually move to France.

You moved to France and became a DJ. What was the turning point for you and did you start with music production or DJing?

Why France? I've always been fascinated by the French language. Its melody has haunted me since I was seven, when I heard Mylène Farmer on television. I made a promise to my mother: one day, I would speak and sing in French. I wanted to pursue an artistic career, which I knew at the time was practically impossible in most post-Soviet countries without connections, money, or if you were not willing to get laid with producers. So, I moved to Paris in 2005. I enrolled in a language school, learned French, and in 2007, I was admitted to EICAR, a film school, where I met new influential people. That period of my life truly expanded my network and built immense confidence. The real turning point came one night in a club, when my new friend Maria introduced me to an agent, saying, "I'd like you to meet Migova, she's a great DJ, you have to book her." The funny thing is, the agent offered me a set for the very next weekend. I haven't even had the gear, and I'd never really practiced! I urgently bought second-hand CDJ-200s and borrowed a DJM mixer—I had only one week to prepare. Completely crazy! Anyway, my first set was a success, and I enjoyed every single moment.

Later you lived in Oslo? What are your best memories as a DJ from that time?

My best memories from Oslo are those moments of diving into music production, thanks to my husband, Johan Ilves, who has been teaching and mentoring me since we moved in together in 2011. I knew I had some kind of musical gift, but I didn't yet have the tools or the knowledge to apply it. I've always been comfortable with computers and technology, so learning to make beats using DAWs and VSTs was pretty easy for me. Together, we produced our first track, Femme Desire, which was signed to Noir Music and remixed by Adana Twins—an unforgettable moment.

We were later invited to perform at Villa Club, Jaeger, and the Midnight Sun Festival in Værøy, where I had the pleasure of meeting many artists. Those private parties at friends' homes in Oslo were sometimes even more fun. I've always preferred small dance floors. So, for example, performing in the RedBox at Space in Ibiza was my ultimate dream.

Then you moved to Spain, why and what do you miss about France?

France will always be something I miss, because it's the country where my identity was formed. That's where I started as an artist, and this language will stay close to my heart for life. But I try not to go back anymore — it brings up too many memories that unsettle my mind: the madness of youth, friends I've lost, philosophical thoughts; wondering what my life would be like today if I had stayed in Paris... My very first trip to Spain was a four-day trip to Ibiza with my boyfriend (my future husband), back in 2010. It was a straight dive into madness, the ultimate dream destination for DJs. Probably the most expensive short vacation of my life. When I got back home, I didn't even have enough money left to buy a Burger King meal. And yet, I have no regrets. I needed to feel that connection, the energy, the vibe of the island, that sense of mental freedom, and to be aligned with the people of my tribe. So my husband and I worked hard, saved money, and four years later, we moved to Ibiza. The magnetism of the island was too strong, along with this feeling of being exactly where I belonged, where I could truly be myself and live in a society that thinks outside the box. For me, Ibiza isn't exactly Spain. It is very international. I often said it felt like another planet, with its own rules and rhythms, like powerful waves that either knock you over or carry you along in harmony. After a few years in this paradise, I managed to build some networks and work opportunities, even had a few gigs, but financially it wasn't easy. So, we went back to Sweden. It was at that time that I got the opportunity to work on Stunlock Studio's new game, "Battlerite". My journey as a composer really began like this.

Working in a home studio versus DJing at night are two different worlds...

For me, the difference between being a DJ and a composer, I'd say, is loneliness and the feedback. As a composer, sometimes I have to wait five years or even longer to find out if people truly connect with my music. When performing as a DJ, you instantly feel the energy from the crowd, and it's a priceless feeling. Not knowing whether your music resonates can be very frustrating. I'm a pretty restless extrovert, so performing on stage, where I can dance and meet people, suits my personality and lifestyle much better than staying cooped up in a studio all day. Though with age, I've come to appreciate working from home, surrounded by my three cats, and being able to sleep well at night. The older you get, the more fragile your body becomes, and proper rest is essential, something that's much harder to achieve with a DJ lifestyle. Well, in any case, I'm grateful to have experienced both of these careers. I don't regret anything, and I can always do small selective gigs from time to time.

How did you come to compose your first track for a video game? Do you often play games?

When I started producing deep house and techno in 2011, my husband used to tell me that I was overloading my beats with too many melodic parts and that it wouldn't work for the electronic scene. Loops with simple 4-tone hooks were trendy at the time, and there wasn't even a "Melodic Techno" category on Beatport yet. I was ahead of my time with my creations. I felt limited, like a fish in a small aquarium, when I had the potential to explore the whole musical ocean.

In 2014, I jumped in to help my husband with some melodies and harmonies for the electronic soundtrack of "Dead Island Epidemic" that he had been working on. He immediately realized that music came to me naturally, probably thanks to my absolute pitch, sound memory, and the way I use my own voice as a musical instrument. Then, in early 2016, my husband was hired as marketing director at Stunlock Studios, and one day he suggested I try composing the music for their Battlerite game announcement trailer. I knew how to work in the DAW, but I had never composed anything cinematic before, so I was a bit scared. Well, I accepted the challenge — my inner voice was calling. I just followed my instincts and did everything intuitively. I enjoy immersive, atmospheric, and mysterious games, with exploration, puzzles, and shooter mechanics. I usually play 2 to 3 times a year, when I have some time between deadlines. It's mainly to get inspired, but also to escape into another world. I just discovered the remastered version of "Metroid Prime" and was completely captivated!

"As a composer, I have to wait longer to find out if people truly connect with my music than when I performing as a DJ."



Game designs are becoming increasingly realistic; for example, the Lumpini Garden in Bangkok has been used as a map in "Battlefield 4". How do you evoke emotions...

The realism of the art style doesn't change the way I compose. My process stays the same, and just because the graphics are realistic doesn't affect my ability to be creative and evoke emotions in the players.

Your latest work for "V Rising" seems more orchestral, cinematic, less electronic. Tell us more about your creative process; how was it different from your previous compositions?

I'm not entirely sure, but I think I use a fairly unique approach to creating orchestral music. It usually starts with defining the mood. I hear the opening tones in my head, I sing them, and then I find them on my keyboard while recording in real time. From there, I listen to this intro on repeat, and the next melodic ideas start to appear. I don't hear full chords in my head; I layer the keys step by step, and when everything clicks harmonically, I have a complete composition. The main difference from my previous works is that for the "V Rising" soundtrack, I focused more on the vampire theme and atmosphere, letting carefully chosen instruments and gothic, melancholic melodies carry the narrative, rather than relying on looped beats or electronic textures. For the creative process, I usually start from the game's concept art and environment descriptions. I asked the developers for directions and some music references to make sure I captured their vision. Then I received early gameplay builds to refine the pacing and tempo of the music. It's hard to explain exactly how it all comes together, especially since I don't have an academic background in music. But when I work with the right theme, I connect to a sort of cosmic source, and the music flows through me into my DAW.

Your compositions for "Pocket Politics 2" sound different; it's yet another approach. What was your mindset, your process? And is it different because it's a mobile game?

What sets this project apart from an open-world game like "V Rising" is that "Pocket Politics 2" is a mobile game with clearly defined, limited areas in biomes that unlock gradually as you progress. For this project, I received specific directions: each track needed to be an "endless loop" of precise length and with music themes that matched the "cartoon" gameplay. Creating happy and quirky music was a challenge for me, as I'm usually more comfortable working with dark, melancholic themes. However, my previous experience as a DJ and beats producer helped me quickly and almost effortlessly build the structure of each track. The developers were very satisfied with the result.

For "Battlelrite" you sampled a more than 50k year-old Neanderthal flute. Do you use more samples, play instruments, or collaborate with guest musicians?

For this particular track, I used a Waveform Audio file of the neanderthal flute that I found in an article about archaeological discoveries. The performer played the flute using a variety of techniques, showcasing what this ancient instrument was capable of. The pitch range was somewhat limited, so I essentially built Battlelrite's Prehistoric Theme around the available pre-recorded notes. When I work, I use my voice as an instrument to help me find the lead melody, mood, and even the chord progression. For example, I sing over the initial key, layering notes with my voice. I've only worked with guest musicians once, for Battlelrite's Main Theme, but I found the process quite complex and somewhat out of my control. I generally prefer to do everything myself. Occasionally, I let my husband do the soundcheck. He reviews my mix, and I take notes for further refinements. Having a fresh pair of ears is always welcome.

Your compositions seem to be moving away from your electronic music roots, but your compositions for "Source Of Madness" in 2022 are an exception?

This independent developer gave me complete creative freedom. It was a level-based roguelike game, where rhythmic loop-based compositions work particularly well. The game design was perfectly suited to an orchestral-hybrid sound with electronic elements. It's not the only soundtrack I've created using this approach, I also worked this way on "Astral Awaken Blade" and "Mote Mancer", and on my new project currently in development, "Symbiosis".

Are there any gimmicks to identify VGM composers? Do you have any, or do you make a point of reinventing yourself each time?

Every composer who doesn't copy others develops unique gimmicks. It could be melodic hooks, like in James Horner's music, or distinctive instrument choices and rhythmic patterns, as often heard in Hans Zimmer's work. When listening to Danny Elfman's scores across different films, you can recognize similarities in how he builds melodies, moods, and rhythms. People often say I have a recognizable musical signature. I don't make a conscious effort to preserve it. I create music the way I feel it, using my favorite VST libraries, and it ends up sounding like me. Of course, I listen to other composers and draw inspiration before every project, but I never try to replicate anyone else's work.

Why Kohdu Studios, how has your equipment evolved since your beginnings?

It's a long story, but I'll try to keep it short. My husband is half Estonian, half Swedish. His grandfather had a project for the Estonian community called "Metsakodu", which means "Forest Home." The idea was to name our label and studio Kodu, like a home for artists. But we couldn't use that name because Microsoft had already reserved all the rights. So we changed it to Kohdu. My studio setup has evolved in a slightly chaotic way, mostly because of all the relocations I've gone through over the past fifteen years. It started very simply: a PC and a pair of speakers. Then I bought a Novation keyboard. The plastic, clacky feel of the keys was pretty awful, but at the time, I was grateful for anything that got the job done. Over the years, I gradually collected some hardware synths, part of which I later sold when we were moving to Sweden. When I shifted toward cinematic production, the focus shifted to high-quality VST libraries, which are very CPU-intensive. That meant a major PC upgrade, and I also upgraded my speakers. The more seriously you take music production, the more solid and professional your gear needs to be. Today, I'm pretty happy with my studio setup. I finally have a proper desk with an extendable keyboard shelf. Well, I'm still missing some acoustic treatment.

What is your relationship with vinyl today? How many records do you have in your private collection and what genres? And what do you think about the current vinyl hype in the VGM scene?

I inherited about 30 vinyls from my father—well, that's what I could bring home by airplane. I've never counted them all, but I probably have around 100 vinyls in my collection. Most of them are movie scores and albums from iconic rock and pop artists, and a couple of soundtracks from favorite video games. I also have about 150 LP copies of our project "Hold The Sun", which we started with my husband in 2019 but had to put on hold during the pandemic. Still, I have some great memories from that time, including the very first and last gig we did in Sweden. I think vinyl has gained popularity not just in the video game world, but in general. People are rediscovering the experience of enjoying their favorite music on record rather than streaming it at lower quality. I'm thrilled about this trend, and I can't wait to release another vinyl for my next game project.

Do you remember your reaction when you first held the vinyl record with one of your songs...

I felt a mix of affirmation and intense emotions: joy, overflowing hope, and a strong desire to keep going... but also a touch of sadness, because I wished I could share that moment with my father and grandmother, who were no longer there, and show them that I had succeeded.



Have you considered releasing your solo album?

I have a bunch of unfinished deep house, techno, and electronica drafts on my hard drive that could eventually become an EP or a solo album. For now, though, I'm fully focused on my current video game projects. I'm also aiming to break into the film industry. Writing music for a feature-length film is definitely on my bucket list. Let's see what the future holds.

Furthermore, your compositions often delve into morbid and vampiric themes, but you like what is organic...

In life, I'm really drawn to anything organic. Nature, animals, and simple things help me stay grounded and balanced. Outside of work, I love taking care of my houseplants and my three cats, watching old movies, doing yoga, walking along the sea, and traveling whenever I can. I usually listen to playlists like Café del Mar or film/game scores. Honestly, I haven't had much time to explore new artists outside of composers, but everything I experience and feel continues to feed my creative universe.

Do you have a passion for Japan?

When I was little, I played video games on my Dendi, a licensed hardware clone of the Nintendo, where I heard a lot of chiptune music. One of my favorites was the "RoboCop 3 (NES) Music - Title Theme". The intro reminded me of the falling stars. Visiting Japan, and especially walking around Kyoto and Nara, really let me feel where that creativity comes from: the source of the gaming experiences I loved as a kid. Japan's landscapes were so colorful and picturesque that I could almost hear the themes from "Zelda" playing in my head. One of the most breathtaking moments was stepping into the famous Arashiyama Bamboo Forest. It was so peaceful and quiet that I almost felt a panic attack coming on, but then my husband took my hand and helped me calm down. After a few minutes, I was able to fully embrace the magic of the place. I must, of course, mention how delighted I was to see such love and care for cats in Japan. For someone like me, who has shared my entire life with these furry companions and adopted three cats over the past ten years, it was an absolute joy. Seeing all the cute cat statues and visiting the cat cafés created so many lovely memories! Another special experience was visiting the Golden-Gai in Tokyo. We met so many interesting people in those cozy bars, and it was a lot of fun connecting with the locals. Overall, Japanese people - even those who didn't speak English - were incredibly friendly and polite. I hope I'll have the chance to return one day and continue exploring this wonderful country!

Which VGM composers fascinate you, and is there any studio or game you dream of collaborating with?

I'm fascinated by Austin Wintory's work and absolutely in love with his "Journey" and "Abzu" soundtracks. Gareth Coker creates truly magical music for the "Ori" series. Another favorite video game composer of mine is Inon Zur; I can listen to those atmospheric "Fallout" soundtracks over and over again. Jeremy Soule has also been a huge inspiration, especially the "Skyrim: Elder Scrolls" OST. Michael McCann is incredible, particularly for "XCOM: Enemy Unknown". My dream would be to collaborate with any of these composers. As for the studio, I'm not chasing any particular one. What I'm really hoping for is the opportunity to create music for an immersive game with atmospheric, hypnotic, surreal, and cosmic vibes.

Can you explain what a cyberpunk theme is?

Just a few decades ago, when we were watching movies like "Blade Runner", "Akira", "Ghost in the Shell", or "The Matrix", cyberpunk felt like something from a distant future. Today, we're living in it. Chipped animals and people, advanced intuitive prosthetics that help the injured walk flawlessly, fully automated AI hospitals, VR, drone, and hybrid warfare. When it comes to music, the first thing that comes to mind is Vangelis and his score for "Blade Runner". Personally, I've never really had the chance to work with this theme myself, so I hope that one day I'll get the right game or film project to further explore my musical skills.

Video games are considered part of a digital universe, how do you perceive AI, do you use it?

Sometimes I use ChatGPT as a tool to help with musical scales, since I don't fully know music theory. It saves me hours of research and lets me focus on creativity. For example, I can ask: "C minor?" or "Which scales work well with A minor so I can add some variation to the soundtrack while keeping it coherent?". AI doesn't replace my creativity—it just speeds up the process, which is really valuable in an industry where everything is stressful, and you have to deliver on time while juggling multiple clients. ChatGPT also helps me correct spelling mistakes since I have dyslexia.

"In 2011 there wasn't even a 'Melodic Techno' category on Beatport yet."

Do you still go to clubs and when you're not composing, how do you listen to music: what kind of format, what genre, could you please share some names?

For the past three years, I only go to very selective events because it's hard to find parties that match my particular taste here in Spain. It's quite niche and not many artists play the music I truly enjoy. I love old-school deep, hypnotic electro, techno, and house. Sven Väth is still one of the few who delivers, so I will try to catch his next performance in Spain. Otherwise, WooMooN at Cova Santa in Ibiza is an event with a very warm atmosphere that I really enjoyed. It feels like a small open-air festival, with several stages, an artisan market, as well as creative activities and workshops. I would definitely go back to the Pikes Hotel during Halloween. It was absolutely one of the most memorable parties I've ever been to. One thing that really bothers me is the crowd with their smartphones. I grew up in an era when only a crew member at the event had a camera, and you had to ask them to take a photo of you. Sometimes, if you were lucky, you would even get featured on the event page. I really miss that time.



"Everyone is gifted, but some people never open their packages."

Last but not least, what is your motto, your personal mantra?

This quote by Aneko Yusagi reflects my daily life perfectly: "It's better to regret trying and failing than to regret not trying at all." I'm sharing this life lesson that I learned when I was only nine years old. There was a kind of City Festival, organized by the local government, where kids could show their love for the city through their art (it could be a song, a poem, or a drawing). The prizes were amazing—Barbie dolls for girls, Lego sets for boys. My mom and stepfather encouraged me to participate because they knew I could sing, act, and paint. But I was so afraid of not winning first place that I didn't try at all. I just watched the other kids perform and receive their awards. Then I was shocked to discover that every single participant got a box of chocolates! I ran into my mom's arms and broke into tears, feeling devastated for not even taking part. Since that day, I've lived by the motto "fearlessly take action." Even if one door closes, another always opens sooner or later. There will be more chances, and I will try to take them all. I also like this quote: "Everyone is gifted, but some people never open their packages."



MATHEUS LODEWIJK IS YET ANOTHER COMPOSER WITH A DIFFERENT TRAJECTORY. BEFORE PLAYING THE MPC, THE DUTCH ARTIST CREATED HIS FIRST DEMOS WITH A ROLAND D20. AS A TEENAGER, HE DEVELOPED A PASSION FOR SYNTHESIZERS AND STARTED OUT PLAYING BASS IN BANDS. HE LATER ENROLLED AT THE ROTTERDAM CONSERVATORY, IN THE JAZZ DEPARTMENT. FROM 2014 ONWARDS, HE DECIDED TO RETURN TO HIS FIRST LOVE, ELECTRONIC MUSIC, UNDER THE ALIAS LUDOWIC. HE ACQUIRED HIS FIRST MODULAR SYNTHESIZER AND IN 2015 HE ADOPTED THE TRAUTONIUM, A RARE ELECTROACOUSTIC INSTRUMENT. HE CO-FOUNDED WIC RECORDINGS, RELEASED SEVERAL DIGITAL TITLES AND LP. HIS WORK STANDS OUT, AND HE WAS INVITED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOUNDTRACKS OF 'KATANA ZERO' AND 'NITRO KIDS'. TODAY HE IS PREPARING HIS 5TH ALBUM 'NUNC STANS'.

Welcome! A glass of...

A glass of water. When it comes to drinks, I'm afraid I'm a boring person.

In what kind of environment did you grow up and did you have vinyl records and music instruments at home?

I grew up in a musical and creative family. From a young age, there were instruments all around me. The piano played a central role, though. On my father's side of the family, there was always a lot of music being made. My mother is particularly creative in the field of handicrafts and always wanted to become a dancer. As for music, there was always a lot of jazz and classical music playing at home. Especially in my younger years, this was mainly vinyl. I can still clearly remember the vinyl record of Charlie Parker Live in Paris. I still have that record. When I was about 15 or 16, I had many friends in the village where I grew up who made music. That is also where my first bands were formed, in which I played my first synthesizer. The Roland D20.

Your first approach to music production?

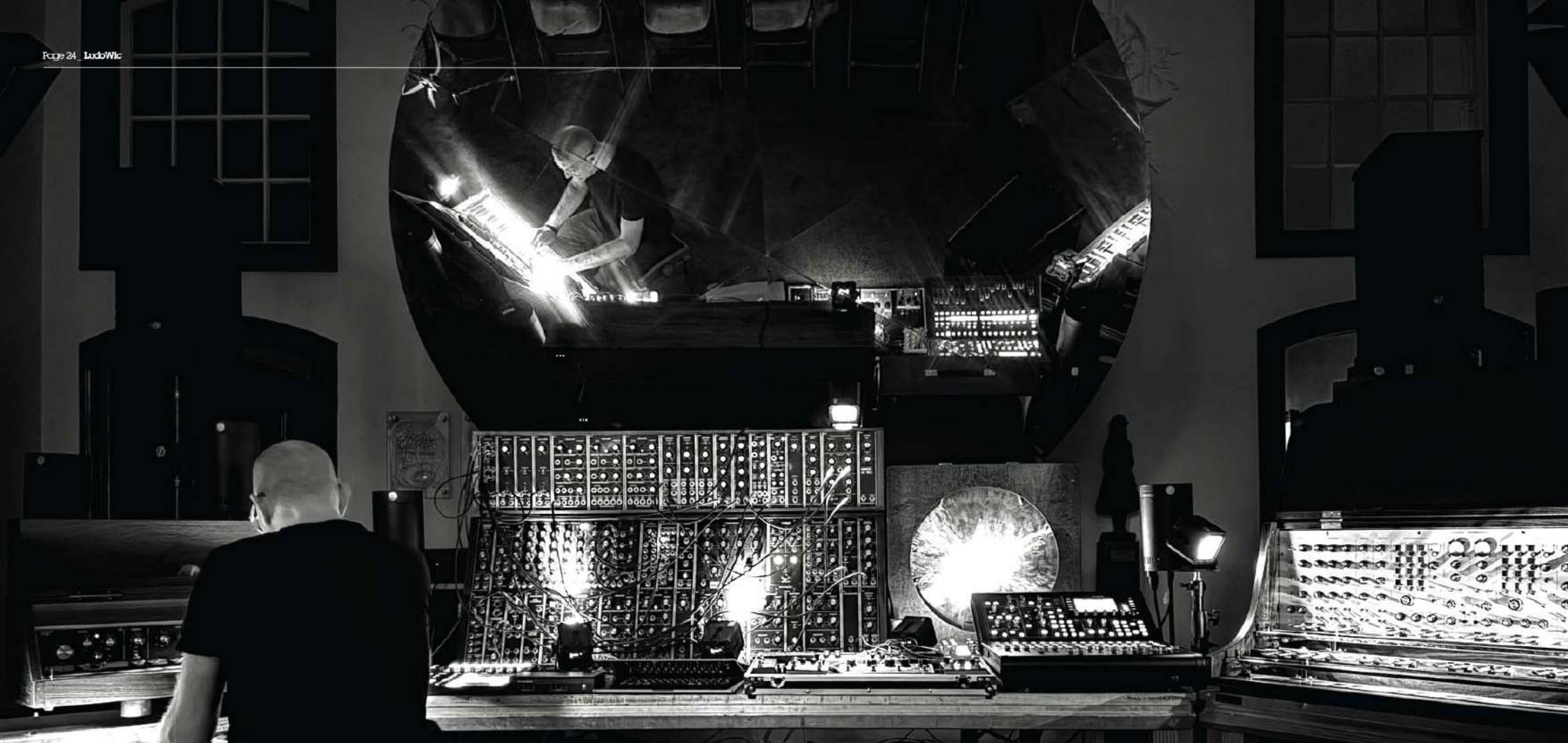
My first experience with music production was making demos on the Roland D20 that I bought when I was 16, in 1989. This synthesizer had a built-in sequencer and a floppy disk. A whole new world opened up for me. Subsequently, with the Akai MPC 2000xl, things became increasingly serious. Around the age of 19, I also started playing bass guitar in various bands. Then, at the age of 21, I began studying at the Rotterdam Conservatory in 1994 at the jazz department. During those years, I focused mainly on bass, and electronic music took a back seat. After the conservatory, I worked for several years as a professional bass player for various well-known Dutch artists, and I worked as a teacher at the Conservatory. But after a few years, I realized that electronic music is ultimately my great love after all. And to be able and willing to fully commit to this again, I stopped playing bass guitar pretty much overnight. I can still remember that very well, because it felt so good. This was 13 years ago now. Since then, I have been working on electronic music under the name LudoWic, which is an old nickname from my childhood.

How has your music production gear evolved since the beginning?

Well, as I mentioned earlier, I started with a Roland D20 and the Akai MPC. But at the age of 21, I was able to buy a Juno 60 at a local music store. It was 1994, and the digital workstations were for sale in the store, while this Juno was placed in the window display merely as a decorative piece. I managed to convince the shop owner to sell that synth for 100 euros. From that day on, I was completely sold on the warm and lively sound of an analog synthesizer. The physical aspect of such an instrument also really appealed to me. From then on, whenever I had money, I started buying synthesizers. Not so much out of a collecting urge, but more out of a desire for discovering sound. First I bought a Korg MS10, which has always remained faithful to me in production, then a Minimoog Model D, Powertran, Modular Synth, EMS Synthi A and E, etc. In recent years, I have increasingly focused on the really very old electronic instruments, such as the Trautonium and the Ondes Martenot. At the same time, I am not necessarily a purist, even though I give that impression. I am not against plugins, for example, and if I find it necessary, I even use them in my productions sometimes. But in the end, 95% of my productions are analog.

When did you start to compose music with modular and did Don Buchla, Suzanne Ciani, John Chowning influence you?

I started with modular in 2014. That was when I bought my first second-hand synthesizers.com system 22. I bought it because I was inspired by Alessandro Cortini, a musician with NIN at the time. A famous Buchla player as well. Through him, I came into contact with the music of Suzanne Ciani and Don Buchla, with whom he also gave a very beautiful performance by the way. I have always felt more drawn to single-brand-systems like the Moog, Buchla, or ARP2500, and less to the Eurorack world. But perhaps that is because there is so overwhelmingly much in that Eurorack world that I may have lost sight of it a bit.



“To capture the rawness that suits this pixel-art game, my starting point was always a synth-jam one-take.”

You seem to have many influences, have you been to Japan? Could you tell us how Japanese art influences your work?

I was in Japan years ago. That was for a tour with a Dutch jazz saxophone player. I didn't see very much of the country and the culture back then, but I have been interested in Japanese culture since childhood. The level of dedication and concentration that seems to exist in that culture is very inspiring to me. In minimal art, Japan has many prominent artists such as the painter Toko Shinoda and composers like Hiroshi Yoshimura and Yoshi Wada, whom I have listened to a lot. There is something about that which I find so fascinating. Perhaps it is the ability to convey the maximum with very little. In particular, I would like to mention the Japanese composer Ryuichi Sakamoto. He has always had a great influence on me. I listen to "Vrioon" weekly, the album in collaboration with the German composer Alva Noto.

In 2015 you launched your label Wic Recordings, do you have any specific vision?

I founded Wic Recordings with my brother Joost Lodewijk. Because I wanted to release music with LudoWic, and I assumed that we wouldn't just be signed by a label, we decided to handle everything entirely independently. The idea of doing as much as possible in-house also suited me at the time. Subsequently, we received more and more requests from electronic artists to release their music on our label, because they were drawn to my music. As a result, it started to grow in a very natural way. The artists we sign are generally artists who sound experimental and unique, usually aimed at a niche scene. It is nice to have my own label, but at the same time, my career as an artist-producer is the most important thing. Releasing my own music under another label always remains an option.

Since when have you been using the Trautonium mixer and what has it brought to your compositions and did you already use it when you composed "Elka Village" out in 2017?

In 2015, I stumbled upon a video on YouTube of an Oskar Sala concert. Oskar Sala is, perhaps the only, renowned player of this instrument. This video hit me like a bomb. I didn't know what I was hearing. The sound and the playing sounded somehow very familiar and known, but at the same time also very strange and unfamiliar. This contrast is something I always look for in art and music. The Trautonium also sits so beautifully at the intersection of electronic and classical music. After watching this video, I was completely convinced that this instrument suits me. First, I acquired the small "Volks-Trautonium." This instrument also appears on track "There Are Moments" from my album "Elka Village". The Trautonium always adds this melancholic touch to the music. But that probably also has to do with my playing.

In 2020 you composed a few tracks for "Katana Zero" OST. Were these pieces from your catalog or did you receive a special order and could you explain your creative process?

In 2015, I was asked to compose music for the indie game "Katana Zero". This came about after the developer Justin Stander saw my synth jams on YouTube, upon the recommendation of a friend. Subsequently, in the years that followed, I began developing these jams into full-fledged songs and composing new music as well. Sometimes I worked on a track independently, after which Justin reviewed how it would fit into the game, but often I received a request from him for a specific level. I would then be briefed on the story and how the music needed to fit to the atmosphere and emotion, usually accompanied by GIF footage of the gameplay. To capture the rawness that suits this pixel-art game, my starting point was always a synth-jam one-take. I would often choose two or three synths, a drum machine, and another crazy little device – a circuit bend-like box. Then I would put together a track that I could perform and record live in one take. Usually, that recording was already 80% of the final result. Then some post-production, and that was it. Justin would often provide some feedback afterwards, which I would then incorporate.

Do you play video games, especially the ones for which you composed the music?

I often don't have the time for it, but if I can, I do indeed enjoy gaming. It completely clears my head for a while, and that is pleasant. And of course, I played Katana ZERO. That was amazing. I also really like playing other games from our publisher, like "Devolver Digital". Such as "GRIS" and "Hotline Miami". But I also enjoy playing an obvious game like GTA5.

In 2022, you composed tracks for the "Nitro Kids" soundtrack. How did the connection with Wildboy Studios, based in New Zealand, come about? Did you have creative freedom to compose, or were you given a brief?

I don't know exactly how I came to the attention of Wildboy Studios, but that likely had something to do with my work for "Katana Zero", which received a lot of attention. This was a very smooth and straightforward collaboration. The world and the story were clear, and my style fit well within it. I was asked to compose four tracks and was given complete freedom, which is very nice for me as a composer. Afterwards, there was also very little back-and-forth feedback, so in that respect, it went very smoothly.

Then, you released two albums. Do you have a different approach than for composing an OST?

Absolutely. For an OST, much more is applied, of course. There are frameworks to respect: the developer's wishes, the storyline, the emotion, and the duration that suits the level or scene. Moreover, the game is the core of the product, and the music contributes to it. A very important support, but initially not a standalone product. Alongside the game, the music can of course be released on its own, but it will always have a relationship with the game. That is very different from autonomous original work. Because then there are no frameworks. It has no relationship with any other product other than with yourself. This also makes it more difficult, and you are more vulnerable. Especially because, in my case, I am doing it entirely alone, there is a greater chance of doubt, insecurity, etc. Both are incredibly fun to do, but original creation is what I hold closest to my heart.

You also do installations, could you tell us about 'Noise', a tribute to the ultimate painting No 39 by Ad Reinhardt?

Well, Noise is perhaps the most personal of all the art installations I have created. Noise is an interpretation of "The Ultimate Painting" by the abstract painter Ad Reinhardt from New York in the 1960s. But I need to explain why it is so personal. In the years leading up to this installation, I was increasingly occupied with stripping down my work. Because I am a trained musician, I sometimes struggled with my knowledge. My knowledge made it harder for me to access my intuition, and making music became too much of a format for me. So I started stripping away musical elements. First, I avoided melodies in my music. Then chords and harmonies. I also wanted to get rid of rhythm: the patterns, time signatures, etc. At the same time, I became fascinated by painters who were searching for the zero point, such as Kasimir Malevich and Ad Reinhardt. And then I stumbled upon Ad Reinhardt's famous 12 rules. A manifesto for creating "pure" abstract art, focusing on what to avoid rather than what to include. His rules aimed for total abstraction, forbidding texture, brushwork, sketch, form, design, color, light, space, time, scale, movement, and objects. When I read these rules, I knew I was undertaking that same quest in music. I translated those rules into music and incorporated that into the art installation "NOISE." An installation with exactly the same dimensions as the original painting, with speakers that emit only noise. An ultimate painting, but in music, so to speak. After creating this installation, I had reached my personal point zero, and was subsequently able to enjoy chords, melodies, and rhythms more and more again. So this helped me avoid getting completely stuck in stripping down my work.

Also, could you explain why you brought this amazing sound system in the tunnel tube? What did you want to experience with 'A9'?

At that time, as an artist, I was asked by a well-known construction company from the Netherlands to sonify infrastructure. This involved converting data emanating from those buildings into music, thereby making it known that this company has meaningful data they work with. This was the year 2019, and they were constructing the longest land tunnel in the Netherlands at that time (3 km long). I got the idea to see what a 3 km tunnel would sound like if you could send drones and pulses from the center using a full PA sound system to make the tunnel vibrate. I wanted to place microphones every 350 meters so that you could follow the sound (approximately the speed of sound per second). Because I created art objects for this construction company, I managed to get them to make this tunnel available for my experiment for a day. My main goal was to capture the tunnel in sound. And the result was successful.

"My knowledge made it harder for me to access my intuition, and making music became too much of a format for me."

You are working on a new album. Could you explain your creative process for 'Memories of a silent movie' your last EP. Is it fiction or inspired by a true story?

That is a true story. As a child, I must have seen a silent film of which I have retained a vague memory. A black-and-white film without sound, with long, timeless shots of landscapes, sometimes with a close-up of a face. That is all I remember of it. Yet, it made an impression on me. The overall atmosphere and feeling, in particular, have stayed with me. Last year, I decided to make music that captures that memory and feeling. And that resulted in a series of four pieces, which led to the EP "Memories of a Silent Movie".

Concerning the artwork, could you explain it and the vision that you share with Tomohiro Yokokawa?

Tomohiro Yokokawa contacted me via Instagram. He liked my music, and we started talking about art and music. I shared my idea for the EP "Memories of a Silent Movie" with him, and he came up with the idea to give visuals to this concept. That is, of course, not easy, because giving substance to a vague memory is difficult, and if you give it too much substance, you destroy the memory. So he came up with the great idea of using an old offset printing technique, with the inherent small fluctuations and deviations that come with it. And then, subsequently, not printing an image, but only showing the imperfections of this technique. This creates a very vague abstract image of stripes and patches that fits perfectly with the concept of the EP.

Are you digging vinyl, and what obsesses you when you hunt for them?

Yes, I'm digging vinyl records sometimes. Honestly, I have to admit that I often listen to music on Spotify, because that is practical in many situations, of course. But vinyl offers something special. It is like holding a piece of the artist's world in your hands. The whole ritual of putting on an album and then sitting down in a chair to listen to the whole album with the artwork on your lap appeals to me. The best part, of course, is coming across a rare album that you have wanted for a long time. Even though you are looking for it, this always happens at an unexpected moment. That is wonderful. My latest purchased album is "Cheetah" by Aphex Twin.

Some DJ-composers are nostalgic for the past and swear by vinyl and analog only. And you?

I am not a purist in this regard either. Sometimes vinyl is awesome, and sometimes streaming is convenient and works just fine. For me, it also depends a bit on the music style. A certain pop record works perfectly with streaming, but a deep analog ambient record is, of course, wonderful on vinyl.

What is your motto-adage?

"True beauty lies in imperfection"

Last question, what does Paris represent for you?

Haaaa Paris! I love this city so much. Been there many times. Doing a live performance in Paris someday is at the top of my wishlist. Because for me, Paris represents both history and the future.

RAISED ON CONSOLES AND VIDEO GAMES, FRAN ROMGUER DREAMED OF BEING AN ASTRONAUT. BUT LIFE HAD OTHER PLANS FOR THE NATIVE OF MALAGA – SPAIN. HE ENTERED THE CONSERVATORY AND BECAME A PIANO VIRTUOSO. HE EXPERIMENTED WITH SEVERAL BANDS OF ALL STYLES. THEN HE OBTAINED A DEGREE IN FILM STUDIES AND MEDIA EXPERTISE WHILE COMPLETING A DEGREE IN MUSIC COMPOSITION AT THE CONSERVATORY. AFTER, THE YOUNG MAN WAS HIRED AS A TEACHER. ALONGSIDE, HE PARTICIPATED IN GAME JAMS WHERE HE DEVELOPED HIS SKILLS. TODAY, HE PERFORMS AS A PIANIST, GIVES SOLO SHOWS, ACCOMPANIES ENSEMBLES, WHILE ALSO CONTRIBUTING TO NUMEROUS OST. WITH OVER A HUNDRED PROJECTS UNDER HIS BELT, HE NOTABLY COMPOSED THE ENTIRE SCORE FOR “BUBBLE GHOST REMAKE” AND “FURWIND.” FRAN EXPLAINS HIS JOURNEY AND HIS VISION FOR INTERTWINING AUDIO WITH THE VISUALS OF A GAME.



FRAN
ROM
GUER

Welcome, a glass of...

Horchata. It's a traditional sweet drink from Spain, absolutely delicious and perfect for a tectotaler like me. Always in a regular glass, of course, not a wine glass.

In what environment did you grow up? Were there vinyl records and video games at home?

I'm from a small town in Málaga, in the south of Spain, and I grew up in a kind of family-tribe, surrounded by loads of cousins. I was born in 1993, so even though my parents had vinyl records at home, they were already pretty much out of use by then. What I did have around me, though, were different consoles and video games, from the Game Boy to PlayStation 2. But without a doubt, what gave me the most hours of fun was a Sega Mega Drive emulator on PC, around which my cousins and I spent hours and hours trying out hundreds of different classic titles. It was something beautiful: video games as a social act, even before high-speed internet arrived.

Can you tell us about your first experiences in music? Did you start by playing the piano?

The truth is, even though I've been the first professional musician in my family, music has always held a special place at home. Apparently, when she was pregnant with me, my mother would put headphones on her belly so I could listen to the same music she was hearing. So lovely. Later on, when I was three, they gave me a small toy piano, the kind with those dreadful animal sound buttons, and it seems that one day I was playing the melodies of nursery songs I already knew. My parents noticed I might have a knack for it, enrolled me in the conservatory, and the rest is history!

Did you play in a band or did you absolutely want to become a film music composer?

I've played in a great many places, including bands and musical groups across pretty much every style of music. I was always interested in many other things besides music, but when the time came to choose what degree to pursue and what I wanted to do in the future, I realized that composing music for audiovisual media was a beautiful way to bring together that dual path of academic life and conservatory training I'd been on since I was a kid. So I graduated in Film and Media Studies while also completing my degree in Music Composition at the Conservatory. Of course, what I always wanted to be was an astronaut, like any self-respecting child!

How did your career as a composer begin?

No doubt it depends on how far back I want to go, but I'd say it started when I was around 11 or 12. By then I was comfortable enough at the piano that, out of boredom in the middle of practicing a piece, I'd start awkwardly improvising things that weren't on the score.

At some point, it hit me that what I was playing was actually original, and that feeling, playing something unique and truly mine, even though I had no real understanding of things like harmony at the time, was probably the spark that made me want to compose.

Is the process of composing and producing music for a film or tv advert different from that of music for a video game?

Without a doubt, they are radically different processes. Composing for a video, regardless of its length, is a linear task: you have a set amount of time, and only so much music can fit into it, it's simply about moving from point A to point B. Composing for a video game, on the other hand, is like a branching tree of possibilities. You can go from point A to point G, go back, move forward, and return to point A again, with endless variations. The musical knowledge required to write a good score for a film is similar, but doing it for a video game is a much greater challenge, because the music has to be adaptive. And that is, without a doubt, the most beautiful aspect of video game composition: adapting to the player's interaction.

How do you create emotions and make your music interesting? Do you always record in one shot like you play in your video?

We composers have a range of tools to suggest emotions to the listener, from harmony to instrumentation. Writing a good soundtrack often comes down to having a solid set of resources and knowing how to apply them coherently to the story you're supporting, the game's setting in time and place, its emotional tone, and the sensations the player will experience. I can come up with initial ideas almost instantly, since I usually use piano improvisation as a kind of first brainstorming. But truly good music, properly orchestrated and fitting the project like a glove, can never be written in a single take, and anyone who tells you otherwise... is lying!

Do you still play games & what is your top 5?

During my teenage years I played a lot of video games, but over the past decade I've channeled that playful drive into board games. They're much more social face to face, and they allow me to disconnect from screens, which are already far too present in my day-to-day work. That said, I still really enjoy playing from time to time. Judging by how old my all-time top 5 is, you'll probably notice it reflects a very specific era in gaming (between 2001 and 2011 – editor's note): "The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim", "Blade: The Edge of Darkness", "Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy", "Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory" puis "Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos".

“Composing for a video game presents a much greater challenge than composing for a film because the music must be adaptive.”



You like spontaneity and to enter in many game jams, including the Global Game Jam X in Malaga, Spain. You composed for "Tenants" in 2019. Can you talk about your experience?

Taking part in a game jam is something I'd recommend to any beginner composer. Locking yourself in for 48 hours with a group of people passionate about game creation pushes you to develop a lot of skills: teamwork, creating under tight deadlines, and connecting with people who will very likely end up working in the video game industry, if they aren't already. As for the specific game jam you mention, I actually have a video on my YouTube channel where I talk about exactly that: how to compose the soundtrack for three video games in 48 hours. Yes, instead of just one, I did three... I like a good challenge! So if you want to see what the full experience is like and the steps involved in such a fast and direct creative process, that's the one to watch!

Can you explain why it's better to follow your channel with 248 videos rather than another?

I don't consider myself better than anyone else. There are great content creators out there! What I can promise is that you'll have a lot of fun with my content, and on my channel you'll find a mix of humor, original music, music education, and creativity. I'm also on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitch, always under the handle @fromguér. Looking forward to seeing you there!

The drawings of "Furwind" are reminiscent of an old era... What memories do you have of the creative process?

The entire creative process for "Furwind" took around a year. It was one of the first large-scale projects I took on, creating not only the soundtrack but also all the sound effects for a game lasting around four to five hours. It was intense and exhausting, but I'm very happy with the result. It proved that I could, on my own, deliver a complete audio solution for a video game, at least on an indie scale. Since the game had a pixel art aesthetic, we briefly considered going for a chiptune style, but in the end I decided to take a more realistic, orchestral approach, and I'm convinced it was the best possible choice. I invite you to look it up online and judge for yourselves!

You composed "Bubble Ghost Remake", can you explain the creative process? Do you play the game first, do you have guest musicians...

"Bubble Ghost Remake" has been, without a doubt, the best video game project I've worked on so far. My role in its development was, once again, a one-man army: I composed the entire soundtrack, created all the sound effects, and even contributed to localization and narrative design for a game lasting around six to eight hours. I usually work from a brief that I design myself and present to the studio, and I'm generally given a lot of creative freedom.

I always try to play the game, or at least the levels I need to score, so that the feeling experienced by the player becomes one of the key elements I take into account when composing. Occasionally I work with real performers, especially singers, but most of the instruments are VSTs for budget reasons. Since it was a remake, one of the most interesting challenges was finding a way to bring together the music from the original game, which I referenced here and there, with a completely new and reimagined sonic universe, with its own original themes. Moving from a late '80s arcade game to a modern title for PC or Switch meant embracing an entirely new narrative, and that opened up a lot of possibilities from a musical perspective.

So electronic music is in your creative process...

Yes, absolutely! Don't let my background as a classical composer fool you! Almost everything I compose is recorded or produced in my DAW of choice, and in fact, after the piano, the DAW, along with its whole army of plugins, is my main working tool. I've also composed quite a lot of electronic music. There's a wide range of electronic genres that work perfectly for OST in projects with a cyberpunk aesthetic or narratives rooted in sci-fi, action, and beyond.

Across all genres, which composition-project are you most proud of and why?

Without a doubt, the most recent one: "Bubble Ghost Remake". I'm also very proud of other games like "Furwind", "Dodge Frenzy", "Kick or Die", and "Smart World", to name a few with very different styles. I've also composed music for films, advertising, theatre, and social media, but I'll keep the mentions focused on video games, since that's the main scope of this interview.

Video games are synonymous with a digital era, what is your relationship with AI?

AI gives me mixed feelings, even though I've experimented with it on several occasions. We're living through a time of intense cultural change that isn't always unfolding in the most ethical way. I see AI as a very powerful tool, but I'm concerned that its development may deepen some of the system's existing issues: increasing global inequality and prioritizing profit for a few over broader social value. Of course, I've never used AI for anything related to music, and I watch generative music AI with some concern. That said, I believe it's still far from matching human composers, especially when it comes to lyrical creativity and to adapting music to a specific audiovisual project in a truly synchronous way.

What memory do you have of the first time your music was pressed onto vinyl?

I've never had the chance to have any of my music released on vinyl. Unfortunately, my work has only reached CD status so far... but I'm definitely looking forward to conquering new formats!

Has the gear in your music studio evolved since you started?

Without a doubt. Over the years, headphones, studio monitors, audio interfaces, controllers, screens... I've gradually added new gear and upgraded what I already had in the studio, and today I work with highly professional hardware that has been with me for several years, and I hope it lasts for many more. That said, the first, and best, investment I'd recommend to anyone is a good chair, one that takes care of your body no matter how many hours you spend sitting in it. Trust me, that's the voice of experience!

Patata Games is a small production studio in Seville, can you tell us about your experience?

I met them at a game jam, like most of the indie studios I've worked with. Working with a small studio is always a great experience. There's a close, peer-to-peer dynamic that creates a very friendly working environment, nothing like large companies that see you as just another asset. Of course, the budget is smaller as a result... but there's no such thing as a perfect solution!

Are you more into Creative Commons or traditional copyright?

For me, it's important to support legal frameworks that best promote creativity and freedom on the internet, without overlooking proper credit for authors; that's why I've always been in favor of Creative Commons. At the same time, as a mid-to small-scale composer, I think traditional copyright can help me pay my bills a bit better, but the reality I see is that it tends to benefit large companies the most. I don't know what the perfect solution is, but the existence of distribution monopolies like Spotify, which devalue and exploit the work of so many smaller artists, deeply concerns me, and I believe it lies at the heart of the issue of who gets the biggest slice of the pie.

Do you have a passion for Asia?

The truth is, I don't have a particular passion for that part of the world. That said, I do love certain audiovisual works produced in Japan, and I think composers like Joe Hisaishi (many Studio Ghibli films), Nobuo Uematsu ("Final Fantasy"), Yoko Kanno ("Cowboy Bebop"), or Takashi Yoshimatsu (beautiful contemporary classical works) are among the most talented composers alive today. Japan is a country with an enormous amount of talent and a very valuable perspective on the world.

An Oxo museum opened in Malaga in 2023, are you familiar with this place?

Yes! I've been there several times and have been able to enjoy its many rooms. It's a real privilege to have a museum entirely dedicated to video games open in my city, and it's something I'd recommend to any self-respecting gamer: you won't just visit a museum there... you'll play video games!

Who are the VGM composers who inspire you? And is there a studio or game you dream of collaborating with?

I'd definitely name figures like Nobuo Uematsu, Koji Kondo, Harry Gregson-Williams, or Hans Zimmer. The latter two are better known for film, but they've also made their way into the world of video games. Scoring a game for Nintendo, tapping into the more playful and lighthearted side of my musical style, or for Bethesda Softworks, exploring a more epic and fantasy-driven approach, would be an absolute dream.

Do you know any women you could recommend who compose video game music?

Of course! There are many talented female composers, but I'll focus my recommendation on a somewhat lesser-known profile and, perhaps for that reason, an even more valuable discovery for the reader: Sara López Productions, a wonderful composer and a great content creator from the Canary Islands, those beautiful Spanish islands.

Finally, what is your motto, your adage?

I play, therefore I am!

“I play, therefore I am!”

YANN VAN DER CRUYSSSEN



“For many reasons, I feel much more comfortable working with my material than with standard sound libraries.”

BEFORE AI WAS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE, YANN WAS ALREADY PROGRAMMING GENERATIVE SYSTEMS. IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, HE DEVELOPED HIS FIRST GAMES, AND AS A TEENAGER, HE WAS ALREADY COMPOSING FOR AMATEUR PROJECTS. A CONSERVATORY GRADUATE WITH A DEGREE IN JAZZ AND SPECIALIZED TRAINING IN VIDEO GAMES FROM ENJMIN SCHOOL, HE USES MULTIPLE PSEUDONYMS TO RELEASE VARIOUS PROJECTS AND HAS BECOME A SKILLED TINKERER WHO PLAYS PIANO AND CELLO. AN INTERVIEW WITH A TALENTED NERD WHO HAS WORKED ON OST FOR GAMES SUCH AS "GAME OF THRONES," "AARKLASH LEGACY," "STRAY," AND "SEASONS AFTER FALL", TO NAME JUST A FEW.

Welcome, a glass of...
Coffee, it's 10 A.m.

Did you grow up in an artistic environment?
Were there records?

There were loads of records. A lot of opera and a bit of weird music. The first records I was able to put on the turntable myself fairly regularly were "Never for Ever" by Kate Bush, "La Demoiselle" by Angelo Branduardi, and "The Rite of Spring" by Stravinsky.

Did you start out developing games or playing music?

I started playing music quite early in a master's program where we learned to sing for church services. Then, in middle school, I developed games in BASIC when I got a PC.

Your first professional experience as a composer?

I started composing for amateur games as a teenager. My first paid contract was in 2008 and involved recreating rock hits in MIDI for a Konami rhythm game on mobile phones.

How do you see yourself in the music industry as a composer of experimental music...

I don't know, maybe I don't really ask myself those questions. I'd say I don't feel particularly close to today's mainstream scene, not even as a listener.

Why do you use multiple pseudonyms like Morusque and Nurykabe?

Nurykabe is a pseudonym I chose when I was in high school and used for a very short time, but the website where I store my work is still hosted under that domain name, which I bought back then. Morusque is another pseudonym inspired by a series of invented words when I could barely speak, hence, probably the haphazard name. I also sometimes release things under my real name or under a bunch of other, more secretive pseudonyms.

Are you nostalgic about the golden age of video games and the chiptune era?

I certainly have a strong affinity for that period, but it can be misleading to talk about nostalgia. Composing specifically for the chip of an old machine involves a set of constraints, a range of sounds, a certain aesthetic. One might want to exploit these characteristics in the same way that a filmmaker might want to work in black and white or silent film without necessarily being nostalgic or even having experienced the era when that was the norm.

I find game OST very inconsistent; sometimes they're splendid and sometimes they sound a bit like elevator music, lacking bass... I'm thinking in particular of the OST for "Minecraft", is one of the best-selling games...

It's important to remember that this kind of music aims to serve a purpose, not necessarily to showcase itself with a spectacular production. The example of "Minecraft" comes from a time when we were beginning to accept that music in a game didn't need to be constantly present, that it could remain understated and in the background. I have no problem with that; on the contrary, it's an approach I find inspiring. Moreover, more generally, I'm often intrigued by the pejorative connotation of music that's functional or perceived as such. I've already encountered quite a bit of misunderstanding on this subject: typically, let's say a rather slow jazz track will be described by some people as generic elevator music, while others will perceive a wealth of subtleties in the arrangement or the playing of the instrumentalists. It's a question of listening to the details or the overall picture, I suppose.

What do you remember about your time working on "Game of Thrones"? I believe you had a tight deadline?

Indeed, the Cyanide game and the HBO series were both in production at the same time, and some decisions regarding the music had to be made in a hurry. So, it was a rather unusual job where I had to produce around three hours of music in fifteen days, but with the possibility of reusing parts of the soundtrack originally composed for the series. As a result, I sampled a lot, repurposed and added layers of sound on top of the existing ones.

What are you looking for when you compose? Do you have free rein?

It depends a lot on the projects. I can be very direct or completely free. Often, that freedom is more associated with smaller team projects and a more authorial approach

You co-composed "Aarklash Legacy." Can you explain the creative process? Do you play the game first, or do you invite other musicians?

It was a soundtrack primarily directed by the other composer, Henri-Pierre Pellegrin. I had to record some cello for him and lend a hand on a couple of tracks, but I don't think I ever actually played the game. Depending on the situation, sometimes I'm very involved in the project and play a lot of it. I also frequently do sound effects or integration, the technical aspects of the audio. In other cases, I come in at the last minute to create the soundtrack for a game that's already been in development for a while and that I don't always even get a chance to play. I do sometimes invite other musicians, especially to perform certain parts, and ideally, I'd like to do that more often. This can pose some problems in terms of organization: defining to what extent what I show is a mock-up or a final form, and to what extent the recorded parts are final tracks or sound material that I will then reappropriate.

Regarding "Stray" OST, can you explain how it's happen?

On "Stray," I composed the music, but also the sound design and integration; I was quite involved throughout. Yes, I spend a lot of time doing sampling work. Since the word "sampling" can be ambiguous in the context of a DJ-oriented magazine, I'll give a concrete example: if I have an object that makes a sound I like, I'll record that sound several times, in different ways, louder or softer, using different pitches, and so on. Then I cut and organize the files so I can use them musically, mostly in MIDI samplers. I do this with instruments, synthesizers, generative experiments, everyday objects. For example, I went to Asia several times to prepare exhibitions and workshops, unrelated to "Stray," but I took the opportunity to record a lot of ambient sounds there. For many reasons, I feel much more comfortable working with this kind of material than with standard sound libraries. Some of the soundtracks I'm working on now have a distinct MIDI feel and are made up almost entirely of sounds collected this way over the last twenty years or so. And yes, the soundtrack for "Stray" was released on vinyl, as is often the case via a track selection, since it's about five hours long in its entirety.

Do you use AI, and if not, why not?

Yes, my relationship with AI is complicated to summarize. I've always used and programmed generative systems extensively, in the broadest sense.

Around 2015, when AI started to become increasingly prevalent, I spent a lot of time exploring its potential and accumulating generated sounds, images, and texts, often with bizarre results that I sometimes used in my work. A few years later, when it became more accessible and less bizarre, I started to be more cautious in my use of it, but I still have a great deal of curiosity about it in general, as long as it doesn't become a lazy default solution.

Which composition project has excited you the most?

I really enjoyed composing for string quartet on "Seasons After Fall" and recording everything in one take, as opposed to the track-by-track recording I usually do. The soundtrack was also released on vinyl. I would have liked to repeat that kind of experience, but more recent projects haven't lent themselves to it as much.

Has your studio equipment evolved since you started?

The studio is at my house. There was a fairly long period when I didn't have enough money for decent equipment, and I worked with small desktop speakers and a lavalier mic; it required a fair amount of creativity. Fortunately, things have improved in that respect. Sometimes, I get a new instrument; for example, this year I got a small trumpet, but in recent years, the evolution in my work has been more on the software side than the hardware side.

Do you turn down a project if you don't like the game or the company's vision?

I have a tendency to accept everything that's offered to me indiscriminately and without setting any conditions, but I'm gradually trying to stop doing that.

What's your best memory from live show?

Hmm... I can't think of anything that stands out, but I'd say when I do something a bit "whatere-freestyle" it often results in good memories. Recently, for example, I gave a concert where I decided to sing "Les eaux de mars" for almost the entire show, nearly an hour. It was quite unsettling for everyone, myself included, but I don't regret it. It was a good performance experience in the end.

Today you're in residence for a dance performance...

Yes, it's very different, and it wasn't easy at first to understand how to work with dancers, especially since it's contemporary dance and there can be a deliberate disconnect between the music and the movement. The work I do on it is sometimes based on reworked existing music, sometimes improvised. I'm often on site during the residencies and on stage with the dancers during the performances, and depending on the situation, I end up doing a kind of enhanced DJ set.

Are you constantly in the studio or do you go out to parties, concerts, or gaming festivals?

I go out a little when there are concerts near me, yes, nothing more than that.

How many instruments do you play and what is your formal training?

I mainly play piano and cello. I also have a lot of smaller instruments that I don't always play very well, but I record them occasionally. Currently, I play part-time in Montpellier with a band that plays traditional Irish music. Concerning my training I went to the conservatory, have a degree in jazz, and completed specific training in video games at ENJMIN.

Hardware or software?

I have a bit of both at home, but the bulk of my work is more often on the digital side.

"I don't have a favorite motto, but I do have some 'anti-favorite' sayings like: 'Good artists copy, great artists steal.'"

Your soundtrack game top 5?

Since I've been asked several times in interviews about my favorite soundtracks, and I don't want to repeat myself, I'm going to list some that come to mind, soundtracks I haven't mentioned elsewhere, but that I find interesting, whether they're in my personal top picks or not. So, "Intelligent Qube" by Takayuki Hattori: unusually dramatic and sophisticated music for what ultimately seems to be a kind of 3D Tetris. "Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles" by Kumi Tanioka: use of ancient and traditional instruments, not so common, especially for that era. "Inside" by Martin Stig Andersen: I'm not sure if it officially exists as an album; it's more for listening to in-game. I was very impressed by the sound design in Playdead games. Kazunori Miyake's "Gradius Suite Fantasia": acoustic reinterpretations of music originally featured in arcades; I don't know the story behind this album, but I find it enjoyable. Ben Babbitt's "Kentucky Route Zero": a curious mix of styles and an interesting overall art direction.

Which VGM composers do you like the most?

Oh yes, there are many composers I really like, especially for Japanese games, such as Jun Chikuma ("Bomberman", "Faxanadu"), Yoko Shimomura ("Legend of Mana"), Miki Higashino ("Suikoden"), Michiru Oshima ("Ico"), Yoko Kanno ("Napple Tale"), or Kumi Tanioka...

And your top 5 game?

Likewise, a top list is complicated, so I'll answer with the most recent substantial games I've finished, with a quick review for each: "Six Ages 2": unmanageable difficulty, even for me, and I'm quite an expert on this series. "Chrono Cross": finished it twenty years after starting it, rather disappointed by the rediscovery, but the soundtrack remains a classic. "Disco Elysium": brilliant storytelling that even managed to reconcile me with recorded voice acting, because I generally have a hard time with it. "Inscryption": I persevered through the final hardcore section, "Kaycee's Mod," it was worth it. And, "Storyteller": I'd been waiting for this game to come out for ten years. Not really what I expected, but very clever.

Creative Commons or traditional copyright?

Given the number of things I freely share, I'm pretty much obliged to say Creative Commons, even if there isn't always an explicit CC mention on my work.

Do you collect vinyl records?

I still have a few records, but I had to get rid of a lot of things about ten years ago when I moved to a much smaller place, and since then I haven't even had a record player. So in a way, having records without being able to listen to them makes me a kind of collector, I suppose.

Mountains or sea?

Let's say mountains; I've lived twenty minutes from the sea for ten years and I've only been there maybe five times.

Do you have other passions?

Yes, I think so, but it can be very fleeting. Recently, I've started working more and more on films, for example, including as an editor or actor, things I don't usually do as much; it's refreshing.

What makes you proud?

I would say mainly the quantity and variety of what I do, rather than the quality of each specific thing.

Last question, what's your favorite motto?

I don't have a favorite motto, but I do have some « anti-favorite » sayings like: "Good artists copy, great artists steal."



MOBILE SUITS

WE MET WITH ADRIEN, WHO CO-FOUNDED UNDERWATER COMPUTING IN 2019, A LABEL THAT HAS SIGNED NUMEROUS ARTISTS FROM THE VAPORWAVE SCENE. IN 2020, HE LAUNCHED MOBILE SUITS, CATERING TO DREAMPUNK AFICIONADOS, A GENRE THAT EVOLVED FROM VAPORWAVE. COMPOSERS LIKE SOARER, ROOM 208, AND KUNISAKI PERFECTLY EMBODY THE CATALOG'S SIGNATURE SOUND, WHERE ELECTRONICS, LO-FI, AND PITCHED SAMPLES IN A CHOPPY, SCREWED-UP STYLE HARMONIZE. ADRIEN SHARES HIS INFLUENCES, THE ORIGINS OF BOTH GENRES AND THEIR TIES TO VGM, THE IMPORTANCE OF CRAFTING A DISTINCT VISUAL IDENTITY FOR EACH ALBUM RELEASED IN ULTRA-LIMITED EDITIONS. INTERVIEW.

What was the environment like where you grew up?

I live in the Lyon area in France and originally hail from Vienne. From a very young age, I was immersed in music thanks to my parents, who played everything from Dire Straits and Pink Floyd to PJ Harvey and The Doors. As a teenager, I'd dig through the CD bins at record stores — I think I explored just about every musical genre, but it was electronic music, in all its forms, that truly captivated me. My electronic music culture was shaped by artists like Burial, Boards of Canada, Zero7, and Biosphere, to name just a few.

Which manga and video games inspired your own label?

When I launched the label, I drew heavy inspiration from Gundam—a manga I have a special affection for. I've always been drawn to sci-fi and robots! I'd also mention Astro Boy by Tezuka, which is an essential read, just like all of his works. Other influential manga include "BLAME!", "Akira", and "Ghost in the Shell", each with their mesmerizing universes that have deeply inspired me. One of the games that most influenced the label is "Hyper Light Drifter", with its flawless soundtrack by Disasterpeace and a visual style that embodies everything I love. Other titles that come to mind are NieR: Automata and Armored Core VI for their immersive worlds. As a gamer, though, my heart leans more toward the "Dark Souls" and "Dragon Quest" series.

Can you tell us more about the early days of Underwater Computing?

Absolutely. It all started with three friends who, like me, were cassette diggers. We decided to each create a handmade cassette featuring an exclusive mix, and we had an absolute blast doing it. I was particularly excited about a Dreampunk prototype I had just put together. Through this process, we discovered the creative and artistic potential of cassettes, their entire surface is customizable. That's when we decided to launch our first label, Underwater Computing, and produce cassettes for artists in the vaporwave scene. For me, the adventure lasted two years. We met so many incredible artists and gradually carved out a space for ourselves in the community. Today, the label is thriving with over 287 releases—it's become a key player in the vaporwave scene.

Today, you have your own label, Mobile Suits Records. What was the decisive factor?

The desire to create the label came from my deep connection to the Dreampunk universe. That's where I discovered incredible artists like 2814, Sangam, Rashida Prime, and CMD094. Dreampunk is the perfect blend of sci-fi atmosphere and 2000s electronic music—it's also a massive love letter to sci-fi, with many albums that could easily serve as film soundtracks.

Artists like Kunisaki, Sangam, and The Microgram immediately embraced the project and trusted me completely. This allowed me to release my first cassettes and, alongside my graphic designer friend Reminiz, craft a visual identity that perfectly matched their music. And just like that, the label was officially up and running!

“ Dreampunk is the perfect blend of sci-fi atmosphere and 2000s electronic musicsci-fi, many albums that could easily serve as film soundtracks. ”

Could you tell us about the DNA of your label?

Mobile Suits Records is the culmination of all my passions: music, comics/manga, cinema, and street culture with skateboarding and graphic design. I love how music can transport you, and that's exactly what I want to share with listeners. The initial idea was to collaborate with a graphic designer who shared the same artistic sensibilities. That's how Reminiz, an Australian designer, joined me on this adventure and brought so much to the label. My best friend, Saint Honoré, helped to build the website and has been a lifesaver in countless ways. As the projects grew, the team expanded. Saimonix came on board, taking charge of part of the distribution and contributing with his incredible writing. Two more designers, WDE and Z.E.R.O., joined us, each adding their unique touch to our projects. For albums by F0x3r and Vid.nas, we worked with two illustrators, Czar_Noka and Storiel, who brought our visions to life with amazing adaptability. Musically, I wanted to offer something distinct. I chose artists based on their ability to transport listeners into their own world. What I love about Dreampunk, is its blend of ambient artists with unique artistic worlds, while also drawing from the UK's 90s/00s electronic scene—think DJ Javascript or Cult Member. For future releases, I want to explore more rhythm. I'm really drawn to dub techno, jungle, and ambient techno.

Why do you prefer cassette and DVDr formats?

There are several reasons. With Vaporwave/Dreampunk culture, cassettes have made a real comeback. They're a medium that allows for creative visual experimentation; you can design across the entire surface, unlike vinyl or CDs. We wanted to create beautiful, collection objects, giving them a new purpose beyond just audio. Cassettes are a truly unique and fun format.

The choice is also practical and economic. Producing vinyl is a significant investment; you have to get it right and be able to cover the production costs. Cassettes are more affordable, and we can choose the quantities we produce. The idea of using DVDrs came about when we collaborated with the group WDE, who had the expertise. We wanted an album that was both musical and visual, and we were absolutely thrilled with the result.

What about limited editions?

Since demand isn't endless, we wanted to number each item sold. We usually limit runs to 50 or 100 copies, but we occasionally do reissues with alternative versions. We also had fun by creating a collector's edition of Sangam & Microgram's album "Best Unknown"; we added texture to the cassette, hand-tagged the cases, and designed special stickers just for that release. It's all about making each piece feel unique and special!

Music intensifies the atmosphere of a video game and deepens our immersion. In your project, the musical compositions are paired with highly crafted videos. Could you tell us more about that?

In the Dreampunk and Vaporwave scenes, there are so many incredibly talented visual artists who collaborate with musicians—their skill level is mind-blowing. There have been numerous online festivals featuring these visual creators; check out the Pure Live Festival or the MTHRBRD channel by the label Vill4in—it's truly amazing. On our end, we've worked with the South Korean artist Prekursor on several projects to strengthen the visual identity of our albums. I also had this wild idea to create an album on DVD, with a unique video for each track. The duo WDE took on the challenge, crafting both the music and the visuals for us—they're an incredibly talented duo.

What are the main challenges of running a label?

When you sell small runs of cassettes, usually 50 to 100 copies, the profit margins are razor-thin. After covering manufacturing, graphic design, promotion, and paying the artists, there's often just enough left to fund the next release. If sales don't go well, everything becomes unstable, and you have to get creative to keep moving forward instead of stagnating. Right now, taxes and customs issues are hitting us hard.

Listeners outside the EU struggle to buy physical releases from Europe; it's become truly complicated, so as a small label we have to find alternative distribution channels. Our survival depends on it. Another challenge close to my heart is finding a local foothold. One day, I would love to bring artists to perform, participate in local events or even to host exhibitions. But building that local presence isn't as easy as it seems.

Your definition of vaporwave?

Vaporwave is pure 80s/90s nostalgia, but it's also a brilliant gateway for new generations to dive into that era. It draws heavily from advertising culture, early internet aesthetics, retro-gaming, cinema, and TV shows, with a strong fascination for Japan and the USA. To put it simply, the music often involves sampling entire tracks, then adding glitch effects, slowing the tempo to 100-110 BPM, and layering on reverb and other effects to create the artist's signature sound. Visually, vaporwave is all about collages of borrowed images—think Japanese ads, retro-gaming footage, mall culture, and anything that evokes a hypnagogic state. There are also many subgenres, like slush-wave, barber beat, dungeon synth, and dream funk, each with its own distinct vibe. A few essential vaporwave references: t e l e p a t h テレパシー能力者, MindSpring Memories, Saint Pepsi, and Death's Dynamic Shroud.Memories, or Death Dynamic Shroud.



And what about dreampunk?

Dreampunk originally emerged as a fusion of vaporwave and electronic music, pioneered by 2814 (HKE and t e l e p a t h テレパシー能力者) on the Dream catalogue label. It's atmospheric and hypnotic, like ambient music infused with deep emotional and cinematic layers. Sci-fi cinematography - think Blade Runner, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Akira, Ghost in the Shell, and The Matrix - has been foundational to both its visual and sonic identity. You could say that Vangelis is the spiritual father of dreampunk, just as Oneohtrix Point Never is for vaporwave. Today, dreampunk has evolved beyond its original codes and genre constraints, with artists breaking free to create something truly unique. A few essential dreampunk references: 2814, Sangam, Rashida Prime, CMD094, and 輕描淡寫.

What's the connection between vaporwave music and video game culture?

The link between the two is very strong. Video game culture is deeply ingrained in us—just like cinema and music. Since vaporwave is all about nostalgia, if an artist has a connection to a particular game, they will find a way to share that feeling through their work. I'm thinking of Brickmason's Pokédream—a stunning box set featuring Pokémon pixel art. Some artists like Foxtail with the album Leaving or Equip with synthetic core 88 have conceived their music as a video game OST, generally the visuals are super cool.

When I mention "Ecco the Dolphin", what comes to your mind?

Yes, exactly, the video game on the Mega Drive! But also, and especially, EccoJams by Daniel Lopatin, aka Chuck Person. It's the first album that already embodies all the codes of the Vaporwave genre, and he never continued. He then launched his main project, Oneohtrix Point Never. What's amazing is that the Vaporwave scene emerged thanks to this seminal album. This was followed by seminal albums like Floral Shoppe, which definitively launched Vaporwave culture. Daniel Lopatin also composed the soundtracks for the Safdie brothers' films (Good Times, Marty Supreme, etc.), which are fantastic. In short, he's the GOAT.

What do you think about labels releasing music on floppy disks?

That's pure vaporwave culture—digging up obsolete formats just for the fun of it! We tried it once, but you can only fit about 2 minutes of heavily compressed music on a floppy. The sound is quirky and full of artifacts, which can be charming in its own way. Now, MiniDiscs, on the other hand, are awesome! You need a MiniDisc player, but the sound quality is just as good as a CD. Plus, the format itself is perfect for creating little works of art. The label Underwater Computing still regularly releases music on MiniDiscs.

How do you see the future of the music industry with the rise of AI?

If AI is used as a tool to help creating music more easily or to explore unheard sonic possibilities, then sure, why not? But beyond that, I'm deeply skeptical of AI-generated music. The driving force behind it is purely financial, so I don't expect anything truly meaningful to come from it. I'm relieved that Bandcamp is resisting AI for now, but for how long?

I agree with you, music of the future should stay human, creative and authentic. What are your other passions?

Skateboarding and surfskating. I've got the board culture in my blood. Tennis too, it's my new thing; try to hit harder and harder! And I'm making a point of watching all the great films I've missed, it keeps me pretty busy.

Your top 5 video game OSTs?

- "Faster Than Life" by Ben puntry
- "Neon White" by Machine Girl, an absolute banger!
- "Hyper Light Drifter" & "FEZ" by Disasterpeace, iconic.
- "Silent Hill II" by Akira Yamaoka, a timeless masterpiece.
- "NieR:Automata" by Kuniyuki Takahashi, and beyond!

His jazz-infused electronic tracks are wild and brilliant.

Your top 5 favorite festivals?

Nuits Sonores (Lyon), as often as possible! I even saw Oneohtrix Point Never there in 2014; it was unforgettable. Worldwide Festival (Sète), organized by Gilles Peterson, with Machine-drum and so many others. The seaside setting is just magical. Slushwave Festival (Kortrijk - Belgium) because it's the only vaporwave festival in Europe, where I bump into so many familiar faces. A must for the scene. Dekmantel, because the lineup is always endless and irresistible. PLXI Festival, organized by the London-based dreampunk label Pure Life. Most of the Mobile Suits artists have performed there—check it out, everything is online!

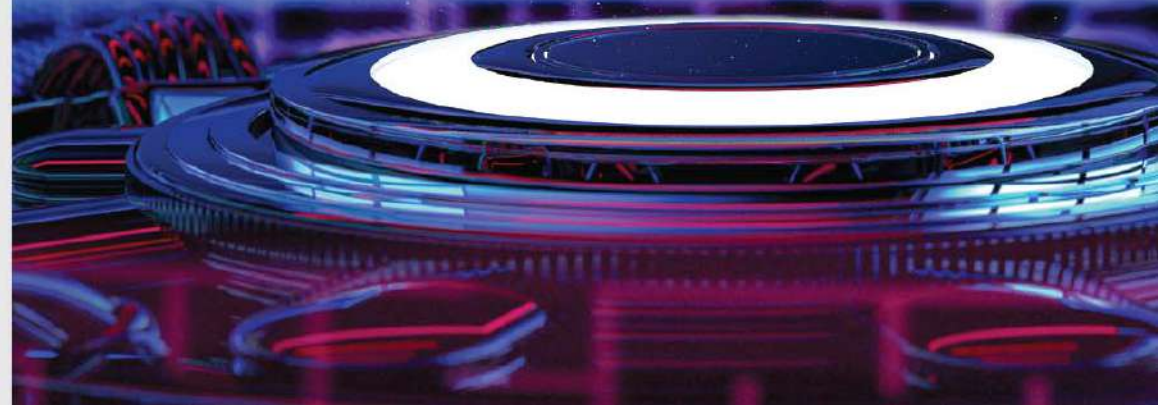
Your latest artistic crush?

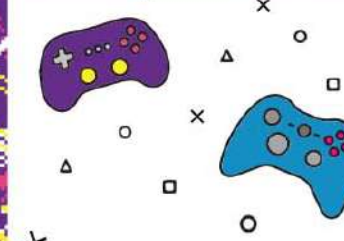
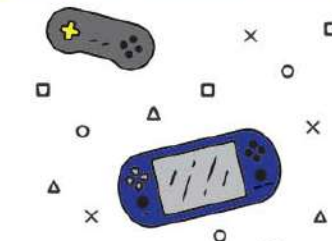
I can't pick just one, sorry! Here are my recent obsessions: As an oldies gem: Opik-Opik 1994 - progressive ambient house that's absolutely extraordinary. I only discovered it recently, and it's pure bliss. As hypnotic techno: Voice from the Lake II by Donato Dozzy & Neel. It's soft, mesmerizing, and a huge favorite of mine. As techno perfection: Irini (Traumprinz) and her 37 tracks—every single one is flawless. Finally, as a cinematic journey: Kangding Ray's soundtrack for Strät movie; it literally transported me. He's playing at Nuits Sonores this year, and it's going to be epic. Each of these is a masterpiece in its own right!

If you could teleport yourself for a few days...

Japan, without hesitation, for all its cultural richness. But the risk is that I wouldn't want to come back!

“In the Dreampunk and Vaporwave scenes, there are so many incredibly talented visual artists.”





FOR THIS VGM SPECIAL, WALID, AKA 2080, REPRESENTS THE IDEAL COLLECTOR AND PRODUCER BECAUSE HE BLENDS VIDEO GAME CONSOLE SOUNDS AND ANALOG SYNTHESIZERS TO CONNECT MICROMUSIC SUBCULTURES AND POP. A LEADING FIGURE IN THE CHIPTUNE MOVEMENT IN FRANCE, HE HAS NOTABLY COLLABORATED WITH dAMAGE, JULIE WATAI, CLAUDE VIOLANTE, SATANIC PORNOCULTSHOP, AND HAS ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO SOUNDTRACKS FOR VIDEO GAMES, DOCUMENTARIES, AND FILMS BY JAC & JOHAN... HIS SELECTION REFLECTS HIS INFLUENCES, RANGING FROM RAVE AND CHIPTUNE TO TECHNO AND SYNTHPOP, NOISE AND AMBIENT.

Jean-François Freitas / Another World Lp
(Black Screen Records - 2017)

Released in 1991 on Amiga and subsequently on all other platforms, it's my favorite game. I discovered it on the Super Nintendo, which perfectly captured the Amiga's characteristic low-fi micro-samples. The minimalist, atmospheric, cinematic soundtrack, featuring the legendary flute sound, takes on an extra dimension in a version reworked specifically for vinyl by Jean-François Freitas himself.

Haruomi Hosono / Video Game Music Lp
(Yen Records - 1984)

Considered the first video game music album and the first chiptune album, this album sees the legendary Haruomi Hosono pushing the boundaries of his art once again. Having created J-Rock in the 1970s and revolutionized synthpop with Yellow Magic Orchestra, Hosono leverages his vast influence to assert that video game music is a legitimate art form. In this album, he reinterprets and rearranges classic arcade themes, delivering an iconic record.

Suzanne Ciani / Xenon 7-inch
(Finders Keepers Records - 2021)

A slight change of pace: Xenon isn't a video game, but an electronic game! A pinball machine, even, but Suzanne Ciani's sound design is exceptional. A pioneer of electronic music since the 1960s, she was contacted to create the sound design for Xenon, a pinball machine from 1980. With arpeggiated Buchla synthesizers, state-of-the-art samplers, and vocoders whispering the game's actions in a sexy, otherworldly voice, the limited-edition transparent blue vinyl (only 500 copies) compiles all the machine's special effects.

V.A / R-Type - Irem Game Music Lp
(G.M.O. Records - 1988)

Behind the nightmarish visuals of the shooter R-Type, an homage to the Alien films, lies a compilation of various arcade games from the developer Irem. It features music from several more or less forgotten arcade titles, including "R-Type", "Moon Patrol", "Kikde Cubele", and "Lode Runner", to name just a few. The sound is raw and unfiltered, no effects, just pure, unadulterated music. The chips sing, they scream, plunging us back into the atmosphere of arcades in 1988, the year this album was released.

Yoko Shimomura / Street Fighter 2 spéciale box 4Lp
(Brave Wave - 2016)

Few classic game OSTs reach the level of "Street Fighter 2's". And this four-vinyl box set pays homage to both arcade versions of the game. All the music has been restored as close as possible to the original 1991 sound, and the set includes artwork, a booklet featuring an interview with composer Yoko Shimomura and a massive collector's-quality box. The excitement is still there, the themes are timeless and relentless.

Yuzo Koshiro / Street of Rage 2 Lp
(Data Discs - 2016)

Undoubtedly one of the most famous soundtracks in the pantheon alongside "Super Mario Bros.", "Sonic", "Mega Man 2", and "Street Fighter 2", Koshiro delivers an early house score so perfect that it's still regularly featured in DJ sets. Aggressive and groovy, the iconic tracks flow seamlessly together, enhancing a gaming experience that no one has forgotten if they were lucky enough to experience it firsthand in 1991.

Sword & Sworcery / Jim Guthrie Lp
(Dark Flute - 2011)

In 2011, "Sword & Sworcery" emerged as part of the new era of indie games. Emotional pixel art, an abstract and poetic storyline, all set to an ambient electronic soundtrack. Catchy melodies, somewhere between naivety and melancholy, over sharp trip-hop beats. A newfound artistic freedom, thanks to very small teams working outside the constraints of industrial productions, the indie spirit is even reflected in its music.

Sexy Synthesizer / Space Lp
(8bit Is Enough - 2023)

I bend the rules a little more by placing one of my favorite chiptune albums on the shelf. Takeshi Nagai, aka Sexy Synthesizer, is a fan of early 80s Namco arcade games, from which he draws samples that he twists into a disco-funk sound that could have come straight from a forgotten game. This album embarks on an exploration of space disco that culminates in a triumphant homage to contemporary minimal music in the style of Steve Reich—a marvel limited to 100 copies.



Eulcläie

Welcome, a drink of...

Thank you. I'm happy with any sort of alcohol.

Top 5 video game soundtracks

- V-A "Animal Crossing: New Horizons"
- Tsukasa Tawada "Pokémon Colosseum"
- Ingrid Mejia "Planet Laika"
- "GERMS: The Targeted Town"
- Haishima Kuniaki "Kowloon's Gate"

Top 5 single or album

- RATM "The Battle Of Los Angeles"
- Roni Size & Reprezent "New Forms"
- Juana Molina "Un día"
- 2814 "Birth of a New Day"
- Kuroi Ame "Sacred"

Your first professional experience as a composer?

I still don't feel like I'm a professional.

How many instruments do you play?

Guitar, piano, bass, a few electronic instruments, a bamboo flute from my grandmother's house, a toy frog synthesiser, and terrible drums. Lately I've been playing the kalimba...

If I tell you Japan?

Trains and toilets.

Creative Commons or traditional copyright?

I support CC. Especially Japan's traditional music copyright system isn't my style. That's why I'm currently running a radio station that only plays tracks by independent artists who aren't registered with copyright organisations. It's called Somnyan In-ter-face...

Do you collect vinyl records?

I have a collection of vinyl, including second-hand records and releases by friends...

If you could have a conversation with someone in the Game industry...

Osamu Sato.

What job would you like to do if you weren't a composer?

I'm doing this job because none of my other work is going well.



Eric Ye

Welcome, a drink of...

Boba.

Top 5 video game soundtracks

- ZUN "Embodiment of Scarlet Devil"
- Yasunori Mitsuda "Chrono Cross"
- Castlevania series
- Akira Yamaoka "Silent Hill 2"
- Masashi Hamauzu "Sigma Harmonics"

Top 5 video game

I can't say I'm much of a gamer, but my favorite game growing up was "Bugdom"...

Your first professional experience as a composer?

"Haus of Pacific" 2021. Haus of Pacific (2021). The film was about a drag queen and for the main theme I was going for something over-the-top, so I wanted dramatic soprano vocals over an orchestral instrumental... I couldn't find a soprano, so I ended up singing the part myself...

What was your first teaching experience as a composer?

A college course called Writing Japanese Video Game Music at San Francisco State University in 2021.

Why are you a specialist educator?

I think Japanese composers pioneered a distinctive game music sound that's quite different from orchestral film scoring, partly due to the technological constraints of the chiptrunc era... Traditional music curriculums don't necessarily teach the craft well, so I wanted to fill that gap.

Do you advise your students to use AI?

I don't advise against it. But any serious game composer should be able to create strong and meaningful tracks with speed, and I teach them the tools and techniques to do so.

Analog or digital equipment?

Digital.

CC or traditional copyright?

Traditional copyright.

What job would you like to do if you weren't a teacher?

Probably a multi-platinum pop sensation.



Sara Lopez Productions

Welcome, a drink of...

I love tea, in almost all of its forms. I usually drink green tea all day long. Let's have some...

Top 5 video game soundtracks

- Austin Wintory "Journey"
- Bear McCreary "God of War: Ragnarok"
- Olivier Desivière "A Plague Tale: Requiem"
- Gareth Coker "Ori and the Blind Forest"
- Bill Brown "Lineage II"

Top 5 single or album

This might be a shocker for people that don't know me, but my fav album from the last 10 years is "Calambre", by Nathy Peluso.

Your first professional experience as a composer?

If it's the first time I got payed as a composer, I was 16 years old and I went abroad to Germany to give a concert of my own little music, around 2005-2006.

Analog or digital?

Mix!

How many instruments do you play?

more than 10 but I only studied the trumpet, horn, piano and guitar...

Can you explain the creative process behind "The Hookmaine" OST?

I ventured a little outside of my comfort zone, since I thought an ambience-synth-like OST would fit the purpose of the game better than my usual traditional-folklore orchestra.

Do you use AI?

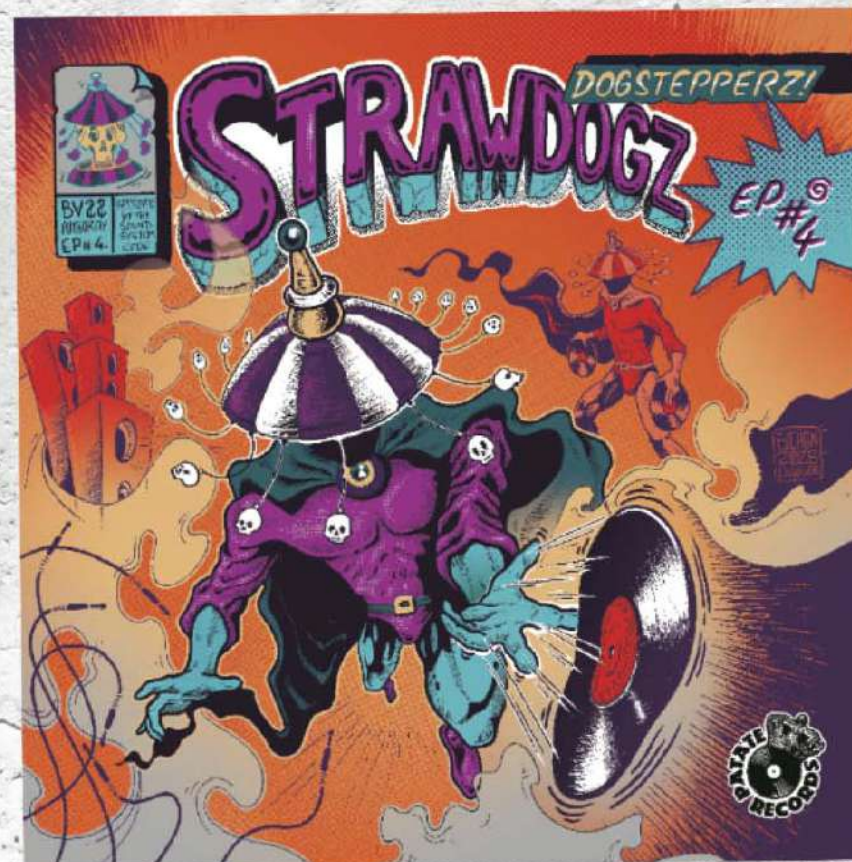
I don't and I actively refuse to use it and campaign against it. At least GEN AI, that is...

What are your three favorite piece?

I almost never listen back to what I've composed, I always want to change things. If I have to choose, maybe "Oye, Mama's" OST introduction, "Born Again" and "Nana de la Olla Blanca".

If you could have a conversation with someone in the Game industry?

J. K. Rakoczy



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