The Importance of Game Music

ICO: Castle in the Mist

I listen to game music. A lot. This is a recent trend circa 1995 with Chrono Trigger on the Super Nintendo. Well, it's even earlier if you count the one time I finished Karateka in 1985 and let the music at the end of the game (scored by Jordan's Dad, Francis) loop for hours as I recorded it on a tape player. But CD quality audio-wise, Chrono Trigger was the first game that demanded more attention. It was Yasunori Mitsuda's first game composing job and it was pure magic. I still listen to that soundtrack today, interspersed with the thousands of other game songs I've collected.

When you play a game you are experiencing a combination of story/design, interaction and audio. The audio is a very important part of the gaming experience and I always listen to the music and sound effects because it was carefully designed into the game and frames the entire piece. After the game is over and you listen to the music outside the game, if you bother to get the soundtrack, you will remember what was happening during the game as you listen to the songs.

This is what I like about game music: it lets me remember playing the game without me having to actually pull out my SNES and find the cartridge and spend time replaying it. Listening to the full soundtrack lets you remember the whole game, not just one part of it. With a library of thousands of songs, I'm reliving many of the games I've played.

Seiken Densetsu 3: Whiz Kid

I also have a lot of music from games I've never played and after listening to them for so long, I feel as if I know the games without having played them. For example, I've played Secret of Mana (Seiken Densetsu 2) and listen to all its music and remember the parts I played and it's great. I also have the soundtrack to Seiken Densetsu 3, never released in the USA, and the music is similar in a way, but very different. And through the music I get a very good sense of the kind of game that it is.

Remixes take game music to a whole new level. The Zelda, Super Mario, Final Fantasy and Chrono Trigger series have some of the most remixed songs. The styles these songs are remixed in vary from 70?s disco to jazz to orchestral to just plain crazy and creative. Best of all, you can get most game remixes for free from OCREMIX.ORG. Remixers have gotten so good at remaking these songs that they also create their own originals and recently have been scoring the soundtracks to new games such as Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo HD. The industry is waking up to a whole new world of talent – game music remixers. Back in 2005 when I started working on my MMO, I wanted to have remixers as composers for my game. Quinn Fox has already delivered some great stuff.
Illinois Afterglow – Quinn Fox

It's true, game music doesn't sound like anything you would hear on the radio or MTV and most people don't recognize it when they hear it. They think it's electronic music usually. But it's not – it's a special musical form that not only sounds great, but helps you to remember.

I like remembering.