Niubie

A SNAKE HOOKED TO YOUR MOBILE PHONE

[As translated from Spanish.]

A few days ago, we tested *Pro Zombie Soccer*, a game that is quite addictive, for the iPhone. One of the things that surprised us was the soundtrack, so we decided to talk to those responsible for this section: Jorge and Guillermo Badolato.

These two Spanish brothers are Badolato Music, and to their credit, have several projects for film, Television and video games. Apart from *Pro Zombie Soccer* and *Terminator* (both for iPhone), they worked on **Vin Diesel's Wheelman**, **Elefunk** and **Doodle Hex**, among others.

Jorge and Guillermo talked to *Niubie* about the sound design process, different consoles, their hobbies and some tips for those who want to start in this profession.

What is the main difference between doing the sound for a movie and a video game?
The goal is the same in both: create a unique sound atmosphere for the project in question, and pose a challenge to the composer. However, although at first glance the two may seem very similar, different techniques are used in musical composition.

In a film, music and sound effects are linear, follow a set of images and are always reproduced in the same order. All that will happen in the sequence is planned beforehand, and the composer can go directly to composing while watching the images. This technique is also used to compose for video game "cutscenes," which are actually small, animated sequences.

In modern video games, music is interactive: the sound has to adapt in real time what happens on screen; there is no possibility that a situation is repeated exactly twice in the game. In addition, we must construct the music as least repetitive as possible, and that it can be played on loop if a player takes longer to solve the difficulties of the game.

One attractive thing for the video game music composer, is the freedom to mix musical styles, which are usually greater in number than in the cinema. Often, the soundtracks of games are made by subjects of hybrid styles, blending sounds/styles that are seemingly very different, but in the context of a game, fit like a glove. In general, there is more freedom to experiment, and try new things.

To get more variety, next-generation consoles enable the composer to divide a song into layers or sub-mixes (drums, orchestra, guitars, etc.) and that the game engine itself regulates their volumes in real time, based on what happens on screen. This technique was employed for the soundtrack in **Vin Diesel's** *Wheelman* (Midway/Ubisoft/ Tigon Studios). For cutscenes, the cinematic technique was used.

The sound is a fundamental element in the experience of the player, and thanks to technical advances being introduced with each new generation of consoles and game engines, the sound is improving everyday.

In the proposed gaming experience, how do you build this level of sound experience?

Before starting to compose or design effects and environments for a project and creating an accompanying truly listening experience for the game, you need to collect all available information on resources and the creative side. For example:

   • Platform. You have to know the technical limitations of the platform where the game is played, in order to know the possibilities of implementation that we have.

   • Genre of the game. To define the musical styles.
   • Conceptual art drawings (if any).
   • Development of the story.
   • Types of levels and environments.
   • Flesh out the kind of feelings that the developer wants to transmit at any time. This is the moment that the fun part begins, to create audio content in the mind.

With a level of style and work platforms that has shown your versatility, how hard is it to make the change to work in a game going from *Wheelman* to *Pro Zombie Soccer*?

Thank you. Although the resources of the platforms used in *Wheelman* (PS3/XBOX 360/PC) and *Pro Zombie Soccer* (iPhone) are very different, we were very comfortable working in *PZS*, as we could use "real audio" instead of small sound banks triggered by midi sequences. This happens in other small platforms such as Nintendo DS and similar, and the sound quality is much lower.

With *PZS*, we wanted to compose and produce music as if it were intended to sound in a game or "big" movie, and include it in the game as mp3. If you listen through headphones or a stereo, you'll hear a sound like an mp3 of a soundtrack genre. The full game soundtrack will be available very soon through a record label.

The truth is that the whole team, Super Awesome Hyper Dimensional Mega Team, attempted to maximize *PZS*, trying to squeeze the full potential of the iPhone and do our very best job.

What was your main source of inspiration in *Pro Zombie Soccer*?
Although not specifically investigating other music to compose music for *PZS*, inspiration comes from all the years of watching movies and action/horror games, two of our favorite genres, as well as our preference for the hybrid styles. In this case, mixing rock music and orchestral/cinematic. The end result is a hybrid orchestral/rock/electronic. We are very happy that we are having a very positive acceptance by players and the press in general.

Is there anything you would have liked to have implemented in this project, but ultimately could not?
Although the final result was good, we would have liked to have had more RAM available to use more simultaneous sound effects and less compression of files, to get greater sound quality. The next-generation iPhone will have more power, but we have to optimize everything to run smoothly on older models. Moreover, we are glad to have used mp3 format for music, getting the same quality as any standard commercial CD in mp3.

What part of the work did you love most in doing *Pro Zombie Soccer*?
What we most enjoy of the entire process, is the first time we played a new scene/sound level in place and adjusted, and seeing that everything fits with the intention that we wanted to have. In *Pro Zombie Soccer*, it was the absolute freedom for all of us, all the equipment we enjoyed in all parts of the process.

This is exactly why we did this game with a group of friends from the industry–the "Super Awesome Hyper Dimensional Mega Team" –when in 2009, we decided to make games to our liking. We believe that's why the result is so special, at least for us.

What activities or hobbies do you have? Do they influence your projects?
In any artistic creation, everything helps and influences our manner of working. Some activities that we enjoy include photography, travel, enjoying the outdoors, always watching movies and listening to music. Anything that distracts us from our work helps us bring a fresh approach when we return.

What are the tools that you cannot live without?
Variax guitars and amplifiers, Pod Farm (Version 6), our all symphonic library sampler, Project Sam, Vienna Symphonic Cube, Spectrasonics virtual instruments, and more.

What advice would give to those who are interested in getting started in composition and sound design for videogames?

Play a lot, constantly investigate new technologies and test all virtual instruments that are constantly coming onto the market. It is essential to play many games, the more different genres and consoles the better. While having fun, you can study the technical side: how they are made and how the effects and music are implemented in every situation.

Among the many out there, we recommend three good books to start: *The Complete Guide to Game Audio: for Composers, Musicians, Sound Designers and Game Developers* by Aaron Marks; *Audio for Games: Planning, Process and Production* by Alexander Brandon; and, *The Study of Orchestration* by Samuel Adler

Trying adding sound to your own sound effects and games. Mod sound to some free games, to learn how to implement the game audio (music and sfx) and, coincidentally, learn to drive a games engine. Available now for free, noncommercial use is Unreal Engine 3 (**Gears Of War, Wheelman**). Add sound to cutscenes in a commercial game, writing music and sfx.

Will Spain win the World Cup in South Africa?

Hmm... Considering that the Spanish team did not have penetrating balls and other gadgets like our character Jaxx in **Pro Zombie Soccer**, good luck, and support our team to victory!

We thank Jorge and Guillermo for this interview, and we are awaiting their next projects.

Links:

Badolato Music
Pro Zombie Soccer [NB Labs] (Niubie)
Pro Zombie Soccer [Official Site]