

Introduction

This reflective commentary documents the creative and artistic decisions made on the path to creating the portfolio of work. It will explore and compare the original intentions of the plan and the final outcome while discussing the reasons and meanings of those accomplishments and changes, and where relevant, it will suggest further alterations based on the individual feedback. The first point to discuss is the approach to commencing the creative process. The plan was to compose 10 tracks or up to 30 minutes of original music and procure or produce supporting visual content; this material would become the video element of the production intended to attract and hook viewers to the hosting platforms. The first attempt to source original videos was unsuccessful - for a substantial period the 'FREE MUSIC' ads went largely unnoticed across many platforms and any interest was not accompanied by commitment. The same issue arose in my search for musical collaborators; although posts were responded to with likes and shares, these did not translate into further opportunities and the expectation to collaborate was therefore abandoned. During this time, I focused on recording ideas and capturing instrument setting and arrangement mixes instead of creating or borrowing imagery that would be of limited value; my pool of musical ideas was extensive, diverse and had potential to inspire several individual tracks. It was in this time that I studied the work of my chosen composers and producers to create Project 6 and Project 7.

Project 6 and Project 7

Using select criteria from my written proposal and devising a challenge based on my personal SWOT analysis, I developed two thematically diverse cinematic pieces based around ambient textures and expressing emotion through movement and structure. Project 6 (renamed P6V3_ALASILPOR) was inspired by the various soundtracks of the MCU films, namely *Avengers: Endgame*. Using a blend of classical and modern instruments and techniques I constructed a theme song that explores the journey of a multi-paced action sequence filled with tension, relief, anticipation and excitement. As previously planned I then used this piece to explore the amalgamation of film music and the chosen production techniques used in Nine Inch Nails' *The Fragile*; the first instance came in the form of the panoramic ghost whispers indicating the end of the intro (1:20) and the start of the first percussion bridge (1:40). Another instance is the meticulously programmed and mixed drums and percussion - these layers were written to fill the frequency, depth and panoramic range as thoroughly and evenly as possible. This track was also planned to be a dynamic, dramatic, cinematic chain of musical ideas and production techniques. I believe I achieved both objectives. It took several arrangement variations and multiple melodic and chordal changes to arrive at the concept of rising, urgent struggle and conflict because the versatility of the percussion kits made it easy to progress in any creative direction. This project ended with almost as much unused additional material as there was in the final track.

The inspiration I took from the works of Nine Inch Nails led me to change my writing methods from structure-based composition to movement-based narration. This in part explains the contrast between the sections, and the use of call and response embedded in the layers of texture. By selecting orchestral instruments with the most authentic-sounding samples and merging them with iZotope, Native Instruments and Valhalla plugins, I began making an effects-heavy track that transitioned into an organic sounding theme that transformed it into a complex percussion-driven action sequence. Making this track helped me hone my production skills and strategy, I have now developed a process chain that is applicable to many instruments and can greatly improve the balance of future works, helping

me work more efficiently and effectively. The mixing stage was an intricate process that allowed me to explore and manipulate the musical devices essential to building structural changes and sequences, and shaping complementary arrangements. This resulted in obtaining an EQ curve that very closely matched that of Alan Silvestri's *Portals*, the reference track on which it was based. Peer and tutor feedback indicate that my mixing skills are strong, the use of space and reverb is effective but the cymbals and wooden percussion elements can be brought forward in the mix. Personal tutor Ciarán Robinson stated that the strings lack the programming realism of the rest of the instruments but 'the rhythmic & percussion programming is excellent' (Appendix A).

The second of these compositions, Project 7 (renamed 4MAST) is a similar work. Its conception was based on minimalism and ambience, and with the later addition of a royalty free video by artist Mikkehouse, it was restructured to a space theme. This track is also dense with production techniques however it follows a timeline of cues exploring 4 moods/themes including:

00:00 to 1:50 – exposition/vista.

1:50 to 3:35 – relaxed/retro.

3:35 to 4:40 – nothingness/tension/despair.

4:40 to 5:00 – danger/death.

Dissimilarly to P6V3 *ALASILPOR* I planned this track as a multi-texture composition designed to demonstrate my production skills in a condensed amount of time. Following Holmgren's Spotting technique, I studied the content of Mikkehouse's video to discover how best to narrate it, it was with this analysis that I concluded that strategically separating, modulating and layering instruments would enable me to utilise the full frequency and panoramic range to balance sounds and textures as typical of the space-themed music. A recurring complication was the composition element, space music is progressive and uses long reverbs and notes to convey the enormity of space, this is not usually achievable in short pieces and many works can be up to 30 minutes in length. In order to achieve this target this track had to demonstrate high production and mix value where it would inevitably lack in composition detail. The influences for this piece originate from films such as *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and games such as *Titanfall* (2014) and *Fallout 4* (2015). My aim was to capture the essence of traveling through space by focussing on the sound design approach to the reverb settings.

The most important tool used was the modulation wheel, to obtain the optimum recording every note had to be played with its unique, personalised expression curve, and then processed according to its place in the timeline. Then, using a 2-bus system I created a sense of close density with a small reverb on the first send and magnified it with a larger, longer reverb of the second send. I found that using sends allowed more control when individually automating large numbers of parameters as opposed to inserting a reverb which colours the entire channel and cannot be separately pan or volume adjusted (8 Reverb Mixing Tips, 2020). Even though this was the approach I adopted throughout the production process across all the tracks, I still performed A/B comparisons to the insert method to check quality of outcome and sound. In all instances the outcome was superior when automating a send and recording a performed modulation. This entire track is built from live takes and original loops; the live performance aspect gives a sense of life and movement, making it less mechanical and systematic.

I accomplished my objective and learned that this music has potential for in game and game trailer application. The genre lends itself to app, console and pc platform games with examples such as *Gears of Eden* (2018), *The Outer Worlds* (2019), *Endless Space 2* (2017)

and the *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* franchise (2004-2017) as highly suitable candidates.

The first responses came from filmmaker associations and online communities, following several screenings, the comments were positive and the audio was deemed suitable or relevant to the images. The level of production was praised as professional and high standard, and the cinematic/space themes were described as different and unique but not suitable for the current briefs and commissions. The attending producers and filmmakers did not have a need for space music or a freelance music producer, they claimed to be content with their own music production skills or current sound engineers. In addition, the remaining producers who had scheduled work also had no need or interest in collaborating. Peer responses suggest the arrangement can be rebalanced to soften the mix; producer Rich Buck states that the opening synth becomes heavy and ‘tiresome on the ears’ (Appendix B) whereas sections 2 and 3 lack a melodic phrase to break up the ambience or introduce an additional instrument. However, the instrumentation is unobtrusive to the visuals and with some minor alterations to the 1980s-style section it can make suitable library music.

Upon reflection of these compositions and the industry responses it became evident that relevant visuals were a vital element of the delivery strategy. In an attempt to obtain video material and to build industry connections I contacted freelance Assistant Director Alyn Luker who stated ‘the media claims that 80% of the industry is working again but they don’t tell you the who, where or what, or how the budget is being used...it’s uncertain times for everyone and you shouldn’t expect any project to follow through because plans are literally changing on the spot’ (Luker, 2020). Following this discussion, I opted to focus my approach on the gaming community and opened a dialogue with developers and coders. Using social media, I reached out to assorted groups and within a reasonable period I received numerous offers and requests.

Forging Destiny

The first of these requests came from Mr. Shoaib Mulla, who responded to my advertisement on 9th October stating he had a game in development and was lacking all sound aspects and assets. He explained in great depth the nature and principles of the game and what he envisaged, and was very clear on what his needs were regarding audio (Appendix C). The first map in development, Abandoned Fortress, is a barren wasteland with a dark history of evil and suffering. The reference material he provided was a series of excerpts from *The Lord of the Rings* films whereby the fellowship travels through the Mines of Moria and experience an overwhelming sensation of alertness and danger. The score adds tension to the already anxiety-causing visual environment as the cavernous drops echo with unsettling tones. Mr. Mulla requested that I produce background music in this style to use as a looping track for the game, but the video I was provided inspired a different thought process. The video I received was a work-in-progress montage of map 1 of 4. The techniques it contained (angles, pans, fades, cuts and pull out) were cinematic, they demonstrated an understanding of film composition, and were indicative of a teaser trailer. Further research confirmed the film techniques are used in both film and TV, and can be effectively synced with various sound effects and music genres.

When commencing the writing process, I responded to the client brief observing the requirements and designing the audio environment according to the reference material. The first draft accomplished the objective and contained all the desired devices, yet even prior to mixing it was not a complementary outcome. I studied game trailers, teasers and adverts in an attempt to understand why the composition was not meshing with the video; between YouTube ads and in-game pop ups there was enough evidence to conclude the theory. The transitions to black and the pull out are reminiscent of teaser and reveal trailers, therefore the

ambient music loop without dialogue didn't accurately support the visual environment. In response to this a second draft was produced to include diegetic sounds and a better suited underscore with heightened tension and dynamics.

Firstly, the giant gears now produce a mechanical clatter of chains on top of the Orch-inspired chants and hits, this suggests the slave army inside the torturous environment. Secondly, the long open space reverb adequately separates the thin textures of the intro from the chamber choir and strings leading to the throne. Combining sfx and foley adds musical diversity and structural dynamics to a simplistic trailer and replaces repetitive music sequences. Thirdly, the higher volume of the gears also forces a break between the two registers of the string section giving a sense of movement and size to the otherwise short video. Ultimately, the pull out is a grand device and needs to be accompanied by similar music - the thundering percussion adds weight to the darkly reverbed strings and ends on a perfect cadence for a pleasant finish.

It is arguably a safe formulaic interpretation and lends itself to a narrator vocal track describing important elements of the game in an attempt to entice the viewer to download/buy it, but it contains the correct devices and musical theme. Mr. Mulla approves of the concept, composition and mix - he suggests making cleaner silences between cutscenes but has requested a remix for an extended version of the complete full-length trailer. The game is due for release in mid/late 2021 so these changes can be implemented fully and accurately.

The Secret Note – Surface World and Dark World

Next, developer and YouTuber Mr. Michael Hayter was looking to recruit help to build a game with which to enter the Unity Create With Code Game Jam 2020. The competition ran from 9am Monday 19th to 4:30pm Friday 23rd October (Pacific Time); this meant that factoring the time difference and work patterns I had 3 days to produce and deliver the music for the brief. As an experienced developer and Game Jam competitor Mr. Hayter stated 'these games focus on graphics and action, I think we should capitalise on the music aspect and stand out from the rest...having a musician on the team will set us apart from the competition' (Hayter, 2020). The musical requirements were simply two themes; happy ambience and danger mood. Drawing inspiration from 3 agreeably iconic but different games, *Minecraft*, *Dig Out! – Gold Digger Adventure* and *Sonic the Hedgehog*, I composed two multi-layer audio tracks that convey these moods with numerous progressive changes.

The idea was inspired by my experiences of using FMOD and Wwise whereby vast diversity can be produced with loop triggers and probability functions, the resulting tracks are the product of emulating the probability function to construct layers of texture. The choice of arrangement came from instrument settings I had developed in a previous project, the gentle notes of the harp and softly bowed strings provided an almost dream-like ambience that with reasonable changes of attack and release could become dark and menacing. Time was a major factor for this project so all demos and versions of musical ideas were transferred immediately for confirmation of eligibility, and in turn discussed for further editing. Upon completion of the first room the music was henceforth uploaded directly into the game file and Alpha tested; between writing and mixing sessions I studied the authenticity and accuracy of the flute's reverb and analysed the sound levels and quality. The value of this process is immeasurable because the stimuli of the visuals affect the impact and quality of the audio, and can greatly influence the gaming experience. During these tests I made numerous vital EQ and reverb send edits as well as performance-based changes, without which the game outcome would have been distinctively unbalanced.

Following an in-depth discussion and a series of mind-mapping exercises we concluded that a music-based door unlocking puzzle was a suitable USP; we then established

that a child-friendly musical feature would help boost popularity among the discerning family audience. This decision was commercially wise because we are planning to continue the development to release standard and market it to a universal audience when complete. My previous experience of working with producer Dror Margalith at a writing camp inspired the suggestion of a woodwind instrument as a feature. We then discussed the intricacies of each instrument, and using Kontakt to record samples to demonstrate potential musical outcomes we determined that the flute offers sufficient range and performance versatility. Most importantly we found that the resourcefulness of the flute allowed us to be stylistically unhindered, with any amount and type of alteration the flute can be visually and aurally customised to suit any era or theme. This was demonstrated using a series of plugins ranging from dynamics and filters to modulations and sidechain techniques. Mr. Hayter approved of this and wrote it into the game along with my original flute samples as the key element. The game is simple in nature, the player explores a room avoiding dangers and collecting clues in the shape of musical notes that, when complete, make a melody that unlocks the door to the next room and puzzle. My process of experimenting with reverb and reflective surfaces inspired upscaling the project; future plans for the game now include exploring and unlocking a series of rooms each with different sonic quality, modifying the instrument according to the different themes of the rooms, and unlocking different worlds/maps.

The music and game were in development simultaneously so the progress of this project relied on the timing of long-distance communication at convenient intervals, similarly the response to feedback depended on the overlapping work schedules and the interpretation of the work available at the time of reflection. Mr. Hayter reports that the game did not win the competition but is receiving mixed opinions, which are supporting its further development. It has been stated that it shows potential and many parents would let their children play it to learn about music theory. It has been stated that it shows potential and many parents would let their children play it. The main concerns relate to the gameplay aspect and not the music, however user feedback suggests that the music changes theme with the progression through the levels, and that the instrumental realism could be softer and more like cartoon music to better suit the visuals. Interestingly, peer and professional feedback disagrees; the articulation and instrumentation should be altered to sound more authentic and the mix should demonstrate more movement through dynamics. Producer Amit Dhiman suggests using staccato and crescendo to intensify the composition, and differentiating the sections with fuller harmonies and a melodic element (Appendix D). These ideas were discussed at the Game Jam launch meeting; however, they were not implemented simply due to time restraints - for future instances I intend to consider this more carefully and obtain market research from the target audience.

Game link: <https://play.unity.com/mg/other/the-secret-note?fbclid=IwAR1BDQM7evxkVwvY0u49Cx5ETZzZ4zY0sZp9FhFqBRhOyosMYnKLSMtKXeU>

Bloody Mary

Alongside this project I was involved in a short horror film. Mr. Warren Badenski also responded to my ad stating his requirements of background music and jump scare sound effects for two distinct spots on his film. The reference material he suggested were the films *Insidious* and *Saw*, these were the starting points for his writing process which is demonstrated in the arrival of the demon, and the nature and execution of the attack. The danger within this type of horror film is usually psychological torment with an end kill so the aspect of the jump scare relies on long-drawn high pitches, uncomfortable silences, rising tension and sudden extreme releases. This formula and the associated devices are especially

typical of supernatural thrillers of the 1970s, which effectively has been reimagined and remastered for the modern cinema by companies such as Vertigo (The Woman in Black), Twisted Pictures (Saw, Dead Silence), Lionsgate Films (Saw, American Psycho), Ghost House Pictures (Don't Breathe) and Blumhouse Productions (Insidious).

The decision to use the modern jump scare was fundamentally to support the cleanness of the visuals. I found that colouring the film with vintage effects took away from the effect of the scare, and the wrong instruments failed to purvey tension or fear (Brownrigg, 2003). When revisiting Brownrigg's conventions of horror film music, I confirmed that the devices used today are modern equivalents or iterations of the original techniques however the advancement of technology has given birth to the bass drop and the distortion screams which have become powerful new age features. The use of these devices was strongly suggested but after a thorough logical argument I submitted to the client's needs; the decision was based on the producer's stylistic preference and technical specifications, two areas I professionally cater to. Having reviewed numerous examples of jump scare it was clear that silence was the best base sound, that slowly increasing tension to inorganic attack sounds was more effective than a continuous soundtrack, and that a gentle reverb on low level music emphasises the emptiness and coldness of an internal shot.

The deadline coincided with that of the Game Jam but this was an opportunity to test my skill under pressure, and possibly utilise project files and instrument settings which I maintain to be essential when considering the workload and schedule. The projects share the string section and some reverb busses but the remaining effects are uniquely synthesised instrument voices layered and sequenced to the spot. Upon completion the producer made some additional edits and post-production adjustments to the sound, these technical adjustments have altered the overall clarity and quality of the mix and implemented a different saturation to that of my production. I believe the audio was mixed down with the dialogue more harshly than necessary, but that may be due to the frequency responses of the different monitoring equipment used or for artistic reasons. I believe I achieved the requirements of the brief, but I maintain that the bass drop and the processed scream may be more appropriate sounds to emphasise the inhumanity of the demon. In future works involving horror themes I would favour experimenting with instruments such as the Aztec Death Whistle to obtain an original demonic voice.

Mr. Badenski returned with positive feedback stating 'It won our little Quarantine Film Competition for Halloween special which is nice. People seem to like it' (Badenski, 2020). Furthermore, it was commended at the screenings for its sound effects and sound design with comments including 'contemporary', 'effective' and 'unexpected'. The technical and artistic responses insist that the strings should fade out faster to build tension, and though they are used effectively the silences could be longer. Controversially, producer Rick Buck argues the strings should be replaced by a less intense instrument like a distantly reverbed soft pad. This would allow the tension to build for longer and can facilitate wider modulation, but the different sounding demonic theme could drastically alter the overall motif of the film (Appendix B). Peer feedback also addresses the final cut edits made by the producer; musician and producer Dror Margalith states 'The end scene seems to reuse the same tension rise and then cuts abruptly again, this sounds a bit cheap and makes it more comedy than horror' (Appendix E). Film industry practice enables the producer and the sound department to collaborate throughout the final mix, however personal experience demonstrates that filmmakers also oversee the production and alter the creative outcome of the final cut. These alterations occurred in the instance of this production and resulted in changes to my original score, but the positive outcome is the development of a professional relationship and the satisfaction of a new industry client and connection.

Rise of Humanity

On 19th November I was approached by David Benoy, the marketing/community manager of Cybernetic Walrus, stating that they are currently working on a PC game called Rise of Humanity due for release in 2021. I was invited to make some music for the promo material, and given the game teaser trailer and Mick Gordon's '*Advanced Research – DOOM* soundtrack' as a reference track. The brief was to 'produce an interesting soundtrack for the trailer' (Benoy, 2020). The original soundtrack was generic and flat, it contained several typical techniques and devices found in library music but lacked colour and character, and from the opening frame it emitted stock quality sound and little movement. Fully understanding the client's needs, I based my arrangements on those of *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (2013) and *Iron Harvest* (2020) trailers.

My first steps were spotting and time signature plotting using the many visual elements that offered impactful cues and opportunities for changes, and once the tempo was fixed the musical sections simply dropped into place. The footage started with a sneak melee attack on a robot in an urban compound at night and culminated with an explosives assault in a midday desert location, this indicated that the game contains numerous variable locations and weapons therefore the music should reflect that diversity. Instinctively I interpreted that with long and wide reverbs, minor key choir voices, and orchestral instruments denoting intense modulation and expression. Developing suitable environment texture for such short clips seemed fruitless and challenging, instead I focused on creating sombre vocal tones and the sharp metallic hits as the key features. I revisited the project file for P6V3_ALASILPOR to reflect on the percussion programming and mix - from here I reutilised certain elements in order to maintain the mechanical rhythms and tonality of drums track. A challenge arose when mixing the male and female vocals, the harmonies appeared to work but the samples of the male voices didn't blend as naturally as their female counterparts. In future I will avoid using these particular male samples in favour of something more authentic. Breaks, drops and chops are techniques well suited to sci-fi and action, so using tremolo and multiple parameter automations I manipulated a riser to dynamically bridge the gap to the accelerated marching beat and staccato strings. This bridging method allowed the scene to change without losing momentum and help deliver contrast and variation in a small teaser trailer format. I chose to cut off the music in time with the burst of the chest, after comparing playbacks I found the diegetic ending was more dynamic and fitting than fading out the music, and the flow bound it pleasantly to the previous metallic strikes and grenade explosion. There were several options to interpreting this brief; a popular trend for this type of game uses electronic music (*Portal 2* - 2010, *Robot Rundown* - 2014, and *Robo Recall* - 2017), however in keeping with the current trends I chose cinematic soundscape for heightened dynamic variety. The arrangement didn't match that of *Wolfenstein* or *Iron Harvest*, but with further development it could produce similar intensity.

Professional feedback indicates that it is a suitable rendition, it has depth, is mixed well for several viewing devices and flows appropriately with an effective arrangement (Appendix B). In contrast, tutor feedback recommends addressing the male vocal choir issue and replacing the kick drum with a pulsing bass effect in keeping with the style (Appendix A). In addition, prior to submission I will record a guitar part to help drive the mechanical aspect of the game play, this could also help bind the instruments and expand the mix by applying the 'epic' sound of Metallica's S&M album.

Producing this portfolio has confirmed 2 intriguing behaviours that I aim to explore and exploit moving forward. Firstly, I observed that typically the least comprehensive but most valuable feedback was the responses to the premiers; the test audience expectations were in line with film and TV standards but many individuals were incapable of communicating technically. And Secondly, the responses of musically knowledgeable people

to works-in-progress were coloured by their interpretations and personal preferences. Though not impossible, it was a rare occurrence to receive unbiased technical recommendations from a producer or artist. This information can inevitably support me in future feedback and productions.

Conclusion

In the process of creating a portfolio to professional standards, I encountered academic, creative or professional challenges in every area of its execution. However, I feel I have also learned how to create opportunities to overcome those boundaries and limitations. Against expectations I only created 2 of the 10 original compositions I had planned, but what I did create contained the concept album principles and the progressive music structure I intended to explore in my proposal, both of which successfully demonstrate immense detail and variation in a compact format. The issues associated with making film industry connections to source material on which to collaborate was a disappointment and a setback, but equally a valuable lesson. The anticipated instability of that industry presented me the opportunity with which to develop my independent research and work skills, and to explore new opportunities within the game industry, a sector that is now opening to me and full of potential. The experience of producing music unaccompanied has taught me to practice efficient workflow methods and has made me aware of my personal and productivity limitations. Though I did not achieve my plan of a collaboration with a featured musician or artist, I did form a close professional network which helped reinforced my learning and production by means of research and feedback.

I established that the most effective method of data collection came in the form of test screenings, and that the questionnaire and survey methods actively deterred the participants. Using this method repeatedly I determined that the quality of my work has risen measurably upon completion of each project, and that my interpretation and production skills have progressed substantially since the start of my studies. The volume of my feedback reflects the density of my productions; as my projects increase in size and complexity the depth of their responses increases in detail. This outcome is the first indicator that I am working towards producing at industry standards. Creating this portfolio has enabled me to increase my subject knowledge and learning skills to a competitive standard, in doing so I have learned how to connect industry practices and academic methodologies to accomplish advanced tasks and obtain the desired results. In doing so I have increased my knowledge of the principles and theories of music for game trailers, and I have started developing a strategy and the resources for approaching prospective industry clients.

My most rewarding opportunity was the privilege of having Goetz Botzenhardt as a personal mentor throughout this experience. Upon review of my portfolio he congratulated me commending the quality of my work, he stated 'It is very good, the production works very well and all the work speaks for itself. No, there are no rookie mistakes, it demonstrates your skills well and you should take this out to the industries happily. You should be proud.' (Botzenhardt, 2020). His influence guided my latter-stage development and helped shape my professional presentability. My portfolio is a testament to the support, guidance and feedback of my mentor, tutor and peers during its conception and creation. To conclude my reflection, I state that my most valued tool is the ability to obtain effective feedback and extrapolate the data required for self-improvement and the enrichment of my work. The criticism received during this production has also revealed new ways in which to address the commercial needs of the industry, and what trends I can be expected to follow or indeed challenge. And finally, the professional relationships I have created are not merely new connections or potential employers; they are a window into the industries in which I aim to navigate for my career.

Word count: 5183

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ciarán Robinson's Feedback – 01/12/2020

Hi Nick

All looking/sounding good. Here's a few of my notes:

Secret Note - Dark World

Some work to be done on the string articulation to sync it better with the notes (try some negative delay on the tracks to allow for the attack portion of the envelope.

Good percussive programming, and the use of reverb gels the elements of the track together.

Secret Note - Surface World

The instrumentation works well with the previous track.

The lower strung swells don't quite sound realistic - take a look at how you can vary the articulation (e.g. through aftertouch) to add more emotion to the piece.

The main melody could work well within a game - it's not too prominent, and should suit the repetition that it would have to deal with in usage context.

Bloody Mary

Good use of silence. As mentioned before, this is very much meeting the expectations of the genre, but as a consequence it approaches pastiche.

It might just be my memory, but this seems like a better mix than the previous one - the foley is more restrained.

FD_AF

The use of mechanical timbres suit the game aesthetics - though with a name like this, I'd have made more use of anvil/metallic percussion layered with the timpani.

The cymbal crashes make the mix a little thin and harsh - pull these down a touch, and be careful of hard-panning in an orchestral mix.

P6V3_ALASILPOR

Very influenced by the Terminator theme? Good use of space and reverb in the wooden percussion elements - there is room for this to cut through.

When the strings come in, it's clear that this is an area worth looking into more - they lack the realism of the rest of your programming (the rhythmic & percussion programming is excellent).

4MAST

The first sound effect was very reminiscent of Event Horizon.

As catalogue music this could be quite successful - the music is unobtrusive enough (in a good way!) to avoid over-influencing the visuals.

At around 2:20, the lead synth line adds a very 80's twist, which is enhanced by the hi-hat. I can see his being the start of a synth-wave track - just add some more FM elements.

Regards

Ciarán

Surface World

Felt like the build-up could have gone bigger, more layers! Really nice melodies! Maybe some more staccato, quicker instruments to increase intensity at top of build also!

Dark World

The drums that you use on the first minute seem like they could do with some more lows/low mids. Also, the Rev cymbal back end is quite harsh on the ear, maybe quieter or adjust EQ!

Bloody Mary

Bloody love it haha! At the start before he says Bloody Mary I feel the music has too much intensity for what was happening in the dialogue, I would probably have basic quiet pads far in the background so that it moulds into your intense rise during the Bloody Mary phrases.

P6V3

Just the hats in at 2:45 I think maybe pitch up a bit, just felt didn't sit right, arrangement great though!

FD_AF

All good just felt was missing that game melody. I'm assuming that was a title screen or advert?

4MAST

First high pad gets a bit tiresome on the ears, maybe modulate a filter or something to help the highs move or lower. First hat that comes in seemed a bit too dry to go with the dreamy pads you got going on. Sounds fine when the rest of instruments come in so maybe automate a reverb or something!

So well done mate, all sounding good!

Appendix C

Shoaib Mulla's game description of Forging Destiny – 09/10/2020

So basically, it was the stronghold of the three kings.

The first king was wise, so he sought to peace for his kingdom and prosperity instead of waging wars on others and so he devised an artefact that passed wisdom to those who possess it. His son the second king was powerful and gifted, he expanded his kingdom far and wide, and riches flew from all parts of land into their kingdom. The third king was kind and gentle, who fell in love which led to his demise. On death of his beloved he went insane and sort to dark magic to bring her back, we opened a portal to bring her back from afterlife, but what came was evil, which took over him and his fortress, and so all was lost so the three kings left behind three artefact buried in their Sarcophagus, the artefacts of wisdom, power and love, together of which can make someone immensely powerful, yet it's the a necessity component for those who wish to close the evil portal so at the end of this dungeon, the player will have a choice, to keep the artefacts he collected raiding this fortress, or to close the portal and free the trapped souls, but losing the artefacts in the process, also if you notice in the dungeon video i shared, there are 3 statues, those belong to the 3 kings. People believed that the witch is source of evil and anyone who ventures close to fortress are taken by her, but when the player defeats the witch, she turns to a normal person and she tells him her tale. That she too was pure of heart, but the evil in the fortress consumed her and used her as a tool for greater disasters, so she will point the player to the artefacts and how they can be found. As a witch, she was burnt, and she is blind, so she works on her senses to attack the player. You battle her first, thinking she is the evil in the fortress who was responsible for dwarf's disappearance, but when she is defeated, the evil in her is gone and she tells the players the tale of the 3 kings, and that's when you know it's not her that was problem along, it's the portal at the depth of the dungeon. So, when you collect the 3 artefacts she tells you about and go to the depth where the portal is, there will be in game cinematic where a voice from portal will try to trick you saying why close the portal and lose the artefacts, it will give you all the power you need. The souls trapped here are already lost and gone, freeing them is not going to do any good, but having the artefacts will. Kind of tempting player to not scarifies the artefacts and there will be a choice, close the portal, or leave the portal and keep the artefacts. In case player decides to not close the portal, it's just a personal decision, won't matter in game, and you get to keep the artefacts, but your conscious will hurt knowing you left the souls trapped in dungeons forever. In case you close the portal, the souls will come and thank you for freeing them, and before they leave, they will tell you of a treasure chest that's in the throne room, and give you a key to open it, so you lose the artefacts but gain a lot of gold and other stuff.

The Secret Note – Dark World

Well mixed in general

High's a little too high for my liking, they really stand out needs to be a little reduced

Reverse Cymbal to Cymbal needs zero gap in between (smoother) use the hit and rise

Kontakt library for this (they have some under orchestral that are super smooth).

Drums are a little detached from the mix as they really explode out, maybe they just need to be lowered? A Little more movement in the strings towards the end like a crescendo to the finish could make it a little more interesting. Try out Session Strings Pro's Animator which can give you Arpeggiated rhythms in Staccato style (not sure I'm using the right terminology here, just trying to sound clever :P)

The Secret Note – Surface World

Really nice and well mixed.

I would have liked the melody at the start with the melody at the end to make the penultimate 4/8 bars a little more interesting and potentially like a call and response? This same melody could do with less reverb in my opinion too, bring the sound a little closer to the front. The high section of strings (violas?) could come down a bit at 1:09, they are little loud

Bloody Mary QFC Halloween Special

At 0:58 maybe have a steep fade to make the strings come out and the crickets come in? I think they switch a little too quickly and detached me from the experience a little.

1:55 – maybe put in a dissonant chord or two (off key)?

02:36 – the door slam was a bit modest, needs a little more impact and to be louder

Turn up the “spread my scarlet gospels” and take of the reverb?

0:44 & 3:21 – voices could be louder – unless you want people to intentionally turn up their speakers to get the shock of 1:10 to be more apparent? The mix is all a little bit low but might be intentional?

Forging Destiny

A little abrupt and needs more movement in the first two parts, maybe some percussion? So that the drums at the end don't scare the shit out of you? Lol!

P6V3_ALASILPOR

Nicely mixed, especially like the drum panning. I think the drum filter starts sounding a little too distorted around 0:48 til 1:04 unless you were going for that? 4:20 needs more low end (I'm not hearing any on my monitor)

4MAST

Not loads to feedback on this one, it sounds great. The transition fx at 3:34 stands out as it sounds distorted as does 4:35 unless this was intentional?

RoH

Nice! Very game, but maybe change up that second snare (or some kind of loud perc) that comes in at 0:33?

The mixing on this one could do with a look too, there is quite a bit of distortion on the louder sounds (not sure again if this was intentional?). Maybe you could glue the whole this together with a compressor on the master bus?

The Secret Note - Dark World:

I can imagine the scene.

Suspense/horror. A bit repetitive, might need some more development.

Soundwise - it works.

The Secret Note - Surface World:

Not sure about the vibe. Is it sad? If so it's not warm enough...maybe fuller harmonies.

Not sure about the effect on the harp.

Sounds like the whole piece is a bit unfinished.

Bloody Mary

Too scary...ha ha.

The scary sfx at the beginning is great. Harmonies are good.

Maybe try to react when he sees the dead patient in the bath.

The delay at the end of act one (before the 2 weeks later) cuts abruptly.

The end scene seems to reuse the same tension rise and then cuts abruptly again, this sounds a bit cheap and makes it more comedy than horror.

FD_AF:

Very good. Great vibe. Kinda epic.

The music is actually better or creating big expectations.

The end might need more longer reverb or slow fade of the last note.