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Features

The Making Of The First Symphonic Game Music Concert In Europe

Contents

- ▶ [Introduction](#)
- ▶ [Organizing The Event](#)
- ▶ [Printer Friendly Version](#)

Common Tasks

- ▶ [Change Login/Pwd](#)
- ▶ [Post A Job](#)
- ▶ [Post A Project](#)
- ▶ [Post Resume](#)
- ▶ [Post An Event](#)
- ▶ [Post A Contractor](#)
- ▶ [Post A Product](#)
- ▶ [Write An Article](#)
- ▶ [Get In Art Gallery](#)
- ▶ [Submit News](#)

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 - ▶ [Symbian Issues For Mobile Games](#) by Ben St. John [11.24.2003]
 - ▶ [Drama Games, Markets, and Programmers](#) by Chris Crawford [11.22.2003]

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Las Vegas, United States
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Miami Beach, United States
12.08.03
 - ▶ [HP Bazaar Camp USA](#)
Palo Alto, United States
12.09.03
 - ▶ [IGDA Meeting: San Francisco Chapter](#)
San Francisco, United States
12.10.03
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01.07.04

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Although interest in game music has been growing over the last few years, it still takes a back seat to graphics and design. What's more, it often is lumped together with sound effects and voice acting by developers - and publishers - not giving it the full respect it deserves. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that the idea of a European game music concert was virtually unconsidered until this year. Most assumed that there was no market for such an event.

The Symphonic Game Music concert in Leipzig, Germany disproved that notion. Performed by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra at the famous Gewandhaus hall, it was the first of its kind held outside of Japan. It attracted a sell-out crowd of approximately 2000 people, and its popularity indicates that game music can be appreciated by a wide audience -- including people who may have no interest in playing games. This article tells the story of how that event came to pass.

Perhaps a little background about myself is in order. Since 1999, I have been fortunate to work within the industry as a producer, Music Director and/or music consultant for titles like *Chicago 1930* from Wanadoo, *Knights of the Temple* from TDK Mediactive and *Stalker - Oblivion Lost* from THQ Inc. As the Executive Producer of the *Merregon* trilogy, a soundtrack CD set in a fantasy world, I had the chance to work with the finest game composers from around the world, including Chris Huelsbeck, Yuzo Koshiro and Fabian Del Priore. My role on the project was session manager for the live recordings, which were performed by the Prague Symphony Orchestra and choir. In that role I was able to select players from famous ensembles like the New York Pops, too.



Andy Brick conducts the Czech Symphony Orchestra during one of its rehearsals.

Selecting A Venue

As the event producer, I was responsible for organizing everything related to the performance. We knew we needed to hold the concert alongside an established event, ideally one that was connected to the games industry. The Games Convention (GC) in Leipzig seemed like the perfect opportunity, as it is generally regarded as Europe's leading videogame trade fair. By scheduling the concert during GC, it would pull in people from our target audience. I impressed upon the GC show management the idea that I would most like to honor publishers who worked with live orchestras in the past. I wanted the majority of the selected compositions to have been previously recorded with this kind of ensemble. I did allow some exceptions to this rule - for example, I chose Chris Huelsbeck's "Apidya" from 1991. This music had never been performed by a live orchestra. But as Germany's most well-known composer in his field, Huelsbeck was certainly an important influence in the industry.

Fortunately, GC show management liked my proposal. We got their blessing to hold the concert during the show.

Choosing The Musical Content

With the date and location established, the next decision revolved around the content. Although I was born in Germany, I didn't want the concert to focus exclusively on European game music. The goal, then, was to provide a selection from titles around the world. I wanted the program to be adventurous, so as to appeal to younger audience members. Choosing music from the greatest games of recent years would help in that respect, and would also show that the most successful productions also use a live musical score. My plan was to assemble about 70 minutes, brought together in an interesting juxtaposition of Asian, European and American titles to showcase and contrast various musical styles. Fortunately, my recent work on *Merregon* provided me with many industry contacts including conductors, orchestras and composers.



Event producer (and article author) Thomas Boecker.

The Management Team

Three of us acted as musical directors for the concert: Andy Brick, Petr Pycha, and me. Andy Brick (composer of *Sim City 4: Rush Hour* and *The Sims 2*) was responsible for getting the scores, checking them and making suggestions for changes that would make them work better in a live performance. One of his bigger challenges was to establish a format for people to deliver submissions to us. Perhaps Brick's most important task, however, was learning the material and preparing everything for the rehearsals and the concert's conductor.

Petr Pycha (the orchestra contractor for *Splinter Cell* and *EverQuest 2*) also had his hands full. His major tasks were to book the orchestra and manage the transportation of the musicians from Prague to Leipzig. Additionally, he saw to it that somebody was available to work with the parts for the orchestra and that the sheet music was printed locally.



The Gewandhaus in Leipzig, Germany, where the concert was held.

My job was to make sure everyone knew what was going on and had access to the latest information about the project. We set up a database on the Internet, in which we used to store contact information for the composers, orchestrators, Andy Brick and Petr Pycha, and the management of the Games Convention, among other things.

▶ [Organizing The Event](#)