



**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
EARLY MUSIC NEWS**

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FROM THE EDITOR

I suspect that most readers of the *Southern California Early Music News* are not very conversant with video game music. As I have learned, video games use newly composed classical music extensively. Perhaps even more surprising, there is a growing use of *early music and historical instruments* in video game scores. Join us on a great quest with this month's feature article, **"Distant Courses: Early Music and Historical Instruments in Video Game Soundtracks."**

Laurence Vittes has a delightful mélange for us this month: news of a spectacular recording of **Bach's *St Matthew Passion***; a review of Southern California ensemble **Voxfire's latest release, *FONTIS***; and an **homage to the fountain pen!**

Sadly, the "Concert Calendar" is no more, but you can keep up with the latest goings on in our community by visiting the **SCEMS on-line calendar** www.earlymusicla.org/calendar. Should your interests take you farther afield, be sure to check **"Things to Come"** for upcoming events outside the Southland.

Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, many concerts are being cancelled. Please check appropriate websites or contact concert organizers to confirm that a performance will actually take place.

Thank you for your support of early music in Southern California!

Sincerely,

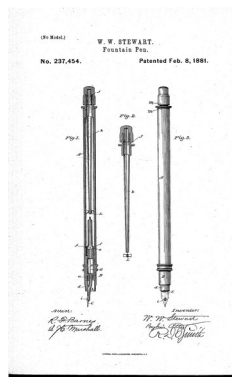
John L. Robinson, Editor-in-Chief,

Southern California Early Music News,

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SCORE WRITING WITH FOUNTAIN PENS: THE RETURN OF A LOST ART

By Laurence Vittes



With the advent of score writing software like Sibelius and Finale, physical rather than virtual writing instruments to produce scores seemed doomed to become forever obsolete. The recent surge in interest in the fountain pen as a general writing instrument, however, reminds us of how central the fountain pen was

to the art of composing from the 1870s, and how dramatic the difference is between the mechanical act of typing and the tangible focus and flow of laying down ink on paper.

Wagner used a gold fountain pen to write out the entire fair copy (a handwritten document that has been written neatly and correctly without scratch-outs and revisions—Ed.) of the score of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Mahler used a black fountain pen to write out the fair copy of his Symphony No. 8 in E-flat major (the “Symphony of a Thousand”—Ed.). Stravinsky used a fountain pen, as can be seen in the 1957 NBC television documentary, “A Conversation with Igor Stravinsky.” When Henry Cowell was incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison (on a “morals” charge) in 1937, he requested a typewriter and a fountain pen. Dimitri Shostakovich was another fountain pen fan, apparently fond of purple ink.

The concept of a fountain pen—a pen that has its own reservoir of ink rather than having to be dipped in an inkwell—has been around for more than a millennium. In the late tenth century, the Egyptian caliph Al-Mu’izz li-Din

Allah demanded and received such a pen.

There is said to be evidence that Leonardo da Vinci used a fountain pen.

Composer Mark Simon, who has been using Finale for the past 16 years, explained how he once deployed the fountain pen for note heads, flags and beams, clefs, instrument names, dynamics, and for tempo markings and other bold-face directions such as “cresc.,” “dim.,” and “con sord” (“con sordino,” “with mute”—Ed.).

Boston-based Karl Henning urges young composers to learn how to notate properly by writing longhand in order to know where computer software is helpful and where its limitations lie. Digital sampling, he says, allows composers to write parts “which would be both unplayable on a specific instrument, as well as being inaudible in a large orchestral texture if played by an acoustic instrument in an ensemble of acoustic instruments.”

The key to writing scores with a fountain pen is using a nib, the part of the pen that lays down the ink, whose familiar point has been cut into a broad italic or stub shape. So modified, it can make thin vertical strokes for the stems and flags of the notes, and the fat horizontal ones for their heads—and can do it very fast.

While established Japanese pen makers like Platinum, Pilot, and Sailor have been offering so-called “music nibs” for the purpose, the real excitement in the field is coming from American companies like San Jose-based Osprey Pens. Osprey recommends using their “juicy, soft flex” broad #5.5 nib for music writing, allowing the user to create both the fine lines and wide horizontal strokes score writing requires.

Before Sibelius, Finale, and pens with steel nibs, there were the goose quills that Beethoven and even Brahms used into the 1890s—the quills from the left wing of a goose, that is. As British harpsichordist, flautist, conductor, and early music expert Nicholas McGegan explained, if a right hander like Beethoven used a feather from the right wing, “it would have gone straight up his nose as he was writing. The goose feather has to be from the left wing, so that the tip of the feather points away from the person writing.”

CD REVIEW



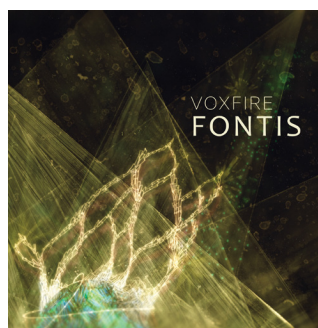
J.S. Bach: *St Matthew Passion*
Choir of King's College, Cambridge & Academy of Ancient Music—Stephen Cleobury, King's College Choir

When Harmonia Mundi announced that they will release Sir Stephen Cleobury's new recording of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at the end of March, I was struck by how far early music has come since the days of Arnold Dolmetsch, Curt Sachs, and Sol Babitz, that we can have a second recording from such an important conductor. In this new recording, Cleobury leads the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, joined by the Academy of Ancient Music and a cast of soloists featuring James Gilchrist's Evangelist. The album is accompanied by a booklet with over sixty pages of texts and photographs, including an essay by John Butt, one of the very best writers on Bach and Handel.

Also a sign of the times, the new recording will be released on hybrid SACD (Super Audio CD, a read-only optical disc format for audio storage intended to be the successor to the Compact Disc [CD] format—Ed.) and will be streamed

and downloadable via all the major digital music services on March 27th, 2020. Selected tracks from the recording, beginning with the opening chorus, are now available to listen to on streaming services and to watch on the Choir's YouTube channel youtube.com/user/ChoirOfKingsCollege. It will be the penultimate recording by Sir Stephen Cleobury to be released on the College's label, to be followed by a recording of the Bruckner Motets in June 2020.

Instead of reviewing, I thought I would give our readers a chance to listen to the demo tracks themselves before they read what I have to say. My review will appear in the April issue.



FONTIS, Voxfire, Orenda Records

FONTIS is a casually brilliant recital across ten centuries by the Southern California group called Voxfire, which describes itself as a “groundbreaking

mashup of elegant heavenly voices and sizzling soulful instrumental soundscapes.” Voxfire members are early music vocalists Samela Aird Beasom, Christen Herman, and Susan Judy; and multi-genre composers/arrangers/instrumentalists Nick DePinna and Ross Garren.

Over the course of thirteen mind bending tracks, they reach backwards into time, to the chapels, courts, and countryside of medieval Spain and France, then telescope back to jazz, rock, folk, and even classical music. Each song's sound world is enhanced by computer processing, loops, and the latest in recording studio techniques and effects. And yet, the essence of the three singers is always pure at the music's core, no matter how mashed up they become.

DISTANT COURSES: EARLY MUSIC AND HISTORICAL INSTRUMENTS IN VIDEO GAME SOUNDTRACKS

Adam Gilberti, Ph.D. and Jose Daniel Ruiz

Introduction

The sounds of early musical instruments, never more accessible to audiences than they are today, help to create an atmosphere of otherworldly drama in the soundtracks of video games played by tens of millions. Early instruments are used solo, accompanied by singers, and in ensembles with or without modern instruments, to expand the timbral palate employed by modern video game composers and developers to transport players to an interactive game world for an immersive and transcendent experience.



Dulcian

Video game composers have adopted this technique from film and television (harpsichord, shawms, recorders, sackbuts, and dulcian in *Harry Potter: The Prisoner of Azkaban*; viols, recorders, and dulcimer in *Game of Thrones*) and modern opera (alto recorder, ocarina, and harpsichord in *Juana*¹), using instruments

from around the world and from all times to paint soundscapes of imaginary worlds. In the process, they have brought the sounds of early instruments and musical forms to a mass audience, much of which would not normally attend early music concerts. This has motivated

many people who would not otherwise have heard early music and historical instruments to explore a new world of sounds and possibilities.

The History of Video Game Music

Video game music has its roots in the arcade scene of the 1970s. The earliest form of game music was generated on purpose-built chips limited to very primitive synthesized sounds, as heard in *Space Invaders* (1978), considered the first game with continuous background music. Chiptunes, as they came to be known, dominated the scene for over a decade, reaching their peak in the late 1980s. Video game consoles such as the Sega Genesis (1989) included relatively advanced FM synthesis processors that allowed multi-channel and polyphonic music to be composed and programmed. In the years that followed, hardware became more powerful and the cost of memory storage decreased, allowing sampled and recorded music to be more commonly used (see, for example, the Sony PlayStation [1995]).

One of the first celebrated composers for video games was Koji Kondo (b. 1961), who composed many of the familiar tunes from the early era of game music (*Super Mario Bros.* and the original games in the *Legend of Zelda* franchise, *inter alia*). Subsequently, music production from games became much like that from film, as music composition moved away from in-house programmers to professional composers employing the same tools and techniques as used in Hollywood. Today, the possibilities for video game music are limited only by budget. Scores can range from a single composer using sample libraries to a

full orchestral production requiring multiple composers, conductors, contractors, mixers, and studio musicians. This flexibility has allowed modern game composers to tap into less commonly used genres, including early music, while continuing to meet the unique challenges of the medium.

The Fantasy Genre of Video Games and Early Musical Instruments

The fantasy genre of video games has always been peppered with medieval history and imagery. The animals are often straight out of medieval bestiaries; the buildings often resemble medieval castles and villages; the costumes are largely inspired by dress of the Middle Ages; the weapons are often based on medieval models, with an emphasis on bows and arrows, swords, and axes; and the magic and lore are derived from fears and superstitious beliefs of this bygone era. Dragons in fantasy games feel historical, like a species long extinct. Even when the setting is not of this world (e.g., *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King*, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, or any of *The Legend of Zelda* or *Final Fantasy* franchises), the quasi-medieval feel of the game is present as more than subtext. Sensationally popular fantasy books, films, and their franchises (e.g., *The Lord of the Rings*, *Game of Thrones*, *Eragon*, *Highlander*, *Harry Potter*—even *Star Wars*) reach back for inspiration to a past world of mystery, magic, and power. They rely on the captivating lore of the European Middle Ages and Renaissance, when sorcery “still existed,” dragons “still flew the skies,” and battles for castles were won with swords. Because music is such an emotive part of the video game soundtrack, historical and unfamiliar instruments and singing styles can be among the most powerful engines for enriching the fantasy of places distant in time or space.

The Legend of Zelda is one of the most popular video game franchises, dating back nearly to the inception of video games. It is famous

for its extensive use of the ocarina. While in the original game *The Legend of Zelda* and its immediate sequel, *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*, the “magic flute” of mysterious power resembles (and is even called) a recorder, in subsequent games starting with *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, it is referred to as (and resembles) the ocarina (a clay flute, believed to date back over 12,000 years, of particular importance in Chinese and Mesoamerican cultures.) The gamer must, in many cases, learn to play the ocarina to navigate the game. It is used to transport the player through time, as in the games *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* and *The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask*. The popularity of *The Legend of Zelda*, with its reliance on the ocarina as the “magic flute” (perhaps a nod to Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* and the syrinx/panpipe/Pan flute, symbol of the Greek god Pan) has piqued interest in the instrument and its exponents, such as ocarina virtuoso David Erick Ramos <http://daviderrickramos.com>. The instrument is used in modern compositions, including the aforementioned *Juana* and compositions by György Ligeti² and Krzysztof Penderecki³.



Contrabass recorder

The recorder, early harps, lute, and hammered dulcimer are often used in video game scores. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, performed in a forty-minute symphony by the Game Music Ensemble at the University of California, Los Angeles <http://gmeat UCLA.com> in 2017, featured the medieval-style hammered dulcimer

as a solo instrument, most clearly heard in “Ancient Stones.” The symphony also used tenor viol, nyckelharpa (a traditional Swedish bowed musical instrument depicted as early as 1408), archlute, early drums, Gamelan gongs, and medieval vocal techniques to convey the sounds of the mostly digitally-produced original soundtrack. (“Ancient Stones” original soundtrack: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjrmRW3VXF8&feature=youtu.be>.) The nyckelharpa is also used prominently in “Grizzly Hills Day,” from the music for *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpyInx0ldfo&feature=youtu.be>).

The use of these early instruments provides a rustic atmosphere and transportation away from the modern world to a fantasy other. *Wrath of the Lich King* uses shawms, sackbuts, dulcian, the clear tone of a boy soprano soloist, and the Armenian duduk (an early double reed woodwind instrument). (Live performance of

Wrath of the Lich King with the Game Music Ensemble at UCLA: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJ9nWN3PF6M&feature=youtu.be>.)

The *Final Fantasy* franchise has long been noted not only for its use of orchestral and choral video game scores but also for its use of a plethora of special solo instruments. This is particularly true of *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* (2003). This soundtrack, composed by Kumi Tanioka (b. 1974), features over two hours of tuneful and ear-catching themes in a nearly all-chamber music setting that almost always features at least one Renaissance or medieval instrument. (The entire soundtrack can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-VnIKtclgo&feature=youtu.be>.) Leading in the soundtrack are the sounds of many sizes of recorder, crumhorn, lute, medieval harp, early bagpipes, serpent, and sackbut. Sometimes these are solo, sometimes combined with other early instruments, and sometimes combined with one or two modern



Adam Gilberti was born in Hayward, California in 1981. His musical interests were first inspired by listening to the Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ at a local pizza parlor. He received his B.M. in music

composition at the University of California, Santa Barbara, studying composition and orchestration with Joel Feigin and William Kraft; his M.A. in music theory and composition from the University of California, Riverside, studying with Tim Labor and Byron Adams; and his Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), studying with Roger Bourland, Ian Krouse, David Lefkowitz, Bruce Broughton, James Newton and Susan McClary.

Dr. Gilberti’s large ensemble compositions have won multiple awards. He has recorded in ensembles for film composers Shirley Walker and Don Davis. Dr. Gilberti has an interest in rare, obsolete, historical, sub-bass, and special new instruments, playing and writing for them in large ensemble compositions.

Dr. Gilberti studies the psychoacoustics of low frequency instruments, runs the musical instruments collections at UCLA, co-directs the 185-member Game Music Ensemble at UCLA, is organist and composer-in-residence at the First Baptist Church of Glendale, is a member of three early music ensembles (The Wessex Consort, Commmercium Musicum, and Los Goytx), and is head chef at Epic Dining Experience, LLC.

instruments, most prominently marimba, modern piccolo, snare drum, and modern violin. The style of the music was described by Tanioka as being “based on ancient instruments...creating a distinctively rustic feel, [following] the practices and styles of early music.”⁴ Many of the pieces are essentially unharmonized melody lines played by various instruments and repeated a number of times. (This is a performance style used by many medieval instrumental ensembles, such as the Los Angeles-based Los Goytx.) Leaving out modern harmony and formal structure, while incorporating timbres associated with bygone ages, gives the soundtrack a dramatic sense of being from another time and another place.

An additional famous moment from the franchise occurs in *Final Fantasy IX*. The soundtrack opens with “The Place I’ll Return to Someday,” performed by a Renaissance recorder quartet (soprano, alto, tenor, bass). Because recorders are readily accessible to many,

the famous *Final Fantasy* recorder quartet is frequently performed by gamers and game music enthusiasts. Nearly one hundred videos of people performing this composition on recorders are online. Some versions use lower recorders (not used in the original soundtrack), an example of which can be heard here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2tmTP_U-fY&feature=youtu.be.

Early Pipe Organs and the Voice of the Church

Musical sampling of early pipe organs by Vienna Symphonic Library GmbH and Milan Digital Audio LLC (creator of the Hauptwerk computer program) has facilitated the inclusion of early organ sounds in modern video game soundtracks. Notable examples may be found in *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles*, featuring the 1680 organ of St.-Peter-und-Paul-Kirche in Cappel, Germany, built by Arp Schnitger (1648–1719); and *Final Fantasy XV* (2016, score by Yoko Shimomura [b. 1967]), featuring



Jose Daniel Ruiz is a composer, arranger, conductor, and advocate for increasing public awareness and appreciation of the growing repertoire of music written for video games. He has appeared

as a panelist on video game music concerts and their educational impact at PAX (originally the Penny Arcade Expo), MAGFest (Music and Gaming Festival, originally the Mid-Atlantic Gaming Festival), and for the Music Library at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Jose plays violin, accordion, piano, guitar, and oboe. He has studied conducting under

SMC Symphony Orchestra director Dr. James Martin and UCLA Symphony director Maxim Kuzin, and choral music as a former member of the UCLA Chorale and the UCLA Chamber Singers, under the direction of Donald Neuen. He has performed on bass balalaika with the Los Angeles Russian Strings Orchestra directed by Iryna Orlova. With soprano and harpist May Claire La Plante, he has performed at the 2014 IndieCade festival and for the Materia Collective.

In 2014, Jose founded the Game Music Ensemble at UCLA, serving as co-director, music librarian, arranger, and conductor for that academic year. More recently, he has led the ensemble as music director and conductor, overseeing its growth to a 185-member orchestra and choir.

the 1741 organ of the Bovenkerk in Kampen, Netherlands, built by Albertus Antoni Hinsz (1704–1785).

Plainchant and choral writing imitating Renaissance liturgical polyphony are used in fantasy game soundtracks. One particular track, “Hymn of the Fayth,” from *Final Fantasy X* (composed by Nobuo Uematsu [b. 1959]) begins with a chime, establishing a churchlike musical atmosphere. This is followed by a chant-like solo melody sung first by a baritone; then, a soprano. The chant melody reappears later, sung in medieval-style organum, with the added voices in perfect fourths and fifths. A recording can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ohpdy99kEc&feature=youtu.be. The organum appears at 2:37: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ohpdy99kEc&feature=youtu.be&t=157.

Other notable uses of early music style choral writing are in the soundtracks to *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2006 and 2011, scores by Jeremy Soule [b. 1975]), *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015, score by Marcin Przybyłowicz [b. 1985]), and *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (2016, score by Jessica Curry [b. 1973]).

Practical Use of Historical Instruments in Video Game Soundtracks

In May 2018, the Game Music Ensemble at UCLA programed an entire concert around how early and historical musical instruments could be used in choral and orchestral textures in video game soundtracks. The program, entitled *Around the World in Seven Games*, featured the Los Angeles-based Wessex Consort <http://wessexconsort.com>. *Wrath of the Lich King* particularly showcased the Renaissance loud band, or alta cappella (shawms, sackbuts, and dulcian), as well as organ and clavichord. “Mother’s Lament,” from *Wrath of the Lich King*, used a medieval consort: *musa* (a type of early bagpipe), *symphony* (a small box-shaped hurdy-gurdy), *cornamuse* (a straight crumhorn), *recorders*, *vielle* (a medieval bowed string instrument), *frame drum*, and *singers*. A selection of the Game Music Ensemble’s performance of *Wrath of the Lich King* can be found here: <https://youtu.be/Fv-yeVRcug0>.

Around the World in Seven Games included selections from *God of War II* (2007, score by Gerard Marino [b. 1968], featuring the alta cappella), *Prey* (2006, score by Jeremy Soule, featuring Native American [Lakota] flute and organ), *Civilization IV* (2005, score by Jeff



Wessex Consort



Musa (bagpipe)



Vielle

Briggs [b. 1957], featuring the didgeridoo [an Australian Aboriginal wind instrument] and African instruments and vocal

majority of the program presented for the first time ever performances from the soundtracks played for a live audience and by an ensemble of acoustic instruments.

Epilogue

The use of early music and instruments to help create the quasi-medieval fantasy realms of *Skyrim*, *World of Warcraft*, and *The Legend of Zelda*, or the whimsical worlds of *Super Mario Bros.*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, and *Final Fantasy IX*, is a powerful compositional and sonic tool. It has not only proven effective, but has increased in popularity and prominence. If this trend continues, more early music and instruments should appear in new video game music.

Footnotes

¹ Music and libretto by Carla Lucero, 2019. Première by UCLA Opera, Fall 2019.

² In his Violin Concerto (1993), Ligeti calls for four woodwind players to double on ocarinas.

³ *The Dream of Jacob* (1974) calls for twelve ocarinas. *Fifty* ocarinas are called for in Symphony No. 8 (2008), when he asks the choir members to play them.

⁴ Jeriaska; Kumi, Tanioka (2008-03-29). "Interview with Kumi Tanioka." RPGFan. Archived from the original on 2012-09-08. Retrieved 2009-02-11.

techniques), and *Banjo-Kazooie* (1998, score by Grant Kirkhope [b.1962], featuring recorder consort, crumhorn consort, sackbut ensemble, and theremin [an electronic musical instrument]). The concert also premiered the video game score composition *Celtic Fanfare* by Adam Gilberti. This piece featured sopranino, soprano, alto, tenor, bass, and contrabass recorders; tenor and bass sackbuts; medieval harp; hammered dulcimer; Renaissance lute; organ; serpent; ocarina; harpsichord; bagpipes; and bodhrán (an Irish frame drum). The

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EMAT Calendar www.earlymusicla.org/calendar, a monthly shortlist of local early music concerts and events.

Current Master Calendar <http://www.earlymusicla.org/2019-2020-calendar>, a list of the entire season of concerts and events.

The San Francisco Early Music Society has announced its 2019–2020 Concert Season: Passions of the Dance. For more information, please go to <https://sfems.org/19-20-concert-season>.

The Boston Early Music Festival has announced its 2019–2020 season. For more information, please go to www.bemf.org.

The San Francisco Early Music Society has announced its 2020 SFEMS Summer Workshops. For more information, please go to <https://app.arts-people.com/index.php?class=sfems>.

The SRP National Recorder Festival will be held from April 17th to 19th, 2020 at the Chantry Academy, Ipswich, UK. For more information, please go to <https://www.srp.org.uk/national-festival>.

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