# This is Music: VIDEOGAMES

**Sean Stoto**
**Andrew Chapman**
A&E Editor
Comics Editor

To any form of entertainment with sound, music is almost as important as the work it represents. The right music can often send the intended message or set the right mood to an audience more effectively than anything else present in the work. Certain radio, movie and television franchises can instantly be identified by simply playing the first few notes of the theme.

The same holds true for the medium of videogames, where the soundtracks for videogames are gaining as much attention and recognition as the soundtracks for the more accepted establishments of television, film, and radio. As more and more games reach popularity with the mainstream public, so does the games' music; with the themes reaching the same iconic status as the main characters of the games themselves. While most people might not be able to name all of the main characters of the popular "Legend of Zelda" or "Metal Gear Solid" game series, they can certainly hum the melody of the games' theme.

Videogame music has existed for as long as videogames themselves. In the early days of videogames music was often used simply as a few notes introducing the game. The limited technology available at the time prevented any further musical sounds from being used without causing the gameplay to suffer as a result. The songs were also composed of simple blips and beeps. Still, game designers were able to take advantage of the technology available, with the introductory themes to such popular early games as "Pac Man" and "Donkey Kong" which helped add to the games appeal.

As videogame technology progressed, the tools available to game designers allowed game music to move beyond simple introductory melodies and actually form short songs that could be looped during gameplay.

The many tracks put forth by vintage videogames are not only classics, though. They are also stepping-stones, inspiration for the youth growing up in the age of 8-bit.

Since the late 1990s, acts have been appearing in the underground music scene that incorporate the sounds of classic videogames into their music. They take each individual blip and bleep, each crunch and muted thump, and reform them into fast-paced, midi-blasting dance music. This is called bitpop, a play on the popular music genre britpop.

One artist known as Pixelh8 (pronounced Pixel Hate) creates his sound using software originally utilized in the Nintendo Entertainment System and other videogame consoles. He utilizes the techniques of circuit bending and chip tune to make absolutely original music, unlike most electronic musicians who alter samples recorded elsewhere. Every beat and synth wave he uses is entirely unique.

He recently wrote software designed for the Gameboy Advance that basically turns the handheld gaming system into a miniature synthesizer by turning each button into a key that has an entirely customizable sound. Pixelh8 is partially responsible for bitpop's currently rising popularity, as he was an opening act for the popular pop artist Imogene Heap during a past tour.

Nullsleep is another bitpop act who has left a mark on the culture. The brain behind Nullsleep is a man named Jeremiah Johnson. He creates romantic pop music derived entirely from videogames, as the genre implies. He is a prominent artist, and renowned as one of the best.

In the process of creating Nullsleep, he also co-founded a group by the name of 8bitpeoples. 8bitpeoples is a DIY record label and arts collective focusing on vintage videogame systems and the 8-bit subculture. The label has put out numerous compilation albums, as well as a tribute album to the classic electronic artist Kraftwerk, having all of the songs done in an 8-bit format.

Videogame music didn't stop at the 8-bit format, though. As technology advanced, more and more games came with original soundtracks performed instrumentally and recorded. Not only that, but many games featured songs performed by popular composers and artists, which added much appeal.

One game known for its soundtrack is "Jet Set Radio" (released as "Jet Grind Radio" in the United States). The soundtrack featured songs from artists such as Rob Zombie, Jurassic 5, and Cold. It also featured many original tracks written specifically for the game by popular composer Hideki Naganuma. Naganuma is famous in his own rite because of his original music, so it was a big attraction (especially in Japan) for gamers.

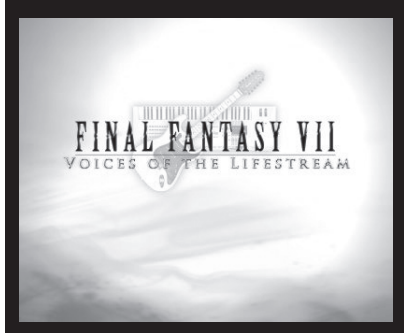
The "Grand Theft Auto" line of games also featured expansive soundtracks of popular songs. Each "Grand Theft Auto" game was set in a different decade. For instance, "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" was set in the 1980s. As such, artists such as Judas Priest, Wang Chung, INXS, and Bryan Adams are featured.

The videogame industry has recently brought its musical influence to a new level, though, with popular interactive music games, such as "Dance Dance Revolution," "Guitar Hero," and "Rock Band." These games are rhythm based, forcing the player to perform in tune with the song playing, whether that be through virtual music instrument or dance sequence.

Starting in 2005, videogame music made a significant leap in its march towards mainstream popularity. A concert known as Videogames Live began its global tour. Videogames Live features the music of popular videogame franchises such as classics like the "Mario," "Sonic," and "Castlevania" titles, to more modern fare such as "Halo," "God of War," and "World of Warcraft," played entirely by orchestra. The tour has become very popular and has attracted a great amount of media attention and praise.

As videogame music continues to break its way into the mainstream media, it won't be long before the game composer becomes as popular as the top 40 musical artists and a videogame is as anticipated for its soundtrack as it is for its gameplay.

## Albums to Check Out




"Voices of the LIfestream" is a tribute album to Final Fantasy VII done by various artists.

"Electric Heart Strike" by Nullsleep is heavily influenced by video game themes.

# MacBook Air:
## Cool as Ice or Silly as String?

**Renee Macdonald**
Layout Editor

A man walks up with a manila envelope and pulls out… a laptop?

The revolution-airy MacBook Air by Apple is about as thick as your finger, or approximately .76 inches. Can this thin laptop still pack the punch needed to keep up with its predecessors such as the MacBook Pro?

This very thin computer still has a full size display, a 13.3 inch diagonal glossy widescreen with an extremely crisp visual that leaves the eye substantially satisfied. Unfortunately, the MacBook Air only comes with a glossy screen, so those looking for an outdoor computer are out of luck due to the high glare a glossy screen creates.

Not only does the MacBook Air have a full size screen but it has a full size backlit keyboard. Usually when laptops become thin, they also lose the luxury of a comfortable keyboard. This is not the case with the Air. The Air has a perfect size keyboard and the keys work effortlessly. Right under the keyboard by the "enter" key are the speakers to the MacBook Air. These speakers might as well not exist with the low sound quality they have. The speakers are hard to hear, and if you didn't know where they were located you wouldn't even see them.

Located below the keyboard is the touch pad that controls the mouse on the screen. Normally these touch pads are self explanitory, but this one has features similar to that of the iPhone's. With a few simple swipes and pinches on the keyboard, you can zoom in or out of a website or pictures, rotate your pictures, and move from one website to the other. This feature works nicely and saves one a lot of time from moving the mouse around looking for the right buttons to click.

The design of the Air is very aerodynamic. There are no external plugs that are seen at first glance. It all looks like one piece, and it is possibly one of the most aesthetically pleasing laptops out there. Do not be deceived, there is still a place to plug in your flash drive. A compartment on the underside of the Air pulls down to expose a USB port, a micro-DVI slot (which allows connections to projectors), and a headphone jack. Due to the awkward placing of these outlets, not all devices plugged in will connect. Without the help of a USB cable, connecting your flash drive to the MacBook Air is difficult. Getting a clear sound from the headphones is possible, but still difficult due to the awkward placing.

In theory, the Air has a battery life of five hours. Trials done at engadget.com only managed 3 hours and 35 minutes, even when it was only being used lightly. For a person who travels a lot this could be a problem, especially since the battery is not user friendly when it comes to replacing it.

Don't expect to break this laptop easily either. The MacBook Air retains a metal frame, making it durable. While most ultra-light laptops switch to plastic or aluminum in order to cut weight, the Air manages to keep its light weight with a full metal frame.

With a slower 80 gigabytes and a 1.8 inch drive, the Air lacks the same power as an average laptop (which usually use a 2.5 inch drive) and because of this, the Air loads videos and such at a slower pace than most computers. The 1.8 inch drive is used in many portable media players.

Wireless plays a big role with the MacBook Air, as the Air is supposed to be completely wire free. It accomplishes this by being able to connect with other computers, both other Macs and PCs, to download what you need.

This truly light and portable laptop can be used completely free of messy wires. An external CD drive for the Air can be purchased for $99, so CD's and DVD's aren't completely obselete. Purchasing the external CD drive is highly recommended, especially for those who don't have a desktop computer. However, don't expect to be able to burn or rip CD's wirelessly. The wireless capability is meant to only be used for installing applications, downloading data, or reinstalling the OS (Operating System). On the plus side, when you use them, the wireless capabilites work flawlessly.

At 3.0 pounds, the upgraded version of the MacBook Air is a whopping $3,098. The downgraded version is still a pricey $1,799. While the upgraded version is worth it, the better equipped MacBook Pro is only around $1,500. The MacBook Pro has more power, more memory, and has more going for it than the MacBook Air.

The Air is truly a light laptop, excellent for frequent travelers, so long as they don't travel too long due to the Air's short battery life. Because of the Air's setbacks, this laptop wouldn't make a very good primary machine, and not many people could afford $3,000 for a second computer. The Air hits a certain target audience and hits them well. For everyone else, take a look at the MacBook Pro. This slim and savory Apple Air receives 3.5 apple rating out of 5.

# Online the Sky Really is the Limit
## The Double Life of LN Students

**Andrew Chapman**
Comics Editor

They are your peers, your classmates, your teammates, and your best friends. However, at a different time and a different place they're space marines, athletes, warriors, sports coaches, wizards, soldiers, racers, and generals; fighting never-ending wars and playing never-ending seasons against challengers from all over the world. They're the online gamers of Loy Norrix High School, members of a growing subculture that is slowly beginning to cross over into the mainstream.

In the last decade online gaming has grown exponentially in popularity and availability. What was once a luxury for only a handful of gamers has expanded to become a staple of most modern videogames. With a fanbase of millions worldwide, an online gaming subculture has spawned with its own humor, lingo, clothing, and gatherings.

But what exactly is online gaming? The internet connects computers worldwide to share data, media, and information with each other. When you game online, this connection is used to connect you and the game you are playing (if it's online enabled) with other people on a server where you can play with each other. Online games are sometimes subscription based, where you have to pay a minimal monthly fee to play online or have access to extra bonus content. Some games are designed to be played entirely online. The number of players can range from two to several thousand (if you are playing an RPG that takes place in a massive free-roaming world).

Many different game genres have been adapted to have some sort of online play. The most popular of these has been the RPG (roleplaying game), shooters (primarily first-person, but some third-person, too), RTS (real-time strategy), and sports. Other genres that have made the transition include stealth, fighting, music-based, and puzzle games.

What makes online gaming so appealing and different than normal gaming is the people. When you game online you are gaming against other people who range in experience, style, and skill.

"You're playing with a huge amount of people, with different play styles and strategies," said LN junior David "Abe" Epskamp-Hunt. Hunt mainly plays massive multiplayer RPGs, games where strategy relies heavily on the customization of your character (be it with spells, attacks, or statistical values that measure a character's abilities).

Your opponents are constantly changing; you rarely have the same encounter twice and can never truly create the perfect strategy. This experience isn't limited to when you're facing someone, but also when you are working with them. The cooperative and team play adds a strategy element that is unique to each player; no two players share the same online experience.

This need to interact as well as the ability to vocally communicate brings a social aspect to online games that has led to numerous friendships from players across the world through online gaming; even a few romances as well.

"You meet people all over the world who you can communicate with on a daily basis," said senior Michael Sortland. Sortland likes to play shooters as well as some racing and sports games, all the while making plenty of friends online, even meeting a few in real life.

Online gaming has garnered a lot of attention and controversy from critics and supporters alike, with topics ranging from gameplay addiction to the social aspects of each game. Gameplay addiction of one of the most controversial aspects of online gaming. Due to a high amount of depth and competition present in online games, a small amount of players have become totally consumed in playing online games, often to the point of addiction.

"It's hard to tell, since I've been playing since I was nine; but I'm about to graduate and go to college, so I really don't think it's affected me," responded senior David Geer. A shooter and sports game fan, Geer finds the time to play between schoolwork and a job, and has successfully managed to balance the three.

Both Hunt and Sortland admitted to gaming up to 40 hours a week, while Geer plays up to 20; however neither think that online gaming has gotten in the way of their lives.

As gaming technology continues to develop, so will online gameplay. With a user base in the millions, online gaming will continue to help shape the future of videogames.