



THE STRATEGY GUIDE



The Official Newsletter for the Gamer Symphony Orchestra at the University of Maryland

Issue 1 ~ Winter 2012/2013

GSO initiates IndieGoGo campaign to ease tuba troubles

Every rehearsal, all of the members of the Gamer Symphony Orchestra (GSO) set up their instruments and get ready to practice... except for one. The tuba player sits without an instrument. Every semester the GSO officers wonder where and how the GSO will get a tuba for the next concert.

"The tuba is an instrument that is unparalleled in an orchestra," said conductress Kira Levitzky. "It has the power, strength and range that only a strange expensive instrument like a contralto clarinet, contra bassoon, or a tubax could even begin to think to match. If it weren't for the tuba, the pyramid of sound that keeps the orchestra from sounding like a tinny 1930s phonograph player would be lost."

Faced with this tuba problem and limited funds, the officers turned to Indiegogo.com to raise money for a tuba. The GSO's Indiegogo fundraiser runs from Nov. 28 through Jan. 11.

Indiegogo's service allows any individual or group to create a campaign to raise money for any goal. Donors may give any amount to the cause through the website.

"If everyone at our concert gave

\$5, we would meet our goal," said Jacob Coppage-Gross, conductor and senior chemical engineering major.

The only instrument that the GSO owns is a drum set, and the university's School of Music loans other concert percussion instruments and a piano. Other members must provide their own instruments. Previously, GSO tuba player and junior biology major David Scherr borrowed a tuba from Levitzky, who borrowed the tuba from a friend.

Because tubas boast a steep price tag and high schools and universities often provide an instrument to tuba players in for-credit ensembles, finding a tuba player who can provide his or her own instrument proves difficult.

For this semester's concert, Scherr paid out of pocket for a rental tuba. This marks the third semester since Scherr joined in the fall of 2010 that he has not been able to play with the group for the first half of the semester.

"The issue is, you come in a month



Conductress Kira Levitzky, tuba player David Scherr and conductor Jacob Coppage-Gross want to raise excitement about GSO's tuba fundraiser. Photo by Mary Beck

or so after everyone's already been rehearsing, and they expect you to be right on par," Scherr said. "It's a hassle."

The GSO relies on funding from the university and donations from fans, which barely covers yearly operating costs. The GSO set \$4,000 as the goal on Indiegogo's website for a tuba. If the donations surpass this goal, the GSO will use the money for regular operating funds, such as renting rehearsal space.

Donors can visit the campaign website at <http://www.indiegogo.com/gсотuba>.

Arkenstone teams up with the GSO for new piece

A Gamer Symphony Orchestra arranger will again collaborate with a video game composer for the spring concert.

Three-time Grammy nominee David Arkenstone, a New Age artist and video game composer, contacted the GSO's president, Alex Ryan, about collaborating for an arrangement. Games such as "Emperor: Battle for Dune," "Blade Runner" and "Earth and Beyond" feature his work. He also sits among the ranks of Blizzard Entertainment's composing team for the popular World of Warcraft series.

GSO arranger and piano player

Nathan Gulla stepped up to the challenge and now works closely with Arkenstone on a World of Warcraft arrangement.

GSO arrangers collaborated with video game composers twice before. Chris Apple worked with "Civilization V" composer Geoff Knorr for the fall 2011 concert, and Joe Wang worked with Austin Wintory on "fIOW" in spring 2012. Wintory plans to submit his work from "Journey" for the spring concert as well.

To learn more about arranging for the GSO, please contact Mary Beck at mbeck@terpmail.umd.edu.

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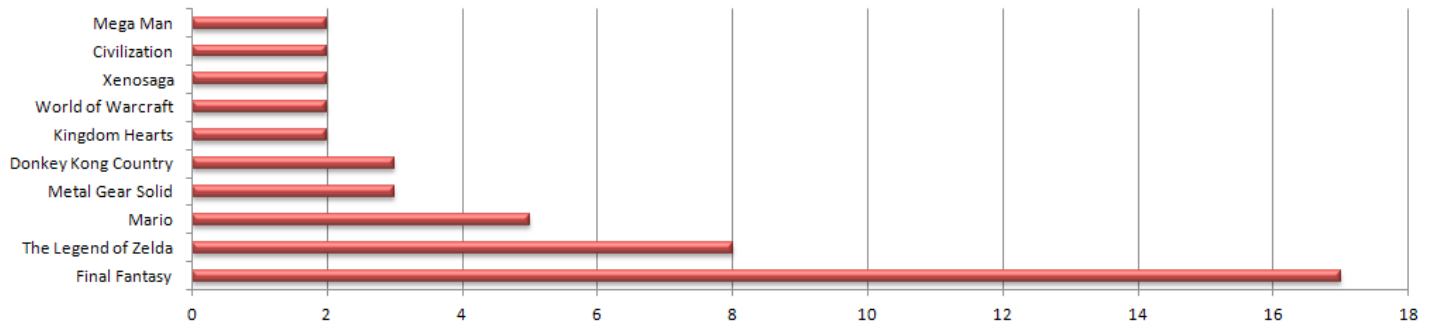
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GSO loves Final Fantasy!

As of our most recent concert, the Gamer Symphony Orchestra has played 17 different arrangements featuring music from the Final Fantasy series, which makes it our most popular series to arrange for. This graph breaks down the top 10 games that the GSO draws arrangements from the most:



Source: GSO's website, umd.gamersymphony.org. Graphic by Mary Beck.

Spotlight: Chris Apple, GSO arranger turned composer

Six years after first discovering the GSO, Chris Apple's legacy with the group speaks for itself. He wrote the group's first choral arrangement based on music from "Halo," served as music director for three years, co-directed the choir for four years and arranged 12 songs in total for the GSO. Apple's work for the GSO also pushed him to pursue his dream of composing video game soundtracks. Apple talked to The Strategy Guide about composing and his work on the "Alcarys Complex" soundtrack.



Chris Apple poses with his girlfriend Ayla Hurley, a soprano, who he met through the GSO. Photo by Mary Beck

Strategy Guide: What instruments do you play and which is your favorite?

Chris Apple: I play guitar; I play soprano, alto, tenor and bass recorder; I play harmonica; I play a little bit of piano – badly – and I sing. It's a toss-up between singing and playing guitar. I think if I had to pick a favorite I would pick singing.

SG: When did you launch Chris Apple Studios? Has that always been a dream for you?

CA: Officially, it launched January 2012. Unofficially, I've been preparing for it about a year or two before that. I guess

it had been on-and-off a dream of mine. I always loved video game music ever since I played "Mega Man" when I was four. I was so into it, and [I thought] maybe one day I'll be a composer, maybe I won't, and then eventually one day I was like, 'No, I should definitely go for it.' Even if it totally screws up and nothing comes of it, I should just go for it, because it would be cool.

SG: Did the GSO influence that decision?

CA: I think so. I think GSO helped give me an intermediary step between starting out with nothing and churning out compositions. GSO gave me a place where I could learn about

orchestra instruments and where I could create arrangements, which are kind of like compositions but kind of not. ... [GSO] introduced me to a lot of people who could perform my compositions, and it introduced me to a lot of people who taught me how these instruments work so I can make better compositions. It introduced me to a lot of friends who gave me a constructive environment and who really support me.

SG: You recently composed music for the indie game "Alcarys Complex." What was that like

for you?

CA: [I composed] an album of folk music. The creators of the game said they wanted to go with folk music because it was a genre that was almost never touched in video games. At first I was like, 'Hmm, I've never done that before,' but then I said, 'It's money, let's do it.' There are 26 original folk songs on it, totaling almost 80 minutes, covering a variety of moods. You have to have the ominous music, victory music, the boss battle music, you have to have all these different moods as the story changes.

Story continues on page 4.



GSO draws crowd of 900 people for fall concert

At 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 1, the GSO performed for more than 900 people in Dekelboun Concert Hall, the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (CSPAC)'s largest concert hall. This was the GSO's first concert since the group performed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum as part of the museum's "Art of Video Games" exhibit.

The GSO's first concert took place in April 2006 in a classroom in CSPAC. At that time, 20 musicians comprised the group. Now, the GSO boasts over 120 musicians, which includes a full choir. The vast majority of the GSO's repertoire comes from members of the ensemble who create the arrangements themselves.

The GSO performed 11 songs during the two-hour concert, which included fan favorites such as "Chrono Cross and Chrono Trigger Medley" and new pieces such as "Maria & Draco," an opera from the Final Fantasy series.

Both audience members and ensemble members alike could visualize narratives from the music performed.



Conductress Kira Levitzky addresses the crowd during the GSO's Dec. 1 concert. Photo by James Ryan

First-time audience member Andrew Michon, a freshman chemical engineering major, favored the driving beat in "The Gerudo Temple."

"It was very epic-sounding," Michon said. "You could kind of feel a story from it."

Drew Star, a Montgomery College information systems student and GSO trombonist, enjoyed the choir's a cappella piece, "Nightsong."

"I personally could vision the quiet Elven forests," he said. "Then as the war drums started beating, I could picture the forest burning as waves of bloodthirsty orcs invade, all the way to the end of the piece in the climactic battle."

Story continues on page 4.

The Program

"Que Sera, Sera" – Small ensemble piece arranged and performed by Chris Apple, Julius Verzosa, Gerald Butler and Eden Davis

"Princess of Shadows (Twilight Princess)" – Orchestra and chorus piece arranged by Robert Garner and Katie Noble

"Kirby Super Star" – Orchestra and chorus piece arranged by Steve O'Brien

"Donkey Kong, Opus 64" – Solo piano piece arranged and performed by Jacob Coppage-Gross

"Chrono Cross and Chrono Trigger Medley" – Orchestra piece arranged by Alex Song

"Glorious Morning" – Small ensemble piece arranged by Jacob Coppage-Gross

"The Gerudo Temple" – Orchestra piece arranged by Doug Eber

"Nightsong" – A cappella chorus piece arranged by Julia Seeholzer

"The Ruined Futures of Maplestory" – Orchestra piece arranged by Christopher Lee

"Maria & Draco" – Orchestra and chorus piece arranged by Greg Cox

Encore: "Liberi Fatali" – Orchestra and chorus piece arranged by Mike Charles and Andrew Bishop

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Our website: umd.gamersymphony.org
Our email: umd@gamersymphony.org



GSO to host workshop and panel at MAGFest

The GSO will host a two-hour workshop at the 11th annual Music and Gaming Festival (MAGFest) in Baltimore, Md. The workshop will provide attendees the opportunity to play the GSO's arrangement of "Still Alive" from "Portal" and live the video game orchestra experience. The GSO will also host a discussion panel, titled "Gamer Symphony Orchestra: Q&A&More."

"We use [the panel] to advertise and talk with our fans," said Joel Guttman, a junior marketing major and the GSO's vice president. "[The panel] will

cover the group's history, goals and will include a lengthy question and answer session for our fans to get to know both the group and the individuals on the panel better."

This year, MAGFest runs from Thursday, Jan. 3 through Sunday, Jan. 7. MAGFest representatives will release the date and time for the workshop and panel approximately a week before the event.

The panel leaders include Guttman, President Alex Ryan, conductress Kira Levitzky, choir conductor Kyle

Jamolin, Towson GSO founder Jesse Mayer and Bryan Berclan of Magruder High School's GSO.

In addition, the GSO sells more than 50 MAGFest passes each year to ensemble members, which makes MAGFest the GSO's largest social event. Peter English, a junior landscape management major, said he enjoys the MAGFest culture and is excited to return with the GSO this year.

"I like gaming and music and music from games, and [MAGFest] is all of that," he said.

Spotlight: Chris Apple

Continued from page 2.

SG: Did you eventually get used to composing folk music?

CA: At first it was really difficult. I was like, 'What am I going to do without a brass section?' My dad really loves folk music, so I said, 'Give me all your music!'

SG: Where do you see Chris Apple Studios in five years?

CA: Hopefully in five years I'll be doing Triple-A titles. I'll get the "Call of Duty"s or the "Halo"s or the big Japanese RPG titles. Indie games are cool, and they give you a lot of freedom but it's hard to pay the bills with indie games, and it's hard to progress with indie games. You have to get super, super

lucky.

SG: What advice do you have for people who want to start arranging or composing for video games?

CA: Don't quit your day job until people are beating down your door to get you to write their soundtrack. . . . Be creative, learn your equipment, do experimental compositions to learn how your stuff works. Read books about mixing and mastering. A lot of composers overlook the technical side of it – how to make audio files sound like a professional rendition. A lot of people will judge your mix on how professional it sounds. . . . Don't get discouraged!

Fall Concert

Continued from page 3.

Austin Roche, a junior math major, came to the concert excited to hear "Princess of Shadows," but found another unexpected favorite.

"I played 'Chrono Trigger,' but I didn't remember any of the music being that good, and I heard ['Chrono Cross and Chrono Trigger Medley'] and it was surprisingly good," Roche said.

The audience demonstrated their appreciation for the performance with two standing ovations: one after "Maria and Draco" and another after the encore, "Liberi Fatali."

"I would totally recommend it to all of my gaming friends," Roche said.

Spring 2013 Calendar - Save the dates!

Jan. 3 - 7: MAGFest! Come visit the GSO's panel and workshop!

Jan. 11: The GSO's tuba campaign ends - be sure to donate before then!

April ??: Keep your eye our for the date of the GSO's annual Deathmatch for Charity event. Come join a video game tournament to benefit Children's National Medical Center!

April 27: The GSO will perform for Maryland Day.

May 4: The GSO's spring concert.



Want to form your own GSO?

If you or someone you know is interested in starting a GSO at your high school or college, we can help! Send us an email at umd@gamersymphony.org and we can help you get the ball rolling.