



HÖGSKOLAN
DALARNA

Examensarbete kandidatnivå

Video Game Music and Nostalgia

A look into leitmotifs in video game music

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Kurskod: GLP2NN

Poäng: 15 hp

Termin: HT2022

Examinationsdatum: 2023-06-01

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis discusses the way nostalgia correlates with video game music and how the emotion of nostalgia is achieved in the different soundtracks discussed. A large part of the bachelor thesis discusses leitmotifs and their role in video game music when attempting to create a sense of familiarity and an emotionally memorable soundtrack. The study approaches nostalgia from different perspectives to be able to identify what it is exactly in video game music that evokes the emotion.

Keywords

Nostalgia, leitmotifs, Video Game Music, immersion, Zelda, Music Theory

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1. Introduction

As I've journeyed through the duration of my life. I've experienced a number of events that can feel miniscule or irrelevant at the moment, however as I've continued growing up I've felt a certain sentimental recalling towards these events when they are tied to a wide array of things such as music or even physical places. Nostalgia has been a loose and flexible concept to me that can be both everywhere and nowhere at the same time depending on my surroundings. I could randomly hear a song that was a number one hit 10 years ago and instantly be transported to where I was when I first heard it and even reminisce about what kind of person I was back then. Nostalgia in a sense can be perceived as a mental time machine that teleports us momentarily to fond memories of a time that once was. It can be a longing for a time or place when things were preserved as being easier and more enjoyable. The feeling can reveal itself in such a vast amount of ways as it is ever flexible depending on the generation that it is referring to. It is a unique feeling that can be a combination of longing and bliss of a time or something that we as humans thought would last forever is now behind us. There is no frame of time required to experience the sense of nostalgia as it often calls to us when we are least expecting it, a reminder of a time that passed when we weren't even looking.

I want to research what it is exactly that can cause a listener of video game music to feel a sense of nostalgia. To research this the bachelor thesis looks deep into different factors of video game music such as classic chord progressions and general music theory used in early soundtracks mostly by Nintendo or Japanese composers. I attempted to spot similarities and patterns that are consistent along the pieces of work that evoke a sense of nostalgia. Among music theory I will also look into which instruments and ranges of sound selection that are also prominent in the field of nostalgia video game music. I have researched how the feeling of nostalgia appears even if there is no real sense or connection to a nostalgic moment in one's life.

As the bachelor thesis advances there are a number of terms and abbreviations used, therefore I have explained their meanings and backgrounds in detail to be able to deliver a clear sense of the subject and theories.

1.1 Nostalgia and its definitions

Nostalgia is a word that has existed in different mediums for up to 2000 years, it originally stems from a greek word prevalent in ancient greece “Nostos” which translates to the english word “return”, one of the first appearances of the word is in the context of the acclaimed poet Homer when he wrote his world renowned piece and tale of “Odysseus”. (Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004) The tale tells the story of Odysseus, a highborn man who set out from Itacha, a Greek island located in the ionian sea off the northern and east coast of Kefalonia to partake in the Trojan wars. Homer tells the tale from the perspective of Odysseus as he participates in a long grueling twenty of years of adversity ranging from battles at sea with a range of mythological monsters. However, in the tale as homer tells it Odysseus was focused on the idea of journeying back to Ithaca and retelling the story of his encounters on his great 20 year adventure (Homer, 1921) His yearning to return home and tell his wife and son of his adventures was his driving force to journey homeward. In turn his lust for “nostos” caused him to endure emotional and cognitive pain. It is for this reason that the earliest definition of the word we today recognize as nostalgia was “the psychological suffering caused by unrelenting yearning to return to one's homeland “ (Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004).

1.2 Nostalgia throughout history

A few hundred years later the term nostalgia has repeated itself in numerous texts and studies. The word nostalgia has been stretched and redefined under both positive and negative lights. The word has been found in relation to the feeling of a longing for home. As history records the word nostalgia as we know it today was not officially composed until the year of 1688 when a famous Swiss physician named Johannes Hoffer presented a thesis deeply analyzing the phenomenon. Johannes Hoffer related the feeling to a German word known as “Heimweh” which can be

transcribed to the english word “homesickness”. The word roughly translates to “Distress or pain caused by ones absence from from their home or native land” or defined as “distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home” (Thurber & Sigman,1998) The word found relevance often on the frontlines mainly during one of the most lengthy and catastrophic wars which was fought in europe known as the “Thirty Years War”. However the word was cast under a more negative leaning light as the spanish coined the term “el mal de corazón” which can be roughly transcribed to “the evil that stirs in the heart of man”

In his attempts to diagnose soldiers there Johannes Hoffer attached the two Greek words known as nostos which translate to “return” and algos/alga which translates to “pain”. Hence spawning the word nostalgia as we know it today. Although the word was loosely defined and thrown around in different directions today a majority of scientists and logicians view nostalgia as a global sentiment that we have all experienced at one point or another. (Batcho, 1998)

2. Purpose & Questions

The overall purpose of this bachelor thesis is to find out what components in video game music it is that causes the listener to feel nostalgia, the purpose of this research has been broken down into two questions.

- What role do leitmotifs play when creating nostalgic music?
- What is it that causes a listener to feel nostalgic?

3. Previous Research & Theory

I have been quite successful in my pursuit of previous research and theories regarding the topic I want to research. Across the web there are multiple essays and books that discuss relatively the same topic concerning the presence of nostalgia in video game music. Texts such as “Video Games as Objects and Vehicles of Nostalgia” by Peter Kristof Makai and “and” WHY WE VIDEO GAME MUSIC:

NOSTALGIA” by Thomas Quillfeldt have been quite insightful. There are also a number of books, papers, and other mediums that research such more westernized game soundtracks and series. The book this bachelor thesis studies the most is the “Nostalgia and Video Game Music (Book) A Primer of Case Studies, Theories, and Analyses for the Player-Academic ” as it will be the most relative piece of work to my bachelor thesis. The book is a body of works and compiled essays from different writers which study how nostalgia is tied to a wide range of video games from the past decades. “The Game Music Handbook ” will also be an important asset to my writing as it goes into deep analysis of how video game music itself is built. From that book this bachelor thesis researches the repeating factors and components that can be later tied to the feeling of nostalgia.

3. 1 Immersion In Relation To Nostalgia

Immersion refers to the deep mental involvement one can have when performing an activity. Therefore the act of immersion is crucial when attempting to set a scene for nostalgia in a video game. An immersive quality in a game can attract players towards it for a number of reasons, be it a longing to exist in a different world or simply any escape from our current reality. It is therefore game developers and music composers for video games tend to play with the idea of immersion and prioritize transporting the players into their desired worlds.



Pictured above is a screenshot from the “Elder Scrolls: Oblivion” created by Bethesda. Game developers enforce immersion in the Elder Scrolls series by allowing players to experience and interact with a large number of objects that exist in the game world. (Derived from THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VIDEO GAMES Examining the intersection of psychology and video games 18/11/2022)

As the video game industry has progressed over the decades there has however been a shift in the way immersion and video games correlate with one another, for example in the 90’s when conducting immersion the goal is to cause the player to deeply commit themselves to the game whilst playing it and almost zone out in a sense. However, with modern audiences I feel that nostalgia has begun to work side by side with the immersion, in some modern games the focus is to once again transport the audience back to the 90’s era but this time the immersion doesn’t exactly focus on inserting the player into the gameplay. It instead focuses on immersing the player in how they felt whilst they were playing the game. Where they were, what they smelt and simply how their lives felt at the time (Fredric Jameson, 1991)

This is a very interesting shift in the video game industry as the notion has been sighted and predicted in other forms of media that strive through technological development. Frederick Jameson wrote a book as early as the year 1991 when the video game industry was still in its infant years named “Post Modernism the logic of late capitalism”. The book goes into heavy themes and discussions concerning how eventually all future-dedicated technological expansions will in turn cause humans to admire and long for the past (Fredric Jameson, 1991) The phenomena can be described as a “Historic Nostalgia”, “a yearning for a simple rustic lifestyle that individuals may never have personally experienced (Sandra Garrido, Jane W. Davidson, 2019)

It is therefore in an attempt to transport players to these experiences some musicians and also game developers create fictional characters and places as a point of reference and guidance during their creation process.

3. 2 Music Theory In Relation To Nostalgia

Leitmotif or leitmotiv is a “short and recurring musical phrase, most commonly attached to a place a person or an idea of sorts (Kennedy, Michael, 1987)

When attempting to connect nostalgia to a video game composers tend to use the musical theory concept of a leitmotif to act as an anchor for players to be both immersed and have their attention guided in a sense.

Das Rheingold, Scene 1

Nature The depths of the Rhine as undifferentiated
d1, m1a, c1 nature; Urelement



Rhine
d2, m1b, c2, w
1

First stirring
under the
Rhine as a
premonition
of
consciousness
(developed
from d1)



Rhinemaidens
d26, m2, c3,
w2

The song of the
Rhinemaidens as tempters
back to immature
innocence; Rheintöchter (der
ives from d1, the added sixth
as in d24 hinting at the
Rhinemaidens as delight in
nature. Very close to d27)

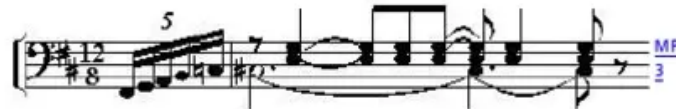


Threat Alberich shakes his fist at the
w4 Rheintöchter; Drohmotiv (close to d50)



Alberich's will
d15, m22, c24, w
30

Alberich's obsessive will as a
force of destiny, the Nibelung's
hatred; Vernichtungsarbeit (harm
onic version of the opening notes
of d13)



Rheingold!
d31, m4, c6, w7

Rheingold! Rheingold! (re-
harmonises the added sixth
of d26; also occurs in the
minor where it is very close
to d68)



Woe or grief
d68, m5, c4, w3

Woe or grief, whether
accepted or
not; Frohnmotiv (the
falling semitone relates
to d4; opposite of d38)
See also Göt
3/1 Rheintöchter
"Siegfried!" and Göt



Pictured above is one of the most famous leitmotifs stemming from its originator "Richard Wagner. The score displays Richard Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" or "The Ring Cycle" when transcribed to english. "Der Ring des Nibelungen" is a four piece act of a musical drama that uses a number of leitmotifs throughout the score.

Wagner uses the short musical ideas that leitmotifs represent to be able to connect the characters, sentiments and settings across the epic drama.

Game developers are able to use this method in a range of long running titles like “The Legend of Zelda” for example. In the 5th installment of the Zelda series “The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, there is a short leitmotif that plays an eighth note melody each time the main character in the series “Link” comes upon a new item or place during the game. This is a common recurring leitmotif that becomes present in all The Legend Of Zelda games. The technique of using a leitmotif across a series can cause the individual player to evoke a sense of nostalgia and enhance their immersion whilst playing through the series (Sandra Garrido, Jane W. Davidson, 2019)

Battlefield 1942 Main Theme

Benjamin Kasser

Joel Eriksson

$\text{♩} = 100$

The musical score for the Battlefield 1942 Main Theme is presented in three systems. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/8. The first system consists of four measures where the right hand has whole rests and the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system, starting at measure 5, features a melody in the right hand marked *ff* (fortissimo) and a continuing accompaniment in the left hand marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The third system, starting at measure 9, continues the melodic and accompanimental patterns. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of the fourth measure in each system.

Pictured above is the score for the Battlefield 1942 theme composed by the Swedish musician "Joel Eriksson" Just like the Zelda series there is a recurring leitmotif that is present throughout all of the battlefield games even to this very day.

Battlefield 2 Theme

Arr. Eloi Escolà

$\text{♩} = 90$

The musical score for the Battlefield 2 Theme, arranged by Eloi Escolà, is presented in 3/4 time with a tempo of 90 beats per minute. The score is written for a variety of instruments, including Trombones, Trombone Bass, Conga, Timbale, Tubular Bells, Marimba, Conga, and Conga. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score shows the first three measures of the piece. The leitmotif, a descending eighth-note pattern, is introduced by the Trombones and Clarinet in the second measure, marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The Timbale and Conga enter in the second measure with a complex rhythmic pattern, marked with ppp, pmp, and f dynamics. The Conga and Conga enter in the third measure with a half-note pattern, marked with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic.

Here the leitmotif appears again but in the form of the Battlefield 2 theme arranged by Eloi Escolà in 2005

However, how battlefield differs from Zelda is that the leitmotif is centered around the main theme of the series instead. Therefore as the Battlefield series progress the game developers have been able to morph and style the leitmotif into new scores relevant to the time period the game is set in, all whilst still keeping the melody of the leitmotif relevant. This is a very inviting way of evoking the elements of nostalgia,

immersion and generational relevance for the players. As when one hears the theme song and the leitmotif, the player can be instantly mentally transported to a series of memories they have experienced across all the battlefield titles no matter what stage of life they find themselves in.

Nostalgic references in video games invert into an immersive force when leit- motifs are their vehicle (Aksoy et al, 2022) It is therefore that leitmotifs are the backbone of both enforcing nostalgia and immersing the individual. It becomes very interesting when the individual's nostalgic memory correlates with leitmotifs to enhance this process. When a long running video game series can execute leitmotifs and transform them with time they can slowly start to become a time capsule of sorts for the player. The process of implementing leitmotifs does not obstruct its original intention which is to attach sound to its intended game mechanic, rather these attachments begin to grow subconsciously and also attach themselves to an individual's personal memories therefore inspiring what we perceive as nostalgia. Leitmotifs can act as the bridge between in-game references and the individual's immersion.

4. Method

I will use a wide range of different methods to conduct my research. Mainly I will be focusing on a few set pieces from the early Nintendo works. This bachelor thesis looks deep into certain elements of music theory, mainly leitmotifs to see which factors of theory repeat themselves across a range of tracks from Nintendo's discography.

I will conduct interviews and listening tests with different people of relevant musical backgrounds to analyze how they react to the different pieces played. I will be using a qualitative method for my interviews. I have opted for a selective selection of participants for the qualitative interviews in order to be able to extract relevant information from the participants that are involved in the interview process (Ahrne &

Svensson, 2015). This way i can carve the interview with very relevant and guided questions but also use questions that gives the interviewee space to answer with more open ended answers that could help me see something i was missing (Kvale 1997) I will work with people who are familiar with the game soundtracks and have experience listening to the music i will be interviewing them about. This is because it will be difficult to discuss the topic of nostalgia if the participants have no strict past or event to connect it to. The participants chosen have also been chosen because of their musical backgrounds as leitmotifs are a driving motive in this bachelor thesis and it is important that the interviewees understand the concept to be able to supply the relevant answers needed for a sufficient result.

To be able to obtain information this study will be conducted in a methodological manner relative to traditional research methods, which are applicable for capturing a number of nuances and placing those values and norms in context (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015) To receive data in a manner which prioritizes quality, the study will be carried out via selective interviewing process to obtain participants that are relevant to the study. These interviews will therefore be conducted online over voice chat and partial text, some of the questions may be answered in text as the interviewees have been given space to follow up on the questions if they feel as though they could have added more to the original interview. The contents of the interview will be recorded and then transcribed for the reviewing process in the analysis.

An advantage of operating the interviews in this style grants the researcher a time frame to be able to prepare and form the questions in correlation with the subject at hand. However, when the interview itself is underway, the questions can be supplemented and reformulated to the conductor's liking (Ahrne and Svensson, 2015). There are several things that can be observed during an interview of this kind such as a tone of voice, mood, slight pauses in the sentences spoken and overall body language which will be very important to observe as they will be reacting to musical pieces that are meant to evoke a range of emotions. All these elements which would be difficult and maybe even impossible to capture if the study had opted for a survey or some other form of collecting information instead (Eriksson, 2018) The

interviews were conducted over the internet to allow the interviewees to feel comfortable and at home in their own environment of choice. This is very relevant as the questions performed can impact the flow of knowledge production (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015)

4.1 Interview Process

Whilst selecting people to interview I chose to prioritize people with experience aligned to the music that would be played and analyzed, as nostalgia is the topic at hand it was important to find an individual who had previously played the games and was familiar with the pieces.

Person 1: A pianist who has a long history of playing numerous games in “The Legend Of Zelda” series and has a deep interest in the musical components of the game.

Person 2: A music producer who has a long history of playing the Pokemon series in his childhood. Person 2 has also sampled several of the Pokemon soundtracks in their own musical creations.

5. Ethical Considerations

During and before the interviews all participants involved in the process were made fully aware concerning the purpose and questions of the interviews and the overall topic of the bachelor thesis in a brief form. The two chosen interviewees have chosen to remain anonymous at their discretion, apart from their musical backgrounds and past game experiences which are the only element of their personalities that are relevant to this study. (C. Booth, G. Colomb. 2019) To apply a good researching method is the reason why the interviewees are kept anonymous, all personal data that has been recorded is kept private, the interviews involved have been informed about the purpose of the research and have chosen to participate on their own behalf voluntarily (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017)

6. Result and Analysis

The interview participant was given two pieces to listen to and analyze in relevance with the questions. The participant was given two tracks from “The Legend Of Zelda : Breath Of The Wild” . The tracks selected are relevant to one another as they each contain a leitmotif that is present in both pieces even though they are two completely different soundtracks that are played in different parts of the game.

For Person 1 the soundtracks selected were “Zelda Breath Of The Wild: Opening theme” and “Zelda Breath Of The Wild : The Silent Princess”

For Person 2 the soundtracks selected were “Pokémon Heart Gold/Soul Silver - Viridian Forest” and “Pokemon Blue/Red - Team Rocket Hideout”

Zelda Breath Of The Wild: Opening theme

As this is the opening theme for the game, the soundtracks start off softly with a soft piano arpeggio that ascends with a string into another piano, this is a very fitting start as the main character Link escapes from a cave into the open world area. The piano plays solo until a flute takes the lead whilst the piano is tucked softly into the back. The flute is accompanied with strings and bells. Once again another instrument takes the lead this time being the strings whilst some minimal percussion adds a rhythm to the piece. The strings gradually increase in volume and octave. At the track's peak the synths are accompanied once again by a piano. The strings abruptly cut off for one more final piano note to play before the soundtrack ends.

Zelda Breath Of The Wild : The Silent Princess

“The Silent Princess” soundtrack is played when the main character “Link” relives a fond memory. Therefore the track starts off quite playful with a violin that is countered by the plucks of a piano. Throughout this piece there is a soft foley of grass rustling and birds chirping that can be heard. After the lead ends a different piano is introduced that plays a soft melancholic melody whilst a string occasionally reveals itself before disappearing again.

Pokémon Heart Gold/Soul Silver : Viridian Forest

This piece starts off with a pluck melody backed by hi hats and a sub bass. As the track continues another pluck is introduced with a bell as the lead melody. The hats are also accompanied by a snare. The piece continues by adding a string and a few more bell notes to counter the main melody. In the classic Pokemon style the track stays roughly the same throughout the remainder of the piece.

Pokemon Blue/Red : Team Rocket Hideout

This soundtrack starts off quite chaotic with a saw lead playing an up and down melody whilst a sine lead plays another melody in the back. The melodies are backed by a bit-crushed piece of white noise that works as the percussion in the track. The bass begins to slow down as sub bass is introduced. After the sub bass the saw lead melody takes the lead again with a bell that gradually climbs up until the sub bass is back again but this time alone.

There is a bridge section where the saw plays singular notes instead of its usual arpeggio which leads up to arrangement at the start of the track. Once again in classic pokemon style the track stays the same and loops until the end.

6.1 Interview One

For the following questions Person 1 is now reviewing Zelda Breath Of The Wild:
Main Theme

Question 1: Is there any specific melody in this piece that catches your attention?

Answer: The melody from 1.08 onward has such a strong emotional tie attached to it. I feel like the buildup really gets you immersed and when the main melody comes in the music sweeps you away and you are suddenly in the middle of this fairytale.
(Interview, person 1)

Already we can see that Person 1 has already been entranced by the leitmotif that is present almost throughout the entirety of this track. Person 1 is instantly immersed into the musical atmosphere of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild soundtrack and feels a strong emotional connection to the music.

Question 2: Do you feel as though you can imagine a place or a time during your life whilst listening to this piece?

Answer: The gentle piano in the beginning of the song makes my mind wander to my carefree days of my youth when I used to sit in the living room playing video games on the television while my mother played classical music in the background
(Interview, person 1)

Through listening to the piece person 1 is mentally transported to their past, they are able to describe where the music takes them in detail. What's interesting with this answer is that the memory described here has no correlation to the Zelda game series at all but instead an overall general sense of when they were younger. The correlation here may be the soft piano from the Zelda soundtrack and their memories of their mother playing classical piano.

Question 3: Do you feel as though you can imagine a place or a time inside the game whilst listening to this piece?

Answer: The piece makes me think of the first time you play the game and come out from this dark damp cave and get to experience the sprawling open world outside. The view that meets your eye as you leave of every place you can explore, and the sense of adventure is well captured in the song in my opinion.
(Interview, person 1)

Here we see nostalgia discussed in how it made Person 1 feel whilst they were playing through The Legend of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild. They are able to distinctly recall their memories during their playthrough of the game and also how the music made them feel. As the piece in question is the main theme of the game series, I

believe the game composers have achieved their goal in attempting to evoke a sense of adventure and excitement in the player that would be memorable even after having completed the game.

Question 4: How do you feel the music impacted you whilst playing?

Answer: I do believe the music has been one of the key factors for this game being one of my favorites. Every location has such a unique atmosphere which the soundtrack mimics and enhances in an important way. It makes it very easy for you to comprehend what kind of emotion the game wants to convey. Some tracks you associate with sadness and others with hope, and this helps keep the story feeling vibrant and emotionally memorable.

(Interview, person 1)

In this question Person 1 discusses how the way the soundtracks are based around locations enhance the emotional connection one has to the game. This may be because the leitmotifs are present throughout the game in different measures and locations as the player journeys through the game. As the tracks morph into different versions of the leitmotifs it helps the player to understand what kind of emotion the game is attempting to convey and also keeps the story interesting and “*emotionally memorable*” in their words. Nostalgia is also at play here as when the player revisits these locations, they instantly have an emotion connected to it depending on the way the leitmotif is presented in the soundtrack that plays.

Question 5: Do you feel more immersed in a game because elements of the music are recognizable to you

Answer: Yeah definitely, it's like you think you've heard the song before but it's changed and the mood is completely different but there's still this lingering central part of the melody which you recognize. The recurring themes and melodies really ground you in the game and make you think how far you've come in the story from the starting point when you first heard the melody.

(Interview, person 1)

Here we can see how the leitmotif plays its role in the Zelda soundtrack, Person 1 observes how the leitmotif acts almost like a vehicle that progresses in the game with you as a reminder of how far you've come during the playthrough. A leitmotif that is recurring in a game can be an anchor of sorts for the player so that things stay both fresh and memorable at the same time.

Question 6: Did you ever choose to play these games because you wanted to feel nostalgic?

Answer: Well, the main reason I first got into breath of the wild is because I used to play a lot of Zelda twilight princess back in my youth. And when you enter the Zelda universe again after so many years and hear this similar tune playing it really makes you feel nostalgic. A lot of the music is very different in the new game compared to the old, but many melodies remain recognizable at its core. Even now I get an urge to go back and replay the game simply from listening to the soundtrack, it really takes you back to the feeling you felt when you went through the game the first time.
(Interview, person 1)

The purpose of this question was to study the modern application of nostalgia as game developers play with the emotion to draw players back to play their more modern titles. Person 1 agrees that as the Zelda series continue the leitmotifs bring a sense of familiarity to the player and causes them to feel nostalgic. Just from the listening period of the interview they felt drawn to play the Zelda games again and relive the nostalgia all over again.

6.2 Interview two

For the following questions Person 1 is now reviewing Zelda Breath Of The Wild: Silent Princess :

Question 7: Is there any specific melody in this piece that catches your attention?

Answer: The part 37 seconds in makes me feel weirdly nostalgic. It's like the song is hinting that there is a forgotten memory or an underlying meaning which is promptly forgotten when the music continues in a comparably mundane fashion.

(Interview, person 2)

In contrast to the other answers, Person 1 draws away from the leitmotif and instead focuses on a different part of the track that acts as an outro for the piece. This is an interesting take on the question as Person 1 describes it as making them feel “weirdly nostalgic” although there is no strict past or event for them to connect that feeling of nostalgia too.

Question 8: Do you feel as though you can imagine a place or a time during your life whilst listening to this piece instead?

Answer: This song is very nostalgic in a sense that it reminds me of when you were going on school trips at a young age and felt that sense of adventure and relaxation you get when you come out into nature. But just when you start to feel free and immersed you are then put back on a bus heading home. (Interview, person 2)

In this segment Person 1 is able to feel a sense of nostalgia but not in a sense that causes immersion in the game or their past life whilst playing through the game. Instead they are carried to a completely different memory evoked by the soundtrack. Their mental location changes in sync with the way the piece progresses.

For the following questions Person 2 is now reviewing “Pokémon Heart Gold/Soul Silver - Viridian Forest”

Question 1: Is there any specific melody in this piece that catches your attention?

I would really say that the glockenspiel that comes in for the first time around the 15 second mark is the melody that sticks with me the most when I listen. Because it

feels very playful and kind in its playing + that I've always loved how Pokémon's songs and music often don't have many soundtracks in them at all, but still keep the songs interesting, thanks a lot to melodies just like this one, which always develop during the course of the song. (Interview, person 2)

From the first question Person 1 is instantly able to recognize the leitmotif and is always able to notice how it transforms during the piece.

Question 2: Do you feel as though you can imagine a place or a time during your life whilst listening to this piece?

Absolutely, I immediately think back to childhood when I had just received this game, when it was actually my first game that I had bought myself and was very excited to play. (Interview, person 2)

From their focus on the leitmotif, Person 2 becomes nostalgic about their past and reminiscences when they first got the chance to play the Pokemon games.

Question 3 : Do you feel as though you can imagine a place or a time inside the game whilst listening to this piece?

This particular song I remember a lot from a previous game and i can recall the different pokemon i was catching in Pokémon FireRed. There is the same piece of music in that game, but a different adaptation, not nearly as happy and a bit more mysterious. I remember being a little scared of that song when I was little. However, I love the way the leitmotif is portrayed in the Heartgold/Soul silver version.
(Interview, person 2)

Person 2 is able to recall childhood memories of their playthrough in the game, it is interesting to note how the piece is from "Pokemon Heartgold/Soul Silver" but the memories they recall are from when they were playing through Pokemon FireRed. This may be because the leitmotif that is present in both games are portrayed in

different shades of emotion. The leitmotif in Pokemon FireRed appears in a more “mysterious” way as Person 2 describes, therefore the contrast between emotions such as fear and nostalgia may be more memorable for an individual.

Question 4: How do you feel the music impacted you whilst playing?

I always wanted to play with sound as I love the music and how nostalgic it all makes me feel. I think it contributes in a nice way to the whole pokemon world and I would say it always contributed to a sense of more adventure in the game. The main theme of the Pokemon games make me feel adventurous when I think about those soundtracks. I like how the music usually changes depending on the area and the person who plays gets completely different types of nostalgic emotions to remember depending on where they are in the environment. (Interview, person 2)

Person 2 continues their train of thought concerning how different emotions correlate with nostalgia. The main theme of the Pokemon games summon a sense of adventurous nostalgia which may be the reason some players come back to play the games with the intention of reliving or fulfilling that nostalgia. Person 2 also supports the notion that nostalgia can be coupled with other emotions to create a more emotionally enhanced type of nostalgia.

Question 5: Do you feel more immersed in a game because elements of the music are recognizable to you

I would say yes, a lot of it goes back to being able to get used to what it was like the first time I was there. What Pokémon were caught there, if I liked that zone, etc.

Person 2 acknowledges that the reason they continue to play through the Pokemon series is to feel nostalgia.

Question 6: Did you ever choose to play these games because you wanted to feel nostalgic?

Back in the day they could be my absolute favorite games in certain periods when I wanted to relive these memories as the Pokemon series soundtracks really nails in making me feel nostalgic. (Interview, person 2)

Person 2 states that the Pokemon soundtracks consistently summons a sense of nostalgia for them, this could be because the leitmotifs are present in tracks throughout most of the Pokemon series even to this very day.

For the following questions Person 2 is now reviewing "Pokemon Blue/Red - Team Rocket Hideout"

Question 7: Is there any specific melody in this piece that catches your attention?

I notice the leitmotif melody that is also present in the previous track however this track never really did much for me as I never enjoyed this part of the game really. (Interview, person 2)

Person 2 is able to connect the two songs but the negative emotions associated with the environment in that game seem to diminish the nostalgia they feel about this particular track. This is interesting as previously when other emotions were added to nostalgia they would heighten the nostalgia, not take away from it.

Question 8: Do you feel as though you can imagine a place or a time during your life whilst listening to this piece instead?

The first song more so than the second, I don't think I would ever prefer the second. Maybe because I haven't played that particular area in the game as much. But I tend to be more drawn to the tracks that make me feel nostalgic like the more melancholic and sentimental themed pieces. (Interview, person 2)

Person 2 seems to have no strict memory tied to the second soundtrack because of their dislike of it and mentions how they prefer their nostalgia to be “more melancholic and sentimental.”

I believe the interviews were a good choice in my desire to unveil and awaken past experiences whilst also holding the topic relevant and adding to my research. By using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes, the interview is also a very convenient way of overcoming distances both in space and in time; past events or faraway experiences can be studied by interviewing people who took part in them (Norman K. Denzin 2017)

Comparison:

Both interviews reply in similar fashion but also stray to different topics that are connected with pieces playing. Person 1 seems to be able to seamlessly recall their memories and connect these memories to the gameplay.

The piece makes me think of the first time you play the game and come out from this dark damp cave and get to experience the sprawling open world outside. Every location has such a unique atmosphere which the soundtrack mimics and enhances in an important way. (Interview, person 1)

Person 1 in comparison seems to focus more on what the song may be hinting or implying to the player and the listener. They also mention how the instruments are connected to their present emotions.

The glockenspiel that comes in for the first time around the 15 second mark is the melody that sticks with me the most when I listen. (Interview, person 1)

Because it feels very playful and kind in its playing". It's interesting how Person 2 lets the instruments dictate their emotions whilst Person 1 connects their emotions to the gameplay and lets that be the driving vehicle in their interpretation of the music. Person 1 "Every location has such a unique atmosphere which the soundtrack mimics and enhances in an important way. It makes it very easy for you to comprehend what kind of emotion the game wants to convey." The similarities reveal themselves however when discussing nostalgia. Both Person 1 and Person 2 are able to recall memories of not when they were playing the game or listening to the specific but from a part of their childhood relating to Nintendo games of that kind. Person 1 talks about themselves playing video games whilst their mother played classical piano, Person 2 recalls their excitement when they were playing another game in the Pokemon series who's music is not connected to the pieces that were analyzed.

7. Discussion

An important aspect in answering "what is that which causes a listener to feel nostalgic" seems to be the presence of leitmotifs and how they form throughout the game. Leitmotifs reveal themselves in different measures during the Zelda soundtracks depending on the setting, mood and time in the gameplay story. There seems to be some kind of connection between when a leitmotif is attached to an environmental shift in mood that causes the player to also recall how their own emotions correlated with the soundtrack. Therefore when the player plays through the games again they have a wide range of emotions that can add color to their nostalgia and enhance their memories attached to the game. The act of having a leitmotif grounded in the main game can cause the player to also feel grounded and comfortable in a sense, it's as if the leitmotif places itself into the pocket of the players subconsciousness and reveals itself when there is something for it to latch onto. This could be a setting, a person or an in-game event. It is also interesting to

note that the leitmotif can also attach itself to notions outside of the game itself, as the first interviewee noted how the soft piano of the soundtrack in “Silent Princess” reminded him of his childhood when his mother tended to play classical piano. It is interesting to note how Person 2 placed great emphasis on how when nostalgia was coupled with emotions like melancholy they felt as though the nostalgic emotion was stronger and more memorable. However when the nostalgia was coupled with negative emotions such as a dislike for a part of the game the feeling of nostalgia could be diminished and undesirable in a sense. It may be compelling to research how specific emotions correlate with nostalgia when attempting to heighten or decrease the nostalgia.

Another discovery seems to be that nostalgia can appear in places that have nothing to do with either the game or the environment the game was played in. It seems that the nostalgia the soundtrack evokes can transport the player to memories of their past even though there is no strict event for the nostalgia to logically connect too. I felt as though I was able to research the purpose and answer the questions accordingly, however the validity of my conclusion may be open for discussion. A bigger sample pool of interviews would have benefited the research as nostalgia as an emotion can be very different depending on an individual's personal experiences. Originally the purpose of this bachelor thesis was to research how nostalgia is able to be present even though there is no strict event or past to connect the nostalgia too. This purpose was later modified as it would be very difficult to research this with the resources available. Although it was interesting to see that hints of the concept did reveal itself during the interviewing and research process.

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