

Animated Narratives wk9

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Character development and music

This week I have been continuously working on character narratives. In animations and interactive pieces, the music serves as part of the narrative elements. With the character sprites I have created, I am looking into the music that might have the potential for character narratives and plot narratives.

Character development, background & musical character identity

Due to the time constraints and budget, I plan to use licensed and royalty free tracks that can be found online. The aiming goal for this part of development is to generate a list of spots where or with which I will implant music pieces as part of the narratives and hunt down the type of music accordingly.

In the article, *5 Tips For More Engaging Visual Novel Soundtracks by Darrell Reconose 2020*, music is as one of the effective elements for engaging the audience in visual novels. Darrell states that the music plays three different roles in games, which are Provide, Attach and Evoke. An example for music in the Provide category is theme song, which is a piece related to a frequent-appearing location or a major event. Character music is the “Attach type, which means the specific music plays when the character is presented. Evoke type of music is used to trigger player’s emotion with plots or setting the emotional tone of the scenes.

After my research, I have drafted a list I will start off with. I use short terms to label the narrative purpose they serve in the game.

BGM = Background music / CH = Character musical identity / EM = Trigger relevant emotions.

1. [**BGM / CH**] Alex (protagonist) musical identity / theme song.
2. [**CH**] Alex with friends.
3. [**CH**] Alphie (the victim).
4. [**CH/ BG**] The Bates / trafficker (antagonist).
5. [**BGM / CH**] Alex’s house.
6. [**EM**] Light hearted.
7. [**EM**] Heavy / negative.
8. [**EM**] Intense situation.
9. [**EM**] Bounding moment.
10. [**BGM**] Party scene.
11. [**BGM/ CH**] School background music.

The most essential piece on the list is the theme song, which I also apply to Alex, the protagonist. Since the player experience the story as Alex, which means Alex is always in the scene, a musical identity for the protagonist is essential for emphasizing the character traits as well as setting the game tone from the start. The theme song is played in general game scenes.

The other three pieces of background music are assigned for their frequent appearances and key-moment appearance in the game.

Alex’s house is the place where the player interacts with in the end of almost every sequence. For character development, Alex lives with his mother and they have a good relationship. The main driven concept for the development is to make the single-parent family as common as possible. The character development for Alex’s mother and the house together represent a social general idea of a family. They have good times and bad times, but they are always there for each other. This development approach is also to set up the background story

contrast between the protagonist and antagonist. The music is also utilized as the narrative element to enhance the contrast.

The background music for school is assigned to emphasize the dynamic between locations / scenes. Since Alex is a high schooler, home, town and school are the three main locations he spends his most time at. School is also a location where some key plots take place.

The party scene is an essential part of the game. An important milestone of character bonding takes place in the scene. This is where Alex finally earns enough trust from Alpie, and the two have established a strong bond in the scene. It is the key moment and required scene to unlock before arriving at the good ending. A music piece for this specific event emphasizes the importance of the plot.

Considering both the plot and the character development, I assign a group musical identity for Alex and his friends. This piece is played when three of them, Alex, Krist and Pam, interact with each other in the scene. As main supporting characters, the two friends mostly appear in general plots and the musical identity reflects the interaction among the group.

Alpie and the Bates, as the secondary main characters, musical identities are also assigned to them to enhance the character traits as well as reflect the dynamic contrast between them.

Aside from background music and character musical identities, there are four different emotional response tunes interweaved with the plot. By utilizing the different combinations of music pieces, I consider 10 is a good number for music used, to create dynamic, highlight key moments and reflect emotion responses, within a game with an estimated 3-4 hours gameplay time.

In the work this week, I examine the relationships between narratives and music and how music is utilized to help shape the characters, locations, emotion responses and events. While the game concept is heavy with human trafficking issue, creating the interactive experience by using the medium is a good approach for engaging the target audience. Instead of reading hard text content about the issue, the player acknowledges the issue by discovering the story himself and is potentially driven to take action upon the issue.

Due to the characteristic of visual novel genre, music is an essential engaging element for telling character-driven story with images and text. While the player experiences the story by reading through text in his mind, the music can help setting the tone of the scenes and communicate the emotion response relevant to the plots. Music also serves as the non-verbal narrative for the player to emphasize the character traits or emotion triggers of key moments.

Most of the animation works and games utilize music as a type of narrative. Assassin's Creed - Ezio Trilogy series by Ubisoft is a good example. The series is a heavy character-driven story, which portrays the life of the Ezio Auditore, the protagonist, being in the part of an ancient group, the Assassins. The story evolves around Ezio and the Auditore family. The musical identity for Ezio enhances the sense of Renaissance Italian era and the mysterious vibe of the Assassins. The music piece becomes a very strong theme for the series. The other music in the game are not as strong but serve as supporting narratives for actions and interactive events and locations.

Due to the music resources I'm planning on applying, I may not have the music that will work as a tailored piece for my characters. The cultural elements and having a firm protagonist image are also not the main focuses for my project. However, in order to create a complex dynamic and engaging narrative, the concept of utilizing the combination of a strong theme track with relatively-subtle supporting music would be a good approach for my soundtrack search. I will continue to modify the list of music while most of the game plots are still under development.