

Review

Collins, K., ed. 2008. *From Pac-Man to Pop Music: Interactive Audio in Games and New Media*. Aldershot: Ashgate. ISBN 978-0-7546-6200-6 (hbk); ISBN 978-0-7546-6211-2 (pbk). 224 pp.

Towards the end of a collection dominated by writers from the global North, the first and only explicit reference to Australasia appears:

Computer-based music took its first steps in the 1950s, although analogue electronic music already had a 50 year head start. In 1951 the Australian mathematician Geoff Hill was the first to generate music in real time (156).

I repeat this here because in many ways the collection takes off from this point, largely focused as it is on the holy grail of adaptive games music design. While the book does include a number of papers on mobile phone ringtone design (Peter Drescher), and low-fi demo culture using old school technology such as the classic Commodore 64 early home computer (Anders Carlsson), its bread-and-butter is the vast possibilities for more sophisticated and interactive music enabled by advances in game technologies.

The collection begins with a brief history of games audio from the editor. Then, in Chapter 1 by Holly Tessler, we get a feel for the new place of games audio in the broader entertainment economy. Tessler examines the value of games as tools for the promotion of new acts using, as her key case study, the big U.S. games company EA which claims credit for breaking bands such as Franz Ferdinand, Arctic Monkeys and The Streets (15). A similar theme is taken up in the next chapter by Antti-Ville Kärjä who pursues what David Hesmondhalgh refers to as 'conglomeration' via the experience of the game *Max Payne 2* and Finnish group Poets of the Fall (29). This chapter covers a lot of ground and ultimately the author is not entirely convinced of the financial benefits of entering into such contracts for the bands themselves. Chapter 3 (Peter Drescher) and Chapter 4 (Agnès Guerraz and Jacques Lemordant) briefly move the focus to mobile phones, although Guerraz and Lemordant's focus is on adaptive audio for games on mobiles using Java functionality. In Chapter 3, 'Could Ringtones *Be* More Annoying?', ringtone designer Peter Drescher talks through his years in the business, and notes that, like the fashion industry, it always has customers because people's identity becomes bound up in their choice of ringtone. He finishes his short piece by predicting the future of ringtones to be DIY customized pieces of people's MP3 files.

A number of practice-heavy chapters are then presented, beginning with Jesper Kaae on composing dynamic music for games—hardcore musicology meets theories of time structure. Norbert Herber follows with a discussion of the kinds of compositional techniques that can best realize the necessary next step of truly interactive music for user-centred media such as games. He contextualizes this future in terms of traditional experimental and improvisatory music practices, as well as generative music such as that of Brian Eno who has been engaged to work on the audio for the game *Spore*. Rob Bridgett has a short chapter on the effects of over-compression on the felt quality and experience of digital audio, before Leonard J. Paul offers an introductory chapter on granulation in video game audio design; that is, the ways in which adaptive qualities are produced via the breaking down of sound into individual parts, and then scripting their order in response to aspects of the game play. Finally, Peter Shultz draws upon theories of pleasure and learning in games studies to analyse the rewards and returns of gameplay in music-focused games, such as *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Guitar Hero*.

A couple of chapters break away from this technical focus. If I were to recommend one chapter here for inclusion in a non music-focused, generalist games studies syllabus it would be Chapter 6: Tim van Geelen's overview of how adaptive music improves the experience of game play and, in particular, the feeling of immersion. Like a number of essays in this book, it draws upon the experience of 'best practice' around both diegetic and non-diegetic sound in film studies to explore its value and unique role in games-based texts. Another chapter which goes back to basics on why sound is important is Kristine Jørgensen's analysis of results from a laboratory study of gameplay that was undertaken both with and without sound. She finds sound to be essential to a game player's capacity to quickly absorb information; when solely reliant on visual cues alone, players suffered from decreased response times as their visual systems became overloaded. They also lost the capacity to pre-empt the looming, out-of-screen events which are frequently flagged by a shift in music.

Among the book's strengths is the breadth of contributors, coming from a mix of academic, arts, programming, composition and industry backgrounds. On the downside, I am not convinced this mix works; at times, it may be too academic for a practitioner audience, and the focus of many of the writers on outlining new approaches to interactive/adaptive programming and composition can leave the uninitiated a little flummoxed. Nevertheless, for those proficient in digital music programming, the models, ideas and 'how tos' suggested here could well be a great resource for, and source of innovation in, their own practice.

Susan Luckman
University of South Australia
Susan.Luckman@unisa.edu.au