

Audio Track Presentation

Presentation Title: The Hobbit – Case Study

Presentation Format: 60 minute lecture

Speakers: Marc Schaeffgen, Rod Abernethy, Dave Adams, Jason Graves

Audience Level: Intermediate

Talk Type: Educational/Analytical

Presentation Abstract:

Delving into the audio production behind The Hobbit, the speakers will detail the positive and negative aspects of said production. With a very limited budget the audio team pulled together a top notch musical score with over 20 minutes of orchestral music recorded by the Northwest Sinfonia, in addition to 40 minutes of acoustic and 90 minutes of ambient music. The Hobbit features full voice implementation for 5 languages, no text without accompanying voice. The sound design rounds out the production including ambience tracks, creature and combat sounds, along with the usual bevy of sound effects. The group will also discuss the non-creative aspects including pre-production, workflow, data management, and audio team dynamics.

Intended Audience and Prerequisites:

This panel is intended for audio professionals and any other discipline that is interested in what it takes to pull together a complete game audio production.

Take-away:

The attendee will leave this presentation with a better understanding of what it takes to bring together all of the elements in a game audio production. Also, information regarding working pipelines, team dynamics, inter-discipline communication, and long distance working relationships will be gleaned.

Presentation Syllabus:

The Hobbit – Case Study

Introduction:

- 1) Introduce speakers and their role
 - a) Marc Schaeffgen: Inevitable - Audio Director, sound designer, composer
 - b) Rod Abernethy: Red Note Audio - president, composer
 - c) Dave Adams : Red Note Audio – composer, arranger
 - d) Jason Graves: Red Note Audio - composer, arranger, orchestration
- 2) Briefly describe The Hobbit game style and audio goals
- 3) Describe audio team

Pre-Production:

- 1) Discuss budget and how it was allocated
- 2) Explain Sierra's involvement with the dialogue
 - a) Originally to be cast and recorded in Austin for little budget
 - b) Sierra increased dialogue budget and moved production to LA
- 3) Project scope – biting off more than you can chew
- 4) Tolkien License issues and content guidelines
- 5) Resource hiring and scheduling
 - a) Composer selection process
 - b) Sound design resource allocation and contracting
- 6) Setting up data pipe-line
 - a) Asset tracking and management
 - b) Version control
 - c) Team feedback

Production:

- 1) Music
 - a) Discuss and Create an overall style concept for the soundtrack
 - b) Create the cue list as a road map for composing the scores
 - c) Create the milestone schedule
 - d) Create midi demos that reflect what the final scores will sound like
 - e) Orchestrate and prepare the midi scores for the live orchestral sessions
 - f) Tolkien approvals process
 - g) Record the live orchestra
 - h) Mix and deliver: combine all the recorded elements, mix in surround, and deliver to the developer
- 2) Sound Design
 - a) Hard SFX
 - b) Ambient One Shots
 - c) Ambient Loops
 - d) GUI
 - e) Sounds for Particle effects
- 3) Voice
 - a) Casting

- b) Recording
- c) Edit/Processing

Team Dynamics:

- 1) Working long distance
- 2) Resource scheduling and contractor milestone development
- 3) Hitting the moving target – As the game design evolves, the content must be changed or adapted

Implementation:

- 1) Music
- 2) SFX
 - a) Audio Scripts
 - b) Coded
 - c) Editor Tool
 - d) Animation Events
- 3) Voice
 - a) Designer dialogues
 - b) Animation Events
- 4) Challenges
- 5) Hitting the moving target

Conclusion:

- 1) Overall mistakes, and things that need to be addressed in our future titles
- 2) Q & A

The Hobbit:

Audio Production Case Study

Pre-production General

- Budgeting
- Developer / Publisher relationship
- Project scope
- Licensing issues
- Resource allocation
- Data pipeline

Pre-production - Music

- Determine style – gather reference
- Preliminary cue sheet
- Music milestone scheduling
- Music style guide
- Develop music production pipeline

Music Production Pipeline

- Direction for level(s)
- Create MIDI demos
- Music approval process
- Orchestration / Preparation
- Recording (orchestral, acoustic)
- Final mixing and delivery



Create Midi Demos

- Created original "The Hobbit" theme with midi orchestra
- Recorded authentic Celtic instruments for various level themes
- Compose and record midi orchestra for all level music beds.
- Used sampled orchestral clippings such cymbals, harp gliss, etc ...



Music Approvals

- Tolkien Music Director relationship
- Licensing issues
- Re-work pieces to conform with Tolkien philosophies and styles

Music Orchestration / Prep

- Decide which pieces are priority for live orchestration
- Compile midi and audio files to be orchestrated
- Used Sibelius to orchestrate parts
- Combined specific loops to same cue
- Print out orchestrated scores and parts

Music Recording

- All live orchestra was recorded at Studio X in Seattle with the Northwest Sinfonia
- All recording was done on a Mac G4 laptop & Ipod through Grace pre-amps and SSL board using Digital Performer 4 and a Motu 896
- All Celtic instruments, orchestral percussion and woodwinds were recorded at Rednote Audio



Music Mixing / Delivery

- All orchestral mixes were done on Digital Performer 4, with an Otari 80 channel audio console and Mackie D8B digital mixer.
- Surround sound mix stems were required for final delivery
- All final mixes converted to 32K



Music: Ambient

- Determining necessity and style
- Musical glue?
- Incorporating main score elements
- Approvals / re-work
- Did the experiment work?

Pre-production – Sound Design

- Generate asset list / database
- Determine resources
- Gather visual reference
- Iteration / dynamic production

Production – Sound Design

- Placeholder / 1st pass creation
- Managing / directing resources
- Gather visual reference
- Iteration / dynamic production

Pre-production – Dialogue

- Script / Asset database
- Placeholder recording
- Working with *Absinthe Pictures*
- Scheduling recording

Production – Dialogue

- Recording
- Editing / Processing
- Pickup session(s)
- Localization



Implementation

- Music
 - Combat / ambient systems
 - Triggers
 - Pre-rendered cinematics



Implementation

- Sound Effects
 - Sound emitters
 - Ambient Triggers
 - Animation event driven
 - Coded

Implementation

- Dialogue
 - Editor dialogue system
 - Animation event driven

Team Dynamics

- Long distance relationships
- Hitting the moving target
 - Expect the worst
 - Minimize risk
- Early involvement vs. Drawn out contracts



Conclusion

- Thank You!