search the blog | Search

FILM & GAME
COMPOSERS

- Menu Item
- InterviewsComposer Interviews
- ResourcesBooks + more
- Tutorials Software tutorials
- GuidesComposers Guides
- The ForumComposers Forum
- The BlogRandom ramblings
  - ProductsNew products
    - Announcements
    - Reviews
  - Competitions
  - Discounts/Offers/Sales
  - Featured Workspace
- ContactGot a question?

Composer Interview – Nathaniel Chambers

Posted by Emmett Cooke on November 29, 2012 in Interviews

Home > Interviews > Composer Interview – Nathaniel Chambers

Tell us a bit about yourself. Where do you come from and what do you do?

As a teenager, I was a computer nerd and I toyed in any cool stuff I could get my hands on (often failing miserably). I liked game soundtracks a lot more than any sane person should have and was really into cartoon and film music as well. I used to play game music from either my computer or console into a tape recorder so I could bring it around with me everywhere. I started messing around with music programs, and started making weird soundscapes / 'music' out of strange things like water drops and my friends' voices. I recorded just about anything I could put a microphone on. Funny enough, it wasn't until recently as a sound designer that I got back into that sort of thing. I just kept spending time on audio programs until I said to myself: "You know, if you don't do this as your job, you're going to be miserable and always wonder what would happen if you only tried." I then started looking at schools for music technology.

Bubble Pipe Media
01 Primordia

Like   Share

4:24

▶ 503 ❤ 4   SOUNDCLOUD

When and how did you make the move to being a full time composer?

This is probably not the way most people go about it. I went to school and when I got out, a little switch went off in my head about priorities, money, and wanting to start my own business. It turns out, I was a packrat and very careful when I was young, so I had a lot of comics, toys, and video games in pristine condition. I sold my collections on Amazon and used that money to start my own business, as well as have some money for food when gigs were scarce.

What does your studio currently consist of hardware/software wise?

The hardware I use most: Mac Pro 2008, Sennheiser 650hd headphones, and **Zoom H4n**. For software, I use **Native Instruments Komplete 7** and **Kore2**, **Spectrasonics Omnisphere**, **Toontrack**, **Plogue Chipsounds**, **Logic Pro 9**, and a few downloadable sound libraries.

Whats your favorite software right now and what software are you looking forward to most in the future?

Omnisphere is the plugin I've used most for **Primordia**, along with FM8. I write most of my music by playing into a keyboard and recording it. Omnisphere reacts really well to that, it's very expressive. You can't use it for sound design though and while I'll keep using it because it feels so good to play, in the future I suspect I will focus primarily on buying libraries that have a less limiting EULA and can be used for both sound design and music. For interactive music especially, where you might want separate stems to be able to fade in and out, that's important.

You're currently writing music for the upcoming adventure game Primordia. How did this come about?

I go to a lot of NYC game developer events. Dave Gilbert, the producer of the game, and I had met a few times and ended up hanging out. I pestered him a few times with my 'oh by the way do you need music' routine, but he already had a composer he was happy with. In this case, I think his regular composer couldn't fit the gig in his schedule, so he asked me for some samples and liked them.

How do you approach writing for a game in general?

I'm a big fan of puzzle games and that's how I tend to approach writing for games. Each one needs to have their needs figured out on multiple levels. The style of music is just one part of the puzzle. A good example is that with **Primordia**, we had music that had drums in it originally. But the drums ended up spoiling the game play with an inherent sense of pacing. When I play point and click adventures I want the player to take their own time solving the puzzles in a way that feels natural. So each game has to be individually considered.

How different is it to compose music for a game, compared to a film?

When I compose for film, I'm composing for a linear medium that will always be watched in the same way. There's a good bit of fun in that. You can, in many ways, play with the audience a lot more. You can foreshadow. You can not worry about a tune getting annoying if a player gets stuck on a certain area, because in film, you control time.

Composing for games you never quite know what the player is going to do. Are they going to breeze through the area? Leave the game on and go into the kitchen to make a sandwich? What if they get stuck on a boss fight and end up hearing that same battle intro music over and over again and want to find me so they can punch me in the eye? I have a tendency to start the game up and then make some coffee. I made the **Primordia** menu theme fairly long just for people who do that.

Bubble Pipe Media
07 Regeneration

♥ Like   ↱ Share

1:44

▶ 140 | ♥ 1

SOUNDCLOUD

At what point are you normally asked to come on board when writing music for a game? Is the game nearly complete, or are you brought in towards the beginning so you can start to put some ideas together?

It varies so much from game to game. I'd say at least the game is usually worked on a good bit before I'm usually asked to come in, so that it's in some playable form (usually early alpha builds). I've worked some gigs where I don't even get to play the game, just see a video and they only want one track for the menu. While I usually end up being less invested in the project itself at that point, I still give my all musically, and some of those tracks end up being my favorite. In those cases usually the developers specifically know what they want, so there's less brainstorming. I get to focus on the music more and the puzzle of the game itself less.

For **Primordia**, I would say I was brought in near the midpoint. The first half of the game was mostly done and the second half wasn't really very playable. This worked out well for me, because I felt like I got to tackle each half almost separately and we decided there should be a very different vibe to the two areas. The script was mostly done, the story was done, and the design document was really helpful for getting to know all the characters.

What do you do in between projects when you don't currently have something to work on?

I read more graphic novels and usually end up getting back in shape. Most of the time is spent looking for the next gig and taking advantage of the time to read field-related books.

What does your daily routine consist of?

Currently, in order: wake up and check email, power bar, coffee, check email again (with clearer head) along with facebook, then buckle down and work. If I'm lucky, no 'real life' things will distract me, such as the need to buy groceries. When I work, I tend to like to really focus and not be distracted, especially when writing music. If I'm in any kind of zone mentally, if I get hungry, a microwavable meal will take too long, so I end up eating way too many power bars on those days (Cliff Builder's are my favorite currently). When I'm working on sound design, I tend to take more mini breaks between sounds. If I get stuck musically, I end up pacing around or taking a shower, mumbling to myself like a madman.

Bubble Pipe Media
11 Faith In Fission

♥ Like   Share

5:07

▶ 91   SOUNDCLOUD

Where do you normally go about finding game developers to work with?
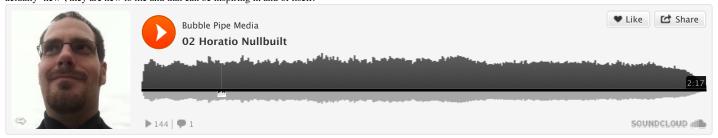
I go to GDC, Indiecade, and local NYC events and just talk. Sometimes I find gigs on forums online at places like **TIGsource**. Othertimes, occasionally, someone will email who I've never met who just happened to find my music on Soundcloud.

What's your definition of success?

Being happy. Well, that, and being able to afford food and rent. I'd say if I'm working gigs I enjoy and getting enough to not have to worry too much, then I've succeeded. I don't need a lot. I wouldn't mind more, but I certainly don't think that sort of attention is the only thing that makes you successful. Being happy with what you do makes you successful.

How do you stay fresh as a composer?

I don't. I use sample libraries, presets even, and get inspired by bands that are new to me, but have probably been around for at least a few years. Trying to ride 'new' is probably a bad idea, but certainly not always. I think bringing your own take to things, but not necessarily a new take, is what matters most. I like to think most composers have their own inherent style, even if they change genres from project to project. That said, I'm always looking at new software and new bands. While they may not be actually 'new', they are new to me and that can be inspiring in and of itself.

Bubble Pipe Media
02 Horatio Nullbuilt

♥ Like   Share

2:17

▶ 144 ● 1   SOUNDCLOUD

What advice would you give yourself if you could go back in time to when you were originally starting off?

It's hard to say. I've often asked myself that question (strangely), but the truth is I'm very happy with where I am in life. Sure, I made some poor decisions and would love to go back in time and tell myself to not do that, but then I wouldn't be here now, happy in NYC. That said, if I could somehow be where I am now and go back, I would jump at good chances, even if they're a bit of a strain. I played it safe, which works out in some ways, but definitely not in others. I was offered some overflow work, but I'd have to move 4 hours away. I was new to the industry and genuinely didn't know how hard it was to get started. If I could go back in time, I'd take that gig in a heartbeat. I'm sure it would have helped my resume immensely and it would have been a great experience.
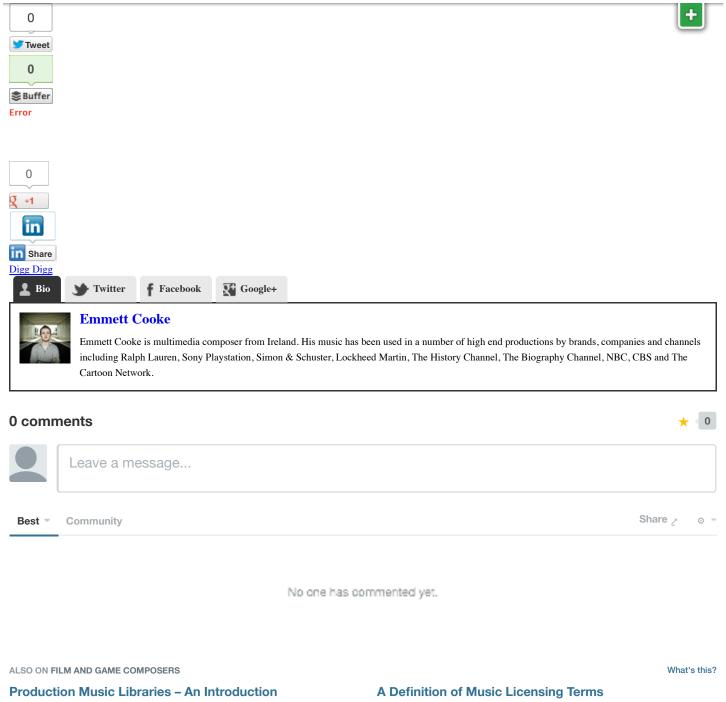
Your studio is on fire and you only have time to grab one thing – what do you take?

Hah, that's a mean one. I've never been good at hypothetical questions like this. First, I'd probably spend a lot of time screaming and crying. I suspect I'd grab my Mac Pro, which has my current work on it, so that I could keep working and buy quick gear to finish the job. It also has all my software on it. I also have stacks of disc wallets with many dvds worth of my music that goes all the way back to when I was a teenager, which I'd be tempted to grab for sentimental reasons. They also have my old PC games in it, like Baulder's Gate and Sam & Max, which probably says way too much about my sentimental attachment to the games since I keep it with the music I've written.

Can you recommend any useful books on composition/mastering/business etc. that you've read and enjoyed?

I highly recommend these three books to all game composers: **Audio For Games: Planning, Process, and Production** by Alexander Brandon is a great short book about game audio. I think it covers well things like audio design in games, implementation, and even communication within the team. **The Complete Guide To Game Audio** by Aaron Marks is also really great and works well with the other book, covering more the business end in addition to various other topics and interviews. And less direct information and more pure inspiration is **The Fat Man on Game Audio: Tasty Morsels of Sonic Goodness** by George Sanger, which has some great stories from the game and music industry.

For actual composition, mastering, and mixing, I've found nothing really helps as much as just doing it over and over again. Use your ears. Compare your work to polished productions in similar styles. I also think that with the amount of forums these days, as well as the amount of easy to use and affordable plugins, it's never been easier to get into composing.

0

Tweet

0

Buffer

Error

0

+1

in Share

Digg Digg

| Bio | Twitter | Facebook | Google+ |

Emmett Cooke

Emmett Cooke is multimedia composer from Ireland. His music has been used in a number of high end productions by brands, companies and channels including Ralph Lauren, Sony Playstation, Simon & Schuster, Lockheed Martin, The History Channel, The Biography Channel, NBC, CBS and The Cartoon Network.

0 comments

★ 0

Leave a message...

Best Community

Share ⤢ ⚙

No one has commented yet.

- **Popular Posts**

Selling Music Online – The Stock Audio Market	**23**
Building an Audio Production PC	**18**
How much should I charge to compose music?	**14**
Open Forum Friday: Which DAW and Why?	**12**
Cinematic Strings 2.0 Review	**11**

- # Like us on Facebook

Find us on Facebook

Film and Game Composers

👍Like

4,016 people like Film and Game Composers.

Facebook social plugin

*

- # Subscribe for Updates Via Email

✉ Enter your email*

👤 Enter your name

* = required field

Subscribe