

# Music beyond gameplay: embodied experience of acoustic music in the covers of original game soundtrackse

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## Keywords

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The paper concerns a specific type of participatory engagement (Jenkins 2008, Fuchs 2014, Hellekson and Busse 2006), prosumption (Beer and Burrows 2010, Hofman-Kohlmeyer 2020) or meaning-making activity (Burwell 2017) that stems from the interaction with video games that act as open culture (Salen and Zimmerman 2004), namely the production of fan YouTube videos (Karpovich 2007) that feature musicians playing acoustic covers of video games original soundtracks (OST).

As the number of covers uploaded on YouTube can prove, some OST are more frequently and eagerly chosen by fans to record their own versions of the compositions. This could be related to the number of people who represent specific fandoms, as well as to the popularity of the games or their developers. For example, OST from The Legend of Zelda and Super Mario series by Nintendo are often covered by fans, as are tracks from other Nintendo series, such as Pokemon. In this case, since 1986 the studio has established a stable leading position on the US market (Collins 2008, 24), which definitely contributes to high visibility and cultural impact of Nintendo games worldwide.

A fan trend that emerged around 2015 involves performing video game music arranged for a consort of recorders, that is the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass recorders which correspond in naming and function to the vocal ranges of singers in a choir (Socha 1993, 5). The consort can be further enriched with larger or smaller members of the recorder family, such as the sopranino and contrabass recorders. Used to

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perform a small number of simultaneous parts, recorder quartets that consist of instruments with a homogeneous sound, are particularly well-suited to reproducing the 8-bit OST of older games. The modest nature of these OST was shaped by the limited processing power of the late 1970s and early 1980s processors, including the small number of available sound channels and the timbres of the sound generators (Donnelly et al. 2014, 153). As it turns out, a recorder consort is a perfect acoustic means to emulate classic OST. Applying an interdisciplinary approach that combines musicology, fan studies, and game studies, we want to present the analysis of music videos uploaded on the InstrumentManiac YouTube channel that contain the covers of Pokemon compositions.

We find it interesting to observe how OST, being a part of digitally-mediated interactive game systems, are reconstructed as covers (Wolański 2000, 68; Griffiths 2002) played with the help of traditional acoustic instruments such as recorders. In this case, changing the medium entails significant modifications as the performer needs to recreate the score (using either the OST or MIDI files, as original scores are usually unavailable) and adjust it to a different technology, that is the affordances of the particular instrumentarium they decide to use. The materiality of the instrument and the skill of the musician directs the interpretation of the source material that results in a new arrangement. This materiality also entails a different type of embodied experience (Corness 2008, Clayton and Leante 2013, Cox 2016, DeChaine 2002, Finnegan 2012, Juntunen 2017, McGuinness and Overy 2011, Shapiro, Lawrence A., and Shannon Spaulding 2024, van der Schyff 2013) as the performer is physically engaged in the production of music.

As follows, it could be assumed that fan appropriation of OST seems to be connected with the identity of the performer as an active audience member (Consalvo 2003) and a musician (Bennett 2001) who proves to be able to reconstruct and perform a particular score. The new arrangement is a challenge that the musician has been able to accomplish. The resulting text – in this case a video posted on YouTube platform – becomes a de-centered paratext (Consalvo 2017) that may be read as a testimony of the game reception or a player produced text (Newman 2005) and constitutes a form of artistic expression within the game culture.

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