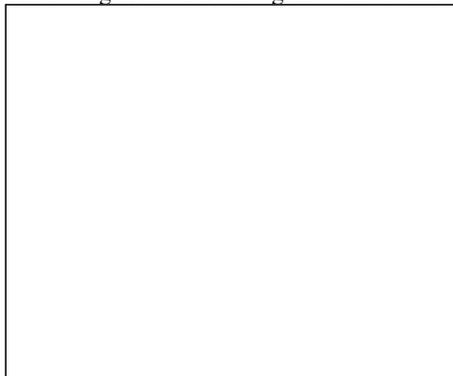


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Video Games Live In Dallas

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The roving orchestral videogame concert series hits 21.



By Alex Van Zelfden Video Games Live, the game music concert tour that's recently been playing such exotic places as New Zealand, South Korea, and...Ohio, made Dallas, Texas its latest destination last week. This marked the 21st stop in less than two years since its premiere - quite an achievement for what might seem an unlikely pairing of symphony and game culture. But for the more than 3,500 fans who came primarily from Texas and Oklahoma it was a match made in heaven.

Game music concerts performed by orchestras and choirs have spread like wildfire in the past few years, with shows like Play! and A Night in Fantasia touring internationally in addition to VGL, and many independent shows like the annual Games Convention concert in Leipzig, Germany. The trend makes sense considering the current popularity of gaming and the fact that so many games already use orchestras and choirs to record their soundtracks; the music seems ready-made for such concerts.

Another interesting factor is that symphony orchestras are eager to attract the younger demographic represented by gamers, and playing music from genres like that is a sure way of drawing in new people. Earlier this year in fact, the Dallas Symphony held separate concerts of Star Wars and Star Trek music. It's too soon to tell if this sort of thing will positively affect regular classical concerts, but one certainly can't blame them for trying.

Using a local orchestra wherever Video Games Live performs makes the concerts feel local in a way, while still allowing all of the high production values of a touring show. Dramatic lighting synchronized with the music and videos shown on the giant screen hanging above the orchestra definitely make a large impact on an audience.



After VGL's last trip to Texas - over a thousand people were turned away from the sold-out performance in Houston last summer - the Dallas concert was planned for two consecutive nights on Wednesday and Thursday. This turned out to be a good move since Wednesday's concert was filled close to capacity, and Thursday's show was fully sold-out.

Both concerts were held at the Meyerson Symphony Center, the Dallas Symphony's regular home since the building opened in 1989. Surrounded by sculpture and art museums in the middle of the downtown Dallas arts district, the Meyerson is a marvel itself. From the outside it resembles a giant stone cube with a glass and chrome sphere embedded in it, and the four-story concert hall inside is fleshed out with rich cherry wood. The second tier provides opera-style private box seats with a perfect view of the stage and one of the largest pipe organs ever made for a concert hall.

Wednesday's and Thursday's performances used the same program, starting as always with VGL's classic arcade medley made up like an early history of games featuring titles like Pong, Joust, Donkey Kong, and Centipede. Forget modern games for a moment, it's amazing to hear a full orchestra transforming what was once barely more than beeps and bleeps into a symphony.

Metal Gear Solid was next on the list, followed by God of War. Space Invaders brought an audience member up on stage to represent the defending ship by running back and forth while firing at the oncoming aliens in an attempt to win a cash prize.

Conductor Jack Wall's music from the Myst series was next, this time including his daughter Gracie on stage reprising her solo from the original recording. Afterwards came Medal of Honor Frontline, Civilization IV, Tron, and the first half of the concert finished with music from the Legend of Zelda.

After a twenty minute or so intermission where the attendees went to buy drinks, merchandise, or play video games in the lobby, the show came back with a second interactive segment. This time two audience members took turns competing against each other in Frogger for an AMD Ferrari laptop, all while the orchestra matched the action in real-time. The Wednesday show was especially exciting with the winner achieving the highest score VGL has had at one of these performances, and the crowd went wild.

Kingdom Hearts, Sonic, and World of Warcraft came next, followed by video game pianist Martin Leung's solo piano medley of Final Fantasy music. VGL co-creator Tommy Tallarico's music was represented with a suite from Advent Rising, and themes from the ever-popular Super Mario Bros. series came soon after. Leung encored that with another Super Mario all-piano rendition complete with power up sound effects. Thursday's performance even included him playing blindfolded and an additional piano version of Tetris. [Continues](#)

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Halo was the big finale for the concert, putting the whole orchestra and choir to work, and even bringing Tallarico out at the end to play electric guitar for the Halo 3 part. After a thunderous standing ovation Tallarico picked up his guitar again, Wall signaled the orchestra and choir, and the concert finally ended with One-Winged Angel from Final Fantasy VII.

As Tallarico said at one point in the evening, the Dallas Symphony is one of the best orchestras VGL has ever played with. There were some amazing performances both nights, but One-Winged Angel was the piece where they really seemed to let loose and rock. It was quite an end to the evening.

Tallarico, Wall, and Leung were part of the free meet-and-greet after the show where people could get their programs or posters autographed, and quite a few people stayed in line for that before going home.

Despite what the old prime-time soap opera may have led you to believe, Dallas has a vibrant tech side these days, including numerous important game developers like id Software, 3D Realms, Ensemble, and Gearbox. Most of these had at least a couple of artists or designers representing them in the signing line as well, giving fans a chance to chat with and get autographs from around a dozen industry veterans. Photo ops were taken advantage of, hundreds of items were signed, and it was a cool way to put gamers and developers in touch with each other for an industry that inexplicably has so little by way of its own celebrities.

Video Games Live is scheduled to play two more sold-out performances in Washington, D.C. this weekend, and then it's off to Detroit, Houston, Louisville, and Spain in July. If you don't live near any of those, don't worry - there's a good chance VGL will be making its way to your town soon.

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