

**IMAGES OF CHOPIN
IN, AND THROUGH,
JAPANESE VIDEO
GAMES**

The fascinating intersections between Western classical music and popular media have long been the subject of academic enquiry.¹ Such investigations have been particularly prominent in the context of classical music in film. Much has been revealed about the role of classical music in the media experiences of Blockbuster Hollywood film,² animation,³ composer biopics,⁴ and the audiovisual work of auteur directors like Stanley Kubrick.⁵ Furthermore, research by Jonathan Godsall and others has highlighted how such film examples play an important role in shaping our understanding of classical music outside these contexts.⁶

Music by Western classical composers was no late addition to the moving image; right from the earliest practices of music accompanying film, classical music has been part of the soundscape of cinema.⁷ The same is true of a medium that had its advent many decades after silent film pianists had put away their books of classical excerpts.

The video game first came to public prominence with arcade machines and home television games of the 1970s. As soon as video games acquired the technology to produce recognisable and coherent melodies, they played classical music. Furthermore, just as in silent film, they played Chopin.⁸ Before the *Space Invaders* started their march in 1978 (Taito), and before the amphibian in *Frogger* (Konami 1981) even tried to cross the road, *Circus* (Exidy 1977) featured an excerpt from the 'Marche funèbre' from Chopin's Second Piano Sonata when the player's character met their demise. Since 1977 Chopin's music has permeated the landscape of video games.

Video games are an international medium, with particularly active sites of creation and consumption in Europe, North America and Japan. Electronic technologies are exchanged and developed across the globe, and game releases aim to capture

1 I here use the term 'classical music', but it is, of course, acknowledged that this umbrella term encompasses a great diversity of musical styles, and chronological and cultural contexts.

2 See e.g. Lars Franke, 'The Godfather Part III: Film, Opera, and the Generation of Meaning', in Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (eds), *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 31–45; Kordula Knaus, 'Emotions Unveiled: Romance at the Opera in Moonstruck (1987), Pretty Woman (1990) and Little Women (1994)', *Musicological Annual*, 48/1 (2012), 117–128, and Robynn J. Stilwell, "'I just put a drone under him...': Collage and Subversion in the Score of Die Hard', *Music & Letters*, 78/4 (1997), 551–580.

3 Daniel Goldmark, *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

4 Discussions of Chopin in film have focussed primarily on either biopics of Chopin or questions related to his Polish identity. See Jeffrey Kallberg, 'Nocturnal Thoughts on *Impromptu*', *The Musical Quarterly*, 81/1 (1997), 199–203; Krzysztof Kornacki, 'Chopin on the cinema screen. Aesthetic and Cultural Determinants', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology*, 9 (2018), 317–342; Lawrence Kramer, 'Musicology and Meaning', *The Musical Times*, 144 (2003), 6–12; Li Ming-chun, 'The Legendary Life of Chopin, the Revolutionary Musician in Poland: On the Film *A Song to Remember*', *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 5/4 (2014), 81–84; John C. Tibbetts, 'Whose Chopin? Politics and Patriotism in *A Song to Remember* (1945)', *American Studies*, 46/1 (2005), 115–140. Further valuable discussions of Chopin on film include Marinne Kielian-Gilbert, 'Chopiniana and Music's Contextual Allusions', in Halina Goldberg (ed.), *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 162–200, and Michael L. Klein, 'Chopin Fragments: Narrative Voice in the First Ballade', *19th-Century Music*, 48/1 (2018), 30–52, though the arguments are not particularly relevant for the topic and examples covered here.

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David J. Code, 'Real Feelings: Music as Path to Philosophy in 2001: A Space Odyssey', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 7/2 (2010), 195–217; David J. Code, 'Don Juan in Nadsat: Kubrick's Music for A Clockwork Orange', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 139/2 (2014), 339–386; Christine Lee Gengaro, *Listening to Stanley Kubrick: The Music in His Films* (Lanham, NC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Kate McQuiston, *We'll Meet Again: Musical Design in the Films of Stanley Kubrick* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

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Jonathan Godsall, *Reeled In: Pre-Existing Music in Narrative Film* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 131–161; Jonathan Godsall, 'Hi-Yo Rossini: Hearing Pre-Existing Music as Post-Existing Music', in Carlo Cenciarelli (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 315–335.

7

Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13–26.

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On Chopin and silent film, see Charles Merrell Berg, 'An Investigation of the Motives for and Realization of Music to Accompany the American Silent Film, 1896–1927', PhD thesis, University of Iowa, 1973, 119, 140, 144, 210; Thomas J. Mathiesen, 'Silent Film Music and the Theatre Organ', *Indiana Theory Review*, 11 (1990), 97.

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For more on the early history of Japan's involvement in games, see Chris Kohler, *Power-Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life* (Indianapolis: Brady-Games, 2005).

10

Neil Lerner, 'Mario's Dynamic Leaps: Musical Innovations and the Specter of Early Cinema in Donkey Kong and Super Mario Bros.', in K. J. Donnelly, William Gibbons and Neil Lerner (eds), *Music in Video Games: Studying Play* (New York; London: Routledge, 2014), 1–29.

11

William Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays: Video Games and Classical Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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Dana Plank, 'From the Concert Hall to the Console: Three 8-Bit Translations of the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor', *Bach: Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute*, 50/1 (2019), 32–62.

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Karen M. Cook, 'Music, History, and Progress in Sid Meier's Civilization IV', in K. J. Donnelly, William Gibbons and Neil Lerner (eds), *Music in Video Games: Studying Play* (New York; London: Routledge, 2014), 180–196.

international audiences. Early international agreements for game development and distribution meant that American-made games, like *Circus*, were distributed in Japan, and Japanese-made games, like *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man* (Namco 1980) and *Frogger*, found popularity in American arcades.⁹ After the initial rapid expansion of mass-market video gaming in the late 1970s in the US, the American industry grew unsustainably quickly, and with market saturation and poor quality products, it collapsed under its own weight in a moment now referred to as the 'video game crash of 1983'. Particularly after this episode, Japanese games companies, who had not been affected by the crash in the same way, took a leading role in the international games industry. Not for nothing was the company name of 'Nintendo' adopted across America to become a generic name for playing video games. The video game industry has become a major cultural icon of Japan, both domestically and internationally; at the 2016 Olympic games in Rio de Janeiro, when the games were handed over to Japan as the next host country, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe appeared dressed as Super Mario to accept the games on behalf of Tokyo.

This article examines the use of Chopin's music in video games created by Japanese developers from 1978 to 2018. Given, as already noted, that Chopin was used in silent film accompaniment, and that early Japanese game music seems to draw on such silent film scoring practices,¹⁰ it is perhaps not surprising that Chopin's music is evident in these games. In addition, as William Gibbons,¹¹ Dana Plank,¹² Karen M. Cook,¹³ and others have discussed, classical music has been used throughout the history of video games. That recognised, there is a significant representation of Chopin's music in games, and Japanese games in particular. Table 1 is a list of games that feature music by Chopin, though there are likely many more that could be added to the survey. Sometimes the composer's music is presented as a straightforward performance of a piece by Chopin (diegetically or non-diegetically), but other games remix, vary or interpolate Chopin's musical materials as part of new compositions. It is easy to focus on how 'simplistic' the sounding of Chopin's music can be, particularly in the earlier games: it might take

the form of a sine-wave monophonic excerpt of the Second Sonata's 'Funeral March' or a rigidly metronomic performance of a section of the Fantasy-Impromptu. Yet we should take even these examples seriously, partly because of the mass audiences that these games reach, and partly because of the cultural meanings they reveal.

Table 1. Survey of video games featuring compositions either written by Chopin or adapted from specific Chopin compositions.

Game	Type	Country	Piece(s)
Circus (1977)	Arcade/breakout	US	'Funeral March'
Wild Gunman (1984)	Arcade shooting gallery	Japan	'Funeral March'
Up Up and Away (1985)	Flight simulator	UK	'Funeral March'
Empire City (1986)	Arcade shooting gallery	Japan	'Funeral March'
Apple Town Story (1987)	Simulation	Japan	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Hard Head (1988)	Arcade platformer	South Korea	Fantasy-Impromptu
Hanjuku Hero (1988)	Role-playing game	Japan	'Funeral March'
Parodius (1988)	Vehicular scrolling shooter	Japan	Fantasy-Impromptu
Mega Blast (1989)	Vehicular scrolling shooter	Japan	Fantasy-Impromptu
Space Adventure: Cobra (1991)	Shooting/adventure	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 3
Tetrastar (1991)	Vehicular shooting	Japan	Polonaise Op. 53 ('Heroic')
Fixeight (1992)	Vehicular shooting	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 3
Alone in the Dark (1992)	Survival horror	France	Waltz Op. 69 No. 1
Rock and Bach Studio (1993)	Educational	Canada	Waltz Op. 64 No. 2
Heros (1993)	Platformer	US	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Inferno (1994)	Spaceship combat	UK	'Funeral March'
Titanic: Adventure out of Time (1996)	Adventure	US	Prelude Op. 28 No. 7
Mega Man Legends (1997)	Platformer	Japan	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Akagawa Jirō: Yasōkyoku (1998)	Visual novel – mystery	Japan	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Tokimeki Memorial 2 (1999)	Dating game	Japan	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Memories Off 2nd (2001)	Visual novel – romance	Japan	Ballade No. 3, Op. 47
Clock Tower 3 (2002)	Survival horror	Japan	Fantasy-Impromptu

Game	Type	Country	Piece(s)
Dance Dance Revolution Max 2 and Beatmania II DX 7th Style (2002)	Rhythm	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 12 ('Revolutionary')
Hourglass of Summer (2002)	Visual novel – romance	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 12 ('Revolutionary')
Pop'n Music 8 (2003) and sequels	Rhythm	Japan	Etudes Op. 10 No. 12 and Op. 10 No. 3, Waltz Op. 64 No. 1 and 'Funeral March'
King of Fighters 2003 (2003)	Fighting game	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 12 ('Revolutionary')
La Corda d'Oro (2003)	Visual novel – romance	Japan	Fantasy-Impromptu, Waltz Op. 64 No. 1
World of Warcraft (2004)	Role-playing game	US	Nocturne Op. 27 No. 1
Gran Turismo IV (2004)	Racing game	Japan	Prelude Op. 28 No. 15
Donkey Konga 2 (2004)	Rhythm game	Japan	Waltz Op. 64 No. 1
Oshare Majo Love and Berry (2004)	Rhythm game	Japan	Waltz Op. 18
Phantom Dust (2004)	Action – third person	Japan	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 1
Saints Row (2006)	Action – third person	US	Ballade No. 1 Op. 23
QuickSpot (2006)	Puzzle	Japan	Waltz Op. 64 No. 1, Prelude Op. 28 No. 7, Etude Op. 10 No. 3
Test Drive Unlimited (2006)	Racing	France	Waltz Op. 64 No. 1
Eternal Sonata (2007)	Role-playing game	Japan	Many
Taiko No Tatsujin (2008 editions onwards)	Rhythm	Japan	Fantasy-Impromptu, Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2, Etude Op. 10 No. 4
Devil on G-String (2008)	Visual novel – romance	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 12 ('Revolutionary')
Magician's Quest (2008)	Life simulation	Japan	Waltz Op. 18, Etude Op. 10 No. 3, Barcarolle Op. 60, Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games (2009)	Sports/rhythm	Japan	Fantasy-Impromptu
Bayonetta (2009)	Action – third person	Japan	Fantasy-Impromptu
Little King's Story (2009)	Strategy	Japan	Polonaise Op. 40 No. 1 ('Military')

Game	Type	Country	Piece(s)
Maestro! Jump in Music (2010 iOS version)	Rhythm	France	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Gran Turismo V (2010)	Racing	Japan	Many
Armen Noir (2010)	Visual novel – mystery and romance	Japan	Nocturne No. 20, Op. posth., <i>Grande valse brillante</i> Op. 18, Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Saints Row: The Third (2011)	Action – third person	US	Waltz Op. 64 No. 1
Stacking (2011)	Adventure	US	Mazurka Op. 7 No. 1
Ruins (2011)	Adventure	US	Prelude Op. 28 No. 2 and Op. 28 No. 7
Catherine (2011)	Platform/romantic	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 12 ('Revolutionary') and 'Funeral March'
Saints Row IV (2013)	Action – third person	US	Waltz Op. 18
Pure Chess (2013)	Chess	UK	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Gas Guzzlers Extreme (2013)	Racing	Netherlands	Mazurka Op. 33
Fez (2013)	Platform	Canada	Prelude Op. 28 No. 4
Deemo (2013)	Rhythm	Taiwan	Etude Op. 10 No. 3, Ballade No. 1, Op. 23, Sonata No. 3 (fourth movement), Waltz Op. 18.
BioShock Infinite and expansions (2013/4)	First-person shooter	US	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Frederic: The Resurrection of Music (2014)	Rhythm	Poland	Many
Tsuki ni Yorisou Otome no Sahou 2 (2014/2015)	Visual novel – romance	Japan	Ballade No. 1, Op. 23
Rocksmith 2014: Bachsmith II (2015)	Rhythm/Music	US	'Funeral March'
Fallout 4 (2015)	Role-playing game	US	Ballade No. 1, Op. 23, Polonaise Op. 3 No. 1, Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
The Order: 1886 (2015)	Action	US	Prelude Op. 28 No. 4, Mazurka Op. 33 No. 1, Waltz Op. 34 No. 2
Quantum Break (2016)	Adventure	Finland	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2

Game	Type	Country	Piece(s)
Mary Skelter: Nightmares (2016)	Role-playing game	Japan	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Raw Data (2017)	Shooting	US	Nocturne Op. 27 Nos. 1 and 2, Nocturne Op. 48 No. 1, Nocturne Op. 55 No. 1, Nocturne Op. 72 No. 1
Tsugihagi Make Peace! -Pretending x Friendship- (2017/2018)	Visual novel – romance	Japan	Etude Op. 25 No. 9
Hyakunen Senki Euro Historia (2017)	Strategy	Japan	Polonaise Op. 53 ('Heroic')
World End Heroes (2018)	RPG	Japan	Etude Op. 10 No. 3
Nostalgia Op.2 (2018)	Rhythm/Music	Japan	Waltz Op. 34 No. 3
Super X Chess (2018)	Chess	Finland	Nocturne Op. 15 No. 1
Dynamix, Electroclassica song pack (2018)	Rhythm/Music	Hong Kong	Etude Op. 25 No. 12
Aviary Attorney (2020)	Visual novel – legal	UK	Etude Op. 25 No. 4
The Medium (2021)	Adventure	Poland	Mazurka Op. 68 No. 4
Uktena 64 (2021)	First-person shooter	US	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Forza Horizon 5 (2021)	Racing	US	Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2
Gran Turismo 7 (2022)	Racing	Japan	Prelude Op. 28 No. 15

Surveying Chopin in Japanese games reveals several distinct themes informing the use of his music. The first is sentimentalism (both in association with death, the supernatural and the morbid, and in association with sexual romance and romanticism more broadly). Secondly, Chopin's music is associated with virtuosity, intertwining emotion and physicality. And finally, Chopin's music is used as an agent for postmodern juxtaposition, in the process problematising a divide between art and mass culture. These three trends are interlinked and draw upon longstanding historical images and connotative values in relation to Chopin.

The use of Chopin's music in these video games stages both the internal tensions and the potentialities of the medium. In that sense, Chopin's music 'thematizes' video games. Some of these games are aimed primarily at domestic Japanese gamers, while others capture huge worldwide audiences, amounting to millions of players. As such, these games are an important part of Chopin's modern legacy. Just as the medium of the video game represents a cultural nexus between Europe, North America and Japan (among others), so Chopin's music is a microcosm of this global dialogue. The interrogation of Chopin's music in Japanese games serves as

a way to understand the meanings of Chopin's music in a modern pop-culture context. At the same time, such a study uncovers how the issues central to the discourse of Chopin are manifest and (re) configured in a medium and context of production very far from that of the music's nineteenth-century European origin.

Sentimentalism: Morbid Melancholy, the Supernatural and Romance

It is perhaps no surprise that one of the main tropes of Chopin's image, that of the suffering romantic artist, should find articulation in games. Jim Samson has documented how, in the years after Chopin's death, the reception of Chopin, particularly in France, emphasised 'a very particular dimension of the "romantic" myth [...] the image of Chopin the consumptive, with "the pallor of the grave", [which] came to take on additional significance, interpreted almost as a philosophy of life and even as an explanation of his creative output. Through music he "discloses his suffering"'.¹⁴

Jeffrey Kallberg, too, has written of the extent to which Chopin's 'death shapes our understanding of him not only by lending to our perception of his music an aura of regret over a compositional trajectory cut short. It also represents, according to a certain cruel logic, the culmination of tropes of frailty, illness, and pathology that surrounded Chopin during his lifetime'.¹⁵

The association of Chopin's music with morbidity and death is played out in several games. Titles like *Wild Gunman* (Nintendo 1984, NES version), *Empire City* (Seibu Kaihatsu 1986, arcade version) and *Hanujiku Hero* (1988) follow *Circus* in using the famous melody of the Second Piano Sonata's 'Funeral March' for moments of 'game over' and/or when the player's character dies.¹⁶ These examples are rather overdetermined and straightforward in their semiosis, yet they represent another example of the innumerable ways that the meaning of Chopin's melody is taught to listeners and reinforced.

Nevertheless, there are also richer meditations on loss, death and Chopin in games, and these often turn toward the melancholic and sentimental. Stephen Downes, in his monograph on music and sentimentalism, writes extensively about Chopin. Downes argues that, rather than attempting to somehow excuse away the sentimental, it should be understood as a valuable aesthetic mode, and one that troubles simplistic assumptions about value, particularly as connected to unabashed emotionalism. Downes writes, as part of a discussion specifically regarding Chopin's music, 'When we hear the sentimental in music, we are invited to listen sympathetically to versions of sweet and possibly vicarious expression and so recuperate expressive and aesthetic types elsewhere too swiftly rejected'.¹⁷ Some video games both encourage us to hear Chopin in this way and use the existing associations of

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Jim Samson, 'A Biographical Introduction', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.

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Jeffrey Kallberg, 'Chopin's March, Chopin's Death', *19th-Century Music*, 25/1 (2001), 3.

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Mechanical games also indicate a similar trend: the pachinko machine *Magic Carpet* by Sankyo, also uses the same theme for 'game over' moments.

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Stephen Downes, *Music and Sentimentalism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 214.

Chopin and the sentimental for that same emotional leverage on the player. Three Japanese games offer particularly clear examples of this musical discourse: *Space Adventure: Cobra* (1991/1995), *Eternal Sonata* (2007) and *Clock Tower 3* (2002).

***The Space Adventure – Cobra: The Legendary Bandit*
(Hudson Soft 1991/1995)**

Space Adventure – Cobra, released for the PC Engine in 1991 and Sega CD in 1995, is a science-fiction adventure game based on the *Cobra Manga* (1978–1984) by Buichi Terasawa. The game is a fantastic, pulpy space Western taking its stylistic and generic cues from *Star Wars*, *Flash Gordon* and *Barbarella* (particularly in its depiction of women), and in the titular Cobra, it features a suave, wisecracking hero in the tradition of James Bond. At the start of the game, the loveable space pirate Cobra teams up with a woman called Jane, who is looking for her two sisters and a treasure that can only be located when the triplets work together. Cobra's interior monologue clearly signals his attraction to Jane, and their dialogue articulates a sexual tension. Cobra's spaceship, the Turtle, has a computer room for accessing databanks. The Turtle computer's interface is a piano keyboard (Figure 1). Cobra insists that it is not a 'computer shaped like a piano' (as Jane suggests) but a 'piano that doubles as a computer'. When the gamer teaches Cobra to play the piano, he plays 'Ständchen' from Schubert's *Schwanengesang*, in the manner of the Liszt transcription. While Cobra plays, Jane begins a conversation:

Jane: Schubert, eh? I like Chopin myself.

Cobra: Not me. That's probably why I don't play Chopin.

Jane: Never?

Cobra: No, never.

Jane: If I die, will you play Chopin in remembrance of me?

Cobra: (laughs) I'll think about it.

In a context where neither character has been discussing death or memorialisation, it is surprising that Chopin is the conduit for introducing these themes into the conversation. Moreover, the baldness with which Chopin is associated with these themes is striking in its congruity with received images of Chopin originating from Europe.

Later in the game, as foreshadowed by the above dialogue, Jane is indeed tragically killed. Following her death, the player now has two options for Cobra when using the piano computer. We can choose whether he plays Schubert or Chopin. The command to play Chopin prompts Cobra to start playing Etude Op. 10 No. 3. Upon fulfilling Jane's request, a hitherto unknown video message from Jane begins to play on the computer, recorded for the eventuality of her death. The video begins:



Figure 1. Cobra's piano computer (Sega-CD Version, author's screenshot).

Jane: Hello Cobra. I asked you once before if you would play Chopin in remembrance of me. Well, you can start tuning up the piano. Only kidding.

After she has revealed key information for the next stage of the plot, she finishes the message by saying: 'And thank you for playing Chopin for me. Bye'. After the message concludes, Cobra continues playing while the image holds on the now empty viewscreen. It provides a poignant moment, a brief oasis for the player and Cobra to reflect on the loss of Jane. There are no wisecracks from Cobra, or other noises, only Chopin to memorialise her, just as she asked, in a clearly sentimental mode. While the etude is adapted for the sound chip technology of the hardware (i.e. it plays through the sound-generating chip, rather than playing back an acoustic recording), it is not remixed or stylistically altered. Though it has been arranged for a different instrument, it is performed in a straightforward way. Here, Chopin's music is obviously bound up with romance, death, tragic loss and memory.

Eternal Sonata (tri-Crescendo 2007)

Perhaps the most famous and extensive video game treatment of Chopin is the game *Eternal Sonata*, in which Chopin serves as the main character. The game belongs to the distinctive genre of the Japanese Role-Playing Game (JRPG). In this example, Chopin is the hero. The central conceit of the game is that Chopin is on his deathbed in Paris, during which time, he has a fantastical dream, in which this game takes place. The music that accompanies the core gameplay is newly composed by Motoi Sakuraba and (with one

exception) does not use Chopin's music as a stylistic model or source of material for variation. It is much more in keeping with the style and material of other contemporary JRPGs.¹⁸

However, interspersed throughout the game are short factual interludes about Chopin's life. They take the form of educational episodes with on-screen text and images. They generally focus on a combination of historical-contextual information and background about a particular piece.¹⁹ These interludes are accompanied by new recordings of Chopin's music performed for the game by Stanislav Bunin (1985 winner of the International Chopin Piano Competition), played back just like a performance on a CD album.²⁰

William Gibbons has discussed this example in the broader context of classical music in video games. He notes how the game 'transform[s] Chopin, dramatically reinventing the composer for the benefit of twenty-first-century gaming audiences',²¹ because it emphasises his nationalism.

In *Eternal Sonata's* metafictional world, a highly stylized Chopin – fully aware that this world exists only in his mind – joins a ragtag group of youths in a rebellion against an oppressive government. [...] The political struggles also evoke the composer's life; as the game repeatedly implies, the oppression he fights is reminiscent of that in Chopin's native Poland. By actively contributing to the battle, the metafictional Chopin engages with conflict in a direct way that the real composer never could.²²

Aside from the heroic nationalism in *Eternal Sonata*, the game trades heavily on the 'deathbed Chopin' image (Figure 2). Chopin makes melodramatic comments like, 'This world is unquestionably a dream. A dream I'm experiencing as I drift over the abyss of death', 'I believe that this is going to be my final journey. But my final destination is shrouded in darkness, no matter how hard I look, I cannot see it all' and 'When a man's consciousness is fading away he will find, without fail, that he comes face to face with his own soul, and must challenge it. It is the one moment when we are able to look directly upon our naked selves'. Even the game's trailer emphasises the connection of Chopin with romanticised death. In a voiceover underscored by Etude Op. 10 No. 3 and accompanied by images Chopin on his deathbed in the game's 'real world', Chopin says, 'This is my final journey. I can never return to my world again' and 'Death is a reality that is far too real'. A character (Polka) is also shown jumping off a cliff in apparent suicide.

At the end of the game, Chopin chooses to reject his fantasy reality. To dispel the dream and release himself into death, Chopin battles his friends accompanied by a remixed version of the 'Revolutionary' Etude Op. 10 No. 12, adapted to the style of the game's other battle music.²³ This is the moment at which Chopin's compositions intrude on the fantasy dreamworld. Chopin's friends overpower him and, in the process and together with some romantic

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On the musical characteristics of the Japanese role-playing game, see William Gibbons, 'Music, Genre, and Nationality in the Postmillennial Fantasy Role-Playing Game', in Miguel Mera, Ronald Sadoff and Ben Winters (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 412–422; Thomas B. Yee, 'Battle Hymn of the God-Slayers: Troping Rock and Sacred Music Topics in Xenoblade Chronicles', *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, 1/1 (2020), 2–29; contributors to Richard Anatonie (ed.), *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the "Final Fantasy" Series* (Bristol: Intellect, 2022).

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In the US/European releases of the game, relevant historical and contextual images are used to accompany the performances; in Japan, newly-created impressionist paintings are shown alongside the performance and text.

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The pieces are, as listed by Gibbons, Op. 25 No. 15, Op. 10 No. 12, Op. 66, Op. 18, Op. 9 No. 2, Op. 10 No. 3 and Op. 53, with the 'chapter' of the game taken from the title of each piece. Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 133.

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Ibid, 129.

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Ibid, 130.

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On JRPG battle music, see Stephen Armstrong, 'Sounding the Grind: Musicospacial Stasis in JRPG Battle Themes', *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, 2/2 (2021), 1–21.



Figure 2. *Eternal Sonata*'s 'real world' Chopin (author's screenshots).

self-sacrifice, provide redemption for him: Chopin dies in the 'real world', but his spirit rises from his dead body to play the piano and is liberated into the fantasy world.

The game's director, Hiroya Hatsushiba, clearly thought of *Eternal Sonata* in educational terms:

Most people in Japan know the name of Chopin; however, most of the people who know of Chopin think he is just some kind of a great music composer without knowing any more about him. Most of them have heard Chopin's music but not a lot could put his name to it immediately. By creating a colorful fantasy world in Chopin's dream, I was hoping that people would get into this game easily and also come to know how great Chopin's music is.²⁴

The fantastic world and its story are clearly demarcated from the 'factual' historical interludes. Yet the game is educational not just in this historical sense; it also teaches – intentionally or otherwise – a whole set of associations connected to Chopin's music, particularly concerning death and sentimentality. Players are encouraged to see the connections between Chopin's biography, his music, and the game's fantastic story. The plots and dialogue of Japanese role-playing games often tend toward melodrama, symbolism and grand philosophies of life and death. In *Eternal Sonata*, that sentimentalism is fused with Chopin's music and with the cultural image it evokes. Gibbons notes how Chopin's image is 'reinvented' for *Eternal Sonata*. Yet, just as in *Cobra*, *Eternal Sonata* uses and reinforces longstanding meanings associated with Chopin's music, and his music and cultural image are used to enrich the meanings of the game.²⁵

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Gamespot Staff, 'Eternal Sonata Director Q&A', www.gamespot.com/articles/eternal-sonata-director-qa-nda/1100-6176358/, accessed 21 August 2022.

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Another less extensive, but similar, example is *Phantom Dust*, a game set in a post-apocalyptic world where the surviving humans are suffering collective amnesia. Chopin's Nocturne Op. 9 No. 3 is used to accompany 'memory boxes' which hold information about the past. Again, Chopin's association with reminiscence and loss is put to use here.

Clock Tower 3 (Capcom 2002)

Clock Tower 3 is a survival horror game. This genre, which has been particularly prominent for both production and consumption in Japan, challenges players to solve puzzles and escape maze-like levels while avoiding enemies like zombies and demonic creatures.

Clock Tower 3 uses Chopin's Fantasy-Impromptu prominently during the early stages of the game, and to accompany both gameplay and non-interactive cutscenes. The piece serves as a theme for a tragic murdered child pianist, a spirit trapped between planes of reality.

When the game's heroine and player character Alyssa returns home from boarding school, she finds her mother gone, and a threatening mysterious man inside the mansion. Upon discovering a picture of the intruder in a book, she suddenly hears a piano playing Chopin's Fantasy-Impromptu.

She falls through a portal in the fabric of space and time to arrive in the past of a blitz-torn London. Amid the air-raid sirens, fire and bomb explosions, Chopin's piece continues to play through the streets. However, it seems that something is wrong, as the pianist stumbles over a particular passage and keeps having to restart the piece over and over again. Even more curiously, the passage causing the problem is not a particularly virtuosic moment, but rather a slower sentimental section.

Alyssa can find newspapers which contain reports of a recent murder. A young girl, May Norton, was a pianist who had been taking part in a competition she had been expected to win, but an 'unfortunate error in her performance prevented her from taking the crown' (as the newspaper describes). She was subsequently murdered in mysterious circumstances.

Alyssa eventually locates the source of the music – a concert hall. On the stage in the empty concert hall, she finds the child ghost playing the piece on a piano covered in blood (Figure 3). She repeatedly makes mistakes in the piece, is upset at her errors, and restarts the piece. They are interrupted when the monster who had killed the girl comes to attack Alyssa. The ghostly May disappears and Alyssa eventually escapes.

Later, when Alyssa visits May Norton's home, she experiences a vision which reveals the significance of the Chopin piece. In a non-interactive cutscene set before the competition, May is seen rehearsing the Fantasy-Impromptu perfectly, including the passage we earlier heard her fail to play correctly. May's father is present and tells her that he is going to war. She explains that she has chosen to perform the Chopin at the competition because a pocket watch given to her father by her late mother has a clockwork mechanism that plays the melody. Since the competition will be broadcast on radio, she says that this piece will let her father remember her and her mother, even if he is away at war. A sudden cut to



Figure 3. *Clock Tower 3*'s ghostly apparition (author's screenshot).

a war scene reveals that May's father dies in the war (it is implied, without hearing May perform). In a grisly melodramatic scene, the clockwork watch plays the Chopin melody as he dies.

Alyssa magically summons the pocket watch and returns it to May. Returning it to the rehearsing ghost in the concert hall, May plays along with the melody and finally masters the passage. Playing together with the watch has allowed her to 'move on', both with the piece and with her grief. Now that she can play the piece, she is reunited with her ghostly father in a peaceful afterlife, in a sequence accompanied by an orchestral version of the Fantasy-Impromptu.

That Chopin's music has an association with death and sickness is nothing new. Charles Rosen used the reception of Chopin's music to illustrate that the associations of his music with the morbid, sickness, melancholy, death and despair were not simply created posthumously, but were discussed as qualities of Chopin's music even among his contemporaries.²⁶ Downes discusses the sentimental as an expressive mode 'for releasing a heartfelt yearning for connection, to embrace, to share, often through sympathetic response to the spectacle of another's suffering or loss.'²⁷ *Clock Tower 3* uses Chopin's music to articulate this affective nexus between sentimentalism and morbidity and sickness.

Human-Computer Interaction researcher Katherine Isbister, discussing the emotional power of video games, proposes that, because humans have an 'innate tendency to respond to social cues as if they were real', such 'social signals' are used by games to prompt 'strong feelings' and 'deep socially-based emotions triggered by choice and consequence'.²⁸ Sentimentally-signifying music would seem to be a perfect candidate for such socially meaningful signification.

Musical expressivity, in music already coded as specifically sentimental, is an excellent way for games to leverage emotional value. *Clock Tower 3*, along with both *Eternal Sonata* and *Cobra*,

26
Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 398-399.

27
Downes, *Music and Sentimentalism*, 13.

28
Katherine Isbister, *How Games Move Us: Emotion by Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 10, 41, 131.

uses (and reinforces for its audience) associations of Chopin's music with death and memorialisation, and all with a romantic sensibility of sentimentalism. Chopin's music is used as part of the aestheticisation of death and the morbid in these games. It fuses the sentimental aesthetic with the ludic-mechanical aspects of the game.²⁹

Visual Novels

There is another distinct, but related, tradition of Chopin and sentimentalism in Japanese games. Away from physical pain and death, Chopin's music is used in association with romantic sentimentalism and the emotional yearning of sexually or erotically-charged romantic relationships. Several Japanese 'visual novels' make use of Chopin in this way.

Visual novels are games where stories are presented primarily as text dialogue with cartoon-style visuals and, usually, at least some voice acting and limited animation. The player's main role is to allow the story to unfold in front of them, and to make occasional choices regarding the dialogue and actions of the characters. A mystery or central intrigue often drives the plot. Visual novels also usually involve a romantic dimension. Like the related genre of dating simulators, players make choices to affect the course of romance for their avatar. They often focus on relationships in and around educational institutions. These kinds of games are very popular in Japan, though they remain a niche interest in other territories. Here, too, we find a sentimental connection with Chopin, albeit without the connotations of death and disease discussed earlier. Chopin seems well-suited to dating games and visual novels given the existing associations with romantic yearning.

Examples of these kinds of games featuring Chopin include *Tokimeki Memorial 2* (1999), *Memories Off 2nd* (2001), *Hourglass of Summer* (2002), *Armen Noir* (2010) and *Tsuki ni Yorisou Otome no Sahoo 2* (2014/5). These games fuse mystery elements with dating and romance options. The music tends to be presented either diegetically as a performance, or non-diegetically to accompany reflection and romance. Chopin is represented in these games as part of the piano repertoire performed by young people in Japan: it is rehearsed and performed by young pianists, including at piano competitions, as in *La Corda d'Oro* (2003). In *Tsuki ni Yorisou Otome no Sahoo 2*, an attractive suitor plays Chopin as part of his allure as a pianist. *Devil on G-String* (2008) features a hero and player character who is a classical music connoisseur. Most of the music in this game consists of pop-style remixes of classical music. One of the cues that plays during moments of his introspection and internal monologue is a version of the 'Revolutionary' Etude Op. 10 No. 12.

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There are other, less extensive examples of Chopin's association with the mysterious, the supernatural and death. For instance, the game *Akagawa Jirō: Yasōkyoku* (Open Sesame 1998), a mystery horror game for the PlayStation, an adaptation of Akagawa Jirō's short stories, uses Chopin's Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2 as the title music. Though the music is not integrated into the gameplay, the choice probably comes from the name of the game: Yasōkyoku translates as Nocturne.

Tsugihagi Make Peace! -Pretending x Friendship- (2017/2018) is an erotic cartoon visual novel. One of the opening sequences that highlights the romantic options in the game features a saccharine, hyperkinetic upbeat pop theme song based on Etude Op. 25 No. 9. The song was used to promote the game on online video websites. As well as noting the song's title and producer in a title card, it explicitly names the Chopin composition on which it is based. Chopin is here highlighted as part of the marketing strategy for the game.

Along with many of the examples in Table 1, the use of Chopin in these games indicates the cultural presence of Chopin's music; it holds meaningful signification. It would be easy to criticise these games for repeatedly using the same few pieces of Chopin and argue that this betrays a lack of imagination or thoughtful engagement with the music. However, the familiarity of the pieces is perhaps part of the power of their signification.

These pieces are those most likely to be familiar to players through education and from other media. As Mike Cormack has argued, using familiar classical music in film creates spaces for interpretive possibilities and a variety of potential meanings.³⁰ In the case of Chopin specifically, however, three important qualities are combined: the familiarity of the pieces, the intimacy of the piano, and the romantic-sentimental associations of the music.

One of Japan's biggest publishers of textbooks approved for use in schools (and one that has long emphasised provision for music education in particular), Kyoiku – Shuppan, lists pieces by Chopin in its educational textbook publications dating back to the mid-1950s.³¹ Unsurprisingly, those same pieces repeatedly appear in Japanese games: Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2, Prelude Op. 28 No. 15, Etudes Op. 10 No. 3 and Op. 10 No. 12 ('Revolutionary'), Polonaise Op. 40 No. 1 ('Military'), Fantasy-Impromptu Op. 66, and so on. Given the preponderance of Chopin's music, and these pieces in particular, in education, such pieces would be good choices if one wanted to find music that players would be most likely to know, and would have bodily, corporeal experience of playing. Players may well remember (or project) their physical engagement in performance as they listen to Chopin's music.

Lawrence Kramer describes Chopin's music in terms of an intimate encounter between human and machine. He suggests that 'We always hear the pianist in the piano, the ghost in the machine',³² as human and machine meet. He describes the intimacy of this encounter, whether it is the player's actual experience, or the body imagined by the listener. He writes of the piano as a stage for this encounter in Chopin's music. 'The idea here is to make the instrument an extension of one's own body, to coax the spirit out of it, transcend the mechanism, make it disappear, make the instrument sing'.³³ This is meaningful, intimate, bodily, sentimental music – the perfect aesthetic register for games about romance and the body.

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Mike Cormack, 'The Pleasures of Ambiguity: Using Classical Music in Film', in Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (eds), *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 19–30.

31

For a list of the repertoire in Kyoiku-Shuppan's books, see https://www.kyoiku-shuppan.co.jp/textbook/chuu/ongaku/files/sbj16db_170421.xlsx, accessed 21 August 2022.

32

Lawrence Kramer, *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 136.

Chopin's sentimental and romanticist associations, then, occur in two distinct, but related, frames. The first concerns most explicitly death, loss and sickness, while the latter trades on sexual yearning and romance. As we will see, these meanings continue to interweave with the other dimensions of Chopin in Japanese games.

Virtuosity and the Keyboard

A second notable trend in the use of Chopin in Japanese games concerns associations with virtuosity. These are most apparent in shooting games and rhythm games, i.e. games that require quick, carefully-timed movements. There are a number of shooting games that use Chopin's music, including *Parodius* (1988), *MegaBlast* (1989), *TetraStar* (1991) and *FixEight* (1992). In the MSX version of *Parodius*, an upbeat pop version of 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' is combined with the Fantasy-Impromptu. In *TetraStar*, the Polonaise in A flat major, Op. 53 is repeated in level 5, and then later returns in the final stage of the game, as part of a recapitulation of the music from prior levels (all based on classical music). *FixEight* uses the Etude Op. 10 No. 3 to accompany the epilogue for the game, while the arcade game *Mega Blast* uses the Fantasy-Impromptu at the start to entice customers to part with their money and play.

Though it may be unexpected to group shooting games and music rhythm games together, they have very similar gameplay mechanics, albeit dressed in different visual clothing. Music games typically involve levels structured around particular pieces of music, during which players are presented with visual prompts to which they must respond in time with the music. An archetypal example of a rhythm game is *Dance Dance Revolution*, where players must follow choreographic instructions for pressing buttons on a floor pad with their feet, in order to dance in time with the music.³⁴ Another popular example is *Taiko no Tatsujin* (2001+), a taiko drumming game where players follow scrolling on-screen instructions to perform the drum part of a piece of music. Rhythm games can be themed around dancing or specific instruments, or they might instead just use abstract shapes that require a response from the player. As one might imagine, in these games the challenge varies according to the complexity and dexterity required to follow the prompts accurately. As such, the most impressive players are those who can rise to the demands of speed and precision of the music and the game. Some players also delight in the performative flair of how they perform and meet these demands.³⁵ For the most difficult games and levels, hours of disciplined practice are required, as well as generally impressive motor skills. Rhythm games had their first flowering of popularity in Japan during the late 1990s through games produced by Konami's Games & Music Division, later known as Bemani.

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Ibid., 143.

34
On *Dance Dance Revolution*, see Joanna Demers, 'Dancing Machines: 'Dance Dance Revolution', Cybernetic Dance, and Musical Taste', *Popular Music*, 24/3 (2006), 401–414, and Jacob Smith, 'I Can See Tomorrow In Your Dance: A Study of Dance Dance Revolution and Music Video Games', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 16/1 (2004), 58–84.

35
Kiri Miller, *Playing Along: Digital Games, YouTube, and Virtual Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Chopin has been used extensively in Japanese music/rhythm games. Popular examples of the genre like *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Taiko no Tatsujin*, *Beatmania* (DJ decks), *Nostalgia Op. 2* (piano keyboard) and *Donkey Konga 2* (conga drums) have levels based on Chopin pieces. Chopin's music has also been used in rhythm games with more abstract styles, like *Pop'n Music*, which use shapes and colours rather than depicting instruments directly. Though the game's title might not indicate a rhythm game, in *Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games*, the Fantasy-Impromptu is used for figure skating, and this part of the game functions as a dance/rhythm challenge, where players have to respond to the prompts correctly for their character to perform the figure skating moves correctly. *Oshare Majo Love and Berry* uses the Op. 18 *Grande Valse brillante* in a similar way, though for a ballroom rather than an ice-skating sequence. Just as in the other genres described in this article, some music games, like *Beatmania*, adapt Chopin's music substantially and translate it into a musical genre otherwise alien to Chopin (in this case, adapting the 'Revolutionary' Etude into an EDM track with a thrillingly propulsive drumbeat in a piece called 'Kakumei'). Others use a more straightforward rendering of his pieces (as in the *Olympic Games* figure skating).

Music games exist in keen synergy with YouTube, where players show off their mastery of the most demanding levels and pieces. *Pop'n Music* is no exception. The fundamental game mechanic of *Pop'n Music* is similar to many other music/rhythm games. As the piece of music plays, icons scroll down the screen. When they reach the bottom, the player must push the button represented by the icon. *Pop'n Music* uses an array of nine circular buttons, each a few inches in diameter, which represent different notes in the piece (Figure 4). On the levels featuring Chopin, these buttons correspond to notes on the piano. Individual notes of the melodic line are translated into button-presses. Performers tackle these very challenging pieces with undeniable virtuosity, even if it is a different manifestation of virtuosity than traditional pianistic technique. Note instructions scroll past at breakneck speed, so performers must learn the piece and be ready to 'perform' the rhythm and melody correctly. They must ensure that the rapid repetitions of pitches are accurate, that ornamentation is successfully navigated, and that all the notes of chords can be covered. Performers develop techniques such as hand crossing to achieve the precision required. The pieces also have rubato 'written in', so players have to be ready to account for that, too. I am not suggesting that performing a piece of Chopin on a piano and in *Pop'n Music* are the same, but both involve virtuosity built on Chopin's musical material. Further, the cultural associations of Chopin's music with pianistic virtuosity further amplify this physical, kinesonic aspect of the game and its performance.



Figure 4. *Pop'n Music* with Chopin's music (note the player spanning two buttons with one hand to cover all of the notes required during this performance of Waltz Op. 64 No. 1).³⁶

Since the 1980s, the connection between arcade virtuosity, as in shooting and rhythm games, and piano virtuosity have been noted. Sociologist and pianist David Sudnow, in his book *Pilgrim in the Microworld* (1983), writes of his period of obsession with the Atari game *Breakout*, and throughout the volume he compares his experience of learned virtuosity between the action game and the piano keyboard. He writes:

At first it felt like my eyes told my fingers where to go. But in time I knew the smooth rotating hand motions were assisting the look in turn, eyes and fingers in a two-way partnership. [...] So too with sight reading music at the piano for instance, where you never look ahead of what you can grasp and your hands' own sense of their location therefore instructs the gaze where to regard the score [...] And so too here, you'd have to sustain a pulse to organize the simultaneous work of visually and tactily grasping the ball, your hands helping your look help your hands make the shot.³⁷

There are many passages in the book that are similar.

Roger Moseley has made reciprocal arguments, writing how 'Like a Mario game, the playing of a Mozart concerto primarily involves interactive digital input: in prompting both linear and looping motions through time and space, it responds to imaginative engagement [...]. Relying on a variety of props as both aids and hazards, both blocked out sequences that made stringent yet negotiable demands of performers while affording them ample opportunity to display their virtuosity and ingenuity';³⁸ 'In the context of play, keyboards are not merely input devices: they stage exhibitions of timing, rhythm, and dexterity that are as integral to games as they are to musical performance.'³⁹

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Screenshot from video performance: pop'n music Y, '[ポップン] クラシック9(CLASSIC9) Hell? or Heaven? EX', *YouTube.com*, 21 September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z96LDhqa0-Y> accessed 30 August 2022.

37

David Sudnow, *Pilgrim in the Microworld* (New York: Warner Books, 1983), 40–41.

38

Roger Moseley, *Keys to Play: Music as a Ludic Medium from Apollo to Nintendo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 216–217.

39

Roger Moseley, 'Digital Analogies: The Keyboard as Field of Musical Play', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 68/1 (2015), 157.

We can discuss Chopin, however, more specifically. Kramer writes how touch is a central theme in Chopin's music: 'Voice or the body swayed to music confronts the power of the hands to strike, tap, flourish, caress, and manipulate, and sometimes (being quicker than the eye) to confound'.⁴⁰ Kramer presents Chopin's music as 'an antagonism between the inward and the mechanical',⁴¹ but feeling is physical as well as emotional.

Charles Rosen notes, again about Chopin in particular, how the emotional tension is connected to the physicality of performance, what he calls the 'actual pain associated with emotional violence'.⁴² Indeed, he claims that the reason for Chopin's popularity is the synthesis of virtuosity and sentimentalism.⁴³ In this sense, Chopin in games helps to emphasise the physicality of the emotions of playing, both games and the piano. The thrilling emotions bound up with the kinaesthetic challenge of both playing games and playing music are highlighted in games that require dexterous performance, and they do so to the accompaniment of Chopin. These are not merely mechanical challenges, but are simultaneously highly emotive experiences, whether in the crackling nervousness of dealing with the last wave of enemies in a level of a shooting game, the satisfaction of mastering a section of a rhythm game, or the joy of smoothly and fluidly navigating the ornamental lines of Chopin. The connection of game playing and piano playing in these examples of music games and shooting games is also a striking juxtaposition of cultural registers, which leads to the final theme of this article.

Postmodern and Juxtapositional Contexts

Chopin's use in games is also often part of juxtaposition: moments where aesthetic power comes from a mismatching. This is primarily evident where Chopin's music is remixed into different styles, or where the cultural meanings and connotations of Chopin's music, and those of other signifiers, are (superficially at least) in tension. Several examples already discussed above also exhibit this kind of juxtaposition, such as the romantic visual novels and the shooting games. But several other examples provide particularly revealing instances of this effect.

Catherine (Atlas 2011)

The game *Catherine* represents an unusual mixture of a romantic visual novel with a puzzle game. The game's story concerns the player character Vincent and his affections for both his girlfriend Katherine and the attractive Catherine. Daytime visual novel sequences, in which Vincent negotiates his relationships with Katherine and Catherine, are separated by puzzle game levels set in Vincent's dreams, which are charged with surreal monstrous

40
Kramer, *Why Classical Music Still Matters*, 147

41
Ibid., 151.

42
Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 383.

43
Ibid., 383–385.

imagery that thematises Vincent's fears about love and fatherhood. In the dream/puzzle sequences, the player must help Vincent scale a tower by changing the tower's geography and clearing a path to ascend.

Catherine's music has already received academic attention in the form of William Gibbons's discussion in his volume about classical music in games. Gibbons notes how the dream sequences are scored by remixes of classical music. The final challenge of the game is accompanied by an electronic dance version of the 'Revolutionary' Etude. Another piece by Chopin, the funeral march, is also included in the game. This is the only classical music that makes the leap to the 'real world' from the world of dreams, when it accompanies the break-ups of relationships. (The remixing here is to a jazz style rather than electronic dance music.)

Gibbons suggests that *Catherine's* classical remixes are a representation of the 'clash of incompatibles' and the 'grotesque' theme of the game.⁴⁴ He locates this grotesque in the fusion of dualities in the game – the night/day difference, the two K/Catherines, the mashing of game types, and so on. These, Gibbons suggests, are also reflected in the fusion of high and low genres in the remixed classical music. He maps the art/entertainment duality onto the classical/popular fusion. The blending of high and low styles results in a 'dizzily incomprehensible musical accompaniment',⁴⁵ as Vincent's internal conflict finds musical voice in the fusion of genres. The soundtrack of 'uncomfortably juxtaposed classical and popular styles', Gibbons argues, 'relies on that combination to be unconvincing; the grotesque must always be repulsive'.⁴⁶ Yet we have already noted Chopin's longstanding association with sickness and a bodily sentimentalism more characteristic of 'low' culture.

Gibbons perhaps subscribes to the binary discourse of art and entertainment a little too readily. Chopin has long troubled models of 'high' (art) and 'low' (popular) culture, revealing the artificiality of that polarisation. Andreas Huyssen has used the phrase 'the great divide' to refer to the fallacious ideology that claims a separation of mass culture from artistic modernism. He writes, 'The culture of modernity has been characterized by a volatile relationship between high art and mass culture [...] this anxiety of contamination has appeared in the guise of an irreconcilable opposition. [...] The Great Divide is the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture'.⁴⁷

This ideological division is a construct, and one that has been continually undermined. Chopin's use of the waltz, for instance, was part of the genre's journey in the nineteenth century from the ballroom right across the cultural register from cabaret to the salon and concert hall. The waltz, as Downes puts it, 'demonstrates how high, low and middle levels of cultural prestige can [...] blend, blur or break down'.⁴⁸ Similarly, a frequent criticism of Chopin concerns

44
Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays*, 102–104.

45
Ibid., 108.

46
Ibid., 113.

47
Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), vii–viii.

48
Downes, *Music and Sentimentalism*, 86.

his treatment of musical structure – that his formal processes do not conform to classical proportions and structural processes. Charles Rosen has argued extensively that this criticism stems from a lack of appreciation of Chopin's influence from the rather more popular genre of Italian opera, writing that, 'It is, in fact, the constructive use of Italian operatic technique that may puzzle critics, most of whose tools of analysis are derived from German instrumental music'.⁴⁹

Gibbons's observations about the use of stylistic remixing to thematise the conflict of high culture art and low culture entertainment is perhaps only the first step in the discussions about Chopin. The game, like Chopin's music, critiques that binary division. The classical-pop fusion may not be to everyone's taste, but it is hardly clear that it is intended to read as the failure that Gibbons suggests. At least, contemporary reviews, though noting the soundtrack as unusual, typically praise it.⁵⁰ Using well-known, classical pieces (including Chopin) already makes inroads into critiquing a model that positions 'popular' and 'classical' as oppositional. Both Chopin's output and the game seek to trouble and transgress the borders of classical and popular, rather than insisting on, and reinforcing, those categorical distinctions and oppositions.

Gran Turismo 5 (Polyphony Digital 2010)

Chopin's music is no stranger to racing video games. It has found extensive use in one of the most well-known and popular video game series, *Gran Turismo*. The fourth and seventh *Gran Turismo* games use the Prelude Op. 28 No. 15, but the fifth game features several more Chopin pieces: Waltz Op. 64 No. 2, Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2, Polonaise Op. 40 No. 1, Etude Op. 10 No. 3, Fantasy-Impromptu Op. 66 and Waltz Op. 64 No. 1.

The first music heard by the player upon starting *Gran Turismo 5* is a piece of solo piano music. While this is not Chopin (it is the third movement of Prokofiev's Piano Sonata Op. 83 No. 7), the game immediately sets out its aesthetic stall. The Prokofiev is heard alongside a film sequence that traces the production of a car from mining the raw materials through to the car rolling off the production line. Humans are relegated to the background of this sequence, which is visually dominated by heavy machinery, the exact repeating movements of manufacturing equipment and robots working with inhuman precision and speed.

Part of the appeal of the *Gran Turismo* games is the customisation that the game allows. Each game in the series trumpets the ever-expanding range of racetracks, cars and modes of racing. That customisation also extends to the music. The game includes a large selection of music across a varied selection of genres: jazz, electronica, lounge music and classical music. Chopin is represented

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Rosen, *Romantic Generation*, 283–5.

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Two representative examples: Colin Moriarty, 'Catherine Review', *IGN.com* (2011), <https://www.ign.com/articles/2011/07/26/catherine-review>; Kevin VanOrd, 'Catherine Review', *Gamespot.com* (2011), <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/catherine-review/1900-6324696/>, both accessed 21 August 2022.

more than any other classical composer, and the classical selection emphasises piano music in general.

The game uses a playlist approach, where a defined selection of music will be randomly ordered. However, players can define which selections will be used for the races, replay videos and menu system. They can include or exclude particular pieces completely, or confine them to specific parts of the game. I can choose where I will hear Chopin, and it might appear as part of a very limited selection of music that I have curated, or it might randomly appear in a stylistically wide-ranging playlist.

When Chopin plays during the central racing, it is completely indifferent to my progress and does not react at all. Whether I am skilfully navigating tricky corners with virtuosic precision and fluidity, or careering across the track and bouncing from one barrier to the other, a Polonaise (for example) will follow its own independent musical logic and progress. If I am still racing when the piece finishes, another will start, and if I finish the race before the conclusion of the piece, it will be unceremoniously cut off. The music accompanies the race, but remains removed from the minutiae of its progress.

The inclusion of Chopin, as well as other classical piano music, in the game was bound up with the involvement of Lang Lang. The developers of the *Gran Turismo*, Polyphony Digital, are a subsidiary of Sony. Lang Lang's deal with Sony was not limited just to Sony Classical, but facilitated his promotional work across the company. Lang Lang recorded piano music for the game, including the Prokofiev for the opening sequence and the Chopin selections. In a press release, he reports:

It might seem incongruous at first – classical music and video games – but the more we delved into what we could do with the music, the more excited I got. Classical music reflects the same passion and intensity as racing, and hearing these musical pieces that have stood the test of time for centuries brings a whole new element to sensation of racing. When I recorded the music for GT5 in the studio, I felt like I was racing on the track – it was really thrilling. I'm sure this music will bring more passion and excitement to the game when you play too.⁵¹

PR hype notwithstanding, Lang Lang identifies the apparent incongruity of the piano music as part of its effect, and suggests a deep, rather than superficial, resonance between racing and his repertoire. Chopin's music is heard in a game where human figures are largely absent, where the visuals are dominated by mechanical technology, and the expected imagery and signifiers of classical music are not evident. Instead, the game and Lang Lang explain that the association and connection between the music and the game is less prosaic.

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Lang Lang, 'Recording the Gran Turismo 5 Soundtrack', PlayStation Blog (2010), <https://blog.playstation.com/2010/12/14/recording-the-gran-turismo-5-soundtrack/>, accessed 21 August 2022.

The involvement of a bona fide classical performer helps the game to leverage the high-culture cachet of the performer, his repertoire and classical music. Both video games and motorsport have traditionally inhabited the low-brow domain of the ‘great divide’. Associations of virtuosity, romanticism, artistry, connoisseurship, emotional power, and so on, are borrowed from the classical piano repertoire. Indeed, the argument is all the more striking and assertively articulated because the combination of classical piano music with the racing is so initially ‘incongruous’, transgressing high/low cultural borders.

When games like *Catherine* and *Gran Turismo* use and remix Chopin, especially in contexts that draw attention to assumptions about high/low, classical/popular distinctions, they are also revealing how Chopin is part of popular culture – both in these games and more generally. As Chopin has done for previous generations of critics, they problematise the ‘great divide’.

The use of Chopin in games illuminates and reinforces his status as part of what Mina Yang, drawing on Stuart Hall, calls the global postmodern of classical music. The global aspect is particularly important given both the context of Japanese games and the broader geographical spread of the games that feature Chopin’s music. Yang explains: ‘Although European classical music is often held up as the Other against which popular music is defined, some classical works become genuinely “popular” in their use and reception [...] classical music no longer serves as simply a high-class Other to popular music, but rather functions as a multivalent signifier that connotes a complex web of meanings.’⁵²

The Chopin pieces that we have repeatedly encountered in these examples surely qualify as the popular classics that Yang has in mind. She proposes understanding global contexts that use popular classical music as a ‘a site upon which the values of various ideological moments are inscribed and superimposed – a musical palimpsest’.⁵³ These pieces trouble and rework structures of value and power, both productively using, and yet resisting, cultural hegemonies. Chopin is part of this classical global postmodern. The games in this article, and particularly those that engage in juxtapositional aesthetics, both reveal and serve as agents for this.

Conclusions

This article has identified three interrelated strands to the presentation of Chopin’s music in Japanese games. Certain images of Chopin tend to be emphasised, but these are not the limits of Chopin’s meanings in games. Chopin is shown to be significant for modern audiences in distinct ways. He is used by games to access a melancholy mode and sentimentalism (both sexual-romantic and more broadly romanticist); he emphasises the fusion of emotion

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Mina Yang, ‘Für Elise, Circa 2000: Postmodern Readings of Beethoven in Popular Contexts’, *Popular Music and Society* 29/1 (2006), 1, 6.

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Ibid., 12.

and physicality in intimate virtuosity; and his music serves as an agent to destabilise the so-called ‘great divide’ between art and mass culture.

Many of these associations have long roots in Chopin reception. It is striking the degree to which discourses about Chopin have been transmitted across time and cultural contexts, to be here reconfigured and presented to new audiences. In addition, these re-presentations of Chopin often seem to have shed (or at least loosened) the ideological value judgements that have frequently attended Chopin’s reception. In so doing, games stage tensions across the ‘great divide’ which are evident in the discourse about both games and Chopin (Table 2).

Table 2 **Border crossings in both Japanese video games and Chopin’s piano music.**

High/Art Culture	Low/Mass Culture
Mechanistic	Human
<i>The piano and the computer both serve as interfaces between the mechanical and the human.</i>	
Virtuosity	Accessibility
<i>Games stage virtuosity designed for mass audiences. Chopin’s technically demanding works are listened to, and played by, large audiences.</i>	
Rational	Sentimental/irrational
<i>The logically rigid programming of games gives rise to emotionally rich, expressive experiences (often with irrational emergent behaviour). Though Chopin’s pieces often ostensibly conform to particular genres, they often challenge and evolve parameters of genre.</i>	
Public	Private
<i>The public expression of private passions in performances of Chopin’s solo piano works. The playing of games can be performative, yet primarily for the audience of the players themselves.</i>	
Absolute/abstract	Subjective
<i>The largely non-denotive semiotics of Chopin’s music are nevertheless understood to articulate subjective experiences. The ludic mechanics of games, though absolute rules, present individualised experiences for each player.</i>	
Mind	Body
<i>Mind and body intertwine in the intellectual, emotional and physical challenges of both game play and pianistic performance.</i>	
Global/universal	Local
<i>Chopin and Japanese games are understood as made in specific geographic/historic contexts, but they also speak to global audiences.</i>	

High/Art Culture	Low/Mass Culture
Classical/old	Juvenile/modern
<i>Chopin's music is historical, yet is presented as articulating and reflecting youthful experiences. Games deploy the traditional signification of classical music while appealing to a young audience.</i>	
Art music/artwork	Pop music/entertainment
<i>Chopin's music is positioned as canonical art music, yet it also has popular appeal and currency. Games are popular entertainment, yet they readily engage with 'high' artistic materials.</i>	

When the piano keyboard and the gamer's controls are placed in dialogue, the piano player and game player are set as mirror images, and the images reflect on each other. Perhaps, then, games and Chopin fit so well because they deal with, and challenge, complementary cultural tensions and themes, albeit incarnated in very different forms. Both play with and across divides, and in so doing present us with striking aesthetic experiences, whether we play on the piano or on the PlayStation.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the use of Chopin's music in video games created by Japanese developers. While, as William Gibbons and others have documented, classical music has been used throughout the history of video games, a surprising number of Japanese games have used Chopin's music. Sometimes this music is presented as a straightforward performance of a piece by Chopin, while others remix, vary or interpolate Chopin's musical materials in new compositions.

Chopin's music here stages many of the tensions and possibilities found in the video game medium. In that sense, it 'thematizes' video games. The article focuses on three aspects of Chopin in games. The first is sentimentalism (both in association with death, the supernatural and the morbid, and in association with sexual romance and romanticism more broadly). Secondly, Chopin's music is associated with virtuosity, intertwining emotion and physicality. Finally, Chopin's music is used as an agent for postmodern juxtaposition, in the process problematising a divide between art and mass culture. These three trends are interlinked and draw upon longstanding historical images and connotative values in relation to Chopin.

The discussion builds on antecedent research concerning Chopin's reception by Lawrence Kramer, Jim Samson, Charles Rosen and Stephen Downes, critical perspectives on games and/as musical interfaces by David Sudnow and Roger Moseley, and discussions of classical music in popular culture by Andreas Huyssen and Mina Yang. Key case studies include *Space Adventure Cobra*, *Clock Tower 3*, *Eternal Sonata*, *Gran Turismo*, *Pop'n Music*, *Catherine* and a selection of visual novels. Chopin's music in Japanese games serves as a way to understand the meanings of that music in a modern pop-culture context. Besides that, however, such a study uncovers how the issues central to the discourse of Chopin are manifest and (re)configured in a medium and context of production very far removed from the music's origins.

KEYWORDS

video games, piano, interface, sentimentalism, virtuosity, RPG, visual novel, music games, ludomusicology

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