

CRITICAL HITS

GAME MUSIC LIVE AT FORTRESS



PRESIDENTS ADDRESS

This is a call to all the adventurers. All the dreamers. All the ones who long to spend their days battling aliens in a full suit of armour or wandering through castles on quests to prevent the destruction of worlds.

Join us for an evening at Sydney's Alienware Area as we bring to soundtracks to your adventures in our inaugural partnership with Fortress Sydney. Prepare be transported to fantastical realms with performances of iconic video game music. Join Master Chief on his mission safeguard Cortana, explore the mysterious planet of Journey, and accompany Nathan Drake on an epic treasure hunt.

Whether you're a life long gamer or just keen to soak in atmosphere, there'll be something for everyone this afternoon.

The FilmHarmonia Orchestra cordially invites you to sit back and, relax and lose yourself in new worlds.

JUSTINA HANNA
TFO PRESIDENT

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Morgan Ridley-Smith is a Sydney based video game composer. A graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where she studied Composition for Creative Industries, she is currently writing music for several unreleased indie game titles.

During her studies, she undertook conducting units under Dr. Elizabeth Scott, Dr. Stephen Mould, Stephen Williams and George Ellis, and in early 2024, she participated in Filmharmonia's Composer / Conductor Workshop. Having performed with Filmharmonia as a flautist since 2022, she now takes the stage as conductor for Critical Hits.

CONDUCTORS ADDRESS

From the early days of chip tune music to the fully studio recorded orchestral soundtracks of today, music has always taken games to the next level. Despite its richness as an art form, the legitimisation of game music in the orchestral concert hall is still rare.

With the rise of recent events like Indie Symphony in Melbourne and Press Play in Adelaide, Critical Hits is our answer to the lack of game music programming in orchestral concerts in Sydney.

As the self advertised “Home of Games”, Fortress felt like the perfect place to host it. In selecting music for the program, I chose a variety of fan favourites and some lesser-known gems, and of course I had to highlight home grown Australian game Hollow Knight and composer Christopher Larkin, after the recent release of the hit sequel Silksong.

My deepest gratitude extends to our artistic director Joshua McNulty, the committee, and the orchestra for entrusting me with this concert. I joined Filmharmonia in 2022 as a flautist, and I never imagined I would take the stage with a baton. This concert has been a labour of love. It’s the kind of concert I have wanted to attend as a fan of game music, and it is my joy and privilege now to share it with you.

MORGAN RIDLEY-SMITH
CONDUCTOR

THE ORCHESTRA

Violin 1:

Javiera Scarratt*
Hugh Scarratt
Maddy Hanrahan-Tan
Camille Hanrahan-Tan

Violin 2:

Ashur Varde*
David Loonam
Tania Koeferl
Leala Darby
Justina Hanna~

Viola:

James Constable*
Renee Richardson

Cello:

Mina Scarratt*
James Norton
Zoë Haughton
Ian Wong

Double Bass:

Mike Feghali*~

Timpani:

Freya Steele*

Piano:

Jason Kong*

Flute:

Alex Woof*

Clarinet:

Simon Parker*

Oboe:

Julie Stafford*

Bassoon:

Samuel Herriman*

Horns:

Alex Green*
Angus Kent
Emily Hackney

Trumpets:

Micah Napier*
Yuxiao Chen

Trombones:

Angus Icton*
Aimé Langeveldt~
Conor Bratty

Tuba:

Sohtaka Kikuchi*

Percussion:

Steve Machamer*
Andrea Leong
Ryan Whitford

* Section Leader

~ 2025 Committee Member

HELLDIVERS

“A CUP OF LIBER-TEA”

Wilbert Roget II (arranged by Andrés Soto)

In the explosive, tongue-in-cheek universe of Helldivers 2 (2024), freedom isn't just a value—it's a mission, a lifestyle, and sometimes, a beverage. The game's main theme, “A Cup of Liber-Tea” captures the game's blend of epic sci-fi heroism and over-the-top patriotic satire.

With triumphant orchestral writing reminiscent of grandiose military anthems, the music rallies listeners as if preparing them to spread “Managed Democracy” across the galaxy—one drop pod at a time.

Equal parts earnest and ironic, the piece amplifies the game's high-stakes, all-or-nothing battles while playfully celebrating the camaraderie and chaos of the Helldivers. We're initially propelled into our mission by thunderous drums before taking a moment to reflect on the importance of our mission, then returning to the fray.

With its rousing energy, the theme serves as a musical salute to heroic sacrifice, interstellar justice, and, of course, the liberating power of a freshly brewed cup of freedom.

UNDERTALE

UNDERTALE MEDLY

Toby Fox (arranged by Andrés Soto)

Released in 2015, Undertale became a cultural phenomenon for its emotional storytelling and unique player-driven morality system. Its creator, Toby Fox, not only wrote, designed, and programmed the entire game but also composed its soundtrack — using only Soundfonts and Virtual Studio Technology instruments .

These selections trace the emotional arc of the game's finale. "Fallen Down (Reprise)" begins softly, recalling one of the game's earliest themes — a moment of tenderness and compassion that signals redemption. The "Undertale Theme" and "Save the World" follow with growing determination, underscoring the player's climactic battle to bring peace rather than destruction. "Asgore" introduces regal tragedy, reflecting the sorrow and strength of the fallen king forced into conflict. Finally, "Reunited" closes the suite in warmth and hope — a musical resolution that celebrates forgiveness and new beginnings.

Together, these pieces form a musical journey from conflict to compassion, capturing Undertale's enduring message: that mercy can be the greatest form of strength.

UNCHARTED: DRAKES FORTUNE

DRAKES ELEGY AND NATE'S THEME

Greg Edmondson (arranged by Morgan-Ridley Smith)

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune (2007) set a new benchmark for cinematic storytelling in video games, and the action-adventure game's soundtrack was no small part of that achievement. Our conductor Morgan Ridley-Smith has arranged two contrasting tracks from the game for this performance:

The gentle, haunting and introspective melody of "Drake's Elegy" evokes themes of legacy and loss, while its bass flute solo reflects the exotic rainforest setting of the quest for long-lost treasures.

By contrast, the bold brass fanfare and driving rhythms of "Nate's Theme"—the game's iconic main theme, first heard in the title sequence—instantly establishes Nathan Drake as a charismatic, larger-than-life adventurer.

Together, these musical elements illustrate the heroic and human sides of Nathan Drake, shaping the game's cinematic experience.

JOURNEY



NASCENCE AND APOSTHEOSIS

Austin Wintory

Journey (2012) offers a minimalistic experience that is completely wordless with music that is inseparable from the gameplay. Austin Wintory's score, praised for its seamless integration with the game's emotional storytelling, became the first video game soundtrack to receive a Grammy nomination. "Nascence" and "Apotheosis" are the two tracks that bookend the player's experience, marking the beginning and the culmination of the player's pilgrimage across a vast desert toward a distant mountain.

"Nascence" ("birth" or "origin") opens with quiet strings and a trepidatious cello solo that accompanies the Traveler's first steps on an unknown path. The melody is gently handed to the bass flute like a silent exchange in multiplayer mode.

"Apotheosis", starting similarly with the same cello theme, accompanies the game's climactic ascent.

Earlier musical themes are transformed into a triumphant, soaring orchestral wave expressing catharsis, hope, and spiritual elevation.

ASSASSINS CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

UNDER THE BLACK FLAG

Brian Tyler (arranged by Andrés Soto)

Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag is the sixth game in the alternate-history series that pits the Order of Assassins against the Knights Templar in a millennia-old power struggle. Set in the early 1700s during the Golden Age of Piracy, this 2013 release was notable for its large open-world gameplay, compared to the more linear gameplay of previous instalments. Players are immersed in the world through the daring adventures of Edward Kenway, a privateer-turned-pirate entangled in the secretive Assassin brotherhood.

Brian Tyler's swashbuckling soundtrack conveys both the grandeur and danger of Kenway's world, as well as the thrill of freedom that comes at the expense of living outside of lawful society. "Under the Black Flag" moves seamlessly through time signatures—opening with a rending electric violin solo in 4/4 time, falling into a lilting 6/8 evoking a particularly brutal jig, and morphing into a segment in restless 7/4 time signature.



PLANET OF LANA

DESERT CHASE

Takeshi Furukawa (orchestrated by Saki Furuya)

In the 2023 side-scrolling puzzle-adventure game Planet of Lana, you play as a young girl who sets out to rescue her sister who has been abducted by alien robot invaders.

Despite the simplicity of this premise, the game's stunning artwork (reminiscent of Hayao Miyazaki's hand-painted scenes for Studio Ghibli films) and evocative score conjure a rich impression of a world worth saving. After seeing the game's artwork while the game was in development, Japanese-American composer Takeshi Furukawa reached out to the developers to express his interest in writing music for the game.



On making his career in film and game music, Furukawa said in a 2016 interview, "When I heard John Williams' score for Jurassic Park, I was mesmerized by the power of film music, and was inspired to pursue composition for media."

HOLLOW KNIGHT

HOLLOW KNIGHT, ENTER HALLOWNEST, HORNET & GREENPATH

Takeshi Furukawa (orchestrated by Saki Furuya)

Hollow Knight (2017), created by the Adelaide-based studio Team Cherry, has captivated players worldwide with challenging gameplay and the richly detailed subterranean kingdom of Hallownest. The much-anticipated sequel, Hollow Knight: Silksong, was released this year.

A landmark of Australian indie development, the game combined imaginative design, emotional storytelling, and evocative music:

“Hollow Knight” introduces the silent, determined hero with sparse, mournful piano and viola that flicker like a candle in the dark.

“Enter Hallownest” opens with a flourish and a resolute cello solo, as cascading woodwinds bubble away, conveying the awe and mystery of exploring a forgotten kingdom.

“Hornet” depicts the swift, fierce guardian of the realm with a purposeful, soaring melody.

“Greenpath” evokes the kingdom’s lush natural beauty with whimsical pizzicato strings joined by conversational woodwinds and glockenspiel, building a gentle crescendo that introduces a cool percussion-driven groove.

VIDEO GAMES LIVE

HALO CE, CIVILIZATION IV, ADVENT RISING AND KINGDOM HEARTS

This thrilling medley opens with Marty O'Donnell's iconic theme from Halo: Combat Evolved, the sci-fi first-person shooter that debuted on Xbox in 2001. Hailing from 26th-century Earth, Master Chief is among the Spartan super-soldiers warring with both the parasitic Flood and the technologically advanced alien race known as the Covenant in a fight for survival.

The arrangement continues with the emotive "Baba Yetu", written by Christopher Tin for the 2005 turn-based strategy game, Civilization IV. The song was recorded by the Soweto Gospel Choir in 2011 and became the first piece of music composed for a video game to win a Grammy Award, a groundbreaking moment for critical acceptance of the genre.

We're then flung into the epic strains of "Bounty Hunter Theme" from Advent Rising (2005). The story-driven sci-fi game, with score by Tommy Tallarico, Michael Richard Plowman, Emmanuel Fratianni and Laurie Robinson, was originally conceived as a comic book series which was ultimately published after the game's release.

The mix closes with the beloved "Kingdom Hearts" theme by Yoko Shimamura. The orchestral soundtrack to the 2002 game underscores the player's battles, as the power of friendship lends courage to overcome the destructive Heartless.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The FilmHarmonia Orchestra Incorporated would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our partners and patrons without whom this season would not be possible. In particular, we would like to thank:

Fortress Sydney for their enthusiasm and tireless efforts to make this afternoon a possibility, Homebush West Public School for use of their facilities for rehearsals and equipment storage, and Naked Wines for their ongoing partnership. The FilmHarmonia Orchestra would also like to thank the following sponsor(s) for their financial support this year:

Meredith Jacobs

Want to make a difference in keeping the music alive?

Organisations like The FilmHarmonia Orchestra rely on donations to ensure that we can continue to bring live orchestral music to communities and bring musicians and audience members together to celebrate media music as a legitimate art form. If you are passionate about film and game music, or orchestral music in general, please consider making a donation of any amount today to support the orchestra and our artists.

Click anywhere on this page to find out more.

