

Hey, I'm Eli Rainsberry and over the last couple of years, I've been the audio lead - composing music and designing sounds - for Die Gute Fabrik's upcoming game, Saltsea Chronicles. I'm going to be sharing a bit of the 'behind the scenes' development of the music for Saltsea, including my approach towards composing the core parts of the score, and the end outcome for the game's music direction as a result of that. But first, what is Saltsea Chronicle'?

Saltsea Chronicles is a story-driven adventure game, where you are guiding a crew across numerous islands of a post-flood world called the 'Saltsea Archipelago', as they mount a rescue for their missing captain, Maja. Voyaging on their boat, De Kelpie, you can choose where to go and which crew members to investigate with, as you explore the wonderful and different island communities out there, and solve the mystery at the heart of the game.

It felt important to me that because these island communities had different, but strong visual identities and unique cultures, that my compositions of the score and soundscapes were also different per community.

During initial development of the first island, Njarfie Roust, I developed an 'instrumental foley palette', where I would go through the episode and talk to my art and writing peers about the materials found and weather observed on the island. These can range from natural materials such as stones and feathers, through to constructed metals and woods from the boats and buildings.

But I mainly wanted to prioritise the more natural environment, including the island's harsh winds blowing through the bushes and chimes, which I noted down on and considered for its soundscape. I reflected this for the base of its soundscape by using one portion of a voice sample library to represent the surrounding winds and oceans of the island.

Inspiration for the soundscapes was done, in another part, by exploring the small stories being told by members of those communities, whether it be through their day to day activities, or how they communicate to each other.

For example, the Njarfie community are usually seen singing or humming when carrying out their everyday activities, whether they may be at their local pub, carrying through work on the cliffs, or performing rituals. So I wanted to feel like I can reflect them more thematically here.

Bearing this in mind, and following the wind and ocean voice base from earlier, I wanted to be sure to use another portion of voice 'hums', and, in some cases, higher ranged voice calls, to represent the overall island community.

I would then layer with instrument samples that I would gravitate toward when I think about the overall spaces and the people in them, including the crew themselves, depending who may be leading an expedition (which we will get to later on), or who may have spent a considerable amount of time on an island.

Sometimes I would even consider the world bible's notes on the local wildlife for some part of the island communities. The next couple of examples I used percussion as a way to represent the 'pitter patter' of the good cats of Los Gatos, and the 'clicking clatter' of the crabs of Fort Alcazar, respectively.

I mentioned a bit earlier about how I try to think about the overall spaces and the people in them, including the main crew members, when I came around to curating certain instrumental textures. But I wanted to be sure to give further thought towards composing in general for the crew. I asked myself: how would I approach developing music for an ensemble cast, and how can I connect them to the communities they visit?

I approached this by thinking about: who would be leading an expedition at any point during the game? And how would their personalities be read whilst taking on these expeditions? Well, I observed through playing the game and reading through the main story points, that all of the core members of the main ensemble cast will either lead a mission at any given point, or get introduced intentionally as a lead up towards possible recruitment onto the boat.

So I decided to create little motifs for each member of the main ensemble cast that may be emphasised and varied on more when they take the lead on certain locations, or during recurring situations in the game, and connect them more closely to points in the story that affect them the most.

I want to share a small case study of the motif I developed for one of our crew mates, Iris, a teenager with a great special interest in radios and technology. Iris' melody was inspired by a mix of the following factors:

- They were raised in Njarfie Roust, where I used woodwinds from its soundscape as one part of representing the island, focusing on a set of clarinet textures,
- Iris is generally a shy character with some youth to them,
- Iris meets somebody later in the game who they grow especially close to, and I want to be sure their melody could have the potential to be complementary to them in any way.

I took a harmonic progression from the Njarfie soundscape and used that as a basis to develop Iris' melody, and I kept to a relatively high range, alternating between short and longer notes. Though I sometimes used different instrumentation in different chapters, I liked using a clarinet to closely represent how Iris could sound and feel at any given time. Here was the initial demo I created.

Iris leads a few expeditions during the game, two of them being on an island called Sisao, and another on a later island called Minta. I wanted to be sure that any recurring motifs for any characters or situations would be primarily conveyed the most during the main, progressive story points over the course of the game. Iris' melody in the context of the following main story points they're involved with ended up sounding like this.

So I felt like it was important that I wrapped on arranging the soundscapes first, so I can consider whether any of the crew members had a strong connection to an island, or a community within that island, that will be visited at any point in the game, for example, whether they may have grown up there, and whether they're very close to their community.

Iris' melody I felt was still distinctive enough that I felt like it showed that they want to explore and travel further away from Njarfie for a change. Alternatively, some of the other character melodies were more ingrained to the harmonic bed of the soundscape in a way that felt easy to come back 'home' to.

I hope folks who'll be playing the game and or listening to the soundtrack will hear out for the sort of things I talked about here, especially the character and situational motifs that I developed, that may be heard over the panel sequences we have, or during the main points of story progression.

I've really enjoyed using those as a framework to help build up and support the story being told in the game, and with what I do, I try to be sure to support the stories and experiences of the characters and their communities the best I can.

I'm going to finish up by sharing with you all, what will be the reveal of the Saltsea Chronicles title sequence! We intentionally went with making the music a very separate feel to what you would typically hear in-game, whilst still trying to capture the anticipation of voyaging with the crew of De Kelpie.

I was joined on the track by M Gewehr, TV-MA and Tyler Mire who helped bring this piece to life so well. Thanks for joining me here, please look forward to Saltsea Chronicles releasing later this year!