Song of the Weekend

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(https://www.facebook.com/groups/ljackaudiodiscgroup)

Entry: 20210605 – CCCool

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This week's "Song of the Weekend" is CCCool, from the Apogee Software game, "Rise of the Triad."

The title of the song, CCCool, is a throwback to the infatuation that most of the development team and tech support team had at the time for the Howard Stern show, and specifically for the Ba-Ba-Booey character. In retrospect, it was in rather poor taste, in that it (and its companion piece, MMMenu) mimicked Ba-Ba-Booey's trademark stutter, which was probably intentional anyway. But, we were young, and we really didn't know any better at the time. In any case, I thought the song was cool, therefore gave it the simple base name and applied the Stern treatment to it.

At the time, I'd meant for the song to be the theme song to Rise of the Triad. That's why I wrote MMMenu in the same style (and why I won't be covering MMMenu in a separate Song of the Weekend). I'd intended the two songs to form a "suite" and serve as an integral part of the incidental music for the game. For a while, they did: Tom Hall put CCCool and MMMenu in as the theme song and the menu music, respectively, for a beta version of ROTT. I thought it worked well, and I believe some of the beta testers liked it as well, but the Powers On High decided otherwise and chose Bobby Prince's "Rise" as the theme song instead (they left "MMMenu" in as the menu music). CCCool was relegated to the role of a level track.

CCCool was inspired by an unusual source: Frankie Goes to Hollywood's "Welcome to the Pleasuredome." If you listen to the two back-to-back, you'll hear deep influences from the FGTH classic. Welcome to the Pleasuredome is one of my all-time favorite pieces, mainly because of a live FGTH concert my wife and I attended at the Austin City Colosseum. The band had such a huge PA stack that the signature low note of the song rattled my pants legs from over 100 feet away from the stage! For many years after that, I used that track off of their CD to help calibrate my audio systems.

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This was also a song where we were up against the polyphony limits of some of the sound cards of the day. What we went by back then was this: 8-bit Sound Blasters and compatibles could play 9 melodic notes, plus a percussion track, while 16-bit Sound Blasters and compatibles could play 16 melodic notes, plus a percussion track. So, the programmers in charge of sound wrote up a little trick for me. If the user selected an 8-bit sound card during the game's setup, the game would only read and output the first 9 MIDI channels plus the percussion channels of my songs. Otherwise, the game would read and output the entire song, up to the maximum of 16 channels. It was my job to make sure I didn't exceed the maximum polyphony for those channels.

As far as the above applies to CCCool, there is a chord progression that runs through the song which is split between MIDI channels 7 and 11. I wrote the progression so that it sounds okay if only channel 7 plays, but it sounds better if both channels 7 and 11 play. Therefore, the better the card you had, the better the song sounded. There are also sections in the song where I had to shorten notes in order to keep from exceeding the polyphony limit: measure 37, during the piano solo, is such a spot.

In lieu of a full musical analysis, seeing as how this write-up has already reached epic proportions, I will instead say a few words about the two most recognizable features of the song: the piano solo and the bass solo.

The piano solo, mentioned earlier, is easily the most recognizable part of CCCool. Many words have been written about it in YouTube reviews, if memory serves. It's also a departure from the original FGTH influence in the song, while not killing the influence entirely. I think I got the idea for the solo from a combination of Joe Jackson's "Steppin' Out" video and the collective works of Rick Wakeman. I wanted something classy sounding for a video game track, which is where the Joe Jackson video comes in, and I wanted something intricate, which is where Wakeman comes in. I hope I succeeded on both counts.

The bass solo, while not as instantly recognizable, is still a signature of the piece. I believe it's one of the first, if not *the* first fretless bass solo in a video game track in history. It's certainly unique, whatever the case. I got my inspiration for the bass solo from the late, great bassist for Thomas Dolby, Mr. Matt Seligman. Matt was a virtuoso par excellence on the bass, knowing when to support a song and when to shine as a soloist. We lost Matt to COVID-19 in 2020, and the world is a lesser place as a result.

I hope this has given you some insight into CCCool. Now, please allow me to leave you with a link to a YouTube video of the song. Thank you for reading, and thank you for voting for your "Song of the Weekend!"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfMeH_EpqSU