

Song of the Weekend

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Entry: 20210828 – Warehaus

This week's "Song of the Weekend" is Warehaus, from the 3D Realms hit game, "Duke Nukem 3D."

“Warehaus” gets its name from a corruption of the English spelling of the word “warehouse.” I chose that word since the song was meant to accompany a scene where the player would be creeping through a warehouse-like area (not through a specific mapper’s level – just a generic scene). As for the corruption, I went back into the history of 3D shooters, toward the first one to be a big hit – id Software’s “Wolfenstein 3D” – and decided to pull from the German language used in that game. So, the word “Warehouse” got corrupted into “Warehaus.” I don’t even know if that’s how the Germans spell the word: it just looks good. Another reason for the corruption: “WAREHAUS.MID” fits into the DOS 8.3 file naming standard of the time.

“Warehaus” is in the key of C minor (three flats) and runs at 88 beats per minute in 3/4 time. It was composed using a Roland SC-88 and is scored for three lines of Polysynth (left, right, center), two lines of strings (high and middle), a single line of Choir Aahs, a Sweep Pad, Fingered Bass, and six separate lines of Roland Standard Percussion Kit, all playing on MIDI channel 10. This is how it is configured in my original private copy of the Cakewalk .WRK file: the configuration may be different in the file that went out with the game, due to the EMIDI API that we used to support various sound cards within a single MIDI file.

Note that the Choir Aahs were originally intended to be a French Horn line in early drafts of the piece. Imagine how different it would have sounded if that would have made it through to the final cut.

Musical Analysis:

The best place to start with "Warehaus" is in the Fingered Bass line. The line is very syncopated and very jumpy, going from a low C (C2 in American Standard Pitch Notation, or ASPN) to either a C3, a Bb2, or a Db3, then back down to a C2, sometimes followed by a Bb1. This continues for the first four measures. It calms down a bit beginning in measure five, omitting the Db3 to avoid dissonance with the lines going on above it through the phrase that begins at measure 13

(con't).

Meanwhile, the Choir Aahs begin their line at measure five. They play a chord progression of i-ii°-i (a Cmin, a Ddim, and a Cmin) that runs for three measures, with a break of a measure afterward. This gets repeated once. Beneath it, the high strings play a counter-harmony during the third and fourth measures of the first figure, while the middle strings do the same during the second figure.

After the repeat, the Sweep Pad plays a drone that goes back and forth from left speaker to right speaker for four measures. During this four-measure break, the Fingered Bass reintroduces the Db3 into its pattern, since there is no one else playing for it to cause serious dissonance. It returns to the non-Db3 pattern afterward through the next Choir Aahs feature.

That Choir Aahs feature starts up at Measure 17. It begins as a repeat of the feature that played from measures 5 through 12, including the counter-harmonies from the high and middle strings. However, at measure 25, the chord progression switches to a iv-VII-VI (Fmin-BbMaj-AbMaj), with an appropriate counter-harmony from the high strings. Again, it is repeated, with another counter-harmony from the middle strings. At measure 33, the original eight measure section played from measures 17 through 24 repeats once more, strings and all, with a Polysynth line playing a trill in the background during measures 37-40. The feature ends at measure 41 on an open fourth interval in the Choir Aahs of a C3 over a G2, held for four measures on a decrescendo. Note that the Fingered Bass reinserts the Db3 again here and leaves it in until the end of the piece, adding to the dissonance that is to follow.

Another important note: while the Sweep Pad stopped going back and forth between speakers back at measure 17, it never stopped playing. In fact, it keeps on playing a constant drone through to the end of the piece. At measure 41, it starts sweeping between speakers again, continuing through the end of measure 64. However, it is during the section between measures 45-48 that it plays more of a solo role, with it and the Fingered Bass being the only things going on besides the percussion.

At measure 49, an intentionally dissonant section begins involving the left and right channel Polysynth lines. The right channel plays a Bb4 tone that sustains until measure 92, the end of the loop. The left channel rests for measures 49 and 50, then plays a note of a suspended chord (Db2) that resolves down to the root of said chord (C2) in measures 51 and 52. It repeats this "rest 2/resolve 2" pattern until measure 88, just four measures before the end of the piece.

In measure 57, the high strings start playing a chromatic scale downward from G4 to C4, one measure at a time until they reach measure 64. One measure later, at measure 65, the Choir Aahs kick back in, repeating their feature from measures 17-44, however this time without the high-and-middle string counter-harmonies. Those are replaced by the dissonances going on in the Polysynths, along with another eight-bar downward chromatic scale from the high strings from measure 73-80. Everything wraps up for the loop at measure 92.

(con't)

This has been a rather involved musical analysis, requiring some music theory that I'd forgotten from my basic studies days. I'm a bit embarrassed to admit that, but there you go. In any case, I hope you enjoyed it, and with that, please allow me to leave you with a link to the song. Thank you for reading, and thank you for voting for your "Song of the Weekend!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIyfaFIb15k>