

Patreon - Music Chats (RQG and MAG)

Content Warnings

- **Brief explicit language & innuendo**
- **Spoilers for all of Rusty Quill Gaming and The Magnus Archives**
- **Mentions of: stress & depression**
- **SFX: occasional music, inc. brief low frequency tones**
-

(The Rusty Quill Gaming theme music plays, then fades out under the introduction)

KATIE

Hello and welcome! I am Katie, one of the producers here at Rusty Quill. My pronouns are she/her. I am here to ask some questions of two people who are vaguely associated with Rusty Quill about the music that goes with the podcasts, but I'm gonna let them introduce themselves.

SAM

Hello! I'm Sam, the resident composer at Rusty Quill, my pronouns are he/him. Delighted to be here, hello!

ALEX

And I am Alexander J Newall, he/him, founder and CEO of Rusty Quill. And I was foolish enough to let Sam do some music for the company, and that's why we're here.

SAM

(Laughing) That's gratitude for you, isn't it, eh?

(Everyone laughing)

KATIE

Well, that leads into my first question. At the beginning, Sam, how did you get involved, and how do you two know each other?

SAM

I've known Alex for... twenty-

ALEX

... unnecessarily long years.

SAM

-eight (laughing) Yes, a lot of long years, twenty-eight, or so. Cause since we joined school together.

ALEX

About twenty-eight and a half, I think.

SAM

Yes. And every age line is showing. And we've been friends all that time, and had a love of film, and stories and, and all of this. Skimming over lots of happy childhood in that answer, but, when it came to actually doing things, cause we always said we wanted to work together, didn't we? Then Alex bravely set up this company and asked me to help.

ALEX

Well, let's let's let's dive into that a little bit cause we both took very radically different paths, you see. What Sam did is he got himself a really successful career in film and TV music. What I did is I tried every single medium that there is...

KATIE

(Laughing)

ALEX

... And disappeared into a padded room for a number of years. And, at some point, those things managed to reconnect back into a way that was productive.

KATIE

(Laughing)

SAM

Well Alex, as always, is being flattering there. I mean, we we both have-

ALEX

Hands up people associated with an Oscar. (Stage whispering) I'm not putting my hand up.

SAM

Nomination (laughing). But no, there, there... We both have been through high levels of desperation and stress.

(Everyone laughing)

SAM

Let's be honest (laughing). And, you know. Now, if I remember rightly, I may have been at college when the gaming podcast was pitched?

ALEX

I believe you were, yes, cause it was late 2015 so you were just finishing up I think.

SAM

Just to extrapolate on what Alex was saying there... You were all about the writing, directing, the making the story happen, right? I ended up kind of falling into music, I'll put it that way. And from, as soon as I knew I was doing that it was all about film and TV and writing to narrative. And so, our sort of childhood dreams of actually working together kind of ended up happening which is kind of-

ALEX

Being a grim...

SAM

Kind of romantic!

ALEX

... Grim reality.

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah, yeah. Exactly. The grim reality of what that meant became swiftly apparent.

ALEX

(Laughing)

SAM

I mean I won't speak for Alex on this but it felt kind of natural that we'd kind of always talked about it and we'd done sort of the odd thing, not necessarily me doing music and stuff, but we'd toyed with the idea of working together for, since we were kids. And then, Alex was like, do you wanna actually do it? And then it was like, yeah!

ALEX

I think Sam's been privy to more failed projects of mine than any other human alive.

SAM

The one that sticks in my mind was the stop animation in the attic.

ALEX

Oh! Oh yeah, the adventures of Blue Tac Man, now that, that was-

KATIE

(semi-whispering into the microphone) I wanna see it. (Laughing)

ALEX

Oh I've, I have the entire trilogy saved, don't you worry.

SAM

I was in charge of ruffling the blue paper that represented the ocean in such a way that felt natural over time.

KATIE

(Laughing)

SAM

But I had very little responsibility otherwise! (Laughing)

ALEX

That's not true, you were also a giant squid.

SAM

Was I the hands? With the marigolds on?

ALEX

At various points, yes, because don't you remember one side of your body went numb cause you'd been laying on your side for like four hours.

SAM

God, that's right, yeah. I'd forgotten that.

ALEX

So, yeah, long story short, when I procrastinate for exams, I really do quite procrastinate and what started as me getting a bit bored turned into a five minute long stop motion. If you've ever seen *Parks and Rec*, where he just becomes a depressive mess and makes like a three second video, retrospectively there's a, there's an element of that in there. It's not good, but I like knowing that Sam was injured in the process of it.

KATIE

He was by your side...

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah. I think this was G.C.S.E. procrastination, by the way, maybe not A-Levels-

KATIE

Right.

SAM

I can't remember.

KATIE

Okay.

SAM

If it was A-Levels then you've done very well for yourself. (Laughing)

ALEX

I think it was A-Levels in fairness, I think it was A.S. And what's worse, what's worse is, I look at it now and go (laughing) that's not actually very good for the age that I was at.

(KATIE and ALEX laughing)

ALEX

I like pretending that it was a wildly ambitious ten year old instead of a desperately, like, bored seventeen.

KATIE

In a way it's better than looking at work that you did when you were sixteen, going, "*never topped that*". (Laughing)

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah.

ALEX

This is true, I look at it with nothing but shame, so that's okay.

SAM

There, there has been progress. There has been progress.

KATIE

(Laughing) I feel like there's a whole lot in more in there that we could delve into, but we are supposed to be talking about the music from Rusty Quill.

(Everyone laughing)

KATIE

I wanna know about the marigold squid at some other stage, though, so I'm gonna make a note of that. And, move on to the first theme tune that you composed for Rusty Quill Sam-

SAM

Yeah.

KATIE

Which, I believe, was Rusty Quill Gaming.

SAM

Correct, yeah.

KATIE

Correct, yeah?

(Rusty Quill Theme starts playing)

KATIE

The first thing I was wondering is, what was the brief that Alex gave you for that theme? I mean, if you can remember.

SAM

I can remember, but I'm interested to hear what Alex thinks he told me.

(ALEX and KATIE laughing)

ALEX

Okay. Okay, okay, okay, right. I believe the first thing I did was informally explain what Dungeon Punk as a genre was to Sam.

KATIE

Hm!

ALEX

Which sounds like a sex thing but it's not.

(KATIE and SAM laughing)

ALEX

It's what happens if you take sort of fantasy and and sort of mix it with sort of Diesel Punk type aesthetics, I guess.

KATIE

Right.

ALEX

It's the idea of industrialised magic being a thing. I remember the brief being, explaining very badly that it was mostly gonna be in London, I think, when I first started speaking with Sam, because it had a much smaller scope initially. And that, in terms of instrumentation, I remember saying that I wanted to capture it as being both a bit like high flown adventure-

KATIE

Mhmm.

ALEX

But in a sort of Dungeon Punk mode. Let's see what I actually sent. I feel like you've got a print out that's just like, 'Oi, Sam, music but like, adventurous and that.'

SAM

I don't have a print out, I, I just have a vivid memory of, of you telling me, I mean, yeah, there was some of that, sure.

(ALEX and KATIE laughing)

SAM

My memory is that you said, 'I want this to be a catchy theme tune, I wanna come out of listening to this humming, you know, by that I don't mean smelling.'

ALEX

That's true. I did say I wanted it to be an ear worm.

SAM

(Laughing) You said, 'This needs to be catchy.'

ALEX

I want it to be so melodic that it's a problem.

(Everyone laughing)

SAM

Yeah. You actually sent me a, quite an impressive document. Bearing in mind that I knew that Alex was gonna come at this from a background in RPG stuff. Which he knew I had none of. So, he needed to explain why I needed to be enthusiastic about this.

(KATIE and ALEX laughing)

ALEX

What a, what an eloquent way of putting it.

SAM

Well you had the whole thing! You had an idea of the world already planned out, and-

ALEX

Yeah, yeah.

SAM

And what it was, and he explained exactly like you said, it's, 'you've heard of Steampunk, right?' And I'm like, 'Yeah,' and, 'Well, it's not that.'

ALEX

(Laughing)

SAM

'It's got this magical element and it's, you know,' and, and yeah, you were explaining it this way, and, and I pretty quickly had an idea of what that should be. And I think partly helped by the fact that, I think I was still at college because at the time me and my friends at college were obsessed with the *How To Train Your Dragon* soundtrack.

ALEX

Oooh, what a soundtrack.

KATIE

Right.

SAM

Which is incredible.

ALEX

I was listening to that today, so good, still!

SAM

And without wanting to incriminate myself (laughing) as a plagiarist...

(ALEX and KATIE laughing)

SAM

You know, there are clearly elements of that in this theme. And, I mean, it's really quite straightforward, I mean it was a case of getting a theme down that was very simple, very hummable, simple structure to it. And, on top of that, to kind of weave in textures of, a bit sound design that gave you an idea that this was industrial and, you'll hear at the beginning and a bit at the end some, some rhythmical, I guess it lends itself to Steampunk as well, those kinds of sounds, but it's that kind of industrial, rhythmical-

KATIE

(Verbally imitating the RQG theme)

SAM

Yeah.

(RQG Theme fades in)

SAM

Like footsteps of a, some kind of steamy robot. (laughing) Again, non sexual.

KATIE

Mmm, mmm.

(RQG Theme playing for a bit)

ALEX

I do remember the initial brief that I gave to you wasn't particularly helpful because we were still figuring out the best music to do for podcasting.

SAM

Yeah.

ALEX

Cause bear in mind it's a few years ago so part of that was like, 'How much do you need?' 'I don't know.'

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah.

ALEX

Where, initially it was like, okay, Sam was like 'Well why don't I give you a two minute track and then we'll see what we go from there.' Which was fine, but I came to realize that, yeah, intro music... Our standard now is normally that we'll get something that has, you know, intro music, outro music, and like generic music bed that's on theme. We didn't have any of that at the start, it was just like 'Give me some music and I'll figure it out.' "What?" And then,

Poor Sam, was like 'Cool, I need this bit, and then that bit, but then this bit, and a bit-'

KATIE

Mmm.

ALEX

(Laughing) Must have been incredibly frustrating for Sam.

SAM

No, I mean it was fine! But yeah, in terms of sort of specific durations I suppose it wasn't, it was probably just a, ended up being a bit of a mess for you guys but I mean I, I just knew you needed a theme and writing a track like that, you generally write it in a straightforward form that, you know, you've got a, a main theme and then a B section and, and that's kind of what I did. And then naturally shoved in some music bed stuff in the middle with some plucked strings and things. I can't remember what ended up, what you ended up using of the sort of B section and things like that.

ALEX

We've used it quite a lot over the years. I just remember that by the end of the brief process where there's a bit of back and forth and it was like 'What do you actually need?' etcetera, we came to our standard model now, which, you know, giving away the keys of the kingdom here is, you want something that is, maybe a 30 second intro, then you want it to drop down into a, a theme bed ideally. And then you want, yeah, your outro to similarly either be a repeat of your intro or you want it to be a 30 second that builds to a peak and then drops off, ideally where you can have that as a single track and then split out those three elements separately. But for gaming, specifically, it was just the single theme, so it's, it's actually truncated, if I remember correctly, where we have the intro, then we sort of do a fade out, the music bed sits around for ads and things, and then we come in for the outro of it, but it's actually just a single

track that we just did a very... I say we, (laughing) / did a horrendous butchering job and didn't tell Sam.

SAM

A brutal edit. Oh, I mean, I knew you'd have to, cuz I'd just kind of wrote it (laughing) without thinking about editing. Cause we, we didn't know what we were doing! It was written as a piece of music with a very vague idea of what Alex was actually gonna need. Cause remember at the time, Alex has built this company up from the ground, so...

KATIE

Hmm.

SAM

It was all him, basically, at that point. I was only really thinking about what is Alex gonna do to this?

KATIE

Yeah (laughing)

ALEX

(Laughing) A sentence I hear a lot from the talent!

SAM

(Laughing) 'What, what on earth is Alex gonna-' No, it was more just like, I didn't know yet was gonna be useful for him, but I had a vague idea, you know, he needed that catchy theme, and that was mine and his priority. And that's, you know, the first main thing you hear, isn't it?

ALEX

You and I, Sam, do tend to subscribe to the same idea that, it comes in and out of vogue but you and I always have a tendency to lean toward melody-led stuff in sort of film, TV, music, and stuff like that.

SAM

That is true! Although, contrast to that, we've ended up often not doing that. But that's probably just due to the subject of the podcast. But, but yeah, certainly for this, it was all about that catchy tune. And, just maybe to add to what we were saying before-

ALEX

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SAM

That... the *How To Train Your Dragon* soundtrack has this as well, and that was certainly an influence, but you needed that sense of a journey as well. That there was a, I hesitate to say epicness to it, but it had that sort of fantasy size and scope, and that's something that was important to do as well, and that's why it was, it's orchestral. As well, (laughing) I remember thinking 'Right, get an idea of them setting off on a journey.' And that's why I do this, what to my ear now is an incredibly naff fanfare (laughing) at the start. This is why, guys, this is why I've tried to send you an edit that you-

ALEX

And I keep saying no, tough! No.

SAM

But I understand, because it's, even though like I'm, I'm thinking, you know, I'm sort of slapping past Sam across the face for the samples I was using for that sound, which is essentially a, a naff trumpet. But, it's kind of become part of the identity, I think, of the podcast, hasn't it? So, you can't mess with that.

KATIE

Yeah!

ALEX

(Laughing) Rusty Quill Gaming: Good Enough!

KATIE

Yeah.

SAM

Well, it is what it is, it's this kind of really, (laughing) really fake trumpet, 'Ba ba ba baa!'

(RQG Trumpet fanfare plays)

SAM

(Laughing)

ALEX

I like it! That's why I won't let you change it.

KATIE

Yeah, there's a kind of facsimile chic going on there, I think-

SAM

Yeah! (laughing)

KATIE

Which (laughing) goes with the idea of roleplay, I dunno, you can probably dress it up that way, anyway (laughing).

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah, sure, sure.

ALEX

Oh yeah, yeah yeah! 'We were deliberately making a, a comment on the, the allusion to reality that's inherent within the RPG medium, but, it's never real reality, no.'

KATIE

That's *totally* what I picked up, Alex.

ALEX

Ultimately, we're all just victims of Sam's muse is, is, is what we're getting at.

SAM

(Laughing) Another thing as well, Alex, that we need to talk about is, is my syndrome of being a Second Take Sally. I seem to remember for this, *not* getting it right (laughing).

ALEX

Sam, it's the case for everything I've ever, it's for any work you've ever done, it's always been second take wonder.

SAM

I think there's been one podcast that I got it pretty close the first time. Every other time I've been completely wrong, and then right, the second time.

KATIE

I think this is an interesting indication of how it works when you are trying to write somebody else's vision in music, which is a process of interpretation. The process of getting feedback from a director is more about trying to get that little tube in their brain so you, you know exactly what they want, because it can't always be communicated verbally, there has to be some kind of back and forth with the noises themselves before you begin to understand, often, what it is that they're trying to do.

SAM

Oh, for sure.

ALEX

Well, Sam's been very good at targeted questions, is what Sam's good at. I've worked with a decent number of composers over time, and you'd be surprised by how few ever hand anything in on time! (Laughing) If you wanna be a

composer, hand stuff in on time, you'd be astonished how many people that weeds out. But no, it's, Sam's quite good at asking the specific question, where it's less like, 'Does this make you *feel* happy?' It's more like, 'Can this function in a minor mode, yes or no?' It's very targeted, I find, on the reviewal of the first draft, which makes it very easy. Makes it much easier at my end, at least.

SAM

And that process has been honed over the years that we've worked together and has been really helpful for that. It begins now, having learned in that way, it just begins now, 'Right, stop saying you want trumpets, shut up about that, these are my two questions; give me an idea of energy, and give me an idea of tone. They're the first two things I need to start doing anything.' And then, after that point, like you, you're saying Katie, they need to hear something to be able to comment on it. That's, I guess, yeah, that's why there being that sort of second time lucky person does happen a lot, but certainly it, I mean it helps having known Alex for so long as well. That there, there's a dia- there's a-

ALEX

Vicious diatribe-

SAM

Yes!

ALEX

That we coerce into a conversation.

SAM

We can be frank with each other as well! I love that Alex, I feel no preciousness of, of ego, you know, he's very frank, and I, that's what I like.

And I can take it because we're friends. So it's, it, it's very helpful to have that shield of (laughing) familiarity!

ALEX

Though, in fairness, it does occasionally direct elsewhere. I remember doing, I won't say the project, we've done spotting on like underscoring for a project before, where at some point I'll just pause and be like 'What's this? What is this? Why is this?! (sounds of frustration)' and then Sam will be like, 'Okay, I'll put a sting there, and we'll cover that and then that's fine.' (Laughing)

SAM

It's obviously important to have some freedom to explore ideas and stuff, but, for a lot of the sort of in-house stuff that Rusty Quill has done it, it's been very functional because it's a main title that has to draw in the listener. They have to listen to it over and over, every episode it's the same thing, and it has to not be tiring to the ear. So, at the same time it has to give that, again, that idea of energy and tone, which are the two, for me, the two most heavy identifiers of a projects. The thing that you pick up on straightaway. Is this high or low energy, or somewhere in between? Is this dark or light or, whatever, you know, it's that, that kind of language, that it needs to be understood very quickly, and needs to be distilled, and that, that's kind of something we've talked about a lot Alex as well is, this is what it's trying to achieve, and you're, you're, you know, you'll say, 'You're somewhere there but can you do this more?' That's a process that has improved (laughing) over six or seven years.

KATIE

The Rusty Quill Gaming theme interests me. I don't, it's the podcast I listened to last out of all the Rusty Quill podcasts. I don't feel I, I identify with the origins of it and the, you know this, kind of the history of the people making it quite as much as, as you will. So it is interesting what I got from the music itself, you were talking about the industrial London allusions, Sam, I heard some, possibly via film music references to the British nationalistic - and by that I mean calling on British folk music rather than, kind of, politically nationalistic - composers like in the early 20th century. In particular, I was

thinking about Holst and his London music and the Second Suite for Wind Band, which I will splice into this edit, if it seems appropriate.

ALEX

I'll tell you what, I'll tell you what, one sec. If we give, give it a break, and then pretend we just heard it.

(snatch of "The Blacksmith" from the Second Suite for Wind Band by Gustav Holst plays)

ALEX

Gosh, ah. Isn't, isn't that wonderful? Ah. (Laughing)

KATIE

Great piece, great piece, yeah! (Laughing) There's a movement called the blacksmith, which does exactly that thing, it, okay, it's trying to paint the picture of someone sort of hammering a horseshoe on. You were talking about that kind of industrial magic thing, and I feel like the combination of the folk music and that industrial element is there. But again, I hear the cinematic things too in there, because you were talking about John Powell and *How To Train Your Dragon*. I think the question I'm trying to ask is, to what degree do you like to draw in allusions from other genres, from music that's gone by which references what you're trying to capture, in order to kind of give the, the audience a shortcut in, and to what extent do you want to kind of, try and find the essence of the thing, in its own right?

SAM

The answer is, constantly, though, not always consciously. You know, I've got a background in concert music that helps a lot, but I'm not always thinking, this needs to sound like that, it just, often just falls into place. I mean, certainly for the Rusty Quill Gaming, it's no accident that it sounds folky. You referenced the Holst and Vaughan Williams, well their whole thing was, was referencing folk melodies. And the reason for that is that they're catchy and, and easily

harmonised, and that's exactly my approach, I wasn't consciously, although I'm a huge fan of both composers.

ALEX

I thought Holst when I first heard it, to be clear. I remember Holst coming to my mind when I first, first heard it.

SAM

It, it will naturally feel that way because you wanted a catchy theme, so what I did was, when playing, I, I can't remember honestly if I was thinking 'It needs to be pentatonic.' For those that don't know, pentatonic is a five-note scale, which you hear all the time.

(Pentatonic piano scale playing)

SAM

There's a great video of a singer called Bobby McFerrin doing a lecture about this where he proves to the audience that they all inherently know the pentatonic scale by jumping, and they all just naturally sing the notes.

KATIE

It's great, yeah, we'll put the link in the show notes.

SAM

Yeah, it's great.

KATIE

It, it's worth a watch.

SAM

But the point being that it's the closest thing to everybody's hearts, without them knowing, and so, that's why it produces catchy melodies. The relationship between the notes are so human and so universal.

(Piano plays *Amazing Grace*)

SAM

Whether I was thinking about it or not, that's why it naturally ended up being that way, is cause it produces a simple, catchy tune.

(Piano plays the start of *Auld Lang Syne*, and then the start of *The Skye Boat Song*)

SAM

And I think from that I'll have drawn a lot of influence from Holst and Vaughan Williams, possibly via John Powell, because the *How To Train Your Dragon* score. There's a bit more Celtic stuff in that, but there's definitely that folk, it's a very folk heavy score, so, absolutely no accident. And, just more generally, this is where the questions of like tone and energy are really important because, that's where you can start to draw influence from the back of your mind, from your memory of other pieces, and you know, again it's not always conscious, it's not like 'Oh it needs to sound like this' - Sometimes it is! Sometimes I'll say, 'Oh it needs to be kind of like this piece, that will work so well.' As a music editor might, for instance, to a project they'd whack that on as a temp score. I usually just start playing around on the piano and, and your hands kind of naturally move to the harmony, the intervals that work for the, the tone required. Again, speaking about energy and, and that folk element it kind of ended up being this almost, not 'oompah' style, but like this kind of bouncy, march-like thing.

(RQG theme bouncy march playing)

SAM

It wasn't like, this is a march, when I started writing it, but it just fell into that way. I definitely wrote the melody first.

ALEX

I feel like I have a draft saved in the depths of the internet of your first draft for this, but I cannot for the life of me think where that would be. I should dig that up if I can.

KATIE

That would be interesting to hear, yeah.

SAM

Oh, I don't remember that at all. I've probably deleted it in shame.

ALEX

I remember you didn't like it.

SAM

You didn't like it, or I didn't like it?

ALEX

First one, then the other.

SAM

This is something I can do with Alex as well, I can send him things I don't like.

(Everyone laughing)

SAM

There's no fear. I would just be like, 'Do you like this? Cause I don't.'

ALEX

(Laughing)

SAM

And hope it works (laughing) you know.

ALEX

I'm sad to hear you're not a rip-off artist, Sam, I was very much ready for that to be the takeaway on that question.

SAM

I mean, all composers are rip off artists. If you've heard music before, you are influenced by it, whether you know it or not. And I think I certainly am, because I've played in orchestras my whole, you know, well, not now, (laughing) I don't play in one. I do conduct one and so you're constantly absorbing music and you can't help but hear things in that way whenever you're presented with having to create something. This is having come from a university which, its sole priority was originality, and it, it never quite sat well with me, because to me it was a, unachievable goal in the realm of accessibility.

ALEX

What you're talking about where like there's stuff lifts whether you mean it to or not. You hear it all the time. The only time it becomes a problem is when you lean into it and you're just like, 'Yeah, I'm gonna take that,' you know, and that's very different.

SAM

One thing I would say just to add to that is that when you're dealing with stories, certainly speaking for myself here because I'm, I'm not certain it's the same for all narrative composers, but I always make associations with stories that have been scored, so films or TV or non-visual. My influences, if they are conscious or subconscious, are often from them. But of course, film music itself is, is influenced directly by concert music. Not to get too deep into it, (laughing) but like certainly, golden-era Hollywood was all, all German immigrants from the war. So it's, you know, there's a heavy influence of them, and I think it's obviously it's evolved far beyond that, but film music is really my first love in music, generally. So that's probably where I get the, the strongest influences.

KATIE

I'd like to talk a bit about the quirkiness of the theme, the added quirk, and I feel like that was deliberately put in there to match the podcast and the characters and the story and the flavour of the whole thing. I was wondering if maybe you could sort of maybe talk us through technically some of the devices - you've referred to the pentatonic scale, I was very discreetly trying to remove my son's mattress from my piano, which I'm using for acoustic dampening purposes, in order to play it. (Laughing)

ALEX

(Laughing)

KATIE

Which I shall edit that in afterwards. But I was thinking, you are using modality, which is absolutely key to both folk music and to film music, and we can talk about that a little bit and how you kind of you switch up the modes as a kind of way of adding that sense of the unexpected from time to time.

ALEX

Dare we try explaining modality for the listeners?

SAM

I mean mode is, is essentially, the perhaps more commonly known word is the scale, but what people know as a scale is major or minor. But major or minor are just two examples of modes. And a, modes is, it comes from a, there, there's a kind of Greek naming system where essentially the distances between the notes that you know that form a major or minor scale, they're just slightly changed within that, and they all have different names and, it often gives a sense of... Basically, it's more surprising to the ear which I think is what you're saying Katie, and and used all the time, certainly in classical music, they were used very early on in music cause that's where they came from. But then, rules happened, things changed, major and minor became gospel. Literally gospel. Later on, there was this resurgence in, certainly in sort of French music and, and other things, where it just became rediscovered.

KATIE

Yeah, other scales are available (laughing).

ALEX

(Laughing) On request!

KATIE

Yeah.

SAM

And that, just, it seeped into film music, as well. They're just, a collective term for all of the modes, scales that there are. The series of notes that music is built from.

KATIE

Back when I was a music teacher, I'd describe it to my students like, each is almost like a, a palette of colours you can draw from.

SAM

Just on that, I think that, just to give maybe an example, Leonard Bernstein explains this much better in a Harvard lecture, but, the strengths of notes, and the relationships between them, is all based on the harmonic series. So all the notes that you can't quite hear that are spread in the spectrum of when you play a note. And if you get rid of them you, you hear an octave than a fifth than a fourth and it goes on. That was very fast. Listen, watch that YouTube video, it's amazing.

KATIE

We'll link that too! (laughing)

SAM

(Laughing) Link that one too! So, one example, you know, the fifth note of a scale is, after an octave, so the same notes higher or lower, that's the strongest relationship. After that is a fifth, all because of the harmonics series. A really strong relationship in a major or minor scale is the last two notes. Da da da da.

(Piano joins in to harmonise Sam's sung demonstration of a semitone)

SAM

It's a semitone and it's actually called the leading notes. And there's a famous story, I think it's Mozart, might be Beethoven, think it's Mozart, where he wouldn't get out of bed in the morning as a kid so his dad, who was a musician, played the first seven notes of the scale and then stopped.

ALEX

No, bad!

(Piano playing first seven notes of the scale, harmonised, and then stopping)

ALEX

Nooo!

SAM

He couldn't bear it, so he had to play the last one!

(Running footsteps down stairs, last note/chord of the scale played)

SAM

But the reason for that is because it was so desperate because of that relationship between those last two notes. Now, if you played a different mode, that doesn't have that relationship, it changes the feeling.

(Piano plays a scale in a different mode, harmonising to demonstrate the difference)

SAM

Seems subtle on paper, but actually it's quite profound when you start writing with different modes, and, you know, for instance if that last relationship is a tone, not a semitone, as it is in many of the modes...

(Piano plays an upward whole tone, harmonised, to demonstrate the difference)

SAM

Then, yeah, it changes things. And imagine that through all of the, the scale and suddenly it's a new palette like, like Katie was saying.

KATIE

So, going back to Rusty Quill Gaming, there are some switches of scale.

(SAM and KATIE laughing)

SAM

Yes.

KATIE

You mentioned a B section earlier on. Do you want to sort of talk about why you did that? (Laughing)

(RQG theme B section playing)

SAM

No, cause it's a very disappointing answer!

(SAM and KATIE laughing)

ALEX

Do it! Share, share the disappointment! How was the sausage made, Sam? Why do we shift modes?

SAM

The sausage happened with very little conscious input. It was where the fingers fell on the piano, honestly. I'm sort of justifying it retrospectively with the character of that second section, which I knew wanted to be this kind of softer, warmer thing that could be used, and maybe it was less forthright sounding than (laughing) the first section. And that's just kind of what happened. And, you know, I, I've had friends come and listen to a piece where it's like 'Ah, brilliant! You used a Lydian. I love the Lydian mode.' Which I, I do love the Lydian mode, it's great. But, I very rarely go in thinking 'This would be great in the Lydian mode,' it just kind of naturally happens that way, because it feels right. And, and, yeah it's a very disappointing answer to that, I'm sorry, but it's just how I write.

ALEX

So just to simplify that you're saying, 'No I just mashed the keyboard and that's what came out.'

SAM

Well, I mean, that's a slightly ham-fisted way of putting it, Alex!

ALEX

(Laughing)

KATIE

Literally! (Laughing)

SAM

I can play the piano a little bit. Yeah, in as many words.

KATIE

I don't think we should underestimate subconscious processes in all of this. You know, we expose ourselves to music - as you've alluded to - all our lives, and what feels like is just coming out through your fingers is often actually a, a probably quite a complex mental process of sort of harmonising the knowledge that we've got with the creative stuff as well.

SAM

Yeah it, it's familiarity, I mean Alex will have the same process with writing or whatever. Things are second nature because you've done it so much. You just know without having to think what's going to work and what isn't. That's certainly a process for me.

ALEX

Trope is a thing, as well. And I don't mean that as a derogatory term. Like, you have literary trope, you have musical tropes as well, where certain times there is a hole in a piece, and everyone then knows what it needs, and it's because you've heard an iteration of that type of music a hundred times, and you like... A good example, the bass needs to drop here.

(Bass drops)

ALEX

Where it's sort of like, that's sort of a tropey move, and if it doesn't, everyone's like 'Ergh, it's missing a thing that I know it needs!' (Laughing)

KATIE

(Laughing) 'Where is the bass drop?!'

'Why didn't it drop?!' There's an element of that at play, I think, as well, where I was very explicit at the start for Rusty Quill Gaming where I was just like, tropes are fine. It is a schlocky genre RPG-thing. You don't need to shy away from that kind of thing. So I, I kind of feel a bit bad, cause I, I gave Sam just the worst, most generic brief ever and what we got out of the other end was really quite nice.

SAM

That was the fun of it for me. It was, as an orchestrator as well an arranger, that's part of the fun of it as well. It, it almost felt like an arrangement of, of my own themes. So, that's maybe more where the influences came in was in the arranging process, is that I felt like I had my melodies and my harmony and then it was a case of kind of making it work in this tropey way, as Alex is putting it. It is absolutely, it's kind of, there's a lot of kind of cliché in there. That's great!

(Everyone laughing)

SAM

I, I love doing that. (Laughing)

KATIE

Yeah. Oh, I love it! I really love it, actually, as it happens. I'm glad you said about that because that was gonna be my final question about the musical side of things, was, it's got quite a kaleidoscopic, if I can put it that way, arrangement. You know, the colours shift like really regularly, and that goes with the way the melody is structured as well cause it, because there's a bit of deliberate wonkiness in it, where we're kind of not completing those square four-bar phrases all the time, that sort of thing, to kind of get that quirkiness into the subject. And, the way you've orchestrated and arranged it reflects that too.

(RQG theme playing)

KATIE

I presume that was deliberate, because of, you know, the way that games are played and the unexpected ways that players can go and the dance that the, you know, Alex was doing with the players and all the other sorts of things.

SAM

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. I mean, it's, it's, again, as with the sort of fanfare at the beginning, it's setting off on a journey and that was always in my mind. And, there are surprises on the journey, otherwise it's boring. And, frankly, it just, I think it just makes for better music anyways, to have those surprising moments. But yeah, absolutely, cutting phrases short was very deliberate. The changes of colour I think as well lended itself to the fantasy. I think having that change of colour, yes you want kind of a magical texture to it, but, at the same time, changes of colour is what gives vibracy.

ALEX

And, for listeners, if we're talking about 'colour' in music, what are we talking about?

KATIE

It's timbre, really, isn't it? The sounds?

SAM

Yeah, exactly, it's the sort of specific sound qualities of an instrument or, or sound. In terms of the, the overall colour, it's how, how it's arranged, how it's orchestrated for, in this case, an orchestra. The choice is made to, you know, use clarinet for the main theme and then piccolo or whatever. Which, by the way, was solely because I wanted it to sound higher quality than I was able to afford, so I recorded myself on clarinet and saxophone.

KATIE

The instruments that we can play. Classic budget trick! (Laughing)

ALEX

'I'm Sam Music Man Jones, you'll find I'm the only composer who plays every instrument in the orchestra at the same time.'

KATIE

(Laughing)

SAM

Well, the value of recording anything is that it tricks the ear. So, as soon as you record one thing, most people will hear it and be tricked into thinking a lot of it is recorded, not just that one thing.

KATIE

Last question for Alex on RQG before we move on to The Magnus Archives. As it so happens, we are recording this commentary as the very last few episodes of Rusty Quill Gaming are airing. So it's been quite a journey. When did you start, was it 2016?

ALEX

Project started in 2015-

KATIE

15!

ALEX

Although it's a bit mucky cause it's like, bear in mind Sam was generating music and nothing was even recorded yet.

KATIE

Right, yeah. Six years, basically. If you knew at the beginning where this story would take you, would you have asked Sam for anything different?

ALEX

Yes. I'm gonna dive into some story stuff now. The actual core narrative became heavier as things moved on because I came to realise that, with the original story planning, I hadn't given enough emotional weight to the topics that I was broaching. Not as a, like, failing, but like as you work you can be like 'Oh, that's a lot heavier than I thought it was gonna be.' Part of that was it's actually... Hah, I always laugh because you always get a lot of apologists for the Meritocrats who were these big dragons who run the world, but the entire piece is meant to be anticolonial (laughing) and a deconstruction of centralised power, like, centralised power is bad, and what better way to show centralised

power than a big fuck-off dragon? But, one of the things that I think I would have done, is I would have asked for that to be reflected in the music with a ever so slightly increasingly ominous tone running through it. Cause at the moment it's like 'Ba da da da, we're gonna have an adventure, da da da da da!' If I had the entire thing and went back I'd be like, let's take that and also have underneath a mid-to-low tone that's like just got a slight ominous underlay that pokes its head out and then disappears again. Cause I think that would capture a lot of what the story actually is shaped to be, which is Raa! Big adventure! Actual commentary on various things that starts to creep in and then, you know, there starts to be actual heavy emotional weight in terms of what's going on. I don't think that's particularly reflected, but I think that's more my own failing of underestimating scale. I admit that when I brought Sam on I was like, 'Oh yeah, it's gonna be massive, it'll be run for six years, and ah-'

KATIE

(Laughing)

ALEX

'It's definitely gonna take the world by storm and then we'll, we'll launch a massive massive film studio off the back of it! No worries, absolutely, yeah, do the work.'

KATIE

Yeah.

ALEX

But, in reality, I think I was a lot more conservative in terms of project brief. But, I think that's what I'd change, I'd have a... You know what? Let's do a real time demo! Sam?

SAM

No. (Laughing) You're gonna get me...? Right.

ALEX

No, here we go! In real time! In real time. Right, Sam, I love the piece that you've given, it's 99% of the way there, but I really wanna reflect like a growing menace throughout of it. Ideally like, I'm thinking something like a low tone that, that grows in prominence, but I don't want it to take over. What would you suggest?

SAM

Well, it's orchestral. So, I'm sticking to that.

ALEX

(stage whispering) Cello, do cello!

SAM

I like me low strings. I'd have a fiddle with me low strings. This is gonna be a beautiful segue for you, Katie, but we used a little bit of ominous strings in Magnus.

ALEX

Did we?

KATIE

Funny that, yeah.

ALEX

Gosh.

SAM

We used an awful lot, actually. Bendy or trem-y or... And by that I mean tremolo strings.

(Ominous tremolo strings)

SAM

But yeah, something not too obtrusive unless you're wanting thematic materials. Alex, are you wanting thematic materials for your ominousness?

ALEX

Honestly, I'm feeling a little bit thematic as opposed to non-thematic on this one.

SAM

Well, we can do some slidey moving low strings, cello basses.

(Sliding low strings)

ALEX

Honestly, actually no go bass. Go double bass. Go for it.

SAM

How many minutes do you want?

ALEX

We've got two minutes to work with, so can I get that condensed into about 15 seconds in progression (laughing)

SAM

(Laughing) Smashing. I'll charge my hourly rate.

(Everyone laughing)

ALEX

Gosh, isn't it exciting?

(SAM and ALEX laughing)

KATIE

Well, I'll look forward to hearing that!

(SAM and KATIE laughing)

KATIE

Let's move on to The Magnus Archives. First question for both of you: While the Rusty Quill Gaming theme is led, as you have said, by melody and musical devices - chords, rhythms, tunes - The Magnus Archives seem, to me seems to be led by sonic design, more than anything. Can we talk about how these very different approaches match two different stories and approaches to storytelling?

ALEX

If I may, Sam, I think I'd jump in with one point that'll help contextualise what comes later. Which is, for Gaming, it was 'Give us a theme tune.' 'Do you need anything else?' 'I don't think that we're gonna be able to logistically make it work.' For Magnus, I wanted to go a step higher, so it wasn't just a case of 'Hey, can you give us a theme tune?' There's gonna be music running through this, we're gonna need a palette of themes and stuff like that. In the original brief it was like, 'Listen, it's gonna be like, you know, little bit of chatter, monologue, little bit of chatter, and under the monologue we need, you know, some creepy palettes to work with.'

KATIE

Yeah. So you're looking for something that could work as underscore as well as an opener and closer.

ALEX

Or at least would set the tone for that kind of thing.

SAM

Oh yeah, completely. And, I think by this point as well you'd realised you needed things kind of split up a bit. Sort of after the theme was done you were like, 'I love the sounds you're using, so can you give me stuff, give me a toolkit that's gonna be useful.' And I think that was kind of ongoing as well.

ALEX

But as well, bear in mind that we've used multiple palettes over the years. Cause we did a first round of palettes and then we had a second round.

SAM

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

(Tape clicking and tape hiss playing)

KATIE

The music you've written does blend in quite well with the sonic character of the series itself, which is quite like austere. Most things are in mono and it's quite, it's often filtered for the tape, and it's just, the way people talk is, is quite austere, and your music is even incorporating the tape hiss. So had you heard the way the episodes sound before you wrote the music?

SAM

I don't believe so.

ALEX

No, Sam hadn't heard a single bit of audio again.

SAM

I think it's pretty rare that I hear anything before I at least start writing. Unless I'm scoring.

ALEX

As a director I try to avoid it, for the simple reason that if it's in audio specifically, I prefer to have the music generated in isolation from the vocals or mock-ups or whatever. It's a personal preference cause I think you get a more interesting pitch for the music, cause otherwise people tend to use music to try and serve what's already in place when actually I'm like, 'No just give me the best music that you can, and I'll make it connect. Don't worry about that, I'll,

I'll tweak and bend and make things work, just give me the best music that you can that captures this thing.' And if you give people, 'Here's the episode, can you put some music in?' It tends to turn into... Again, when I'm talking about spotting that's like a mechanical process where you literally, you know, you go through, you listen to a thing, you go 'Alright, we'll put this here, we'll put some music here, we'll do this, we'll make sure this sinks in.' And I find that quite mechanical, which is fine for underscoring, but for a main theme, I don't like working that mechanically. I deliberately have made sure (laughing) that Sam's never heard any proper content before working on a theme.

SAM

And it, it's a nice way of working musically, cause I think there's, less sort of beholden to what you think it should be.

ALEX

That's exactly what I mean.

SAM

It's obviously easy to say it in hindsight, that it's down to Alex' direction, but, you know, it is nice that they do go well together, you know, Jonny's voice and how it's recorded with the theme. And actually, you know, because he reads in that way, you know. (Laughs) It's hard to describe.

ALEX

(Imitating Jonny Sims) We don't know what you mean.

(Everyone laughing)

SAM

But there's, there's something about that that actually as an exception to what we were just saying would've really been informative, I think.

ALEX

I have to confess, yeah, he has a very specific timbre.

SAM

Yeah, and I think it, it just, it just happened that... Well, I'm sure it didn't, I'm sure you, you had your hands on the reins, Alex, but, like, it does seem to work well, you're right. But, you mention the tape aspect, and that's what makes me remember the brief that Alex did give me for this. Which was, I remember distinctly, knowing what it's about, it was like alright, it's about an archivist, I was like, okay, I'll put some kind of creepy tape sound on it. That was an easy decision. That was like the first thing I did, I didn't even write any music yet, I just put down-

ALEX

I don't think I'd even said anything about tapes with you, I just said 'Archivist' (laughing).

SAM

I think you just said archivist, yeah. But what you did say to me is 'It's like a non-silly and scarier version of *X-Files*.' I was like, 'Okay.' But you were like, 'But don't do *The X-Files* music!' (Laughing) 'Don't do that!'

KATIE

(Laughing)

SAM

And I was like, okay, alright, I'll ignore what you just said then.

ALEX

What I did stumble on is I still have the playlist that I made in Spotify which was the source musics that I passed across.

SAM

I'd forgotten you did that.

ALEX

Yeah, so I can happily lay, to run through them right now. I can probably, we can probably put links to them all because it's all on Spotify.

KATIE

Go for it, yeah.

ALEX

Bear in mind that this is like early days where I didn't say 'Oh, rip these off,' I just, I've done this with Sam before, I just vomit a bunch of music on a wall and go, 'There might be something here.' So, the game *Dead Space* does the album — these aren't in a particular order — So, from *Dead Space* it was "Entering Zero G," and the main theme, so those are both by Jason Grave. I actually added some from the Sherlock BBC soundtrack.

SAM

Fabulous scores, both of them.

ALEX

The tracks, I think it was “Security Cameras” and “Targets.” Bear in mind, I haven’t listened to this playlist in years. *The Last of Us*, the game, so that’s Gustavo Santaolalla. I struggle to pronounce it, but ‘Santaolalla.’

SAM

Santaolalla, yeah.

ALEX

And that was the track “All Gone,” which is like the outside, and that’s the one that’s kind of like, it, it’s a bit more haunting? It’s less like, ‘It’s gonna get you!’ and it’s more like, ‘Look, the world isn’t dying, it’s just wild now.’ Really good. And then the last ones are a song called “East Hastings” by *Godspeed You!* “Damned,” by Brian Tuey, “In the House” by John Murphy, and... I think it was the main title for *Nightmare on Elm Street* which is Steve Jablonsky. But, again I haven’t listened to all of these so some of them might be irrelevant, but I did literally go ‘Blaaa! Is there anything in there that’s useful?’

SAM

As soon as you said it I remember latching onto *Dead Space*. Cause that’s, I remember have, knowing that at the time and being blown away by it because, for those that don’t know it is, it’s a horror game. Don’t play it in the dark, because-

ALEX

(Laughing)

SAM

You, you’ll make a mess!

(Everyone laughing)

SAM

Basically, supremely scary, ominous textures, musical textures, are pinned to points in the map, and as you approach them they-

ALEX

It's actually location based and I love it for that.

SAM

Yeah, they're layered, and it's very, it really makes the game in my opinion, but-

ALEX

So like, as an example, there'll be a door, and as you're approaching the door like, the strings will get more intense, and if you walk away from the door, the strings kind of quiet down a bit. And it's like, I hate it.

(ALEX and KATIE laughing)

ALEX

It's the best most awful experience having that, I love it. But, I was definitely in that headspace at the time, I think.

SAM

And what you said as well, Alex, about... It was more threatening than super scary. That was the main thing that you wanted, I think. You wanted it to be...

anticipatory? Is that, if that's a word? More than just scaring the shit out of you-

ALEX

Yes, yeah.

SAM

Before you've even heard anything.

ALEX

Ominous threat.

SAM

That was for Jonny to do, or for the, for the story to do. That's kind of, was what I was going for. And for me, that's what I leaned into a bit, was the ominous textures of weird, what we call 'aleatoric' string stuff.

(Aleatoric string music playing)

SAM

Which is where everyone's playing a, a little box of an idea and it sounds like super polyphony basically. So there's a bit of those kinds of sounds. And then I added this viola melody on top, where I got in a guy called Elliot Corner to come and record that. And I thought that was a good sound cause it's, a lot of people know like cello, which is much sort of a more romantic, warmer sound, and a viola's got that graininess to it that actually works really well.

KATIE

I'm very pro-violin, too.

SAM

It's a great instrument. And, I think it, it works well for this. And, and top of all of this stuff was just this bendy, weird, non-diatonic, not, you know, didn't really fit into a scale melody. The least melodious thing ever, basically.

(SAM and ALEX laughing)

(The opening of The Magnus Archives theme plays)

KATIE

Just bringing that back to the storytelling thing, for me, those kind of slowly evolving colours and textures and all those aleatoric bits from which sounds emerge - that's what it sounds like to me, things are emerging from it - absolutely mirrors this story where you've got these huge unseen things, which are there and gradually shows themselves. So my big question to you is: Did you know about the meta plot from the start?

ALEX

I did, didn't tell Sam.

SAM

I knew nothing. I, I, I mean, I, yeah, I found out the story when I listened to it. I'm not even certain I knew that the episodes were connected in any way. I think all I knew was that, not to reference *The X-Files* again (laughing), but, in that way that there's a sort of compartmentalised story per episode, I knew that there was that, and that this had to sort of suture them in their common nausea.

(SAM and KATIE laughing)

SAM

The, you know, you just had to, yeah. Tie that tone, again it was talking about tone, I mean that's, that's what it is, is, is just getting the tone bang on before you've heard anyone speak.

ALEX

The thing is, is like, I'll have to reference Stellar in this one to demonstrate my point, but... As a director the briefs come from different places. So Rusty Quill Gaming needed to capture an impetus, 'Let's go do a thing!' Magnus needed to evoke a location, and by that I mean specifically the archive, you know it's kind of brooding, it-it's ominous and threatening, but it's not... You have the like, you know the, not percussion, the, the percussive playing towards the end and things like that, but it's not, it's not a jump-scare, it's not like a 'Baaa!' It's a lot more about that and the anticipation that never really quite lands, and that's what all of early Magnus is, and no one ever really seems to clock it, which is, the horror is really just 'It's gonna get you, it's gonna get you...' And then it doesn't, the bass doesn't drop! (Laughing)

(Bass drops)

ALEX

The the, and, and that's why you're always left feeling on edge.

KATIE

Yeah.

ALEX

But, for Stellar again towards the tail end, that was one where it needed to evoke a feeling a lot more than a setting. I mean, yes, it's spacey, but that was more like that was very tonally-driven, I guess, whereas Magnus, yeah it was tonally driven, but I was very focused on-

KATIE

Mmm.

ALEX

I need you to listen to this, and you're looking at a bunch of establishing shots of someone alone in a massive archive. That isn't something I communicated well to Sam, but I think it came out in the end is that, yeah they, they're coming from different places and that's why the music, to a degree, has a different, not structure but, it holds together differently I guess.

SAM

Completely. And, actually, what you just described there Alex is exactly how I had it in my mind. So I think you, you've either communicated it or we're, we're of one mind.

KATIE

Sounds like it!

SAM

Which is why I'm screaming inside.

(ALEX and KATIE laughing)

SAM

But, absolutely, I, I had this picture of a guy in this cave office, for some reason not turning the lights on while he reads this stuff out. And just being constantly, this oppressive environment basically, and constantly feeling a bit sick. But at the same time...

(The Magnus Archives theme starts playing)

SAM

Perhaps this is justifying it retrospectively, but, the melody for me is the kind of seductive aspects of the stories. That there's this kind of siren quality to the, each story, that is drawing you in whilst everything else in the, in the theme is making you feel like, this isn't good for me.

ALEX

Yeah, absolutely.

KATIE

One of the observations I made about that melody is it, it uses that classic rule of three that you get often in melody. So the first time the viola comes in, it felt to me like the eye kind of opens and has a little kind of look around.

SAM

Yeah!

KATIE

(Laughing) And the second time it kind of does a wider sweep, and then the third time it's right, now it's, you know, it's in, it's on there for the kill now.

SAM

Yeah.

KATIE

A sense of something deliberate and inevitable kind of emerging as, as you get each iteration of that. Those phrases going higher and higher.

(The Magnus Archives violas swelling)

SAM

Exactly, and in the space of a minute as well. Bear in mind this is much shorter than what I gave Alex for the first one I think cause he knew, 'Right I, I can't have more than a minute for this.'

KATIE

I have a very specific question, actually. You know those three bangs at the end?

SAM

Yes.

KATIE

There seems to be, there seems to be some debate out there in the community about what they represent. (Laughing) Can we clarify it once and for all?

ALEX

We've been asked this so many times!

SAM

They were specific to me!

ALEX

The one that made me laugh the most, not in a bad way, just like cause it spoke to me the most was... A lot of people refer it to like lights turning on or off. You know, like a, a corridor of lights going (imitates the sound of large lights shutting off down a corridor). I actually know what it is, cause I discussed it with Sam, so I'm not gonna ruin it before you say, Katie, but what do you think they are?

KATIE

I thought it was a, like, either a like a cabinet drawer or a door banging shut, trapping someone in something.

SAM

That's what they were to me.

KATIE

Oh, okay!

SAM

I guess similar to the kind of corridor setting, but yeah, just a load of doors slamming is what they were meant to be. Shutting you in.

ALEX

But what was it instrumentally?

SAM

It's a combination of what's called Bartok pizz, which is where string players pluck the string over forcefully so it slaps the, the finger board. It's used all the time by film composers.

(Example of Bartok pizz playing)

SAM

Another one called *col legno battuto*, which sounds a lot fancier than it is, which is where they, they hit the string with the wood of the bow.

(Example of *col legno battuto* playing)

ALEX

Bash it one!

SAM

Bash it one, yeah, exactly. And then I think I probably whacked in some like, there's definitely some percussive stuff in there as well like hammer on wood and things like that.

(Percussive hammer on wood drumming)

SAM

But, I can't remember exactly.

ALEX

I remember at the time me being like, 'Is there anything in there?' And you were like, 'No, that's all instrumentation, there's no like, actual door slamming or anything like that going on in there.'

SAM

It's not sound design. It's just sounds I thought would have the right kind of... I knew I wanted an abrupt end. And I'm not sure I thought 'Right, there's gonna be a door slamming,' I'm not even certain I thought of that, but I think as I used sounds I was like, ah, that kind of makes sense in my head as being shut in and not being able to escape. And that, that was kind of the idea of it. But yeah (laughing) it didn't even occur to me to download the sound of a door slamming.

(Everyone laughing)

SAM

Didn't even occur to me.

ALEX

'If I use these 40 instruments I can make it sound like a door closing!'

ALEX

Ultimately, we're all just victims of Sam's muse is, is, is what we're getting at.

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah, exactly. 'If I pitch down this *col legno battuto*, it would sound just like...'

ALEX

(Laughing) That's such a you, that's such a you solution!

SAM

Yeah.

(ALEX and KATIE laughing)

SAM

'I'll purchase Soundtoys' *Alter Boy* plug-in specifically to pitch down my *col legno battuto* (laughing) to sound like a door.'

KATIE

Actually, another technical question: Did you create that with a delay? That, the, the three, or, or did you actually put it in manually?

SAM

Bearing in mind, this is Sam of six years ago, where I feel like I knew nothing. So, no. I think I just did it manually, I think I just played it in.

KATIE

Yeah.

ALEX

He was keen and green!

SAM

Keen and green, yeah. It's the same thing with the trumpet sound! I look back and like wonder what on Earth I was thinking. And yet, it kind of it, yeah, it just kind of works still but yeah, I didn't even think of delay. I just built it as three separate sounds.

ALEX

(Laughing)

KATIE

Well...

SAM

(Laughing) It's a very boring answer again, isn't it?

KATIE

In a way it's better because you've placed them in a way that sounds so naturally like the bouncing ball that it could have been, you know. So clearly you have, a lot of attention to detail went into this, you know.

SAM

That's kind of how I did things before I had explored plug-ins that did it for you (laughing).

ALEX

Before you became lazy, lazy Sam!

SAM

It happens, yeah. You gotta be wary of it, to be honest. I was still kind of concert-y at the time so I was still thinking of things as, as very practical and playable, if that makes sense. So that, that's a lot, most of what I do actually is orchestration. So, you know, I still think in practical terms because, yeah. If someone were playing the hammer (laughing) they, they would hit it three times! They wouldn't be sent through an external delay thing.

KATIE

I have reached the end of my questions, but it occurs to me that it, there may be things you want to say about this that I have not thought of.

SAM

Alex.

ALEX

I'll share a regret with Sam that I can now say now that Magnus is long done, which is, there was no place for it whatsoever, but I feel like this was my only and best chance to put in some like, extended *glissando* vocals in a project. I always think of the skydive from the, the Godzilla remake, you know the 'HoooOoooOooo!' But like, with a massive choir and blah blah blah. I love that and I don't think I'm gonna get the chance in a project (laughing) to use that, I think this was, as close as I get and I regret that it wasn't gonna happen. It wouldn't have worked.

SAM

Yeah.

ALEX

The last point that I'd raise as well is, I think we've put the actual music beds themselves available on Patreon in the dim and distant where it's just like, 'Look, this is the music bed. Don't like, sell it elsewhere, but you know, this is what we used.' If we have, I strongly recommend people sit and actually just listen to it on its own without other stuff over the top for a little while. Because I think that, A, we did the palette dirty (laughing) in terms of like we did not do them justice in music edit. There is some rough editing, especially in season 1, where I was just like, 'Right, we'll go from creepy to angry and then we'll go back to creepy and I'll just do a crossfade, it'll be fine. I'll make sure the time signatures match, no worries.' It was very rough and ready. But if you actually listen to them each in individual, A, the season one and half of season two, like, the first iterations have a lot of progression to them that people won't notice because I did a lot of loops and, and butchered them. So they're actually decent to listen to in and of themselves. And for them, and the later ones, which are a little bit more static, they have less progression baked in, there's a lot more layers than people think. Like, it's kind of on the edge of hearing which is a shame because I remember when I first heard the actual music palette going, 'Ooh there's quite a lot going on there.' And I compressed (laughing) the hell out of it, stripped it, chopped it, cut it and smashed it together.

SAM

That's because of six years ago Sam not knowing what he was doing and probably sending you-

ALEX

Keen and green!

SAM

Keen and green. I sent it to you with zero dB, or something and that's why it was, you know, so soft.

KATIE

But a lot of people do listen on their phones speakers, or on their laptop speakers as their working, or in the car, and so you can't have an exquisite dynamic range because half of it'll get lost.

ALEX

I think there's a, like a platonic ideal of it. Like I think there's a very clean and crisp version out there where every individual music note is exactly on point and etcetera, but it's beyond me.

SAM

I think on that it was kind of a not a, not a rushed job on my part but like...

ALEX

(Laughing)

SAM

Not, no, I just mean that I kind of got it done and then it kind of ended up being this big thing. A while after it started you were like 'Actually, we need some music bed stuff, so can you sort it out?' And I sent you like, 10 or 15 or, you know, I can't remember how many. But (laughing) just of different ominous textures.

KATIE

(Laughing) Have some rumbles!

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah.

ALEX

So then when we did the redo in like season two, late season two, season three, there's a hard shift in terms of music beds, where, if you actually listen to the first ones and the last ones, the first ones the music's all over the place! Not in a bad way, that's my fault, but the later ones it's much more layered out and it's simplified progression wise. And that's because on the reiteration it was like 'Cool. Give me a creepy one. Give me an aggressive one. Give me a vicious one. Give me a-' I didn't go literally to the point of 'Please give me one for each of the fears,' which we could have done. Instead, I chose a different route, which is a little bit more like, it is emotional driven but it's not lore driven. Because I think if we'd have gone into the lore side of it you'd have ended up with 'Here are two themes that are nearly identical!' Because 14 separate, well 13, 14, whatever, it starts being a different level of complexity whereas it really just needed to be, should I be feeling creepy right now, yes or no? Should I be feeling chased, or whatever, which is a bit different.

KATIE

The other problem with having one for each of the fears would be, there are some highly attentive fans out there who would've mapped them eventually, and 'Oh it's this fear!' You know (laughing) so, yeah.

ALEX

Oh, they'd have clocked it immediately. I pulled all kinds of nonsense that people still haven't clocked. And I'm not gonna say what they are!

KATIE

(Laughing)

ALEX

But people will spot it now and then where it's like hyper low frequency stuff is layered in there and all kinds of nonsense. Just to mess with people.

SAM

(Laughing)

ALEX

I didn't mess with the music, Sam! Promise.

SAM

No that's fine, I'm just enjoying your... sadism.

(KATIE and SAM laughing)

ALEX

I just like messing with people.

SAM

But like, what you were saying there about providing all the toolkit, basically, I mean, that's informed everything we've done since.

ALEX

Phenomenally helpful.

SAM

Yeah, I mean we've just realised you know, every time the start of the process needs to be 'Right, what are you actually going to need?' Unless I'm, I think we, we've only done one project where I've properly scored it.

KATIE

Yeah, yeah.

ALEX

And I'm, I'm looking forward to being able to do more of that going forward, but yeah, that's a different process. Very different.

SAM

It's a very different process, very, you know, not to get technical, but, you know, because of the labour that it takes if you're actually scoring something from start to finish it's, it's a whole other thing, so you know, it, it takes a, it's a different process but anyways in terms of the toolkit way of doing things it's informed this and that theme, what sounds from that theme are going to be useful for you, okay, I'll create a music bed for you to use. It's far more like part of the process now.

KATIE

It'll be interesting if we could talk to Maddy and you at some point about doing that for Inexplicables, where I feel like how it, it ascended to its final point at that point, you know, cause you'd sort of-

SAM

For sure.

KATIE

Perfected the technique of working in that way. So yeah.

ALEX

Oh, I get it, I get it.

KATIE

(Laughing)

ALEX

You remove me from the, from the circle and then magically just everything settles into place, I bet, yeah!

SAM

Yeah we just got rid of the chaff, and then-

ALEX

Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, yeah.

SAM

And suddenly it was a streamlined thing.

KATIE

(Laughing)

ALEX

Sure...

SAM

But no I agree, I mean that one for sure was the one I felt really comfortable with how it was working, cause it was like... Cause I, I'd not met Maddy before that. And, it was just like, this is what we're gonna need, this is how we're gonna do it. It felt like a really, really smooth process by that point. So yeah, it, but it, it did take the (laughing) sort of the graft from me and Alex initially, I guess.

ALEX

No, no, not at all, understood. Sam appreciates a firmer hand.

SAM

(Laughing)

ALEX

I'll make sure that Maddy takes the lead on all future ones in a really like aggressive, 'This is what you get, go! I say jump you say how high?'

SAM

I actually found her comparatively polite and, and agreeable, Alex.

ALEX

Well no wonder you found it easy!

SAM

(Laughing) Yeah, yeah, yeah, let's not comment-

ALEX

That's not how we get work out of you!

SAM

Let's not comment on the quality (laughing).

ALEX

Sheer aggression and unnecessarily scathing, that's, that's my motto, right?

KATIE

Shall we move on to closing insults, then? (Laughing)

SAM

Yes!

(Everyone laughing)

KATIE

This has been really interesting, I've enjoyed it.

ALEX

May I ask one last question from Sam just, just to really push the boat out?

SAM

(Laughing)

ALEX

Promise, promise.

SAM

You go.

ALEX

If you wanted to recommend a composer or music to people that you think has been like particularly influential on either of the shows, what would you recommend?

SAM

Oh, god.

ALEX

Something where it's like, 'If you liked this you'll love this.' Not like, 'Oh, this was necessarily like, what I based it on.' Just, 'If you liked this, you'll like this.'

SAM

Oh, if I could name one it would be John Powell, for the Gaming podcast. But, just generally, I'm not even answering your question now, I'm just saying go and listen to John Powell. Because, when John Williams dies, (laughing) he, he's going to be the guy to replace him as far as I'm concerned. For the Magnus one though, *Dead Space*, and turn the lights out, and get a hot water bottle.

(KATIE and ALEX laughing)

SAM

It's just terrifying music.

KATIE

Thank you very much, both of you! I really-

SAM

Thanks, Katie!

KATIE

Appreciate you doing this.

SAM

Aw, pleasure!

(The end of The Magnus Archives theme plays)