



ONE YEAR OLDER

COMMENTARY BOOK

One Year Older

VVNG-AUG-2022

okay first things first

I

MADE THIS

FOR YOU

Foreword

Yes you. The one sitting at their computer or phone or other gadget, you the one who's doing their hair or putting on flair like you just don't care, you the one sitting at a desk or laying in a bed or even hiding from the cops, I don't really care, this was made for you. It's been worked on over a long period of time (technically almost two years!), it's been delayed and pushed back, it was actually not even going to come out for a while, but here it is. And I'm incredibly thankful that you, whoever you are and whatever your interest, are spending the time to listen to this music.

So what is this, then? Well, back when the Homestuck music team was all jumping on the concept of "solo albums", I said to myself, hum, why not do one? The original concept was incredibly vague, because I'm not a very imaginative person most of the time, an album for John Egbert that used piano in every track to some degree. And after a few tracks were made, a more specific idea began to emerge, that of an album that sequentially examined moments in his journey through SBURB, music for key points or just for scenes. I even graphed the entire (known) timeline out on a giant piece of paper and plotted it all out. It's turned out to be far more ambitious and broad of a goal than I'd originally planned for, especially with how "key events known" slowly eclipsed "key events to unfold" over time, but I feel confident enough about how this album has turned out that I'm not too worried. And if anything, that means more music has come to you.

Now, before I start rambling at length about the music in here, I've got to toss out a few "thank you"s to people.

-First, to all the artists that helped out with the track art. The stuff that they've all given me is just incredible, and if you ever ask me what my favorite part of this album is I would definitely say "the art". I might be biased. There's full versions of all the album art included with the album itself, and I'd highly encourage you to give it a look-over and see what else these talented people have put out.

-Second, to the other people in the music team, who've helped me go from "some guy who uses famitracker and an awful microphone" to "somewhat of an okay digital musician". I'm thankful for every bit of critiquing I've gotten, too, even if I can be really stubborn about it. And all the bros I know in there, if I could meet everyone in person there would be endless fistbumps. You guys rock.

-Third, to all the friends and people I've met over the years, through Homestuck and otherwise, that've been great to hang out with and chill with and just talk about stupid random things with.

-Fourth, to my family for always being around, and for...well, being family. Keeping me alive and healthy and stuff and keeping me from completely failing in this "life" thing.

-And lastly to Andrew Hussie for creating Homestuck, making the really crazy decision to bring me onto the team in the first place, and for giving me the opportunity to both make an album and just make music for him in the first place. I don't know how little I would've composed if I didn't have Homestuck pushing along, both giving me a reason to write and things to write about.

Alright! Now that all that before-album talk is done with, it's time to get into the album proper. I hope you, out there, enjoy this album, and I'll see you on the flipside. If you ever want to contact me, check the last page of this PDF.

Signed, Erik "Jit" Scheele



Sunrise

So, where else to start this off but the beginning? And by beginning, I mean "the morning of 4/13/09, John's birthday and the beginning of it all". So I wanted to take time with this piece, and create a sort of smooth, shifting landscape, illustrating the sun rising over John's neighborhood before he wakes up. This was mainly achieved by interspersing little melodic hits on instruments with each other, building up and fading out in turn. The opening from a rather old tune of mine, "Light" from Volume 5, also makes an appearance in here to further the overall effect.

I imagine, if this piece were ever performed live, it would do best with all the instrumentalists scattered to some degree. And I usually hate that gimmick, but it could work well in this context.

October

Now to completely break away from the previous track, we move into a peppy, small ensemble piece. This one just started out because I wanted a tight ensemble to play something together, something sort of bouncy and light. Before that, I'd been making a lot of pieces that felt unnecessarily large, sticking in instruments for just one little section and not using them the rest of the time, so something lighter with more emphasis on individual parts seemed like a great idea. I had no idea what to call it, though, and it didn't really seem to have much context in terms of the album either, until I was looking through the 2010 calendar that the art team made, and came across the October artwork. Immediately it was like, that was it, the piece both fit the "kids and fun" aesthetic that lasted a while in the beginning, and the artwork fit too, so it achieved purpose and title both at the same time.

Instrumentally it fit too, it had piano and bass and bitcrushed drums that sounded somewhat like beatboxing, which were three out of the four instruments the original kids used. There's definitely a discrepancy with using synth vs. violin, though. Before anyone asks, I definitely spent time trying to fangle string patches into it, but it just didn't work. So you can imagine Rose playing an electric violin, that's what I do. (I don't know if electric violins can function like that string players please don't strangle me thank you)

Firefly Cloud

So after a quick burst of events and some luck, John finds himself in LOWAS, the Land of Wind and Shade. Everything's dark, except for the stars above, but as we found out, they were really fireflies trapped in the clouds. This was one of the concepts I latched onto rather hard with this piece, the mass of sparkling and blinking above John as he traipsed about. I've been lucky enough to live in a more rural area for most of my life, and being able to watch the stars was always great, so I could only ever imagine what LOWAS's clouds looked like.

Anyway. I kept the sparkling mainly to the piano, higher register work with some delay making a nice twinkling effect. I'd also just gotten some wonderful "piano in an attic for 80 years" samples, which came with a large variety of inner-piano work, like tapping or heavy strokes of the strings, and I sprinkled those rather liberally in places to try and get the effect of thunder. (after all, what sort of lightning storms could a firefly cloud have, anyway?)

And of course, there's one or two Doctor quotes in there just because.

FantasyP

This is definitely one of the older tracks on the record, a cover of Penumbra Phantasm by Toby Fox aka Radiation. At the time of writing this, that track still hasn't been released, but that didn't stop me from making a cover of it. And then re-making that cover, since the first one was kind of crap.

Not really a whole lot of deep thought or anything with this, I just thought the melody sounded cool and it could work for a sort of high-energy swooping-around sort of thing. And then later, I associated it with John's jetpack flight after he gets warned off from dieing to his planet's Denizen, so that's what it became.

On a completely random note this piece always makes me want to go out running, and I have done so to this piece a few times. If I could do flips and parkour and stuff I'd totally be doing that too cause it works really well. Maybe gunfights too. Alright let's move on to the next piece.

Underfoot

The first of two completely-solo-piano pieces on here, this piece was a small idea that I had one night, that I sat on and worked into a rough piece right then and there even though I was supposed to be recording parts of the Sburb album at the time. And a little later, I was fortunate enough to get a good recording of it before heading home for the summer.

The piece itself is meant to go along with John discovering Jade's dead dreamself, after waking up on Skaia for the first time. I know a lot of people associate Sarabande, from Volume 5, with that event, or at least with John reading Jade's letter, but I couldn't help but want to at least touch on it while going through his timeline. Originally I'd stuck this before John even entered the Medium, but that didn't really have any moment tacked on with it, and it made much more sense here.

Flying Car

A little later, and John's achieved God Tier (near-invincibility) and is blasting around Skaia (central planet hub) with one of the game pieces (who was later called the Wayward Vagabond but is equivalent to a pawn in chess), using his powers to make a car (he took from his dad's wallet) fly around.

That's kind of a confusing explanation, I'm sure! Basically all you need to know is that there's a car that can fly and it's flying. Like pchooo flying. It's awesome.

For the piece, I went with this old idea I had a few years back in college, a 13/8 double-piano piece. Seeing as I'm not two piano players, though, I wanted to orchestrate it out a bit, so I put some brighter instruments to double the melody, over top of the original riff, and beefed it up a bit with some light strings and drums. A few other instruments come in later as the piece developed, but like October, I tried to keep it all to a small group and not let the orchestration explode.

Cancerous Core

The descent into Skaia and the exploration of its interior, I feel, went by too quick. It might just be because the Tomb Raider series was a favorite while growing up, but I've always loved old, unexplored ruins, arcane or mystical elements hinted at with wall carvings or murals, that sort of thing. And Skaia, being the center of a sort of central planet to everything in Sburb, could be chock-full of old buildings and mystical secrets to explore.

So, to try and accompany the general air of mystery and exploration that would have gone with a long journey into the center of Skaia, I took an old idea in Locrian mode. If you're a music person, Locrian is when you take a major scale, but start it on the last note. It's a rather off-kilter scale, and can't ever really resolve to the tonic chord like most other scales can, which made it rather suited to a piece about the sort of strange secrets and landscapes that could be hidden in the center of Skaia.

Art by Playerprophet at playerprophet.tumblr.com

Game Over

This is most likely the first piece that was ever made and put into this album. It might even be from before I started on the album, I'm not sure. At any rate, when John was stabbed and "died" (god tier characters can only truly die from a Just or Heroic death), he stayed dead for a few minutes. And for those few minutes, I imagined that he came to a sort of Game Over screen, or, if you were playing a video game of Homestuck, you would come to a Game Over screen. From there, you could either continue or give up, which is a pretty staple part of game over screens, I think.

At any rate, the music I went for was to just go along with that, a peaceful song for his demise before he came back. It feels kind of morbid, but since the concept of death has kind of gone out the window and back again in Homestuck, it's hardly as morbid as it could be.

Art by Sarahfu at sarahfu.tumblr.com

Unlabeled

This is the second of the solo piano pieces on this album, at least in the main tracks, and a really late release as well, given that it first appeared in the comic some time around a year ago. I've held it back from getting released just so it could go on this record, so I'm glad it could finally go out.

This is also the only piece on the album that doesn't have a specific event to go along with it. Instead, I went for where it appeared in the comic when placing it, and see it as more of a small interlude. The intermission between Act 1 and Act 2 of a musical, if you will. The art is meant to go along with this as well, a sort of non-canon get-together of the first set of trolls and kids we know, and I can imagine them playing this record while they chill.

Art by Vivian Ng at viivus.tumblr.com

Skaian Shrapnel

The lights go down, everyone finds their way back into their seats, and we're off.

This piece marks the beginning of my writing into "events that have not yet occurred". At the time, the scratched copy of Sburb was just starting to show some real-world effects by making the "game" (aka our viewing experience as an audience) glitch up. So, I set about making some heavier action music for it, incorporating heavy use of weird, messed-up glitching sounds and a few heavy-handed uses numerical motifs. I also brought in Ruins, one of the first piano pieces I ever recorded, the latter section of Walk-Stab-Walk, and Crystalanthemums.

Overall, in my opinion at least, the piece turned out a little strange, a little awkward and not really nice, but really that works just fine for me. Everything was really going south for the characters at the time, after all. People were getting hunted down, friends were turning on each other, nobody in the fandom really knew who was going to be next. Was this person? Or this person? Were you next? It all led to a heavy air of unease that sort of manifested itself in the odd piano riff and distorted drums that were used, and all the heavy glitching that led us up to....

Art by Crowbawt at crowbawt.tumblr.com

The Scratch

Aka "the big reset button for the universe". It was hinted at for ages in the comic, and finally happened at some point after this piece was made. It also served as the inspiration for a project that my third-year piano studio did.

In the comic, this event was basically a way to reset the universe, everything inside it, and recreate it in a different way, one that would make the game winnable. So, in my head, a mass de-compilation of everything, like a massive maelstrom building as bits of data are pulled apart. A black hole, in other words, but arcing out in waves of energy like lightning. Mother Nature ain't got crap on this beast.

The piece started out as extreme laziness on my part, just idle playing around with various distortion on synths and samples, until the school project came up and wanted results fast. So I threw some things together until they formed the opening, and took a very lax approach to the piano part, a sort of "here's a riff, now play around with it, there's your part" with a drum loop over top. Thankfully my laziness didn't extend to the whole thing, and it all got more polished up and developed over time. It still keeps the "improvised piano part based off one riff" idea, though.

Art by Brian Griv at brigriv.tumblr.com

Respit

To separate the big glitched-up waves from the final battle and rest up ahead, I wanted to stick something right in the middle just to give the listener a break. And, in some games I've played, there's a sort of resting area before the final boss, or a small break to prepare yourself before the last battle. This is what spawned Respit, the idea of a light and airy, calming piece. I was also pretty reminded of Kingdom Heart's usage of the "resting area" trope, which was a small chamber with several large crystals around. So, I went with the idea of a large, reflective area, someplace in the dream bubbles perhaps, where the heroes could rest and reflect.

This is another one of those tracks, too, that tried to predict a future event but was overtaken as time went on. The concept of the dream bubbles and the long voyage John took fit my original idea well enough, though, so that's what the piece molded itself into being.

Art by K at MasterKFox.tumblr.com

Negastrike

And now that everyone is prepared...it's time for the final fight.

This track, like the album, was perhaps a bit ambitious to try, a final boss fight with the biggest baddest dudes around, but I made it anyway. It pulls from Showtime, the original strife music, and also (ironically enough) from an idea I had when I was around 11 and wanted to make something spooky for Halloween. Let me tell you, it worked way better in this context than my original plan.

So seeing as this is the final boss fight, there wasn't really any reason to hold back while adding in instruments and layers. To this day, it's definitely the largest piece I've made in instrumentation, also the first to make me render everything out into separate files because my computer just couldn't handle it. Suffice to say, it's a pretty large piece, for a pretty large fight. There's a rather intentional and large nod to the aesthetic in *Rex Duodecim Angelus* by Malcolm Brown as well, since his piece was about the trolls' final fight with the Black King at the end of their session.

And at the end, there's a little victory music to pass through and segue into the last piece..

Mother

Way back, before I was even on the team and before I thought I even belonged on the team, I recorded a simple piano refrain. First thing I'd ever recorded, too, and I want to say it was done a few months after Homestuck had started. In my head, it fit in as a possible refrain for one of the characters, and the idea always stuck in my head that it could also work as a piece for the very ending of Homestuck, a sort of "all is well" refrain. After two years, I was finally able to make something like what I was thinking and put it in the right context.

Like the Homestuck Anthem, I went with using the four kids' instruments: piano, strings, drums/percussion, and bass, and stuck mainly with those. I also got some help by Mr. Lake of Awesome Beats Inc. who was way better at beats than I am, and he made it way better too. Big props to him.

With the new universe and many new character being explored, this piece might not work for "the end of Homestuck" anymore, but if anything, I see it as a sort of moving forward. John's journey on that one day, when he turned 13, matured both him and his friends. Like many others, he took the hero's journey, and grew as a result of it, and so this piece could very well fit him leaving his universe and going on to the next, bringing his experiences and knowledge with him, just as well as it could fit him moving past Sburb to whatever adventures lie ahead.

Another Chance

BONUS TRACK TIME! But since I didn't make this one, I'm not going to talk over it, I'm going to turn this over to Eston for his commentary. So here's Eston:

- Like most of this album, it was made over a year before release
- Sound sources include the "stab" sound from Walk-Stab-Walk and a burnt-out lightbulb
- Jit is an amazingly talented musician and a spectacular pianist, but he will never admit it nor accept it
- I spent longer writing and producing this piece than any other finished song I've worked on (~5 months)
- I took cues from Jit's style of orchestral instruments accompanying synths reminiscent of chiptunes, and though it is largely a re-imagining of Walk-Stab-Walk, I included subtle tips of the hat to his other early works
- Yes good that sounded sufficiently pretentious

Eston is the coolest of bros and makes sick music. But in a good way, not like sick with the flu or whatever. If you want to check out more of his stuff, and you should, you can visit his blog at siasinsilence.tumblr.com.

Under the Hat

Also known as Trollcops, this is a rather old idea that I once had for a Dad strife theme. I mean, all the kids had fight music, why not him? Anyway, between a chiptune variant I started and Trollcops, it's had a bit of a journey, but when it turned out alright on piano too, I didn't see any reason not to record a few takes.

Let me just put this out here, I'm not a jazz pianist at all, nor is this really jazz. Not very complicated jazz, at any rate. I know there's way better jazz playing out there, and probably quite a few pianists that'll be wondering why some pianist douchebag thinks he can play jazz, well rest assured, I'm not claiming I'm amazing at it at all.

Of course, not being able to play something magnificently and to the best form of the genre didn't really stop me from playing around with this piece. So I did.

I also think it would fit in during the first Intermission, with all the under-the-hat chicanery and stabbings that went on.

Mother (Piano)

This is the original recording that Mother came from, made years back when I thought the only way to avoid clipping while recording was to play the softest I possibly could. I stressed out for ages to get it sounding just right, too, and after two years or however long it's been, it's still not perfect but it's pretty close.

If you've been reading this along with the tracks, then this means you've reached the end. You can either put the entire album on repeat and let it loop back to the beginning, or you can stop it here if you'd like. But in any case this means you're done reading this pdf for now, so I'll say goodbye now.

And of course, thanks for listening to this album, and supporting both me and the comic in whatever way you have.

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