

Herbert Weixelbaum Interview: Gameboy Music Club Curator and Musician

In May 2005 I interviewed Herbert Weixelbaum via email. The interview was part of a larger research project on Chiptune for my Masters Degree.

At this time Chiptune was only just emerging as a genre and there was scant information and knowledge on the subject.

I set out to interview some of the key players, research the scene and produce an original Gameboy set at Bristol Cube based on my findings.



1) How did the club form, and what was it that interested you in forming the club and using the Gameboy as a musical instrument?

I once was playing around with Nanoloop 1.1, and gave the Gameboy to a young girl (12 years or so), who was watching me. And – to my surprise what she did sounded rather good. I told Wolfgang about this, and he thought it might be a good idea, to use the Gameboy for musical education. This proved very soon impossible (indifference of kids and parents, short supply of

the necessary Gameboy programs ...I'm interested in the raw and dirty sound of the Gameboy, in it's limitations, and in the surprising fact, that out of this little children's toy comes a massive sound, if you just amplify it properly.

2) What Gameboy software do you and other club members commonly use in live performance and why?

I use LSDJ, because for me it's the best Gameboy music program.

3) Do you find Gameboy musicians interesting to watch? to what extent do you use accompanying visuals in Gameboy Music Club Shows and why?

I think, watching Gameboy musicians is at least more interesting than watching a laptop performance. Sometimes you wonder, if these people are really making music, or just reading their emails. Anyway - yes, sometimes there are visuals. This seems to be common in a lot of electronic music performances, maybe due to the fact, that the performance itself is often not very thrilling (being more of a shoegazer kind, than a rockband performance). Visuals offer something for the eye.

4) What do you think of Nintendo's licensing laws, and to what extent do you feel there policies have effected amateur musicians and people on the demo scene?

I heard, that Johan Kotlinski, the programmer of LSDJ (LSDJ being an unlicensed program), had some problems with Nintendo, but I don't know, if this story is true. What I know is, that Nintendo sued some of the firms, which produced and sold backup equipment (to be fair, I think it's realistic to assume, that this backup equipment was used for illegal copies of games in most cases). So, the flash cartridges for the old Gameboys were and are in short supply.

5) What do you think of Gameboy Advance and its recent transformations, compared to making music with the classic monochrome Gameboy?

The SP is somewhat practical at home, when you "program" your music, because of the lit screen, and the rechargeable battery pack. But I would never use it in a concert or for recording. The original Gameboy (classic) has the best sound. The modified colour sounds second best.

6) What do you think of mainstream computer programs such as Pro Tools, Logic, Cubase ect?

You need some of these programs, if you want to record your music on the computer. I guess, you're thinking about Malcolm McLaren and his infamous 8-bit punk. It is true, that I find polished computer music boring, too. But it is also true that you can make interesting music with a computer (if you can make music at all).

7) Do you think that due to progressions in new technology that old school Gameboy's will be left behind?

Making music (even electronic music) is not only about new technology, but about rhythm, melodies, harmonies and sound. I mean, after some hundred years you still play Amatis, Stradivaris and Guarneris, because they sound better than, say, a Yamaha Silent Violin (which is new technology, so to say).

It is clear, that the old Gameboys are not produced anymore, you can get them only second hand. And it's also clear that they won't function for eternity. And I also notice, that some of the Gameboy musicians don't care so much about the sound, or about the retro charm of the old Gameboys. But I also know, that a lot of musicians care. And as long, as this is the case, there will be a place for the old Gameboys.