

Report on travel undertaken with assistance from the Santander Travel Award 2017-2018

Ludo2018: 7th European Conference on Video Game Music and Sound (HMT Leipzig, Germany)

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I was fortunate enough to win the Santander Travel Award to be able to attend the 7th European Conference on Video Game Music and Sound. The conference was organised by the Ludomusicology Research Group (an inter-university research organisation dedicated to the study of game music) and was held at HMT Leipzig, Germany, from 13 April to 15 April 2018.

As a relatively recent field of study, many existing and prospective academics gather at these conferences to share their findings and yet-to-be-published papers on video game music and issues surrounding video game music both within and outside of video game contexts. Due to ludomusicology (musicological research in video game music) being a budding academic field and hence having rather limited published literature in comparison to other more established fields of music, this was a rare and wonderful opportunity afforded to me by the Santander Travel Award which allowed me to gain invaluable insight on current research as well as interact with and hear the opinions of informed, leading individuals in the field.

Due to bad weather leading up to flight cancellations, I was only able to attend the third day of the conference. Being trapped at the airport with one of the conference organisers and some of the speakers was an interesting experience of its own, but not the point of this report. Despite only managing to attend a fraction of the conference, it was nevertheless a most valuable experience. Issues ranging from aesthetics, compositional approaches, immersion, and user-generated content to potential commercial exploitation of gamer fan-bases, and issues in ethics and lack of appropriate cultural representation in video games were of prime discussion amidst a buzzing community of people brought together from all over the world by a common interest in the research of video game music.



A few speakers also shared about their ongoing projects and new technologies that use video game music outside conventional video game contexts, introducing new directions video game music can take. One talk that I thought was of notable mention was about the use of virtual reality (VR) to create immersive musical experiences of the past and how the technology of VR gaming might be used to reconstruct historic performances and spaces, offering new experiential perspectives on early music and its performance, and allowing audiences to experience ephemeral elements of music performance that might otherwise be lost. The use of VR technology, together with ludomusicological expertise (amongst other interdisciplinary knowledge), was showcased as an education-related means to provide a fresh and more immersive view of history, highlighting the potential of video game music beyond simply entertainment. I felt that this was truly the sort of knowledge and vision that I would never have been able to observe through self-study and independent research, and that this kind of insight would only be accessible at such events and opportunities.

A group of us were also very kindly given a tour of the university's musicology department's ludomusicological research resources in the university library. I found myself in a room full of video games – there is no other way to go around it. Shelves and shelves of game titles in different languages for different consoles, ranging from vintage or retro games to recent releases, as well as computer screens and safeguarded drawers containing both older and newer consoles for the respective cartridges. It was most definitely an *otaku's* paradise and potentially a research assistant's agonising organisational nightmare (but I should clarify that the department took extremely good care to avoid such a predicament – i.e. they appeared immaculately organised).

It was certainly an encouraging wake-up call; to know that a renowned university with such an established music department was willing to invest so much time and effort in ludomusicological research (imagine hours of playing through the games to actually know the games themselves followed by hours more replaying them for observational purposes, and then possibly having to do that all over again for games in different languages catered to different audiences) only reaffirmed the growing significance and esteem that ludomusicology possessed. It was heartening to stand witness and gain an insider's point of view of how the field of ludomusicology continued to solidify a place of its own in academia.



In sum, without the Santander Travel Award, I would not have been able to attend the conference and gain so much knowledge and insight from such a wonderful opportunity. I got to know not just an avenue for research but also a community that earnestly looked toward learning and discovering new perspectives, understanding and challenging problematic issues that arise from current research assumptions, and realising new and rich potentials in a field that had only begun to be explored. The insight gained from listening to other people presenting their research and engaging in discussions with others at the conference directly aided my studies and informed the decisions I made as I conducted my own research. My only regret was having to miss the first two days of the conference and only being able to attend the third and last day of the event; if I had learnt this much in one day, I can only imagine how much more I would have been able to learn!

As one of the few (if not only) events in Europe that opened up intellectual debate and new horizons to a relatively new yet exciting field, the conference was an invaluable experience that provided access to all sorts of different directions and perspectives that I would not have been able to obtain anywhere else. I highly encourage anyone who wishes to undertake further study in ludomusicology to apply for the award in the future.