

Before talking about Sins of Hyrule, your latest album, I would like to ask you about your link with the Zelda series. When and how did you discover it?

I was about 4 years old when I started playing A Link to the Past – I did not own it, but I would borrow it from my cousin every two weeks or so. It wasn't until Ocarina of Time that I was more aware of what the series was and immediately fell in love with it. My dad used to play it with me and my brother all the time, so I have very fond memories of it.

Since, you've played every single game of the saga. Is it the only fictional creation that you've been following with so much steadiness, or are there others as important to you?

This is for sure the series I am most devoted to, but I also feel similarly towards Star Ocean - I've played all its installments and feel a deep connection with the music and lore.

Outside of gaming, I can say I have a bit of an obsession with any films by Christopher Nolan.

If you had to keep only one Zelda game on home gaming systems and one on portable gaming systems, which would they be?

I would pick Breath of the Wild and A Link Between Worlds, one for the length and one the story.

When we have a look at your discography, Zelda series takes on an important role, we could even say obsession. Do you think you could ever one day get tired of those musical themes?

I've probably arranged Zelda's Lullaby about 20 times in my life, so I don't think I'll get tired of those melodies for a while. The beauty of music arranging and remixing is that there's no limit to the number of interpretations you can come up with. I have no plans to stop arranging Zelda music anytime soon.

When did you start to work on Sins of Hyrule? You have published "NieR: Glory to Mankind" early September and we're now early December. I find it hard to imagine that at that time Sins of Hyrule wasn't already in progress.

The idea of my next Zelda album was conceived around this past summer, and it would have come out months before, but NieR: Automata happened. "Sins of Hyrule" was a very different album concept-wise, but it ended up having the same musical direction. "Ganon's Requiem" was the first new track that I worked on for this album, but it wasn't until I was done with the production of "NieR: Glory to Mankind" that I resumed with Sins of Hyrule. I would say the process took about 3 months.

What was the purpose of this album? What motivated the production of Sins of Hyrule rather than another project?

I was looking for my next big project, and it had to be a Zelda album; the last time I had released one was "Time Once Lost" back in 2015, so both my fans and I wanted to hear more of these arrangements. The album went through several iterations before it

became what it was. My favorite part of the process was coming up with the title of the album and the track list first, so I could get the general picture of the story I want to convey.

No two projects are the same; “NieR: Glory to Mankind” had been a fantastic experience, working in a very challenging style for me, so naturally I wanted my next album to be very stylistically different from that. After working non-stop for a couple of months on this emotional hybrid pop-orchestral repertoire, I felt the need of working on something heavier sounding, and dark.

Given that I adore all the music from the Zelda series, it was hard for me to pick one game, or one concept to work on. Instead, I wanted to release something that would contain more thematic material from across the series, including the recent release Breath of the Wild, which had a big impact on my life. This made me think about the whole Hyrule Historia and its mysterious lore that has yet to be revealed. I spent a long time going through the book and its timelines, re-discovering all the details that I had missed before, and this made me very excited; I had finally found my inspiration.

The dark themes of the series are a big part of Sins of Hyrule. We already owe you Time Once Lost, an album dedicated to Majora’s Mask. Are the darkest sides of the saga the ones motivating you the most?

It is easier for me to find a home in the obscure and emotional themes from these games. As a composer, it is hardship that brings the deepest inspiration out of you. But more so than dark sides in a game, I’m looking for side stories or other details that haven’t been explored as fully.

In Sins of Hyrule, some musical themes can evolve, disappear, come back and mix with others. The process is a lot more complex than just “Each track will be a cover of a famous theme”. How did you approach this album? Track by track? Like a whole evolving as one piece?

This whole album was conceived as a whole; I had all the tracks laid out in front of me, with a structure and a direction, before I wrote the first note. I had a very clear sound for the project in mind, and I could see the particular scenes playing in my head.

I wanted to take the liberty of exploring what’s beyond that which has been explicitly given to us in the games, without deviating from the lore. I wanted to be able to hear all those pieces of music that would have accompanied the missing scenes from certain elements in the game. So, I took on the task of writing as much of original work as I would need to achieve this.

From start to finish, Sins of Hyrule is very consistent in its themes and melody; both epic and dramatic. Occasionally some elements stand out: an electric guitar here, some electro notes there, etc. How did you pick the sounds you wanted in the album, and those you didn’t?

I wanted to make a bold statement with Sins of Hyrule, so that the sound of every track would “hit you in the face”. Electronic elements as well as rock influence alongside the heavy orchestral instrumentation gave me different ways to achieve this loudness. The process of picking which parts would benefit from this was based on the character of each song. Hylia would often get an ethereal sound complimented by choir, whereas Ganondorf had the guitar sound more present.

Vocals and the chorus have an important place in Sins of Hyrule. Some major themes are introduced vocally before accompanied by orchestra. I believe this is the first time that you've worked with a real chorus on a personal project; an element I feel freed you in this composition. Is this the case?

I've worked with choral ensembles even before college, so it's like second nature to me. The logistics of recording one are pretty complex and expensive, so I hadn't chosen to include an ensemble for these projects until now. Ever since working on Theophany's Time's End II, I was able to figure out a much better process for recording bigger ensembles, and I used that to my advantage here. Nevertheless, the lack of this opportunity never limited how I wrote my arrangements.

Are there still some limits in what you can do in the tracks you would like to explore? For example: I was under the impression that the brass section was sometimes a little bit covered by the orchestra.

I am constantly improving my production methods with each project, and it can take a while for things to sound how I imagine they could sound. I always try to use my tools to their strengths, allowing my arrangements to grow naturally while pushing the boundaries of what my software can do.

During a recording session, is there still some space for improvisations or last-minute changes?

Pieces can change at any point, especially with live performers. Performers sometimes have interesting ideas in how their parts could change to improve the impact of the arrangement, and I respect their input greatly. There's experimentation that happens back and forth during sessions.

Sins of Hyrule was an opportunity for you to solidify some collaborations, as well as an opportunity to pursue previous ones. Can you tell us more about this?

A big part of the concept I had in mind for this album was to have more guest artists than in the past. I've had all the people in mind for a while, and this was the perfect chance to do it. Having worked with Laura Intravia on other projects, it was nice to feature her in the opening piece. My work with Julie Elven followed our previous collaboration "Battle for Spira" which proved very successful and we both wanted to work together again.

Your album is published under the "Materia Collective" label. When does your work stop, and when is theirs starting?

Materia Collective is instrumental in allowing me to put out albums of licensed game music arrangements. I consult them while working on a project to ensure that it won't have any problems with licensing, and then once the music is finished, they go to work providing distribution to stores, marketing, and making sure that fans can get their hands on merchandise.

Materia Collective has already published other albums related to Zelda (Octorock, Hero of Time, Time's End etc.). Has their expertise been useful for you?

Each Zelda project from Materia has been very different logistically and so had a different approach. However, they are always very willing to explore new directions and procedures. I always trust that they will take the best care of me and the successes of their projects attest to the strength of their efforts.

I imagine that the production of an album must be an adventure full of anecdotes. Are there some that you would like to share?

One of my favorite moments was when “Ganon’s Requiem” came to be. At first, it was an extension of a track I had split, but it became its own thing in the end. I had scheduled a choir recording session for a Saturday, and that Friday night I still hadn’t written a note. Luckily, inspiration found me in time and I created a track from beginning to end, including the choral parts, a few hours before the session. This was only possible thanks to the expertise of my team.

Can we anticipate seeing you evolve to other styles in the future; such as by moving towards more minimalism or maybe exotic sounds?

Every album I write has been different stylistically, and it will continue to be the case. The unchanged factor will be my signature attention to detail. I hope people will be able to always identify my work regardless of the genre.

I have a specific interest in producing my next album in the style of Symphonic Metal, so please look forward to it.

To conclude this interview, I have three last questions for you. What are your three favorites tracks from the saga?

Zelda’s Lullaby, Gerudo Valley, and Song of Healing. In that order.

In the future, what are the musical themes from Zelda games that you would like to work on?

Ballad of the Windfish is up there. The whole Ocarina of Time Soundtrack, but not yet. Great Sea from Wind Waker, and Lorule Castle, among many others.

I think most of our readers have discovered you on the Internet or probably through recommendations. Are there creators, more or less popular, that you would like to highlight?

Theophany is my biggest recommendation to anyone, but he is quite popular already. And Reven, a growing artists who will greatly surprise you with her imaginative and otherworldly arrangements if you let her.

Thank you very much, Rozen, for your time and your answers. We wish you the best for your next projects.