

NEOSonicFest: Contemporary Youth Orchestra to team up with Neoglyphic Entertainment

by Mike Telin



On Saturday, March 12 at 7:00 pm in Cleveland State University's Waetjen Auditorium, Liza Grossman's Contemporary Youth Orchestra will team up with Neoglyphic Entertainment to present "POWER UP, music from video games. The program will include tunes from *Super Mario Brothers*, *Angry Birds*, *Final Fantasy*, *World of Warcraft*, *Zelda*, *Pokemon*, and *Halo*, and music from the upcoming video game *Sunborn Rising*. The concert, presented as part of NEOSonicFest, is the tenth edition of CYO's annual Music and its Industry series.

In the past, the series has focused on Broadway music, movie scoring, and songwriting. This year, the program will feature past and future video game music. "Video games are filled with fantasy and require logic, memory, and quick reaction from both mind and body to fulfill goals," CYO founder and artistic director Liza Grossman said during an interview. "The music gives the experience more depth and really creates the atmosphere of each game. It can be light and fun, like *Mario Brothers*, or deep and foreboding, like *Final Fantasy*."

Saturday's performance will also include the premiere of music from [Neoglyphic Entertainment](#)'s upcoming video game *Sunborn Rising*. "We recorded the three minute theme back in December," Grossman explained. "Of course there are musicians who record music for video games all of the time, but we are the first youth orchestra to do

it.” The performance on March 12 will include 25 minutes of selected music from the game. What’s exciting is that the audience will not only hear the music for the first time, but we’ll be projecting on a screen what’s happening during the game as the music is played.”

Grossman said that the Music and its Industry series is becoming the foundation for CYO because it provides its young musicians with life experiences in aspects of the music industry beyond the concert stage. “Instead of telling them what being in a recording session is like, or what composing music is like, they’ve had the opportunity to do all of those things themselves. They were in a real recording session with headphones and click tracks.”

Grossman pointed out that playing in a recording session is very different from playing in a rehearsal. “When you walk into a session, the fewer takes that are needed to get the recording, the more frequently you will be hired. I think the musicians understand that now.”

Neoglyphic Entertainment Co-founder and COO David Ramadge noted during a Skype conference call with composer Sean Beeson that *Sunborn Rising* started out as a novel. “During the writing of that story, we realized that a very rich, vibrant, and deep world was being created. The story is set on another planet with different creatures — it’s an immersive fantasy world.”

Ramadge said they soon began to think about creating other expressions of that fantasy world, some of which is visual art. “We then thought, why don’t we create a video game that would allow people to explore that world? Of course underlying all of those things is the music. That’s when we started working with Sean. In addition to the game, we’ll also be releasing a book with an original musical score so that people can read it while listening to Sean’s six hours of music.”

How did the Contemporary Youth Orchestra become involved with the project? “It’s an interesting story that began back in September,” Beeson said. “A friend of mine, Stefan Podell, is an arranger for CYO, and he sent me an email about their concert featuring video game music. He knew that I’m a video game composer — I’ve scored 50-plus games.”

At the same time he received Podell’s email, Beeson was in the thick of scoring the music for *Sunborn Rising*. Then the light bulb went on. “I thought, what if CYO were to premiere new music, for this new project, from this new company that was going to be releasing many of its products around the same time as this concert?”

Ramadge added that what made the prospect intriguing to the company is that the world of *Sunborn Rising* is aimed at young audiences. “The fact that CYO is a youth orchestra was really interesting to us. They haven’t read the book yet, but they will soon. Our hope is that the players will become our biggest fans, in addition to performing the music.”

Beeson said that the music from the game that will be performed on Saturday represents *Sunborn Rising*’s protagonists, antagonists, and its environments. “We’ve basically created a 25-minute suite from the six-hour score.”

Although the recording project was challenging at times, Ramadge and Beeson are very happy to have taken it on. “For us, it’s about the mission of what Liza and CYO are doing in terms of exposing and educating young people about the professional world of music,” Ramadge said. “Could we have hired a professional orchestra? Sure, but for us that would miss out on the underlying motivation. We’ve created a world for young people. We’re very big believers in storytelling, and in the power that the creative arts can have on society. That was a message that resonated very strongly back to us from Liza, so I think we were spiritually aligned as organizations.”

Click [here](#) to watch a video of CYO recording the main theme from *Sunborn Rising*.

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