

THE WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN GAMER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PRESENTS

SONGS OF THE
LIFESTREAM

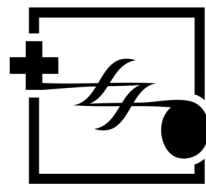
A VIDEO GAME MUSIC CONCERT



WITH PRE-CONCERT LECTURE BY DR. RICHARD ANATONE
AND SPECIAL GUEST DOUG PERRY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19 - 7:30PM ET

PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE - CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS



WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN

Gamer Symphony Orchestra

The Washington Metropolitan Gamer Symphony Orchestra (WMGSO) is a community orchestra and choir whose mission is to share and celebrate video game music with a wide audience, primarily by putting on affordable, accessible concerts in the D.C. area.

Game music weaves a complex melodic thread through the traditions, shared memories, values, and myths of an entire international and intergenerational culture. WMGSO showcases this music that largely escapes recognition in professional circles.

The result: classical music with a 21st-century twist, drawing non-gamers to the artistic merits of video game soundtracks and attracting new audiences to orchestral concert halls.

About Our Music Director



Jamin Morden attended Northwestern University, dual majoring in French Horn Performance and Music Education. After he completed a master's degree in French Horn Performance at Yale University, he moved to Maryland to teach instrumental music in Montgomery County Public Schools. Jamin is also involved with Symphony of the Potomac and the Maryland Band Directors' Band.

About Our Choir Director



Anthony Khong is an active musician, educator, and arts administrator and is native to the D.C. area. Prior to his work in community choirs, he served as a chorus teacher in Fairfax County. Anthony holds a master's in Arts Management from George Mason University, and a bachelor's in Music Education from James Madison University, where he studied voice and clarinet.

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WMGSO Welcomes Special Guest Doug Perry

Doug Perry is an internationally-renowned percussionist, composer, and educator. His technical skill and passion for performing new works transcends disciplines, making him a sought-after performer in the worlds of new music and video game scoring. Featured soloist performances include the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Norwalk Symphony Orchestra, and the Neue Eutiner Festspiele Orchestra.

Doug frequently records and produces music for video games and film; he was featured as a soloist in the scores to *Lara Croft and the Temple of Osiris* and Sid Meyer's *Civilization VI*, and can be heard in such titles as *Mortal Kombat 11*, *Celeste*, and *Guild Wars 2*.

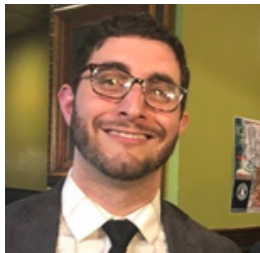
Currently music faculty at Western Connecticut State University, Doug teaches percussion and audio production, as well as classes on music streaming and video game music. Doug holds degrees from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Kansas, as well as an artist diploma from the Yale School of Music, where he was awarded the Horatio Parker Memorial Prize.



About Our Pre-Concert Lecturer, Professor Richard Anatone

Richard Anatone is a Professor of Music Theory and Coordinator of Applied Music Lessons at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Md., where he teaches courses in both the traditional and commercial music. He earned his master's and doctoral degree in piano performance with cognates in theory/composition from Ball State University.

His primary research endeavors surround video game music, particularly within role-playing games. He published a collection of essays titled *The Music of Nobuo Uematsu in the Final Fantasy Series* (Intellect, 2022) and his article "Leitmotivic Strategies in Nobuo Uematsu's Final Fantasy Soundtracks" will be published in *Music Theory Spectrum* in 2023. He is also the guest-editor of the special issue of the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* dedicated to the musical legacy of *Final Fantasy VII*, which will be published in 2023. He posts his conference and concert presentations as well as video game music performances on his website at <http://www.richardanatonemusic.com>.



Concert Program Available Online

To view the concert program on your phone, use the QR code on the right or go to www.wmgso.org/program.



START!

Slam Shuffle

Final Fantasy VI (1994)

Nobuo Uematsu
Arr. Ashleah Younker

This is Zozo—a wretched hive of scum and villainy. Everyone here is a liar, except for one character, who tells the player, “This place is dangerous.” Indeed, the rain-slicked, dark-even-in-daylight streets are extremely treacherous: Zozo is a rare example of a town in a Japanese role-playing game (JRPG) where random battles can occur. Between the many, many random encounters that bring up the battle music, you can listen to “Slam Shuffle,” the very fitting town theme for Zozo.

While watching a streamed playthrough of this game, the arranger immediately knew that the piece needed to be written for sax quartet. It already has a jazzy feel, the melody bops around a lot, and the bassline is simultaneously a growl and a slink. In this arrangement, the first iteration of the melody is fairly faithful, but later iterations play with the original material by adding and subtracting from it. The climax features the melody harmonized in all four voices, partially as a love letter to Yoko Kanno (especially for her music in the *Cowboy Bebop* anime). The piece winds down as the baritone sax gets a turn at the melody and ends with a farewell wave from each player.

“Slam Shuffle” is presented by Hojin Yoon and Anna Trejo on alto sax, Greg Danis on tenor sax, and Jacob Deaven on baritone sax.

Spyro Can't Sleep

Spyro the Dragon (1998)

Stewart Copeland
Arr. Thomas Ashcom

Spyro is a small, purple dragon tasked with saving his kingdom by finding all its scattered treasure and freeing his fellow dragons, who are frozen in crystal. With the protection of his dragonfly companion Sparx, Spyro must fight his way past a range of fanciful creatures. This piano arrangement toys with themes from two of the homeworlds within the dragon kingdom: Magic Crafters and Dream Weavers. The arrangement's title highlights how much tireless exploration Spyro must undergo through these two extremely dreamlike landscapes.

Thomas Ashcom presents his arrangement on solo piano.

Enter the Summerlands

Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch (2011)

Joe Hisaishi
Arr. Ben Ryer

Ni no Kuni, which very roughly translates to “another world,” tells the story of a young boy named Oliver who loses his mother in a tragic accident. After an encounter with a precocious fairy named Drippy, Oliver travels to another world, where he soon discovers that many of his friends and neighbors from back home all have counterparts in this new world. Oliver also discovers that many of the citizens

of this world seem to share a link with their counterparts, as the evil wizard Shadar is causing them to suffer ill effects of broken-heartedness. Together with Drippy and his other companions, Oliver sets out to confront Shadar and ultimately an even more powerful force foreshadowed in the game's subtitle.

The first major open area Oliver encounters in the parallel world is the Summerlands, the northern section of which contains rolling green hills and the quaint town of Ding Dong Dell. During Oliver's adventure, he encounters a friendly wyvern named Tengri, who allows Oliver and his party to ride on his back and quickly traverse the world. The first half of this arrangement consists of the theme heard while traversing this area on foot. The second half depicts the theme heard while riding on Tengri and is introduced by a solo trumpet mimicking Oliver's signal call to summon his wyvern ally.

Singing Hill

Ar Tonelico: Melody of Elemia (2006)

Akira Tsuchiya

Arr. Anne Marie Porter

In the story of *Ar Tonelico*, the power of singing can save the world! The *Ar Tonelico* game series depicts a world where Earth has become enveloped in a poisonous miasma, and the remaining humans survive by living in three enormous towers that stretch far above the toxic fog. The largest of the three towers is called *Ar Tonelico*. Among the humans living within the towers, certain individuals have the special ability to cast magic spells with their songs and sing to protect their companions during battle. In the end, the singers gather their power and clear the Earth of the toxic miasma forever.

Because singers act as the central characters of the story, the *Ar Tonelico* game series has a rich and beautiful choral soundtrack. The choral lyrics are written in two languages—Japanese and Hymmnos, a fictional language that the characters use when singing their spells.

“Singing Hill” is the opening choral symphony of the first game and serves as the flagship musical theme of the whole series. In this symphony, the singers cast a powerful magic spell of celebration and happiness. The lyrics of the song communicate the singers' desire to create a world where people can share their feelings with one another and coexist in peace and harmony.

WMGSO's choir is joined by Johnny Mullen on the shakers, Iain Kierzewski on the djembe, and Julius Verzosa on the tambourine.

The Sanctuary of Bad Dreams

Rayman 2: The Great Escape (1999)

Eric Chevalier, Daniel Masson

Arr. Thomas Ashcom

It's unclear why developers chose to make the humanoid protagonist of the Rayman series have no limbs, but it certainly adds up in the context of the pseudo-natural worlds he tackles throughout his series of games.

In this second installment, Rayman must save the peaceful fairy glade from being destroyed by Admiral Razorbeard and his brutish army of robot pirates. Much

like the timeless battle of nature versus machine, this arrangement is a tug-of-war between itself at two extremes, stirring together musical themes from across the original soundtrack. In order to stitch these individual shorts into a long form that befits a concerto, the arranger used many techniques and novel ideas from his own classical training and study.

The arranger would also like to thank our featured guest, Doug Perry, for giving this concerto the limbs it needs...it can't magically hold its body parts together like Rayman can.

PAUSE

Are you enjoying the show
so far?

- Yes.
- Of course!

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Level 2 – START!

Final Fantasy VII Symphonic Suite: Songs of the Lifestream

Nobuo Uematsu

Final Fantasy VII (1997)

Additional thematic material from Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children (2005)
and Aaron Copland's *Rodeo (1942)*

Arrangers: Chris Apple, Zeynep Dilli, Josh Haas & Jamin Morden

One story begins in 1987, when the Japanese video game company Square released what they then thought would be their last game: *Final Fantasy*. The game was a critical and commercial success, opening the way for more games in the series. The numbered main sequence games each have completely independent settings, characters, and stories, but some elements of gameplay and design have stayed throughout 35 years (and counting).

One very important such element is Nobuo Uematsu's music. He is the sole composer for the first nine main sequence games and has contributed to several of the rest; a few musical themes dating all the way back to 1987 are recurring in the soundtracks. With his particular genius in crafting melodies, his versatility, his

inspirations from and forays into many genres and eras of music, his ability to work around technical limitations, and his obvious joy in building lovely soundscapes out of little details, he has produced an immense, impressive body of work throughout his years in the worlds of *Final Fantasy* games.

One story begins in 1994. In April 1994, Square released their last *Final Fantasy* game for Nintendo: *Final Fantasy VI*. In December 1994, Sony released their new console: the PlayStation, with games on CDs instead of cartridges. While whole new vistas of graphics processing were thus available, what matters more to us is that composers were no longer limited to low-resolution, few-channel synthesizers. Although actual CD-quality music would lead to too-long loading times, the PlayStation still allowed more channels and better synthesizers, making the music more “photo-realistic” so to speak. You could now put in...say, a high-quality digitized chorus. In Latin. Creating what would ultimately become, arguably, the “O Fortuna” of video game music.

Final Fantasy VII was released for the PlayStation in 1997. Now, 25 years on, it appears in countless “most influential games” and “best of” lists and maybe even a few “most over-hyped” lists—but looking at the game in its context, there is nothing over-hyped about either its scope or its depth. More importantly for us, there is nothing over-hyped about the quality or power of its music. It is an extraordinary achievement: one moment impossibly tender, another, impossibly terrifying; one moment sneaky or mischievous, another, open, strong, and heart-uplifting; one moment quiet and clean, another, dazzling and stupefying—chock-full of absolute gems all, with astounding variety of color and tone.

WMGSO began plans for this symphonic suite, *Songs of the Lifestream*, several years ago, targeting a 2022 concert program to coincide with the 25th anniversary of *Final Fantasy VII*’s release. It is difficult to choose what to include in such a work, especially given the sheer volume of music in the original game and countless re-arrangements and re-releases and the 2020 Remake since. The arrangers sought a balance: some pieces simply have to be there to represent the game; some are hardly ever performed and deserve to be; we have an entirely new twist to one of the mainstays of the entire series; and of the numerous character themes, we present not the one for the putative main character, but the one for arguably the actual protagonist—Aerith, whose presence, choices, and fate are the emotional centerpoints of the *Final Fantasy VII* story.

The six movements of the suite form a story arc with a continuous, atmospheric flow. A number of the movements allude to or quote others, for thematic unity and a connective tissue stretching through. With the source material selection and musical approaches, the suite thus strives to represent *Final Fantasy VII*: a story of courage and sacrifice and choices, of searching through the past and standing by your friends, of loss and acceptance and rejection and triumph, of selfish injustice and its consequences, of justice and its seekers, of the little people whose lives are buffeted by powers way out of their control who stand up and fight nonetheless, of misunderstood history and rebuilt future, and of an angry planet ultimately defending itself with its own lifeforce, the Lifestream.

Opening - Bombing Mission

Final Fantasy VII starts in media res, in an opening cinematic that is hard to match even now in its iconic power—the pretty face of a beautiful, but pensive, flower girl, pulling back to a wide-angle shot of sky and a decidedly cyberpunk city, segueing into—what’s this, a train station...? Why am I fighting these guards? We all need to get on this train to go... somewhere...? To do what, again? Why? In between tutorial fights, the backstory comes in bits and pieces, but you remain uncertain of why or how the character you are controlling has thrown his lot in with this group of eco-activists and ended up on this train...and why does that guy have a machine gun for an arm?! The disorientation and vagueness in the backstory are deliberate. Welcome to playing as a main character with a fractured mind and personality, courtesy of an extremely bad case of PTSD.

After the sweet, focused opening in the high voices with the flower girl, the music swells as the camera pulls back to the full cityscape and crashes into a fanfare that accompanies the game title’s appearance. Once the train sequence begins, the music jumps disorientingly between ideas every eight measures, a few times not even completing the full eight. This arrangement takes the disorientation further, with the inclusion of a sequence where musical ideas are torn apart and distorted and mixed up—or occasionally, appear with that momentary clarity of some dreams...or nightmares. All throughout, the clacking of the train wheels rises and falls, the force driving us inexorably to the crashing end.

Hoedown de Chocobo

Arr. Josh Haas

featuring “Hoedown,” from *Rodeo*, by Aaron Copland

A chocobo is a (maybe) tame, (probably) yellow bird, the size of a (sort of) ostrich with the build of a (kind of) chicken. One of the recurring elements in the *Final Fantasy* series, chocobos were introduced as mounts (for fast, uninterrupted overworld travel) in 1988 in *Final Fantasy II*, which has the first appearance of a then-four-bar-only Chocobo theme. By *Final Fantasy IV*, the theme had been expanded to its full 16-bar form, and the genre-bending that was to be its signature had already begun. The chocobo theme (and chocobos) appear in every numbered main sequence game, and the variations on the musical theme include “Mambo de Chocobo,” “Waltz de Chocobo,” “Pulse de Chocobo,” “Swing de Chocobo,” “Ukulele de Chocobo” ...“Fiddle de Chocobo,” which is one that appears in *Final Fantasy VII*...

“Rodeo,” by American composer Aaron Copland (1900-1990) is a ballet featuring cowboys and cowgirls—the wild, fancy-free Western folk who usually ride horses, when they aren’t dancing. What if they rode chocobos instead?

Shinra Army on Maneuvers

Arr. Chris Apple

This movement combines three marches from the *Final Fantasy VII* soundtrack: “Rufus’ Welcoming Ceremony,” “Fortress of the Condor,” and “Shinra Army Wages a Full-Scale Attack.”

The “Shin-Ra” Electric Power Company is not only the premiere energy company on the planet, but in many places serves as virtually the only form of government. The company is tapping into a dangerous new form of energy, with the aim to bring a “new way” of life all over the globe. To keep activists and slum-dwellers in line, Shinra maintains a standing army for security.

The protagonists fight the Shinra Army and sometimes infiltrate it, pretending to be its soldiers. These soldiers excel at flashy parades, but are often hapless and unreliable on the battlefield. At times, to maintain their disguises, Cloud and his friends partake in army ceremonies, such as one to welcome the chairman, Rufus, to a port city. These ceremonies of course feature appropriately pompous marches, with very colorful instrumentation to reflect the army’s showmanship. Frequent comedic effects paint a picture of a lumbering, confused army that’s barely holding itself together.

The mood is more serious for “Fortress of the Condor,” the background music for a tower-defense mini-game where the player attempts to defend Fort Condor from Shinra Army forces. It gets even heavier with the third march, “...Full-Scale Attack,” and takes a somber turn with the arrival of the theme of the Shinra Company itself and the theme of its Mako reactors that are sapping and strangling the planet’s life force. This disturbing ending serves as a reminder that, though these troops may be clueless and amusing, they are still the armies of darkness and will go on to do terrible, terrible things...

Aerith’s Theme

Arr. Jamin Morden
Lyrics by Zeynep Dilli

...but standing against them, and against the true antagonist (who hates Shinra just as much, for good reasons), is the last Ancient.

The emotional and narrative context of “Aerith’s Theme” is inseparable from its impact as a piece of music. Even after 25 years, we would hate to spoil anything, so while we will attempt to avoid spoilers here, discerning readers will probably be able to put two and two together.

The arrangement is organized into three distinct sections. The first is based on “Aerith’s Theme” as heard when we first meet her. The music is gentle, a little ethereal, and mysterious, not unlike Aerith herself—though it’s worth remembering that she has a great deal more personality than just “healer gal.” The overall feel occasionally expands into louder, more triumphant sections, but generally speaking, reflects the quiet mystery of the girl we just met.

The second section is based on the actual track “Aerith’s Theme,” which may be one of the most powerful pieces of video game music ever composed due to its place in the overarching narrative. Suffice to say, its context is tragic. The original PlayStation version, through creative orchestration and use of synths, elicits both the beauty of the introductory theme as well as a raw, sharp grief. The arrangement features moments of other themes and motifs, symbolizing the other people impacted by the tragedy.

The final section is inspired by the Adagietto from Gustav Mahler’s 5th Symphony. Delicate harp arpeggios underscore a quiet, contemplative version punctuated at times by short, anguished outbursts from the strings. Woodwind soloists carry the tune, holding onto each motif as long as possible, unwilling to let go. There is one final, desperate plea from the winds and strings, before section by section, person by person, the music settles at last into acceptance.

This theme represents the first time this arranger (who played *Final Fantasy VII* at a very young age) was compelled to complete a game solely to see justice done. He felt he had to do something, and luckily, the player is given the opportunity to do so at the very end of the game. Even more luckily, here in this suite we will get the chance right away.

One-Winged Angel

Arr. Zeynep Dilli
Lyrics: Anonymous, from Carmina Burana;
additional lyrics by Tetsuya Nomura/Taro Yamashita

For all that “One-Winged Angel” is associated with Sephiroth, our antagonist, it is not the actual character theme for Sephiroth. Motifs from that theme, “Those Chosen by the Planet,” do however appear in “One-Winged Angel,” the final boss battle theme of *Final Fantasy VII*. “One-Winged Angel” describes the “Safer Sephiroth” form, one of his forms during the final battle. As to the piece itself, there is simply no brief way to describe its sheer iconic stature, so we will not try.

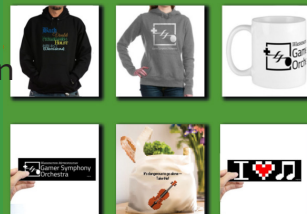
For “One-Winged Angel,” Uematsu cites Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971, particularly *The Rite of Spring*, 1913) and Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970, particularly “Purple Haze,” 1967) as influences. The *Rite of Spring* inspiration is immediately clear upon hearing the second section of that work, “The Auguries of Spring,” with its characteristic soundscape defined by “the augur chord” that Stravinsky loved very much: a major triad with a ninth dominant on top. The Hendrix inspiration is likewise clear in the opening chords and the feel of some of the phrases, which even with the initial, fully acoustic/symphonic orchestration, openly yearns for an electric guitar. To compose especially the opening of “Angel,” Uematsu used a jigsaw-puzzle method: He composed numerous eight-bar phrases and stitched them into an order that sounded good.

Final Fantasy VII was the first *Final Fantasy* game to have direct prequels and sequels—same world, related or same characters—including a 2005 animated movie, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, set two years after the events of the main game and dealing with the survivor’s guilt of the main character, Cloud. The movie

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features a final battle between Cloud and a returning Sephiroth, accompanied by a reworking of “One-Winged Angel.” In addition to new lyrics and completely new musical material in a middle sequence, the entire character of the piece has changed: Uematsu, who at the time played with his hard rock band Black Mages, has let his inner prog-rock musician fully come out to play with the addition of a keyboard, drum kit, and electric guitar and bass to the orchestration. As he himself considers this the definitive version of “One-Winged Angel,” so do we (but for the older material, we have retained the original lyrics, since they feel more iconic).

The arrangement follows the exact structure of Advent’s “One-Winged Angel” and makes heavy use of the same harmonic motifs—ninth dissonances and tritones. The orchestration and instrumentation have some additional touches, such as more call-and-response in the first choral part; the full brass section as well as some woodwinds being deployed against the chorus and the rock band in the middle hard-rock section; furtive, very brief phrases contributing to the very gradual buildup in the coda; and one additional measure stretching the tension just that much more before the final explosive end.

Finale: Main Theme and The Anthem

*Arr. Jamin Morden
Lyrics by Zeynep Dilli*

Following the calamity of “One-Winged Angel,” now each section of the orchestra asks: Is it over? They attempt to construct the beautiful, sweeping theme that is used as both an airship theme and the Main Theme of *Final Fantasy VII* itself. Strings play the very striking leap between the first and fourth notes of the melody, but skip the second and third. The horn and woodwind solos likewise manage to play only parts, and even with the help of the harp, it still isn’t quite right. The string quintet is the first to figure it out, playing a complete, if rather sparse, version of the main tune. Their music is carried on in the choir, picking up almost everyone except the brass, who, like the strings before them, manage to play the melody, but in the wrong key. It is only after a brief period of murkiness, and a little help from a friend, that the orchestra and choir are finally able to present the main theme in full glory.

What follows is a celebration of *Final Fantasy VII* as an individual game, as well as the Final Fantasy series as a whole, with themes from the game interwoven between statements of the Main Theme of *Final Fantasy*, the series (known to WMGSO veterans as “The Anthem”). Thematic material is tossed between sections, before finally bursting in a glorious callback to the fanfare from “Opening: Bombing Mission” overlaying The Anthem, bringing the symphonic suite full circle to end peacefully, confirming finally that yes, good has triumphed over evil.

Divinity

Arr. C. Apple & Zeynep Dilli

Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children (2005)

It’s a boss battle, you’re in trouble, but hey! You have Materia! You can summon... let’s say Bahamut...and Cid’s your uncle, all enemies are taken care of and you can retreat to 7th Heaven for a nightcap—

Wait.

They have the Materia? Well, you shouldn’t have left them lying unguarded in an unlocked chest in some ruined church—

They summoned Bahamut?

And let it loose on the entire civilian population of your city?

...whoops.

But all is not yet lost. You can still count on your limit breaks...and a little help from your friends. *All* your friends.

*The Legend of Zelda, Myst, Final Fantasy,
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*Mega Man 3, Starcraft II, Chrono Trigger,
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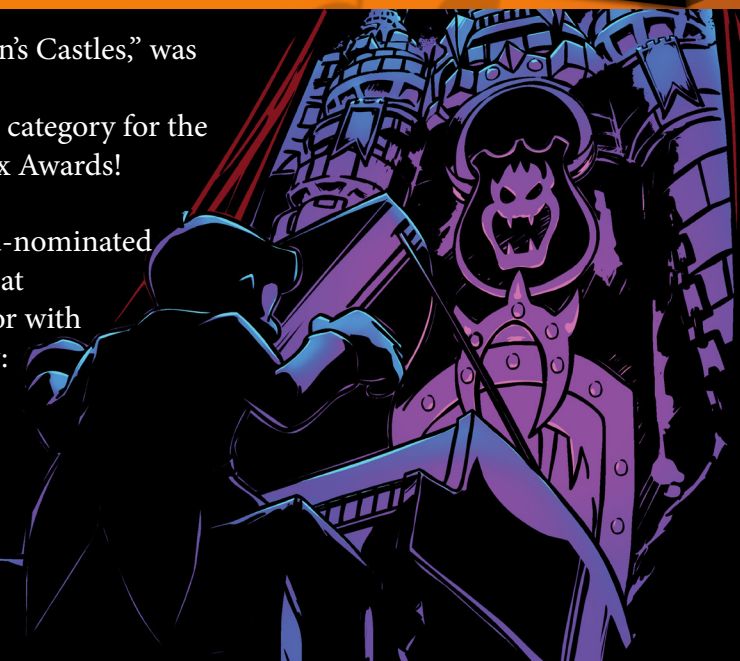
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bit.ly/WMCastles or with
the QR code below:



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT! WANT TO STAY INVOLVED?

WE'RE COLLECTING DONATIONS!

More drop-off dates will
be announced soon!

for more information please visit
<https://tinyurl.com/wmgsofundrive>

SOFT GOODS

PACK IN 10-GALLON
TRASH BAGS

HARD GOODS & BOOKS

PACK TIGHTLY IN BOXES

A screenshot of a Twitch stream. The video player shows a blurred scene with the text "Stream starting soon" overlaid. Below the player, the stream title is "WMGSO Presents: Hylia Hymns" with "Music - 44 views". The channel name "WMGSO" is visible, along with "last live 3 days ago". There are icons for "Manage Your Sub" and "Gift a Sub".

Stream starting soon

WMGSO Presents: Hylia Hymns
Music - 44 views

WMGSO
last live 3 days ago

Hang out with us during our
gaming streams on twitch!
twitch.tv/wmgso



Keep an eye out for our Spring 2023 album campaign!



THE WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN
GAMER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA