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Minibosses -- This Song Is for All the Geeks Out There

Posted 03/09/2010 at 12:10:35pm | by Chris Barylick

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GameWeek

Ever wanted to play Street Fighter on a guitar?
Nintendo-music masters the Minibosses share the secrets to their success.



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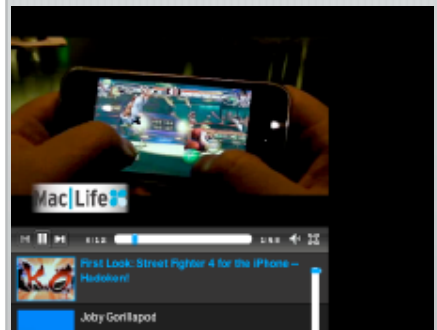
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Case Study: [The Minibosses](#)

Occupation: Rock band specializing in remixed Nintendo music

Gear: Assorted Macs, iPod touch units running [Bebot](#), [Pro Tools](#), [Tablature](#), and NES emulators like [NESticle](#) and [iNES](#).



Friends, rockers, geeks: The Minibosses.

Take a great thing from your youth and run with it. This could be the motto of the Minibosses, a Phoenix-based rock band that for almost 10 years has taken original Nintendo videogame songs and strung them together with incredibly energetic riffs and long medleys in a standard four piece rock format (consisting of two guitars, bass and drums) to become one of the most popular touring acts for any geek event.

The band, which consists of Aaron Burke (guitar), Ben Baraldi (guitar), Robin Vining (bass), and Matt Wood (percussion), originally began back in Northampton, Massachusetts, as the Jenova Project, which toyed with the idea of throwing old Nintendo theme songs into the middle of other songs for the fun of it. When the Jenova Project broke up at the end of the '90s and the Minibosses formed in 2000, the group had found its niche.

Getting to the Good Stuff

It's one thing to love and adore the Nintendo music you grew up with. It's another thing to get direct access to that music in order to learn how to play it with different instruments. This is where a series of free Nintendo Entertainment System emulators such as NESTicle and iNES first came in. "Those are great because with most of them you can isolate the parts and only listen to the specific stuff you need to figure out," says Burke.



This process became even easier as media players like Winamp and iTunes allowed for Nintendo Sound Files to be loaded in. Third-party extensions like Slow Me Down allow the band to slow down the tempo in order to take the songs apart and reassemble them as needed.

Enter the Mac



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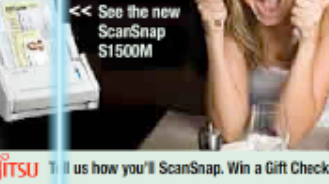
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Before any kind of CD release, or even a live performance, editing and mixing becomes crucial. "We use a lot of stuff but most of the studios we deal with use Macs for hardware, and as far as software goes, it's usually Pro Tools or some other variant thereof," says Burke. "A bunch of us have iPods as well that we want to incorporate into the performances. The Bebot app [a music synthesizer application for the iPhone and iPod touch] is amazing."

"I've used Bebot for some home recording and once or twice live...I tend to crank up all the settings but it depends on what's going on. It's VERY easy to integrate into recordings as a real instrument," says Burke.



Playing Nintendo, only with guitars instead of controllers.

Other chunks of shareware have made the process that much easier. A small Mac OS X and Windows application called Tablature creates virtual charts that tell musicians what position on a guitar string to play at what time became handy. Once installed, files can be sent back and forth, with Tablatures playing the music back to let the band know if they got it right.

"Not too long ago we recorded a secret song for an upcoming game on a Mac. That song was also edited and mastered on a Mac," continued Burke. "As for performances, we haven't used them in a musical capacity, but when we played a show in Mexico a few years ago, we used Macs to play movies of Nintendo games over us while we played."

Leveling Up Your Cred

For bands just starting out, the Minibosses advise putting the same energy into your relationships as you do your playing. "Make friends with the people who record you, if they're not your friends already," says Burke. "Learn from someone who already knows the stuff, that's the easiest way. Don't be afraid to experiment, but also seek out whatever help you can get, and have an open mind. You don't have to record/mix/do anything the same time over and over again."



Playing live is hard work--they could probably use a power-up mushroom right now.



Chuzzle

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And outside the studio, don't forget to use social media to extend your band's reach. The best method: Play the gig, record everything you can, drive home, and keep uploading those recordings until the sun comes up. "We do use social media like Facebook, MySpace, and [our own website](#). It's generated a lot of traffic over the years, especially when we first started," says Burke.

"We use them like most bands do, to let fans know when we're playing or have something new coming out. But we also like them for sharing photos or stories...those are things I think not enough bands spend that much time on."

Bringing It All Together

When it's all said and done, the payoff is impressive. At larger venues, the band will find itself playing in front of hundreds or thousands of bouncing, energetic video game fans, each reliving part of their childhood through the music.



As the set wears on, the energy increases, the fans associating the music with the struggle and the joy of the video games they grew up on. After the show, the fans wander up to the stage, have autographs signed, snag a CD or t-shirt and talk about the games and the music.

"If you get a chance to see us, come say hi," says Burke. "We're nice folks, and Robin will let you stroke his beard. Well, maybe."

For more information as well as MP3s of their most recent album, *Brass*, check out www.minibosses.com.

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