



Proteus

- Genre: Open World / Exploration
- Published: 30. January 2013
- Publisher: Curve Studios (PlayStation)
- Developer: Ed Key
- Sound: David Kanaga

This analysis will focus on the importance of sound to the game, its gameplay and its aesthetic. Lastly, it will compare two games and how each rely on sound and what is achieved through it.

Game Description

Proteus is an open-world game developed by Ed Key and David Kanaga for Microsoft Windows, Mac OS and Linux as well as PlayStation 3 and PlayStation Vita. The game was released in 2013. In Proteus, the player explores a procedurally generated 3d pixel art island in first person point-of-view and wanders through meadows, hills and forests, also meeting animals along the way. The game has no goal. The only thing the player can do is walk and sit down. The core of Proteus lies in music and sounds.

Gameplay example:

[wqyzFlt5i6s?.swf](#)

Sound Analysis

What purpose does the sound have?

Proteus is a game without a specific goal in that it is a pure exploration game in which atmosphere, mainly created by sound, plays the crucial role. As the visuals are held in simple pixel art, sound attains all the more emphasis. It is the main factor that keeps the player motivated.

Firstly, there are different background sounds which create the basic atmosphere. These background sounds change in relation to time and location of the player. Secondly, there are sounds which occur as soon as the player gets near to a certain object. Sound can also be triggered as certain objects comes into the camera's view. Further, it is influenced by the player's movement.

The basic atmosphere of the game is given by the current background music but the player can enhance this particular mood by navigating through the game world and thereby activating plenty of unique and atmospheric sounds. Every object of the world has a distinct musical signature and will react to the player's position and movements on the island. This way, the player has an impact on the musical elements of the game. The world of Proteus could be described as a piece of music and the player's movements through it a live mixing system.

Relationship between actions and sound

Background Sound

Each of the four seasons has its own background music which can further be divided into day and night sound. Thus, there are altogether eight different background songs. Additionally, there are also short pieces for sunrises and sunsets. The background music further depends on the altitude of the player's position: if he is up on a hill or down in a valley, for example, the music will change. The player can therefore interact with the background sound and influence it.

Objects

There are plenty of interactive objects which trigger sound. Some animals are activated as the player gets near them. However, they run away but the player may pursue them, if he likes, and trigger further sounds. Others are static and activated each time the player navigates close to them. Even seemingly environmental objects like the sun may trigger a sound when they come within view.

Pursuing an animal:

[t1sHAdxAgfw?.swf](#)

Interacting with static objects:

[02IbOghkls0?.swf](#)

Movement

The player can affect the sound also by changing his speed sliding down a hill. As the player moves faster, a sound emerges to emphasize his speed of motion.

Narration & Dramaturgy

Narrative Metatopics

The concept of Proteus is the experience between player and environment. Therefore, narrative metatopics are severely featured in the game. As the player wanders in the island, he'll often come to face with changes in the background music and environmental sounds due to daytime and seasonal changes. For example, the player will find energetic-sound mayflies in Spring. In Autumn, he'll find them lying on the ground, dying with sounds of the weak flaps of their wings. This suggests that Winter is coming.

Seasons affect NPCs and their sounds:

[hJR0adIoBtI?.swf](#)

Dramatising

Proteus' total gameplay boils down to exploration of the environment however certain emotional cues are reached at given points. For example, when a player simply climbs a mountain to the top or triggers certain events, the music seamlessly changes accordingly in reaction to his achievement.

Climbing mountains influences the music:

[aLPmPRU6wAk?.swf](#)

Music changes in events triggered by the player's exploration:

[nIrxusVS0BE?.swf](#)

Time perception

Proteus has a day/night cycle system in which the sun rises every morning and sets every evening. Music and environmental sounds differ substantially between night and day, with daytime featuring several environmental sounds and night-time becoming much calmer. This helps distinguish the passing of time.

The player can travel forwards in time by positioning himself accordingly in relation to a circle of stones and open up a portal. This ritual will not only drastically change the landscape of the island but background music and environmental sounds will also change accordingly. The sounds in the warmer seasons of Spring and Summer are playful and loud where as in the colder seasons of Autumn and Winter they become eerie and melancholic.

Creating a portal and difference between season's sounds:

[vNzUEIXyujw?.swf](#)

Character and Personality

Whereas the player plays an invisible and soundless character, NPC animals in Proteus have distinguishably different visuals and sounds from each other. Animal sounds will often correspond to their locomotion style. For example, partridge are small and quick-footed birds and therefore their respective sounds are high-pitched and nervous whereas fireflies in the night sound like small echoing bells.

Examples: [Partridge running](#) , [Fireflies in the night](#)

Suggestion, Metaphor, Subtext

A recurrent theme in Proteus is spirituality and ascension. This mood is set during certain locations and events in the game through few instruments or choirs playing in the absence of any other distracting environmental sound. Approaching totems will result in said thematic mood. It is also arguably perceivable by climbing or „ascending“ hills though the collaboration between metaphor, sound and action is contextually more comprehensible at the end of the game.

Achieving a spiritual mood through visuals and sounds:

[CeAHMXaz5eg?.swf](#)

Room

Navigation, Orientation

Music will sound while the player is on land whereas he'll hear only water when swimming in the ocean. This may aid the player in understanding that the progress through the game is achieved on the island itself.

Music begins as the island is reached, suggesting progress:

[zZSrTReIMT0?.swf](#)

Setting, Scenography

Proteus' background music will change depending on several factors. The most dramatic is the change between day, night and seasons, each providing a different mood and audible content to experience in the island. Nights sounds, for example, will often feature echoes, which strengthens a

sound in the absence of any other during the quiet of night.

Composition / Mix / Aesthetic

The overall musical style of Proteus is based on electronic/8-bit sounds and music, thus adapting it well with the retro visuals of the game. The melody is always quite simple and it seems as if someone (without musical experience, like a child) was improvising a melody by randomly pressing the keys on a synthesizer. The music is mostly made of clear, high tones for the melody and some low tones for the bass. The melody is slow but the rhythm changes depending on the season and the hour of the day in the world of the game. The basic sounds are clearly electronic, but they can be accompanied by choirs, percussion, string or wind instruments which are more „realistic“. The overall feeling is that it is a very light, aerial and quiet music that makes the player feel relaxed and peaceful. The different sounds and melodies in Proteus are always short and simple and can be repeated several times. Having a very simple and „non-structured“ melody as basis also gives more freedom for the sounds of the world. This way, they can be easily combined with others and thus create „new“ melodies. The feeling of the music and sounds of Proteus makes it seem like quite a messy, random mix of sounds. Which it literally is when you look at the game as a whole but the melodies of the objects themselves are not randomly generated. It still can be quite a peculiar patchwork of sounds. However, it is never disturbing for the ears, since all the sounds have a common and basic identity/genre and a simple background music.

Examples: Daytime music found in [Spring](#) , [Summer](#) , [Autumn](#) and [Winter](#) .

Game Comparison: Flower

[Link to Flower Analysis Page](#)

Purpose of sounds

As flower does have a specific goal and stunning visuals, the role that sound plays isn't as big as in Proteus but nevertheless crucial for a thrilling game experience. While in Proteus, sound is the main motivation for the player to keep playing, in Flower, it adds to the atmosphere and the gameplay.

Objects

Object sounds are less prominent than in Proteus and rather subtle in comparison to Flower.

Movement

The player in Proteus is less prominent than in Flower, as he is neither visually nor audibly present.

Composition / Mix / Aesthetic

The music in Flower doesn't sound as „random“ or „childish“ as the music in Proteus. This is classical music that is widely known, not ambient electronic or 8-bit. All the sound elements in Flower are realistic and arguably more „mainstream“ than the ones in Proteus, which is a game that takes much more liberties with sounds and experiments with them.

Comparison Conclusion

Although the sound in Flower depends a lot on the player's location, his progress and his speed of movement, it is much more predefined than in Proteus. In Proteus, the player's main motivation is to experiment and experience sound, as objects and movement allow him to directly influence music and atmosphere. It motivates the player to keep exploring the environment in Proteus in search for new sounds and sound combinations as the system brings about a continuous variation. In Flower, the sounds mostly underline the general atmosphere of the current environment and contribute to an audibly interesting gameplay.

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