Interview with Allister Brimble

(http://www.retrogamingplanet.it/intervista/dal-amiga-al-nintendo-3ds-allister-brimble-del-team17-svela-i-suoi-segreti-musicali/)

After the interview with **Chris Huelsbeck** (which you can read **here**) Retrogaming Planet is pleased to present to its readers another interview: **Allister Brimble**, author of the soundtracks of games Team17, talks about his experience as a "videogame musician" providing a list (really infinite) of his compositions!!

What better way to celebrate the second birthday of Retrogaming Planet (July 27)?

RGP: Hi Allister, thanks for accepting this interview despite your busy schedule! My readers will surely be curious to know about your first approach into music and your very first computing experience...
First of all, what's been your reasons for choosing videogame music instead of traditional music?
ALLISTER: From the age of about 6 years old I was crazy about the new technology at the time... the black and white bat'n'ball games which I persuaded my parents to buy for me!
My father is both a musician and electrical engineer so I guess I got the interest for both sides from him. From this time on I was hooked on video games! In later years I had a **ZX Spectrum**, **C64** and the finally **Commodore Amiga** and experimented on each with music, inspired by the music of **David Whittaker**, **Rob Hubbard**, **Tim Follin** and **Ben Daglish**.

RGP: Do You remember your first videogame music composition?
ALLISTER: My first for a video game was **Four Soccer Sims** for Codemasters software. I used **Sound Tracker** by Karsten Obarski and his preset instruments sets ST-01 & ST-02.

RGP: All players know about your experience in one of the most productive software houses of the Amiga era: TEAM17! Before becoming part of that company, mother of legendary titles like Alien Breed, Full Contact and Project X, did you have any work experience in other software houses?
ALLISTER: Codermasters and also Grandslam Entertainments (Later Sales Curve Interactive) for which I did a remix of the **Thunderbirds** tune. You will see from my next answer how they get to know about me.

RGP: How did you come in touch with Team17 and how did you manage to be part of the group?
ALLISTER: Well, today people show their music with Youtube or Myspace, but back then we only had Public Domain software companies. You could send them your music and if they liked it they would include it on their disk which would sell to the public for about 3 euros which was the price of the disk with no profit.
One such company was **17 Bit software** which I contacted via CU Amiga magazine. After many PD releases including my

music, this company later turned into **Team 17** and they asked me to write the music for some games.

RGP: What have you felt when you first realized your hobby was becoming a true professional activity?
ALLISTER: I was very young at the time (18) and could hardly believe it! Today it is very hard to get into the business so I think I was very lucky to be around at the right time!

RGP: In the videogaming world your passion for the Amiga is particularly known, platform that hosted many of the music works you created during your long career... can you tell us if there's a track, among them, you still like most?
ALLISTER: I think the Team 17 titles probably rank amongst my favourites. I think because I knew the whole team personally I put that little bit more effort in. **Alien Breed** is my favourite shortly followed by **Project X**.

RGP: Although using the Commodore 64 for a long time, I've known you "virtually" playing the Full Contact title on the Amiga.. I still remember the way I felt literally "electrified" in listening to that track with its oriental feeling accompanying the beautiful animation of the warrior executing the Kata in front of the horizon! Can you tell us something about the creation of Full Contact soundtrack?
ALLISTER: Yes, for this I was asked to listen to the music in the Karate Kid films and also the Van Dam Kick Boxer film, but I had also recently been listening to the crazy music/sfx in the early Bruce Lee films.
Alongside this, I had listened many times to Rob Hubards International Karate and so what you have in full contact is Karate Kid, Bruce Lee film, Kick Boxer and International Karate in one!
This is essentially how I normally work.. many influences come together to make something new.

RGP: And what about Alien Breed or Project X?
ALLISTER: Alien Breed is very much Rob Hubbard inspired... its really a combination of his styles combined with Jean Michel Jarre which I listened to a lot at the time.
For Project X I was asked to replicate the Rave Dance style of the time. I hadn't listened to any of this before so had to research the style very carefully with various tunes that my friends lent me on cassette tapes. The main synth sound you hear on it was sampled from one of these tapes! (perhaps one of your readers can identify it??!).
The piano's were very mainstream at the time so I added these and then some nice sampled string chords to go alongside. Then I came up with the nice intro using some FM synth sounds from my Yamaha TG77 synth.

RGP: Which hardware tools and software tools did you use in creating your pieces?
ALLISTER: The Commodore Amiga with **Soundtracker** or **Soundmon** software and then a range of hardware synths such as the Kawai K1 (used for the waveforms in Alien Breed), Roland D110 (Full Contact sounds) and later the Yamaha TG77 and Kurzweil K2000.

RGP: Can you describe the process that lead to the creation of music for Team17 games?
ALLISTER: Martyn Brown, the project manager would come up with an idea of style and give me a rough idea. After this I would go away and do my research into the style and create the first version of the track in my own way.
Then I would set about sampling instrument for it from my hardware synths and carefully looping the samples... a few instrument would also be taken from other games if I really liked them! (EG chords on Full Contact=chords on Tim Follins Ghouls & Ghosts!).
The final part is loading the sounds into soundtracker and creating the actual music.

RGP: How long did it take, for you, to create a full videogame sound track?
ALLISTER: About 3 weeks for a full game. It takes me about 2 days to write one tune.

Martyn Brown, founder of Team17

RGP: Once the track was created, did you usually have to wait for it being approved by the other members of the team to include it in the final game release?
ALLISTER: Yes, everyone would listen to it and tell me if changes were needed. Thankfully they liked it most of the time so I didn't have to make many changes!

RGP: I guess the "work hours" in a software house aren't the traditional 9to5 routine, in fact many of these companies had teams working till late and the night was usually a moment of great creativity... was it like this at Team17?
ALLISTER: I didn't work at Team 17... I was always hired on a freelance basis working from home so I was never subjected to any restrictions on hours. Indeed I worked late into the night with my parents getting annoyed if I played it too loud at the wrong time!
The coders and artist were also freelance (Andreas & Rico) and so could work any times they wanted as long as the job was done.

The famous logo of Team17

RGP: How would you define your relation with Martyn Brown and other team members?
ALLISTER: Martyn gave me my first chance with 17 Bit Software so I always wanted to please him with my early Team 17 work. I didn't see so much of Rico & Andreas because they were in Sweden at the time, however both of them visited my house for a week in order to provide a calm atmosphere in which to finish **SuperFrog**. We live in the countryside so there was little to do except work!
This was a great time and I was good friends with all of them.

RGP: Team 17 is at the moment one of the few software houses able to get over the 16 bit era and also the 32 bit era afterward, managing to extend its activities up to the recent gaming market producing conversions of their main titles for desktop computers and mobile platforms.
Are you still cooperating with them or are you involved in different professional activities today?
ALLISTER: In recent years the only work I have done for them was for the Alien Breed Evolution 360 title. It was a remix of the original title theme and can be heard on the credits page. Since the Team 17 days I have worked on many titles and have become somewhat of a specialist on the handheld consoles such as **Gameboy**, **Nintendo DS**, **3DS** & **Wii**. My most recent big title was **Hydroventure** (Fluidity in USA) which is a Wii downloadable title. You can keep up with all of my work on my website at **http://www.orchestralmedia.co.uk**

RGP: If you would choose just one machine to take with you on the proverbial desert island, among all those you've been using during your career, which one would be?
ALLISTER: If we're going by past memories then of course it has to be the Amiga... However if I'm being practical it has to be my PC because I can keep writing music with the latest technology!

RGP: Is it possible to find you whole "discography" and if so, where? Are there any music CD compilation containing your tracks?
ALLISTER: My full game portfolio is found at **http://www.orchestralmedia.co.uk/portfolio/**. A discography is shown here: **http://www.exotica.org.uk/wiki/Allister_Brimble**

RGP: Did you ever consider the opportunity to rearrange your tracks to have them performed by a whole real orchestra like Chris Huelsbeck (author if The Great Giana Sister soundtrack) did sometimes?
ALLISTER: Yes Alien Breed was re-arranged for orchestra and played as part of an Amiga Medley in Leipzig a few years ago. I worked with Thomas Boecker on the project. It was great to be able to hear my own music played by a top orchestra!

RGP: Do you have plans for concerts or other events where Retro-gaming Planet's reader could see you and eventually listen to your music?

ALLISTER: No but I am releasing some new individual tracks soon as part of my **Sounds Digital II** CD. The days of albums may be gone so I am hoping to release each track separately under the Sounds Digital II name.
You can follow on Twitter to keep up to date finding "AllisterBrimble".

RGP: What would be your advice for a musician wanting to follow your career path today?
ALLISTER: My career path no longer exists. I was there at the right time when things were just starting. I think today the path is more conventional... you have to find a good music school that teaches about modern studio technology.
There are several around... in the UK there's a great one at Bath Spa University. From here you can be placed at in-house music positions if of course you have the talent to write some nice music! Most of all... nobody can teach you to write a great tune... only guide you in this direction... so write all the music you can and play it to your friends... they will be your best guide!

RGP: This interesting interview is at its end, so I get the chance to thank you very much for the time you found in answering all the questions! Let me leave you, anyway, with one last, vital question: are you really aware of the role you've conquered in 8-16bit videogaming history and the fact we're going to remember your works for many, many years still?
ALLISTER: This is very difficult to contemplate this because I have never stopped working in video game music and am still working just as hard today. I think there were many great people at the time but I was given a very good chance by 17 Bit software and was very lucky that the Team 17 titles were there to showcase my tunes.
I feel very proud though that people might remember my tunes in the future.

July 2011, Robert Grechi