

Ubisoft Game Makers Podcast
Composing the Music of Far Cry 6
October 27, 2021

(PLAYFUL MUSIC)

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

It's been my best experience. It's one of the most fluid and interesting experiences I've had composing music for any media.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

You're listening to the Ubisoft Game Makers podcast. I'm Charles-Adam Foster-Simard. When Ubisoft revealed Far Cry 6 last summer, the first glimpse of the game players got was the cinematic title sequence. It's a hypnotising and atmospheric sequence of images: saturated with colour. A tropical island at sunset appears in a crocodile's eye. The spinning wheel of a vintage car becomes a record on a turntable. A glass of rum seen from above becomes the burning end of a cigar. Players were impressed by the visuals of the sequence, but many also remarked on the music that underpinned these images. It's the track you're hearing now.

It's called 'Libertad' and it was written by Pedro Bromfman, the composer of the Far Cry 6 soundtrack. Bromfman was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, and has been writing, playing, and producing music for video games, films, and TV shows for the last 20 years. His past projects include the music for the 2014 movie, 'Robocop', three seasons of the hit Netflix series, 'Narcos', and the video games, Max Payne 3 and Need for Speed Heat. Pedro Bromfman joins us on this episode of Game Makers to talk about his work on Far Cry 6, which came out earlier in October. The game is set in the fictional Caribbean island of Yara with a player joining a guerrilla movement to fight against the forces of the country's president played by John Carlo Esposito.

Hello, Pedro, thank you for joining us.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Thank you so much for having me, Charles, a pleasure.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

I'm super excited to talk about the music of Far Cry 6. I find it very beautiful and I know it's something that players have been talking about since the game was revealed in 2020. I was curious, just to start by asking you how the project started for you and how you came on board to compose the music for this game.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Yes, I've been with Far Cry 6 for over two years now. I was doing some music with Simon Landry, who is a music supervisor out of Ubisoft Montreal, for a different game

and he mentioned, Oh, there's this game coming up that takes place in a Caribbean island. And he never told me what the game was. I had no idea it was Far Cry or anything like that.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right, you just had an idea of the setting?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Yeah. He told me about the setting and he's like, I think your music would be perfect for it. Do you want to submit some tracks? They sent me some initial videos of cutting photographs and graphics from the game, along with some existing footage from other shows. And then in the background, there was one of my tracks playing, (CHARLES-ADAM CHUCKLES) and by coincidence, like no one realised that.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So, one of your existing tracks from another project had been placed there as placeholder, essentially?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Just as placeholder or something like that, yes. And at that point I'm like, Look, my music is already in the game (CHARLES-ADAM LAUGHS) and it feels meant to be. But then I met Eduardo, who is... Simon sent some tracks to Eduardo, who is the audio director for Far Cry 6. And we hit it off. He loved the music. I mean, personally, we really hit it off and it's been my best experience. It's one of the most fluid and interesting experiences I've had composing music for any media.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So you say it was a fluid experience. It was a good collaboration. Can you say a little bit more about that? What made it so particularly special or remarkable in that regard?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I think we were on the same page from the very beginning, discussing what the music should be. And we had to hit the ground running. At first, we had a 10-minute mission that needed to be scored, to be submitted. So basically, I hit the ground running. We wrote those initial 10 minutes, and then we had a hiatus, and took some time to really develop it more, and see if what we had done would ultimately fit in the game, which most of it actually ended up in the game. But we really took our time after that to develop what the score needed to be, for me to get more familiarised with the story. I had several briefings with Navid, who is the narrative director. He was telling me everything about Yara, everything about every character: back story, future story.

(CHARLES-ADAM CHUCKLES)

So, I really got immersed into Far Cry 6. And from there, we were able to really develop this tremendous amount of music for this tremendous game, it's over three hours of my music alone.

(INTENSE FOREBODING MUSIC)

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

When you were starting off on this project, what were your principal sources of inspiration, or what's the thing that really drew you into this game? Is it the world or the characters or the story?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

The story is fascinating. I mean, I did some research and looked into the other Far Crys, and then also really got immersed into this story. And it's fascinating to see how much work goes into a game like this, right? I keep telling people it's the ultimate, to me, at least, this one has been the ultimate collaborative experience because I was in from almost the very beginning

AND EVERYTHING THEY WERE DOING:

the designers, the narrative team, everything they had to feed me was feeding my creative process. But, at the same time, my music was... They were like, Oh, this is the theme for Clara, This is the theme for 'Libertad'. And as everyone else was hearing the music, that would also influence the way they were designing the game. So, it really felt like something I've never done before. I mean, even when you are brought in very early on in a movie or in a game or in a TV show, usually most of it, the story's already there, the design is already there. You already have the look of how the scenes were shot and everything like that. In this one, we had very little from both sides, and I feel like everything was built together and really feel like it's a cohesive thing, like it's a part of the same thing.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right, like the game and the music, they were growing alongside each other and feeding off each other.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Exactly. And I never had to hear anyone else's music in there. I never had anything that I needed to get close to or that people really love, then it's like, Oh, this should be the sound. Can we copy or do something similar to this?" No, everything was conceptualised and created. And all the sound exploration that I did here in my studio, everything was done exclusively for the game, and with the game in mind.

(TROPICAL ISLAND MUSIC)

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yara is a fictional place. It's a fictional island, of course. There are some inspirations from Cuba, but there was also inspiration from other places in the Caribbean and Central America. Did you do any research into music from those areas to get a certain vibe?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I think, I was brought in... One of the reasons I was brought in, besides hitting it off with the team and also them liking my music, is enormous experience with Latin music, in general. I'm from Brazil, but I've spent time in Argentina. I've studied, I've always been into Caribbean music and Cuban music. I've recorded in my early 20s a Latin jazz album with mostly like salsas and merengues, and things like that. So, it's really been a part of me forever, even though Brazilian music is a different type of music. I play a lot of those instruments, the cuatro, also instruments from the north of South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, like charango, ronroco. And all those instruments ended up being brought into this score. There wasn't much research as far as styles of music or because I was so familiar with it, but...

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

..there was extensive research and exploration as far as how we would treat those sounds. We wanted to anchor the music in Latin American and Caribbean music. We wanted to have that root to take from, but at the same time we wanted to do something new. So, I was doing extensive research here and sound exploration, how to process acoustic instruments, how to mix the Latin American percussion that we were recording with analogue synths and the soundscapes. I mean, I spent a lot of time creating different soundscapes and things, all that came from an acoustic origin. So, like coming from an acoustic instrument originally...

(OMINOUS MUSIC)

..and then getting processed and reverbs and delay, and just creating this massive sound that could sit behind the tracks or really colour the world we were living.

(OMINOUS MUSIC)

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

What was the goal of editing and transforming that sound in the way you're describing, instead of kind of using it more straight, I guess?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I think it's used straight in the diegetic music. So, there's a lot of street music like

you're walking, if you're in the open world and you walk by a place, there's a band playing in there and it's playing traditional Caribbean music.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I know a few artists were brought in to do the more traditional work, more really exactly what would be playing in an island like Yara. But, our objective was to really do something hip and cool and modern and differentiate. We didn't want just the players to be listening to salsas and merengues and boleros (CHARLES-ADAM CHUCKLES) all day long. We didn't really feel that would illustrate the game properly, so we wanted to have some influence from that music and instrumentation. But then, really create our own sound and do something hip and something blood-pumping that would work with the action. And not only that, we differentiated Yara or we split Yara. Yara is split into three different regions. So, the western region, the central region, and the eastern region. And we really wanted to give each of those regions its own sound, you know, musical sound. I tried to keep the entire score cohesive, so it doesn't sound like you're jumping around and it's something completely new.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

But we really focused on the western region. It's the more acoustic. It's where the population that the Yarans who have been there forever, the traditional Yarans, the traditional families live. And so, we went with the more acoustic, the more traditional-sounding music.

(CALM ACOUSTIC GUITAR MUSIC)

The central region is where the capital is. It's where the president lives and where the military is. And it's more urban and it's more greedy. So, we really introduced urban elements and hip-hop elements into the music. There's a band that lives in the central region in the game, within the story that's called Máximas Matanzas, and they're a hip-hop band. So, we felt like we should introduce some of that element into the score.

(SLOW HIP-HOP MUSIC)

And then, the eastern region is where the industry, where the factories are where they produce whatever is for the vivera that's produced in Yara. And so, we went with the more industrial sounding, more processed sounding, a lot of metallic

percussion and heavy ambiances. And so, we really did try to do a different musical treatment, while keeping the cohesion of the whole score.

(INDUSTRIAL-SOUNDING MUSIC)

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So, that's fascinating because it means that what you're seeing in the game, and the characters that you're meeting, and the geography of those regions, and the themes I'm sure that are explored in the story are kind of bleeding into the music that you're hearing at the same time.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Yeah, for sure. And we really tried to illustrate that in the way that we were able to interpret that musically. And hopefully, the audience can feel it. But there's definitely a finger, like a signature for each of the regions, musically speaking, for each of the Yaran regions.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

This game explores some pretty intense themes. Of course, there's a revolution during the game. It's all about resistance, about guerrilla fighting. Were you inspired at all by those themes, as well? Or were there emotions that you wanted to kind of translate in the music you were composing?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Yes, very much so. We actually started the process after those initial 10 minutes. We started an exploration of the themes, the main themes of the game, as far as story themes, like the revolution, oppression, and then, some of the characters. So, we were creating... They were asking me to create two-minute pieces about what the revolution sounds like, what the oppression that Anton forces upon his people, what does it sound like? What's your musical interpretation of this? And then, we moved on to the characters, OK, we need a theme for Anton. We need a theme for Clara. We need a theme for Diego.

So, we were exploring all of this initially without actually scoring to picture, just musically saying, What should be the sound of this? And I'll tell you, that's why also I was saying it was such a pleasurable, collaborative experience. A lot of times, it takes a while for you to find the sounds, and you send a few things and then you get some pushback and it's, "Oh, no, it's not exactly this. Let's try something out. But with this game, I feel like 90% of what I sent in, sometimes they would send more than one option, but 90% of what I sent in ended up in the game. And the team was really excited about it. It's really been...

I think we were on the same page, and I probably was the right choice for this game, because it's very normal in my profession that we have to redo things multiple times or that some scenes need to be re-tweaked and reworked. And this game, it's really flowed very, very smoothly.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Do you work with any partners, as well, to help you create the music? I assume you have some musicians who play some of the instruments?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I do. I actually play most of the instruments in the game.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Really?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I love doing the exploration of bringing instruments here that I don't even know how to play, and just finding ways to make it play. But I usually record percussionists because I use a lot of percussion in most of my score. And then I have Juan Carlos Enriquez, who is a great composer, who has been my right-hand man for a while. And he's really an intricate part of the process. He's always helping me. I do some themes, I pass it over to him, he develops them or fits them into a scene, sometimes when I'm busy creating those scenes, or he comes up with ideas and I develop that.

Yeah, he's a very helpful and talented person who's a part of my team. So basically, the score for Far Cry is the two of us, to be honest...

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Wow.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

..doing the whole thing. Yeah, we had time, though. We had two years to work on the game. What's the mood and the process like when you have that much time? Is it almost like a jam session where you're kind of experimenting with the instruments, seeing what comes out and then you can feed that back into your tools? Or I assume you're not really sitting down to compose, to write.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I am. I mean, I always like to do sound explorations in the beginning, so I'll get a bunch of instruments and then just do a huge recording session and then edit the parts I like from that recording session. And then, bring that into contact, like a software instrument inside the software that I write the music in. And then I can spread out those ideas throughout the keyboard played in different tones. So, we create a lot of software instruments or it originated here in my studio and specifically thinking about Far Cry, and those instruments ended up being used throughout the whole score. So,

there's a lot of exploration in that, the beginning of sound exploration, finding the sounds that will populate the game.

But ultimately, when I start writing themes, whether it's to picture or just based on conversations I have with the team that's usually have me sitting down to already write, but write using those tools that I've already created, and that sound that I've already determined and developed here before. And....

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right. You're equipping yourself with the sounds that you need and the notes that you need, and then you're working from there.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Yeah, exactly.

(PEACEFUL ACOUSTIC GUITAR MUSIC)

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

You mentioned that, obviously, this is your third game. You've done a lot of projects for film and TV. And you mentioned this time constraint often for film and TV projects where the edit is done, and you're composing to that screen. Can you explain a little bit more about the difference between the process for composing music for an interactive medium like video games versus TV and film?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

There are a few differences, I'd say. I mean, there's a part of games that's very much like composing for filming and TV, which is when you're working with the cinematics. In this case, the cinematics came in the very end. I think, we did probably score over 40 minutes and 50 minutes of cinematics. And that's very much what I'm used to, you get a scene and you see where the music should come in, where the music should come out, where it needs to build. And then...

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah, everything's already timed so you're writing to...

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Exactly. And you will always hear the music that same way and that same scene, you know? It's not going to shift every time. The aspect that's really different about games are the missions and the open world because you're creating music for a mission that a player can take two minutes to go through. Or a player can take 15 minutes to go through. So, we have to take all of that into account. We have to create loopable cues, so loopable pieces of music that can go back to the beginning and start playing again if the player is still in that same area. But at the same time, we have to

introduce new elements and introduce new things to keep it interesting, so it doesn't just sound like the same thing over and over again.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

And also, we have to be able to build an intensity. So we have to be able to have that piece of music sound very minimalistic and small when you're just in stealth mode, and just looking at the opponent, the combat hasn't really kicked in. And then, if you're battling two opponents, it has to have a little more intensity. If you have more opponents coming on, then you have to release. And the way we do it is through separate tracks that we just pile on top of each other.

So it's like the different stems that help us build a track, so it can play with just one stem when there's only two enemies. Or you can have three stems playing at the same time if there are 10 enemies. Or you can have up to five stems playing at the same time if you battle tanks and helicopters and all of that.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right, so you're delivering kind of layers that have to sound good on their own, but that also have to be stacked together and sound good when they're stacked together to add that intensity and adjust to what the player is doing, right?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Exactly. Exactly. They've programmed the game engine to release my music and these stems according to what's going on within the game. And that's been a fascinating... It's the first time I was also brought into that aspect of the game engine and the programming. The other video games I had been involved with, I was just delivering music and they were putting it into the game. And this one, I feel... I went to Toronto. They showed me how the music would get integrated. And it allowed me to think even further about possibilities and ways to keep it interesting and ways to vary intensities and things like that.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Of course, what the players can listen to when they listen to the soundtrack is kind of these finished edited tracks of the music from the game. I was wondering if there was a track that you were particularly proud of or one that you found particularly challenging?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Yes, there's several tracks. I mean, there are the three main themes for the game are Anton's theme, which is played on the cello, and it's on the lower register of the cello.

And it appears over many queues and many spots that where you're hearing a piece of music, and then all of a sudden you hear Anton's theme on top.

(FAST-PACED OMINOUS MUSIC)

Probably my favourite piece of music is called, in the soundtrack, it will come out as 'Viva Clara' and it's Clara's theme. And Clara is one of the key figures of the revolution. The player meets her right in the beginning of the game and decides to follow her into this battle to free Yara from Anton. And 'Viva Clara', it's a sad, melancholic piece, but at the same time, it's got this drive and hope for the future, exactly like the character itself. We wanted to illustrate that, and I really feel that piece came out beautifully, and works the way it was supposed to.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

For me, when listening to the soundtrack, that song kind of pops out a little bit. It's a little bit more acoustic, maybe, than the other tracks. I was interested how you came upon that one. And if there's anything that you can share about the process, writing that music.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Yeah, it came very fast. They sent me the video for a specific part where Clara is a key element in a scene. And they're like, Oh, can you write a two-minute piece for what Clara should sound like? And we never discussed whether it should, like I said, whether she is part of the western region or the central region. I mean, she's Yara, you know?

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yes.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

But I felt like it needed to be even though she's a warrior and she's a go-getter and she's the one sometimes really driving the revolution and seeing what should be next for all the brave men who are fighting with her, she's very introverted and living in the past and a little melancholic. So, I felt the acoustic guitar... So, it's primarily nylon-string guitar. There's some punctuation with the charango and the piano. And then, a lot of the soundscapes that I mentioned that I created for the game that are originally created in acoustic instruments, but then it gets processed, and gets a lot of reverb and delays. And then, it becomes this wall of sound in the background. And I love to have that wall of sound in the background and then play the guitar lines and guitar chords on top. I think it really works well. And that's basically what 'Viva Clara' is.

(QUIET MELANCHOLY MUSIC)

And then, the third main theme is about the revolution. So it's the revolution theme, it's 'Libertad'.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

That's the one we can hear. It was first revealed during the cinematic sequence when the game was first revealed, right?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Exactly. Yeah, that's the one that will be part of the opening, the cinematic sequence that opens the game. And also, that was revealed early on as a teaser. And that was one of the pieces we created for the revolution and that initial exercise of trying to find the music for the sound of the revolution rooted in Latin American and Caribbean music, but having the grit and the blood-pumping element, you know, the heavy percussion. And then, the ronroco turns into electric guitar, and it builds as we see the revolution build throughout the game.

(DRAMATIC FOREBODING MUSIC)

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Is it hard to come up with melodies for themes like that? Because, obviously, they have pretty catchy melodies. I wonder how difficult it is to come up with those?

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

I love it. I grew up with music, so listening mostly to music itself. And also, listening to a lot of Morricone and all of his scores. I mean, back then, all of the films and TV shows,

THEY WERE SO MELODIC, RIGHT? CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

We used to have huge themes.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

You come out humming and then whistling, for sure.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Exactly. And little by little, we've sort of gravitated away from it a little bit. I think modern film scoring, there's much less melodic elements. There's much more colours and soundscapes and they're present all the time. Before, there used to be much less music in a movie. But when it came in, it made a statement that it was playing loud and people could leave the theatre, humming the melody. I agree that my job is to be in the background and score, help the experience and help tell the story, not necessarily people need leave the theatre, humming the melody. Sometimes, a movie

doesn't really need a theme or a melodic theme and it's more about soundscapes and colour.

But every time I have an opportunity or someone, a team really pushing us to create beautiful melodies, it's the best because that's what I think I'm best at, and what I really started in music for, you know, creating these melodies. So, whenever we have a chance to work melodically like this, it's just... It's great. And then Eduardo really wanted... Eduardo and Navid, all of them really wanted these iconic melodies to populate the game and to illustrate the characters that we were seeing.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Well, Pedro, thank you very much for joining the show today and for talking about the soundtrack for Far Cry 6.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

It was a pleasure talking to you and best of luck with your next projects.

PEDRO BROMFMAN:

Thank you. Thank you very much, Charles.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

The Far Cry 6 complete music, original game soundtrack, composed by Pedro Bromfman is out now and available wherever you listen to your music. You can find a link to it in the show notes. This episode of Game Makers was produced and edited by the team at Engle. I'm Charles-Adam Foster-Simard from Ubisoft. Transcripts of our episodes are available on Ubisoft News. For more from Game Makers, remember to subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening.