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## 4.

# The Street Fighter Lady

## Invisibility and Gender in Game Composition

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### ABSTRACT

The international success of Japanese game design provides an example of the invisibility of female game composers, as well as of gendered identification in game music production and sound design. Yoko Shimomura, the female composer who produced the iconic soundtrack for the 1991 arcade game, *Street Fighter II* (Capcom 1991), seems to have been *invisible to* game developers and music producers, which is partly due to the way in which the game is credited as a team effort. Regardless of their personal gender identity, game composers respond to themed briefs by

drawing on transnational musical ideas and gendered stereotypes that resonate with the Global Popular. Game music, as imagined as suitable for hyper-masculine game arcades, seems to draw on a masculinist aesthetic developed in Hollywood compositions. In turn, *Street Fighter II*'s music and the competitive game culture of arcade fighting games has been interwoven with masculinist music scenes of hip-hop and grime. The discussion of the music of *Street Fighter II* and the musical versions it inspired, nevertheless highlights that although seemingly simplified gendered stereotypes are reproduced within the game, gender identification itself can be complex within the context of game music composition.

#### Keywords

gender; game music composition; *Street Fighter*; arcade game culture

## INTRODUCTION

Yoko Shimomura is the Japanese female composer of the distinctive and memorable character and scene music of the successful seminal 1991 arcade version of *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* for the Capcom game development company. On playing an opponent, the first player experiences the graphical and musical theme of their challenger's home stage, such as Ryu's Japanese dojo rooftop-themed setting, Blanka's Brazilian jungle riverside cottage, Chun-Li's Chinese street vendor stage, or Guile's American military base. In this way, the game sets the scene and gives the player a sense of place, time and atmosphere. Some of her home stage music themes, associated with fighting characters such as Blanka, are idiosyncratic and quirky, while many of the music themes also make reference to the music of internationally known action movies, thereby enhancing the mass appeal of the game. Regardless of their own sense of identity, game composers respond to themed music composition briefs that assume, and

often reproduce, stereotypes as shorthand for game scene and character identities. We are currently hearing more about female composers in the Japanese game world. The music stems that Shimomura created for the arcade version were used for subsequent versions of the game, adapted to a range of platforms, and left their legacy in various forms of popular electronic music. However, in the successive soundtrack CD releases of music from the *Street Fighter* franchise<sup>1</sup>, she is often not given recognition or credited as the original composer of her iconic *Street Fighter II* themes, even though her compositions can be clearly recognised within the arrangements produced by others on these releases.

The international success of Japanese game design offers a useful example of how gendered identification can work in unexpected ways in game production, and gamer expectations. Nevertheless, there is still insufficient appreciation of the original composition work of female composers of arcade games. Laine Nooney (2013) suggests to “[s]hift the relevant question from ‘Where are women in game history?’ to ‘Why are they there in the way that they are?’”. In the case of Yoko Shimomura’s composition of *Street Fighter II*’s music themes, she seemed not to be present at all, at the time. As a result, credit for her contributions to game music were *exscripted* from game history until relatively recently. Her work was left uncredited, as was often the case in game sound design and composition where the credit was often to a composition team in which its members remain anonymous, while there was a lack of a record of the game’s project team during its development. In addition, there seems to be an assumption within mainstream Western gaming discourse that game producers, developers and composers of male-coded games are male. Yet the music themes and sound effects created by Yoko Shimomura circulate widely as memes within the musical outputs by countless fans and music producers. After first laying out the research context of the

1. Examples: *Street Fighter II Image Album*. Japan. Scitron/Pony Canyon. 1991; *Street Fighter Alpha 2 Underground Mixxes "Da Soundz of Spasm"*. Japan. Victor Entertainment. 1996; *Street Fighter II Chun-Li Flying Legend*. TM Factory/Toshiba EMI. 1992 {Credit only via Pseudonym Pii}

discussion, we next turn to the game arcade context of the music composition for *Street Fighter II*. This is followed by insights into the perceived role of Yoko Shimomura within the game company, Capcom. After the discussion addresses the various musical approaches to the characters of *Street Fighter II*, it will be shown how reinterpretations of the music themes further distanced the accreditation to the original composer. Yet, the enduring longevity of Shimomura's work is underpinned by the return to her original compositions for the more recent versions of the game.

## METHODOLOGY--FIGHT!

This article was born from a need to address gender issues in the game music industry from the perspective of music production and development. There is an increasing interest in gender and sexuality in general game studies; without intending to be exhaustive, this can be illustrated, for example, by the international organisation Women in Games, which collaborated with *DiGRA* Italia for a conference on the topic in 2018, as well by discussions of women in game development (such as Nooney 2013), gendered gaming contexts (Skolnik & Conway 2017; Kocurek 2015), gender in gaming (Chess 2017; Royse et al., 2007; Wai-ming Ng 2006), as well as cross-gender game play, or “drag”, (for example, Hodson & Livingston 2017; Westcott 2016; Schleiner 2001). Similarly, in popular music studies, debates and publications on the topic can be traced back as far back as the 1950s, which can be illustrated, for example, in collections edited by Frith and Goodwin (1990) and by Whiteley (1997), as well as numerous monographs, including Whiteley (2000), Rodgers (2010), O'Brien (2012), Reddington (2012) and Farrugia (2013). However, despite some tentative attempts, such as Machin and van Leeuwen (2016) on the relation between sound and gender roles in mobile games, there is space for further development in the study of gender and sexuality within game music and game audio studies. Although there is an increasing set of publications on the topic of game music and sound, which has expanded since Karen

Collins' seminal 2008 monograph *Game Sound*, the dimension of music is still developing within general game studies (Carbone & Rietveld 2017; Kamp, Summers, Sweeney 2016). Collins' 2016 *Beep* project and other documentaries such as Neil (2014) being recent exceptions, female game music composers are too often rendered invisible within game archaeological practices. This article wishes to address this lacuna with a case study of Yoko Shimomura's influential music and sound effects in *Street Fighter II*, and show that gender role-play not only occurs within the selection of game characters by players, but also within theme-based composition practices.

The capture of data for this article was achieved through a historical-archival approach. Sources include the original arcade ROM program data for the games in question, because much of the credit information is not available online for each game title. More traditional archival sources include final film- and game-credit databases such as the VGMDb.net website, which provides game soundtrack album credits and information, and Mobygames.com, a site dedicated to the preservation of video game credits, as well as the IMDb (Internet Movie Data-base), which has recently started cataloguing video game credits. The data captured were cross-referenced in these multiple sources. It can be problematic to attain credit information from game music and sound design; often video game end-of-game credit material feature pseudonyms or handles, or are merely credited to the game company. For example, on successive releases of both game soundtracks and in-game ROM data for *Street Fighter*, rather than its individual composers the Capcom Sound Team is credited as a whole.

The reflection on the material takes the perspective that identity is discursively situated and articulated (Foucault 1984), and performed (Butler 1990), in this case through sound, music and images. In the context of identity formation in relation to music, Negus (1996, 100) states that, "cultural identities are not fixed in any essential way but are actively created through particular communication processes, social practices and articulations within

specific circumstances”. In this sense, we take the perspective that there is no necessary connection between the gender of the composer and the music they create (or of the game player and the music they engage in). Rather, as in the case of the *Street Fighter II* music themes, a set of cultural and gendered stereotypes circulate between Hollywood cinema, Japanese game development, and a global network of game cultures and music cultures that mutually reinforce each other. The connection between the gendered identities of producer and the game characters is not always as clear-cut as it may initially seem.

On the basis of the material we have assessed, we argue here that in composing the music of a game for the *masculinist* space of the game arcade, as a female composer Yoko Shimomura effectively operated with a “double consciousness”. The latter term is adapted from Gilroy (1993), in his analysis of what it means to be black in a white-dominated post-colonial society. In this context, a form of *transvestism* (gender role play) occurs in the subjectivity of female composer. This term is borrowed from Mulvey (2009, 35), who argues that, “for women ... trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second nature ... and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes”<sup>2</sup>. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a female composer such as Yoko Shimomura was able to produce a convincing set of macho music themes, basing these on masculinist mythologies that are recycled within the Global Popular (During 1997). We have selected the playful notion of “lady” to refer to Yoko Shimomura, indicating both a notion of subordinate, adaptable, femininity (as was normal during her time at Capcom), combined with fight-ready female assertiveness. “Street Fighter Lady” additionally resonates with the popular imagination, as illustrated by the film *Lady Street Fighter* (James Bryan 1981) and the character Shadow Lady in *Marvel vs Capcom*

2. Mulvey’s seminal work on gendered subject positions has been debated extensively during the last four decades since its publication. However, a discussion of her argument is not the focus of the article. The cited statement importantly illustrates the subject position of Yoko Shimomura as a female composer, listening to, and producing, a musical sound track from a masculinist perspective.

2 (Capcom 2000), an echo of Shimomura's favourite female fighting character Chun-Li<sup>3</sup>. At this point, then, we say: FIGHT!—let the discussion commence.

## STREET FIGHTER II & ARCADE CULTURE

*Street Fighter II* was released in 1991 as a fighting game for game arcades. The success story of *Street Fighter II* significantly helped to rescue an ailing game arcade industry, capturing the imagination of players who, by the start of the 1990s, had left the arcade pay-per-play setting to pursue gameplay at home on consoles<sup>4</sup> (June 2013; Skolnik & Conway 2017). Initially only playable on bespoke Capcom CPS1 JAMMA arcade hardware, *Street Fighter II* attracted a hardcore following of players back into the arcade setting, intent on mastering the game's multiple playable characters, using sprites that occupy almost half of the height of the screen. While its predecessor, *Street Fighter*, offers only two characters (Japanese judo hero Ryu and American fighter Ken), *Street Fighter II* enables a selection from six additional unique fighting characters: the mystical yogi Dhalsim; the monstrous Blanka; the troubled character of Guile; the Russian wrestler Zangief; and Sumo wrestler E.Honda, all male, as well as a singular female character, Chinese super-cop Chun-Li. In short, there is a diverse set of characters to appeal to a range of players. By including these characters, presented in lush colour palettes, *Street Fighter II* innovated the fighting game genre.

In 1991, most arcade games had a maximum of around three to four selectable playable characters who shared many of the same moves or abilities, as well as core gameplay mechanics, even if they looked different, as was also the case with the two characters in *Street Fighter*<sup>5</sup> (1987). In *Street Fighter II*, though,

3. Yoko Shimomura did not compose the theme music for Shadow Lady, however.
4. Game consoles such as the Nintendo Super NES and personal computers including the IBM PC, Commodore Amiga and Atari ST.
5. The composer of the game music for *Street Fighter* (1987) is Yoshihiro Sakaguchi (aka Yuukichan's Papa).

each character is featured with their own distinctive background and set of special moves, recognisable sound effects (Shimomura & Abe 1991), backstories and locales, as well as original unique character-based theme music, and character endings that were played on completion of a solo game. With the two playable characters of *Street Fighter*, there was no opportunity for the winner to play against a new player (see, for example Capcom's 2018 documentary, directed by Joe Peter). However, in *Street Fighter II*, the winner is able to play the next challenger, making it a successful (if informal) arcade tournament game. In addition, although a hugely successful single player game, *Street Fighter II* innovated two-player action; at any point during gameplay against the CPU (the computer player) a new (human) contender is able to interrupt and challenge the current two-player game by inserting money into the machine and a quick touch of the start button. This differs dramatically from many of the arcade games of 1991, when Player Two could usually only gain access when the game character of solo Player One dies. *Street Fighter II* also differed because it did not allow players an opportunity to support or cooperate in fighting a common enemy; instead, *Street Fighter II* was about competition between players. Solo gameplay was only possible when the other, human, opponent was defeated.

Importantly, the game differed from its predecessors in terms of its sound design. Game arcades can be extremely noisy environments, where the sounds of different games compete for attention. *Street Fighter II* certainly held its own in the sonic stakes with deep cutting sound effects via the dual sound design within the arcade hardware. An eight-bit sample-based sound chip was used for hard-hitting combat sound effects and vocal samples, as well as for deep, sampled, percussion grooves that could cut through the soundscapes of competitor machines. This was further afforded by the accompanying Yamaha 2151 synthesizer chip, with eight independent channels of FM sound. Later iterations of the game offered stereo sound with side-dependent bias on the sound levels and speaker output for the sound samples, so that players can hear their characters move across the screen.



The game arcades for which *Street Fighter II* was designed, were assumed to be male-dominated public spaces<sup>6</sup> that catered to what Skolnik and Conway (2017) refer to as “Bachelor Culture”. Admittedly, as Chess (2017) shows, there are too many chauvinistic assumptions in the gaming industry about which types of games women (the secondary “Ready Player 2”, inspiring the title to Chess’ book on the matter) would like to play, while Royse et al (2007) evidence that women participate in a wide variety of digital games. Furthermore, Hodson and Livingston (2017) as well as Westcott (2016), for example, discuss how women use male avatars and characters as part of their game play. Nevertheless, being victorious in shooting and fighting games at an arcade can be a measure of competitive macho posture. For example, the friends of the winner can stay on as the competition continues, while there is also the cult of leaving your mark in the high score table, comparable to a graffiti tag, to prove the player’s superiority.

Such attitudes can be illustrated in competitive masculinist music scenes that are interwoven with competitive game culture. For example, Gallagher (2017) highlights close links between fighting game culture and the grime music scene, as an alignment between video game play and electronic music production can be found in the use of similar computer technologies for gaming and composition: “(v)iewed as a configurative practice, gameplay betrays striking affinities with grime, affinities highlighted by stories of producers cutting their compositional teeth on games or gaming hardware” (web source). The characteristic competitiveness of fighting game participation can be illustrated in the lyrical battle discourse of Dizzee Rascal’s “Street Fighter Freestyle” (2004), and in the rapid name-checking of the fighting characters of *Street Fighter IV* by D Double E in “Street Fighter Riddim” (2015). In relation to links between game culture and the grime scene, Gallagher further notes:

6. For a discussion of game arcades as male-dominated spaces in a North American context, see, for example, Kocurek, (2015).

That the two scenes are compatible is neither particularly shocking nor necessarily flattering: both thrive on macho taunts and fierce competition, and if fighting game culture still has issues with inclusivity and abuse, grime is no less prone than dancehall or hip-hop to homophobia and misogyny.

A hyperreal exaggeration of gender characteristics is a reoccurring theme, which may be linked to an actual erosion of gender differences in an increasingly electronic and digitised social world (Springer 1991). A gender identity crisis seems partly the result of work that is increasingly based on computer-based activities. Springer argues that this is partly addressed, and temporarily alleviated, through body fantasies that suggest unsustainable differences. Meanwhile, the composer of the character theme music, and co-producer of its popular and often sampled sound effects, is an unassuming female composer who created the sound track of *Street Fighter II* as part of her day job as a member of an all-female game music team.

## CAPCOM SOUND TEAM

Yoko Shimomura joined the game industry shortly after graduating from Osaka College of Music in 1988. Capcom released *Street Fighter II* in 1991, the result of its development during the late 80s. In an interview, she observes that “(t)here were a lot of people [on the team] who were outside the norm. I might have been the only one who wasn’t” (Leone 2014). However, she also notes that:

(w)hen I joined Capcom originally, ... both of the top composers were women then. I heard them at the time, and they were talented and made great music. I felt that since the head staff were women, it was easier for other women to join the department.

Yoko Shimomura remembers that, initially, composing music for *Street Fighter II* was not her first choice:

I ended up working on *Street Fighter 2* by chance, rather than being excited to do it. I was free and had to choose between a few projects,

and just went with *Street Fighter 2*. It was incredibly lucky when I think about it now (Dwyer 2014, web source).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the Western game developer community was unaware that Yoko Shimomura was female, and that the Capcom composition team was mainly female. This may partially be due to Western unfamiliarity with Japanese names, as well as an overall Japanese game composer habit of remaining anonymous; Yoko Shimomura used abstract pseudonyms in the credits at the end of games, such as: Pii♪ or SHIMO-P, which were not even readily available, as the “credit sequence with staff photos” only appears “(i)f you complete SF2 with a single coin” Dwyer (2014).

In addition, the composition work for arcade games was mainly ported to home computers by male music arrangers/coders, so video game players would end up knowing the cover artist rather than the original composer. The young male composer Isao Abe did additional work on the OST for the arcade game *Street Fighter II*, co-creating the sound effects with Shimomura and composing three tracks, “Sagat’s Theme”, “VS. screen” (10 seconds) and “Here Comes a New Challenger” (a brief stinger). As Yoko Shimomura left Capcom (for Square and other companies), Isao Abe next produced and composed the music for the *Street Fighter* series following on from the original arcade version of *Street Fighter II*. The sound effects, meanwhile, found their way into the realm of popular culture, whether the use of “Perfect” and other samples by the internationally successful rapper Kanye West on “FACTS” (2016), the use of Ken and Ryu’s fire-ball cry “Hadōken” on the obscure 34-second grindcore album opener “Hadouken” by Sordo (2012), or the term “Fight!” in the above mentioned grime tracks.

## YOKO SHIMOMURA'S THEMES

While the fighting scenes in *Street Fighter II* are identifiable by their own theme music, these have become synonymous with the

characters associated with the scenes they were designed for. Significantly, the compositions seem to respond with a gender-coded cultural space of the game arcade. For example, Shimomura drew on masculinist Hollywood compositions, such as Cheap Trick's "Mighty Wings" from the film soundtrack to *Top Gun* (1986) for the *Street Fighter* character theme tune of Ken, a blonde American black belt martial arts fighting character. The stomping 1994 rap recording "Street Fighter II (Hyper Fighting Club Mix)", performed by The World Warrior and Einstein, makes extensive use of both Ken's theme and the "Title Theme", as well as of other character sound effects.

Also Guile, a blond flat-topped army boxing character in a green army-inspired outfit, is accompanied by a particularly popular melodic and epic theme. Guile's theme took its influence from a 1984 album recording "Travellers", by the Japanese Jazz-fusion band, T-Square (also known as The Square), which further resonates with the Ryu character theme. It became subject of an internet meme, "Guile theme goes with everything", where fans insert the theme music into a range of unrelated videos at the point where, in the video's narrative, tension builds towards an expected victorious end. The "Guile theme" also appears as a reference point in popular music, in particular hip-hop music, such as Ras Kass feat. Killah Priest & Kurupt (2017) "Street Fighter". Furthermore, versions and interpretations of the theme have appeared in other music styles, such as an embellished version played by classical pianist Sonya Belosova for PlayerPiano (2014), and an acapella version by Smooth McGroove (2013)<sup>7</sup>.

When playing *Street Fighter II*, Yoko Shimomura, gives preference to the only female fighter character in the game, the Chinese Chun-Li, "the strongest woman in the world". Her game play is thereby not in "drag". This seminal female fight character does have an active role, though, unlike hegemonic patriarchal assumptions of passive femininity. Much is made of the character's

7. Initial versions of the game had Ken's theme swapped with Guile, which further emphasises the *Top Gun* influence.

strong legs, which could possibly be interpreted as an implicit erotic fetish that re-inscribes this character into a masculinist fantasy. Still, her powerful moves (curbed somewhat in later versions of the game) ensure that she often wins, making her a popular fighter selection for players of any gender. This enables a dynamic shift in roles during game play, which Westcott (2016: 236) refers to as “distributed subjectivity”. Her character resonates in popular culture. For example, in 2018 Nickie Minaj released a track fantasising about being a hyper-sexualised Chun-Li (even though the track does not refer to the original music). The original “Chinese-styled” music theme partially adapts the pentatonic scale, offering an upward movement in a higher frequency range than Guile’s epic theme, or Ken’s racy *Top Gun*-inspired theme, achieving an Orientalist femininity for Western players. Like Ryu’s Theme, her character music has persisted throughout the various versions of the game in the *Street Fighter* franchise; for example, samples from Chun-Li’s theme form the musical backbone for the grime rap of Dizzee Rascal’s “Street Fighter Freestyle” (2004).

The off-key rhythmic music theme for the monstrous fighting character Blanka is cited as a favourite with some electronic music producers (Neil 2014). Its primitivist repetitive rhythm was inspired by Shimomura’s regular train trip to work; it memorably mixes the major key of the melody with the minor key of the rhythm section. Shimomura reminisces in an interview with Dwyer (2014):

That strange, broken feeling is what made the song for me. People said the music was wrong at the time, but if so many people tell me they love it now, then I don’t think it’s wrong. I’m finally able to believe that now.

It is exactly this “broken” quality that appeals to electronic music producers whose work is associated with Black Atlantic musical forms, such as hip-hop in the US (Neil 2014) and other break beat-related genres. It may therefore not be surprising that turntablist

DJ Q-bert's work on *Super Street Fighter II* (1993) and A Guy Called Gerald's drum'n'bass recording "Cybergen" (1995) make reference to this theme. Yet, the first casualty of Shimomura's original composition work was Blanka's off-beat backing percussion. As much as it may have been appreciated on the hip-hop scene, Blanka's backing music was streamlined with congas (a musical cliché to signify an exotic primitivism) in *Super Street Fighter II*, losing the unusually low-frequency rhythm of Shimomura's original version.

Although the characters in the *Street Fighter* franchise arguably correspond to competitive masculinist bravado of fighting game culture, they are culturally diverse, attracting a wide range of players who take an opportunity to role-play in the game and outside of it. As Benjamin Wai-ming Ng (2006) points out in his study of male working-class *Street Fighter* fans during the first years of the Millennium in Hong Kong,

If the world is becoming a "global village", this global village must include different tribes. Japanese games have gained global popularity, but they are interpreted and played differently by players according to their own social and cultural backgrounds. (web page)

Similarly, musical interpretations and adaptations vary, both within the game versions and in wider popular culture.

## DI/VERSIONS

Although credit is not always given to her compositions, Yoko Shimomura's original thematic compositions for *Street Fighter II* have been transferred into different environments, while the melodies remain memorable and instantly recognisable. This makes her music themes iconic, enduring through decades of remixes and re-arrangements, which land in a variety of game versions and playing contexts. Due to their recognisable melodies, as well as Shimomura's fluid subject position towards their compositional processes, the original music themes may be

understood as a type of “transferrable object”, or musical meme (a.k.a. museme), a signifying component that is ultimately beyond the (gendered) identity and the (artistic) control of the original composer. In remixing or re-arranging a theme, the arranger takes the original composition in a direction of their choosing, making it contemporary for the players by extending it, or by making additions to the original note data. Often, changes made to the composition structure next live on within further iterations of the game series. Such additional iterations, often without proper crediting, add to the invisibility of the original composer, in this case Yoko Shimomura, and work to further de- and re-gender her.

There are numerous examples of the versioning of the music themes across the *Street Fighter* franchise life cycle. We can follow the development of a theme and the addition of music and textural elements through the example of “Ryu’s Theme” in the *Street Fighter* series between 1991 and 2016<sup>8</sup>. This character is a familiar mainstay, if not mascot, of the *Street Fighter II* series, who appears in almost all iterations of the *Street Fighter* franchise. Shimomura’s original melody line for *Street Fighter II* was arranged in a synthesized rock-guitar style and includes reference points to Japanese culture, especially in its percussion and instrumentation, signifying the nationality and fighting style of this character. The theme has developed in style over the years through the *Street Fighter* franchise via the work of talented arrangers from the Japanese games industry, traversing styles as diverse as synth pop (*Marvel vs Capcom* 1, 1997; *Marvel vs Capcom*, 1998; *Street Fighter IV*; 2008), techno (*Capcom vs SNK*), funk and disco (*Street Fighter Alpha* series of 1995-1996) and rock (*Street Fighter V*, 2016 onwards) during the series’ life cycle, from 1991 to the present day. The theme is immediately recognizable as Ryu’s, within the various arrangements. The core

8. See Appendix for the full chronology of Street Fighter games from 1991 to the time of writing.
9. *Marvel Vs Capcom* is a related fighting game series that also contains Street Fighter II characters developed by Capcom and features popular characters from the Marvel universe battling with and against characters from the Capcom roster.

thematic elements and the “vibe” (sonic atmosphere) of the content remain present in the composition, while various elements are incorporated, starting with additional ornamentation in *Street Fighter Alpha*, the “prequel” series to *Street Fighter II*. Its OST is influenced by funk music that can be heard in 1970s action movies, such as Lalo Schifrin’s scores to *Charley Varrick* (Dir. Don Siegel, 1973) and *Dirty Harry* (Dir. Don Siegel, 1971), as well as Jerry Goldsmith’s OST for *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Don Taylor, 1971) or Quincy Jones’s compositional work for *They Call Me Mister Tibbs* (Dir. Gordon Douglas, 1970).

A diversion from the original themes can be found in the *Street Fighter EX* (1996-2000) arcade game series, which were developed by a different company, Arika, instead of Capcom. Arika employed well-known composers for the title, who are otherwise associated with yet another company, Namco, which itself is famous for groundbreaking arcade game music. Ayako Saso and Shinji Hosoe are, respectively, the female and male producers of Namco’s iconic video arcade game music for the *Tekken* series, *Galaxian3* and *Ridge Racer*. Their vision for the *Street Fighter* character themes are largely original and take a new stylistic direction towards nu-jazz fusion for the EX series of *Street Fighter*, as can be heard on *Street Fighter EX3*’s Guile’s theme, “Strange Sunset” (comp. Saso & Hosoe, 2000); this opens with a mellow “tip-toeing” walking bass and jazz guitar (perhaps suggesting a gentler masculinity than the *Top Gun*-inspired Guile theme of *Street Fighter II*) to evolve into an epic high energy arrangement with brass stabs, funk slap bass and djent-flavoured<sup>10</sup> metal solo guitar, worthy of an intense street fight. This complex composition moves away from Shimomura’s perhaps cruder macho-gendered interpretation for this character. Compared to the competitive arcade setting, for which *Street Fighter II* was developed, the music for the *Street Fighter EX* series was designed, more than a decade later, for the more reflective context of the home computer. The music for the EX series shows how context is important to the production of a particular gender

10. Djent is a progressive metal subgenre.



identity. Still, although the new thematic compositions have their own hard-core fans, their jazz arrangements lose the advantages of the iconic hooks of Shimomura's memorable melody lines.

Also in the year 2000, the initial thematic compositions of *Street Fighter III* took a different direction, offering entirely new compositions by male composer Hideki Okugawa. Similarly to Shimomura, however, he took his stylistic cues from action movies of the time, particularly Hong Kong action cinema, as well as hip-hop and big beat. The compositions included an underground dance music track for the Dudley Stage ("You Blow My Mind—stupid dope mix") of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* (Capcom 2000) in a musical style that refers to deep house. This is a far cry from the macho music stems of arcade versions, as in the USA this dance club genre is mostly associated with its sexually experimental and male gay clubs. The comparison between Yoko Shimomura's original iconic compositions for mostly macho characters and the "lighter" and more complex versions produced by composers Ayako Saso and Shinji Hosoe and Hideki Okugawa, illustrates how the gender of the composer cannot necessarily be gleaned from the musical styles they produce. Reproducing the discursive sensibilities of the Global Popular, a professional composer is able to (re)create, as well as efface, musical gender stereotypes within the actual compositional processes as required, regardless of their preferred personal gender identity.

We cannot generalise from one version to another, however. Although accomplished compositions, the decision to go with completely new musical material for existing characters in the *Street Fighter III* series was eventually reversed from the inception of the next series, *Street Fighter IV*. Also *Street Fighter V* (2016) remains loyal to Shimomura's compositions, with versions of the original character themes, as for Ryu, Ken, Blanka and Guile, albeit in the orchestrated and rock guitar-driven arrangements and synthesiser solos, which are not present in Shimomura's original compositions, *Street Fighter V* (2016) makes extensive use of

embellishments. Here, the composing and arranging team<sup>11</sup> pay tribute to the original reference points for Shimomura from *Street Fighter II*. By constructing orchestrated versions, the updated themes are stylistically cinematic. However, these ornaments would not have been possible without the core of these themes being established in the original compositions of Yoko Shimomura.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion of Shimomura's 1991 OST of *Street Fighter II* not only identifies the issue of invisibility of a game music composer for a Japanese game company like Capcom, it also shows how musical influences can flow via *Street Fighter II* from Western macho film music to macho game arcades, regardless of the gender identity of the composer. We have found that through her compositions for the game, Yoko Shimomura discursively (re)produced an imagined hegemonic *hyper-masculinity*. Through a comparison of versions and alternative compositions of the game character and scene themes, the discussion also highlights a slippery complexity in gender identification within the context of game music composition. The hidden gender role-play in the composition process for *Street Fighter II* may well have given rise to a possible assumption that its anonymous game composer is male, even though this was not the case. Such gender misrecognition projected onto this female game composer also occurred when her music compositions for arcade games were transposed for home computers, mainly by male coders, who were subsequently given credit for, and are often mistakenly remembered as, the originators of these compositions. While invisibility can be problematic for male composers, combined with a type of *transvestism* (or gender role-play) within the composition

11. *Street Fighter V* employed a range of different composer/arrangers, but the lead composer is listed as Hideyuki Fukasawa. In order of their contribution weight (in terms of numbers of themes listed as composer): Masahiro Aoki, Hideyuki Fukasawa, Keiki Kobayashi, Zac Zinger, Takatsuki Wakabayashi.

process, such opaqueness can enhance the *excription* of female game composers from game archaeologies. A historical revision of game music composition is therefore recommended. Here, then, we herald Yoko Shimomura as “The Street Fighter Lady”.

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