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SHADOW OF WAR

Scoring Middle-earth: Shadow of War — A Postmortem

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MONOLITH

Origin Story

Shadow of Mordor: a “Primitive Industrial” Hybrid Orchestral Score...


- Timbre: blending non-traditional source, processing, and extended techniques
- Harmony: sustaining tension through dissonance and avoiding tidy resolutions
- Rhythm: Stressing asymmetry to project a world out of balance

Getting the Band Back Together

Shadow of War: It's easier AND harder the second time around...



- Don't reinvent the wheel...
- ...just make it a bigger wheel. Much bigger.
- ...and make it a better wheel.



Production Process

Design, Content , and Implementation

Positive Dynamics of an In-House Composer:

- Nate owns aesthetic and structural direction for music in all Monolith projects
- Allows for informal, efficient review process
- Music implemented quickly and reviewed in context
- Direct feedback loop with outsourced composer

Process Outline:

- **Pre-Production**
 - Cue lists and delegating content
 - Sort cues by dependencies and composer
- **Production**
 - Prep outsourced direction with any available reference
 - Drop “mocked-up” cues in game for contextual evaluation
 - Select & greenlight cues for orchestration.
- **Post-Production**
 - Swap in final game mixes
 - Polish & maintenance

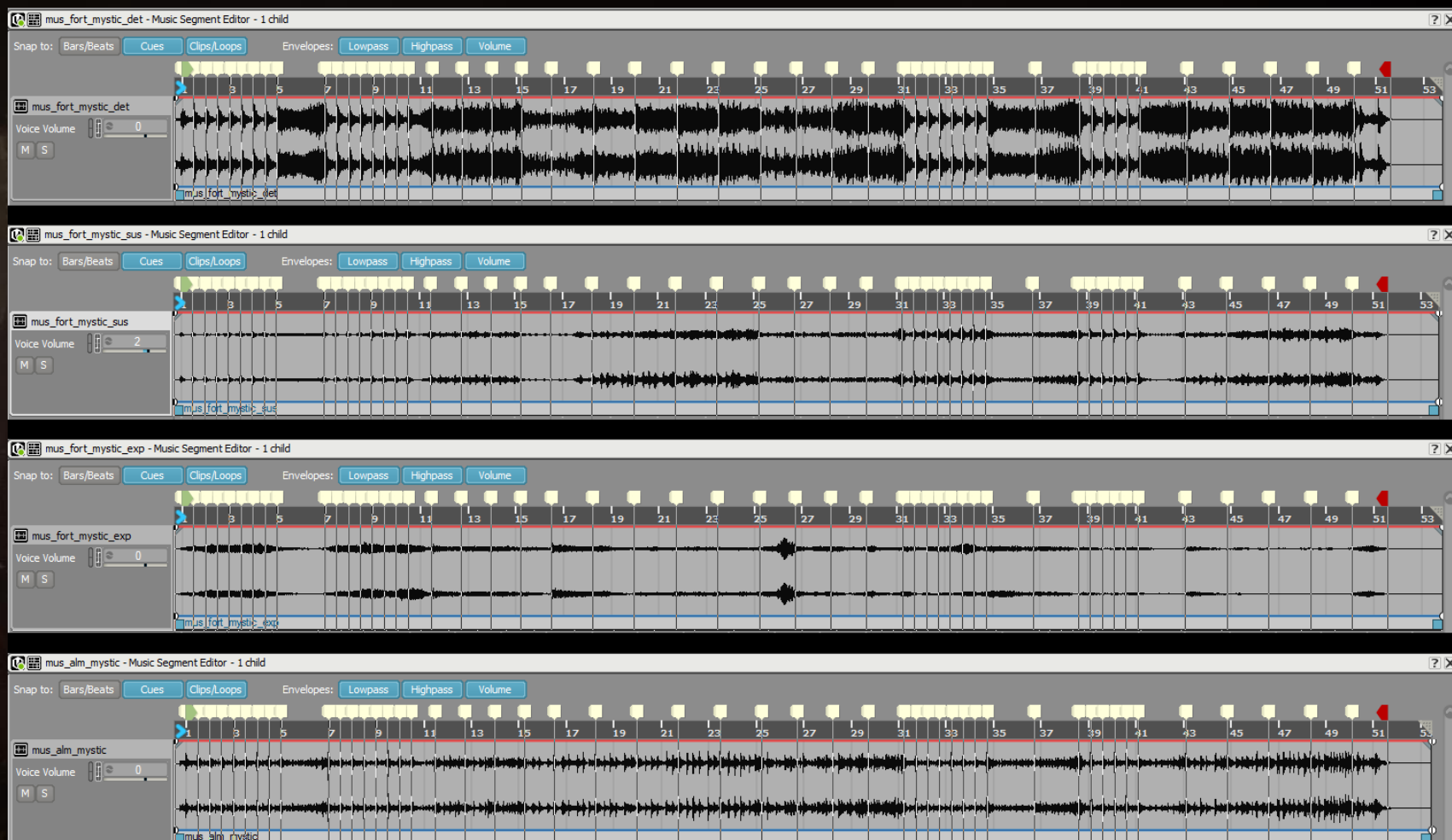
An Overriding Hierarchy of Features...

- Cinematics
- Menus
- Presentations
- Scripted Themes
- Overlord/Boss Themes – vary by tribe and AI activity
- Riding Themes – vary by creature
- Fort Themes – vary by tribe and AI activity
- Creature Themes – vary by alert creature
- Zone Themes – vary by day/night and AI activity

Arrangement Variations

All variations follow the same compositional form:

- “Detected” (AI fully aware)
- “Suspicious” (AI seeking source of disturbance)
- “Explore” (AI unaware of Player)
- “Alarm” (AI running to Fort Alarm)



Keeping It Alive

Supporting the Open World with Diverse Themes

Tribal Identity

Unique Fort and Overlord
Themes per Tribe

Machine Tribe Fort Theme



Tribal Identity

Unique Fort and Overlord
Themes per Tribe

Marauder Tribe Fort Theme



Changing Up the Composition Process

- Most Zone and Fort themes were written “top down” (highest intensity variation first).
- This usually resulted in dense, rhythmic combat themes that we would thin out for lower intensities.
- We wanted a less dense and more emotional combat theme for Minas Morgul, so we started with the lowest intensity variation and then scaled up.
 - Minas Morgul Exploration
 - Minas Morgul Combat

“The Singer”

- Lute and Voice mockups, defining melody and tempo for all dialog variations
- Face capture and voice recording to click

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- Lute and Voice mockups, defining melody and tempo for all dialog variations
- Face capture and voice recording to click
- Motion capture to synchronized lute, voice, and click
- Implementation in game



Recording: Bringing In the Humans

New Strategies to Address Increased Scope and Complexity

Solo Sessions

- War Horns - reinforcing tribal identity and supporting primitive battle themes
- Session for two players with collection of rare & ethnic horn instruments

Conches/Helmuts Buffalo and Steer Horns Shofar Serpent Femur Aztec Death Whistle

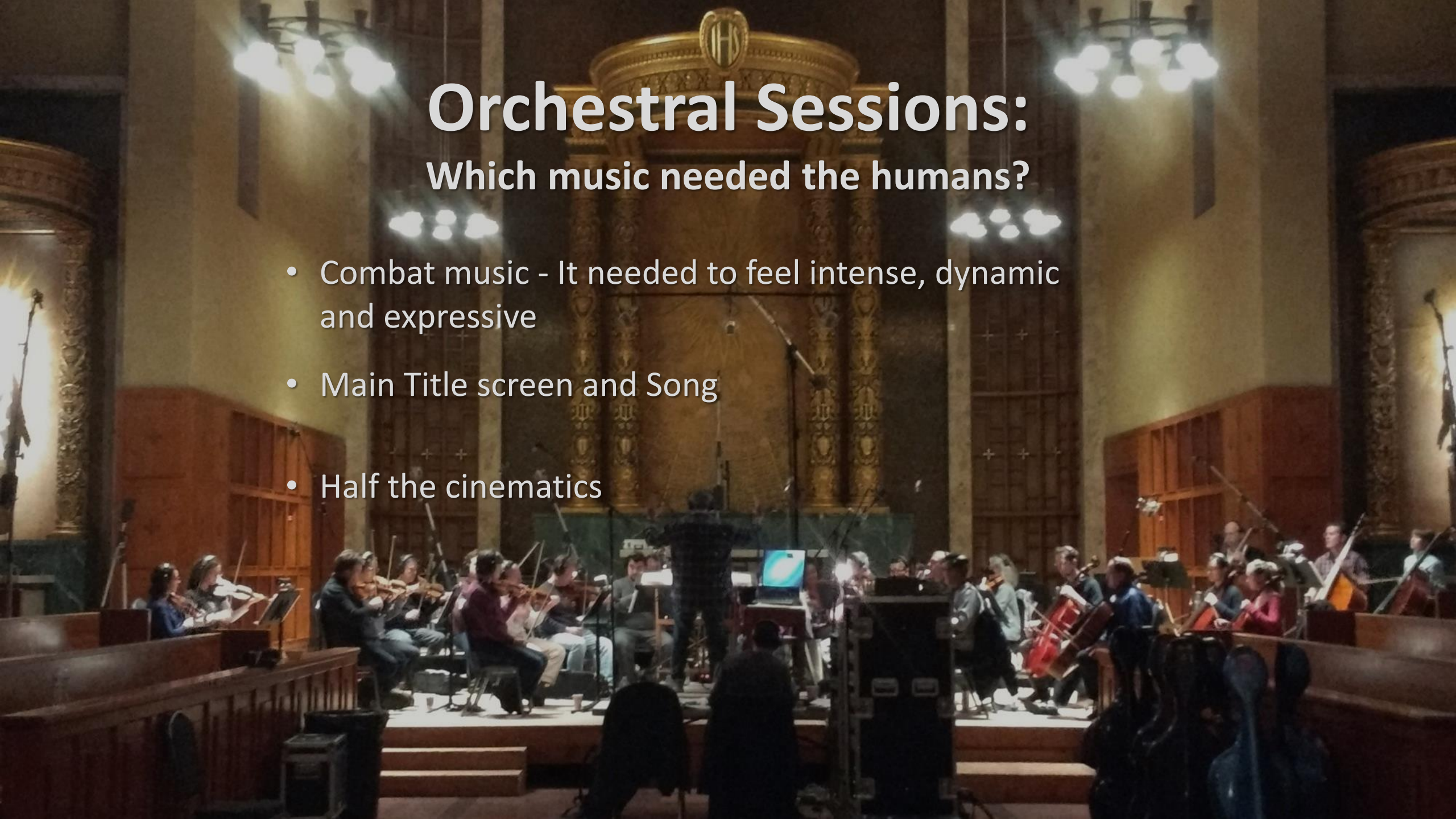
Tibetan Horns



Orchestral Sessions:

Which music needed the humans?

- Combat music - It needed to feel intense, dynamic and expressive
- Main Title screen and Song
- Half the cinematics



When “bigger and better” got harder...

- Shadow of Mordor recorded in sections (strings/woodwinds, and brass).
- Shadow of War’s combat music was described by our orchestrator as “the most difficult music he has ever prepared.” Combat themes ran behind schedule.
- We recorded cinematic cues with both sections simultaneously to compensate.
- Aleatoric effects were recorded as overdubs and triaged based on mock-up success.

Making Complex Ideas Playable

Feral Tribe Overlord Theme

- This theme is recorded in two passes to different clicks-- one in 4/4, one in 6/4--to achieve rhythmic ambiguity while remaining playable.

Feral Tribe Overlord Theme:

Back to Single Pass

Sheet music for the Feral Tribe Overlord Theme, measures 30 through 34. The score is written for five staves: Vlns. O/D, Vla. O/D, Vc. O/D, and Cb. O/D. The Vlns. O/D and Vla. O/D staves are empty. The Vc. O/D staff contains a 'CUE' box in measure 30, followed by a dotted line and a 'pizz.' instruction. The Cb. O/D staff contains a 'pizz.' instruction in measure 30. Both the Vc. O/D and Cb. O/D staves are marked 'mp cresc. poco a poco' in measure 30. In measure 33, the Vc. O/D staff is marked 'molto' and the Cb. O/D staff is marked 'molto'. The measures are numbered 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34 at the bottom.

Making Complex Ideas Playable

Marauder Tribe Fort Theme

- The strings are recorded in two passes that dovetail alternating phrases, allowing the middle section of the piece to build continuously without overtaxing the players.

Marauder Tribe Fort Theme:

Strings Pass 1

Strings Pass 2

GARRY: Dovetailed string lines to help with extreme chromaticism

[Harpichord]

exp.

Vins.

Vla.

Cello

Bass

sempre marc.

sempre marc.

sempre marc.

sempre marc.

sempre marc.

sempre marc.

ALL VINS
sempre marc.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

Marauder Tribe Fort Theme:

Strings Pass 1

Strings Pass 2

REF

Vlns.

Vla.

Cello

Bass

Vlns. O/D

Vla. O/D

Vc. O/D

Cb. O/D

25 26 27 28 29 30 31



Tying it All Together

Creating Thematic Continuity in a Chaotic Landscape

Sharing Character Motifs

Shelob's "Human Form" Theme

- Nate created the theme for Shelob's reveal early in development.

Sharing Character Motifs

Shelob's "Human Form" Theme

- Nate created the theme for Shelob's reveal early in development.
- Nate passed that theme onto Garry for cinematics in Shelob's quest loop and Garry developed the theme.

“Fires of War”

- We created a contemporary song to “brand” the title.
- The song was written without a clear idea about its placement.
- The song’s melodies were brought into instrumental cues during production.
- Our Director of Cinematics created a space for the song in the game’s bonus ending.

A dark, atmospheric background image depicting a desolate industrial landscape. In the foreground, several tall, dark smokestacks rise from a dark, rocky terrain, with thick black smoke billowing from them into a cloudy, grey sky. In the background, a large, dark, and imposing tower or structure is visible, partially obscured by the smoke and the overall darkness of the scene. The overall tone is somber and industrial.

QUESTIONS?